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ON FIRM GLOBAL CUES

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PANT'S
CAPTAINCY
UNDER LENS
12 SPORTS

Modi takes Hanuman Chalisa dig at Congress



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated by BJP leaders during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections in Tonk district Rajasthan on Tuesday

it could not fulfil its intention," Modi claimed.

"In 2011, the Congress tried to implement it throughout the country. They played a game of snatching away the rights given to SC, ST and OBC and giving them to others for vote bank politics. The Congress did this deliberately and without caring about the Constitution and B R Ambedkar," he said. Modi alleged when the BJP Government in Karnataka got an opportunity, the first thing it did was to abolish the Muslim quota which was created by snatching it from ST and SC. The Prime Minister said the constitutional limit for reservation was ending in 2020 and he had extended the reservation of Dalit and tribals for another 10 years. The Congress and INDIA Bloc, Modi said, were peeved after he exposed their vote bank and appeasement politics in his recent address in Rajasthan's Banswara.

Attacking the Congress, Modi said, "Even listening to Hanuman Chalisa becomes crime under Congress rule" and referred to an incident in Congress-ruled Karnataka where a shopkeeper was beaten up for listening to Hanuman Chalisa. He said during the Congress rule in Rajasthan, those who pelted stones on Ram Navmi procession were given protection and restrictions were imposed on such procession. However, after the formation of the BJP Government in the State, no one has the courage to question faith.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAIPUR/RAIPUR/NEW DELHI

In his two different election rallies on Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi continued his attack on the Congress, addressing the current controversy over wealth redistribution, a dispute over forced Constitution in Goa, and alleging that the grand old party never allows the recitation of Hanuman Chalisa and the celebration of Ram Navmi within the Congress-ruled States. In his Rajasthan tour, Modi said the Congress tried to extend

reservation on the basis of religion and give it to Muslims, and once again accused the party of hatching a "deep conspiracy" to snatch people's wealth and distribute it among "select" people. Modi also charged that it is difficult to follow one's faith under the Congress and that even listening to Hanuman Chalisa becomes crime under that party's rule. His remarks come on a day when the country is celebrating Hanuman Jayanti.

Addressing an election rally in Tonk, the Prime Minister said as soon as the Congress formed the Government at the Centre in 2004, one of its first task was to reduce the SC/ST reservation in Andhra Pradesh and give it to Muslims. "Modi is giving you a guarantee with an open heart that reservation for Dalits and backward tribals will neither end nor will it be allowed to be divided in the name of religion," he said. Amid a row over his 'redistribution of wealth'

remarks, the Prime Minister again charged that the Congress will snatch people's wealth and distribute it to select people. Modi said the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had given a speech in which he had said that Muslims have the first right on the resources of the country. "There was a pilot project which the Congress wanted to try in the entire country. Between 2004 and 2010, the Congress tried to implement Muslim reservation in Andhra Pradesh four times but due to legal hurdles and the awareness of the Supreme Court,



Gusty winds swept the national Capital as parts of Delhi received light rain on Tuesday, bringing respite to people
Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Asia worst hit by disasters in 2023: WMO report

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Last year, Asia faced the most disasters in the world as 79 events associated with extreme weather, climate, and water-related hazards, affecting over nine million people in the region and claiming over 2,000 lives, a new report by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has said. Thus, underscoring the urgent need for concerted action to mitigate impacts of climate change and protect our planet for future generations. The report 'State of the Climate in Asia 2023' which was released on Tuesday on 'World Earth Day' noted that Asia has warmed faster than the global average and the warming trend has nearly doubled since the 1961-1990 period. The accelerating rate of key climate change indicators such as surface temperatures, glacier retreat and sea level rise will have major consequences for Asia, its economy and ecosystems, the report warned. In India alone, severe heatwaves in April and June resulted in about 110

reported fatalities due to heatstroke in 2023, said the report adding in August, some States in India experienced a record-high monthly mean temperature, as well as an unprecedented rainfall deficit for the month.

Continued on Page 2

Delhi hit by freak weather

NEW DELHI: Strong winds and rains that lashed the national Capital on Tuesday provided much-needed relief for Delhiites, offering respite from the scorching hot weather. The sudden atmospheric change brought down the temperature, even as the weather officials have predicted no heat wave conditions for the next seven days. The Met office has forecast partly cloudy sky with light rain/thunderstorm with hail and squall on Wednesday.



DGCA directs airlines to let kids sit with parents

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has asked airlines to ensure children below the age of 12 are seated with at least one of their parents or guardians who are travelling on the same PNR. The directive comes against the backdrop of instances of children below the age of 12 years were not seated along with their parents or guardians during flights. "Airlines shall ensure that children up to the age of 12 years are allocated seats with at least one of their parents/guardians, who are travelling on the same PNR and a record of the same shall be maintained," the DGCA said. In this regard, the DGCA has revised the Air Transport Circular titled, 'unbundle of services and fees by scheduled airlines' as per which, some services like zero baggage, preferential seating, meals/snack/drink charges, charges for carriage of musical instruments etc. have been allowed. "Such unbundled services are provided on 'opt-in' basis by airlines and are not mandatory in nature. There is also a provision for auto seat assignment to the passengers who have not selected any seat for web check-in before scheduled departure.

Kejriwal given insulin in Tihar jail



SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was administered a "low dose" of insulin on Tuesday in Tihar jail after his blood sugar level spiked. Meanwhile, a Rouse Avenue court on Tuesday extended the judicial custody of Kejriwal and BRS leader K Kavitha in a money laundering case related to the alleged excise scam till May 7. "Kejriwal was given two units of low dose insulin on Monday evening on the advice of AIIMS doctors," a Tihar official said. His blood sugar level reading was found to be 217 around 7 pm, following which the doctors at Tihar looking after him decided to give him the insulin, the official said. The AIIMS specialists, during a video conference with the Chief Minister on April 20, had advised the Tihar doctors that insulin could be given to him if his sugar level crosses a certain

level, officials added. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) welcomed this news received on the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti and said the development was the result of the blessings of the deity. Delhi Cabinet minister Atishi said in a post on X in Hindi, "Jai Bajrang Bali! Good news received on Hanuman Jayanti. Tihar administration finally gave insulin to Arvind Kejriwal. This is the result of the blessings of Hanuman ji and the struggle of the people of Delhi. Even in this time of struggle, the blessings of Bajrang Bali remain on all of us." Meanwhile, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva alleged that the AAP leaders "only political hope" was to "create public sympathy" over the health of Kejriwal in view of the Lok Sabha elections. "No doubt Arvind Kejriwal is a diabetic but his sugar is under control in jail as he didn't raise demand for insulin in the video consultation with the doctors of AIIMS," he said. Rebuking the charges, the CM, in a letter to the jail administration, said he has raised the issue of insulin for 10 days, every day, multiple times. Delhi Cabinet Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj who participated in an event in his constituency to celebrate Hanuman Jayanti. A person dressed as Lord Hanuman was carrying vials of insulin with Bharadwaj carrying a mace ('gada') as they travelled in the area atop a vehicle. Vials of insulin were stuck on the mace.

UNCONDITIONAL PUBLIC APOLOGY

In wake of on going matter before the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India (Writ Petition C. No. 645/2022), we in our individual capacity as well as on behalf of the Company, unconditionally apologise for the non-compliance or disobedience of directions/orders of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

We unconditionally extend the apology for holding meeting/press conference dated 22.11.2023. We earnestly apologize for the mistake made in publishing our advertisements and it is our whole-hearted commitment that such errors will not be repeated. We undertake to abide by directions and instructions of the Hon'ble Court with due care and utmost sincerity. We undertake to uphold the majesty of the court and comply with applicable laws and directions of the Hon'ble Court of law/relevant authorities.

Sincerely,

**Patanjali Ayurved Limited,
Acharya Balkrishna,
Swami Ramdev,
Haridwar, Uttarakhand**

Two Christian sects not with BJP

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

With hardly four days to go for the Lok Sabha election in Kerala, two prominent Christian sects have come out against the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre. On Monday, Joseph Mar Gregorios, the head of the Jacobite Church, declared that the followers of his sect would vote en masse for candidates fielded by the CPI(M)-led LDF. "The LDF Government in Kerala have always supported and helped the Church. The CPI(M) has stood with the demands of the Church and hence we are obliged and bound to help them by electing the LDF candidates," said the Jacobite Church. But he was evasive when asked about the Congress candidate Benni Behanan, the



Congress candidate and a member of the Jacobite Church who is pitted against two Hindu candidates fielded by the CPI(M) and the NDA at Chhakkudi constituency. "Let the believers take their own decision after studying the ground realities.

The interests of the Church should prevail," said Gregorios. He also said the Jacobite Church has a lot of issues regarding the control of Churches and it is the CPI(M) that had always stood with the sect. Meanwhile, the Latin Catholic Church, a dominant

section along coastal Kerala declared that it would never support the BJP. The Kerala Region Latin Catholic Council, the apex decision making body of the sect declared on Monday that the Central Government has subverted the missionary works (proselytisation, evangelisation and indoctrination) by holding back the funds meant for the Latin Catholic Church. Even after assuring that the funds meant for the Church would not be held back, the Central Government has withheld two more accounts and this has made missionary works impossible. The training of young pastors and priests too have been stuck because of the delay in releasing the funds," said the KRLCC in a release issued on Monday.



Two children saved by tree stopping bus from falling down gorge

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Two children had a miraculous escape in Pithoragarh district on Tuesday when their school bus was going to fall into a gorge but was stopped by a tree on the mountainside. Both students were in shock because of the incident and sustained some injuries but their health was stable, the officials said. According to them, the incident occurred in the Berinag area of Pithoragarh district on Tuesday morning when the driver of a private school bus carrying students observed some cables lying on the road. He stopped the bus and came out to remove the power supply cables off the road when the bus rolled down into the nearby gorge. They said that although most of the children and teachers were able to exit the bus in time, two children remained inside when the bus fell about 50 feet down the road. However, a tree on the mountainside fortunately stopped the bus from falling



further down the gorge which prevented any further harm to the children. Soon, one of the teachers helped the injured children to get out of the bus.

The children had some injuries to their heads and hands and were immediately taken to the nearby community health centre (CHC) in Berinag for treatment. The officials said that the accident site is only about one kilometre away from the Berinag tehsil office and authorities were soon called at the spot. The

school administration was also informed about the incident and the staff reached the CHC to inquire about the well being of the children. The officials said that the police were aware that the incident could have been a fatal accident if the bus had not stopped due to the tree. The police questioned the driver and teachers about the incident and how the bus reportedly moved down the mountainside endangering several lives. The police will take further action accordingly, they added.

Forest fires rage in Pithoragarh district

PNS ■ BAGESHWAR

Forest fires have continued to rage in various parts of the State fuelled by dry conditions and rising temperatures. More than 36 incidents of forest fires have been reported in the Pithoragarh district so far this sea-



son. The light rain witnessed in various parts of the State in recent days has not had a major impact on

the forest fires.

Since last Friday, forest fires have been reported in Didihat, Pithoragarh, Munakot, Kanalichina, Berinag, Rai Agar, Dharamghar and other forest ranges in the

occurred in reserve forests and more than 27 in civil and Panchayat forests. The fires are estimated to have caused damage worth lakhs of rupees so far. Forest fires have been reported in various parts of the Kumaon region, especially in pine forests which are susceptible to fires due to the high resin content in the wood and pine needles (pirul). The Lok Sabha election, for which polling was held on April 19, resulted in staff of various departments being deputed to election duty. However, the personnel have returned from election duty and are focusing their efforts on tackling the forest fires. Divisional forest officer Ashutosh Singh has requested the villagers to cooperate in preventing and extinguishing the forest fires.

district. So far this season, 52.5 hectares of forest has been damaged in 36 fire incidents. Nine incidents have

Snakes visiting villages around Corbett more often as summer heat rises

PNS ■ RAMNAGAR

The movement of snakes in human habitations appears to have increased in the areas neighbouring the Corbett national park with consistent rise in summer temperatures. About a dozen cobras and other snakes have been rescued and released in the wild during the past two days alone.

Snake expert and head of Save The Snakes Society, Chandrasen Kashyap said that as the summer heat rises, snakes have started entering rural areas on the borders of Corbett. In the past two days, more than 15 cobras and other snakes have been rescued from Dhela, Sanvalde, Dhikuli, Ramnagar and other areas adjoining Corbett. These snakes were released in the wild with the help of the Forest department. He appealed to the people to de-



sist from killing snakes which enter inhabited areas and to inform the authorities so that the reptile is rescued and released away from inhabited areas.

He said that when a snake enters a home in the rural areas the people inform volunteers of his society, who reach the site to rescue the snake. He claimed that so far a total of

50,000 snakes have been rescued from inhabited areas and released in the wild with the help of the department by Save The Snakes Society in a number of years. The Corbett deputy director Diganth Nayak said that Kashyap and his team are working consistently in coordination with the department to rescue snakes.

Light rain likely in mountains, no relief from heat in plains

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Some parts of the State have witnessed light rain and windy conditions in recent days. Light rain was reported in some places on Tuesday too. However, this has not brought any major relief from the rising temperatures especially in the plain regions. The State meteorological centre has forecast that very light to light rain/thunderstorms are likely to occur at isolated places in Uttarakashi, Chamoli and Pithoragarh districts on Wednesday while dry weather is likely to prevail in the remaining districts.

The provisional State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a mainly clear to partly cloudy sky. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 35 degrees

Celsius and 18 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today.

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in various parts of the State on Tuesday were 34 degrees Celsius and 18.9 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 36.6 degrees Celsius and 16.4 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 23.6

degrees Celsius and 10.1 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 23.8 degrees Celsius and 11.1 degrees Celsius in New Tehri. Further, light rain was reported in some parts of the State on Tuesday with 4.5 millimetres in Mori, two millimetres in Bharsar, 3.4 millimetres in Pithoragarh and one millimetre in Gangolihat.

Wildlife thronging waterholes in Corbett to quench thirst, seek relief from rising heat

OP AGNIHOTRI ■ HALDWANI

The Corbett national park administration is watering about 150 waterholes in the national park to provide water and relief from the heat to the wildlife amidst rising summer heat. Tankers are being used to fill water in about 150 waterholes in the Dhikala, Sarpduli, Bijrani, Dhela, Jhirna, Kalagarh ranges and other parts of the national park. A range of wildlife from deer to elephants are frequenting these waterholes to quench their thirst and seek relief from the heat. Officials point out that the forest fire season is currently underway and summer temperatures are also on the rise. The natural sources of water have started to dry out due to the rising heat which results in shortage of water for the wildlife. The Forest department has built waterholes in various spots.



The Dhela and Bijrani range officer Bhanu Prakash Harbola said that all the waterholes in Dhela and Bijrani were recently inspected and filled with water either from natural sources or using water tankers. The staff have been directed to regularly monitor the waterholes to ensure that there is no dearth of water in them. Similarly, arrangements are being made to ensure water in all the waterholes in Kalagarh and Jhirna ranges of

Corbett. Range officer Nandkishore Ruvali informed that there are a total of 30 waterholes in these two forest ranges. These sites are being monitored regularly to ensure that the wildlife doesn't suffer from lack of water. Apart from tigers being seen cooling off in waterholes, various other wild animals are also seen visiting the same waterhole to quench their thirst and seek relief from the rising heat, he added.

Table top exercise and mock exercise to be held for Yatra preparations

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority (USDMA) have stepped up preparations for the smooth conduct of the Char Dham Yatra slated to start next month. An orientation and coordination conference was held on Tuesday regarding the table top exercise proposed by NDMA on April 30 and the mock exercise proposed on May 2. This online conference was attended by district magistrates of the districts on the Yatra route, army ITBP and more than 200 officers of 28 departments.



NDMA senior consultant major general (retd) Sudhir Bahl issued necessary instructions and spoke about the aim of the table top exercise and mock exercise to be held later. He said that the Disaster Management department, district administration, Indian Army, ITBP, police, Central Armed Police Forces, Public Works Department, Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam, Forest department, Tourism department, Information and Public Relations department and other bodies have an important role in ensuring the successful conduct of the Char Dham Yatra. The table top ex-

ercise and mock exercise are being held to enable better coordination among the departments. The exercise will be held in all the districts on the Yatra route. The mock exercise will be held to check the preparations of various departments to carry out rescue and relief operations during situations like inclement weather, flooding and landslide, earthquake, fire, avalanche, snowfall, heavy rain, helicopter and road accidents, stampede and other disaster scenarios. Any technical or other problem faced will be resolved during the exercise so that there are no gaps during the Yatra, he said. Bahl further said that this exercise will make it easy to understand the management of search and rescue at various levels, status of health facilities, deployment of army and police personnel, weather condition of relief camps, crowd and traffic management, the ac-

Latu Devta Mandir reopens amidst rituals & fervour

PNS ■ JOSHIMATH

The portals of Latu Devta Mandir in the Deval block of Chamoli district were reopened ceremoniously on Tuesday. A large number of people had gathered to witness the reopening of the temple of the deity considered to be the brother (Dharm Bhai) of Nanda Devi. Following traditional and religious rites, the priest of the temple, Kheem

Singh Bisht opened the portals of the temple at 2:10 PM. The villagers rendered Jagars to the beats of Dhol and Damau, and also performed Jhoda and Jhumelo folk dances to celebrate the reopening of the temple. Devotees will be able to pay obeisance to Latu Devta here for a period of six months.

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SR.DEN/C/MB acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders. Closing date and time mentioned against each tender. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids upto closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. Contractors are allowed to make payments against this tender towards tender document cost and earnest money only through online payment modes available on IREPS portal like net banking, debit card, credit card etc. Manual payments through Demand draft, Banker's cheque, Deposit receipts, FDR etc. are not allowed.

Tender No. Date	13-DRM-MB-24-25 Date: 23.04.2024
Name of work	Housekeeping and maintenance of officer's rest house at Dehradun, Haridwar, Rishikesh and Roorkee under Sr. DEN-I/MB
Contract Type	Service
Tender Closing Date/Time	09.05.2024 (16:00 hrs.)
Advertised Value(₹)	₹1,24,30,531.76
Earnest Money(₹)	₹2,12,200.00
Bidding Start Date	25.04.2024
Validity of offer (Days)	60 Days
Period of Completion	12 Months

No. 74-W/2/3/WA/Publication Dated: 23.04.2024 1212/2024
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NOTICE INVITING TENDER

SN	Name of work with its location	App. Cost of the work (in Rs.)	Address of the office from where the tender form has been issued	Bid Security to be deposited (in Rs.)	Completion period of the work	Date & Time for submission of tender & opening of tender	Website particulars & Address of office
1	11/SrDEE/G/MB/2024:- Provision of prepaid energy meter for vendors with allied electrical work over MB division.	4008622.60 (Including GST)	Electrical Branch, Divisional Railway Manager's office, Northern Railway, Moradabad	80200.00	6 (Six) Months	Tender will be received upto 15:00 hrs and opened at 15:00 hrs on 15/05/2024	Website www.ireps.gov.in Divisional Railway Manager's office, Northern Railway, Moradabad

Tender Notice No. - 14/2024 Dated - 23.04.2024 1215/2024
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THE PIONEER
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PUBLIC NOTICE

I KRISHNA W/o No. 3192843H Rank HAV Name SUNIL KUMAR R/o Dharoli (191), PO: Darauli, Dist. Jhajjar Haryana-124109. I have changed my name from KRISHNA to KIROSHNA and DOB 22.07.1982 to 15.07.1981 VIDE AFFIDAVIT DATED 22 April 2024 BEFORE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE, DEHRADUN (UK).

I PUNEMA GOGOI Mother of No. JC550497F Rank SUB Name BHUBANESWAR GOGOI R/o Batoni Nahar Pakhuri P/o Khowang Distt. Dibrugarh, Assam-785676. I have changed my name from PUNEMA GOGOI to PURNIMA GOGOI AND DOB 10.02.1954 to 01.10.1962 VIDE AFFIDAVIT DATED 16 April 2024 BEFORE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE, DEHRADUN (UK).

This is to declare that in my daughter TENZIN NORZOM's Class X Marksheet and other documents her mother's name is mentioned as TSERING whereas her mother's correct name is TSERING PALKYI as mentioned in Aadhaar Card. Both the names TSERING PALKYI and TSERING belong to the same person. YESHI THUPTEN S/O PEMA GAKYIL SITHAR R/o Snow View Ward, Shanti Niwas Charlton Lodge, Mallital, Nainital, Distt. Nainital (Uttarakhand) 263002

In my Army Record my Daughter name mistakenly recorded as SNEHA and whereas her correct name is SNEHA BANGWAL as mentioned in all other documents. ARMY No.JC 386690P Ex SUB Hemant Kumar R/O Daurwala PO-Mothrowala DEHRADUN UTTARAKHAND Vide IN-UK 171954466029435WW Affidavit 23.04.24 before Dehradun.

Lost & Found

Original sale deed of my property which is duly registered vide Book No 1, Jild 88, Page 101 to 118 at Serial No 2634 dated 25.04.1992 in Sub Registrar office Dehradun has been actually lost somewhere. If it is found by anyone kindly contact Jamshed Ahmad S/o Late Shri Rasheem Ahmad, R/o 47-A East Shishila Enclave, GMS Road,

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I CHAVAN SANTOSH YASHVANT No. 2813091F Rank NK S/O YASHVANT SADASHIV CHAVAN R/o Plot No 311, Galli No 14 A, Rankala, Hariom Nagar Phulewadi, Kolhapur Maharashtra-416010. I have changed my Daughter name from SHIVANYA to SHIVANYA SANTOSH CHAVAN VIDE AFFIDAVIT DATED 22 April 2024 BEFORE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE, DEHRADUN (UK).

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U'khand associated with Aushadhi, Ayush and cure: President Murmu

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The President Droupadi Murmu has said that the idea of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam' is at the root of our commitment to make the entire world healthy and free from diseases. She was addressing the fourth convocation of the All India Institute

professional career.

She said that in India's ancient scriptures, the divine land of Uttarakhand was linked with Ayush, Aushadhi and cure. Murmu said in the AIIMS Rishikesh, the patients are also treated with AYUSH

of the latest technology should be the priority of an institute such as AIIMS Rishikesh. She said that the AIIMS Rishikesh is trying to move forward in CAR-T cell therapy and Stem Cell Research. She suggested that the institute should collaborate with other institutes

dence that the institute will use them in practice.

She said that the number of people affected by diabetes in India is more than 10 crore which is the highest in the world. Use of Semaglutide in treatment of diabetes is in discussion these days. The President said that people in Uttarakhand get affected with osteoporosis and anemia and research on such local problems should be the priority of AIIMS Rishikesh.

She opined that the AIIMS Rishikesh should focus on public health and community engagement and by doing this the institute should contribute to the mission of healthy and developed India. The President exhorted the students and said that their patients should remember them for their expert clinical touch as well as their special healing touch.

The governor lieutenant general (retd) Gurmit Singh, the executive director of AIIMS Rishikesh Dr Meenu Singh and others were present on the occasion. A total of 598 students were awarded degrees in the ceremony.



of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Rishikesh on Tuesday. She exhorted the teachers, students and nurses of AIIMS Rishikesh to make the commitment the motto of their

apart from allopathy. She expressed a desire that Uttarakhand should establish itself as an 'Arogya Land'.

The President said that use

for doing research on these subjects. Murmu said that the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics in diagnostics will continue to increase in future and expressed confi-

President Murmu to preside over IGNEFA convocation today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

President Droupadi Murmu will preside over the convocation ceremony of Indian Forest Service probationers of 2022-24 training course at the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy (IGNFA) here on Wednesday. The academy officials informed that the training course consists of 99 IFS probationers and two foreign trainees from Bhutan. The State of Mad-

services of three officers.

Formerly known as Indian Forest College, the IGNEFA has been serving the nation since 1926. All the IFS officers of independent India and 365 forest officers from 14 friendly nations have been trained at this institute so far.

A number of awards will be announced for outstand-



hya Pradesh is going to get the maximum 15 officers from the current batch while Uttarakhand will get the

ing achievements in the training to the IFS probationers and foreign trainees, officials said.

More than 14 lakh people register to visit Char Dham & Hemkund

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

More than 14 lakh people have registered for the Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand so far. According to the information provided by the Tourism department 2,39,167 people have registered to visit Yamunotri, 2,58,456 have registered for Gangotri, 4,79,551

the web portal, 1,87,481 registered through the mobile phone application and 1,19,719 registered through WhatsApp.

It is pertinent to mention here that more than 50 lakh pilgrims had visited the Char



have registered for Kedarnath, 4,02,517 for Badrinath. Further, 20,997 people have registered to visit Hemkund Sahib. As on Tuesday evening, a total of 14,00,688 people had registered to visit the Char Dham shrines and Hemkund Sahib.

The department officials further informed that out of the people who have registered for the pilgrimage so far, 10,93,488 registered through

Dham shrines in the State last year. About 5.18 lakh people had visited the Char Dham during 2021 with the number being low that year due to the pilgrimage being affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of pilgrims rose to 46.27 lakh in 2022 and in 2023 more than 50 lakh visited the Char Dham shrines. The authorities are expecting that a higher number of people will visit the Char Dham shrines this year.

Health Dept gears to ensure safe Char Dham Yatra for pilgrims

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Health department of Uttarakhand has started gearing up for the upcoming Char Dham Yatra. The Yatra will start with the opening of the portals of Gangotri, Yamunotri and Kedarnath on May 10.

Informing about the preparations of his department, the Health secretary R Rajesh Kumar said that a parameter of health is kept on the website of the Tourism department in which the pilgrims should give details of their health.

Kumar said that the focus of the department is to make the health services on Kedarnath and Badrinath route better and for this the process of purchasing high quality equipment for the hospitals in both these Dhams has started.

He said that the department has prepared the SoP for the Yatra in 11 languages for the convenience of the pilgrims.

The secretary further said that 50 screening points on the Yatra route have been set



up where the health screening of the pilgrims will be done. Here the test of high blood pressure, sugar and other parameters of the pilgrims will be done.

He said that the health department has made an appeal to the doctors of other states for serving the pilgrims.

Kumar said that in the trek to Yamunotri and Kedarnath the pilgrims should take a rest of five to ten minutes after every one or two hour. They should keep a raincoat, um-

rella, pulse oximeter and thermometer with them in the Yatra. The pilgrims suffering from heart ailments, high BP, sugar and asthma should keep their medicine and the number of their doctor with them.

Kumar said that the department will keep a special focus on the Kedarnath Yatra route. Last year 10 medical relief posts and two PHC centres were set up here.

He added that health ATMs will also be set up on the Yatra routes.

Cyber frauds targeting pilgrims expected to increase this Char Dham Yatra

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Considering the steady rise in the number of registrations for Char Dham Yatra, the number of cyber frauds targeting pilgrims is also expected to increase this year. About 14 lakh people have registered to visit Char Dham shrines in the past five days out of which nearly five lakh pilgrims have registered to visit Kedarnath temple so far. Since the number of registrations for the Kedarnath shrine is usually higher than other shrines, the maximum helicopter services are also booked for Kedarnath. In the past two years, the authorities observed a significant rise in the number of fraudsters duping pilgrims with fake websites that claim to provide helicopter booking services for the Char Dham shrines, especially Kedarnath. Last year, the cyber crime police station of Uttarakhand State Task Force (STF) blocked about 50 similar websites

which were being operated from various parts of the country. The cyber police also took action against eight to 10 accused. Talking about the preparations of cyber police ahead of the Char Dham Yatra this year, the deputy superintendent of police (DSP) of the cyber crime police station, STF, Ankush Mishra said, "Our cyber crime police team is keeping an eye on potential fake websites ahead of Char Dham Yatra that can dupe people to take action against them accordingly. We have also started raising awareness through social media among people across the country." He said that people must pay attention to payment-related methods before any online transaction. He stated that rather than searching for random websites on Google to book helicopter services, one should visit the official website of the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation

(IRCTC). Since many people do not verify the authenticity of the websites they find on Google before booking helicopter service, they become more prone to be the victims of cyber fraud, the DSP said. He also urged the public to provide information about such fake service providers including websites, web links, and mobile numbers to STF. Such details can also be sent on mobile numbers-9456591505 and 9412080875. He also appealed to people to use only the official website of the IRCTC www.helijatra.irctc.co.in for the booking of helicopter service for the Char Dham Yatra. "The cyber fraudsters are coming up with new methods to dupe pilgrims every day. People need to be cautious and must book the helicopter service only through authenticated websites," he added.

Cong campaign lacked lustre of star campaigners in Uttarakhand

Star campaigners rallied voters across State for BJP, only two campaigned for Cong

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

After the end of polling in the five Lok Sabha constituencies of the State, the leaders of Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress are making claims of the victories of their candidates. The veracity of these claims would be verified only on June 4, the day of counting of the votes but it is evident that BJP pushed

State for the Congress party. Apart from her only the former deputy chief minister of Rajasthan Sachin Pilot was the only star campaigner of Congress who came to Uttarakhand.

In absence of star campaigners the candidates of Congress party were left to



more star campaigners than its rival Congress in the election campaign in the State.

In the election campaign, the ruling BJP unleashed a battery of star campaigners in Uttarakhand. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on whose face, performance and guarantees the BJP is contesting the LS election of 2024 addressed two mega rallies in Rudrapur (Udhampur Singh Nagar) and Rishikesh (Dehradun) in the State.

Apart from the PM, the BJP national president JP Nadda, Defence minister Rajnath Singh, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath, Union minister Smriti Irani, Union minister of State general (retd) VK Singh and Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini also addressed public meetings in Uttarakhand for BJP candidates.

On the other hand Priyanka Gandhi addressed two rallies (Roorkee and Ramnagar) in the

manage for themselves in their constituencies. To make matters worse, the tallest leader of the Congress party in Uttarakhand, the former CM Harish Rawat got stuck in Haridwar where his son Virendra Rawat was contesting on Congress ticket and could not campaign for Congress candidates in other constituencies.

CM Pushkar Singh Dhama led from the front in the campaign of the ruling BJP in the State. He addressed more than 90 public meetings and road shows in all parts of the State. He covered all the 70 assembly segments during the campaign. Interestingly the CM was in election mode even before the declaration of the LS elections. He had addressed beneficiary conclaves and women conclaves in all the districts of the State even before the declaration of the elections. The president of the State unit of BJP Mahendra Bhatt also addressed scores of public meetings in all parts of the State in support of the BJP candidates.

More women than men voted in Garhwal & Almora LS constituencies

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Women voters in Garhwal and Almora Lok Sabha constituencies outnumbered their male counterparts in coming out to polling booths to exercise their franchise in the LS elections of 2024. The data released by the Election Commission of India (ECI) shows that in Garhwal LS seat, 3,37,993 male and 3,79,833 female voters exercised their franchise in the just concluded polling. In Garhwal LS seat a total of 13,66,983 voters were registered and out of them 7,17,834 voters came out to vote. The voter turnout in the constituency was 52.42 per cent. Similarly in the Almora (SC) reserved constituency, 3,79,833 women voters voted in comparison to

The additional chief electoral officer (ACEO) VK Jogdande said that the revised voter turnout in the five LS seats in Uttarakhand stands at 57.24 per cent now. He said that 63.53 per cent turnout was reported in Haridwar LS constituency which is highest in the State. Here 12,93,363 voters exercised their franchise which included 6,90,238 Male and 6,03,080 female voters. In Nainital Udhampur Singh Nagar LS constituency 62.47 per cent turnout was reported. Here 12,59,180 voters voted which included 6,55,767 Male and 6,03,394 female voters. Jogdande said that 53.76 per cent turnout was reported in Tehri LS constituency. In this constituency 53.76 per cent



3,05,516 male voters. Here 13,37,648 voters were registered and 48.82 per cent turnout was reported which is the lowest in the State.

turnout was reported. Here 4,27,234 male and 4,20,964 female voters exercised their franchise.

SSP inspects and reviews strong room security

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh on Tuesday inspected the strong room at Maharana Pratap Sports College in Raipur and reviewed the security of the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) of 10 legislative Assemblies kept there following the polling in Lok Sabha elections on April 19. He took stock of the security arrangements of the strong room and interacted with the police and paramilitary forces deployed there for security purposes. He also gave them some instructions regarding the security arrangements. Singh said that the authorities at the district administration level and the police level are taking regular stock of safety



arrangements since all polling parties returned and deposited EVMs in the strong room with full security by April 20. He said that all personnel are efficiently

conducting their duties and the senior police officials are regularly monitoring the security of the strong room at Maharana Pratap Sports College.

PM Modi engaging in politics of hatred: Karan Mahara

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Karan Mahara said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is engaging in politics of religion and caste. In a statement released to the media he said that the election speeches of PM Modi can only create divisions and animosity in the society. He said that the manner in which PM Modi changes colours in every election can put even the chameleon to shame. Mahara opined that Modi is trying to hide the failures of 10 years of his tenure as PM under the garb of religion.

"The speeches of the PM start with the use of bad words for the Congress and Gandhi family and end with criticising other religions. Not even a single word in his speech is dedicated to the achievements of his government," he said.

The PCC president challenged that PM Modi and BJP should go to the people with promises it made in the elections of 2014 and 2019. He said that the PM is not doing this because the people will know that the election promises

have turned out to be a bundle of lies.

Mahara said that PM Modi has so much hatred towards other religions that he compares the election manifesto of Congress party with that of Muslim league. It is a shame that he talks about snatching away the Mangalsutra of women. He added that no one would have believed that PM Modi will stoop down to such a low level for power that in his election speeches he is spreading hatred against a particular religion.

Modi has never done politics on basis of religion: Rajnath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has never done politics on the basis of religion or by dividing the society and stressed that his predecessor Dr Manmohan Singh had in 2006 talked about extending reservation for the Muslims.

The defence minister made the remarks at an election rally in Greater Noida in support of BJP's Gautam Buddha Nagar Lok Sabha candidate Mahesh Sharma.

Prime Minister Modi on Sunday suggested that if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute wealth of people to the Muslims and cited Dr Singh's remark that the

minority community had the first claim on the country's resources.

Addressing a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara, Modi also alleged the Congress plans to give people's hard-earned money and valuables to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children".

Addressing a gathering at Bisahda village in Greater Noida, the defence minister attacked the opposition for creating a ruckus at this time and trying to put a question mark on Prime Minister Modi. "Sisters and brothers, it's not that I know the prime minister from today. We have had very good relations for a long time. He has never done politics of Hindu, Muslim and Christian. Our prime minister never thought of doing politics by



dividing the society," Singh said.

"He (Modi) said at one place that Congress has said in its manifesto that we will get the properties surveyed. If it is said in the manifesto then why should people have any objection to it. What do you want to do by getting the properties surveyed? Do you want to distribute the country's resources equally? What do you want to do?" he asked.

The veteran BJP leader also asked the Congress to clear its position on the matter. "Dr Manmohan Singh ji was the prime minister of India. I respect Dr Manmohan Singh ji even today, I have respect for him, brothers and sisters. Dr Manmohan Singh himself in the meeting of the National Defence Council at the Vigyan

Bhawan on December 9, 2006, had said that if anyone has the first right on the property of this country, it is the minority and especially he had said that it belongs to the Muslims," Rajnath said. "Sisters and brothers, whatever property and whatever resources there are in this country, everyone should have equal rights, he had said this, we did not say this. Now when the prime minister said this, these people created an uproar over it," he added.

Rajnath said the Congress-led government had in the past formed several commissions, which had recommended in their report that out of the 27 per cent reservation for the OBCs, 6 per cent should be for the Muslims and 2 per cent should be for the minorities. "We did not make this com-

mission," he added.

Escalating his attack on the Congress, Rajnath said, "It did not stop at this. If someone from the Scheduled Caste converts, he should be given reservation despite the change of religion. Not only this, they (Congress) also ended the reservation of SC-ST in Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University."

"These people have formed the government by dividing the country equally on the basis of Hindu and Muslim," he alleged. The senior BJP leader stressed that his party does not want to make the country by dividing it on the basis of caste, creed, religion, Hindu, Muslim or Christian, but wants to make India a great country of the world by keeping everyone together.

Government focussing on research, learning and innovation in big way: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said his government is focusing on research, learning and innovation in a big way, a day after QS president Nunzio Quacquarelli lauded the performance improvement in Indian universities.

Indian universities demonstrated the highest performance improvement among all the G20 nations this year, a significant 14 per cent year-on-year improvement in their average ranking, Quacquarelli said in a social media post.

Tagging his post, Modi said on X, "This is encouraging to see! Our Government is focussing on research, learning and innovation in a big way. In the coming times, this emphasis will deepen even



further, thus benefitting our Yuva Shakti."

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was the highest ranked university in India in the coveted rankings announced earlier this month by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the London-based higher education analytics firm. The

university was ranked at 20th position globally for development studies.

IIM-Ahmedabad figured among the top 25 institutions globally for business and management studies while IIM-Bangalore and IIM-Calcutta were among the top 50.

India, Oman review collaboration in combating illegal activities at sea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Oman on Tuesday there reviewed their collaboration in combating transnational illegal activities at sea and promote regional cooperation during the fifth Annual High-Level Meeting between the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and the Royal Oman Police Coast Guard (ROPCG).

Giving details, officials said this meeting follows the institutionalized mechanism as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the ICG and ROPCG.

A delegation from the Royal Oman Police Coast Guard led by Colonel Abdul Aziz Mohammed Ali Al Jabri, Assistant Officer Commanding, ROPCG



arrived in New Delhi on Monday to participate in the meeting. The high-level discussions were led by Director General Coast Guard Rakesh Pal.

The meeting focused on bolstering bilateral engagements through capacity-building programme, cross ship's visit, implementation of Sea Rider programme, establishing professional linkages between pollution reporting centers and other collaborative arrangements.

Both sides expressed their commitment to enhancing mutual cooperation in addressing maritime challenges, thereby strengthening the maritime safety and security framework in the region.

A meeting between the Royal Oman Police Coast Guard delegation and representatives from Society of Indian Defence Manufacturer (SIDM) is also planned on Wednesday here to acquaint with India's shipbuilding capabilities under 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

The 5th Annual ICG-ROPCG High-Level Meeting underscores the commitment of both the Coast Guards to jointly address maritime challenges and foster regional cooperation, ultimately contributing to the safety and security of the maritime domain in the region.

UGC warns public against fake online programmes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has warned the public against fake online programmes with abbreviations similar to recognised degree nomenclature, officials said, flagging a particular "10-day MBA" course.

"Some individuals or organisations are offering online programmes and courses with abbreviated forms similar to the higher education system's recognised degree programmes. One such programme to which the attention of the commission has been drawn is a '10 Days MBA,' University Grants Commission (UGC) Secretary Manish Joshi said.

"The nomenclature of a degree, including its abbreviated form, duration and entry

qualification, is specified by the UGC, with the previous approval of the central government, through the publication of a notification in the official gazette," he added.

The UGC secretary clarified that only a university, established or incorporated by or under a central act, provincial act or state act, or an institution deemed to be a university or an institution specifically empowered by an act of Parliament, has the right to confer a degree.

"Higher education institutions are also required to obtain approval from the UGC to offer any online degree programme in terms of the UGC regulations. A list of recognised HEIs (higher education institutions) to offer online programmes and of permitted online programmes available on deb.Ugc.Ac.In," Joshi said.

BJP rolling back pro people measures in Rajasthan: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday said its previous government in Rajasthan introduced schemes that provided crucial protection to vulnerable populations of the state and asked why the current BJP dispensation is "rolling back" those "pro-people" measures.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh posed questions to Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of his election rally in Tonk-Sawai Madhopur.

"Questions for the PM as he heads to Tonk-Sawai Madhopur today: Why is the BJP scaling back INC's pro-people schemes? How much corruption has the BJP committed in the ERCP? How long will families displaced by the Isarda Dam be denied compensation by the BJP?" Ramesh said in a post on X.

Elaborating on what he said were "jumla details", Ramesh said when the Congress party was in power in Rajasthan, it passed a series of "visionary" laws that would meaningfully improve the quality of life of thousands in the state.

"The Rajasthan Minimum Guaranteed Income Act, the addition of 25 extra days for MGNREGA (Rural) over and above the sanctioned 100 days, the Indira Gandhi Shahari Rojgar Yojana Act which guaranteed 100 days of employment to families residing in urban areas, the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare Act), and the Right to Health Act which provided universal health coverage - all these schemes provided crucial protections to vulnerable populations in the state," he said.

"Instead of these acts being implemented, we are now seeing a breakdown of governance since the BJP came to power in December 2023," Ramesh said.

At least 15.5 lakh pensioners in Rajasthan have stopped receiving their pensions since January this year due to "verification" issues, he claimed.

The government also attempted to reduce the health coverage from Rs 25 lakh under the Congress' Chiranjeevi Yojana to just Rs 5 lakh under the BJP's



Ayushman Bharat, Ramesh alleged.

"In their vindictiveness, why is the BJP government rolling back the INC's pro-people schemes?" he said.

Ramesh said, BJP leader and Rajasthan Agriculture Minister Kirodi Lal Meena has "accused his own government of corruption" in connection with the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP).

"He (Meena) alleged that the Water Resources Department and the ERCP Commission have colluded with a Delhi-based company to scam the government of Rs 35 crore.

"According to a letter that Meena wrote to the Rajasthan CM, land worth Rs 50 crore was sold to the Delhi company for just Rs 9 crore, and Rs 35 crore was pocketed by government officials. He also alleged irregularities in the auction of land located near the Alwar main road for the ERCP project," Ramesh said.

"One can only imagine how deeply corrupt the BJP has become for its own leaders to now be crying foul. Are they just following the example of the PM and his Rs 4 lakh crore Chanda Do Dhandha Lo model of corruption?" the Congress leader said.

Ramesh said the Isarda Dam is now 75 per cent complete but the BJP government is yet to rehabilitate and resettle the 37 villages that were submerged by the dam.

"Farmers from Tonk and Sawai Madhopur have now submitted hundreds of representations to the government demanding fair compensation but all their efforts have been in vain.

"The leader of the Kisan Mahasabha highlighted that compensation had not been determined by the district collector as per law, physical verifications were never conducted, and the farmers have not been adequately compensated for their immovable properties," Ramesh said.

Mechanical bull riding very risky for kids: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The popularity of mechanical bull riding at places like amusement parks and corporate events is on the rise in India too. But with this fun activity comes some serious risks, especially for kids. A study by health experts at Loma Linda University Children's Health has shown just how alarming these risks are, revealing that kids are getting hurt way too often when riding mechanical bulls.

They're getting hurt so much that experts are calling for stricter safety rules and regulations to make sure everyone stays safe while having fun.

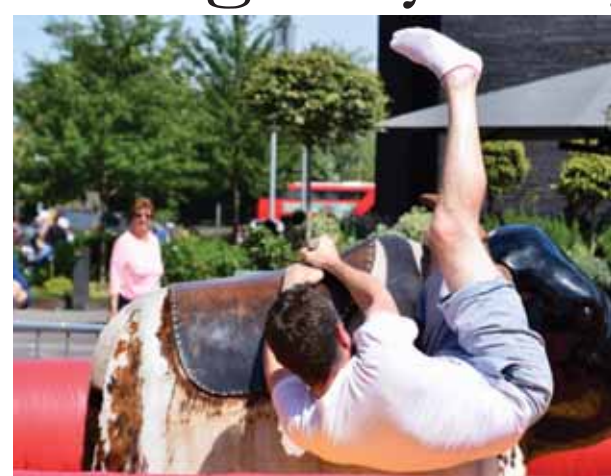
Titled "Mechanical Bull Injuries in Pediatric Patients: A Call for Safety Regulations,"

highlights the urgent need for enhanced safety measures and regulations.

The findings are published in the journal Children's Health Care and revealed that mechanical bull riding poses a significant risk to children, with traumatic brain injuries being the most common outcome.

"Mechanical bulls, even when advertised as 'children friendly' are far from safe and are a real public health concern," said Martin G. Rosenthal, MD, assistant professor of surgery at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital (LUCH) and corresponding author of the study.

LUCH has identified up to 35 cases over seven years, each resulting in severe injuries. Over 65% of these cases



involved severe brain injuries, and more than half of all children required immediate surgical intervention. "Our study, one of the largest examining mechanical bull riding injuries

in children, reveals that most injuries occur at private events where mechanical bulls are rented from vendors," said Sina Asaadi, MD, MBA, a research fellow and lead author of the

study. "This suggests that the actual number of injuries may be higher than reported, indicating potential underreporting." Long-term consequences of brain injuries include memory issues, severe headaches, nausea, seizures, and possible learning disabilities, to name a few.

Rehabilitation for these patients is intensive, involving physical, occupational, and speech therapies, sometimes extending over months and years.

"Several other studies from southern California have reported similar findings and there appears to be a proclivity of these injuries occurring in our own backyard," said Rosenthal.

The machine replicates the sensation of riding a bull and is designed to dismount the

rider, although most are thrown off to land on inflatable or padded flooring. Mechanical bull riding is typically reserved for adults; however, there are modified versions of the machine for children.

Yet another study, 'No more bull: pediatric head injuries as a result of mechanical bull rides,' says that mechanical bulls have an inherent risk of high-force trauma. "We reviewed a series of pediatric patients who suffered head injuries/skull fractures caused by mechanical bull riding, many of which required surgical intervention. We recommend the introduction of increased safety measures and better age guidelines to restrict children from riding these machines," said the authors of the study.

Army Chief outlines Indian Army efforts towards self reliance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Tuesday here outlined the Indian army's efforts towards self-reliance in enhancing its military capabilities and underscored the significance of comprehensive national power in a country's growth.

Making this assertion at All India Management Association's National Leadership Conclave, he said while economic strength serves as the foundation of growth, military prowess is essential for safeguarding national interests.

He underlined the evolving geopolitical landscape characterized by rapid changes and geopolitical power plays, reaffirming the relevance of hard power in ensuring national security.

Stressing upon the Indian Army's role as a deterrent against conflict and its preparedness to respond to threats across the spectrum of conflict, the Army chief highlighted the importance of self-reliance in defence.

He cited the disruptions in the global supply chain during the pandemic and the lessons drawn from ongoing conflicts, emphasizing the imperative for India to reduce its



dependency on external sources for defence requirements.

In pursuit of self-reliance and modernization, General Pande outlined the Indian Army's transformation initiatives, which encompass force restructuring, modernization, improvement of systems and processes, human resource management, and promotion of jointness and integration with sister services.

He emphasized the need to embrace disruptive technologies and foster an indigenous defence-industry ecosystem to achieve self-reliance.

The Indian Army's vision for the future involves transforming into a modern, agile, and technology-enabled force

Ministry seeks report on spice bans by Singapore, Hong Kong

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Days after the Singapore and Hong Kong red flagged four spices products manufactured by the Indian firms MDH and Everest recalling them from the market, the Union Commerce Ministry has directed Indian embassies in both the countries to send a detailed report in the matter.

In a statement posted on its website on April 5, the Hong Kong's food regulatory authority, Centre for Food Safety (CFS), said that three spice products of MDH — Madras Curry Powder (spice blend for Madras Curry), Sambhar Masala (Mixed Masala Powder), and Curry Powder (Mixed Masala Powder) — along with Everest's Fish Curry Masala contain "a pesticide, ethylene oxide".

Recalls have been initiated, and the CFS has instructed vendors to cease sales and remove affected products from shelves. Meanwhile, the Singapore Food Agency (SFA) has ordered a recall of Everest's Fish Curry Masala for similar reasons, as per reports.

Former Vice President Naidu calls for end to freebies in elections

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Tuesday said the "frequent" party-hopping by political leaders was a "disturbing trend" and called for strengthening the anti-defection law.

Speaking at a function at his residence here after receiving the Padma Vibhushan award on Monday evening by President Droupadi Murmu at a function at Rashtrapati Bhawan.

"Defections are being encouraged. We should strengthen the anti-defection law," he asserted.

"Now, the worry is that there is a fall in the standards in public life. In political parties, people often change their parties. The latest trend is people are in one party in the morning and join another party in the evening and then they criticise your leader and say things left and right. Some of them are

favoured with tickets also.

"This is a very disturbing trend and people should avoid it. People should work at parties and prove their credentials. If anybody wants to change parties, one should resign from the post given by that party and then only join another party. One can understand making accusations, but what is happening is not accusing but abusing," Naidu said.

He said another unhealthy trend is that people are making promises left and right, without considering where the money will come from, as there is no money.

"Political parties must come out with a manifesto and secondly, should come out with schemes supported by the financial health of the state and third, how they are going to mobilise resources and then whatever they want to spend," the former vice president said.

He wondered how it was possible to give everything for free as "money does not come from trees". But then some of the leaders and parties are making promises left and right even when the financial health of the state is weak, he observed.



Rajeev Chandrasekhar gets a breather

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI



Attempts by the Congress and the pro-CPI(M) Asianet News channel to derail the electoral fortunes of BJP's Rajeev Chandrasekhar who is contesting as a candidate from the Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha constituency fell flat on Tuesday as Kerala High Court dismissed a public interest litigation petition filed by the Congress challenging the returning officer's decision to accept the nomination papers of the BJP candidate.

The petitioner had contended that Rajeev Chandrasekhar, a union minister of state, had filed false affidavits along with his nomination paper and these were accepted by the Returning Officer. Their grievance was that the union minister, one of the billionaires in the country, had suppressed details of his taxable income and hence his nomination paper should not be accepted.

by the returning officer on that complaint. "Where is the statutory provision that says that a reasoned order must be given by the returning officer on complaints given to them," the Court asked the petitioners and ordered the rejection of the petition. Sources close to the minister told The Pioneer that Asianet News, a channel owned by the former was giving him sleepless nights by telecasting anti-Narendra Modi reports and stories. "Only anti-Modi reports are being aired by the said news channel giving an impression that Rajeev Chandrasekhar is han in glove with the staff. If he dares to take action against the editorial staff, all of them would strike work and the channel would go off the air. The editorial staff members are hardcore CPI(M) fanatics and one of them is a plant by the Church itself," said the source.

A Bench of Justices VG Arun and S Manu accepted the argument of the Election Commission of India (ECI) that once the nomination of a candidate is accepted by the returning officer, the remedy for the aggrieved person is to file an election petition before the High Court and not a PIL. "As rightly contended by counsel for Election Commission of India, the

remedy of the petitioner, if aggrieved by the acceptance of the affidavit filed by one of the candidates is to challenge the same in an election petition," the Court said in its order. Avani Bansal, the petitioner, argued that though she had lodged a complaint with the Returning Officer pointing out the discrepancies in Rajeev Chandrasekhar's affidavits, there was no "reasoned decision" rendered

Congress wants to implement Sharia law in country: Yogi

PTI ■ AMROHA (UP)



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday made serious allegations against the Congress and said the grand old party has in its election manifesto expressed its intention to implement the 'Sharia law' in the country and redistribute people's property.

Addressing an election rally in Amroha, Adityanath said, "The Congress and its allies have betrayed the country and have once again come to you with their false manifesto. If you look at the Congress manifesto, they say that if they form a government, we will implement the Sharia law."

"You tell me, will this country be run by the Constitution made by Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar or by Shariat?" he asked. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has in his election rallies said the Congress has included redistribution of people's property in its manifesto. "Congress people talk in their manifesto that they will implement 'vyaktigat kanoon' (personal laws). That means Sharia law will be implemented because Modi ji stopped the practice of triple talaq," Adityanath said.

Escalating his attack, Adityanath alleged, "The Congress manifesto says that they will take people's property and distribute it. Do you want to allow the Congress and Samajwadi Party to loot your property?" "Look at the condition of these shameless people. On one hand, they are eyeing on your property and on the other hand they are making the mafia and criminals their necklaces and reciting Fatiha in their name," he added.

Referring to a comment made by former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh in 2006, Adityanath said, "When Dr Manmohan Singh ji was the Prime Minister, he had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's resources..." "So where will our Dalits, backward classes, Kharagvanshis, Pals, poor and farmers go? Where will

Two women BJD leaders quit party ahead of LS, Assembly polls

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Two prominent women BJD leaders have quit the ruling party, weeks ahead of the simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections in the state. While Hindol MLA Simarani Nayak resigned from the BJD on Monday, former Sambalpur legislator Raswswari Panigrahi announced her decision to quit on Tuesday.

Nayak resigned from the primary membership of the party, hours after being denied a ticket to contest the assembly polls. She was replaced by Dhenkanal MP Mahesh Sahu.

In her resignation letter to BJD president Naveen Patnaik, the two-time MLA cited personal problems as the reason behind her move. Nayak had won the seat in 2019, defeating BJP candidate Ashok Kumar Nayak by almost 19,000 votes.

Panigrahi said she quit after the BJD leadership fielded candidates who were from outside the district. The BJD initially fielded former MP Prasanna Acharya from Bargharh for the Sambalpur assembly seat, but later named Rohit Pujari from Rairakhol as its candidate for the constituency.

CPM leader DNA remark against Rahul triggers political row

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI



The face off between the CPI(M)-led LDF and the Congress-led UDF in Kerala took an ugly turn on Tuesday with a Marxist leader demanding a DNA test of Rahul Gandhi, the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi clan and its endorsement by the State's most powerful person, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

as there were doubts about the antecedents of the Gandhi scion. Vijayan had called Rahul Gandhi as Pappu during an election campaign on Sunday. Anvar went one step further and described AICC General secretary K C Venugopal as a low quality Congress leader who advises Rahul Gandhi in all important national and international issues.

Interestingly, both the Congress and the CPI(M) are constituents of the INDI Alliance, an umbrella organization formed by Opposition parties to defeat Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Hindutva forces in this edition of General Election. Television news channels and newspapers miss no chance in publishing video images and pictures of Rahul Gandhi hugging and kissing Communist leaders Sitaram Yechury and D Raja though Prakash Karat keeps the former at a safe distance.

On Sunday, Vijayan had declared that Rahul Gandhi would not be a prime ministerial candidate, giving enough hints that Vijayaraghavan would the CPI(M) nominee for the top job, according to A Jayashankar, author and political observer. As CPI(M) and Congress leaders wine and dine together once the go put of the State, the duel between the two is being seen as a faced to cover their links as both are fighting it out in the State. While Vijayan claimed that the LDF would sweep all the 20 seats at stake, Congress strongman Ramesh Chennithala despite his unhappiness with the High Command said on Tuesday that the I.N.D.I. Alliance would win all the 20 seats in Kerala.

16 candidates in fray in two Lok Sabha seats in Goa

PTI ■ PANAJI

Eight candidates each are in fray for the two Lok Sabha seats in Goa after the withdrawal of nominations, as per the Election Commission data. In North Goa, the prominent candidates include sitting BJP MP Shripad Naik and former Union minister Ramakant Khalap fielded by the Congress.

In South Goa, the BJP has fielded industrialist Pallavi Dempo, while the Congress has nominated former naval officer Viriato Fernandes. Monday was the last day for the withdrawal of nominations.

Goa, which has two Lok Sabha seats, will vote on May 7 in the third phase of polling. In North Goa, the BJP has renominated its sitting up Naik, while the Congress has fielded former Union minister Khalap. Manoj Parab, who heads the fledgling Revolutionary Goans Party (RGP), is also contesting the parliamentary poll. Journalist Milan Vaigankar and Sakharam Naik have been nominated by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Akhil Bharatiya Parivar Party, respectively, while three independent candidates are also contesting in the North Goa seat.

Baharampur may not be a cakewalk for Adhir Chowdhury

PTI ■ KOLKATA



Unemployment and workforce migration continue to remain major issues in Congress heavyweight Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury's bastion, the Baharampur Lok Sabha constituency in West Bengal's Murshidabad district, and seems to have triggered 'anti-incumbency' for the five-time MP from the seat.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) sprung a surprise by bringing in former India all-rounder Yusuf Pathan from Gujarat to challenge Chowdhury, the son of the soil who has been winning the seat without a break since 1999.

Besides Pathan, Chowdhury is also taking on BJP's Nirmal Chandra Saha, a popular doctor from the region, where polls are scheduled on May 13. "Although we consider Adhir da as our leader, we did not see his required involvement in Baharampur's development

in the last decade. We had higher expectations from him," Sudhir Sengupta, a local businessman, told PTI. According to Lakshman Hazari, a resident of Amar Chakraborty Road in Baharampur town for the last 55 years, the entire district seems to have earned the dubious distinction of becoming the repository for supplying skilled labour to the rest of the country at a low cost. "What has this TMC government done other than

(ST). The Lok Sabha constituency has seven assembly segments — Burwan (SC), Kandi, Bharatpur, Rejinagar, Beldanga, Baharampur, Naoda — all in Murshidabad district.

As a mark of making political inroads into one of the last remaining Congress strongholds of the state, the TMC managed to win six of those seven seats in the 2021 state Assembly elections, losing just one — the Baharampur assembly segment — to the BJP. While the TMC has never won the Baharampur Lok Sabha constituency, local party leaders appeared to be taking heart from Chowdhury's declining vote share, which has dipped by over 11 per cent since the 2009 general elections. Political observers maintain that despite five consecutive wins, Chowdhury has failed to cement the Congress foothold in Baharampur.

Thrissur Pooram, mother of festivals, leave a trail of pathos

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI



The decision of the Kerala Government to call off Thrissur Pooram, rated as mother of all festivals, has upset the followers of Sanatana Dharma and believers of temple rituals. The 19 April festival was called off by the police without furnishing any reason despite the fact the event was held without any disturbance.

Nandakishore, cine artist and R K Damodaran, poet, termed the police action as an indication of things to come in future targeting the Hindu festivals. Nandakishore said that there was a concern among devotees that the display of Lord Rama's and the Ayodhya Temple pictures in the decorative umbrellas would have upset some political parties and religions and this could be the reason for the decision to cancel the Pooram.

Following intervention by Suresh Gopi, the BJP candidate contesting from Thrissur Lok Sabha constituency and the Chinmaya Mission, an apolitical organization, the police was forced to backtrack from its decision after hours of stand off. The customary fireworks, which marks the conclusion of the year's Pooram was held 24 hours later on Saturday, a hitherto unheard development. The CPI(M) which was

played by the Prime Minister. K Muraleedharan, the Congress candidate fighting against Suresh Gopi, alleged that the commotion was yet another proof of the BJP-CPI(M) joint venture to defeat the Congress candidate. Meanwhile, Harikiran Muraleedharan, a young advocate in Thrissur filed a petition with Ombudsman, Travancore Kochi Devaswam Board, against the Kerala Police for using footwears in the Lord Mahadeva Temple by the Kerala Police. "This was in violation of the High Court order DBP-83/2003

banning wearing footwears inside temple premises and hence an action of contempt of court," said Harikiran in his petition. He wanted strict action against this high handed behavior of City Police Commissioner Ankit Ashokan and his team of cops for hurting the religious sentiments of the believers. "Every year the Pooram concludes with sweet memories of light, sound and the rhythm with which more than 500 percussionists create colorful music. But 2024 Pooram concluded with a sense of pathos," said Nandakishore.

Citizenship big issue in Barak Valley, CAA key to resolving it: BJP

PTI ■ SILCHAR (ASSAM)

Citizenship has been a major issue in the two Lok Sabha constituencies of Barak Valley, and the CAA will go a long way in resolving it, BJP's Silchar (SC) candidate and Assam minister Parimal Suklabaidya said. The BJP took steps to bring in a law, which will help people who came to the valley from Bangladesh, he told PTI in an interview.

He assured that the process will be simplified after the MCC is lifted," the BJP leader said. "Problems may arise in its implementation, but we are committed to resolving those," Suklabaidya said, adding that political parties were making "unnecessary noise" over the matter. All the bottlenecks will be taken care of in the next six to eight months, with support from the state government, he said.

In the two constituencies, which share a 129-km border with Bangladesh, there is a sizeable population of Hindu Bengalis, displaced from the neighbouring country, who entered the valley over a period of time. "The Citizenship (Amendment) Act was enacted as a law by Parliament, but soon after the framing of the rules, the Model Code of Conduct came into force and not much work could be done in this regard," Suklabaidya, the Minister for Excise, Transport and Fisheries, said. The citizenship problem was created due to partition, and no political party took any step to solve it for 70 years, he claimed. "It is true that some people are finding it difficult to apply online, and there are issues related to submission of documents, but Union Home Minister Amit Shah has been

apprised of the matter. He said. Communication and connectivity were the other key issues in the Barak Valley, the BJP nominee said. Suklabaidya said it was former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who had taken the initiative for the East-West Corridor from Silchar to Gujarat, but after that the Congress government was in power for 10 years and it "neglected" the project. "After Narendra Modi became the prime minister in 2014, he took up the initiative again and the project is nearing completion. It will help in reducing the travel time to the state capital to a great extent," he said.

With ₹5785 crore assets, TDP LS contestant Chandra Sekhar stirs election attention

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

TDP's candidate for Guntur Lok Sabha seat P Chandra Sekhar has captured headlines after he declared his family assets — both movable and immovable — at Rs 5,785 crore, in his election affidavit, potentially making him one of the wealthiest contestants in the current electoral race. According to an affidavit filed by him, his individual assets stood at Rs 2,448.72 crore while his wife Sriratna Koneru has Rs 2,343.78 crore worth assets and children have nearly Rs 1,000 crore. A press release by

Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) had earlier said, former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath's son Nakul Nath topped the richest contestants list in the Phase-I of the Lok Sabha polls held on April 19, with nearly Rs 717 crore worth of assets. Chandra Sekhar's family has a liability of Rs 1,138 crore to JP Morgan Chase Bank of USA in the form of Line of Credit. From Burripalem village in Andhra Pradesh to working as physician teacher at Johns Hopkins University — Sinai Hospital to founding UWorld (online learning and study resources platform), Chandra Sekhar's journey

was truly fascinating. The Doctor-Entrepreneur-Politician completed his MBBS at NTR University of Health Sciences Vijayawada in 1999 and pursued MD (Internal Medicine) from Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, Pennsylvania in 2005. He secured 27th rank among 60,000 students who took the EAMCET medical entrance examination (MBBS) in the state which was considered the most competitive examination in the country. Chandra Sekhar with an interest in public service, has been working on behalf of the TDP's NRI wing since 2010 to support several

welfare programmes of the party. Though he desired to contest the Lok Sabha polls from Narasaraopet segment in 2014, TDP allotted the ticket to R Sambasiva Rao due to political issues. In a joint filing with his wife, he declared Rs 605.57 crore as per US Tax Cycle Year January 2022 to December 2022 in that country. He has investments and shares in several US-based firms. He also possesses luxury cars such as Rolls Royce Ghost, Mercedes Benz and Tesla in the USA. Chandra Sekhar will take on YSR Congress Party's K Venkata Rosaiah in the elections.

Congress cheated Himachal Pradesh with false promises: Union Minister Anurag Thakur

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR (HP)

Union minister Anurag Thakur on Tuesday accused the Congress of cheating the people of Himachal Pradesh with false promises and the youths in the state are still waiting for five lakh jobs. Addressing election meetings in Hamirpur and Una district, he said the Congress and its guarantees have failed in the entire country which is why, the party was not voted back to power in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. "In Rajasthan, atrocities against women were highest in the country and 19

recruitment exam papers were leaked. In Chhattisgarh, only the family members of the chief minister used to get government jobs," the BJP candidate from Hamirpur alleged. During the Congress rule, the Mahadev App scam came to light in Chhattisgarh while crores of rupees and gold were recovered from the secretariat of Rajasthan, he alleged. The Congress came to power in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka by giving false guarantees, the Union minister claimed, adding that the party completely failed to fulfill even a single promise in Himachal Pradesh.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Weather vagaries

It is as bad as predicted: Extreme events of 2023 were triggered by a much warmer climate

The year past us was characterised by a slew of extreme weather events. Now, a new study has shed light on a disquieting correlation: Many of these occurrences were in line with predictions of a warmer world due to climate change. The study, by a team of atmospheric scientists, analysed the unprecedented frequency and intensity of extreme weather phenomena across the globe in 2023: From devastating wildfires to record-breaking heatwaves, and from erratic precipitation patterns leading to floods and droughts to powerful tropical storms. One of the key findings is the undeniable alignment between these extreme events and the long-standing predictions made by climate scientists. As greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, Earth's climate system is being pushed to its limits. While it has long been established that a warming climate exacerbates the intensity and frequency of such events, the empirical evidence underscores the urgency of addressing climate change mitigation. Also, the ramifications of these events extend far beyond environmental concerns, encompassing socio-economic, humanitarian and geopolitical dimensions. Vulnerable communities bear most of the brunt, and disruption of essential infrastructure and supply chains amplifies the challenges. In the face of these sobering revelations, concerted action is imperative to mitigate the impacts of climate change. This entails not only reducing greenhouse gas emissions through transitioning to renewable energy sources and implementing sustainable land-use practices, but also investing in adaptation strategies to cope with the unavoidable effects of a changing climate.



One such initiative is the issuance of tailored advisories by meteorological agencies to assist farmers in mitigating the impacts of climate variability on agricultural productivity. In this regard, the IMD has taken proactive steps, leveraging advanced forecasting techniques and agronomic expertise. By harnessing data-driven insights and employing localised approaches, these advisories offer valuable guidance to farmers regarding optimal planting schedules, irrigation management, pest and disease control and crop selection. The IMD's initiative exemplifies the importance of integrating scientific knowledge with practical solutions to address the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. By empowering farmers with actionable information and tools, such initiatives not only enhance agricultural resilience but also contribute to sustainable livelihoods and food security. As we navigate the complexities of a changing climate and its far-reaching implications, collaboration and innovation emerge as indispensable pillars for building a more resilient and sustainable future. By heeding the warnings conveyed by atmospheric science studies and embracing proactive measures at local, national and global levels, we can strive for a world where the impacts of extreme weather events are mitigated, and communities are empowered to thrive in harmony with nature.

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PICTALK



Devotees arrive at Jakhu temple to offer prayers on the occasion of 'Hanuman Jayanti', in Shimla

PTI

The rising power of nano influencers

Unlike their macro and celebrity counterparts, they embody the authenticity of everyday people, fostering genuine connections with their audience

In the ever-changing world of social media marketing, nano influencers are becoming a significant presence, giving brands a different way to connect with consumers that focuses on being genuine and establishing personal relationships. Nano influencers, who usually have between 1,000 and 10,000 followers, provide a unique mix of community-focused influence and relatability that sets them apart from larger accounts like macro and celebrity influencers. Nano influencers are similar to regular people — they are our friends, family and colleagues who share their lives and interests on social media without the polished image usually seen in professional influencer marketing. This authentic form of influence relies on real connections and trust, characteristics that are becoming more important in a crowded marketplace filled with advertisements and endorsements from celebrities. Authenticity and Engagement is at the core of Nano Influencers. Nano influencers are successful because of their gen-



uine relationships with their followers, who see them as peers rather than distant celebrities. This authenticity makes their product recommendations more effective and trustworthy. By leveraging personal connections, nano influencers can have a significant impact on their audience. Why are Brands Leaning Towards Nano Influencers? Smaller brands are starting to see the benefits of working with nano influencers for a few reasons. To start, nano influencers tend to have much higher engagement rates compared to influencers with bigger audiences. This shows that nano influencers have real and personal relationships with their followers. On top of that, collaborating with nano influencers is usually more affordable, which means brands can get more out of their marketing bud-

gets while still connecting with their target audience. The Pros
1. Hyper-Targeted Marketing: Small-scale influencers typically concentrate on particular niches, enabling brands to reach individuals with specific interests, resulting in more impactful marketing initiatives.
2. Cost-Effectiveness: With reduced hopes for payment, companies have the opportunity to collaborate with numerous nano influencers using the same amount of money they would typically spend on just one macro or celebrity influencer.
3. Higher Quality of Engagement: Nano influencers tend to spark more genuine engagement, resulting in increased levels of interaction such as comments, likes and shares.
4. Authentic Product Endorsements: Recommendations from nano influencers hold the same weight as recommendations from friends and can greatly influence buying choices.
5. Increased Brand Visibility and Community Building: Nano influencers play a cru-

cial role in connecting brands with tightly-knit communities, increasing brand exposure and building a strong sense of connection with potential customers. The Challenges
Although there are many benefits to working with nano influencers, there are also some challenges to consider. It is important to find influencers who truly connect with the brand's values and message. Additionally, brands will need to deal with the logistics of working with a larger group of influencers to reach their target audience effectively. Brands are always looking for more genuine ways to connect with consumers and nano influencers are becoming a popular choice. These influencers focus on building real relationships and trust with their followers, creating a more authentic connection. This approach is resonating with consumers who are growing tired of traditional advertising and celebrity endorsements. (The writer is the founder and CEO of iCubesWire; views are personal)



SAHIL CHOPRA

Historic legal battle unfolds over Gyanvapi



PRAFULL GORADIA

Amidst the legal wrangling, a deeper narrative emerges, one of contested ownership, religious desecration and the enduring scars of history

The legal hearings, whether in the court at Varanasi or the Supreme Court, over the past many months regarding the worship at Gyan Vapi, carry ethical interest. The statures of the lawyers of both sides in these courts appear to be comparable. It has occurred to neither lawyers nor laymen that one side argues in defence of their clients' rights of worship; the puja in the tehekhan, whereas the opposing side also has argued that they have been the owners of the edifice in question. Also, it has not occurred to the judges, leaders and clients; in fact, no one else that the property is an acquisition by dacoity; i.e., loot in whatever sense. There was no mosque in that vicinity at all, until 17th century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb via a firman (a royal decree) had the Kashi Vishwanath Temple destroyed, except for the western side, which still unmistakably bears the evidence of the structure being originally a temple, in the form of its carved walls. The fervent followers of the Mughal emperor are not embarrassed that the Hindu devotees of Kashi Viswanath since the mid-17th century and even in independent India, have to worship in a small temple, because of lack of any more space. For over three centuries then, an illegitimate structure stands, welcoming the followers of Aurangzeb's bigoted ideology. The judges in this case should soon begin trials. It should be declared that this is a trial over a place of worship that was robbed and desecrated, not a dispute between two equals. The law of adverse possession cannot apply here. "The Europeans should clearly understand that this spirit of Mohammedanism is unchangeable and that, if by any mischance, India should again come into the possession of men of this creed, all the churches and colleges and all the Mission institutions, would not be worth a week's purchase". So wrote Reverend Mathew Atmore Sherring, an English official. The Muslims did not harm the Christians of British India. But he was so upset at the vandalism he saw in Banaras that he could not help speaking out.



Reverend Sherring was a devout, maybe slightly bigoted evangelist member of the London Missionary Society, dead against idol worship. And yet he said it would not be difficult to find twenty temples in all Banaras of the age of Aurangzeb (1658-1707). This is the case throughout the whole of northern India. His description of the desecration of temples by the thousand and their blatant conversion into mosques, mausoleums, dargahs, palaces or pleasure houses has to be seen to be believed. In his view, if there is one thing about the Mohammedan period that Hindus remember better than another, it is the insulting pride of the Muslims (sic), the outrages that they perpetrated upon Hindu religious convictions and the extensive spoliation of their temples and shrines. "When we endeavour to ascertain what the Mohammedans have left to the Hindus of their ancient buildings in Banaras, we are startled at the result of our investigations. Although the city is bestrewn with temples, it is unlikely that there are many which are old". Reverend Sherring continued, that the diminutive size



HERRING WRITES THAT JUST AS MUSLIMS YEARN TO VISIT MECCA AND CHRISTIANS YEARN TO VISIT JERUSALEM, THE HINDU HEART GOES OUT TO BANARAS. IF THE HINDUS REFER TO ANY ONE CITY AS THEIR HOLIEST, IT IS BANARAS

of nearly all the temples in India — except for the south — that exist is another testimony to the stringency of the Mohammedan rule. It seems clear that Mughal emperors forbade the Hindus to build spacious temples and forced them to erect only small structures, of the size of cages, for their idols and those of no pretensions to beauty. The consequence is that the Hindus of the present day, blindly following the example of their predecessors of two centuries ago, commonly build their religious edifices of the same dwarfish size as formerly. These observations speak volumes about the trauma that the Hindu psyche has suffered as a result of the impact of Islam. Sherring writes that just as Muslims yearn to visit Mecca and the Christians, Jerusalem, the Hindu heart goes out to Banaras. If the Hindus refer to any one city as their holiest, it is Banaras. Aurangzeb tried to change its name to 'Muhammadabad'. The temple of Bisheshwar, regarded as the god of all gods, was systematically demolished by Aurangzeb during the 17th century. The new temple was built at the behest of Rani

Ahilyabai Holkar long after Aurangzeb's desecration. As already explained, all the temples built during the Mohammedan rule in Banaras had to be diminutive in size. It transpires that the demolition of temples was inspired not only by a hatred for idolatry or greed for loot but also by a desire to humiliate the Hindus. Or, else, how does one explain that the masjid built by Aurangzeb is bang next to the Gyan Vapi or the well of knowledge? Sherring has also referred to Al Baruni, an important source of Indian history of the medieval period. He came to India with Mahmud of Ghazni. Although Sherring casts doubts on Al Baruni's contention, nevertheless, he mentions that Ghazni reached as far as Banaras during his ninth incursion into India. In 1194 AD, Shahabuddin, better known as Muhammad Ghori, after defeating the Kannauj monarch, Jaichand, marched to Banaras where he is reported to have destroyed a thousand Hindu temples. (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WEATHER WOES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "India grapples with erratic weather", published on April 22, this is my response. The recent weather fluctuations across India present a stark reminder of our vulnerability to nature's whims. While Delhi anticipates relief from the scorching heat, Odisha and Himachal Pradesh face contrasting challenges. Odisha grapples with a relentless heatwave, prompting necessary precautions, including school closures. Conversely, Himachal Pradesh reels under heavy rain and snow, causing infrastructure havoc. These extreme conditions underscore the urgency of climate resilience measures. Moreover, the IMD's forecast of above — normal monsoon rainfall signifies hope amid uncertainties. However, the spectre of increasing extreme weather events, as highlighted by recent research, casts a shadow over the future. Regions like the Indus and Ganges plains are particularly at risk, threatening millions of lives. This serves as a clarion call for proactive measures, from robust disaster management strategies to sustainable practices. As citizens, it's imperative to heed warnings, adapt to changing climates and advocate for broader environmental stewardship to mitigate future crises.

Rahul Kapoor | Delhi

POWER PRICING PREDICAMENT

Madam — Apropos the news article, "With power freebies, debt comes calling", published on April 22, this is my response. RK Singh's stance on power pricing echoes a common-sense truth: electricity isn't free. His call for States to bear the financial burden of free power initiatives highlights a critical issue plaguing the sector. The practice of offering free electricity distorts the market, undermines the financial health of distribution companies and ultimately hampers economic growth. The complex dynamics of tariff setting, with subsidies for certain consumer segments, exacerbates the problem. While political parties may win favour with vot-

Kejriwal's health report



Apropos the news article, "Kejriwal stopped taking insulin months back: Tihar", published on April 21, this is my response. The revelations about Arvind Kejriwal's health present a perplexing narrative. On one hand, the Tihar jail administration claims he ceased insulin under a Telangana doctor's advice, contradict-

ing his court Statements. The tug-of-war between AAP and BJP adds political spice. Amidst allegations of a "conspiracy," one wonders about the truth's cloak. If Kejriwal indeed stopped insulin, was it wise? The report's assertion of no alarming sugar levels suggests a balanced picture, yet doubts linger. The stringent dietary restrictions, though, raise eyebrows. Are they necessary or punitive? The bureaucratic tangle over hospital referrals muddles clarity. Amidst these complexities, Kejriwal's medical saga becomes a microcosm of larger political battles. As a concerned citizen, one hopes for transparency and genuine concern for his health above political theatrics. The saga demands more than just a casual glance; it beckons scrutiny and empathy amidst the whirlpool of accusations and counterclaims.

Aisha Khan | Chennai

ers through such measures, the long-term repercussions are dire. Delays and partial reimbursements only deepen the financial woes of discoms, leading to a vicious cycle of debt and inefficiency. The solution lies in structural reforms, freeing discoms from undue State control and allowing market forces to determine pricing. Direct financial support to targeted beneficiaries would ensure transparency and sustainability. Such reforms are essential for fostering a resilient and competitive electricity sector, benefiting both consumers and the economy at large.

Vivek Rao | Mumbai

MENTAL HEALTH DISPARITIES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Brain Wellness", published on April 22, this is my response. The staggering statistics on childhood development and the economic ramifications underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions. The formation of the National Task Force on Brain Health, spearheaded by esteemed professionals, marks a significant step towards bridging critical health-

care gaps. Dr RK Dhamija's insights illuminate the task force's holistic approach, emphasising inclusive healthcare from grassroots to tertiary levels. The task force's focus on equitable access and awareness aligns with global initiatives, acknowledging the profound impact of neurological disorders on society. By evaluating existing infrastructure and policies, the panel aims to catalyse transformative change, recognising the intertwined complexities of brain health and socioeconomic factors. India's healthcare landscape mirrors global challenges, with disparities magnified in rural areas. The task force's mandate to submit actionable recommendations reflects a commitment to prompt action. However, sustained efforts beyond policy formulation are crucial to translating vision into tangible improvements, ensuring every individual has access to quality brain healthcare.

Natasha Reddy | Vijayawada

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FIRST COLUMN

THE MYSTERIES OF AFTERLIFE

The Upanishads offer profound insights into the enigmatic realm of the afterlife



SWAMI CHARANASHRIT

The Upanishads, ancient philosophical texts that form the foundation of Hinduism, offer profound insights into the nature of existence, consciousness and the ultimate reality. Among the myriad themes they explore, the concept of the afterlife occupies a significant place. Delving into the Upanishadic thoughts on the afterlife unveils a tapestry of ideas, reflecting deep contemplation on the nature of existence beyond the mortal realm.

The Transient and the Eternal: Central to the Upanishadic understanding of the afterlife is the distinction between the transient, ephemeral aspects of existence and the eternal, unchanging essence of the self (Atman). These texts assert that the physical body is subject to birth and death, bound by the cycles of samsara (the cycle of birth, death and rebirth), while the Atman transcends these cycles, being eternal and indestructible.

The Doctrine of Karma: Integral to the Upanishadic worldview is the doctrine of karma, which holds that every action, thought and intention produces consequences that shape one's future experiences. According to this doctrine, the quality of one's actions determines the nature of their existence in this life and beyond. The Upanishads emphasise that the consequences of karma extend beyond the confines of a single lifetime, influencing the soul's journey through successive rebirths.

The Journey of the Soul: The Upanishads envision the soul's journey through samsara as a process of spiritual evolution aimed at realising its true nature and attaining liberation (moksha) from the cycle of birth and death. This journey is characterised by the accumulation of karma, which propels the soul through various life experiences and incarnations. Each lifetime presents opportunities for growth, learning and self-realisation, ultimately leading the soul closer to its divine source.



The Concept of Rebirth: Rebirth, or reincarnation, is a fundamental tenet of the Upanishadic philosophy. It is believed that the soul undergoes multiple births, inhabiting different bodies and experiencing diverse life circumstances based on its past actions. The Upanishads describe the process of rebirth as governed by the law of karma, wherein individuals are born into specific situations that reflect the consequences of their previous deeds. Liberation from the cycle of rebirth is attained when the soul transcends its attachment to worldly desires and realises its essential unity with the divine.

The Ultimate Goal: Moksha: At the heart of the Upanishadic teachings on the afterlife lies the concept of moksha, or spiritual liberation. Moksha represents the culmination of the soul's journey, wherein it breaks free from the cycle of samsara and merges with the ultimate reality, known as Brahman. Achieving moksha involves transcending the ego, relinquishing attachments and realising the eternal truth of one's identity as Atman, identical to Brahman. In this state of liberation, the soul experiences eternal bliss, beyond the confines of time, space and individual identity. **Conclusion:** The Upanishads offer profound insights into the nature of the afterlife, presenting a holistic worldview that encompasses the transient nature of earthly existence and the eternal essence of the self. Through the exploration of concepts such as karma, rebirth and moksha, these ancient texts provide a framework for understanding the soul's journey beyond mortality and its quest for spiritual realisation. Ultimately, the Upanishads invite us to contemplate the deeper mysteries of life and death, guiding us towards the realisation of our divine nature and the attainment of ultimate liberation.

(Writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

A timeless inspiration for India's reform agenda

Amidst the jubilant celebrations of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, the legacy of Jyotirao Phule, a pioneer in social reform, resonates deeply



RENU PANDEY



India has had a rich treasure of social reformers who contributed immensely to bringing about change in the lives of the people, especially the subaltern class. Jyotirao Phule is one of them who was born in Maharashtra on 11th April and is remembered as a social reformer, author and activist. Though he was born in the 19th century his ideas are still relevant in the 21st century. Throughout his life, he worked tirelessly to bring change in the lives of deprived groups, especially women, Shudras and Dalits. He was a visionary par excellence who realised very early that for a nation to progress, the marginalised groups need to be given due recognition.

As Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav is being celebrated, it is high time to take a pause and introspect as to what initiative has been undertaken to realise the dream of reformers like Phule. In recent years, the Government has initiated a series of welfare measures like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Balika Samridhhi Yojana, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan etc. and a series of direct benefit transfer schemes meant for the poorer segment of the population. These schemes are the furtherance of Phule's ideas as he visualised long back that these groups/communities needed to be made self-reliant. He cudgelled his brain to find the solution to remove the inequalities based on caste, class, gender and religion from society. He understood very early in life that people were kept in the dark and they had been dragged into following the vacuous customs and norms without adequate understanding. He envisioned the furtherance of everyone's rights through social empowerment. Phule's philosophy was conceptualised against the backdrop of the polity and society in pre-colonial Maharashtra, which was in a deteriorated state. His critique of the Brahminic religion, scriptures and theories, the founding of



PHULE REVAMPED THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY AND MARRIAGE SYSTEM AND REFUTED THE HACKNEYED VIEWS ON THE PRESCRIBED TYPECAST ROLES OF MAN AND WOMAN. HE SUPPORTED CONTRACT MARRIAGE AS, FOR HIM, MARRIAGE IS NOT A HOLY SACRAMENT BUT A HOLY CONTRACT

Satyashodhak Samaj (truth-seeking society) for the upliftment of the downtrodden to the 'new moral community' and his radical writings which pioneered a reformation movement in Hindu society deserve special attention. He gave the people a voice and a vehicle by establishing the Satyashodhak Samaj which was the first of its kind for social empowerment. It promoted caste equality and was devoted to securing social justice and human rights of low-caste people. Throughout his life, he fought to emancipate women from the clutches of rigid patriarchal order and found education as a tool to address such evils. He rejected the system of regressive hierarchy which engineered divisions and schism among the oppressed Hindus.

Undoubtedly, the action against all age — long traditions was the result of the hard work, grit, determination and tenacity of Phule. Phule's dour expression and laconic persona had a long-lasting effect on people's minds. It is palpable that Phule in his writings had discussed the eclectic range of ideas and concerns about the socio-cultural milieu additionally, giving the solution of establishing an alternative model of Hindu Social order, which was earlier brimmed with hierarchies and pluralities. He engineered the strategy to free society from myriad inequalities, with elan and consequently, influencing the upcoming reformers in the offing. Phule revamped the traditional family and marriage system and refuted the hackneyed views on the prescribed typecast roles of man and

woman. He supported contract marriage as for him; marriage is not a holy sacrament but a holy contract. Additionally, he also rejected the priesthood system. He was far ahead of his time as he opened an orphanage for helpless widows who got pregnant. He left an indelible impression in the field of women's education as he found it a 'remedial whipcord' for 'nauseating wrong done to the women'. He insisted on compulsory and free primary education and persuaded the British Government to make education compulsory till the age of 12 years. He was also the pioneer of the language formula in schools which was ultimately adopted by the Indian Government after independence. He opined that mother tongue (local language); Hindi and English were the three languages that every person should know. He also suggested that schools should provide education based on vocational skills. He believed that such a course would attract students and help them in gaining employment.

To maintain the high quality of education, he thought that the curriculum of primary education should meet the needs and requirements of society. The same is also emphasised in the New Education Policy, 2020. Even the United Nations has advocated inclusive, equitable and quality education which Phule emphasised long back. His ideas and thoughts will remain relevant in the 21st century as he always believed in establishing an egalitarian social order which is the core of any substantive democracy.

The same is being emphasised by the Government through its various welfare policies. It would be a befitting tribute to him if his ideas of inclusion of those who are at the periphery like women; and marginalised groups were given adequate attention. As seats are reserved for women from Panchayat to Lok Sabha still they are lagging far behind men in terms of their representation. To put it succinctly, it can be said that mainstreaming the periphery should be the motto of Government and by doing so it can fulfill the dream of Mahatma Phule.

Phule's establishment of the Satyashodhak Samaj provided a platform for social empowerment and caste equality. His advocacy for women's education and rejection of regressive customs reshaped societal norms. Phule's foresight extended to educational reforms, advocating for vocational training and multilingual education, ideas that resonate with modern policies like the New Education Policy, 2020. In today's pursuit of an egalitarian society, Phule's principles remain indispensable. Prioritising the inclusion of marginalised groups, especially women, aligns with his vision of social justice. As we honor Phule's legacy, let us commit to mainstreaming the periphery, ensuring that every citizen's voice is heard and valued. In doing so, we honor the spirit of Mahatma Phule and pave the way for a truly inclusive society.

(The writer is Assistant Professor in Department of History Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University; views are personal)

Jallianwala Bagh: A turning point in India's freedom struggle

The aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre not only claimed the lives of over 1,000 innocents but also ignited a fervent spirit of resistance

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre or the Amritsar massacre, a peaceful socio-political gathering of the native population dealt with a violent administrative response on 13th April 1919 by the then British Government killing above 1000 children, women and men firing 1650 gunshots, received strong criticism and gave the Indian freedom movement a clear direction for complete freedom from the foreign rule. The incident underlined the secular and all-inclusive character of the freedom movement. While in other parts of India, there were religious conflicts, in Amritsar the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs had decided to celebrate their religious days (eid ul-fitter on April 01, Ram Nowmi on April 08 and



SUKHDEV SINGH

Baisakhi on April 13) together to communicate the message of united freedom struggle against the foreign rule. The dead bodies of those, including Hindus, killed by the police while they were protesting against the arrest and deportation of the two local leaders Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr Satyapal to some unknown place, according to the local narratives, were kept in the Khairuddin mosque

before their final funeral rites. Earlier on the occasion of Ram Nowmi on April 9, 1919, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims drank water using the same tumbler. These events caused fear among the British rulers. In the background of what happened on April 13, 1919, was the rising unrest among the people caused by the post-world-war inflation, heavy taxes and other repressive policies of the British Indian Government. During the world war between 1914 and 1917, though the British forces were supported by the British-India Government and principalities, the Gadhries in Punjab had planned a mutiny by the Indian soldiers serving in the British Indian Army for February 1915 on the lines of

1857 mutiny, opposing the colonial Government anti-people policies which due to weak planning could not succeed. Yet, given a strong and colonial-Government atmosphere in Punjab and Bengal, in particular and in India, in general, on ardent advocacy by the then Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Michael O'Dwyer, the British India Government passed a 'Defence of India Act 1915' curtailing the civil and political liberties. In 1918, suspecting revolt with support from Russian Bolsheviks, the Government appointed a committee headed by Sidney Rowlett to assess the German and Bolshevik links to the militant movement in India, especially in Punjab and Bengal. On the committee's recommendation, the

Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919, popularly called the Rowlett Act, was passed on 21st March 1919 further limiting civil liberties and granting special powers to the Government enabling up to 2 years' detention of purported political agitators without trial. Breaching their promise for post-war political reforms in exchange for India's resources the Government hurriedly passed the Act, ignoring opposition by the Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council, who all resigned in protest. Muhammad Ali Jinnah wrote to the Viceroy: "I, therefore, as a protest against the passing of the Bill and the manner in which it was passed tender my resignation ... a Government that passes or sanctions such

a law in times of peace forfeits its claim to be called a civilised Government". The Act, seen as a betrayal, enraged the Indian leaders and citizens. Mahatma Gandhi gave a call for Satyagraha against the Rowlett Act urging for a peaceful participation in Hartals (strikes), economic boycott and non-cooperation. The anti-Rowlett Act sentiment was so strong in the whole country, especially in Punjab, that in response to the Satyagraha call on April 6 "practically the whole of Lahore was on the streets". Following the events on April 9 and the detention of the local leaders Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr Satyapal on April 10, 1919, a large crowd gathered to demand the release of Dr Satyapal and Dr Kitchlew. In

the protest, 20-25 Indian and four British were killed while others were injured. The atmosphere in Amritsar was so tense that on April 11, Marcella Sherwood, an elderly English missionary was attacked by an angry mob in the Kucha Kurrichhan. Although she was rescued by some residents in the same street, enraged at the assault, Brigadier General R.E.H. Dyer, ordered every Indian passing through the street to crawl its length on his hands and knees as a punishment. He also authorised the indiscriminate public whipping of locals. The local leaders of the freedom movement, in a meeting held on April 12 at the Hindu College, planned a peaceful public protest gathering on April 13, the day of Baisakhi, in Jallian Wala Bagh

spread over 6-7 acres of vacant land surrounded by residential buildings. By April 13, most parts of Punjab under put under martial law. Civil liberties were curtailed and the assembly of more than four people was banned. The orders of banning public meetings and gatherings were not being widely and properly communicated. After celebrating Baisakhi many people relaxed in the Bagh, waiting to join the peaceful protest against the arrest and deportation of Dr. Satya Pal and Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew. Rest as they say is history.

(The writer is retired professor of Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar and member, governing council, INTACH, New Delhi; views are personal)

Cluster of quakes rattle Taiwan

AP ■ TAIPEI

A cluster of earthquakes struck the island republic of Taiwan early Tuesday, the strongest having a magnitude of 6.1, according to the US Geological Survey. There were no reports of casualties in the quakes, although there were further damages to two multi-story buildings that had been evacuated following a magnitude 7.4 quake that hit the island earlier this month, killing 13 people and injuring over 1,000. That earthquake was centred along the coast of the rural and mountainous Hualien County. It was the strongest earthquake in the past 25 years in Taiwan and was followed by hundreds of aftershocks. According to the USGS, Tuesday's quake of 6.1 magnitude had its epicentre 28 kilometres south of the city of Hualien, at a depth of 10.7 kilometres. The half-dozen other quakes ranged from magnitude 4.5 to magnitude 6, all near Hualien. Taiwan's own earthquake monitoring centre put the magnitudes of the initial quake at 6.3. Such small discrepancies are common between monitoring stations. The largest among them were two earthquakes of magnitude 6.0 and 6.3 that occurred at 2:26 am and 2:32 am Tuesday, respectively, according to the Taiwan centre. Numerous of the scores of aftershocks could be felt on the upper floors of an apartment buildings in the capital Taipei, about 150 kilo-



In this image from a video, roads in Hualien, Taiwan are cordoned off after a cluster of earthquakes struck the island early Tuesday. AP/PTI

metres across steep mountains to the northwest. The Full Hotel in downtown Hualien partially collapsed during the quakes and was left leaning at a severe angle. However, it had been undergoing renovations and was unoccupied at the time. The nearby Tong Shuai Building was also empty, having been marked for demolition after

being heavily damaged in the April 3 quake. Schools and offices in Hualien and the surrounding county were ordered closed on Tuesday as hundreds of aftershocks continued to strike on land and just off the coast in the Pacific Ocean, the vast majority below magnitude 3. Taiwan is no stranger to powerful earthquakes yet their toll

on the high-tech island's 23 million residents has been relatively contained thanks to its excellent earthquake preparedness, experts say. The island also has strict construction standards and widespread public education campaigns about earthquakes. In 1999, a magnitude 7.7 earthquake in Taiwan killed 2,400 people.

UK pledges \$620 million in new military aid for Ukraine

AP ■ WARSAW

The UK on Tuesday pledged an additional \$620 million in new military supplies for Ukraine, including long-range missiles and four millions rounds of ammunition, at a time when Ukraine is struggling to hold off advancing Russian forces on the eastern front line of the war, now in its third year. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak spoke with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday morning to confirm the assistance and "assure him of the UK's steadfast support for Ukraine's

defence against Russia's brutal and expansionist ambitions," Sunak's office said. Sunak was travelling to Warsaw later Tuesday to meet with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg for talks about further aid for Ukraine. Ahead of the visit, the UK government said Sunak would announce 500 million pounds (\$620 million, 580 million euros) in new British military supplies, including 400 vehicles, 60 boats, 1,600 munitions and 4 million rounds of ammunition. The shipment will include British Storm Shadow long-

range missiles, which have a range of some 150 miles and have proved effective at hitting Russian targets. "President Zelenskyy thanked the Prime Minister for the UK's continued support, saying the new military assistance would make a material difference to ordinary Ukrainians fighting on the front line to defend their country," Downing Street said. The announcement comes three days after the US House of Representatives approved \$61 billion in aid for Ukraine, as American lawmakers raced to deliver a fresh round of US support to the war-torn ally.

However, Downing Street did not indicate whether the aid would be immediately available for delivery. Zelenskyy has repeatedly pleaded for greater international assistance, warning that his country will lose the war without it. Ammunition shortages linked to the aid holdup over the past six months have led Ukrainian military commanders to ration shells, a disadvantage that Russia seized on this year — taking the city of Avdiivka and currently inching towards the town of Chasiv Yar, also in the eastern Donetsk region.

2 Indian students killed in traffic collision

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Two Indian students in the United States were killed on the spot in a head-on traffic collision near Lake Pleasant in Arizona, according to police. The victims, reportedly from Telangana, have been identified as 19-year-old Nivesh Mukka and 19-year-old Goutham Parsi. The two Indians were enrolled as international students at Arizona State University. According to the Peoria Police, officers responded to a report

of a collision around 6:18 pm on April 20 on Castle Hot Springs Road, just north of State Route 74. The multiple-vehicle collision involved two vehicles — a white 2024 Kia Forte and a red 2022 Ford F150 — that had collided head-on. Preliminary investigation shows that the driver of the red F150 was travelling southbound on Castle Hot Springs Road while the white Kia Forte was travelling northbound. Mukka and Parsi "died from their injuries on (the) scene",

while the driver of the car in which they were travelling was transported to a local hospital with serious injuries and has since been released. The other car's driver, the sole occupant of the vehicle, was also taken to a local hospital with serious injuries and has been released, the statement said. The area was closed for several hours during the investigation but was reopened for normal traffic Sunday morning. "The cause of this collision is still being investigated," the

police said. "Our thoughts are with the victims, their families, and everybody who rendered aid during this tragic incident," the Peoria Police Department said. The Arizona State University said the International Students and Scholars Centre is working with the dean of students, counselling services and housing representatives to identify the student groups, friends and roommates of the victims so that they can offer any needed support.

Russian strike on Kharkiv's TV tower part of intimidation campaign: Zelenskyy

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said a Russian missile strike that smashed a television tower in Kharkiv was part of the Kremlin's ongoing effort to intimidate Ukraine's second-largest city, which in recent weeks has come under increasingly frequent attack. The strike sought to "make the terror visible to the whole city and to try to limit Kharkiv's connection and access to information," Zelenskyy said in a Monday evening address. The northeastern Kharkiv region straddles the approximately 1,000-km (600-mile) front line where Ukrainian and Russian forces have been locked in battle for more than two years since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The front line has changed little

during a war of attrition, focused mostly on artillery, drones and trenches. Since late March, Russia has stepped up the pressure on Kharkiv, apparently aiming to exploit Ukraine's shortage of air defense systems. It has pounded the local power grid and hit apartment blocks. On Monday, a Russian Kh-59 missile struck Kharkiv's 250-metre (820-foot) -high TV tower, breaking it roughly in half and halting transmissions. A Washington think tank said Russia may be eyeing a ground assault on Kharkiv. "The Kremlin is conducting a concerted air and information operation to destroy Kharkiv City, convince Ukrainians to flee, and internally displace millions of Ukrainians ahead of a possible future Russian offensive operation against the city or elsewhere in Ukraine," the

Institute for the Study of War said in an assessment. The expected arrival in Ukraine in coming weeks of new military aid from its Western partners possibly has prompted Russia to escalate its attacks before the help arrives, the ISW said, adding that trying to capture Kharkiv would be "a significant challenge" for the Kremlin's forces. Instead, the Russian military command "may attempt to destroy Kharkiv City with air, missile, and drone strikes and prompt a large-scale internal displacement of Ukrainian civilians," it said. The US Senate was returning to Washington on Tuesday to vote on \$61 billion in war aid to Ukraine after months of delays. Zelenskyy said US President Joe Biden assured him the aid would include long-range and artillery capa-

bilities. "Four priorities are key: defense of the sky, modern artillery, long-range capacity, and to ensure that packages of American aid arrive as soon as possible," Zelenskyy said. Also Tuesday, Britain pledged 500 million pounds (\$620 million, 580 million euros) in new military supplies for Ukraine, including 400 vehicles, 60 boats, 1,600 munitions and 4 million rounds of ammunition. The shipment will also include British Storm Shadow long-range missiles, which have a range of about 150 miles (240 km) and have proven effective at hitting Russian targets, the British government said. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak spoke with Zelenskyy on Tuesday morning to confirm the new assistance. He was due to announce the aid later Tuesday.

2 Malaysian military helicopters collide and crash while training, killing 10

AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Two Malaysian military helicopters collided midair and crashed during a training session on Tuesday, killing all 10 people on board, the navy said. The helicopters were rehearsing at a naval base in northern Perak state for the navy's 90th anniversary celebration next month when the accident occurred, the navy said in a brief statement. "All victims were confirmed dead on site," it said, adding that the remains have been sent to the hospital to be identified. A video circulating on social media showed several helicopters flying low in a formation. One of the aircraft veered sideways and clipped the rotor of another helicopter, causing both to plunge and crash. A local police officer who declined to be named because



he isn't authorised to speak to the media confirmed that the video footage is genuine. The choppers were mangled beyond recognition. Rescue workers sifted through the debris to find the bodies. The victims included three women and seven men, police said. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said the nation mourned over

the "heart and soul-wrenching tragedy" and that the navy will immediately carry out an investigation to determine what caused the accident. Seven crew members were aboard the AW139 maritime operation helicopter, the navy said. That aircraft is produced by AgustaWestland, which is a subsidiary of the Italian defense

contractor Leonardo. Three other crew members were on a Fennec lightweight helicopter, manufactured by European multinational defense conglomerate Airbus. Local media reported that the AW139 crashed at a sports complex at the naval base, while the Fennec hit a nearby swimming pool.

Musk accuses Australia of censorship

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Tech billionaire Elon Musk accused Australia of censorship after an Australian judge ruled that his social media platform X must block users worldwide from accessing video of a bishop being stabbed in a Sydney church. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese responded Tuesday by describing Musk as an "arrogant billionaire" who considered himself above the law and was out of touch with the public. X Corp., the tech company rebranded in 2023 by Musk after he bought Twitter, announced last week it would fight in court Australian orders to take down posts relating to a knife attack on Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel in an Assyrian Orthodox church as a service was being streamed online on April 15. The material was geoblocked from Australia but available elsewhere. But the regulator that made the

orders, Australia's eSafety Commission, which describes itself as the world's first government agency dedicated to keeping people safer online, successfully applied to the Federal Court in Sydney for a temporary global ban on sharing the video of the bishop being stabbed. In an after-hours hearing Monday, Justice Geoffrey Kennett suppressed the footage from all X users until Wednesday, when an application for a permanent ban will be heard. Hours later, Musk posted on his personal X account a cartoon that depicted a fork in a road with one path leading to "free speech" and "truth" and the other to "censorship" and "propaganda." Musk cited Albanese telling reporters Monday that other social media platforms had largely complied with the regulator's orders to take violent content down. "I'd like to take a moment to thank the PM for informing the

public that this platform is the only truthful one," Musk posted. Albanese berated Musk in several television interviews Tuesday. "We'll do what's necessary to take on this arrogant billionaire who thinks he's above the law, but also above common decency," Albanese told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "The idea that someone would go to court for the right to put up violent content on a platform shows how out of touch Mr. Musk is. Social media needs to have social responsibility with it." Albanese told Sky News, "This is a bloke who's chosen ego and showing violence over common sense." "This isn't about censorship. It's about common sense and common decency. And Elon Musk should show some," Albanese told Seven Network. The regulator's lawyer, Christopher Tran, had argued Monday in court that geoblocking Australia did not meet the definition of removal of the footage under Australian law.

Tran said the footage was a "graphic and violent video" that would cause "irreparable harm if it's continuing to circulate." X's lawyer, Marcus Hoynes, said he was unable to get instructions from his San Francisco-based client because it was early Monday morning in the United States. Musk has described eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant as the "Australian censorship commissar." Albanese said on Monday that social media posts, misinformation and dissemination of violent images had exacerbated suffering from the church attack, which the two clerics survived, as well as a knife attack at a Sydney shopping mall two days earlier that killed six people. X's Global Government Affairs team said Saturday that Inman Grant ordered it to remove some posts that commented on the church attack, but it said the posts did not violate X's rules on violent speech.

X said the Australian regulator had demanded the platform "globally withhold these posts or face a daily fine of USD 785,000." "X believes that eSafety's order was not within the scope of Australian law and we complied with the directive pending a legal challenge," the Global Government Affairs account said. "While X respects the right of a country to enforce its laws within its jurisdiction, the eSafety Commissioner does not have the authority to dictate what content X's users can see globally." "We will robustly challenge this unlawful and dangerous approach in court," it added. The live feed of the church attack and social media posts that followed attracted a crowd of 2,000 people and fuelled a riot against police, who barricaded the young suspected attacker inside the place of worship. The rioting injured 51 police officers and damaged 104 police vehicles, officials said.

German EU lawmaker's aide held on suspicion of spying for China

AP ■ BERLIN

A man who works for a German lawmaker in the European Parliament has been arrested on suspicion of spying for China, German prosecutors said Tuesday. The detention came less than 24 hours after three people were arrested for spying for China in a separate German case. The suspect, identified only as Jian G in line with German privacy rules, was arrested Monday in the eastern German city of Dresden, federal prosecutors said in a statement. They said that he has worked for a German lawmaker in the European Union's legislature since 2019. The statement didn't specify which lawmaker employed him, but German news agency dpa reported, citing unidentified security sources, that he works for Maximilian Krah of the far-right party Alternative

for Germany. Other German media also linked the suspect to Krah, who is the party's top candidate in the European Parliament election in early June. Jian G, a German national, is accused of working for a Chinese intelligence service and of repeatedly passing on information on negotiations and decisions in the European Parliament in January. Prosecutors allege that he also snooped on Chinese dissidents in Germany. German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said the spying allegations were "extremely serious." "If it is confirmed that there was spying for Chinese intelligence from inside the European Parliament, then that is an attack from inside on European democracy," Faeser said in a statement. "Anyone who employs such a staff member also carries responsibility," she added. "This

case must be cleared up precisely. ... All the connections and background must be illuminated." News of the arrest came a day after three Germans suspected of spying for China and arranging to transfer information on technology with potential military uses were arrested in a separate case. Also on Monday, British prosecutors said a former researcher working in the UK Parliament and another man were charged with spying for China. Asked in Beijing about the latest arrest in Germany, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said that "the recent reports in Europe about Chinese spying are all hyping up with an aim to smear and suppress China." Beijing urges "the relevant parties to stop spreading disinformation about China's spy threat and stop political manipulation and malicious smears against China," he added.

Poll outcome shows Maldivians want to preserve sovereignty & freedom: President Muizzu

PTI ■ MALE

Armed with a 'super majority' in the parliamentary polls, Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has said the international community will now understand where the Maldivians stand, especially on the issue of sovereignty and freedom. The pro-China Maldivian president's statement came at a celebratory event on Monday, a day after the People's National Congress (PNC), led by him, won 68 out of 93 seats in Sunday's polls and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively,

taking the total to more than two-thirds in the People's Majlis. A majority in Parliament would mean that Muizzu's party has control not just over lawmaking but also over the legislature which ratifies the laws; which till now had two opposing coalitions and saw several instances of a conflict between the government and the legislature. The PNC's "super majority" in parliamentary elections is being seen as a strong endorsement of his pro-Beijing foreign policy, as both India and China closely watched the outcome of the polls in the strategically-located archipelago nation in the Indian Ocean. Muizzu, 45, rode to power last year on the 'India Out' plank and since

assuming office in November 2023, has visited China and cemented Male's ties with Beijing, including in the defence sector. Ahead of the parliamentary elections, the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by pro-India former president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih had advocated restoring ties with India. The MDP, however, won only 15 seats. Muizzu, who has forced the repatriation of 88 Indian military personnel manning three aviation platforms gifted by India to the Maldives, two of the three batches have already left, said, "We are a proud nation that loves sovereignty and freedom, which we have

shown to the international community as well." The parliamentary election result was also to prove that the Maldivians want "autonomy in choosing their future, without foreign coercion," President Muizzu

said, without naming any country, according to the Sun.mv news portal. "It has also become evident for those with other hidden agendas, what the Maldivians want. So, I urge them to let go of dissidence, now that the elections are over," the president said. "To everyone outside of Maldives ... To everyone in the international community It must be clear now. That we want to decide our own matters by ourselves," he was quoted as saying by Adhadhu.com. Even when he did not name any country during the victory speech, in the run-up to Sunday's polls, Muizzu and other leaders from the PNC had repeatedly claimed that India influenced internal affairs in



the past. The President said he and his team "would use the majority in Parliament to fulfil the demands of the people and fulfil the pledges made by the government," the portal said. Muizzu also "very respectfully" called on political leaders and all parties to move forward with the work of developing the nation; said the country belongs to all Maldivian citizens, and said he would work harder than in the past five months. "These past five months were nothing. You would now have to stay awake for 24 hours. I'm saying seriously. I want to bring development as the public wanted," Adhadhu.com said on Tuesday

quoting the President as saying while addressing the newly elected lawmakers, cabinet ministers, and senior officials of state-owned enterprises. During Monday's celebratory event, Muizzu also claimed that the election outcome is proof that the Maldivians want to uphold and sustain the Islamic faith and its guiding principles as a core identity in shaping the country's future. Meanwhile, Speaker Mohamed Aslam has announced that the new members elected to Parliament in Sunday's election will be sworn in on May 28. Speaker Aslam, who has served four consecutive terms in the Majlis, failed to defend his seat.

Nothing will stand in way of Rwanda flights: PM Sunak

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Tuesday welcomed the passage of his government's controversial Safety of Rwanda Bill by Parliament overnight and pledged that nothing will stand in the way of illegal migrants being flown out to the African country. A day after he revealed a time-frame between 10 and 12 weeks for the first flights taking off from an undisclosed airfield via chartered planes lined up, Sunak described the passage of his "landmark" bill as a "fundamental change" in the handling of global migration. On Monday night, the House of Lords finally gave way to the legislative primacy of the Commons at the end of a lengthy back and forth demanding amendments on a bill drafted to prevent legal challenges. "The passing of this landmark legislation is not just a step forward but a fundamental change in the global equation on migration," Sunak said in a statement issued by Downing Street. "We introduced the Rwanda Bill to deter vulnerable migrants from making perilous crossings and break the business model of the criminal gangs who exploit them. The passing of this legislation will allow us to do that and make

it very clear that if you come here illegally, you will not be able to stay," he said. "Our focus is to now get flights off the ground, and I am clear that nothing will stand in our way of doing that and saving lives," he added. The government is banking on bringing down soaring illegal migration numbers as a result of the "deterrent effect" of the bill, which will become law after Royal Assent from King Charles III. Under the law, migrants arriving illegally on UK shores would be deported to Kigali for their asylum claims to be processed. It came as French media reported on Tuesday morning that five people have died attempting to cross the English Channel towards the UK from an area near the town of Wimereux in France. The French coastguard has said they could not say how many people were involved but that there were several "lifeless bodies." Sunak has made stopping such boats from making dangerous journeys across the Channel one of his priorities ahead of a general election expected later this year. In a Downing Street press briefing on Monday, he declared there were "no ifs, no buts" about using the Rwanda legislation "come what may" to ensure such migrants can be deterred once the message goes

5 dead while crossing English Channel

AP ■ PARIS

At least 5 people have died while crossing the English Channel, according to French media, hours after the UK approved the migrant deportation bill. The Voix du Nord newspaper said the bodies were discovered at the Wimereux beach in northern France on Tuesday. The rescue operation is ongoing and helicopters and boats have been deployed, according to the regional newspaper. About 100 migrants have been rescued and placed aboard a French navy ship. They will be taken to the port of Boulogne, the paper said. This came only hours after British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's latest effort to send some migrants on a one-way ticket to Rwanda finally won approval from Parliament.

The UK government plans to deport some of those who enter the country illegally as a deterrent to migrants who risk their lives in leaky, inflatable boats in hopes that they will be able to claim asylum once they reach Britain. Human rights groups have described the legislation as inhumane and cruel. Both the United Nations refugee agency and the Council of Europe called on the UK Tuesday to rethink its plans for fears they could damage international cooperation on tackling the global migrant crisis. Migrants trying to cross the busy English Channel face drownings and sinking among other deadly incidents, often aboard crowded boats. An estimated 30,000 people made the crossing in 2023, according to UK government figures.

out that they would not be able to stay on in the UK. "These flights are going to Rwanda. We are going to deliver this indispensable deterrent, so that we finally break the business model of the criminal gangs and save lives," he said. Without going into "operational details", the British Indian leader said his government was prepared for the next steps with increased detention spaces to house around 2,200 such migrants and 200 trained dedicated case-workers lined up to process the paperwork. To deal with any

legal cases "quickly and decisively", the UK judiciary have made available 25 courtrooms and identified 150 judges who could provide over 5,000 sitting days. "I can confirm that we've put an airfield on standby, booked commercial charter planes for specific slots and we have 500 highly trained individuals ready to escort illegal migrants all the way to Rwanda, with 300 more trained in the coming weeks. This is one of the most complex operational endeavours the Home Office has carried out. But we are

ready. Plans are in place," he declared. He also ruled out any foreign court intervention, implying that the UK was ready to reconsider its membership of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) if required. The law has come under fierce criticism from Opposition parties, senior peers and rights groups who fear the impact on torture survivors and at-risk refugees who seek asylum in the UK and question the country's approach towards international law.

Human rights groups condemn deportation

AP ■ LONDON

Britain's plans to send some asylum-seekers to Rwanda were swiftly condemned by international humanitarian organisations after Parliament approved legislation allowing the deportation flights to begin later this year. Both the UN refugee agency and the Council of Europe on Tuesday called for the UK to rethink its plans because of concerns that the legislation undermines human rights protections and fears that it will damage international cooperation on tackling the global migrant crisis. "The new legislation marks a

further step away from the UK's long tradition of providing refuge to those in need, in breach of the Refugee Convention," UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said in a statement. "Protecting refugees requires all countries – not just those neighbouring crisis zones – to uphold their obligations." The statement came just hours after Britain's House of Lords dropped its attempts to amend the legislation, paving the way for it to become law. Michael O'Flaherty, the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights, criticised the legislation for pre-

venting asylum-seekers from asking the courts to intervene when they are threatened with being sent back to the countries they are fleeing. "The adoption of the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill by the UK Parliament raises major issues about the human rights of asylum seekers and the rule of law more generally," O'Flaherty said in a statement. "The United Kingdom government should refrain from removing people under the Rwanda policy and reverse the bill's effective infringement of judicial independence." The number of migrants arriving in Britain on small

boats soared to 45,774 in 2022 from just 299 four years earlier as people fleeing war, famine and economic hardship paid criminal gangs thousands of pounds to ferry them across the channel. Small boat arrivals dropped to 29,437 last year as the government cracked down on people smugglers and reached an agreement to return Albanians to their home country. Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson first proposed the Rwanda plan more than two years ago, when he reached an agreement with the East African nation to accept some asylum-seekers in return for

millions of pounds (dollars) in aid. Implementation has been held up by a series of court challenges and opposition from migrant advocates who say it violates international law. The Rwandan government welcomed approval of the bill, saying it underscores the work it has done to make Rwanda "safe and secure" since the genocide that ravaged the country 30 years ago. "We are committed to the migration and economic development partnership with the UK and look forward to welcoming those relocated to Rwanda," government spokesperson Yolande Makolo said.

Iran Prez Raisi & Pak Army chief Munnir discuss border issues

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munnir discussed regional peace, stability and border security, months after the two neighbours carried out tit-for-tat air strikes against alleged terrorist hideouts on rival lands. Gen Munnir called on Raisi, the first head of state of any country to visit Pakistan after the February 8 general elections, and emphasised the need for "improved coordination" against the terrorists, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Pakistan Army said. General Munnir described the Pakistan-Iran border as the "border of peace and friendship", emphasising the need for improved coordination along the border to prevent terrorists from jeopardising the longstanding brotherly relations between the two neighbouring countries, it said. The statement said that the discussion between the two dignitaries focused on matters of mutual interest, notably regional peace, stability, and border security. "Both sides concurred on the necessity to bolster bilateral cooperation while jointly striving for regional stability and economic prosperity," said the ISPR

statement. The Iranian President on Tuesday morning arrived at Lahore's Allama Iqbal International Airport and was received by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. The Foreign Office had stated earlier that Raisi would visit Lahore and Karachi and meet with the provincial leadership. On Monday, Raisi was welcomed by Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the Prime Minister House. Both the leaders held wide-ranging talks and agreed on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism and discussed ways to promote bilateral ties at political, economic, trade and cultural levels. During their talks, President Raisi and Prime Minister Sharif agreed on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism, state-run Radio Pakistan reported. The two leaders also held discussions to increase trade and communication links between their countries. In the presence of Raisi and Sharif, the Iranian and Pakistani officials signed eight documents for promoting cooperation in various fields. Addressing a joint press conference, President Raisi said that Iran and Pakistan have decided to increase the trade volume to USD 10 billion.

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Abortion returns to spotlight in Italy 46 yrs after it was legalised

AP ■ PARIS

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni's far-right-led government wants to allow anti-abortion groups access to women considering ending their pregnancies, reviving tensions around abortion in Italy 46 years after it was legalised in the overwhelmingly Catholic country. The Senate on Tuesday was voting on legislation tied to European Union COVID-19 recovery funds that includes an amendment sponsored by Meloni's Brothers of Italy party. The text, already passed by the lower Chamber of Deputies, allows regions to permit groups "with a qualified experience supporting motherhood" to have access to public support centres where women considering abortions go to receive counselling. For the right, the amendment merely fulfil the original intent of the 1978 law legalising abortion, known as Law 194, which includes provisions to prevent the procedure and support motherhood. For the left-wing opposition, the amendment marks a chip-

ping away of abortion rights that opponents warned would follow Meloni's 2022 election. "The government should realise that they keep saying they absolutely do not want to boycott or touch Law 194, but the truth is that the right-wing opposes women's reproductive autonomy, fears women's choices regarding motherhood, sexuality, and abortion," Cecilia D'Elia, a Democratic Party senator, said at a protest this week against the legislation. Under the 1978 law, Italy allows abortion on request in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, or later if a woman's health or life is endangered. It provides for publicly funded counselling centres to advise pregnant women of their rights and services offered if they want to terminate the pregnancies. But easy access to abortion isn't always guaranteed. The law allows health care personnel to register as conscientious objectors and refuse to perform abortions, and many have, meaning women sometimes have to travel far to have the procedure. Meloni, who campaigned on a

slogan of "God, fatherland and family," has insisted she won't roll back the 1978 law and merely wants to implement it fully. But she has also prioritised encouraging women to have babies to reverse Italy's demographic crisis. Italy's birthrate, already one of the lowest in the world, has been falling steadily for about 15 years and reached a record low last year with 379,000 babies born. Meloni's conservative forces, backed strongly by the Vatican, have mounted a campaign to encourage at least 500,000 births annually by 2033, a rate that demographers say is necessary to prevent the economy from collapsing under the weight of Italy's aging population. Meloni has called the left-wing opposition to the proposed amendment "fake news," recalling that Law 194 provides for measures to prevent abortions, which would include counselling pregnant women about alternatives. The amendment specifically allows anti-abortion groups, or groups "supporting motherhood," to be among the volunteer groups that can work in the counselling centres.

N Korean leader leads rocket drills that simulate a N-counterattack

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised salvo launches of the country's "super-large" multiple rocket launchers that simulated a nuclear counterattack against enemy targets, state media said Tuesday, adding to tests and threats that have raised tensions in the region. The report by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency came a day after the South Korean and Japanese militaries detected the North firing what they suspected were multiple short-range ballistic missiles from a region near its capital, Pyongyang, toward its eastern seas. Analysts say North Korea's large-sized artillery rockets blur the boundary between artillery systems and ballistic missiles because they can create their own thrust and are guided during delivery.



The North has described some of these systems, including the 600mm multiple rocket launchers that were tested Monday, as capable of delivering tactical nuclear warheads. KCNA said Monday's launches represented the first demonstration of the country's nuclear-weapons management and control system called "Haekbangshoe," or "nuclear trigger." The report described the drill as aimed at demonstrating the strength and diverse attack means of North Korea's nuclear forces amid deepening ten-

sions with the United States and South Korea, which it portrayed as "warmongers" raising tensions in the region with their combined military exercises. State media photos showed at least four rockets being fired from launch vehicles as Kim watched from an observation post. It said the rockets flew 352 kilometres before accurately hitting an island target and that the drill verified the reliability of the "system of command, management, control and operation of the whole nuclear force."

Dubai Airport operating at full capacity again: CEO

PTI ■ DUBAI

The Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel, is operating at full capacity, authorities announced on Tuesday, a week after unprecedented torrential rains lashed the Arabian Peninsula and flooded many areas in the UAE. Starting last Tuesday evening, tens of thousands of air passengers were stranded at the waterlogged Dubai International as it became impossible to move from or towards the airport as roads turned into massive rivers due to the unprecedented floods. "After the heaviest rainfall the UAE experienced in 75 years Dubai Airports is making remarkable strides in restoring and normalising operations at Dubai International Airport (DXB)," a statement from Dubai Airports said. Dubai Airports owns and manages the operation and

development of both of Dubai's airports - Dubai International (DXB) and Dubai World Central (DWC). Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports, said since Monday, ahead of its recovery schedule, DXB returned to its normal flight schedule and is back to operating around 1,400 flight movements a day. "With roads in and around the airport 100 per cent clear of water accumulation, our manpower, logistics and facilities are operating as usual again. To have the airport back up and running is no small feat. 2,155 flights were cancelled and 115 were diverted," he said. "It has been the most challenging adverse weather event we've had to navigate, and our people and partners worked tirelessly to keep the operation running and to assist our guests," Griffiths added. He said that 31 flights were diverted to Dubai World Central (DWC), and by April

19, all guests at the airport were successfully supported and continued onwards to complete their travel plans. "Guest welfare remained a key priority throughout the disruption and although there were initial challenges in transporting supplies with road closures around DXB and DWC, over 75,000 food packs were delivered across both airports," the statement added. Extremely heavy rainfall starting on April 15 (Monday) drenched Dubai and other parts of the UAE with 20 mm rainfall. It intensified through April 16 (Tuesday) and by the end of the day, it was over 140 mm in 24 hours, far more than the average yearly rains of 94.7 mm at the Dubai International Airport site. Experts say that the rainfall Dubai received from April 15 to April 16 surpassed "anything documented since the start of data collection in 1949."

Imran's party alleges 'blatant rigging' in bypolls

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Jailed former Pakistan premier Imran Khan's party has alleged that "blatant rigging" took place in the recently held by-elections in which the ruling PML-N got the lion's share, as it announced a plan for countrywide protests, a media report said on Tuesday. By-elections were held on Sunday to 21 national and provincial assembly seats amidst tight security and suspension of cellular and internet services in specific districts of Punjab and Balochistan to maintain law and order. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) won at least two national and 10

provincial assembly seats, according to the unofficial results on Monday. Leaders of 71-year-old Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Monday said that April 21 will be remembered as a "black day" in the history of Pakistan, as "open and blatant violations of law" of a magnitude never observed in the country's history were witnessed, the Dawn newspaper reported. "[The] day of election is considered an accountability day, and people cast their votes with great zeal. However, on April 21, open and blatant violations of law were observed. The magnitude of the rigging and violation of law has never been observed in the history of Pakistan, party Chairman

Barrister Gohar Khan said. "Gates of polling stations were closed, and at some polling stations, more votes were polled than the total registered votes," Gohar said, addressing a press conference. He alleged that the "mandate thieves" resorted to shameful tactics to manipulate the electoral process, including stuffing ballot boxes before voting even began and coercing people as well as officials to rig the by-polls in the presence of Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) representatives. The Express Tribune newspaper reported. Gohar said such actions were unheard of even in the darkest days of dictatorship. The party urged the ECP to withhold the notifications of

results and announced a series of protests starting Friday. Gohar said that he and party leader Omar Ayub visited various polling stations and witnessed flagrant rigging firsthand. He said that even after the electoral watchdog was informed about the rigging incidents in Gujrat, no action had been taken despite 24 hours passing, the report said. "The Constitution, democracy, and the rule of law were virtually suspended in the country," he was quoted as saying in the report. Addressing the press conference, Ayub said that pre-poll rigging began with the suspension of the internet, alleging that Prime Minister Sharif and Punjab Chief Minister Maryam

Nawaz did not "believe in transparency". On Saturday, the federal government announced that cellular services would remain temporarily suspended in specific districts of Punjab and Balochistan during the by-elections. Ayub said police officials told them that intelligence agencies were not allowing voters to enter polling stations. He said that Sunday's by-elections could not be called transparent as it was a complete farce in which only taxpayers' money was wasted on a futile exercise. Claiming that Sharif got fewer votes during the general elections than the candidate contesting on the PML-N ticket in the by-election, Ayub said, "This is beyond comprehension."

Baltimore leaders accuse ship's owner, manager of negligence

AP ■ BALTIMORE

The owner and manager of the massive container ship that took down the Francis Scott Key Bridge last month should be held fully liable for the deadly collapse, according to court papers filed Monday on behalf of Baltimore's mayor and city council. The two companies filed a petition soon after the March 26 collapse asking a court to cap their liability under a pre-Civil War provision of an 1851 maritime law — a routine but important procedure for such cases.

A federal court in Maryland will ultimately decide who's responsible and how much they owe in what could become one of the most expensive maritime disasters in history. Singapore-based Grace Ocean Private Ltd. owns the Dali, the vessel that veered off course and slammed into the bridge. Synergy Marine Pte Ltd, also based in Singapore, is the ship's manager. In their filing Monday, attorneys for the city accused them of negligence, arguing the companies should have realised the Dali was unfit for its voyage and manned the ship with

a competent crew, among other issues. A spokesperson for the companies said Monday that it would be inappropriate to comment on the pending litigation. The ship was headed to Sri Lanka when it lost power shortly after leaving Baltimore and struck one of the bridge's support columns, collapsing the span and sending six members of a roadwork crew plunging to their deaths. "For more than four decades, cargo ships made thousands of trips every year under the Key Bridge without incident," the city's complaint reads.

India leads in GenAI adoption, says report

Investment trends likely to rise in coming years: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India leads globally in adopting GenAI technologies as a vast percentage of organisations incorporate GenAI in operations, and a majority of the populace expects increased investments and budget allocations towards Gen AI in the next 2-3 years, according to a recent report. Search analytics firm Elastic on Monday released the Generative AI Report that gathered insights from 3,200 IT decision-makers and influencers across sectors in the US, Europe, and Asia-Pacific. In the Asia Pacific and Japan region, 1,200 were surveyed, including 300 from India. According to the report, 81 per cent of Indian organisations have already implemented GenAI, making India the leader in adopting generative artificial intelligence technologies. The study also predicted promising investment trends in near future, with about 94 per cent of respondents anticipating increased investments and budget allocations towards GenAI initiatives in the next 2-3



years. However, most all of the respondents expressed concerns about processing and using their data. "As many as 99 per cent of respondents expressed concerns about processing and using their data, highlighting the need for organisations to work with GenAI providers who can help safeguard sensitive information. The report further observed that 73 per cent of respondents in India were confident that conversational data search capabilities would significantly enhance operational efficiency. "The disruptive potential of

GenAI has captured the imaginations and budgets of India's IT and data leaders, as seen by India's lead in GenAI adoption," said Karthik Rajaram, area vice president and general manager, India, Elastic. "However, while the commitment of many organisations to quickly harness the transformative opportunity of GenAI to drive innovation and efficiency is exciting, it's businesses that add search-powered GenAI grounded by business context that will lead and uncover the insights needed to securely innovate, build more efficient businesses, and pioneer new customer experiences."

Markets climb for 3rd day on firm global cues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher for the third session in a row on Tuesday, following gains in telecom, tech and consumer durable shares amid a firm trend in the global markets. After rallying over 400 points, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 89.83 points or 0.12 per cent higher at 73,738.45. During the session, it jumped 411.27 points or 0.55 per cent to 74,059.89. Trimming most of its early gains, the NSE Nifty ended



31.60 points or 0.14 per cent up at 22,368. During the day, it climbed 111.15 points or 0.49 per cent to 22,447.55.

Heavy selling pressure in index heavyweight Reliance Industries, mainly due to profit booking, dragged

market indices lower. Reliance lost over one per cent to end at Rs 2,918.50 per scrip. From the Sensex basket, Bharti Airtel, Nestle, Maruti, Tata Motors, HCL Technologies, NTPC, Asian Paints and State Bank of India were the major gainers. Sun Pharma, Reliance Industries, Mahindra & Mahindra, JSW Steel, Tech Mahindra and Bajaj Finance were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Seoul and Shanghai ended lower.

European markets were trading with gains. Wall Street ended in positive territory on Monday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.41 per cent to USD 87.36 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,915.23 crore on Monday after a day's breather, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark climbed 560.29 points or 0.77 per cent to settle at 73,648.62 on Monday. The NSE Nifty went up by 189.40 points or 0.86 per cent to 22,336.40.

Reliance Industries shares climb nearly one per cent post earnings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Reliance Industries Ltd on Tuesday climbed nearly 1 per cent after the company's annual earnings hit a record high. The stock advanced 0.85 per cent to Rs 2,986.05 on the BSE. At the NSE, it climbed 0.92 per cent to Rs 2,987 apiece. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 20,07,346.55 crore. Reliance Industries Ltd on Monday reported an almost flat March quarter net profit,

while its annual earnings hit a record high on the back of a recovery in core oil and petrochemicals business and sustained momentum across the consumer-facing telecom and retail businesses. The oil-to-telecom-and-retail conglomerate's consolidated net profit stood at Rs 18,951 crore, or Rs 28.01 per share, in January-March quarter of the 2023-24 fiscal, compared to Rs 19,299 crore, or Rs 28.52 a share, a year ago, according to a company's stock exchange filing.

The profit was, however, higher quarter-on-quarter when compared to Rs 17,265 crore in October-December period. For the full fiscal FY24 (April 2023 to March 2024), Reliance posted a record net profit of Rs 69,621 crore, as compared to Rs 66,702 crore earnings in the preceding financial year. Reliance also became the first Indian company to hit Rs 10 lakh crore turnover in FY24 when revenue from operations rose 2.6 per cent from Rs 9.74 lakh crore in 2022-23.

Rupee rises 3 paise to close at 83.33 against \$



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated by 3 paise to close at 83.33 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday on positive domestic markets and a soft American currency. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.37 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.28 and a low of 83.39 against the greenback. The domestic unit finally settled at 83.33 (provisional) against the dollar, 3 paise higher from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee appreciated by 8 paise to close at 83.36 against the US dollar. "Indian rupee appreciated on Tuesday on weak US dollar and positive domestic markets. However, a recovery in crude oil prices and FII outflows capped sharp gains," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.01 per cent lower at 106.06, on easing tensions between Israel and Iran. Brent crude futures, the

global oil benchmark, advanced 0.29 per cent to USD 87.25 per barrel. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on improved global risk sentiments and easing of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East," Choudhary said. Easing dollar on strong euro and pound amid mixed to positive PMI data from Europe also supported the rupee. "However, any fresh aggressions in the Middle East may cap sharp upside. Traders may take cues from PMI data from US. Investors may remain cautious ahead of inflation data from US later this week. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.10 to Rs 83.50," Choudhary added. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 89.83 points, or 0.12 per cent, to settle at 73,738.45 points. The Nifty rose 31.60 points, or 0.14 per cent, to close at 22,368.00 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Monday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,915.23 crore, according to exchange data.

Karnataka, Gujarat lead India's clean energy transition race: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Karnataka and Gujarat continue to lead the race to clean energy transition, but states like Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh need to step up efforts, according to a new report released on Tuesday. The joint report by research organisation, Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), and clean energy think tank Ember evaluates the clean electricity transition preparedness at the sub-national level. The report's authors said Karnataka and Gujarat continue their strong performance across dimensions, effectively integrating renewable energy sources into their power sectors, making strong strides in decarbonisation. But states like Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh need to improve. While these states are in the early stages of their transition, they now need to focus on increasing renewable energy deployment, enhancing short term market participation and strengthening their distribution companies. The report launch coincides with a spell of intense heat wave sweeping parts of India, leading to the Ministry of



Power preparing for a projected peak power demand of 260 gigawatts. Harsh summers also offer the chance to utilise more clean energy like solar power. Although, this requires preparedness of states to transition to clean sources of electricity. "Cyclical weather conditions coupled with faster economic activity is pushing India's peak electricity demand higher every year. While the central government is taking steps to integrate more renewable energy into the grid, states, too, need to be prepared to do so. Gauging sub-national progress now

requires constant monitoring of several parameters at the state level. A purely national overview can often overshadow subtle intricacies at the state level, which may stymie the country's electricity transition," the report's contributing author, Vibhuti Garg, Director, South Asia, IEEFA, said. While the national-level progress towards electricity transition is progressing well, it is far more uneven at the state level. "Some states have developed progressive steps, such as boosting decentralised renewable energy deployment, promoting solar

pumps for agricultural needs, and enhancing storage solutions to ensure more renewable energy in their electricity systems. But, the transition to clean electricity is still in its infancy in many states. "These states should look to accelerate efforts to access benefits of a transition to clean electricity and to ensure they are not left too far behind the better-performing states," the report's contributing author, Aditya Lolla, Asia Programme Director, Ember, said. One of the striking findings from the analysis for the 2024 report is that several states are exhibiting preparedness to embrace electricity transition. They perform well in the "Readiness and Performance of the Power Ecosystem" and "Market Enablers" dimensions but need to improve in the "Decarbonisation" dimension. "Delhi's power system is well-prepared for decarbonisation, while Odisha has robust market enablers to support decarbonisation in the power sector. However, their actual decarbonisation progress so far does not match their strengths in these aspects, highlighting the importance of performing well in both dimensions to effectively

achieve decarbonisation goals," co-author Neshwin Rodrigues, Electricity Policy Analyst, Ember, said. The report also notes that state-level decarbonisation can be further accelerated by strengthening the power ecosystem and having right enablers. Some states that are decarbonising well also lack the right market enablers, others struggle with the readiness of their power ecosystems. Kerala, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Maharashtra all exhibited considerable progress in certain aspects but also lower performance in other aspects. For example, Kerala and Punjab need to improve when it comes to market enablers for decarbonisation, while Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra need to focus on the readiness of their power ecosystems, according to co-author Tanya Rana, Energy Analyst, IEEFA. "Despite achieving relative success in decarbonising the sector thus far, states must address deficiencies in readiness and market enablers to sustain their momentum," says Saloni Sachdeva Michael, Energy Specialist, India Clean Energy Transition, IEEFA. The report recognises the considerable efforts that states are making towards

transitioning to clean electricity and recommends some key steps to accelerate the pace of transition. "We recommend the strengthening of state-level regulatory ecosystems. This not only ensures compliance but also promotes growth, data tracking and monitoring, and a conducive environment for business," Michael said. "India has formulated many central and state-level policy schemes to reinforce its goal of energy independence by supporting various reforms and regulatory interventions across the value chain. However, actual implementation has not been adequate and transparent," she added. The report also calls for a need to shift focus from national-level to state-level studies to understand the nuances of the electricity transition in India fully. "Each state faces unique challenges in decarbonising its power system, necessitating tailored policy interventions. By tracking decarbonisation progress, assessing the power system's readiness for transition, and monitoring the advancement of market enablers, state-specific challenges and potential interventions can be better understood," Rodrigues said.

Growth in housing prices may moderate this fiscal to five per cent annually: India Ratings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Housing demand and prices are likely to moderate this fiscal on a high base effect with sales expected to rise 8-10 per cent and rates by around 5 per cent annually, India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) said on Tuesday. The rating agency has maintained a neutral outlook for the residential real estate sector for the 2024-25 fiscal. "Absorption and prices are likely to be supported by affordability and stability of interest rates. However, given the high base of FY24, the growth rates are likely to taper down," Ind-Ra said in a statement. The residential real estate market registered a strong performance during the first nine months of the 2023-24 fiscal where the sales growth exceeded 25 per cent year-on-year (Y-o-Y) for the top eight real estate clusters, despite price increases and sticky interest rates. "With most regions witnessing a surge in prices, Ind-Ra expects the pre-sales growth to moderate to 8 to 10 per cent yoy in FY25. Inventory levels have also



risen over FY24 in the premium and luxury segment, as launches increased encouraged by the sharp rise in sales and realisations," said Mahaveer Shankarlal Jain, Director, Corporate Ratings, Ind-Ra. The rating agency said the prices have been higher 22 per cent Y-o-Y at the end of FY24 and would be subdued at around 5 per cent Y-o-Y for FY25, due to the base effect and large amount of new launches planned. "With most of the old-stock cleared and existing inventory largely liquidated along with a continued pick-up in demand and a spike in commodity prices due to geopolitical tensions, prices surged by

almost 14 per cent Y-o-Y in FY23 along with an increase in land prices and rental yields," it said. Ind-Ra noted that demand is getting shifted towards mid and Upper-mid income segments from luxury and premium segments. While the premium and luxury segments witnessed sharp demand growth in the first nine months of the last fiscal, Ind-Ra said the demand would cool down due to the high base as the unsold inventory levels remain elevated and are the highest over the past five years. The rating agency also expects tier II and III cities to report significant growth.

Razorpay announces UPI Switch in partnership with Airtel Payments Bank

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fintech company Razorpay on Tuesday launched its own UPI infrastructure with 'UPI Switch', a cloud-based innovation in partnership with Airtel Payments Bank, and said the solution is geared to ensure smoother and faster transactions. Boosting success rates by 4-5 per cent, the solution is designed to handle up to 10,000 transactions per

second (TPS) at any given time, according to a release. The 'UPI Switch' will also enable 5 times faster access to UPI (Unified Payments Interface) innovations for businesses, it added. "Today, Razorpay launches its own UPI infrastructure with UPI Switch, a next-generation cloud-based innovation, in partnership with Airtel Payments Bank," according to a release. Khilana Haria, Head of

Payments Product at Razorpay, said India has always been at the forefront of innovation in the digital payments ecosystem and its possibilities have compounded in the last few years, with the versatility of UPI. "This venture into UPI infrastructure marks a strategic move to manage the end-to-end merchant experience and provide the industry's leading stack.

"With latency below 100 milliseconds, a 4-5 per cent increase in success rates, and features customised to suit business needs, our switch is crafted to enrich the payment experience and ensure that businesses can now manage the surge in UPI transactions on any sale or non-sale day," Haria said. Ganesh Ananthanarayanan, Chief Operating Officer of Airtel Payments Bank, said the integration with

Razorpay's UPI Switch, a cloud-based infrastructure for the most advanced UPI Stack, ensures 99.99 per cent uptime and enables up to 10,000 transactions per second. "As UPI transactions continue to surge, our collaboration sets a new standard for business payments, aligning perfectly with the vision of a digital India," Ananthanarayanan said.

None of G7 economies on track to meet 2030 mitigation targets

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

None of the G7 members are on track to meet their existing emission reduction targets for 2030, according to a new analysis released on Tuesday. The analysis by Climate Analytics, a global climate science and policy institute, comes ahead of the G7 climate, energy, and environment ministers' meeting in Venaria Reale, Italy, during April 28-30. The G7 collectively aims to achieve a 40-42 per cent

emission reduction by 2030 but existing policies suggest that it will likely achieve only 19-33 per cent by the end of this decade, the analysis showed. This is at best around half of what is needed and would lead to greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 exceeding a 1.5 degrees Celsius compatible level by around four gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. Such a shortfall in ambition does not provide the leadership signal needed from the world's richest countries,

making up around 38 per cent of the global economy and responsible for 21 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions in 2021, the researchers said. The G7 economies need to slash their emissions by 58 per cent by 2030 compared to the 2019 levels to do their part to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, they said. "These economies, who make up 38 per cent of the world's GDP, are not pulling their weight: they have both the technology and the finance to up their game."

Tata Power Delhi Distribution appoints Gajanan Kale as CEO

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Tata Power Delhi Distribution Ltd on Monday announced the appointment of Gajanan S Kale as its new Chief Executive Officer, effective April 19. Before joining Tata Power-DDL, Kale served as the Chief Executive Officer of Tata Power Western Odisha Distribution Limited (TPWODL) since 2021. He also served as the CEO of Tata Power Ajmer Distribution Ltd (TPADL) from 2018 to 2020, a company

statement said. Kale, an M-Tech in Integrated Power Systems from NIT-Nagpur, has been with Tata Power group since 2003, it said. Praveer Sinha, CEO & MD, Tata Power, said, "With his (Gajanan S Kale) extensive experience in the distribution domain, I am confident that he will lead Tata Power DDL to new heights of success." Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL) is a joint venture between Tata Power and the Government of NCT of Delhi. It distributes electricity in North Delhi and serves a populace of 7 million.

Serie A title, second star and derby

Inter takes it all with win over Milan

AP ■ MILAN

Winning the derby ended up being the cherry on top of a special night for Inter Milan. Holding off AC Milan 2-1 on Monday clinched for Inter the Serie A title that had been sign-posted for weeks, and earned a coveted second star on its jersey for winning a 20th Italian league title, breaking a tie with its fierce city rival.

"I told the guys, We find ourselves in a situation that's never happened before," Inter captain Lautaro Martinez said. "We needed to take advantage of this opportunity, because look around, the entire stadium is ours now."

Not even the pouring rain could dampen the spirits of the Nerazzurri and their fans. Francesco Acerbi and Marcus Thuram scored and, although Fikayo Tomori's late goal for AC Milan threatened to delay the celebrations, Inter held on for the win that stretched its lead to an insurmountable 17 points over second-placed Milan, with five rounds remaining.

At the final whistle, a beaming Lautaro and teammate Federico Dimarco climbed onto the top of the goal frame at San Siro. Flares and fireworks were set off in the stands, and the Inter players danced raucously in front of their fans. A banner was unfurled saying in Italian: "Repeat it to the Madonnina, who are the champions and who the crybabies." The Madonnina is the statue on top of Milan cathedral that overlooks the city, and which



the derby is named after. After winning eight other trophies, Simone Inzaghi claimed his first league title as a coach.

"Winning the league with five matches left - more or less won with nine matches left, today making it mathematically certain - in a derby, with Milan the home team, that is something that will remain with us," Inzaghi said.

"Everyone gave their very valuable contribution so that we could reach goals like this."

A star is awarded for every 10 Serie A titles. Only Juventus has won more, with a record 36 and thus three stars on its jersey.

Despite the rain, the stars aligned for Inter to wrap up Serie A, another star and the Derby della Madonnina on one night at San Siro, the stadium both teams share. Inter was technically the away team and only one end of the stadium was reserved for its black-and-blue-clad support. Inter had won the past five derbies, including both legs of the Champions League

semifinal last year and a 5-1 humiliation of Milan earlier this season in Serie A. And the Nerazzurri went in front in the 18th minute when Benjamin Pavard nodded on Federico Dimarco's corner for an unmarked Acerbi to head in from close range.

Lautaro should have doubled Inter's lead seven minutes later when he was also left woefully unmarked but the league's top goal-scorer inexplicably fired over the bar from point-blank range.

Milan seemed to draw confidence from that miss

and Rafael Leão had a great chance to level following a rapid run on the counterattack from Tomori, but he fired straight at Inter goalkeeper Yann Sommer. It was end-to-end action and Milan captain Davide Calabria also forced a great save from Sommer at the end of the first half.

But clinching the crown seemed inevitable less than four minutes after the restart when Thuram ran onto a long Alessandro Bastoni ball over the top and feinted around his

marker to cut in from the left along the edge of the area and drill into the near bottom corner.

The finale became tense when Milan pulled one back 10 minutes from time. Sommer did brilliantly to parry Mattia Gabbia's header onto his post but Tomori nodded in the rebound. Tomori grabbed the ball and gestured frantically to teammates as he raced back to the center circle, desperate to get the equalizer that would prevent Inter from securing the title.

As tempers flared, a scuffle broke out in stoppage time

and Milan's Théo Hernandez and Inter defender Denzel Dumfries were sent off. Calabria was also shown a red card five minutes later following another scuffle.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RACE
Bologna consolidated fourth place with a 3-1 win at Roma to inflict Daniele De Rossi's second league defeat as coach of the capital club.

Bologna moved seven points above fifth-placed Roma and eight above Atalanta - both of which have a game in hand.

Spanish women among top Laureus winners and Djokovic is world sportsman of the year

Madrid, Apr 23 (AP) Spain's first Women's World Cup triumph last year earned two more major plaudits at the Laureus World Sports Awards on Monday.

Spain was chosen world team of the year for 2023 and midfielder Aitana Bonmati was picked as the best sportswoman.

Novak Djokovic received the sportsman of the year at the ceremony in Madrid, and American gymnast Simone Biles was given the comeback of the year award.

Real Madrid forward Jude Bellingham earned the breakthrough prize, and Rafael Nadal won the sport for good award thanks to his foundation.

The Spanish women's World Cup breakthrough last August in New Zealand and Australia was tarnished in the following weeks because of an unwanted kiss of forward Jenni Hermoso by

then-federation president Luis Rubiales after the final. Laureus rewarded Spain as the first all-female team to win the team award.

Before the World Cup, Bonmati also helped Barcelona win a second Women's Champions League. She's the first female soccer player to win the Laureus, after also receiving the Ballon d'Or and FIFA best player award.

"I want to thank all my teammates and the staff of my club and national team who have helped me a lot, and because of them I am here today," Bonmati said.

Djokovic won his record-equalling fifth Laureus sportsman award - tying Roger Federer - after titles at the Australian Open, French Open and U.S. Open to reach a record 24 Grand Slam singles triumphs. NFL great Tom Brady presented Djokovic the award.

Biles made a record-breaking return to competition last year when she won four gold medals at the world championships, including a record sixth all-around title.

Nadal's foundation was rewarded for helping more than 1,000 vulnerable young people in Spain and India, according to Laureus.

Teenager Arisa Trew won the action sportsperson award after becoming the first female skateboarder to land a 720 in competition.

Dutch wheelchair player Diede de Groot was selected as the sportsperson of the year with a disability after winning her third straight calendar tennis Grand Slam.



Sreeja surpasses Manika as India number one TT player

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

CWG mixed doubles champion Sreeja Akula on Tuesday became the top-ranked Indian woman table tennis player after rising to career-high rank of 38 in latest ITTF Chart, replacing Manika Batra.

Sreeja climbed a spot while Manika who had been India's number one TT player for a while now, slipped two places to 39 in the latest update.

The 25-year-old Sreeja has enjoyed a good run this year, winning the WTT Feeder Corpus Christi and WTT Feeder Beirut titles in January and March respectively besides reaching the quarterfinal of the WTT Star Contender in Goa.

Sreeja had won the mixed doubles gold medal at the 2022 Commonwealth Games

alongside veteran Sharath Kamal.

Yashaswini Ghorpade and Archana Kamath held on to their 99th and 100th spot in the rankings.

Sharath continues to be the top-ranked male player, occupying the 37 spot in the rankings while G Sathiyar and Manav Thakar have interchanged places to be 60th and 61st respectively.

National champion Harmert Desai, who was the top ranked Indian a couple of months ago, descent continues as he dropped to the 64th spot. India has already qualified for the team events at the Paris Olympics.

Two singles entries in men's and women's singles will be decided by the Table Tennis Federation of India by May 16 after considering the world rankings at the time.

ISL final to be played at home ground



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Indian Super League (ISL) on Tuesday said that the 2023-24 season final, scheduled on May 4, will be played at the home ground of the higher-ranked team in the league among the finalists.

Mohun Bagan pipped Mumbai City FC in a thriller on April 15 to win the League shield, with FC Goa finishing third.

Kolkata, Mumbai and Goa are therefore in contention to host the ISL final. Tickets for the match will go on sale once the venue is confirmed.

Odisha FC and FC Goa emerged victorious in their knockout matches against Kerala Blasters FC and Chennaiyin FC respectively, securing their places in the ISL 2023-24 semi-finals.

The semi-final action kicks off with Mohun Bagan Super Giant facing Odisha FC in Bhubaneswar on April 23. The following day, on April 24, Mumbai City FC will clash with FC Goa in the first leg of their semi-final matchup in Goa.

Shotgun shooter permitted to compete in national trials despite not meeting criteria

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The national shooting federation, which is fighting a court battle to uphold its selection criteria in the ongoing trials for Paris Olympics, seems to have bent the rules for one marksman recently, allowing him to participate despite lower-than-requisite scores.

Trap marksman Karan missed the National Rifles Association of India's (NRAI) criteria for shotgun selection trials by two points but was allowed to compete, while several others, who shot identical scores during last year's National Championships, were not considered.

A letter issued by NRAI in November announcing "Selection Trials as per Shotgun Selection Criteria 2024 & Olympic Selection Criteria 2024 for Shotgun event" states that shooters with a score of 110 in senior men's trap during the 66th National Championship (October-November, 2023) were eligible for the exercise held between December, 2023 and March 2024.

Karan, an Army marksman, shot 108 in the National Championships but his was the only recommendation accepted by the NRAI, while the same exception was not made for a dozen more shooters, who shot identical



scores. The shooter competed in a series of four selection trials and is currently ranked 15th, thus failing to make the national squad.

NRAI secretary Rajiv Bhatia told PTI that since Karan is a "budding" shooter and his "recommendation had come from the Army", an exception was made for him.

"We did give an exception as he is a budding, good shooter. There was a difference of just two points and he has been shooting good scores. That's why we introduced him in the trials for selecting the teams for World Cups, World Championships, everything (including Olympics)," said Bhatia.

"We cannot simply go by the rule book (lakeer ke fikeer nahin ban sakte). There was a recommendation from the Army to allow him (for national trials) because he had shot very well at the National Games (in Goa).

Karan, representing Services Sports Control Board, was the first to be eliminated in the trap finals at the National Games in Goa, finishing sixth.

The NRAI, ironically, is locked in a legal battle with some Olympic aspirants in the Delhi High Court, where it is insisting that no more than top five shooters in rifle and pistol would be allowed in the ongoing trials.

The process has come under criticism from no less than former national coach and legendary pistol shooter Jaspal Rana, who has said that the federation is not following international norms.

Asked why the trials were not opened for marksmen who shot identical scores at the Nationals, Bhatia said, "I think we allowed him under a special criteria because of his previous scores." Bhatia added that giving an exception in trials didn't mean he was selected in the national squad for

international competitions like the World Cups and World Championships.

"So, was he selected for the World Cups? No, we just gave him an opportunity," he said.

"Every state recommends shooters to be included (in trials), and we go by the merit. A marksman can shoot a bad score in a competition. One day you can shoot a bad score." Asked what NRAI would have done had he topped the trials, Bhatia said, "If somebody is performing, then why not (name him in the Olympic squad). How can we not consider him (for Olympics if he had performed)? Aim is to select the best athlete.

"But he is not going for any competition. As on today, he is nowhere in the national ranking. I think his ranking is very low (after the trials). But if he had beaten the field, he would have been (in contention)."

He added that an exception had also been made for the shooter to promote shotgun shooting as it is not as popular as pistol and rifle.

"Shotgun, we have to promote as (the numbers are very less) compared to pistol rifle and other categories... It was a recommendation of the Army Marksmanship Unit, which is an affiliate unit of the NRAI. "It was only one case, we did not open it for everybody. Just one time exce



Man City vs Man United FA Cup final time confirmed

AP ■ LONDON

The FA Cup final between Manchester City and Manchester United will kick off at the traditional time of 3 PM (14.00 GMT) on May 25, the Football Association said Tuesday.

In a repeat of last year's final, holder City will play rival United at Wembley Stadium.

The FA said the kick-off time had been agreed with both clubs, the local authority, safety advisory group and broadcasters.

It is the second straight year that the final will start at 3 PM. In recent years, it has had an early evening time slot.

City beat Chelsea 1-0 on Saturday to secure its place in the final.

Meanwhile, United needed penalties to overcome second-tier Coventry on Sunday after blowing a 3-0 lead to draw 3-3 through extra time.

Olympic gold medallist Gray hopes to be part of US 3x3 team in Paris Games

AP ■ SPRINGFIELD (US)

Alisha Gray is glad to be back playing 3x3 for USA Basketball with an eye towards being a member of the team at the Paris Olympics this summer.

She's the only player returning from the foursome that took home the gold at the Tokyo Games three years ago. That was the inaugural appearance of the sport at the Olympics.

"To be the first team to do it and it being the first time in the Olympics, it was amazing," Gray said.

"It's great to be back and get back into the groove of things."

Gray was one of eight players selected from the 15-person training camp over the weekend to participate in a 3x3 tournament in Springfield, Massachusetts at The Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame. She's on a team with Dearica

Hamby, Cameron Brink and Linnæe Harper.

Brink and Harper helped the US win the 2023 FIBA 3x3 World Cup. Hamby made her 3x3 debut winning the gold at the Women's AmeriCup the same year.

The other US team in the tournament features Cierra Burdick, Rhyné Howard, Lexie Hull and Hailey Van Lith. Burdick and Van Lith were also on that World Cup team last year. Howard has the least 3x3 experience, only playing in USA Basketball nationals in 2019. She's also in the Olympic 5-on-5 national team pool.

"I think 3x3 is more intimate and it really tests your patience a little bit because you have to think about what you're doing in order to get good looks," Howard said.

"You don't have a lot of people to help you get open so you have to create for yourself a lot."



Hull began her 3x3 career in 2016 and also medalled in the sport in 2022 and 2023.

The Americans will eventually choose the four player roster for Paris. Two of the players must be in top 10 for points accumulated for the U.S. The other two players on the team either have to also be in the top 10 or have played in at least one official FIBA 3x3 competition between January 1, 2023 and June 24, 2024.

National team coach Jennifer Rizzotti said that the selection committee will have a tough job picking the four players to compete in Paris.

"What makes it hard is there are also some women who have committed to this game for four years," she said.

"They've earned the points for the US and earned the points for themselves. They've done all the groundwork and laid the

foundation for us to be able play in the Olympics and not all of them will get to go. We tried to find a way to make them know that they are part of the process and you try to keep them here as long as you can."

The 3x3 game is played on a half court with a 12-second shot clock and the winner is the first team to score 21 points or to be leading at the end of a 10-minute period. Baskets inside the arc are worth one point and shots outside it are worth two. Rizzotti said USA Basketball had a 3x3 camp last May that featured a lot of the college players who were playing the game for the first time. She's seen a lot of growth from them. "It's impressive to see in a short amount of time and limited repetitions of playing that they've picked things up," she said.

"Made us really have a competitive camp in a way that I wasn't really expecting."



Pant captaincy under lens as DC eye improved bowling effort against GT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rishabh Pant's leadership skills will be under scrutiny as a struggling Delhi Capitals would seek a much-improved performance from their bowlers when they take on an inconsistent Gujarat Titans in the IPL here on Wednesday.

It was not an ideal homecoming for Pant as after two consecutive wins, DC slumped to a 67-run loss against a marauding Sunrisers Hyderabad at home on Saturday. The loss saw DC slip to the eighth position with three wins and five defeats. They very well know they can't afford to falter if they want to keep their play-off hopes alive. Against SRH, Pant erred in his decisions a few times, starting from the toss as he misjudged the dew factor at the Arun Jaitley Stadium and decided to bowl first. Pant's decision to hand the second over to Lalit Yadav, was even more contentious as SRH were off to a blazing start, scoring a record 125 for no loss in the powerplay. On the personal front, Pant wasn't

in his element as he struggled for timing en route a painstaking 44 off 35 balls while chasing a mammoth score. To chase a target of 267, a team needs its openers to fire from ball one but Prithvi Shaw and David Warner haven't been too successful. Young Jake Fraser-McGurk smashed 65 off just 18 balls to keep DC in the hunt but he lacked support from the other end, even though Abhishek Porel (42 off 22) tried his best. DC bowlers were taken to the cleaners by SRH and they need to pull up their socks. Left-arm seamer Khaleel Ahmed's, whose career has been dogged by inconsistency, decision to employ short stuff in the opening over completely backfired. With short boundaries at the Kotla, DC bowlers need to pitch it up. Pace spearhead Anrich Nortje has been completely off-colour this season and DC would be desperately hoping veteran Ishant Sharma returns after missing the last game due to a back spasm.



Kuldeep Yadav has been DC's best bowler in the season so far with 10 wickets from five games at an economy rate of 7.60. But he didn't have a very good outing against SRH. Even though he had the highest number of dot balls (8) among DC bowlers, he also conceded the maximum numbers of sixes -- 7. GT have also been equally inconsistent under new skipper Shubman Gill. But the three-wicket win over Punjab Kings in their last game has helped the former champions move up slightly in the pecking order at sixth spot from four wins and as many losses. They would be hoping to continue the winning momentum to scale up the leaderboard and be in contention for a play-off berth. The onus would be on Gill to lead from the front. The likes of Sai Sudharsan, David Miller and Azmatullah Omarzai also need to let their willow do the talking while Rahul Tewatia would look to continue his pyrotechnics towards the end stage of their innings.

On the bowling front, the likes of veteran Mohit Sharma, Noor Ahmad and Rashid Khan will be expected to deliver the goods.

TEAMS (FROM):
Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c&wk), David Warner, Abhishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kushagra (wk), Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Rasikh Dar, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk.
Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Wriddhiman Saha, Sai Sudharsan, Shahrulkh Khan, Matthew Wade, Kane Williamson, Azmatullah Omarzai, Abhinav Manohar, Rashid Khan, Vijay Shankar, Rahul Tewatia, Spencer Johnson, Kartik Tyagi, Joshua Little, Darshan Nalkande, Noor Ahmad, Ravishrinivasan Sai Kishore, Mohit Sharma, Jayant Yadav, Umesh Yadav, Sushant Mishra, Sandeep Warrier, Sharath BR, Manav Suthar.



You need big heart when bowling at the death: Sandeep

PTI ■ JAIPUR

You have to have a big heart when bowling at the death while trying to execute your plans, insisted Rajasthan Royals medium pacer Sandeep Sharma after recording the ongoing IPL season's best bowling performance. Bowling after a three-week injury layoff, the 30-year-old Sharma wreaked havoc in the Mumbai Indians camp with a splendid 5 for 18 on Monday. "In this year's IPL, batters are going big and with the impact player rule, there is an extra batter so the games are high-scoring. You have to have a big heart while bowling at the death and try to execute your plans and bowl good balls," he

said after RR's nine-wicket win over MI. Sharma, who started off as a new-ball exponent in the IPL, has been tasked to bowl the death overs by the Royals in the three games that he has played this season. "Even today you ask me where I feel comfortable, I'll say it's with the new ball. With the old ball, you have to adapt and evolve as a bowler," he said. Sharma returned to the RR playing XI after recuperating from a side strain that kept him out for close to a month. "I was working hard towards my fitness for the last three weeks. I had two practice sessions before the game, my main focus was to execute the variations that I did tonight."



Against MI, Sharma's scalps included the dangerous Suryakumar Yadav, Tilak Varma, the big hitting Tim David, Ishan Kishan and Gerald Coetzee. He took three wickets in the final over, restricting MI to 179 despite a 99-run stand between Varma and Nehal Wadhera.

"If you're bowling at the death, it can go both ways. Sometimes, you go for runs, and when you're lucky enough you end up getting a wicket. When we started, the wicket was low and slow. My plan was to keep bowling those cutters and it came off nicely tonight," he said.

MI OPTIMISTIC DESPITE LOSS TO RR: Mumbai Indians fell to their fifth loss of the season but young batter Nehal Wadhera remained optimistic about the five-time champions' chances of qualifying for the playoffs. "MI need to win all their games from here and we need to tighten our socks. We need to raise our game and figure out where we have been going

wrong or where we have been going right so that we can rectify our mistakes whenever we return," Wadhera said after the match. The 23-year-old, who smashed a splendid 24-ball 49, pointed out that MI aren't new to being involved in a mid-table muddle, having risen from the proverbial ashes time and again. "We have been in such a situation in earlier seasons as well, and we have, you know, upped our game from there and qualified. "So, we are optimistic even right now. We will continue the process we are following and win the games for the team. We win as a team, and we lose as a team," Wadhera added.

That door is now closed: Narine rules out T20 World Cup amid purple patch in IPL

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Former West Indies bowling all-rounder Sunil Narine, who is having a terrific IPL season, won't be reversing his retirement decision for the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and USA, insisting that the "door is now closed". The 35-year-old last played for the West Indies in a T20 International in August 2019 before retiring from international cricket in November last year to focus on franchise T20 leagues around the world. But owing to his sensational form with both bat and ball for Kolkata Knight Riders this IPL season, attempts were being made to convince Narine to reverse his decision for the T20 World Cup. "I'm truly flattered and humbled that my performances recently have moved many people to publicly express their wish for me to come out of retirement and play in the upcoming T20 World Cup," Narine wrote in Instagram post. He asserted that he has made peace with his decision and will be supporting the team from home. "I have made peace with that decision and

whilst I never wish to disappoint, that door is now closed and I will be supporting the guys who take the field in June for West Indies. "Guys who have worked hard over the past few months and deserve to show our wonderful fans that they are capable of winning another title. I wish you all the best," he added. Narine, who has been a key member of KKR since 2012, is seventh on the list of leading run-scorers in the ongoing IPL season, having scored 286 runs, including an unbeaten century against Rajasthan Royals last week -- his maiden T20 ton. With the ball, the off-spinner is KKR's joint-leading wicket-taker with nine scalps at an average of 22.11 and an economy rate of 7.10. Narine's purple patch has compelled West Indies captain Rovman Powell to encourage the spinner to come out of retirement for the home World Cup. "For the last 12 months, I've been whispering in his ears, he's blocked out everyone. Asked (Kieron) Pollard, (Dwayne) Bravo, (Nicholas) Pooran, hopefully before they select the team, they can crack his code," Powell had said last week.

We have got a little bit of improving to do, both with bat and ball: Warner



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Capitals opener David Warner has no qualms in admitting that the team is left with no option but to win all their remaining matches to stay in the reckoning for a play-off berth in the ongoing IPL. Having lost five out of their eight matches, DC will be desperate to turn things

around when they take on Gujarat Titans here on Wednesday. "We're not where we want to be for the team's sake. We'd like to win a few more games. But we've got to win the next remainder to obviously compete in the finals. "So for us, it's about doing as best as we can. Hopefully, we can play each game like we did against Gujarat," Warner said

during a media interaction. The seasoned campaigner from Australia added, "We've got a little bit of improving to do, both with bat and the ball. If we can minimise the totals, it would be great. And then if we bat first, try and put a big total on the board and defend it." Warner further highlighted that DC have a dangerous bowling attack that bowled out GT for 89 in their first leg match. "Cannot fault the way the guys are training and preparing. It's just sometimes in the games that the execution isn't there. And we know when we take wickets up front and early, we're a very dangerous bowling attack." Asked about two youngsters in the team who have impressed him this season, Warner said, "Jake's (Jake Fraser-McGurk) been very good. We know he's always had the talent. Abhishek Porel has been outstanding as well. "Abhishek wasn't even going to play in the first game, but we'd lost early wickets and then came in as an impact player. "I think he had nine balls or something and he got 30-odd runs. That changed the game and then the other day as well, he played very well. He is going to be a very good player," he concluded.



Jaiswal batted with maturity against MI, played cricketing shots: Lara

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Impressed with the maturity shown by Yashasvi Jaiswal, West Indies cricket legend Brian Lara said the youngster's knock against Mumbai Indians was well put together as he perfectly balanced taking his time with shots while still maintaining a high strike-rate. Jaiswal ended a barren run by his lofty standards with his first ton of this IPL to power Rajasthan Royals to a nine-wicket win over MI here. "Yeah, beautiful. But the fact of the matter is, he's taking his time, looking at the ball right from up at the back, and he's playing cricketing shots. He's got all the stuff, he doesn't have to worry about it," Lara said on Star Sports Cricket Live. Jaiswal struck nine fours and seven sixes to make an unbeaten 104 from only 60 balls, a knock which was replete with powerful shots on the leg side and crispy drives. "And when you do get on top of the bowlers, that's when you take it back, because that's what I love about Yashasvi. "It was well put together, great cricketing shots, he's managed throughout the innings, and anyone knows, if you're chasing such a good total, at Jaipur and you bounce through the innings, you're soon as going to get there. "So he's shown a lot of responsibility, a lot of maturity, and I'm very happy to have him back." Medium pacer Sandeep Sharma starred with the ball of RR. He wreaked havoc in the MI camp with the ongoing IPL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Once we got Hasaranga that meant we could not go for Yuzi: Mike Hesson

Letting go of Yuzvendra Chahal is something Royal Challengers Bengaluru could regret for the longest time and the franchise's former director of cricket, Mike Hesson on Tuesday insisted they failed to retain the leg-spinner due to a miscalculation at the last IPL auction. On Monday, Chahal scripted history by becoming the first player in IPL to have taken 200 wickets. "Yuzi is one I will be frustrated with until I have finished my career and probably beyond. He is an outstanding bowler. I guess when it comes to every cycle, you have got to decide who you are going to retain. "It was one of those things where if you only retain three players, you give yourself an extra 4 crore in the auction. That potentially gave us the chance to get both Harshal and Yuzi," Hesson told former India batter Robin Uthappa on Jio Cinema. Hesson said Chahal's name came pretty late in the auction and by that



time, the franchise had already bought ace Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga. "... Then the order of the auction came up and Yuzvendra Chahal was at no. 65. Because we had retained that many players we were going to get bullied. After Yuzi there was no other spinner we were interested in. "We were obviously interested in Hasaranga as another option if we did not get Yuzi. So we bid for him upfront and then once we got Hasaranga that meant we could not go for Yuzi," he added. In 153 matches, Chahal has taken 200 wickets at an average of 21.60, with the best figures of 5/40. He has taken six four-wicket hauls and a five-wicket haul in his IPL career. Chahal reached the milestone during the match against

Mumbai Indians in Jaipur on Monday. Hesson served as the franchise's director of cricket from 2019-2023. Meanwhile, former Australia pacer Brett Lee praised RR seamer Sandeep Sharma for returning excellent figures of 5/18 against MI and said picking a five-fer in a T20 match is equivalent to scoring 120 runs with the bat. "They say a 4-fer is worth 100 runs in a T20, so a 5-fer for a bowler is definitely worth 120 for a batter, it's quality bowling... To pick up 5/18 in his comeback game, just makes you feel like you are part of the team again. "It will do a lot for his confidence. You can see in the list of TATA IPL 2024's best figures and he's sitting pretty on it." Lee on lavished praise on Chahal for picking his 200th IPL wicket. "What a very special moment. You think about all the hard work, a great way to bring in your 200th dismissal in the TATA IPL, a catch off your own bowling, very special, well done. I have a feeling, gentleman, there's many more to come," Lee said.