

**OPINION 6**  
AFGHANISTAN UNDER  
TALIBAN RULE

**WORLD 8**  
ISRAELI AID OFFERS TO  
GAZA MAY FALL SHORT

**MONEY 10**  
RBI DECISION SHOWS RESOLVE TO  
ENSURE PRICE STABILITY: EXPERTS

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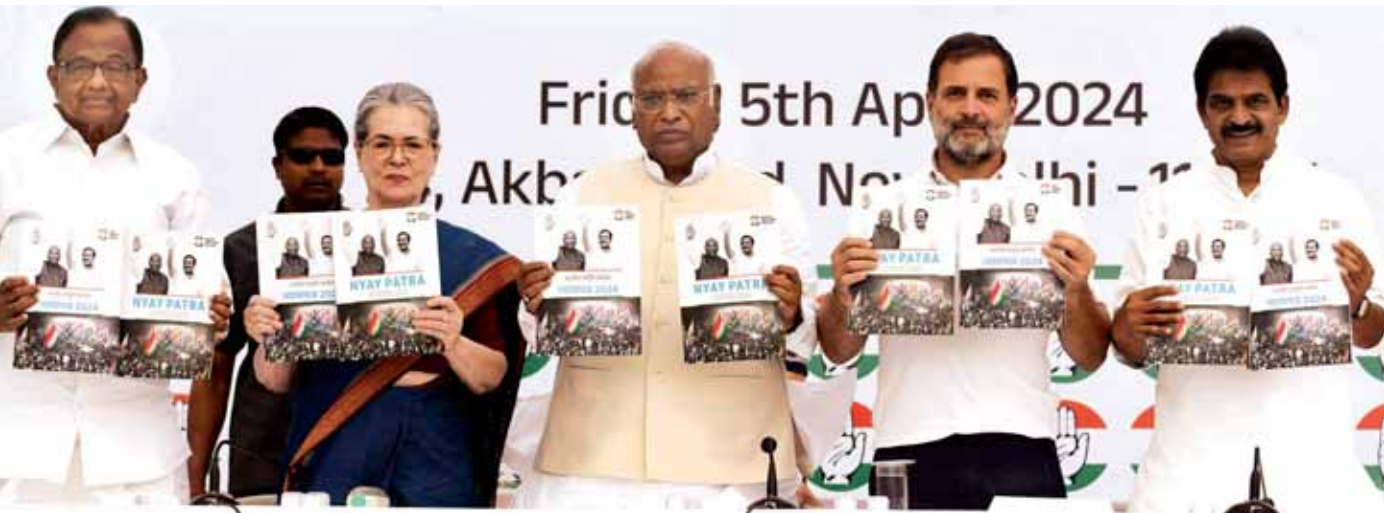
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## Congress releases Nyay Patra manifesto



Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, along with senior party leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, P Chidambaram and KC Venugopal, releases the party's manifesto ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in New Delhi on Friday

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday released its manifesto for the general elections 2024 focusing on equality, youth, women, farmers, workers, Constitution, economy, federalism, national security, environment, jobs creation and nontheless inclusion of more reservations in various segments and work on caste census. Right to apprenticeship, a legal guarantee for MSP, passing a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs, a nationwide caste census and scrapping of Agnipath scheme are also among

the promises made by the party in manifesto released at the AICC headquarters in the presence of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chiefs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. Invoking Rabindranath Tagore's "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high", the grand old party made a fervent appeal to people to repose faith in the party in the Lok Sabha polls and promised greater freedom, faster growth and justice for all. "The economy has registered less-than-satisfactory growth. Widespread

unemployment, high inflation and falling consumption have debilitated even this modest growth. While the poor and the middle classes have been hit below the belt and the atmosphere in the country has become hate-filled and divisive," the party alleged. "It is time to remind ourselves of Tagore's immortal words in Gitanjali: Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high...Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake," the manifesto concluded. In the 45-page document titled 'Nyay Patra', featuring pictures of Kharge and Rahul and

Bharat Jodo Yatra, the Congress said it would implement 10 per cent quota in jobs, educational institutions for economically weaker sections (EWS) for all castes, communities without discrimination if it comes to power. The party also promised full Statehood to Jammu and Kashmir, besides giving special status to Andhra Pradesh, full Statehood to Puducherry, and to amend the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, to declare that Lt Governor shall act on the aid and advice of Council of Ministers of NCT, Delhi. It also promised to fill nearly 30 lakh vacancies in sanctioned posts at various levels in the Central

Government and said the Rajasthan model of cashless insurance of up to ₹25 lakh will be adopted for ensuring universal healthcare across the country. The Congress will pass a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SC, ST and OBC if it comes to power in the general elections beginning April 19, the party promised. The party also said it will conduct a nationwide socio-economic and caste census ensuring equitable distribution among all sections as per their population. It said it will review all laws that interfere with the right to privacy and make suitable amendments to various laws to uphold the right to privacy. It also promised to restore the voters' trust in the election process by amending election laws and ensuring that VVPAT slips are tallied with EVMs. The Congress said it will review the new education policy brought by the NDA. It also promised to enact a law on bail that will incorporate the principle that 'bail is the rule, jail is the exception' in all criminal laws. It further promised to introduce comprehensive prison reforms. It said it guarantees a new 'right to apprenticeship act' to provide one-year apprenticeship to every diploma holder or graduate below age of 25, under which apprentices will get ₹one lakh a year. It also promised to provide financial assistance of ₹one lakh cash transfer to a woman of poor households under the Mahalakshmi scheme. **Continued on Page 2**



## BJP dubs Congress manifesto bundle of lies

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday tore into the Congress manifesto for Lok Sabha elections 2024 and dubbed it a "bundle of lies" and alleged that the party, which ruled the country for several decades, did not fulfil any of the promises made in its earlier manifestos for the Assembly and Parliamentary elections. The BJP further stated that the seriousness of it could be understood from the fact that photos of New York and Thailand were used in it. The BJP said the Congress has come with such a poll manifesto to create confusion and mislead voters. "The Congress manifesto is a bundle of lies. It has been prepared to create confusion among voters," BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi told reporters. The BJP leader said it is an irony

that the Congress is seeking the people's mandate with the promise that it will "do wonders" this time if voted to power again. "After remaining at helm for several decades, they are now promising that they will do wonders this time if voted to power. The Congress has titled its manifesto 'Nyay Patra', which means it admits that it has done 'anyay' (injustice) during its 55-60 years rule in the country," he charged. Trivedi said the Congress, which ruled the country for several decades, is talking about 'nyay' (justice) today, but its Governments did not do justice when in power. The Congress on Friday released its manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections, making a host of promises including the right to apprenticeship, a legal guarantee for MSP, and raising the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs. **Continued on Page 2**

## Returning officer Anil tenders unconditional apology to apex court

**PTI NEW DELHI**

Anil Masih, the returning officer for the Chandigarh mayoral election whose result was overturned by the Supreme Court in February, on Friday tendered an unconditional apology to the apex court for his conduct. He had faced the wrath of the Supreme Court which ordered his criminal prosecution for allegedly making a false statement before it and his "misdemeanour" during the counting of votes. Masih said he would withdraw the earlier affidavit which stated that he was reeling under depression and anxiety and wherein he denied allegations of tampering with ballots. "A purported video recording of the election process was leaked online on January 31. Thereafter, the respondent (Masih) was subjected to incessant criticism, name-calling and ad hominem by members of political parties as well as social media. This put the respondent, including his family members, under immense mental trauma and stress," he had said in the affidavit. **Continued on Page 2**



District administration officials with transgender community people during a meeting organised to employ the latter's help to raise voter awareness ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Gonda district, in UP

## Transgender Ambassadors to boost voter turnout

**ARCHANA JYOTI NEW DELHI**

Determined to reverse the trend of low voter turnout, Gonda administration in Uttar Pradesh has come out with a unique inclusive initiative: It has roped in transgender as polling booth ambassadors. The brainchild of District Magistrate Neha Sharma, the novel idea engaging the third gender has been met enthusiastically from the transgender community too as well as senior officials and law enforcement authorities which have now chalked out a comprehensive strategy in this regard. From composing catchy songs to staging street plays, transgender ambassadors have been asked to leverage their creativity and enthusiasm to educate the public and shed light on their long standing demands as well.

Polls will be held on May 20 in the phase five in the district which is home to 25.30 lakh registered voters, including a small contingent of 94 third-gender individuals. Located approximately 120 km from Lucknow, Gonda has faced persistent challenges with low voter participation compared to the State average. However, now with the involvement of the transgender in the poll process, the district officials are hoping to bring the voters to the polling booth and exercise their electoral rights. "This initiative capitalises on the unique perspective and outreach potential of the transgender community to raise awareness about the importance of voting and encourage public participation," Amruta Soni, a Government officer and transgender spokesperson told a news agency here. **Continued on Page 2**

## Frequent candidate list changes leave SP supporters baffled

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE LUCKNOW**

The Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh finds itself amidst a whirlwind of candidate changes, swapping seven candidates across six crucial constituencies in the past fortnight, prompting worries over the party's leadership indecisiveness. While the party attributes these changes to local requests and voter sentiment, supporters are left bewildered and disheartened by the frequent alterations. Party elders, however, maintain that decisions are reached after extensive consultations with stakeholders in each constituency. "A quick succession of candidate changes sends a negative message. It indicates a lack of confidence and could have detrimental effects on the party's image," remarked a senior SP leader. In Meerut, the situation took a curious turn as the candidate changed thrice, culminating in Sunita Verma, former mayor, filing her nomination on the last day on Thursday. Initially,



advocate Bhanu Pratap Singh was declared the candidate, only to be replaced by Sardhana MLA Atul Pradhan. Despite Pradhan filing his nomination, Verma ultimately took his place. Moradabad witnessed a similar perplexing scenario when sitting MP ST Hasan was replaced by Ruchi Veera, a choice of veteran leader Azam Khan. Efforts to reinstate Hasan before the nomination deadline proved futile. Similar perplexity gripped Rampur, where Khan's

preferred candidate, Asim Raja, was sidelined in favour of Maulana Moibullah Nadi, the Imam of Parliament Street Jama Masjid in Delhi. Speculations even surfaced regarding the potential candidacy of Akhilesh Yadav's nephew, Tej Pratap Yadav, from Rampur. Baghat, Gautam Budh Nagar, and Bijnor also saw candidate changes amidst speculations and strategic considerations, unsettling party members. In Baghat, Amarpal Sharma was initially declared as the SP candidate but was replaced by Manoj Chaudhary. In Gautam Budh Nagar, Mahendra Singh Nagar gave way to Rahul Awana, only to be reinstated by SP leadership on March 30. Similarly, in Bijnor, Yashvir Singh was replaced by Deepak Saini, son of sitting SP MLA Ram Avtar Saini from Noorpur. RLD chief Jayant Chaudhry criticised the SP's approach, referring to it as a "musical chairs" game in a social media post. He wrote a post on X saying, "Congratulations to the 'lucky ones' in the Opposition (who) will get a chance, for a few hours" to contest in the 2024 general election. **Continued on Page 2**



## India denies targeted killings of terrorists in Pakistan

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI**

India has termed as "false and malicious propaganda" reports claiming the country's involvement in targeted assassinations in Pakistan after the 2019 Pulwama terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir. The strong denial from Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was given to the UK daily, *The Guardian*, in response to the report. The report quoted intelligence operatives in India and Pakistan to claim that India's move was part of a wider strategy to eliminate terrorists living on foreign soil. The Ministry also underlined a previous statement by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in which he said targeted killings in other countries were "not the policy of the Government of India." *The Guardian* mentioned denial by the MEA. The report claimed Delhi "has implemented a policy of targeting those it considers hostile to India." According to the report, documents shared by some Pakistani investigators indicated India's intelligence agency, RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) allegedly carried out 20 such targeted killings on foreign soil as part of an emboldened approach to national security after the 2019 Pulwama terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, which killed 40 Indian soldiers. Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed later claimed responsibility for the attack. **Continued on Page 2**

## Tea to elephants: Poll campaign expenses fixed by EC

**RAJESH KUMAR NEW DELHI**

From fixing the rates for hiring of elephants and horses to campaign, to ascertain the rates of chai, kachoris, samosa besides size of garlands and several campaign related paraphernalia, the Election Commission (EC) has fixed rates for the campaign related items to be used by the contesting candidates and political parties during their election campaign in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. The candidates now will have to maintain a record of expenditure among things, on how many samosas, kachoris and cups of tea/coffee a candidate has offered to his/her workers

Name of item/work	Quantity/measurement	Rate (in ₹)
Cholle Kulche	Per plate	43
Cholle Bhature	Per plate	49
Samosa	Each	12
Kachori	Each	19
Pakoda (Mix)	Per plate	36
Tea	Per disposal cup	12
Lunch (Veg)	Each	118
Dinner (Veg)	Each	119
Charges of elephant	Per day	6,150
Charges of horse	Per day	3,075

and supporters, and how many garlands of various sizes were put around the netaji's neck during electioneering. Interestingly, parties and candidates often offer

workers and voters liquor, but the rate list did not mention alcohol. Interestingly, candidates will have to pay ₹12 for a cup of tea in Delhi, ₹10 in Ghaziabad, Noida,

Gautambudh Nagar, ₹15 in Punjab and ₹5 in Madhya Pradesh. The rate for a samosa is fixed at ₹12 in Delhi; ₹10 in Noida and Ghaziabad and ₹15 in Punjab. **Continued on Page 2**

In Delhi, the Election Commission has fixed charges of 1,34 items that will be used during the campaign which include ₹43 for per plate chhole kulche, ₹49 per plate chhole bhature; ₹40 per plate puri sabzi; ₹12 per samosa, ₹19 per kachori, ₹16 for bread pakoda, ₹28 for sandwich, ₹12 per cup (disposal tea), ₹19 per water bottle (one litre), ₹15 per piece laddoo and gulab jamun, ₹118 for vegetable thali at lunch and ₹119 per thali at dinner. If candidates want to hire elephants for their campaigning, they will have to pay ₹6,150 per day; for horses, it will be ₹3,075, according to the Election Commission. **Continued on Page 2**

## RBI to enable cash deposits in banks through UPI soon

**PTI MUMBAI**

In a major decision, the Reserve Bank on Friday said it will soon facilitate cash deposit facility in banks through use of the popular UPI, an instant real-time payment system for inter-bank transactions through mobile phones. The Central bank also decided to permit linking of Prepaid Payment Instruments (PPIs) through third-party Unified Payments Interface (UPI) applications. Announcing the first bi-monthly monetary policy of the current financial year, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said cash deposit machines

(CDMs) deployed by banks enhance customer convenience while reducing cash-handling load on bank branches. The facility of cash deposit is presently available only through use of debit cards. "Given the popularity of UPI, it is also the benefits seen from the availability of UPI for card-less cash withdrawal at ATMs, it is now proposed to facilitate cash deposit facility through use of UPI," Das said. Operational instructions will be issued shortly, the RBI said. The RBI has also proposed to permit linking of PPIs through third-party UPI applications to provide more flexibility to users.



# LG, Minister spar over lack of basic amenities in hospitals

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena and Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj have yet again entered in a war of words, with the former blaming the AAP leader for 'utter lack of basic consumables' in Delhi Government hospital on Friday while the latter inviting the Centre appointed LG to visit the hospitals where majority of patients come from BJP ruled Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Launching a scathing attack on the ruling AAP government, the LG said, "I am writing with reference to your U.O note number Min health/2024/1182 dated 4th April 2024 drawing attention to the utter lack of basic consumables in Dr Hedgewar Arogya Sansthan

and Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya." Claiming that 'the much touted 'Delhi Model' of health service delivery lies in shambles', the Centre appointed LG said that he is appalled at the pathetic state of affairs prevailing in Delhi government hospitals. "I am surprised that hospitals in the national capital run by the Delhi government are not equipped even with basic consumables like cotton," he said. He said that the minister is 'avoiding' his responsibility in the letter while accusing him of making it a recurrent practice to cast blame for deficiency solely on the officers. Hitting back at him, Bhardwaj said, "I will be pleased to take you to the hospitals of Delhi Government where more than 50% patients are from neigh-

bouring Uttar Pradesh." He said that the Chief Secretary and Health Secretary are misleading the AAP ruled Delhi government by submitting that there is no scarcity of medicines & consumables. "However, instead of solving the issue, the Chief Secretary and Health Secretary are misleading the Government by submitting that there is no scarcity of medicines & consumables. You have yourself agreed in your communication that there is scarcity of medicines & consumables in hospitals," Bhardwaj said. Meanwhile, Saxena claimed that over the last one decade, there has been a complete lack of oversight in the health sector. "Infrastructure is grossly inadequate in some cases, while it is nonfunctional in others,"



he said. "I had written to the chief minister way back in June last year, that apart from construction of only one new hospital at Siraspur, which had huge time and cost overruns, no new hospitals have been established during the last nine years. In existing hospitals, addition of beds was badly delayed," LG claimed, while saying that Bhardwaj disregarded his invitation to discuss issues of public importance related to healthcare by giving 'frivolous

excuses'. He said that instead of taking the issues in healthcare head on, Bhardwaj consistently chooses to 'shoot off misleading missives and indulge in media blame game', claiming that the High Court was so 'angushed with the miserable situation of the health infrastructure, that the division bench threatened the AAP leader in open court with imprisonment'. Saxena reminded the Minister that 'health is a subject which is wholly transferred to the elected government under the constitutional scheme of things in GNCT of Delhi'. He said, "As minister in charge, you should not shy away from taking decisions of portfolios assigned to you in the council of ministers. This grave situation should ideally have been discussed

way back in the council of ministers, which is the highest deliberative policy making body of the government." In a bid to hit back at LG, the AAP leader shared multiple news reports where it is claimed that LG has initiated enquiries. He said, "It's nowhere mentioned that CM led NCCSA has ordered those enquiries." While stating that the health conditions in the national capital are bad, Saxena remarked "High Court had to step in recently and constitute a committee of doctors to get a proper assessment of health facilities and a roadmap for invoking correctives." Further, he said that this is a sad reflection on the performance of the executive, if judicial action is required to step in.

He shared, "several public representatives, eminent doctors and the real 'aam aadmi' of Delhi, whom I meet every day, have shared innumerable experiences which highlight the virtual collapse of government health infrastructure." Hitting out on AAP over announcements of augmentation of beds in hospitals and construction of new hospitals, he said, "Sadly, announcements which were made with much fanfare were not followed up with the zeal and urgency that was warranted." Delhi Minister in his response to LG asked several questions including "Why is LG not saying even a word about initiation of enquiry against the Chief Secretary and Health Secretary?"

# EC issues show cause notice to Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Friday issued a show-cause notice to Delhi minister and AAP leader Atishi, asking her to back with facts her statement that the BJP approached her to join the party. She was asked to reply by Monday. The BJP moved the commission earlier against her claim that the party reached out to her through someone close and asked her to join it. The notice issued by the Election Commission read, "...You are a minister in the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi and leader of a national party. The electors tend to believe whatever is being said from public forum by their leaders and in that sense the statements made by them affect the campaign discourse." The poll panel said it expects that there must be a "factual foundation" to the statements



made by the AAP leader and since the veracity of the statements made has been contested, she must be able to back it with a factual basis. The AAP leader has been asked to respond by Monday noon. "Now, therefore, you are hereby called upon to furnish your para wise response to the matter..." the notice added. Reacting to the notice, Atishi alleged that the notice was leaked to the media by the BJP an hour before the EC sent it to her through email.

Commission of the neutrality and non-partisanship expected of it in conducting free and fair elections in the country. The Election Commission has been given a very big responsibility by the Constitution to save democracy in the country, she said. Atishi said the present three election commissioners had predecessors like T N Seshan, and added, "You are running an Election Commission that is looked up to by the whole world and praised for. No question is ever raised on the impartiality of elections in a country like India." "I want to appeal the EC not to bow down before the BJP and its central government. The three election commissioners will be remembered by the country for 100 years for all the wrong reasons if they do not allow level-playing field and free and fair elections," she said. The BJP lodged a complaint with the EC on March 4 and the poll body within hours

issued the notice to her, Atishi claimed and asked why no notices were sent to the central agencies for their action against opposition parties and leaders during elections. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said Atishi has crossed all limits of political and administrative decorum by raising fingers on the independence and fairness of the election commission. The political conduct and her repeated attacks on the constitutional bodies clearly shows that Atishi is a product of school of nexalism. Sachdeva said it would have been better if before raising finger towards Election Commission and reminding the commissioners about T N Seshan, Atishi could have asked Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to follow the precedent of Madan Lal Khurana who resigned on being just named in a politically motivated case diary unlike Arvind Kejriwal who has been arrested in the huge liquor scam.

# ED opposes Kejriwal plea seeking more time with lawyer

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday opposed the plea moved by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal before a city court for more time with his lawyer, saying special privileges cannot be extended to him merely because he wants to run the government from inside the jail. The ED made its submissions before the special judge for CBI and ED cases Kaveri Baweja, who reserved the order on Kejriwal's plea for Monday. Kejriwal's counsel told the judge that multiple cases were pending against the politician and that one hour a week was insufficient for a person to understand and give instructions. "This is the most basic legal right that I am asking to meet my advocate. Sanjay Singh was granted three meetings when he had only five or eight cases," the counsel said.

The ED opposed Kejriwal's prayer for five meetings with his lawyer every week, saying it was against the jail manual. The central probe agency told the court that Kejriwal was already allowed to have two meetings with his lawyers instead of one which is the general practice. "When a person is in jail his stature outside is irrelevant and he is treated equally (like other prisoners). They have already been allowed two meetings in a week. One of the consequences of JC (judicial custody) is that your exposure to the outside world is limited and in accordance with law. "Merely because someone chooses to run the government from the prison he cannot be treated as an exception and cannot be granted the privilege," the ED's counsel told the judge. He alleged that legal interviews were being misused by Kejriwal for purposes other than consulta-

tion. Kejriwal has issued some instructions on matters related to governance from behind bars. His Aam Aadmi Party has asserted he will run the government from jail. "If you are under valid judicial custody, certain rights are curtailed. You don't have absolute rights... They are curtailed in accordance with the jail manuals," the ED said. The ED's submissions were opposed by the defence counsel. "People are unequally treated and you have to balance them. Here is a person who has 30 cases going on against him.... Can I be equated with someone who has one case against them?" Kejriwal's counsel said. Kejriwal had moved the application claiming that two meetings every week with his lawyer, as permitted by the court, was not sufficient since he was facing multiple cases in various states and needed more time for consultation.

# Will meet you soon outside, Sisodia writes letter from Tihar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP leader Manish Sisodia has written a letter from Tihar Jail to the people of his Assembly constituency, comparing his plight with the atrocities committed by the Britishers against freedom fighters and asserting his commitment to education. The former Deputy Chief Minister, who has been arrested in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case, also expressed hope that he will be out of jail soon. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) shared the letter, written in Hindi, on X. "Will meet you soon outside. The British rulers also had arrogance of power and they sent people to jail in false cases," he said and added that Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, who spent many years in jail, were his inspiration. Sisodia's bail hearing is scheduled in a Delhi court on Saturday. In the letter to people of his



assembly constituency Patparganj in east Delhi, Sisodia, said a struggle for good education and schools is underway like people fought for freedom of the country. "Education revolution Zindabad. Love you all," Sisodia, who also served as education minister in the Kejriwal government before his arrest, said in the letter. Sisodia said his love for the people of his constituency has increased while being incarcerated and that they were his

# BJP leadership conspired to put Kejriwal behind bars: Sanjay

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP MP Sanjay Singh on Friday said the senior leadership of the BJP hatched a conspiracy to put Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal behind bars in the excise policy case. Addressing a Press conference two days after coming out of jail, Singh accused the BJP of pressurising Raghav Magunta, who is an accused-turned-approver in the Delhi excise policy case, into giving a false statement against Kejriwal. The Delhi chief minister was arrested on March 21 in connection with the excise policy-linked money laundering case. Singh, who was also arrested in connection with the case, said action was taken against Raghav Magunta's father -- YSR Congress Party Lok Sabha MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy -- on September 16, 2022. "He was pressurised into giving a false statement against Kejriwal but when he refused, his son Raghav Reddy was arrested. After continuous



questioning, Raghav Reddy changed his statement against Kejriwal and became a part of a larger conspiracy," Singh alleged. The Rajya Sabha MP said there is a person Magunta Reddy, who gave three statements, and his son Raghav Magunta gave seven statements. The father and the son gave 10 statements (to ED). When ED asked him (Magunta Reddy) on September 16, 2022 did he meet Arvind Kejriwal. He said he met Arvind Kejriwal regarding the land for a charitable trust. After that his son Raghav Magunta is arrested and he is put in jail for five months and then he (Magunta

# Sanjay violating bail conditions, claims BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday accused Aam Aadmi Party MP Sanjay Singh of violating his bail condition that he will not speak about the Delhi excise scam case in which he was arrested, and asserted that his action will have serious consequences. BJP national spokesperson and senior advocate Gaurav Bhatia told a press conference that Singh's lawyer had given an undertaking in the Supreme Court that he will not speak about the case but he has been referring to the matter in his interaction with the media and has been claiming that no scam has happened. "The AAP MP is also giving 'clean chit' to other accused, including Delhi Chief Minister

Arvind Kejriwal and former deputy CM Manish Sisodia, the two party leaders who remain in jail, Bhatia said. Singh has been making factually incorrect statements to mislead people, the BJP leader said. "It will have consequences and they will be very serious," he said, accusing him of "contempt" of the apex court. Singh has alleged that witnesses were made to make statements against the AAP leaders under coercion, he said, noting that many of these statements have been made before a magistrate, Bhatia added. It is in the character of the AAP to violate constitutional provisions and commit contempt of courts, he alleged.

# HC directs inspection of coaching centres in Mukherjee Nagar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday directed inspection of the coaching centres operating in the Mukherjee Nagar area by a team of lawyers and the fire services here while seeking a report with respect to their status and safety. A bench headed by Justice Yashwant Varma also asked the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to file a status report stating the total number of coaching centres in the locality. The court's order came on a batch of cases concerning the operation of coaching centres in the area, including a case registered by it on its own after taking suo motu cognisance of a fire that broke out at a coaching centre there in June 2023. During the hearing, the counsel for MCD informed the court that six coaching centres have been sealed on account of being non-compliant with the applicable regulations and action would be taken against other defaulters as well.



The court was also informed that around 21 centres have closed down on their own and notice of sealing has been issued to over 20. Amicus curiae advocate Gautam Narayan said that although some centres have closed their operation, new centres might have come up in their place. "In view of the aforesaid, we call upon the MCD to submit a fresh status report setting out the total number of coaching centres which may be operating in Mukherjee Nagar as on date," the bench, also comprising Justice Ravinder Dubeja, ordered. "We also additionally constitute an independent team which would be headed by amicus curiae Gautam Narayan and which would independently inspect the area and submit a report on coaching centres operating there and now many of them are in compliance (with the applicable regulations)," it further said.

The court asked the member secretary of Delhi State Legal Services Authority to nominate five empanelled lawyers to assist Narayan in the exercise. "We further direct Delhi Fire Services to undertake an independent exercise of verification of the area in question and submit a report on non-confirming coaching centres that may be identified," the court said, while directing that the matter be listed for hearing after 3 weeks. The court said it would also hear on the same date a petition by the Coaching Federation of India assailing the inclusion of coaching centres in the definition of "educational buildings", thus requiring them to employ certain specific measures for fire safety etc. In February 2020, DDA modified its Unified Building Bye Laws-2016 (UBBL-2016) including Coaching Centres in the definition of 'Educational Buildings'. Counsel for the federation said the coaching centres want the children to be safe but their inclusion as "educational insti-

tute" was arbitrary. The federation has earlier argued that under the UBBL, educational institutes are required to have several features such as two staircases and a playground which may not be possible in an already existing residential building. Last year, the high court had registered a case on its own by taking suo motu cognisance of a fire that broke out at a coaching centre in Mukherjee Nagar in June and saw students climbing down the building using ropes. A preliminary inquiry suggested that the fire started from an electricity metre board in the five-storey building, the officials said. According to the police, around 250 students were attending classes at the building — Bhandari House — at the time. The high court has earlier ruled that "fire safety is a must" and all coaching centres must either comply with their statutory requirements under the Delhi Master Plan, 2021 and other applicable regulations or face closure.

# Man kills wife, minor daughter, commits suicide in Nihal Vihar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 48-year-old man allegedly committed suicide after killing his wife and a four year old daughter in a building in outer Delhi's Nihal Vihar area on Friday. The three bodies were discovered by the accused's 22 year old son Kushal upon returning from work. Deceased has been identified as Ajay who was found hanging from the ceiling fan, having blood over his body. The wife Teena, aged 38 years, was found with her daughter with blood over their bodies lying on the bed. The accused Ajay's body was first discovered by his son when he returned home after work on Friday morning and found the house locked in the Nihal Vihar area in outer Delhi. Upon checking from a window, he found his father hanging and informed the landlord, who then approached the police around



9.30 am, Deputy Commissioner of Police (outer) Jimmy Chiram said. The police officials reached the spot immediately. DCP said, "It was found that a male person named Ajay S/o Ram Chandra Age 42 Yrs was found hanging from ceiling fan, who was having blood over his body. A female named Teena W/o Ajay Age 38 Yrs was found with her

daughter aged four years with blood over their bodies lying on the bed." They were killed using some sharp weapon, the police said. The door of the room was found locked from inside. Crime team and the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) team were called on the spot. Deceased worked as a halwai and his son Kushal, who discovered the bodies, worked as an electrician. The family lived on the ground floor of the building while the house owner lives on the first floor. "When we checked further, Teena was found with her daughter Varsha with blood over their bodies lying on the bed. Prima facie, it seems that they were killed using some sharp weapon," said the DCP, adding that a case under section 302 Indian Penal Code (Punishment for murder) has been registered. The motive of the crime is not clear yet and further investigation is going on.







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PAPER WITH PASSION

## At crossroads

### Desertions continue to plague Congress even as it releases its election manifesto

The just-released Congress manifesto heralds the vision for a new era of governance, promising radical changes to the existing political landscape. Led by party president Mallikarjun Kharge, along with former chiefs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul, the manifesto emphasises the need for a paradigm shift in governance, particularly in light of the BJP's decade-long rule. Much to its consternation, however, its rank and file are making a beeline to the camp of its arch-rival, the BJP. Undeterred by the desertions, the Congress put up quite a show to launch its manifesto, where the key highlights are the party's commitment to conducting a nationwide socio-economic and caste census. This move, aimed at gaining a comprehensive understanding of India's diverse population, is intended to make policies tailored to address the needs of every segment of society. Additionally, the manifesto guarantees a constitutional amendment to raise the cap on reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs to 50 per cent, signalling a commitment to social justice and inclusivity. This is perhaps its best shot as the Congress and its allies can harness disgruntled backward votes and corner the BJP on caste census. The manifesto promises to adopt the Rajasthan model of cashless insurance, providing coverage of up to ₹25 lakh for universal healthcare. It also pledges to address the issue of unemployment by filling nearly 30 lakh vacancies in sanctioned posts within the Union Government. The party vows to provide a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for agricultural produce, as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission, underlining its commitment to farmers' welfare.



The biggest challenge right now for the 'grand old party' is to keep its flock together and deal with internal dissent. The relentless wave of defections threatens to undermine its unity and electoral prospects. As if to stall this trend, the name of Robert Vadra for the Amethi constituency is doing the rounds. The Congress has proposed amendments to the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, making defection an automatic disqualification from membership in an Assembly or Parliament. Despite these efforts, the party finds itself embroiled in a battle to retain its members, with several prominent leaders defecting to rival parties in recent weeks. The timing of these desertions underscores the internal turmoil and challenges facing Congress. Attacking the BJP in its manifesto, the Congress underscores its commitment to protecting personal freedom, promising not to interfere with individual choices regarding food, dress, love, marriage, travel and residency within India. This assertion of personal liberties is aimed at resonating with a diverse electorate and emphasising the party's commitment to democratic values. As the Congress prepares to present its manifesto to the electorate, it also faces the internal struggle to maintain cohesion and unity within its ranks. The road ahead is laden with obstacles, yet the party seems resolute in its commitment to forge a fresh path.

### PICTALK



Muslims attend an 'iftar' during the Ramadan at the Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Dargah, in Ajmer

# Afghanistan under Taliban rule

## Continuous obliteration of women's rights goes hand in hand with export of terrorism



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Not content with robbing Afghan women of all their rights, the Taliban are pressing forward with measures that would victimise and humiliate them further. The latest indication of this is provided by a verbal outburst by its chief, Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, who said, towards the end of March, 2024, in a voice message carried by Afghanistan's state television, "You say it is a violation of women's human rights" but "we will soon implement the punishment for adultery. We will flog women in public. We will stone them to death." The report (dated March 26, 2024) by Akhtar Makooi in The Telegraph of the United Kingdom, which carries the above quote, further cites Akhundzada, who was addressing Western officials, as saying, "These are all against your democracy but we will continue doing it. We both say we defend human rights—we do it as God's representative and you as the devil's."

What Akhundzada said deserves attention for two reasons. It indicates that fresh barbarous steps against Afghan women are on the anvil. Second, his use of the expression 'representatives of the devil' reflects the visceral hatred that he and the Taliban harbour towards the Western democracies. Further, the indication that the Taliban would fight against the West until sharia rule is established there as well, is implicit in his statement, also quoted in the same report in The Telegraph, "I told the Mujahedin that we tell the Westerners that we fought against you for 20 years and we will fight 20 and even more years against you... We will bring Sharia to this land."

The Taliban are proceeding apace in implementing the provisions of Sharia law all over Afghanistan. At this rate, why should it take 20 years "and even more" to complete the process? It would take, at the most, not more than several years. The time span Mullah Akhundzada mentioned makes sense only if he was thinking of establishing Sharia rule beyond Afghanistan—a move that would lead to conflict. Against this, at the Taliban's first official news confer-



ence in Kabul on 17 August 2021, two days after taking the city over, Zabihullah Mujahid, their spokesman, had said that they wished for peaceful relations with other countries and no group would be allowed to use Afghan territory to attack other nations. The Taliban, however, have not always acted according to their pronouncements. Mujahid had also said at the same press conference, "The Islamic Emirate doesn't want women to be victims. They should be in the Government structure according to Shariah law." What has happened in practice is well-known. Since the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021, women have been wholly excluded from public office, the judiciary and NGO employment. Women and girls are required to adhere to a strict dress code, covering themselves from head to toe, and are not permitted to travel more than 75 kilometres without a close male relative belonging to the category of mahram—one in front of whom a woman does not have to wear a hijab. Girls have been barred from joining secondary schools and women from tertiary education. Women and girls have been



INDEED, AFGHANISTAN MAY AGAIN BECOME A GLOBAL EXPORTER OF TERRORISM EVEN IF THE TALIBAN ARE NOT INVOLVED

banned from entering amusement parks, public baths, gyms and sports clubs. Those believing in the Taliban's profession of its desire to avoid conflicts, can refer to the fact that, as of now, the Taliban cannot win a conventional war against the West. This, however, is a reality that a rational person will recognize. The Taliban are fanatics. If nothing else, their unquestioning allegiance to their obscurantist and perverse version of Islam is proof thereof. Besides, their fanatical belief in their ultimate triumph against the West seems to have been reinforced by their ascent to power in Afghanistan after 20 years of war with the United States and its allies. The Taliban's conflict with the West may, doubtless, take the form of an asymmetrical rather than a conventional war, with terror strikes at the US, its allies and their interests on their own soil or abroad, as the principal weapon. Indeed, Afghanistan may again become a global exporter of terrorism even if the Taliban are not involved. As the 13th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (ASSMT) of the UN Security Council, submitted on May

25, 2022, states, the relationship between al-Qaeda and the Taliban remains close and is underscored by the presence, both in Afghanistan and the region, of al-Qaeda core leadership and affiliated groups, such as Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). That this was right was proved by the killing in Kabul of the al-Qaeda supreme, Ayman al-Zawahiri, by a drone strike by the US on July 31, 2022. Terrorist outfits like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) are also active in Afghanistan. The former has been targeting Pakistan and the latter has claimed responsibility for the recent attack at the Crocus City Hall concert venue outside Moscow on March 22, 2024, which killed 140 people. Contrary to Zabihullah Mujahid's assurance mentioned earlier in this column, Afghanistan is becoming a launching pad for terrorism abroad. The world must take serious note of this, as it must of the plight of Afghan women.

*(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)*

## Yoga-based training to enhance athletic performance



ISHAN SHIVANAND

### Drawing from ancient yogic principles, this approach not only enhances performance but also fosters holistic wellbeing

The mental and emotional well-being of athletes is just as crucial as their physical fitness for optimal performance and overall health. Both professional and amateur athletes encounter numerous stressors in their training and competitions, which were further heightened by the pandemic, impacting their access to resources and support systems. It is essential to approach athletic training with the lens of integrative healthcare to enhance mental and emotional resilience. In competitive environments, athletes face significant psychological stressors such as injuries, performance pressure, high expectations, and demanding training regimens, often leading to sleep disturbances, eating disorders, sports anxiety, and other serious issues. Sudden cardiac arrests (SCAs) are also a leading cause of death among student-athletes, with at least 1 in 300 young individuals having underlying cardiac abnormalities. Therefore, the ability to manage and recover from stress, known as resilience, is crucial



for success in sports and other endeavours, improving endurance, agility, discipline, and overall quality of life. Integration of yoga-based resilience training can facilitate athletes' journeys by enhancing their mental and emotional well-being. **Clinical Impact of Yoga:** Yoga-based Resilience Trainings offer numerous benefits to athletes through various underlying mechanisms. One key mechanism is the regulation of stress hormone levels, particularly cortisol, which is essential for the body's response to stress. Practices such as deep breathing and meditation help regulate cortisol release, and improve emotional stability. Additionally, yogic modalities promote neural plasticity, enhancing cognitive function and motor skills vital for sports performance. Such mental health interventions also stimulate the autonomic nervous system, inducing

relaxation and reducing physiological stress markers. **Efficacy of Yoga-Based Resilience Training** Resilience training methodologies, rooted in ancient Indian Knowledge Systems, combine yogic, breathwork, and meditation techniques. The principles align with sports psychology, emphasizing mental resilience, focus, and emotional regulation among athletes for peak performance. Through non-invasive meditative protocols, athletes develop heightened awareness of their breath and emotions, enabling them to navigate competition pressures calmly and clearly. Studies involving cricketers have shown yoga's positive impact on physical fitness, speed, and accuracy. **Embracing Challenges and Opportunities:** The integration of Yoga-based Resilience Training into sports presents both challenges and opportunities. Scepticism among athletes and coaches enables the traditional prioritisation of physical conditioning over mental well-being. Additionally, cultural misconceptions may hinder acceptance in sports cultures

unfamiliar with yoga-based practices. Logistical hurdles, including access to qualified resources and suitable facilities, further impact widespread adoption. However, these challenges also offer opportunities for dialogue, education, and collaboration. Open discussion and evidence-based education can dispel scepticism and foster understanding within the sports community. Collaboration across disciplines—such as yoga, sports psychology, and sports science—can tailor yoga-based programs to athletes' specific needs. Innovation in training methods, supportive environments within sports organisations, and ongoing research into their effectiveness are also vital. Addressing these challenges and embracing opportunities can allow sports communities to harness the full potential of yoga-based interventions to enhance athlete resilience and elevate athletic excellence.

*(The writer is a mental health researcher and Founder of Yoga of Immortals; views are personal)*

### INDIA'S MARITIME DOMAIN VITAL

Madam — Apropos the news article "A Tribute to India's Maritime Legacy" published on April 5, this is my response. National Maritime Day on April 5th holds profound significance, marking India's journey from maritime history to modern prowess. The maiden voyage of SS Loyalty in 1919 symbolised India's maritime aspirations, laying the groundwork for economic growth and global connectivity. With sovereignty over vast marine areas and rich biodiversity, India's maritime domain is vital for trade and livelihoods. As we celebrate, it's crucial to acknowledge the contributions of seafarers and maritime organizations. Gunter Pauli's 'Blue Economy' offers insights for sustainable development, aligning with India's goals. Amidst climate concerns and security threats, proactive measures are vital. India's initiatives like Sagarmala and Bharatmala signify progress, but more is needed. Modernising ports, enhancing infrastructure, and embracing technology can bolster India's maritime competitiveness. By promoting responsible practices and international collaboration, India can secure its marine resources and emerge as a global maritime leader. The future of India's maritime sector hinges on strategic vision and concerted efforts to navigate challenges while harnessing the vast potential of the seas.

Khirabdi Tanya Nayak | Noida

### CONGRESS MANIFESTO

Madam — Apropos the news article "Congress launches Ghar Ghar campaign" published on April 4, this is my response. Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday, 3 March, launched the party's 'Ghar Ghar Guarantee' initiative under which it aims to reach out to crores of households across the country and make them aware of its "guarantees". Kharge launched the initiative from Usmanpur, Kaithwada, in the North East Delhi parliamentary constituency and distributed pamphlets on the party's 'Paanch Nyay

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A statesman's departure



Apropos the news article "A Dignified Liberal" published on April 5, this is my response. The editorial in the Pioneer pays homage to the illustrious career of Dr Manmohan Singh, a figure whose influence on India's economic and political landscape is unparalleled. Singh's journey from an academic economist to the Prime Minister's office is a testament to his intellect,

integrity, and dedication to public service. His tenure as the Chief Economic Adviser and later as the Finance Minister during the economic crisis of the early 1990s showcased his boldness in implementing liberalization reforms that propelled India onto the global stage. Despite facing criticism during his tenure as Prime Minister, Singh's commitment to inclusive growth and secularism remained unwavering. His departure from the Rajya Sabha symbolises the end of an era in Indian politics, leaving behind a legacy that will continue to shape the country's future. The editorial rightly praises Singh's contributions, acknowledging the profound impact he has had on India's economic trajectory and global standing.

Neha Gupta | Delhi

### Pachees Guarantee

The Congress' poll pitch is centred around 'Paanch Nyay' or five pillars of justice, namely 'Yuva Nyay', 'Naari Nyay', 'Kisaan Nyay', 'Shramik Nyay' and 'Hissedari Nyay' as well as the guarantees made by it to the people under these heads as the Guarantee of the BJP have failed which has become bogus and misleading. The Congress will release its manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections in New Delhi on 5 April with sure Guarantees to the people who have been deprived of promises and the Guarantees for the last 10 years to force them to suffer and struggle by voting for the BJP to bring them to power.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

### THE RISE OF 'WATER AUNTIES'

Madam — Apropos the news article "The rise of 'water aunties' and sustainable solutions" published on April 4, this is my response. The recent water crisis in Bangalore sheds light on the pressing need for water conservation efforts throughout India. Exacerbated by factors like deficient southwest monsoon rains in 2023, this crisis underscores the precarious balance between water availability and population

density. India, with only 4% of the world's freshwater resources accommodating 18% of the global population, faces a daunting challenge in ensuring water security. Understanding the intricate interplay between clean water access, conflict, cooperation, and climate change is crucial for ensuring sustainable water security. Collaborative management of shared water resources, coupled with international treaties and agreements, offers a promising alternative to conflict. Empowering communities, particularly women, plays a vital role in addressing water security challenges. Initiatives like the ijal Network demonstrate the effectiveness of community-driven solutions in providing sustainable water access. Managed predominantly by women, these initiatives not only empower local leadership but also leverage their expertise and understanding of water needs. Replicating such models nationwide can significantly contribute to achieving sustainable water security and fostering equitable water management frameworks across India.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

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## FIRST COLUMN

### I AM THE ULTIMATE REALITY

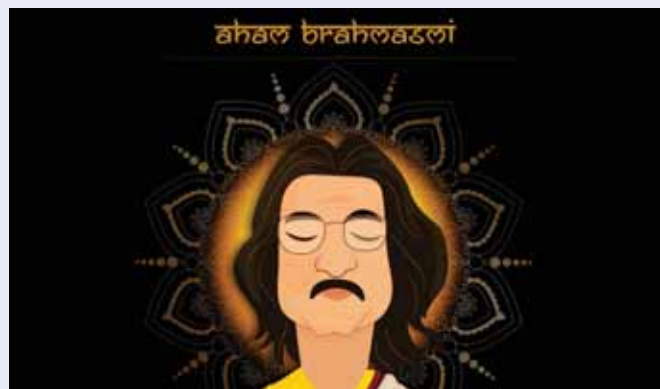
'Aham Brahmasmi' encapsulates the essence of Vedanta philosophy



SWAMI CHARANASHRIT

In the vast tapestry of Hindu philosophy, the principle of "Aham Brahmasmi" stands as a profound declaration encapsulating the essence of existence. This ancient Sanskrit phrase, often translated as "I am Brahman," carries profound implications within the context of Vedanta, one of the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy. It is a declaration of identity, affirming the indivisible connection between the individual self (Atman) and the ultimate reality (Brahman). Let's delve deeper into the meaning and significance of Aham Brahmasmi.

At its core, Vedanta explores the nature of reality and the individual's relationship with it. It posits that the universe is an interconnected web of existence, and understanding this interconnectedness is crucial for realizing one's true nature. Central to Vedanta is the concept of Brahman, the ultimate reality, which is formless, infinite, and beyond attributes. Brahman is the underlying substratum of the universe, the source from which all phenomena arise and into which they dissolve. Conversely, each individual possesses an inner essence known as Atman, often translated as the "self" or the "soul." Atman is not bound by the limitations of the body or mind; it is eternal, unchanging, and identical to Brahman in its essence. However, due to ignorance (avidya), individuals identify themselves with their bodies, minds, and egos, thereby experiencing a sense of separateness from the divine. Herein lies the significance of Aham Brahmasmi. When one declares, "I am Brahman," they are asserting the fundamental truth of their existence—that their true nature is divine and inseparable from the ultimate reality. It is a recognition of the underlying unity that pervades the cosmos, transcending the boundaries of individuality and ego.



The journey towards realizing Aham Brahmasmi is a central theme in Vedantic philosophy. It involves the process of self-inquiry (Atma-vichara) and spiritual practice (sadhana), aimed at transcending the limitations of the ego and realizing one's innate divinity. Through meditation, introspection, and the study of sacred texts such as the Upanishads, aspirants seek to directly experience the unity of Atman and Brahman.

Moreover, the realization of Aham Brahmasmi brings about a profound shift in consciousness. It leads to the dissolution of the illusion of duality (dvaitya) and the recognition of the underlying unity of all existence (advaita). This realisation is not merely intellectual but experiential, akin to the metaphorical tasting of honey rather than merely reading about its sweetness.

The significance of Aham Brahmasmi extends beyond the realm of philosophy; it has practical implications for daily life. When one recognizes the divine nature within themselves, they naturally extend that recognition to all beings, fostering a sense of compassion, empathy, and interconnectedness. This realisation serves as the foundation for a life lived in harmony with the universe, guided by principles of love, truth, and righteousness.

In conclusion, Aham Brahmasmi encapsulates the profound truth of Vedanta philosophy—that the individual self is not separate from the ultimate reality but is, in fact, identical to it. It is a declaration of oneness, unity, and divine identity. Through self-inquiry and spiritual practice, one can realize this truth and live a life in alignment with the eternal principles of Vedanta. As the ancient sages proclaimed, "Tat tvam asi"—"Thou art That."

(Writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

# Power propaganda nexus: A symbiotic bond



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

John Pilger's quest for truth amidst the cacophony of official narratives remains ever-relevant, urging us to scrutinise media's role in shaping perceptions

Amongst other great minds, last year we lost another exceptional man who was larger than life. But he left us with the essence to comprehend how the media evolved and aligned with the power to eliminate the powerless. He is John Pilger, who endeavoured to make others understand the everyday bitter truth about propaganda. I believe it's important to borrow some of his ideas and pen a few thoughts needed for today.

Not only the noise and disturbing content, but also our day-to-day news suppliers and other social media users conveniently monetize oppression and, as Huxley says, 'adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think'. Consequently, the state, as the regulatory body based on ethics and morals, has been weakened. Take our food supply, for example. A few companies are controlling everything by hurting small producers. What they don't realize is that by the time regulation gets enacted and filters down to the farm level, it always hurts small producers and helps the large producers. It's the revolving door. Don't eat healthily; only eat junk. There's only a small group of companies that control the entire food production. They're not only putting everybody out of business but also prioritizing profits over equal distribution. They are systematically manipulating the very right to food of living beings. Propaganda is the vein that follows the blood of this manipulation. The same goes for others.

The First World War, a catastrophic bloodbath claiming 20 million lives and leaving 21 million wounded, saw a desperate thirst for truth amidst relentless propaganda. Prime Minister David Lloyd George confided to C.P. Scott, editor of The Guardian, that if the public truly grasped the reality of the conflict, it would cease instantly. Yet, the British populace, starved of authentic information, clamoured for genuine news amidst the flood of official narratives.

In today's era of incessant news cycles, wars and armed conflicts persist unchecked serving as grim realities. Delves into the unseen dimensions of modern conflict, scrutinising the role of media, particularly in the West and other liberal democracies that hailed to protect and promote the emancipation of mankind, in perpetuating and justifying rapacious wars, is the need of the moment. Edward Bernays, a pioneer in propaganda, highlighted the power of manipulating the masses and shaping public opinion through covert means. His involvement in the US Committee on Public Information during World War I heralded the birth of modern propaganda machinery, cementing the insidious influence of media in shaping perceptions of war and governance.

Edward Bernays's ingenious manipulation tactics disregarded facts in favour of emotional manipulation, pioneering a strategy to sway public opinion by tugging at unconscious desires.

Utilising symbols like the Statue of Liberty in ruins or associating smoking with women's liberation, he forged powerful connections in consumers' minds, irrespective of truth. His legacy endured, evolving into a sophisticated machinery of war propaganda exemplified by numerous conflicts orchestrated by powerful nations such as the United States. The media, once heralded as a beacon of freedom, became entangled in the Pentagon's webs, complicit in disseminating illusions and false narratives. Had journalists rigorously questioned authori-



ty rather than regurgitating official statements, perhaps the calamity of war could have been averted.

The Iraq invasion, as Pilger observed, orchestrated through the doctrine of shock and awe, aimed to instil terror and dismantle the country's infrastructure akin to the devastating impact of atomic bombs on Japan. However, this campaign of destruction was veiled in layers of deception, with embedded journalists serving as conduits for the sanitised narrative dictated by the Pentagon and the Ministry of Defence. Despite sporadic glimpses of truth, the pervasive influence of embedded journalism and the echo chamber of 24-hour news perpetuated illusions and distorted realities, enabling the war machine to operate unchecked.

The toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue hailed as a symbol of liberation, concealed the brutal conquest underway, meticulously orchestrated to exploit media optics and control the narrative. The complicity of journalists, embedded within military units, stifled dissenting voices and prioritised official narratives, shielding the public from the grim realities of war. In the fog of misinformation and propaganda, critical scrutiny faltered, allowing the machinery of war to proceed unabated, casting a shadow over journalistic integrity and the pursuit of truth.

During the symbolic event of the Americans' arrival in Baghdad, the manipulation behind the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue went untold, emblematic of the control exerted over media optics. The image of an American soldier draping the flag over the statue's face signified America's assertion of dominance over Iraq, echoing the sentiments of ownership and conquest. Meanwhile, the invasion hailed as a triumph by Blair and Bush, failed to depict the grim reality of civilian casualties and destruction on the ground, with atrocities like the assault on Fallujah largely

omitted from mainstream coverage. Today's Gaza, under Israeli control, where just a few days ago seven aid workers, along with other unarmed civilians, were killed, is a continuation of this pattern and a consequence of media behaviour. The prime responsibility of media as voices for the victims, shedding light on the untold suffering amidst the sanitised narratives propagated by mainstream media, has been systematically veiled. In contrast to embedded journalists, who may inadvertently perpetuate propaganda, independent reporters like Wilfred Graham Burchett have historically challenged official narratives, uncovering truths that authorities sought to conceal.

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked not the end of conflict, but the beginning of a nuclear arms race and the era of the Cold War, characterised by the perpetual threat of annihilation. Secret conversations, such as the exchange between President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, reveal the willingness of leaders to contemplate the use of nuclear weapons, underscoring the gravity of the global situation. Despite the absence of a clear nuclear threat from Iraq, the Bush administration, bolstered by sensationalist rhetoric from figures like Colin Powell, and Victoria Nuland in the Biden administration manipulated public perception to justify the invasion or covert operations for "regime change", with mainstream media outlets perpetuating false claims and contributing to the dissemination of propaganda. The journalistic failures in scrutinising government narratives reflect a broader failure to uphold the truth and challenge authority, ultimately leading to disastrous consequences.

The repercussions of events in Syria, followed by Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya surpass personal sentiments, constituting a colossal crime. Aren't we experiencing the same in Ukraine? Journalists, albeit unwittingly, become accomplices to such crimes, contributing to the dissemination of propaganda. Despite illustrious careers, figures like Dan Rather acknowledge the presence of fear within newsrooms, stemming from concerns about job security, institutional pressures, and patriotic labels. Rather's admission reflects a broader need for introspection within the journalism community, urging a courageous examination of past failures to uphold truth and integrity in reporting. This is what we keep forgetting, or rather, deliberately ignoring.

Indifference to learn from history, led us to this recurrence of catastrophes and keeping the powerful in power. Learning from history isn't merely a quaint idea; it's an imperative for societies striving to advance and avoid catastrophic missteps. Herodotus, the revered 'Father of History', echoes across the ages, reminding us of the historian's solemn duty to rectify distortions of truth. Yet, in today's world saturated with mass media and communication tools, the dissemination of factual information morphs into a battleground. Cicero's sagacity warns against the folly of ignorance, spotlighting the perpetual infamy of those who dismiss the lessons of the past. Marx's incisive analysis cautions of history's cyclical nature, where tragedies replay as farces if wisdom remains unheeded. Santayana's sombre reflection underlines the dire consequences of historical amnesia, dooming societies to repeat their blunders. Churchill's declaration accentuates the peril awaiting those who ignore historical counsel.

Even Twain's astute observation, that history may not repeat itself verbatim but often rhymes, highlights the urgency of identifying patterns to avert folly. But what if we are truly entertaining ourselves with this folly?

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist. Views are personal)



THE TOPPLING OF SADDAM HUSSEIN'S STATUE, HAILED AS A SYMBOL OF LIBERATION, CONCEALED THE BRUTAL CONQUEST UNDERWAY, METICULOUSLY ORCHESTRATED TO EXPLOIT MEDIA OPTICS AND CONTROL THE NARRATIVE

# Soft power as comparative advantage for India

Soft power stands as a compelling force, often wielded through economic or cultural influence to shape global perceptions and agendas

Soft power is a persuasive approach to international relations, typically involving the use of economic or cultural influence. India has the potential to create its credibility using this non-tangible power. India is sometimes labelled a "soft power by default" (Wagner, 2010), and is believed to have substantial potential in this field. It was one of the first countries to pursue a soft power strategy, under the leadership of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, long before the term was coined.

However, after the defeat in the 1962 war with China, India gradually shifted towards a hard power approach, and its foreign policy became more prag-



KAJLEEN KAUR

matic and driven by realpolitik. The Chanakya Niti of non-aggressive settlements; Gandhi's non-violence movement; the Panchsheel pact of peaceful advancement and a good friendly policy towards its neighbours all exemplify India's comparative advantage in soft power. The notion of soft power for Indians dates back to the Upanishads with the thought of 'VasudhaivaKutumbakam'. We can still vouch for our soft power assets in terms of the widespread acceptance of Buddhism; the popularity of yoga and Ayurveda; and belief in ancient universities which draws scholars and learners to India. To date, our rich, diverse yet

united, and vibrant culture, topography, cuisine, architecture and history attract heavy tourism. Not to forget, Indian cinema has helped popularize not just Indian actors but also the vibrant culture and craze for ethnic clothes. Besides, the only common religion of India 'Cricket' has empowered the dreams of every youngster in India and has helped create India in the international sports arena. Our present prime minister Narendra Modi has recognised soft power as an asset and has instigated several of these which have helped in the popularization of our nation abroad. The huge success of India's tenure as G-20 president has been well-acknowledged the



world over. Modi's catchphrases like 'now is not the time for war', drew international applause. Similarly, Atmanirbhar, Make in India and Swachh Bharat have become national slogans and have been able

to redefine and give better meaning to the age-old Pleonasm policies, and have also popularized India across the world. Besides he has played a major role in increasing the number of embassies abroad and also

reviving ties with regional groups ASEAN, BIMSTEC, and SAARC along with strengthening and intensifying with Eastern and South Asian countries through the East Policy Act, and the Neighborhood First Policy Act. These have helped draw commercial and strategic benefits for India. Ironically, even after recognizing the huge potential and benefits of soft power, we have several limitations in deriving maximum advantages from it. There is a lack of formal inclusion of soft power in foreign policy or its nature and scope. It takes a back seat to other important economic and security concerns or the hard power components. Moreover, soft

power has only drawn limited attention from scholars and policymakers. Even after a rich and diverse diaspora, culture and media, we have not made noteworthy efforts to formalize any policies in literature. India being an emerging economy, will take time to stand tall against other developed nations in terms of hard power. But recognizing its strengths in soft power in varied forms, it should work towards further enriching its assets and using it for international trade, thus creating a niche for itself.

(The writer is an Assistant Professor Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)



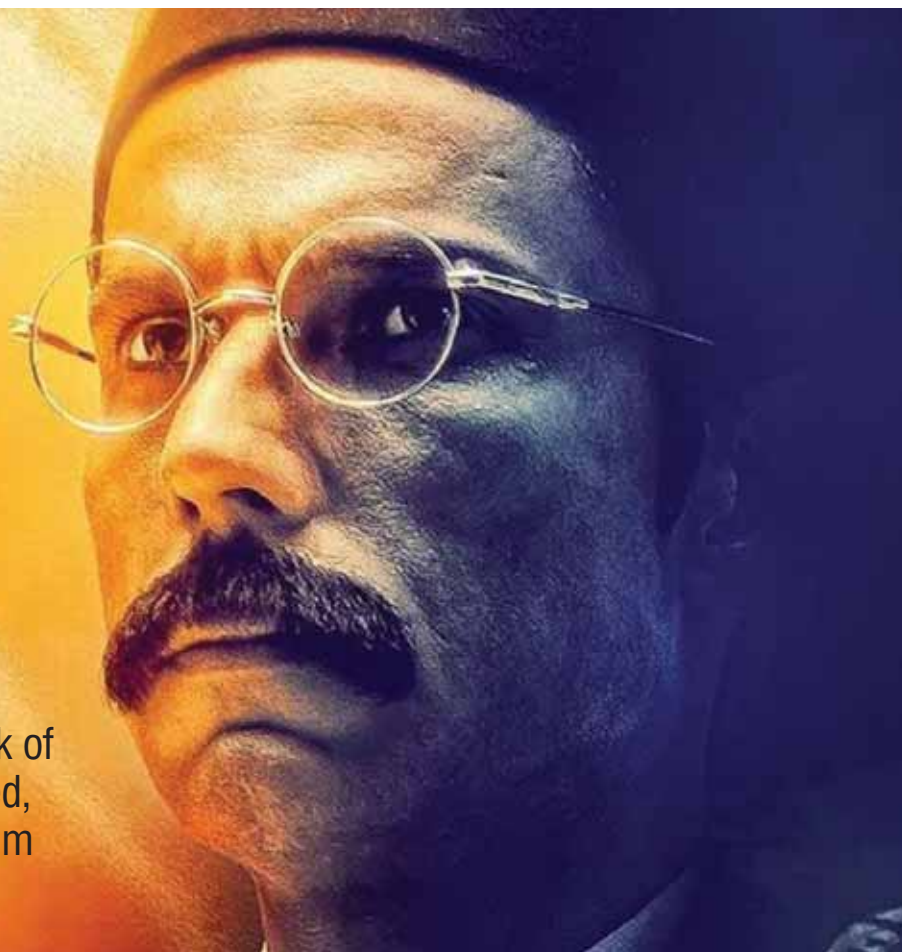








# CINEMA REDISCOVERS SAVARKAR



**SWATANTRA VEER SAVARKAR** is a commendable work of art that sheds light on an important, yet largely neglected, chapter of India's historic struggle for Independence from British Raj says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

## BOLD ATTEMPT, WEAK DELIVERY

Bollywood's *Crew* boasts of a stylish takeoff but is grounded by an uneven plot, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



The recently released *Crew* promises a glamorous, global adventure with a talented cast. However, the story line hits some bumps immediately upon take off to not really reach the heights it intended to. The film follows three flight attendants - Jasmine (Kareena Kapoor Khan), Geeta Sethi (Tabu), and Divya Rana (Kriti Sanon) who are tired of their monotonous routines and yearn for financial freedom.

The undeniable strength of *Crew* lies in its leading ladies. Kareena Kapoor Khan delivers a captivating performance as Jasmine, the mastermind behind the operation. She seamlessly blends ambition with desperation, creating a character that's both strong and vulnerable. Tabu brings her signature elegance to Geeta Sethi, the seasoned flight attendant with a hidden adventurous streak. Kriti Sanon completes the trio as Divya Rana, injecting the film with wide-eyed innocence and a determination to prove herself. Their on-screen chemistry is the heart and soul of the film. Their hilarious mishaps during their escapades are where *Crew* truly shines. Director Rajesh A Krishnan creates a visually stunning portrayal of the airline industry in *Crew*. Luxury airplane cabins, breathtaking aerial views, and carefully designed flight attendant uniforms all contribute to a sense of escapism. These visuals complement the film's central theme, which explores the allure of a life far from ordinary.

The biggest missed opportunity in *Crew* is the heist itself. The plot unfolds too quickly, lacking the tension and intricate planning that make a daring heist film exciting. The stakes could have been higher, with a more elaborate execution, to create a thrilling experience for the audience. Instead, the film seems a remake of the real life misadventures of Vijay Mallya and Kingfisher airlines. The plot as much as the climax could have been more engaging, with more complex challenges to grab the audience's attention. The supporting roles, such as Diljit Dosanjh's love interest, feel underdeveloped and their stories incomplete, leaving viewers wanting more depth in their narratives. Kapil Sharma's comedic talents are underutilized in a brief and somewhat forgettable appearance.

The film feels like a promotional tool for brands, with numerous brands featured heavily. It seems almost like a game to remember all the brand names after watching the movie. Brands like Wow Momo make an appearance, but the movie script itself feels anything but "Wow." Other brands like Zomato, Amul, and Ajo are also prominently featured.

Despite this, *Crew* offers a refreshing perspective on a female-driven heist genre. It celebrates female empowerment and the strength of female friendships. Kareena Kapoor Khan, Tabu, and Kriti Sanon deliver strong performances that hold the film together, even when the plot falters. The heart of the film lies in the mutual trust between these women, showcasing their resilience and unwavering support for each other.

While the narrative could have been more refined, the movie boasts a perfect cast. It's a female-centric film, and everyone plays their roles perfectly. The lighthearted moments, message of female empowerment, and stylish fashion-the ladies look amazing throughout the movie-make *Crew* an enjoyable, albeit uneven, entertainment ride.



The film *Swatantra Veer Savarkar*, directed by Randeep Hooda, who is also the eponymous protagonist of the narrative, tells the untold story of the freedom fighter Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, portraying his journey from heroism to imprisonment. The movie depicts Savarkar's evolution from a hero to a prisoner and highlights his strong ideology and the challenges he faced in the Kaala Paani jail in the Anadams.



Randeep Hooda has clearly excelled himself in portraying Savarkar, taking his acting skills a notch higher. The movie masterfully depicts the jail scenes where Savarkar's struggles are laid bare to a generation that may be

unfamiliar with India's tirelessly and selflessly fought freedom struggle. The attention to detail sets Veer Savarkar apart in a league of its

own. Hooda's unbelievable physical transformation (the actor is supposed to have lost 30 kgs to fit into his character), enhances the overall authenticity of the

portrayal. Hooda's exceptional acting notwithstanding, the film does suffer from some directorial shortcomings, but they seem too minor given the audience's reaction to the film. Ankita Lokhande's portrayal of Yamma Bai is impactful despite her short screen time. Overall, the film underlines Randeep Hooda's tremendous potential as an artist. *Swatantra Veer Savarkar* explores different aspects of the freedom fighter, both from his own standpoint as well as that of Mahatma Gandhi's. While the film has been hailed for its historical authenticity, some feel it is rather slow-paced and that better directorial intervention would have curtailed the shortcomings. For a film that

stretches for three full hours, it could have done a bit more to break the monotony. That pace and drama was missing. Also, there is a general view that the film did not really delve deep enough into Savarkar's history because most of it has been either ignored or erased. *Swatantra Veer Savarkar* in the final analysis is a commendable effort and a work of art that sheds light on an important yet largely neglected chapter of India's historic struggle for Independence from British Raj. It is a must-watch for anyone interested not just in the life of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar but also the inexplicable mystery that surrounds this historical figure.

## LOSE YOURSELF IN A MAZE OF COLOUR

The recently concluded Art Maze by the KIRAN NADAR MUSEUM OF ART celebrated people-to-people connection as much as it celebrated the beauty of art itself, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**



you got to create something special together. The event celebrated people-to-people connection as much as it celebrated the beauty of art itself. The Art Maze stands out as a wonderful example of how the artist within us never fades away. Seeing people colouring the maze was mesmerizing and therapeutic. It was an art platform where everyone got to express themselves. Imagine a maze, but getting lost in it instead. One even got to paint the walls! Kids, parents, grandparents - everyone grabbed a brush and added their splash of colour. Like a never-ending Holi celebration, even the walls came alive with a burst of colours, alongside creativity. The exhibition travelled beyond the narrow realms of the term itself to turn into an immersive journey of creativity, imagination, and the enduring spirit of art. An impact that will definitely last a lifetime, reminding us of the power of art to inspire, unite, and uplift.

The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) opened its doors in 2010 as the first museum in India focused on modern and contemporary art. It was special because it helped people learn about art and how it connects to our culture through exhibitions, publications, and educational programs. Last month, KNMA recently embarked on a collaborative project with Nexus Select Citywalk for a

one-of-a-kind experience called the Art Maze. This was not any ordinary exhibition. It was a journey inspired by the works of Indian legends like Lakshman Pai, Raja Ravi Verma, Jamini Roy, SH Raza, and Vivan Sundram. And as one walked through this mesmerising maze, art came alive to gently embrace you and make you a part of that artistic experience. The Art Maze was designed to spark the participants' creativity and let

their inner selves shine. It was an inspiring gift for aspiring artists, as it allowed them to indulge themselves for an hour, paint with colours from their imaginative palette and share their artistic vision. To the credit of the organisers, the ambience was magical, and it encouraged people of all ages to pick up brushes to create and colour their own masterpieces. Be it a seasoned artist or a rank beginner, the Art Maze

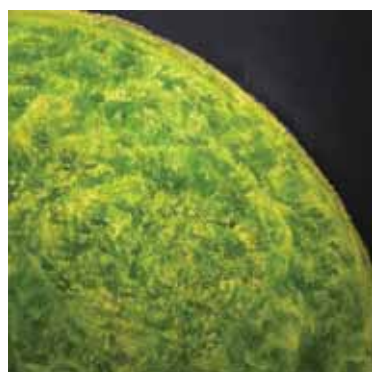
truly provide space for one's artistic expressions to run unbridled. Everyone and anyone was invited to this artistic adventure with families, especially kids, exploring their creativity amid fun and relaxation. The Art Maze was not just about making art; it was about making memories. It was a place where families and friends could bond over their shared love of art. Whether you came with your families, your best friend, or simply by yourself,

## A voyage through cosmos and inner self

The Divine Elements Vol I, an art exhibition unveils the cosmic fusion of artistry by **DIVYAMAN SINGH**

Renowned artist Divyaman Singh is taking art enthusiasts on an ethereal odyssey through his latest exhibition, "The Divine Elements Vol I," curated by the discerning Shahzada Khurram. This visionary collection promises to seamlessly merge the realms of astronomy, earthly elements, and spirituality into a captivating exploration of artistic expression.

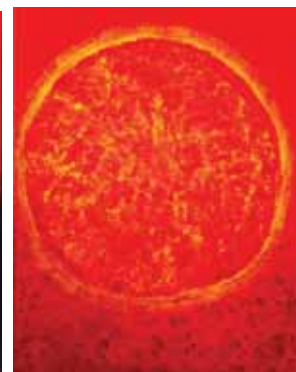
Set against the backdrop of the Kalamkar Gallery in Bikaner House, New Delhi, the exhibition opens its doors today, offering attendees the exclusive opportunity to immerse themselves in Singh's innovative creations and delve into the depths of the artist's creative process.



Earth: Emerald whispers of the cosmos dance with ethereal whispers



Inferno: In vivid colours



Nuclear sun: The glow of red



Unknown: Power of motion

Recognized for his remarkable ability to harmoniously blend diverse elements within his artwork, Divyaman Singh presents a collection that intricately weaves together the

enigmatic mysteries of the universe with the tangible and spiritual facets of human existence. "The Divine Elements Vol I" serves as a visual symphony, inviting

viewers to contemplate the profound connections between the celestial and terrestrial realms. In Singh's own words, painting becomes a dialogue between

the artist and his canvas, wherein oil on canvas becomes the medium to blend the beauty of space with the essence of spirituality. It's akin to a cosmic dance, where stars

mingle with earthly elements, forging a connection between the vast universe and humanity. Each brushstroke narrates a tale of interconnectedness, inviting

spectators to behold a vibrant world where the visible and invisible converge in sublime harmony.

The curator behind this extraordinary exhibition, Shahzada Khurram, brings his keen eye for artistic subtlety and a dedication to showcasing avant-garde voices in the art world. "The Divine Elements Vol I" stands as a testament to Khurram's unwavering commitment to curating exhibitions that transcend conventional boundaries and spotlight artists whose work leaves an indelible imprint on the cultural landscape.

Khurram observes, "The Divine Elements Vol I seamlessly mixes spirituality and earthly elements on canvas. Singh's adept use of oil

painting crafts a mesmerizing journey where the celestial and terrestrial realms unite seamlessly."

Singh's mastery shines through his symbolic portrayal of celestial bodies and earthly elements, weaving a visual narrative that prompts introspection. The color palette, blending celestial blues with earthy hues and golden accents, elevates each artwork to a spiritual realm. This exhibition transcends artistic confines, encouraging viewers to ponder the interconnectedness of the cosmos. "The Divine Elements Vol I" isn't merely a collection; it's a visual masterpiece orchestrating a cosmic ballet of beauty and spirituality," he adds.



# Mumbai Indians get Suryakumar boost

PTI ■ MUMBAI

In a big boost for struggling Mumbai Indians, world number one T20 batter Suryakumar Yadav trained with the team here on Friday after a long injury layoff and unleashed his trademark shots without any visible discomfort, raising hopes that he could compete in the team's next IPL match against Delhi Capitals. Five-time champions Mumbai Indians are languishing at the bottom of the 10-team table, having lost all three matches so far and if Suryakumar plays, the Hardik Pandya-led team will hope that his presence helps them with the anticipated turnaround. The 33-old aggressive batter has been out of action since January. He underwent a surgery to treat sports hernia and was also nursing an ankle injury which he had sustained during India's tour of South Africa late last year. Suryakumar was the first to arrive for the training session at the Wankhede Stadium, more than an hour before his teammates came for the afternoon session.



Suryakumar walked into one of the two nets and batted for more than an hour, not looking to exert himself but getting his body in rhythm and getting his strokes going a few days after he was given the clearance to join the Mumbai Indians' squad by the National Cricket Academy (NCA) staff. The right-handed batter unleashed strokes in all parts of the ground while batting against throwdown specialists and MI spinner Kumar Kartikeya. He hit the ball exactly the way he wanted, middling most of his strokes and also practiced his trademark flick shot over the fine-leg region. The team is coming off a short break after taking a trip to Jamnagar following its third straight loss in the ongoing tournament, the last one being a six-wickets defeat Rajasthan Royals on April 1. Meanwhile, in the adjacent nets, Delhi Capitals and Australia batter David Warner had a long hit among the others. Mumbai's Ranji Trophy bowler Mohit Awasthi was also seen bowling to the Delhi Capitals' batters during their training.



# Virat under lot of pressure this IPL

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Virat Kohli is "under a lot of pressure" in the ongoing IPL owing to the collective failure of Royal Challengers Bengaluru batters, feels former Australia captain Steve Smith who wants the Indian superstar's RCB teammates to come good in the supporting act. Kohli has waged a lone battle for RCB this IPL season with 203 runs in four matches at 67.66 with two fifties. The second-best batter, Dinesh Karthik, is way behind with 90 runs in as many games. Despite Kohli's consistency, RCB have faltered with three losses in four matches throwing them as far back as the seventh spot in the points table. The likes of Glenn Maxwell, skipper Faf du Plessis and Cameron Green have been underwhelming so far with the bat. "He needs the other key batters to stand up with him, and if they do that, they can turn things around for their season. But, at the moment, they're not so a lot of pressure is on Virat," Smith, a member of the Star Sports Incredible Star Cast, told PTI in an exclusive interaction at the channel's studio here. "I doubt he'd be putting extra pressure on himself. (But) some of the other top-order and middle-order (batters) need to help Virat," he said. Smith warned that Kohli is not going to score runs in every match and RCB batters must get their act together. "He started the campaign really well in the IPL and he needs some support. He's not going to score runs on every occasion," he said. "But, I doubt he'd be thinking that way. I don't think he'd go

out and put extra pressure on himself. He'd just go out and play and see what happens in that game." Smith rubbished the criticism which Kohli has faced time and again in his career over his batting strike-rate saying that no player in the world can read situations as well as the Indian batter. Kohli has been hitting at over 140 in this year's IPL. "Virat is an incredible player. What he does really well, and probably better than most people in the world, is (that) he sums up the conditions and the situation of the game and plays accordingly," he said. "If he needs to strike big, he does. If he needs to bring it back a little bit and build some partnerships...You don't need 180 on every ground; 150-160 might be enough on some grounds," he added. "Virat sums up the conditions really well and the situation. I'm not fussed about the strike rate," Smith continued. Smith also touched upon another controversy-mired sub-plot in the IPL — Hardik Pandya's captaincy of Mumbai Indians and the fan backlash he is facing. He understands why Pandya has been subjected to jeering in all three matches so far, but also wants fans to stop holding on to the past. "Yes and no. Obviously, there was that (booing) going on in the first two games. It sort of becomes a bit of a thing, if that makes sense. But, it was unfortunate, I think. I'd love to see them supporting Hardik. Obviously, there's a lot of huge Rohit fans out there," he said. "A lot of people are a bit annoyed that he's not the captain of the side. But, everyone needs to let go of

that and support Hardik. He's a wonderful player. He had a lot of success at Gujarat (Titans). He's back (as) captain of the side at Mumbai now. "The senior players need to help him out," Smith said. Being a subject of severe international scrutiny as Australia captain back in 2018 following the ball-tampering incident in Cape Town which led to him being banned for one year, Smith shared some insights on what it takes to come out. "While all this negativity is out there, he has got to find ways to cope with it and mechanisms to deal with it," Smith said. "Everyone is different (in) the way they do that. For me, personally, I just block everything out. I don't listen to anything; I don't listen to any comments, or boos, or anything like that. "It's difficult to say, but you kind of just have to let it be. Block it out as much as you can, and just get on with the job at hand. I think the best way for him to turn people around is if Mumbai start winning, that's the key thing," Smith said. Smith, however, rejected suggestions that the off-field drama has been a factor in MI's three successive losses. "One thing about the Mumbai Indians is (that) they're notoriously bad starters in the tournament. They've done it on numerous occasions," he said. "I don't think they'd be too worried just yet. But, they will have to turn things around really quickly. It doesn't look good, 0-3 at the bottom of the table. They have to turn things around really quickly," he added.

# RCB, RR look to tackle similar worries to make headway

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Struggling Royal Challengers Bengaluru and high-flying Rajasthan Royals bizarrely have similar worries to address when they face each other in the Indian Premier League here on Saturday. The eighth place where RCB are currently on the 10-team table is a fair indication of their troubles, but Rajasthan's all-win record so far and the resultant second place do not necessarily mirror their turmoil. An underwhelming top-order is the intertwining factor between them. The RCB top-order comprising skipper Faf du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell, Cameron Green and Rajat Patidar is a storehouse of talent and explosiveness. But none of them have fired either in isolation or in unison, except star batter Virat Kohli, the current Orange Cap holder with 203 runs, who has made two fifties. Patidar showed a glimpse of his clean shot-making abilities while registering 29 in their 28-run defeat against Lucknow Super Giants, but he needs to do a lot more to prop up the RCB middle-order. The Bengaluru outfit will hope for a reversal at the Saiwam Singh Stadium, a venue that carries similar traits as RCB's home — Chinnaswamy Stadium — in terms of a smooth pitch and a blistering outfield adding value to the batters' shots. But the aforementioned RCB quartet has company in the Royals' ranks.



Yashasvi Jaiswal entered this iteration of IPL on the back of some excellent recent efforts, but the left-handed opener has made just 39 runs from three matches, and Jos Buttler offers a similar story. The England T20 captain is yet to be in his intimidating self, and has managed 35 runs from three outings and his strike-rate across these matches is a mere 85. The Royals' batting has largely revolved around captain Sanju Samson (109 runs, one fifty) and the highly-improved Riyan Parag (181 runs, 2 fifties) and at some point, the duo will require solid support from others. However, Rajasthan have an edge over their opponents in the bowling department. Pacers Trent Boult and Nandre Burger and veteran leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal have worked up a nice early rhythm and have shared 16 wickets between them. The out of touch Bengaluru batters might just find it tough to tackle the trio at its home turf.

The lone missing piece in Rajasthan's bowling, rather surprising at that, is the patchy form of Ravichandran Ashwin, who has taken one wicket from three matches while giving away 8.3 runs per over. But the seasoned off-spinner can turn that around quickly, and he has a fine record against RCB as well. However, going by their last four matches, RCB seem to be lacking in the variety or strength in their bowling to exploit the chinks in Rajasthan batting. Left-arm pacer Yash Dayal and off-spinner Glenn Maxwell lead their wicket-takers' chart with four wickets apiece but even that really is an inflated picture as the duo hasn't been able to make any real impact on the proceedings. The modest form of experienced pacers has really hurt them as Mohammed Siraj has leaked over 10 runs an over while Alzarri Joseph and his replacement Reece Topley have given away more than nine runs an over for meagre returns.



# Kuldeep advised rest as precautionary measure for groin niggle

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian spinner Kuldeep Yadav is nursing a groin niggle and has been advised rest as a precautionary measure by the Delhi Capitals team management in the ongoing Indian Premier League. The 29-year-old left-arm spinner picked up the niggles after DC's second game of the season against Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur, which the team lost. The player was forced to miss out on the next couple of contests where veteran pacer Ishant Sharma returned to the playing XI. "It will take some time for him to be match fit," an IPL source told PTI when asked about Kuldeep's status. Since he is a centrally-contracted player and a T20

World Cup hopeful, National Cricket Academy's sports science and medical team will have a big say in Kuldeep's injury and rehab management. It is mandatory for franchisees to report niggles and injury concerns of an India player to the NCA. Although he has been travelling with the side for all the clashes, his participation in DC's upcoming tie against Mumbai Indians on Sunday remains doubtful. Kuldeep has picked up three wickets in two matches at an economy of 7.62. He has been on a wicket-taking spree, coming off a great performance in the five-Test series against England that concluded last month, where he claimed 19 wickets in four meetings at an average of 20.15.

## OTHERS GAME

# Shot put legend Valerie to grace World 10K

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Legendary New Zealand shot putter Valerie Adams was on Friday named the "International Event Ambassador" for the 16th TCS World 10K Bengaluru to be held on April 28. Adams had won shot put gold in the 2008 and 2012 Olympics, besides bagging a silver (2016) and bronze (2021) before retiring. "The increasing enthusiasm for running in India is both motivating and inspiring," stated Adams, a four-time consecutive world champion, in a press release. "I am excited to witness the boundless energy and passion that participants will bring to the race." Since retiring from competitive athletics, the 39-year-old has passionately taken on the role of a spokesperson for women in sports. Currently, she holds the office of Chair of the World Athletes Commission, where she continues to champion the rights and welfare of athletes globally. Adams is also closely involved in the Paralympic sphere, collaborating with her sister, Lisa and other athletes, providing support and guidance. "As one of the most accomplished athletes in the world, Valerie embodies determination, perseverance, and excellence," said Vivek



Singh, Jt MD, Procarm International. "Her remarkable achievements in the field and her commitment to the advancement of sports, particularly for women and para-athletes serve as an inspiration to athletes worldwide. We look forward to together celebrating athleticism and our community spirit at the TCS World 10K Bengaluru." Adams also boasts of being a four-time world indoor champion and a three-time Commonwealth Games winner. She is only the third woman to win world championships at youth, junior and senior levels. In 2014, she was honoured with the IAAF World Athlete of the Year title.

# India ready for Australia challenge

PTI ■ PERTH (AUSTRALIA)

The in-form Indian men's hockey team will look to pass the "litmus test" that the formidable Australian side will pose at home when the two face off in a five-match Test series beginning here on Saturday. The series offers India a chance to gauge their strengths and capabilities ahead of the Paris Olympics. "This series serves as a litmus test for our team's preparedness ahead of the Paris Olympics. We aim to fine-tune our strategies and identify areas for improvement to ensure we are in peak form for the mega event. "Our focus will be on executing our game plan effectively and adapting to the challenges posed by the Australian side," chief coach Craig Fulton said. The away assignment offers the ideal chance for India to break their decade-long dry spell against Australia and secure a Test series win. Notably, India won the last away Test series against Australia back in 2014. Fresh from their impressive performances in the FIH Pro League in February, the Indian squad, under



the leadership of Harmanpreet Singh, is approaching this assignment with confidence. India's exceptional abilities and unwavering determination were evident as they clinched victories in three out of four matches in Bhubaneswar (within regulation time) and remained unbeaten in Rourkela

(also within regulation time). However, they had lost both their matches against Australia. With the two sides drawn in the same group at the Olympics, the Test series provides the perfect platform for both to gauge each other's strengths and weaknesses before the ultimate showdown in Paris Games.

"We are geared up for the challenge that lies ahead. Every match is an opportunity for us to showcase our skills and make our nation proud. We are aware of the tough competition Australia presents, but we are confident in our abilities and our preparations," captain Harmanpreet said. "As a team, we are united and determined to give our best on the field. Our goal is to not only perform well in this series but also to learn and grow as a unit, laying a strong foundation for our campaign in the Paris Olympics." India and Australia have clashed on the hockey field a total of 43 times since 2013, according to data from the FIH Data Hub. Among these match-ups, Australia have emerged victorious 28 times, while India have celebrated triumph in eight games. Additionally, seven matches have concluded in a draw. With India ranked fourth and Australia fifth in the current world rankings, the stage is set for a gripping battle between two hockey powerhouses.