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12 SPORTS

How many will be jailed before polls: SC

Apex court gives relief to YouTuber

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Observing that everyone who makes allegations on social media cannot be put behind bars, the Supreme Court on Monday restored the bail to a YouTuber who was accused of making derogatory remarks against Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin in 2021. "If before elections we start putting behind bars everyone who makes allegations on YouTube, imagine how many will be jailed?" a bench of justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan told senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the Tamil Nadu Government, as it set aside the order cancelling A Duraimurugan Sattai's bail. The Supreme Court said the accused did not misuse his liberty by protesting and expressing his views and also rejected the request of the State Government to impose a condition on Sattai to refrain from making scandalous remarks while on bail. The court was hearing Sattai's plea challenging an order of the Madras High Court which cancelled his bail as he had made certain derogatory remarks against Stalin in violation of an undertaking given to the court. While seeking bail in a case, Sattai had submitted an



affidavit to the court undertaking that he would not pass derogatory remarks against anyone. Sattai was arrested by the police for allegedly making derogatory remarks against Stalin and others but had been granted conditional bail. "Scientific inventions are made for the welfare of mankind. The internet is one such wonderful invention that has transformed the lives of many. Even an ordinary man is uploading his day-to-day activities, skills, thoughts, travel experiences on

YouTube. In fact, in modern society, in most families, everyday meals are prepared using the videos uploaded on YouTube," the High Court had said. The High Court had cancelled the bail on the grounds that Sattai went on to make more allegedly derogatory remarks against Stalin despite providing assurances to the contrary. However, in July 2022, the Supreme Court granted interim bail to Sattai and he has been out on bail since. The court, however, said

Sattai did not misuse his liberty by protesting and expressing his views. Rohatgi responded by saying the State Government had registered two first information reports against the YouTuber in December 2022 and March 2023 for repeated offences. The top court noted that the allegations in one case pertained to Sattai's participation in a protest against the demolition of the Babri Masjid — in December 1992 — and the second case pertained to a demand made

by Sattai for the release of certain persons in custody. "We don't think that by protesting and by expressing his views, it can be said that the appellant has misused the liberty granted to him," the bench said. "Even otherwise we are of the view that the grounds mentioned in the impugned order cannot constitute grounds for cancellation of bail." The top court clarified that the State Government may approach it again for the cancellation of Sattai's bail if such grounds arise.

Opposition knocks on EC gates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition parties, the Congress and the Trinamool Congress (TMC), upped the ante against the BJP-led NDA Government and knocked at the gates of the Election Commission (EC) with their respective complaints. TMC leaders were detained by the Delhi Police on Monday while they were holding a dharna outside the EC's office, demanding that the chiefs of CBI, NIA, ED and Income Tax Department be changed. The Congress moved the EC with six complaints, two of which were directed against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his remark targeting the party and comparing its Lok Sabha poll manifesto with that of the Muslim League. Modi has said in his election rallies that the Congress' manifesto for the upcoming general election smacks of the "politics of appeasement" and carries the imprint of the Muslim League, with "every page reeking of breaking India". Separately a 10-member delegation of TMC announced a dharna after meeting a full bench of the EC to press for their demand. TMC MPs Derek O'Brien, Mohammed Nadimul Haque, Dola Sen, Saket Gokhale and Sagarika Ghose, MLA Vivek Gupta, former MPs Arpita Ghosh,



Congress leaders Salman Khurshid, Mukul Wasnik, Pawan Khera and Gurdeep Sappal come out after meeting the Election Commissioners at Nirvachan Sadan in New Delhi on Monday

Santanu Sen and Abir Ranjan Biswas, and party's students' wing West Bengal vice president Sudip Raha were detained. Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said party leaders Salman Khurshid, Pawan Khera, Mukul Wasnik and Gurdeep Sappal met with the EC and complained that Modi said the Congress manifesto is an attempt to divide India. "This is the time for the Election Commission to demonstrate its independence by ensuring a level playing field for all parties," Ramesh said. Congress chief media and publicity leader Pawan Khera said they raised many

issues with the EC and lodged a strong objection to the Prime Minister's remark saying that the Congress manifesto carries the imprint of the Muslim League. In its complaint, the Congress also alleged that the BJP has been using Armed forces for election campaigning in violation of the Model Code of Conduct. Other complaints registered by the Congress against several leaders ahead of the Lok Sabha elections include a claim that Union Minister Rajeev Chandrashekar has presented false information pertaining to his financial status in the election affidavit. **Continued on Page 2**



LG writes to MHA over AAP Ministers meeting refusals in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has complained to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) that Ministers of the Delhi Government have refused to meet him in the past few days on the issues related to citizens. He had convened these meetings to ensure smooth governance in the wake of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest and subsequent events. Giving details, Raj Niwas Secretariat officials said the issues especially pertained to public health infrastructure in the city and the impending Summer Action Plan for water availability. Saxena had asked for a meeting with the Ministers twice on March 29 and April two, they said. However, Ministers of Delhi Government, especially Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj under fire from the Delhi High Court over lack of health infrastructure in the city, instead of solving the issues, indulged in public mud-slinging and refused to meet the LG citing lame excuses. Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on March 21 in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. Bhardwaj upon being asked for a meeting on 29.03.2024 sent a text to the LG Secretariat that read, "We wanted agenda for this

meeting with the LG...I do not think meeting can be called without directions of the CM. Please convey," Bharadwaj, however, said the Constitution does not give the LG the power to issue directions on subjects such as health and water. He said, "I am surprised that a person sitting on a constitutional post is writing a letter and there is no mention of any provision of the Constitution. I want to ask which provision of the Constitution empowers the L-G to issue directions on transferred subjects like health, water, etc. I write to him about the issue related to health. He says it is a transferred subject." Bharadwaj said he had received a WhatsApp message and claimed he was not informed about the agenda of the meeting. "What was that secret meeting about? When I wrote the agenda, I told them it was a transferred subject. If you want to run the Delhi, contest elections. It won't work that you will run the Government from the backdoor," he said. Upon being shared the agenda for the meeting to be reconvened on 02.04.2024, Bhardwaj made the lame excuse of Model Code of Conduct being in effect, despite his colleagues going public with a supposed letter from Chief Minister from Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody, asking Ministers to take advice of the LG if necessary in solving public issues. **Continued on Page 2**

Muizzu aide insults India, apologises

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former Maldivian Minister Mariyam Shiuna has offered "sincerest apologies" for a post on social media reportedly disrespecting the Indian national flag. She is among three Deputy Ministers suspended earlier this year over social media posts targeting the Indian political leadership leading to a diplomatic row. Shiuna, who has since deleted the said post, clarified on Monday that she did not intend to disrespect India or the country's national flag. She apologised after a controversy over a social media post she made against the Opposition using a symbol that resembled the Ashok Chakra. "I would like to address a recent social media post of mine that has garnered attention and criticism. I extend my sincerest apologies for any confusion or offense caused by the content of my recent post," Shiuna wrote on X. "It was brought to my attention that the image used in my response to the Maldivian Opposition party MDP bore a resemblance to the Indian flag. I want to make it clear that this was entirely unintentional, and I

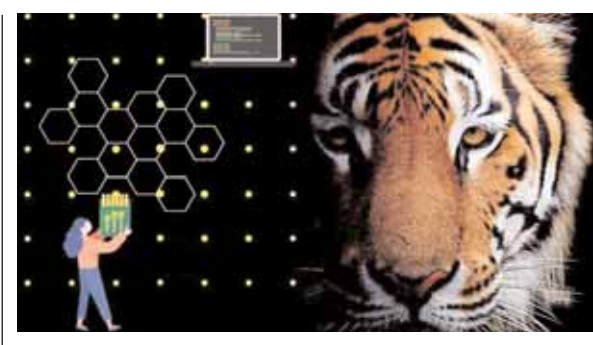


Maldives president Mohamed Muizzu with politician Mariyam Shiuna (Image credits: @shiuna_m on X)

sincerely regret any misunderstanding it may have caused," she said. "Maldives deeply values its relationship and the mutual respect we share with India. In future I will be more vigilant in verifying the content I share to prevent such oversights," the ex-MP added. She also said the image was meant to take a jibe at the Opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). Maldives is set to hold parliamentary elections on April 21. In the deleted post, which targeted the Opposition

MDP's campaign poster, the Opposition party's logo was replaced with what looks like the Ashok Chakra; in the Indian flag, the Navy Blue-coloured Ashok Chakra appears on the white central band. "The MDP is heading towards a big slip. The people of Maldives do not want to fall and slip with them," the post read. In January, Shiuna and two colleagues — Abdulla Mahzoom Majid and Malsha Shareef — were suspended by the Mohamed Muizzu Government, which is widely seen as anti-India and pro-

China. The Ministers' comments stemmed from what they saw as the Indian leadership attempting to promote the country's Lakshadweep islands as a tourist destination that rivals the Maldives. This is not the first time that she has been in the news over similar issues. She was among the three Ministers who were suspended for making derogatory remarks about Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the people of India in the wake of Modi's visit to Lakshadweep. Moreover, President Muizzu had said India had to withdraw nearly 80 of its military personnel from his country between March and May. The process has commenced. During a recent visit to China, Muizzu had said his country may be small but it "doesn't give them the license to bully us" in an apparent reference to India. With elections approaching, the Maldives President has struck a reconciliatory tone and said India will continue to be his country's "closest ally". He has also urged New Delhi to provide debt relief to the Maldives, which owes about \$400.9 million to India at 2023-end.



AI tools boost wildlife conservation efforts

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

From environmental eDNA technology used to create a repository of country's captive elephants through genetic material in dung, artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled drones for monitoring cheetahs health in Kuno in Madhya Pradesh to investigating habitat use of Whale sharks through satellite telemetry studies in Gujarat — cutting-edge innovative digital tools are increasingly being applied for wildlife conservation and keep a track on poachers. There's more. Researchers are deploying remote cameras with AI capabilities to prevent tiger attacks on livestock, thereby mitigating conflicts with their owners. "Where we're working, tigers are killing livestock on almost a daily basis," said Jeremy

Dertien, a postdoctoral researcher at the German Center for Integrative Biodiversity Research about the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh. He said the residents have proven "amazingly resilient" in the face of the roaming cats. But, Dertien said, being able to keep track of the tigers could help them coexist. Similarly, in Gujarat's Rajkot, the forest department, along with the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), is using the artificial intelligence through satellite tagging of whale sharks as part of an elaborate strategy to conserve this endangered species. Late last month, a 27-foot-long whale shark, which got entangled in a fishing net at a harbour, was tagged with a satellite transmitter and later released into the sea in a healthy condition. **Continued on Page 2**

Nakul is India's richest contestant with ₹716 crore assets

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With ₹716 crore assets value, Congress candidate Nakul Nath, son of Congress leader Kamal Nath who is contesting from Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh is the richest person, followed by Ashok Kumar of AIADMK who is contesting from Erode and declared total assets of ₹662 crore. BJP's Dhevanathan Yadav T contesting from Shivaganga is third in the list of richest candidates who has declared ₹302 crore and Jayaprakash from AIADMK with ₹131 crore. One in 10 candidates in the

first phase of the Lok Sabha elections has serious criminal cases registered against them while one in every three candidates is a crorepati. As per his affidavit, Nakul Nath's wealth has gone up by ₹40 crore in the past five years. In his latest submission to the Election Commission, Nakul has declared movable property, including cash, shares and bonds, worth ₹649.51 crore and ₹48.07 crore of immovable property. In 2019, Nakul was the only Congress Lok Sabha MP to win from Madhya Pradesh, otherwise swept by the BJP. In 2019, Nakul was among the top ten richest candidates contesting elections. After his



Kamal Nath and Nakul Nath File photo: PTI

victory, he emerged as the richest serving member of Lok Sabha (2019-2024) with assets worth ₹660 crore. Nakul and wife Priya Nath own immovable and movable assets

worth ₹716 crore together, as per the election affidavit. In 2019, this was ₹660 crore. AIADMK's Ashok declared his movable assets to be worth ₹662 crore while movable

assets of his spouse, Karunambika, were declared to be worth ₹47.38 crore. He also declared his immovable assets as worth ₹56.95 crore and those of his spouse's as worth ₹22.60 crore. His cash in hand stood at ₹10 lakh while his wife's cash in hand was declared as ₹5 lakh. He also declared ₹12 lakh as a liability, as he had obtained a house loan from a private bank. There are 1,625 candidates, contesting the 102 seats of the first phase of Lok Sabha polls. As per data compiled by the Association of Democratic Reforms, BJP candidate S Jagathrathakan of DMK has shown assets worth ₹53 crore and liabilities over ₹649 crore. Jagathrathakan is contesting

from Arakkonam. Dhevanathan Yadav T has shown liabilities of over ₹98 crore. Congress candidates from Chandrapur, Maharashtra Dhanorkar Pratibha Suresh Alias Balubhau have declared assets of ₹80 crore and liabilities of over ₹55 crore. While 10 candidates have declared zero assets, independent candidates Ponraj K (Thoothukkudi), Kartik Gendalji Doke (Ramneta) and Suriyamuthu (Chennai North) have declared the least assets. The ADR found around 28 per cent of candidates in the polls' first phase are "crorepatris" with assets exceeding ₹ one crore. **Continued on Page 2**

INDIA Bloc source of all problems in country: Modi

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Likening the Opposition Congress to 'Kadwa Karela' (bitter gourd), Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday charged that the grand old party was the "source of all problems in the country" and that the "INDI Alliance" which it was heading had pushed the country into instability. Kicking off the BJP's campaign for the Lok Sabha polls at Chandrapur in eastern Maharashtra, Modi said: "The Congress is like 'Kadwa Karela' (Bitter gourd). Bitter gourd can never be sweet even if it is mixed with ghee or sugar. This applies to the Congress perfectly. This party can never mend its ways. Owing to its misdeeds, the Congress party has lost public support within the country. Now it has openly started indulging in the game of divide and rule." Accusing the Congress-led Opposition of indulging in corruption in the past, Modi said: "Through its practice of demanding commission on contract, the Opposition-led government had in the past jeopardised the future of Maharashtra. Its leaders would put a break to contracts if they did not receive commissions. They stopped or put a break to good projects like the Jaljyukta Shivar scheme, irrigation projects. The Congress opposed the Samruddhi Maha marg project. The Opposition leaders also stopped projects like



the water grid project for Marthwada, Mumbai Metro, refinery and housing schemes for the poor." "The INDI Alliance has always pushed the country into instability. How important and necessary a stable government is, who would know better than Maharashtra? As long as the INDI Alliance was in power at the centre, Maharashtra was continuously neglected. These INDI Alliance people snatched the mandate and captured power. Once in power, they worked for their personal gains. "Our government has restarted all these schemes that were stopped by the previous government. Now Big development works are being completed rapidly in the state. When the intention is right, the results are also right," he said. Slamming the Opposition for its divisive ways, Modi charged that the Congress' just released manifesto carried the imprint of Muslim League. "The Congress is indulging in the politics of divide and rule... Its manifesto carries the lan-

guage of the Muslim League. Their MPs are talking about another partition of India. People from the INDI alliance are threatening to separate South India. The DMK party in the INDI alliance talks about ending Sanatan by calling it dengue malaria," the Prime Minister said. Taking a swipe at the Congress over the Ram Temple issue, Modi said: "Who was responsible for the delay in construction of Ayodhya's Ram Temple? The leaders of which party questioned the existence of Lord Ram? Why did the party didn't attend the Ram Temple 'pran pratishtha' ceremony?" Dwelling upon the achievements of the BJP-led government at the Centre, Modi said: "For the past 10 years, the Congress has been out of power. You have given the NDA a full majority. We have provided permanent solutions to the country's major problems. Today, not only Maharashtra but the entire country has weakened Naxalism."

Modi guarantee means sending people to jail, claims Didi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Picking up from where she had left a day before, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday rained fire on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for promoting a kind of "Guarante" that guarantees a definite journey to jail. Launching a frontal attack against the Prime Minister for announcing "stronger action against the corrupt people after June 4," when the third BJP Government would come to power in the Centre, Banerjee said how his government had turned the entire country into a jail. "I respect the Prime Minister's chair but the tone and tenor of his language that he used from a rally at Jalpaiguri does not befit his high post... he said that after June 4, he will send everyone to jail," Banerjee said insisting, "his (Prime Minister's) guarantee means sending people to jail... so much so that they have converted the entire country into jail." Cocking a snook at the Prime Minister she said "you think that you will terrorise everyone with threat of putting them to jail but no one is afraid of that," adding how Modi moved around with Enforcement Directorate, Central Bureau of Investigation in one pocket and National Investigation Agency and Income Tax Department in the other. The Prime Minister had told in an election rally at Dhupguri in Jalpaiguri district that he would

continue his tirade against the corrupt people as he had promised to rid India of corruption and turn into a fully developed country by 2047 by which it would become a third strongest economic power of the world. Referring to his hard-hitting speech, Banerjee said that the BJP Government was using the central agencies to suit its political ends. "They (agencies) are your brothers who bring funds for you and showing them you threaten us... you carry ED and CBI in one pocket and NIA and Income Tax in the other," she said. Banerjee was addressing a rally at Bankura a tribal dominated district of Jangalmahal adjacent to Jharkhand. For the first time raising the issue of the arrest of former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemanta Soren in an election rally Banerjee asked "why did you arrest Hemanta Soren who is a tribal Chief Minister... I have spoken to his wife and they are not scared... my question is who are you threatening... who is afraid of you... you will arrest five TMC man... their wives will come forward to work." Slamming the BJP Government for arresting her Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal, the TMC supreme asked "Why did you arrest Arvind Kejriwal?... what was his fault" adding "just because he did not submit to you... even after his arrest he is working from jail... not only that he will win from jail and this time with a bigger margin."

Jobs were sold when Mamata was Railway Minister: Arjun

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

BJP leader and party's candidate from Barrackpore Parliamentary constituency Arjun Singh on Monday brought serious allegations against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee saying government jobs were not only sold during her Chief Ministership but those were sold when she was the Railway Minister of India. Addressing a rally Singh who had recently rejoined the BJP after being denied a ticket by the TMC, said, "recruitment scam that you are seeing today in Bengal is nothing new... they had started long ago... I have information that when Mamata Banerjee was the Railways Minister railway jobs were sold right here... boards were advertised citing the rate of jobs." Saying that his party would take up the issue and start a protest movement seeking investigation into the alleged railway job scam, Singh said, "we will start a movement against this recruitment scam until things are brought to the fore and the guilty are not arrested."

Nursing officer who stood by rape victim reinstated

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A bold initiative by Kerala's CPI(M) led Government eat humble pie and reinstate a senior nursing officer who stood steadfast with the victim of a gruesome rape. P B Anitha, senior nursing officer, Kozhikode Medical College Hospital (MCH), who has been suspended from service at the intervention of Veena George, the State's controversial health minister, was reinstated by a special order following widespread demonstration and rallies against the minister's high-handed attitude. Anitha was put under suspension for extending all support to the Nirbhaya, who was brutally raped by a CPI(M) trade union leader while she was undergoing treatment at the Intensive Care Unit of the MCH. According to doctors attending to her, Nirbhaya was in a state of semi-conscious stage in the ICU following a surgery when Saseendran, leader of the CPI(M) led trade union sexually assaulted her. Anitha extended all help to the victim as other staff members of the hospital were reluctant to attend to her lest the perpetrator get annoyed. Despite Anitha taking care of the victim, she was shunted out from Kozhikode to far away Idukki in order to save the CPI(M) comrade.

Though Anitha got a favourable order from Kerala High Court which ordered that she be posted at MCH Kozhikode itself, the minister was adamant that the senior nursing officer should go and there was no question of any compromise. Anitha was staging a sit-in in front of the hospital for the last five days demanding justice and the execution of the High Court order. On Friday evening, the Nirbhaya joined the sit-in to express her solidarity with Anitha. "She was very kind to me and was the only one who offered her shoulders to me. I'll sit with her till she is reinstated here itself," the Nirbhaya, who staged the sit-in with her face covered with black mask told media persons. Though Veena George, a lateral entry leader to the CPI(M), stood her ground that there was no question of being kind to Anitha, better sense prevailed by Saturday noon and she ordered the directorate of medical education to reinstate Anitha in MCH Kozhikode. It is reported that the move is a fall out of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's intervention for fear of losing public face during the Lok Sabha polls. Government Hospitals in Kerala have become infamous because of frequent incidents of rape of female patients by male staff and physical assault on duty doctors.

BJP urges EC to take strict action against Congress leaders misusing RSS name

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Monday alleged that an organisation linked to Congress leaders was misusing RSS' name to push propaganda against the ruling party in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls and urged the Election Commission to take "strict action" against them. A delegation of BJP leaders including its national organisation secretary Arun Singh, Sanjay Mayukh and Om Pathak approached the poll panel and submitted a complaint in this connection, demanding that an FIR be lodged against the "fake" organisation and a notice be issued to the Congress. There was no immediate reaction from the Congress on the allegation. Singh told reporters that the outfit has been trying to mislead the people by unlawfully using the name of the RSS to create confusion even though the Supreme Court has also rejected its registration. "The fake organisation has been floated in the name of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) at the behest of the Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Sonia

Gandhi to create confusion and mislead people of the country," Singh said after meeting the Election Commission officials. He alleged that the Congress' Seva Dal chief heads this "fake" organisation. Singh said the outfit is reaching out to people telling them that they should ensure the defeat of the BJP. "Using the name of the RSS, this organisation is pushing the same narrative that Rahul Gandhi has been trying to build. They are posting on X messages like 'Constitution is under threat', 'the BJP's 400 paar slogan is an illusion, the BJP has to be defeated'. And those from the Congress are reposting them," he charged. "We urged the Election Commission to take strict action against them and lodge an FIR against such people. Their social media posts should also be removed," the BJP leader told reporters. Singh said that the BJP delegation also urged the EC to issue a notice to the Congress in the matter so that such "fake organisations" and their social media posts are not promoted to create confusion and mislead people in the run of to elections.

Neither joining politics nor contesting LS polls: Sanjay Dutt

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid media reports that the Opposition Congress might field him as its candidate from Haryana, Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt on Monday categorically stated that he was neither joining politics nor was he contesting the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Taking to micro-blogging site "X", 64-year-old Sanjay wrote: "I would like to put all rumours about me joining politics to rest. I am not joining any party or contesting elections. If I do decide to step into the political arena then I will be the first one to announce it." "Please refrain from believing what is being circulated in the news about me as of now," he clarified. Sanjay's clarification came in the wake of reports in a section that he might contest as a Congress candidate from Karnal Lok Sabha constituency in Haryana. Sanjay comes from a politically influential family that has been close to the Nehru-Gandhi family for more than five decades.

Raut kingpin behind Shiv Sena (UBT) khichdi scam: Nirupam

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

On Monday when the Shiv Sena (UBT) candidate Amol Kirtikar was questioned extensively by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Khichdi scam, expelled former Congress MP Sanjay Nirupam charged that Sena (UBT) leader and spokesperson Sanjay Raut was the kingpin behind the scam. By dragging Raut's name into the Khichdi scam, Nirupam has given a new dimension to the scam, which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic when Uddhav Thackeray headed the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in Maharashtra. At that time, the unified Shiv Sena controlled the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). Interestingly, both Nirupam (59) and Raut (62) are both journalist-turned-politicians. Both of them made a mark for themselves from the stead of late Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray. While Nirupam was the Executive Editor of Dophar ka Saamana, the Hindi edition of Saamana, Raut has been the executive editor of the Shiv Sena's official Marathi mouthpiece "Saamana".

MoS PMO facing tough fight on ground zero

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

With less than 10 days to go for the campaigning to end for the first phase of polling on April 19, the political temperatures are rising in the Chenab Valley region of Jammu and Kashmir. The two main rival candidates MoS PMO Dr Jitendra Singh of BJP and Congress candidate Choudhary Lal Singh are locked in a tight contest in the region. The sitting Member of Parliament from Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha seat Dr Jitendra Singh is facing the daunting task of returning home victoriously. Choudhary Lal Singh of the Congress party is mounting a tough challenge on the ground with active support from the National Conference and Peoples Democratic Party. To boost the poll campaign in the last leg, star campaigners of the Bharatiya Janta Party including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and Defence Minister Rajnath are scheduled to address public rallies in Udhampur, Kathua, and Basohli.

Church screens film Kerala Story in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The CPI(M) and Islamic groups that demonstrated all over Kerala against Doordarshan, the public broadcaster, screening the movie Kerala Story were in for a shock on Monday as the Idukki Diocese of the Catholic Church held a special show of the movie for students in the 15-19 age group in all the churches in the Diocese. The film based only on real life incidents portray the consequences of young girls eloping with Muslim boys who stage manage marriages to convince the victims only to send them to IS jihadis to fight for Islam in West Asia. On Friday, the CPI(M) and its youth wing DYFI had held statewide protests against Doordarshan screening the movie in its prime time slot. Sources in Doordarshan told The Pioneer that hundreds of thousands viewers in Kerala had watched the heart-rending movie about the life of young girls who are cheated by the Jihadis Romeos promising them a safe, secured and luxurious life. The young Jihadis are deployed by the leaders of the extremist organizations and offer the youths motor bikes, smart phones and lot of cash in return for entrapping the gullible girls. The victims are selectively hand picked from Hindu and

Christian community. Though the apprehensions expressed by the Hindu parents fell on deaf ears, the Christians took up the matter seriously which made the Arch Bishops and Bishops issue statements condemning the move. The bishop of Pala, Joseph Kallarangattu warned the laity about the increase in drug addiction among girls of the community because of the Jihadis' modus operandi. "The movie Kerala Story is censored by the Central Board of Film Censors and has been certified that it was ideal for public screening. No communities have been named in the film and hence the claim that it would upset the communal harmony is out of place," said Father Jins Karakkattil, spokesman, Idukki Diocese. He said the movie was screened as part of the Diocese's Festival of Love and Trust. "We made the youngsters to watch the movie and discuss among them the seriousness of the situation and what real love was. There was no space for community here," said Fater Karakkattil. Meanwhile, efforts were underway to screen the movie in all the Dioceses across the State, according to Jaison Mazhuvancherry, minority cell leader of Kerala BJP. But the CPI(M) and the Congress were vying with one another in condemning the Church for screening the movie.

UDF leader exposes CPM on electoral bonds

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Saturday turned out to be a day of double whammy for the ruling CPI(M) in Kerala as a senior leader of the Opposition United Democratic Front exposed the party's double standard and hypocrisy in connection with the electoral bonds. Adding to the woes of the party is the death of a youth leader in Panur in an explosion on Friday night while assembling crude bombs. Shibu Baby John, general secretary of the Revolutionary Socialist Party, a constituent of the UDF, made a disclosure on Saturday that though the CPI(M) had opposed the electoral bonds, the latter had received and mobilized crores of rupees from companies and business houses which were subscribers of the controversial bonds. Speaking to reporters at Kollam, Shibu Baby John, a former minister and two-time MLA, said that the CPI(M) in its report to the Election Commission of India had stated that the party had collected funds from controversial business houses like Navayuga Engineering, pharmaceutical giants Natco Pharma, Hetro Drugs, infrastructure companies Megha Infrastructure, Muthoot and Kitec.

LG writes to MHA over AAP...

From Page 1 Other key Ministers of the Delhi Government — Gopal Rai, Kailash Gahlot and Atishi Marlena have also shown lack of seriousness and insensitivity and declined to attend the meeting with Saxena on the matters affecting the day-to-day lives of the citizens of Delhi in the aftermath of arrest of Kejriwal, the letter from LG Secretariat to MHA reads. "The LG believes that a consultation of this nature was warranted so that routine works of governance are not hampered in the backdrop of arrest and detention of the chief minister," the LG's letter added. The rationale adduced for not attending the meeting appears vague and exhibits lack of seriousness and insensitivity to matters affecting the day-to-day lives of the citizens of Delhi, the LG secretariat said.

written a note to him highlighting the severe shortage of basic medical supplies at Dr Hedgewar Arogya Sansthan and Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya. The very next day, the LG shot back expressing deep concerns regarding the "deteriorating" state of the "Delhi Model" of healthcare delivery, likening it to being on "life support ventilator". The LG had reminded Bhardwaj of disregarding his invitations to discuss critical healthcare issues and criticised his tendency to deflect responsibility and propagate misleading narratives. While Kejriwal was in the ED Custody, Atishi Marlena had claimed that the Chief Minister had written a note to her to take care of the issues of water and sewage in the national Capital and if necessary take advice of the LG. A similar note appeared for Bhardwaj relating to the health and medical infrastructure. In both the cases, questions were raised as to how such notes can be written in ED custody.

AI tools boost wildlife...

From Page 1 The release is part of the project to conduct satellite telemetry studies of five whale sharks. This follows WTI success when it had deployed satellite tags in eight whale sharks of Gujarat between 2011 and 2017. It provided valuable insights into their extensive migratory patterns. Akshay Joshi, Deputy Conservator of Forest, Junagadh said that the project aims to understand the behaviour pattern of aquatic animals like where it goes for breeding, in which continents it migrates etc. This tag, which is much more technologically advanced, will provide more accurate information even if the whale shark goes deep into the sea. "The information will be transmitted even when the whale shark travels at maximum speed during storms or cyclones," State Chief Conservator of Forest, K Ramesh added. Experts say innovative technologies are revolutionising wildlife conservation efforts, making them more accessible, user-friendly, and data-efficient

than ever before. For instance, eDNA technology allows researchers to detect and identify species by analysing genetic material present in environmental samples such as water or soil. The Union Environment Ministry has already profiled 270 elephants since August 2022, aiming at ensuring better protection has been completed. DNA profiling is the process where a specific DNA pattern, called a profile, is obtained from a sample of bodily tissue. The DNA profiling will act as the 'Adhaar card of captive elephants', said an official from the Ministry. Earlier, the captive elephants were chipped electronically, but in vain. At the Kanha-Pench corridor in Madhya Pradesh, wildlife officials are experimenting with cameras with infrared sensors that harness the power of artificial intelligence (AI). These are deployed to count wild animals or monitor the movement of potential poachers. The results are already visible. For the first time, poachers were caught on camera, helping

authorities secure a conviction. This AI-powered TrailGuard-AI camera system which is the world's most advanced wildlife monitoring and security system, providing real-time images of the endangered species, poachers and landscape to the forest authorities has been deployed in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve (DTR) in Uttar Pradesh also, as per a study 'Mitigating human-wildlife conflict and monitoring endangered tigers using a real-time camera-based alert system' published in the BioScience. With forest protection staff spread so thinly across large landscapes, new technology that can provide real-time data notifications for conservation personnel could be a massive aid in preventing poaching or conflict before it occurs or afterward for quickly identifying poaching suspects, said the authors including Rajesh Gopal and Himmat Singh Negi from Global Tiger Forum, Ramesh Krishnamurthy from WII, and Sanjay Kumar Pathak from DTR.

Opposition knocks on EC...

From Page 1 In March 2024, Rajeev Chandrasekhar was announced as the BJP candidate from Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram Constituency for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. On their part TMC has been alleging that the Central probe agencies have been targeting Opposition parties at the behest of the BJP-led Centre. "The BJP is misusing Central agencies against us. The way NIA, ED and CBI are working and targeting TMC leaders is shameful. We would request the EC to ensure a level playing field for all political parties," Sen said. The TMC alleged on Sunday that there is an "unholy alliance" between the NIA and the BJP ahead of elections, prompting the Central investigating agency to deny any mala fide intention and label the entire controversy as "unfortunate".

Nakul is India's...

From Page 1 The average assets per candidate stands at ₹4.51 crore, with notable discrepancies observed across party lines, it said. There are 450 crorepati candidates in the first phase with BJP having 69 such candidates followed by Congress with 49, AIADMK with 35, DMK with 21, BSP with 18, and Trinamool and RJD with 4 each. AIADMK candidates have the highest average assets at ₹35.61 crore followed by DMK which has Rs 31.22 crore, Congress which

has Rs 27.79 crore, and BJP which has Rs 22.37 crore. Analysing 1,618 out of the 1,625 candidates in the first phase of Lok Sabha polls on April 19, it said 161 candidates have serious criminal charges against them, which included seven with murder charges and 19 with attempted murder cases. Eight candidates have crimes against women, including one with rape charges against him. When it comes to party-wise candidates, 14 out of 77 BJP candidates have serious criminal charges while with Congress has eight of 56 candidates in this category. Trinamool Congress has one such candidate while RJD and SP have two each, and DMK and AIADMK six each. BSP

also has eight candidates. The ADR report says 42 (41 per cent) out of 102 constituencies are red alert constituencies in the Lok Sabha elections 2024 phase 1. Red alert constituencies are those constituencies where 3 or more contesting candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves. The report said 505 (31 per cent) candidates have declared their age to be between 25 to 40 years while 849 (52 per cent) candidates have declared their age to be between 41 to 60 years. There are 260 (16 per cent) candidates who have declared their age to be between 61 to 80 years. There are only four candidates who have declared their age to be above 80 years.

DJB did not use funds as per sanction conditions, SC told

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) received more than Rs 28,400 crore since 2015-16 but it did not use the funds as per sanction conditions, the Delhi Government Principal Secretary (Finance) has told the Supreme Court which is hearing an AAP Government's plea alleging non-disbursal of funds to the water utility. "Despite receiving more than Rs.28,400 crores of rupees from public exchequer (i.e. GNCTD) since 2015-16, there is no accountability, and the funds are not being used as per sanction conditions, as indicated by the CAG in its report. "This becomes more so worrisome that the CAG audit has been delayed by non-prepara-

tion of balance sheet, which needs examination about the conduct of DJB in this regard," the Delhi government Principal Secretary (Finance) said in his affidavit, adding the statutory body lacks accountability. The affidavit said Rs 29,172 crore has been disbursed to the DJB between 2015 and 2023-24, adding Rs 4,572.90 crore has been released for 2023-24 alone. It further said the DJB was losing out on a potential revenue of about Rs 1,200 crore per annum due to non-enhancement of tariff against domestic bills alone. "The DJB has received a total of Rs 76,923.82 Cr from various sources and out of which, Rs. 75,313.42 Crore was spent leaving a balance of Rs 1610.40 Crore in the bank accounts of

Delhi Jal Board. But in the absence of balance closing certificates from the various banks, the audit couldn't confirm the balances as shown by the DJB," it said. Referring to the report of the chief secretary, the affidavit said, "Water tariffs (and thus sewer tariffs as they are calculated as 60% of the water tariffs) have not been increased since 01.02.2018 (which used to be revised every year by way of enhancement @ 10% per annum), and service charges have not been increased since 01.01.2015, thus affecting the financial health of the DJB." "While the number of consumers with dues was about 11 lakhs in July, 2023, the same had risen to over 14 lakhs in January, 2024, implying that



consumers were wilfully not depositing their dues in anticipation of yet another scheme as was being announced," the affidavit said. "At one end the loans and

interests thereon upon DJB has surpassed the figure of Rs. 73,000 crore and Delhi Jal Board has repeatedly informed the GNCTD that it is not in a position to repay its debt to the

GNCTD, and at the same time DJB is not following the statutory provisions to bring in financial probity," it said. The affidavit said the directions on the report of the chief secretary are still awaited from the office of the Delhi water minister who had filed the petition. Assailing the claims made in the plea, the affidavit said the DJB is not a government but statutory body constituted under the Delhi Water Board Act, 1998. Therefore, the instant case is not about release of funds allotted in the budget by the legislative assembly, but a case in which the city government provides funds to the DJB in form of "capital loans, grant-in-aid, subsidies, ways and means" on the recommendations of the

administrative department, the affidavit said. The principal secretary said the allegations made against him by the government are not correct. On April 5, the Supreme Court took note of the submissions of senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani, appearing for the Principal Secretary (Finance), that the Delhi government, which has filed the plea against its own official, has not made the DJB a party. "We will implead DJB (as a party) to find out from them (about the dues)...In the meantime, please release funds which are liable to be paid," the bench had said. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the Delhi government, said the minister concerned has written

six times to the finance secretary and yet the entire fund has not been released. The court has fixed the Delhi government's petition for further hearing on April 10. Earlier on April 1, the top court had issued a notice to the Principal Secretary (Finance) on the plea of the AAP government which alleged that the official was not releasing funds to the DJB despite budgetary approval by the legislative assembly. The bench had not issued notice to the office of the Lieutenant Governor after taking note of the submissions of senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi that the LG has no role in disbursement of funds by the finance department of the Delhi government.

ED questions Kejriwal personal assistant Bibhav, AAP MLA Pathak

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate on Monday questioned Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal assistant Bibhav Kumar and AAP MLA Durgesh Pathak in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. According to sources, the ED recorded Bibhav Kumar and Durgesh Pathak's statements under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Sources said Kumar's questioning was essential in connection with the engagements of Kejriwal. Both of them have been questioned in this case earlier too by the ED. The 55-year-old CM, also the national convener of the AAP, was arrested by the ED in this case last month. He is currently lodged in the Tihar jail under judicial custody. Meanwhile, the Aam Aadmi Party alleged the BJP wants to stop it from campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls after the Enforcement Directorate questioned Delhi's ruling party MLA Durgesh Pathak in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. Reacting to the development, Delhi minister Atishi said, "The BJP wants to stop the AAP from campaigning in



Lok Sabha polls at any cost. This is a political conspiracy by the BJP." AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak alleged the BJP "has made a list of leaders and they want to put the entire party in jail so that they are in a solo in race". The agency had alleged in its earlier charge sheets that at least 36 accused, including former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Kumar, "destroyed, used or changed" 170 phones to conceal evidence of "kickbacks" worth thousands of crores of rupees in the alleged scam. The IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) of Bibhav's mobile number is stated to have been changed four times between September 2021 and July 2022, according to the ED

charge sheet filed before a local court last year. Pathak, the 35-year-old AAP MLA from Rajinder Nagar constituency, is understood to have been called by the agency for questioning in connection with the party's 2021-22 poll campaign for the Goa assembly polls. The ED has alleged that Rs 45 crore "kickbacks", out of the Rs 100 crore "bribe" provided by the 'South Group', were used by the AAP for this campaign. The agency has claimed that cash payments were made to individuals involved in campaign activities, managed by AAP members like Vijay Nair and Pathak. The agency informed the court that it has recorded the statements of various per-

Administrative paralysis plagues AAP health model: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former Delhi BJP President and Member of the Legislative Assembly Vijender Gupta, along with Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva and party MLAs, slammed Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government in Delhi for sorry state of affairs of city health sector. Gupta detailed instances of nepotism, administrative paralysis, and deliberate obstruction of beneficial health initiatives, casting a shadow over the AAP's proclaimed health model. Gupta brought to light specific allegations concerning the period when Satyendra Jain served as the Health Minister. He said that the appointment of MD/MS and heads of departments in 17 Delhi government hospitals and medical colleges



heavily favoured individuals sympathetic to AAP, disregarding merit and fostering nepotism.

Gupta also highlighted the current stagnation in the appointment process for new heads of departments and MD/MS. He pointed out that the National Capital Civil Services Authority (NCCSA), under the chairmanship of CM Arvind Kejriwal, has not convened since September 20, 2023, despite the pressing need for these appointments. Now, that these appointments are due for change, the entire appointment process has been stalled. The 17 hospitals include DGHS, Lok

Nayak Hospital, GP Pant Hospital, BSA Medical College and Hospital, Babasaheb Ambedkar Hospital, DDU Hospital, Guru Gobind Singh Hospital, Burari Hospital, Satyawadi Raja Harishchandra Hospital, Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital, Deep Chand Bandhu Hospital, Bhagwan Mahavir Hospital, Dr. Hedgewar Arogya Sansthan Hospital, Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital, Rao Tula Ram Hospital, Acharya Shree Bikashu Hospital, Maharishi 'Valmiki Hospital. He raised serious concerns over 11 critical proposals pending with CM Kejriwal. These include actions against delinquent officers, such as Dr. R N Dass, OSD to the current Health Minister, Saurabh Bharadwaj, who is under scrutiny for corruption charges. Gupta accused the CM of deliberate inaction, thereby hindering the initiation of necessary criminal proceedings against the officer.

DJB scam bigger than Liquorgate: BJP



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Monday demanded CBI probe into alleged Delhi Jal Board (DJB) scam and other scams and claimed the DJB scam is bigger than the liquor scam. Delhi Jal Board has become the main center of corruption of the present regime, he said. Stating this, BJP leader said his party has been saying for a long time that the scam of Delhi Jal Board is bigger than the liquor scam and ruling party leaders have always tried to avoid it. He said the Finance Department of the Delhi Government has informed the Supreme Court that in the last 9 years, there is an amount of Rs. 28,400 crores for which there is no account. Sachdeva said the game of scams that started in Jal Board since 2013 has reached a point where now the Jal Board is drowned in debts of Rs 73,000 crores and a plan has also been made to cheat the people of Delhi for its repayment. He said on one hand, Delhi's Water Minister Atishi says that they are not being given money, while on the other hand, the audit of the Jal Board's accounts has not been done since 2016-17. Atishi should understand that it is illegal to give money to any government department indefinitely without an audit, and

that is why today the situation in the Jal Board has become like a scam, Sachdeva said. Delhi BJP President said the information revealed in the letter written by Atishi on March 9 has exposed many things. According to the information received from the letter, 59% water generates no revenue and there is no transparency on the use of additional 15% water. Today, 74% of water is not accounted for in the Delhi Jal Board. That is, only 26% of the raw water is generating funds for DJB. Not only this, the accounts of 2021-22 are also missing. Sachdeva said the Kejriwal government recovers its economic losses by increasing the tax charge on the people of Delhi by 5% per year. Therefore, the water infrastructure charge was increased four days ago in the residential areas. In October 16, 2020, the expenditure in 200 square meters was Rs 2,15,200, which has now become Rs 3,44,320. Not only this, commercial property charges have gone up from Rs. 3,28,800 to Rs 5,16,480, Sachdeva said. He said the reality of the water bill is that in the residential areas, 30 kiloliters of water costs 790 rupees, service charge 219 rupees, and then sewer charge 474 rupees, and both together become 1484 rupees and if we talk about per kilo liter of water, then it is 49 rupees per kiloliter.

Power demand touching new height

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the mercury rising in the national Capital, electricity demand is touching new heights. The peak power demand in Delhi is expected to cross the 8,000 MW mark for the first time in the summer of 2024, the BSES and Tata Power said on Monday, asserting that discoms are prepared to meet the record demand. Last year, the peak power demand was 7438 MW. In a span of about 20 years, this expected peak power demand this year is an increase of around 280 percent over the peak power demand of 2879 MW in

2002. After clocking a record power demand of 7695 MW in 2022, Delhi's peak power demand during the summers of 2024 will break all previous records with the possibility of reaching 8200 MW according to State Load Dispatch Centre (SLDC) data. According to BSES, Power demand in South and West Delhi is expected to clock 3679, an uptick from 3250 MW and 3389 MW during the summers of 2023 and 2022 respectively. East and central Delhi show the same upward trend with the peak power demand expected to touch around 1857 MW this year.

Cases will be filed over shortage of medicines in hospitals: AAP Minister

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Monday announced in the Delhi Assembly that cases will be registered against the chief secretary and the health secretary over the shortage of medicines in State Government run hospitals and dispensaries. The issues of medicine shortage in Delhi government hospitals and dispensaries and the stoppage of free diagnostic tests at mohalla clinics by "some officers concerned" were raised by AAP MLA Rajendra Pal Gautam through a calling attention motion under Rule 54. On the other hand, BJP MLAs were marshalled out of the Delhi Assembly on Monday as they pressed for a discussion on alleged irregularities in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB). The proceedings of the House began with members raising issues of their constituencies. The BJP legislators started demanding a discussion on alleged irregularities in the DJB. Speaker Ram Niwas Goel rejected the request and asked the opposition members to sit down. As the BJP MLAs continued to press their demand, Goel asked marshals to take them out. Later, the BJP MLAs staged a protest near Mahatma



Gandhi's statue inside the assembly premises. During the proceedings of the House, Bharadwaj submitted two reports, including one from the chief secretary and the health secretary, saying they gave in writing that medicines were available in hospitals and mohalla clinics and those unavailable were substituted. The other report was based on the feedback of MLAs, news reports and his own inquiries, the minister said. He alleged that the Central Procurement Agency (CPA) tender of 2023 was not finalised despite the availability of bids under a "premeditated conspiracy". Medicines for government hospitals, dispensaries and mohalla clinics are procured

through the CPA, he said. The health minister said the issues of medicine shortage and stopping of tests at mohalla clinics came to light in January. He wrote to the chief secretary for details and action on February 12, and again on March 4 and March 18 but nothing happened. There are alternative methods of medicine procurement through local purchase or contract rate purchase by the hospitals but the medical superintendents and the medical directors informed in meetings held on March 1 and March 11 that it was made "impossible" due to circulars issued by the Health department, said the minister. "So, it was a pre-planned conspiracy to stop medicine sup-

plies by obstructing the CPA tender. What will (Chief Minister) Arvind Kejriwal or Saurabh Bharadwaj do if medicines themselves are not available at the hospitals and dispensaries?" he said in the House. Training his guns at Delhi Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, Bharadwaj said he wrote to him repeatedly and pointed out that the chief secretary and the health secretary were "misleading me and the Delhi government" by "hiding" the shortage of medicines and sought action against them but no action was taken. Lakhs of people depend on government hospitals, dispensaries and mohalla clinics for medicines, including those for serious ailments, Bharadwaj said and sought to know from the House if criminal prosecution should not be initiated if someone dies or falls gravely ill due to a lack of medicines. "We will not sit quietly, we will register cases. I will register a case against the chief secretary and the health secretary for this. We will not let it go like this," said the health minister. Several AAP MLAs, including Gautam, Sanjeev Jha, Rakhi Birla and Mahender Goel raised the issue of unavailability of medicines in hospitals and mohalla clinics.

Court denies interim bail to BRS leader Kavitha

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A city court on Monday denied interim bail to BRS leader K Kavitha, arrested in a money laundering case linked to the alleged Liquorgate scam, saying prima facie she not only destroyed evidence but was also instrumental in influencing witnesses and there is "every likelihood" of her continuing to do so in case the relief is granted. Kavitha had approached the court for interim bail, claiming her 16-year-old son has exams and needs her "moral and emotional support". "From the material placed before this court, it appears that the Applicant not only engaged in destruction of material evidence by formatting her phones before joining the investigation and after being served with notice requiring her to do so, along with her digital devices, which stands established by way of the forensic report in this regard, but also has been

towards her active involvement in commission of the alleged offences as also towards her deliberate act of causing destruction of evidence, besides attempting to influence witnesses of the case," the judge said. In response to Kavitha's submission that her husband was busy pursuing litigation on her behalf, the judge said it was not a "convincing reason" for grant of interim bail, and added that "it also appears that so called exam related anxiety of the child does not seem to be his (father's) priority". The judge said there was no apparent reason as to why close relatives (older sibling, father and maternal aunts, i.E., mausis) cannot provide the requisite moral support to the child during his examinations. The argument that they cannot be a substitute for the mother to address the exam related anxiety of the child is not a compelling reason to grant interim bail, she said.

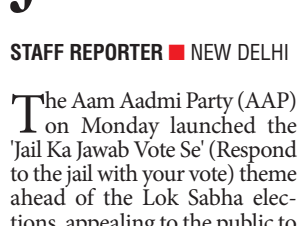
instrumental in influencing witnesses and there is every likelihood of her continuing to do so in case the relief prayed for is granted to her," Special Judge Kaveri Baweja said. The judge said Kavitha was stated to be highly educated, and by no standards can be said to a vulnerable woman who could be made a scapegoat for committing the alleged offences. She is undoubtedly a "well-educated" and "well-placed woman in the society". "The material placed before this court in the course of arguments prima facie points



AAP launches Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se campaign

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday launched the 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' (Respond to the jail with your vote) theme ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, appealing to the public to fight against the dictatorship of the BJP and to support Arvind Kejriwal by giving him votes. The announcement comes a day after the party held a daylong fasting protest to express solidarity with their leader Arvind Kejriwal. Addressing a press conference on Monday, AAP MP Sandeep Pathak, said "As you all saw that Kejriwal ji was put in jail to keep him away from the elections. Kejriwal ji spent his entire life struggling for the people. He considered all people of Delhi as his family and made arrangements for best education, health, electricity and water for all." "It is the first time that a sitting chief minister has been arrested



ed during the Lok Sabha polls. We are launching the campaign 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' (Respond to the jail with your vote) and we want you to empower Kejriwal," announced AAP leader Sandeep Pathak, who along with party senior leader Sanjay Singh, Gopal Rai and Pankaj Gupta, launched the party's campaign. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, also appealed to the people to recall Shri Arvind Kejriwal's face when they go to vote. He stated "Whenever you go out to cast your votes, remember to look at Arvind Kejriwal's face. "Take a look at the electricity bill which has been reduced down to a zero. Take a look at your

child's face, who used to go to dilapidated school and is now studying in air-conditioned classroom, look at the Mohalla clinic which now provides free medicines and free tests for all the treatments and tests, see your daughter's and sister's face who travels free and safely in the buses, and also the faces of the elderly people in your family for whom Kejriwal became their Shrawan Kumar and made their wishes of 'Teerth Yatra' true, also remember the 'Farishtey Scheme' that he formulated...Keep all these things in mind before stepping out to cast your vote on May 25," he said. The new campaign comes a month after Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann on March 8 launched the party's Lok Sabha national campaign, 'Sansad Me Bhi Kejriwal, Toh Delhi Hogi Aur Khushhal' (If Kejriwal is in Parliament too, the city will be more fulfilled).

Nadda: Congress pursuing appeasement politics

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Accusing the Congress of pursuing appeasement politics and working against the majority community, BJP chief J P Nadda on Monday asked the opposition party to make it clear as to who it intends to benefit by promising to raise the reservation cap from 50 per cent.

In a statement, Nadda echoed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charge that the Congress' manifesto bears the imprint of the Muslim League, which had spearheaded the pre-independence movement for Pakistan.

The League had worked for reservation on religion lines in 1929 and the Congress is doing the same, he alleged.

"The Congress manifesto is a blueprint for division, a blatant replica of Jinnah's Muslim League agenda. By prioritising appeasement politics over national unity, the Congress seeks to perpetuate division," the BJP president alleged.

People have repeatedly reject-



ed the Congress but it is determined to pursue appeasement politics and divide the country in its greed for power, he alleged.

He claimed the Congress-led UP government had mulled a law against the majority community, a reference to Hindus, and it continues to work against them.

"India has rejected such divisive politics before and will do so again. The BJP stands firm against this dangerous path to polarisation and remains committed to inclusive governance

for all," he said.

The country has not forgiven the Congress for its "divisive tactics and appeasement politics" and is unlikely to do so in the future, he said.

Targeting Rahul Gandhi, Nadda said he owes an explanation regarding the disappearance of Congress party's flags during his nomination procession in Wayanad Lok Sabha seat in Kerala.

It was done as the Indian Union Muslim League, a Congress ally in Kerala, might not have liked it, he claimed.

NC, Congress to contest LS polls in JK, Ladakh jointly

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/SRINAGAR

Endings days of speculations amidst talks by various leaders that they would contest the Lok Sabha polls off the INDIA alliance banner, the Congress and National Conference on Monday announced contesting the Lok Sabha polls in Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh in alliance, with each fielding candidates in three seats.

At a joint press conference, National Conference leader Omar Abdullah said the Congress would contest in Udhampur, Jammu and Ladakh Lok Sabha seats while the National Conference would field candidates in Anantnag, Srinagar and Baramulla.

Another major regional stakeholder Mehbooba Mufti led PDP which has been part of the grand opposition alliance is still to clear the air on contesting together after announcing last week to go solo in the General Elections similar to the ones stated by NC supremo on many occasions that his party would contest all seats on its own.

"I want to formally announce that the National Conference



and Congress will jointly contest the elections in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh with three candidates for each of the two parties," Abdullah said.

"The National Conference will support Congress candidates in Udhampur, Jammu and Ladakh seats. The INDIA bloc with contest the polls to help fulfil the aspirations of people of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh and truly represent them in Parliament," he said.

The seat-sharing agreement was finalised after consultations between the Congress and NC leaders. Member of the Congress seat sharing committee Salman Khurshid was also present during the joint press conference.

Asked whether PDP was still a part of the INDIA bloc, Khurshid said, "PDP is in our

alliance. Seat adjustment is one part of the alliance and an overall alliance is a different issue. Since Jammu and Kashmir is small in area, there is not much scope for seat adjustment despite our best efforts." The PDP has named candidates for three seats in Kashmir, fielding Mehbooba Mufti against DPAP president Ghulam Nabi Azad in Anantnag. Khurshid said, "The National Conference already has three Lok Sabha MPs and we have decided to give them a chance."

Asked if Omar Abdullah will also contest the polls, the Congress leader said in that case one would have to convene another press conference in Srinagar as and when a decision is taken.

Candidates opting for Imphal centre for prelims exams can choose other venues: UPSC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Public Service Commission has said the candidates who have opted Imphal centre in Manipur to appear in this year's civil services preliminary examination, can choose other venues.

The civil services examination is conducted annually by the UPSC in three stages — preliminary, main and interview - to select officers for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS), among others. The civil services preliminary examination, 2024, is scheduled to be held on June 16.

In a statement, the UPSC said it has decided that candidates who have opted for Imphal centre, "can choose any of the 80 notified centres of the said examination". The move comes following a directive from the Delhi High Court in this regard on a petition filed by the Zomi Students Federation.

The option of change of centre for candidates who chose Imphal will be available on the website of the UPSC from April 8 to April 19, the commission said, adding the candidates may

also submit their request by calling toll-free helpline number (1800118711) on all working days from April 8 to 19 between 10 am and 5 pm.

The candidates can also send their centre change representations at the official e-mail address. "On receipt of centre change options from the willing candidates through any of the above modes, they will be allocated to the venues of their choice centres and accordingly, a message confirming the change of centres shall be sent to each such candidate on his/her registered mobile number," it added.

The e-admit cards to these candidates will be available for downloading from the UPSC's website along with other eligible candidates of the civil services preliminary examination, 2024, around a week before the date of examination, the UPSC added.

At least 219 people have been killed in ethnic strife in Manipur since May last year. The violence erupted on May 3 after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.

Nagpur based startup gets approval for early cancer detection study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Nagpur-based biotech Startup ErlySign has announced a significant milestone in the fight against cancer with approval from the Indian regulatory agency CDSCO (Central Drugs Standard Control Organization) for its active salivary biomarker study designed for early cancer detection.

Following a comprehensive year-long investigation and based on in-house validation data of 150 test samples, the CDSCO has granted permission to ERLYSIGN to proceed with large-scale clinical trials, said the startup in a statement.

Notably, during the initial studies, ERLYSIGN's active salivary biomarker study showcased remarkable performance, demonstrating a sensitivity of 98% and an unparalleled specificity of 100%.

The proprietary technology developed by ERLYSIGN promises to revolutionise cancer detection through its advanced approach. Patents have been secured in both the United States and India for its



Oral Cancer detection kit while Lung Cancer Detection Kit awaits the patent nod.

The oral cancer detection kit streamlines the testing process, allowing multiple tests to be processed within a mere 15-20 minutes, it said.

"Our mission at ERLYSIGN is to provide an easy, accurate, affordable, and painless solution for early cancer detection," says CEO of ERLYSIGN Shubhendra Singh Bhakur. "Our active salivary biomarker study, now approved by CDSCO, marks a significant step towards achieving this goal. With our technology, individuals can now detect precancerous conditions even before the appearance of any oral lesion or tumour formation, empowering proactive intervention and potentially saving countless lives" he further added.

Researchers develop nanosensor for quick detection of Cytokine proteins

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Jodhpur researchers have developed a nanosensor that helps in the quick detection of Cytokines, a group of proteins that regulate various cells. This development aims to reduce the mortality rate occurring due to delayed diagnosis and a lack of early warnings, according to a statement here.

Moreover, the technology has immense potential to be used as a rapid and point-of-care technique for health monitoring, disease diagnosis, prognosis, and immune response tracking.

Cytokines are one of the many biomarkers of inflammation that are used for diagnosing diseases and tracking their progression. They play an important role in tissue damage repair, cancer development and progression, and modulating immune reactions. This is why they are important for developing precision medicine and targeted therapeutics for various conditions like oncology, infectious and rheumatological diseases, among others.

The work was published by Akilandeswari B, Department

of Bioscience and Bioengineering, Sarvar Singh, Department of Electrical Engineering, Prof. Ajay Agarwal, Head, Department of Electrical Engineering, and Prof. Sushmita Jha, Department of Bioscience and Bioengineering at IIT Jodhpur as a conference proceeding of 2023 IEEE Applied Sensing Conference (APSCON).

Talking about the developed technique and its future scope, Prof. Ajay Agarwal, Department of Electrical Engineering, IIT Jodhpur, said, "This technique which is currently in its development stage has provided exciting and encouraging results for three biomarkers i.e. interleukin-6 (IL-6), interleukin-B (IL-B), and TNF- α which are key pro-inflammatory cytokines, released by inflammatory cells. "As of now, the testing is done for controlled samples, but the team aims to take the technology to clinical trials soon. The group is also using this technique to develop detection protocols for the early-stage and quick diagnosis of Sepsis and Fungal infections."

This novel sensor uses Surface Enhanced Raman Spectroscopy to detect analytes even at low concentrations, is

based on semiconductor process technology and works on the principle of Surface Enhanced Raman Scattering (SERS).

Hence, it makes this technique powerful and capable of detecting trace-level molecules with high precision and selectivity. The most widely used techniques currently for cytokine detection are enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) and polymerase chain reaction (PCR). These methods are reliable but highly time-consuming, requiring trained personnel and a long sample preparation or analysis time of over 6 hours. However, the sensor developed by IIT Jodhpur takes only 30 minutes in comparison and is also cost effective.

The developed sensor, a rapid and selective diagnostic technique, is used in conjunction with AI for quick and accurate data processing and analysis. By getting a faster and more robust diagnosis of a person's autoimmune diseases and bacterial infections, this sensor possesses the capability to transform a patient's medical treatment. This way, a patient's disease can be diagnosed and tracked promptly to guide the future course of treating them, said the statement.

Former Union Minister quits BJP, to join Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Union Minister Birender Singh on Monday said he has quit the BJP and will join the Congress, the move coming almost a month after his son Brijendra Singh joined the grand old party. His wife Prem Lata Singh -- a former BJP MLA from Haryana -- also quit the party.

"I have resigned from the primary membership of the BJP and sent my resignation to party chief J P Nadda. My wife, Prem Lata, who was an MLA from 2014-2019, has also quit the party. Tomorrow (Tuesday), we will join the Congress," Birender Singh (78), a prominent political figure in Haryana, told reporters in Delhi.

After quitting the BJP, Birender Singh also met Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda in Delhi. Birender Singh joined the BJP nearly 10 years ago after an over four-decade stint with the Congress.

After his son joined the Congress on March 10, there was speculation that Birender Singh would follow suit. Birender Singh was Union steel minister in the first gov-

ernment led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He also held charge as minister of rural development, Panchayati Raj, and drinking water and sanitation.

During the agitation against the now-repealed farm laws, Birender Singh had extended his support to the farmers. Birender Singh -- who also served as a minister in the Congress government led by Hooda in Haryana -- is the grandson of Sir Chhotu Ram, considered as a "messiah of farmers".

Asked why he quit the BJP, Birender Singh said he had been with the Congress for 42 years but left to join the saffron party in 2014 due to "certain reasons".

"When I joined BJP, I knew the ideology of this party would be different and there would be some differences between the ideologies of the two parties.

Later on, I experienced that there was a wider gap," he said. "During my political career, I connected with people who remained dedicated supporters," said Singh, indicating that this was not recognised by the BJP in the manner it should have been.

On the farmers' agitation, Birender Singh said he had raised the issue on party platforms and urged that their grievances be resolved. "I felt that while I was giving suggestions, those were not being heeded," he said.

Responding to another question, he said, "I have said that I may not be in electoral politics but I will continue to be politically active as long as I can." Birender Singh said he also felt the BJP should have heeded his suggestion to snap ties with the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) several months ago and added that the decision should not have been delayed.

"I had said that if the BJP continued to have an alliance with the JJP, then Birender Singh would not be part of the BJP," he added.

When Birender Singh joined the BJP, it was with the idea that he would remain in the party for the rest of his life, she said. However, some developments such as the farmers' agitation took place during which Birender Singh stood in favour of the farmers, she said.

In his mind, he believes the farmers' issues have not been fully resolved even today, she added.

CDS Chauhan underlines need for joint culture in Armed forces

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With rapidly changing nature of warfare, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Monday underlined the need for developing a joint culture for the armed forces.

Making this assertion at the first day long Tri-Service conference 'Parivartan Chintan,' here he also stressed upon the need to integrate the capabilities of each service by creating structures that increase our efficiency and enhance our war fighting ability and interoperability.

The CDS initiated the 'Chintan' by highlighting the need for developing a Joint Culture for the Armed Forces, which while respecting the uniqueness of each service, distils the best of each service to give a de-novo approach to traditional concepts.

The Tri-service Conference, 'Parivartan Chintan,' was curated as a brainstorming and idea incubation discussion to generate new and fresh ideas, initiatives and reforms to further propel Jointness and Integration in the Armed Forces.

Jointness and Integration are the cornerstones of the transformation to Joint Structures which the Indian Armed forces are progressing towards with the intention of being "Future Ready". The Conference was attended by Heads of the Andaman and Nicobar



Command and Strategic Forces Command, Commandants of National Defence Academy, Defence Services Staff College, College of Defence Management and Military Institute of Technology as well as Heads of the Armed Forces Special Operations Division, Defence Space Agency, Defence Cyber Agency and the Defence Communication Agency. The brainstorming was orchestrated by the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff.

Officers from all the three Services and Headquarters IDS, with diverse service experience also attended the discussion and contributed ideas towards initiating the next generation of reforms related to modernisation, procurement, training, adaptation and collaboration while embracing emerging and innovative technologies. Inputs on National Strategic Issues impacting National Security in both the civil and military domains were also deliberated upon.

Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman, Chiefs

of Staff Committee (CISC) Lt General J P Mathew in his closing remarks expressed confidence that such interactions will provide the necessary guidelines as Joint Operational Structures evolve to transform to a Future Ready Indian Armed Forces.

The first-of-the-kind conference primarily delved into various aspects relating to the implementation of the government's ambitious initiative to roll out theatre commands which were conceived as part of big-ticket defence reforms. It is learnt that each of the three services put across their work in line with the overall policy approach to ensure jointness.

The roadmap for the theaterisation initiative also figured in the discussions.

According to the theatre commands plan, each of the theatre commands will have units of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force and all of them will work as a single entity looking after security challenges in a specified geographical territory.

Be ready for black swan events, expect unexpected: Army chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Monday called upon the force to be always prepared for 'black swan' events and "expect the unexpected" even as he identified technology as the new area for strategic competition among nations.

A black swan event is a high-impact event that is difficult to predict. Making this assertion in an address at the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, he highlighted the weaponisation of technology, especially its extension across various domains - from information to supply chains.

The Army Chief emphasised the importance of cross-functional synergy among the three services to effectively assess threats, articulate strategies, identify capabilities, formulate policies, achieve preparedness, and respond appropriately within the national security framework.

He further delved into the expansion of warfare into new domains, including space, cyber, electromagnetic spectrum and information technology, sources in the Army headquarters here said.

General Pande noted the rapid technological advancement in kinetic war instruments, saying it has made the battlefield increasingly complex, contested, and lethal. He urged the officers to be always prepared for 'black swan' events and "expect the unexpected." The Army



Chief pointed out the emergence of new trends triggered by this rapid change, underscoring how disruptive technologies are reshaping conventional combat force ratios. Highlighting India's ascent on the global stage, Pande stressed the growing need to safeguard India's national interests across expanding strategic horizons.

The Army Chief called for strategic balance, underscoring the necessity for India to be strong and self-reliant in defence capabilities.

He also shed light on the Indian Army's ongoing "transformative initiatives", particularly emphasising the forces' approach in making 2024 the "year of technology absorption".

He highlighted the key areas of focus in the process and said it includes aligning and synergizing technology at strategic, operational, and tactical levels within existing systems. Under the new initiative, map-

ping futuristic and emerging technologies as drivers of military technology is a priority, he said, adding strengthening the defence technology ecosystem to maintain a lead in the military technology curve is another focus area.

The Army Chief said the force is ensuring that acquisition and procurement facilitates the seamless induction of technology and it fosters "techno warriors and commanders".

He was addressing the faculty and officers of the 79th Staff Course, including 36 officers from friendly foreign nations. His address covered critical topics such as national security, the geostrategic landscape and emerging trends, and the Indian Army's transformational initiatives.

Addressing the geo-strategic landscape and emerging trends, Pande highlighted the unprecedented scale and speed of change in the current global arena.

78 per cent birds cannot thrive in modified human dominated environments, says research

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A team of researchers has flagged concerns that nearly 78 per cent of the world's bird species are unable to thrive in highly modified human-dominated environments, underscoring the urgent need for conservation efforts to protect avian biodiversity. This new research comes in the backdrop of the existing statistic that notes that 14 per cent of the world's 11,000 bird species are already threatened

with extinction. Conservation actions targeted towards preserving and restoring habitats for sensitive bird species are crucial to prevent further population declines and safeguard the ecological balance. The study is published in the international science journal Global Ecology and Biogeography, and it was a joint effort of researchers from the University of Helsinki (Finland), Aarhus University (Denmark), University of St Andrews (UK), and the Institute for Mediterranean Studies (Spain). "Threatened species, and species with declining populations, are less tolerant to breeding in human-dominated habitats. For example, the Fern Wren, a species occurring only in tropical forests of northeastern Australia, is endangered, has a declining population and a very low tolerance to any human pressure," said Emma-Liina Marjakangas, leader of the study affiliated at both University of Helsinki and Aarhus University.

However, not all species are as sensitive to living alongside humans. "Some species can tolerate even the most intense human pressures on all continents. Common Swifts are an example of such species that can be found breeding in urban areas all around the world," explained Marjakangas.

Following the UN's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, goals have been set to protect 30 per cent of the Earth's land for conservation, but not much of that percentage will be pristine habitat.

"This study enables us to identify species that are particularly sensitive to human activity and need more protected habitats to thrive, for example the Great Snipe in Europe, the Nkulungu Rail in Africa and the Hume's Lark in Asia. Conservation action to protect or restore habitat can then be targeted towards the species and locations that need it most, explains senior curator Aleksi Lehikoinen from the Finnish Museum of Natural History in Finland.

Europe and North America had higher proportions of human-tolerant bird species than Latin America and Africa did. Europe has a long history of environmental impacts spanning millennia, which, according to the researchers, may have resulted in historical disappearances of sensitive species and also in a long time frame for the remaining species to adapt to the gradually changing landscapes.

Corrupt Congress overlooked needs of poor: Modi

PTI ■ RAIPUR/JAGDALPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday hit out at the opposition Congress, saying it overlooked needs of the poor for decades since Independence and never understood their pain. Addressing the BJP's 'Vijay Sankalp Sankhna' rally in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, which will go to polls on April 19, he also said the Congress manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections has the imprint of the Muslim League. During the Congress regime, corruption had become the country's identity, and the party thought it had a licence to loot, he said. "Since Independence, the Congress overlooked needs of the poor for decades and never understood their pain," the PM said. "People said what will happen to the poor during the

COVID-19 pandemic, but I said I will give free vaccine and ration to them," he said, adding that "due to my government's efforts, 25 crore people have risen above the poverty line." Speaking at the rally in Chhote Ambal village, held in support of BJP candidates Mahesh Kashyap (Bastar) and Bhojraj Nag (Kanker), Modi said it is the poor that suffers most due to corruption. "Corruption destroys the rights of the poor. Before 2014, scams worth several lakh crore rupees were committed," he said, adding that former PM Rajiv Gandhi himself had admitted just 15 paise out of every rupee allotted for development work reached the rightful beneficiary. "Whose claws snatched the remaining 85 paise? Modi has cancelled this licence of loot of the Congress. The BJP government has sent Rs 34



lakh crore directly into the bank accounts of the beneficiaries in the last 10 years. Every rupee sent from Delhi has reached cent per cent to the poor," Modi said. Had the Congress been in power now and the 15 paise

tradition continued, then Rs 28 lakh crore of this Rs 34 lakh crore would have been embezzled, the prime minister said. He managed to cancel this licence to loot because the people gave him the power to do so, the PM asserted.

Targeting the Congress over a statement of Chhattisgarh's Leader of Opposition Charan Das Mahant, the PM said the opposition party started abusing him when he ended their loot. But he was fully protected from such abuse

because "crores of my countrymen, my mothers and sisters have become my 'raksha kavach' (protective shield)," the PM said. Since strict action is being taken against corruption carried out by the previous (Congress) government, including against those who duped the state's youth, the opposition party's leaders are saying that his head should be broken with sticks, Modi told the gathering. "Modi is not afraid of such threats. For Modi, my India is my family. I am busy in saving my country and my family from being looted. I call bhraastachar hatao (remove corruption) and they say bhraastachari bachao (save the corrupt)," the PM said. Modi said the Congress and other opposition parties were holding rallies to save the corrupt but they must understand that wrongdoers

will go to jail no matter how much they threaten him. "This is Modi's guarantee," the prime minister said. Slamming the Congress and other INDIA bloc constituents for declining the invite to the idol consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, Modi said, "Ram Navami festival is not far away. This time people will have a glimpse of our Ram Lalla in Ayodhya in a grand temple not in a tent." He added it was natural for people of Chhattisgarh, the "nanihal" (birthplace of maternal grandparents) of Lord Ram, to be most happy on this dream (of a grand temple) being fulfilled after 500 years. "The Congress and INDIA bloc are very angry with the construction of Ram temple. The 'royal family' of Congress rejected the invitation for the consecration of Ram temple.

The Congress leaders who considered this move wrong were expelled from the party. Those who attended were expelled from the party for six years," Modi said. It showed the Congress can go to any extent for appeasement, Modi said. Modi highlighted the work his government had done for tribals in the past 10 years and said the segment was always the BJP's priority. "The daughter of the tribal community is today the country's President. It is BJP that has given Chhattisgarh a tribal chief minister. The BJP government has created a separate ministry and a separate budget for tribals," Modi asserted. Elections to 11 Lok Sabha seats in the state will be held in three phases on April 19, April 26 and May 7. Bastar Lok Sabha is the lone constituency to go to polls in the first phase.

Congress should seek apology from people for injustice: Marandi

PTI ■ RANCHI

Jharkhand BJP president Babul Marandi on Monday launched a scathing attack on the Congress, accusing it of perpetrating injustice against the people of the country for over 50 years. Criticising Congress' Nyay Patra, the party's election manifesto, Marandi demanded an apology from the grand old party for its actions towards the citizens of the country. "The Congress unveiled the 'Nyay Patra' two days ago. However, before its release, the party should have apologised to the people of the country for the 'anyay (injustice)' it inflicted over the past 50-55 years," Marandi said during a press conference at the party headquarters. He highlighted the lack of basic amenities like roads and electricity in villages, emphasising that the poor and rural communities were deprived of LPG cylinders and bank accounts.

"Rural residents had to undertake arduous journeys for basic necessities. Even medical professionals couldn't reach villages due to the absence of roads. Lack of electricity also posed significant challenges. Despite being in power for many years, the Congress did little to address these issues," he remarked. Marandi claimed that when the BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, significant strides were made in infrastructure development. "Today, there's a network of roads connecting every village, and electricity reaches every household. LPG cylinders are now available in every home, and villagers have access to bank accounts," he noted. He highlighted India's rapid progress across various sectors such as automotive, pharmaceuticals, and defence. "In 2014, India was ranked 10th globally in terms of economy, but now it stands at fifth position," he added.

India borders now become safer under Modi: Yogi

PTI ■ MUMBAI/WARDHA

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday said during Narendra Modi's tenure as prime minister, India's borders have become safer and respect for the country has increased in the world. Speaking at a rally at Hinganghat town in Maharashtra's Wardha district, the UP CM asked the Congress if it could ever assemble the resolve to abrogate Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and abolish 'triple talaq'. Under PM Modi's leadership, the NDA govt wants to make India a global power, Adityanath said. The opposition, on the other hand, neither has a 'neta' (leader) nor 'niti' (policy) nor 'niyat' (intention) to take the country on the path of development, he claimed. "During Modi's tenure as PM, the country's borders have become safer, respect



for India has increased in world," he said. Adityanath said PM Modi was working on the 'Hindavi Swarajya' ideology of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to ensure citizens, especially daughters, of the country are protected, its 'aradhya dev' (deities) are respected and development reaches great heights.

Speaking about his government, Adityanath said Uttar Pradesh has a population of 25 crore and was known for riots and curfew before the BJP came to power in 2017. "Today, we have locked up curfew itself. There have been no riots in UP in the last seven years. In Maharashtra, three saints were killed in Palghar (during

the COVID lockdown). No one dare do this in UP because they know they will be hung upside down," Adityanath said. Adityanath hailed Modi for "giving Ram Lalla a place in Ayodhya after 500 years", a reference to the construction of the Ram Temple there. Citing a report of the Guardian newspaper about targeted killings of terrorists in Pakistan, Adityanath said the neighbouring nation is claiming that India is behind it. It just means terrorists are no longer safe in safe havens across the border, the UP CM added. Adityanath said Pakistan can longer dare to back anti-India terror due to the leadership of Modi and his resolve to carry out surgical strikes if required. He asked the crowd to ensure BJP candidate Ramdas Tadas retains Wardha, adding that the aim is to make Modi prime minister for a third term.

LS polls now fought on development: Gujarat CM

PTI ■ THARAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's performance in the last ten years has set a narrative of development for Lok Sabha elections which were earlier contested on the lines of caste and religion, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel said on Monday. Addressing a rally at Tharad town in Banaskantha district, Patel said people are now discussing when will India become the third largest economy in the world unlike in the past Lok Sabha elections when the issues of caste and religion took centre stage. "Earlier elections were fought based on caste and religion. After Narendra Modi came to power (in 2014), he changed the entire pattern of elections, and today, they are being fought on the issue of development," the chief

minister said. In the previous general elections, people used to express concern over the condition of the Indian economy, he said. "But over the last ten years after Modi came to power, people are now discussing when will we become the world's third-largest economy. They are even mentally preparing themselves for becoming the third largest economy," he said. It is Modi's guarantee that he will take our economy to the third position in his third term, Patel said. "The pace of development in the last ten years has increased significantly compared with the preceding decades," Patel said claiming 38,650 km of railway line network was electrified between 2014-2023 as against the electrification of 21,802 km network between 1947 and 2014.

Congress committed scams in all three worlds: Nadda

PTI ■ RAMPUR (UP)

BJP president JP Nadda on Monday came down heavily on the Congress, accusing it of committing scams in all the three worlds and said the party did not spare the sky, underground and water. Addressing an election rally in Rampur on Monday in favour of the BJP candidates, Nadda attacked the INDIA bloc and said, "Modi ji is saying to end corruption and that none of the corrupt persons will be spared. All of them will go to jail." Further quoting Modi, he said the 'gathbandhan' (alliance) is saying that the corrupt should be "saved" and they are "engaged" in it. "Did the Congress not commit the coal scam? Did the Congress not commit CWG scam, 2G scam, 3G scam, Augusta Westland scam, submarine scam?" he said. In other words, the opposition bloc committed scams in all the three "loks" (worlds), Nadda said. "They did not spare the 'nabh' (sky), 'paatal' (below the surface of the Earth) and 'jal' (water). The Congress committed corruption in the three worlds," he said. He also alleged that Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav committed the laptop scam, the Gomti (river) front scam and foodgrain scam.



Similarly, senior RJD leader Lalu Prasad committed fodder scam and job in lieu of land scam, he further alleged. Attacking DMK leader and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, the BJP chief said, "Do you know that the income of Stalin is Rs 1.32 lakh crore. There is no source of this income. (Former Jharkhand chief minister) Hemant Soren of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) also committed the scam. "Has (Delhi Chief Minister) Arvind Kejriwal not committed the liquor scam? This 'ghamandiya' (arrogant) alliance is nothing but an alliance of the corrupt people," he said. Nadda also said former Congress presidents Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi, senior Congress leader P Chidambaram, the DMK ministers and the ministers of the Mamta Banerjee government are on bail. He asked the audience whether Soren, Kejriwal, AAP

leaders Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain, TMC ministers, KCR's daughter K Kavitha and veteran SP leader from Rampur Azam Khan are in jail or not. "All these leaders of the 'ghamandiya' alliance are either on bail or in jail," he said. Listing the 'parivarvadi' (dynastic) parties, he said, "Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi; rest of it (in Congress) is full stop. In the National Conference (NC), there are Omar Abdullah and Farooq Abdullah; in the PDP, there are (late) Mufti Mohammad and Mehbooba Mufti; in Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), there was Parkash Singh Badal, and now there is Sukhbir Badal; and there is the Chautala family." After Mulayam Singh Yadav, it was Akhilesh Yadav and then Dimple (Yadav). They have even left 'chacha' (Shivpal Yadav), rest of it is full stop, he said, and cited the examples of Lalu Yadav-Rabri Devi-Tejashwi Yadav-Tej Pratap, Mamta Banerjee and (her nephew) Abhishek Banerjee, KCR - KTR - Kavitha, Karunanidhi-MK Stalin-Udhayanidhi and Uddhav Thackeray and Aditya. "There are Sharad Pawar and Supriya Sule. They have pushed away Ajit Pawar," he said. "They have to save their families and indulge in corruption," Nadda said.

Modi has changed the 'dhaara' (wave) and culture of politics. Now, there is the politics of development, he said. "When some people tried to divide the country on the caste lines, Modi ji said he will move on the path of GYAN, where G stands for 'gareeb' (poor), Y stands for 'yuva' (youth), A for 'annadata' (farmers) and N for 'nari shakti' (women power). If their power increases, then the country moves forward," Nadda said. He also said, "The 2024 election... Is an election for the development of the country. It is an election to develop the country. Earlier, vote bank politics was done by dividing people. But, Modi ji changed the definition of politics." Today, there is no vote bank politics but there is only politics of development, he said.

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As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Vellatur Sudhakar/ Vellatur Subbalakshmi/ LBTEEN00005198416	Guntur District, Tenali West Sub District, Angalakuduru Grama Panchayath Area In Angalakuduru Village D. No.322/3, 322/4 In Two D. Numbers Land Is Contiguous And As Per Plan Plot No. 1 Site Is Bounded By: East: Plot No. 8 Site-30'-09", South: 18 Ft. Wide Panchayath Road-30'-06", West: 18 Ft. Wide Panchayath Road-30'-09", North: Plot No. 2 Site Of Unmudi Lakshmi-31'-09", Within These Boundaries An Extent Of 106.34 Sq. Yds. Or 88.91 Sq. Mts. And In That Ground Floor, R C C Daba And With All Other Amenities Along With All Access Rights And Easementary Rights. Property With Door No. 5-136, Panchayath Assessment No. 824/ Symbolic Possession On 04.04.2024	27.12.2023 21,46,108.00/-	Guntur

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.
Date: April 09, 2024 Place: Gurgaon
Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. (CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029) ("Secured Creditor"), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 13.05.2024 from 05.00 P.M. to 06.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 1,06,08,482/- (Rupees One Crore Six Lakh Eight Thousand Four Hundred Eighty Two Only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLNOD00253039, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 04.04.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 05.04.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from BIRENDER SINGH RANA and HEMA RANA.
The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 72,00,000/- (Rupees Seventy Two Lakh only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 7,20,000/- (Rupees Seven Lakh Twenty Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
FLAT NO. B-1402, SUPER AREA 1180 SQ. FT., 14TH FLOOR, TOWER B, SUPERTECH HUES, REVENUE ESTATE, VILLAGE - BADSHAHPUR, SECTOR - 68, GURUGRAM, HARYANA - 122001.
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshome loans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in
Date : 04.04.2024 Authorized officer
Place : GURUGRAM Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

PUBLIC NOTICE
Countrywide Promoters Private Limited
Regd. Office OT-14, 3rd Floor, Next Door, Parklands, Sector -76, Faridabad, Haryana-121004
Phone No.: 0120-4492-650 website: www.btp.com

This Public Notice is being issued in compliance with Memo No. LC-1147B-/PA(SK)-2024/9291 dated 13.03.2024 issued by the District Town Planner (HQ), office of Directorate of Town & Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh ("DTCP").
WHEREAS, License No. 162 of 2008 dated 19.08.2008 was granted by DTCP to Countrywide Promoters Private Limited and others to develop the IT Park ("Project") on the land measuring 5.02 acres. Now, on an application for migration of undeveloped IT Park, the DTCP has issued the Letter of Intent vide its Memo No. LC-1147B-/PA(SK)-2024/9291 dated 13.03.2024 for the grant of an additional licence for setting up of residential group housing colony over an additional area measuring 3.45 acres situated in Sector-66, Gurugram, Haryana as an addition of license No. 31 of 2008 dated 18.02.2008.
AND WHEREAS, in view of the above, DTCP has directed us to invite objections from existing allottees (if any) of the IT Park Project informing existing allottees of the said IT Park Project regarding the proposed migration of land 3.45 acres (out of 5.02 acres). We wish to inform that we have not taken any booking for any unit in the IT Park Project nor any project registration certificate under the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 ever received for the Project, the said Project was never launched and no third party right has been created in the IT Park Project or units proposed to be constructed therein.
Accordingly, out of abundant caution, by this Public Notice, we are inviting objections from the existing allottees of the IT Park Project (License No. 162 of 2008 dated 19.08.2008) with respect to the migration of licensed land from IT park to residential usage, despite the fact that no booking or sale has been accepted by us.
A copy of the earlier approved Site Plan duly showing the proposed migration (being approved in principle) is available on our website i.e. "www.btp.com" and the same can also be perused at the Site Office at Sector-66, Gurugram, Haryana as well as in the office of the Senior Town Planner, HSPV Complex, Sector 14, Gurugram, Haryana.
Any existing allottee of any unit in the IT Park Project (approved under License No. 162 of 2008 dated 19.08.2008) having any objection to the proposed migration of land, may file his/her objection in the office of Senior Town Planner, HSPV Complex, Sector-14, Gurugram, Haryana within 30 days from the date of publication of this notice, failing which it shall be presumed that there is no objection to the proposed migration.
Place: GURUGRAM Rohit Mohan
Date: 09.04.2024 For Countrywide Promoters Private Limited

DMK, Congress owe explanation on Katchatheevu: Thakur

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Anurag Thakur on Monday sought an explanation from the DMK and Congress about "ceding" Katchatheevu islet to Sri Lanka in 1974 and asked the parties to "come out clean" on the issue. Taking exception to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin's criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Thakur asked why Stalin was

"shivering" at the prospect of Modi's visit to the state. Speaking to reporters here, Thakur commented that on the one hand, the Prime Minister was giving a lot to the fishermen including subsidies, policies, and programmes but on the other hand the DMK and Congress have given away Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka. "They should come out open and respond to this. Who is responsible for giving Katchatheevu to Lanka? Why are the DMK and Congress

silent on this? Why have they given an important piece of land to Sri Lanka and hurt the sentiments of fishermen and Tamils," Thakur asked. The chief minister's statements on Modi showed how "nervous" he was over Modi coming to Tamil Nadu. "Why is he shivering? He must be happy over the visit because the people of Tamil Nadu love the prime minister who loves Tamil Nadu, its rich culture, tradition history," the minister said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Stepping back

Signalling a potential shift in conflict dynamics, Israel to withdraw troops from south Gaza

After six months of ongoing conflict and the resultant humanitarian crisis, there are signs that the intensity of the Gaza conflict is on the wane. After the death toll mounted to 32,000 and 75,000 people were injured, besides 75 per cent of the population forcibly displaced, Israel has announced the withdrawal of its troops from southern Gaza. Marking a potential turning point in the ongoing strife between Israel and the Hamas, the decision comes amid mounting international pressure to de-escalate the situation. Caught in the crossfire, civilians have borne the major brunt of the bombardment, enduring unimaginable trauma and suffering. As Israel begins troop withdrawal, it is imperative to reflect on the human cost of war and the urgent need for a sustainable resolution. Throughout the conflict, civilians in south Gaza have faced relentless airstrikes, shelling and ground incursions, leading to a staggering loss of lives. The indiscriminate nature of the attacks has left families shattered, homes reduced to rubble and communities torn apart. Even hospitals have not been spared. On the Israeli side, communities near the Gaza border have lived under the constant threat of rocket attacks launched by the Hamas and its sympathiser militant groups. Besides, the war has deepened existing wounds and entrenched animosities on both sides. Decades of unresolved grievances and territorial disputes have fuelled cycles of violence, making it increasingly challenging to break the cycle of conflict and build trust between the sides.



Israel's troop withdrawal decision apparently stems from a confluence of immediate factors, reflecting both internal and external pressures. Among these, two events have played a significant role in shaping Israel's decision. One, the attack on aid workers on April 1 served as a catalyst for heightened international scrutiny and condemnation. The attack sparked outrage and prompted calls for accountability, amplifying pressure on Israel to reassess its military strategy and prioritise diplomatic solutions. Two, widespread protests against Prime Minister Netanyahu within Israel have added to the domestic pressure for change. The demonstrations, which have been going on for months, reflect growing discontent with Netanyahu's leadership. Meanwhile, Gaza continues to grapple with a severe humanitarian crisis, characterised by widespread poverty, food insecurity and lack of sanitation and healthcare facilities. There is now a glimmer of hope for respite from the bloodshed. However, the road to lasting peace remains fraught with challenges. Both Israel and the Hamas must demonstrate a genuine commitment to dialogue, negotiation and compromise to address the root causes. In addition to diplomatic efforts, the international community has a critical role in supporting peace-building initiatives and providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict. The withdrawal must be accompanied by sustained efforts to address the grievances of all parties involved and ensure that the cycle of violence is not perpetuated.

PICTALK



Women perform rituals as they offer prayers on the occasion of 'Somvati Amavasya', in Bhopal

Advantage BJP in UP following Ansari's exit



SIDHARTH MISHRA

The silence of those feeling relieved at the mafia don's death is much louder than those grieving it

It is often said that sometimes silence is more deafening than cranking noise. At the burial of mafia don-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari in Mohammadabad of Ghazipur district of eastern Uttar Pradesh, there was an estimated crowd of around 30,000 mourners, or more perhaps, who raised the slogan of "mafia nahi messiah hain" (he was not a mafia, he was a messiah). Similar moments of outbursts, although not of the same magnitude, were witnessed when another mafia-don-turned-politician of Uttar Pradesh Atiq Ahmed was killed.

Top Uttar Pradesh Opposition leaders, meanwhile, have demanded a high-level investigation into the death of the jailed gangster-turned politician Mukhtar Ansari, with the Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav even calling for an investigation under the supervision of a Supreme Court Judge. Similarly, with an eye on minority votes, four-time former UP CM and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati, too, has demanded a high-level investigation into the death in view of the serious allegations by the family of the deceased that he was in fact poisoned.

Opposition leaders have alleged that Uttar Pradesh is going through the worst phase of 'government anarchy'. To which, many residing in the State may not agree. Ansari, for decades, was regarded as one of eastern UP's most dreaded gangsters, a reign that involved deadly rivalries with other gangster-politicians, some of whom he and his associates have been accused or convicted of having assassinated. He was lodged in different prisons in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh since 2005, when he was first arrested for inciting violence.

His political career saw him represent the Mau Vidhan Sabha seat for five terms, winning it for the first time as a Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) candidate. He was subsequently expelled from the party but continued to win the seat — in 2002 and 2007 —



as an independent, and in 2012 under the banner of his party Quami Ekta Dal — before he rejoined the BSP in 2017. In 2022, his son took over from the father and contested and won the Mau Vidhan Sabha seat. The silence of those feeling relieved at the death of Ansari is much louder than those grieving it. Although there are no indications of the State being involved in the death of the jailed politician, the silent masses are giving credit to the resolute administration of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for the mafia don exiting the political scene ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. Ansari was accused in 63 criminal cases, including 14 of murder. These cases remained pending in the court of law till Yogi Adityanath came to power as Chief Minister in 2017. Slowing the legal process gained pace and Ansari was convicted and sentenced in eight of these since September 2022. Among the most high profile of these cases were the murders of then sitting Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA



IN THE STATE WHICH GIVES 80 MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO THE 545-STRONG LOK SABHA, THE DETERMINATION OF THE PRESENT CHIEF MINISTER TO EXTERMINATE GANGSTERS HAS TO A GREAT EXTENT RESTORED PEOPLE'S FAITH IN THE LAW AND ORDER MACHINERY

Krishnanand Rai in 2005 and Awadesh Rai (brother of current Uttar Pradesh Congress president Ajay Rai) in 1991. The battle between the Rais (not directly related) and the Ansaris was about hegemony in the award of the Government contracts and the huge profits it brought. The garnering of the contracts needed use of terror and if missed out, unleashing threats of extortion. The gang wars were not limited to just the Ghazipur district but spread their tentacles to almost all the districts of Uttar Pradesh, east of the State capital of Lucknow. In the State which gives 80 Members of Parliament to the 545-strong Lok Sabha, the determination of the present Chief Minister to exterminate gangsters has to a great extent restored people's faith in the law and order machinery. Silent accolades for a Government into the seventh year of its rule, is bound to reap a huge political harvest. The death of Mukhtar Ansari may have made things more difficult for the Samajwadi Party-led Opposition. It will not bring any fresh consignment of minority votes, as they stand already consolidated behind them, but it would certainly send a firm message to law-abiding citizens about the 'effectiveness' of the Yogi Adityanath Government. There are still images in the minds of the local residents of Ansari moving around in an open vehicle, flaunting firearms in a communally affected town under curfew. Government bulldozers pulling down concrete emblems of Ansari's empire — events that preceded his death — restored people's faith and belief in the Government machinery. Yogi Adityanath's bulldozers may, at times, seem to have crossed the line but they have been largely effective in restoring a sense of confidence in even among those who may not have been much swayed by the passion surrounding the inauguration of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. Therefore, Ansari, in his death, may give just that decisive advantage to the BJP in Uttar Pradesh.

(The writer is a political analyst and President, Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AAP LEADERS PROTEST

Madam — Apropos the news article "AAP leaders hold collective fast at Delhi's Jantar Mantar to protest against Kejriwal's arrest" published on April 7, this is my response. Top leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convened at Jantar Mantar for a day-long fast, condemning the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). The gesture, backed by scores of supporters, echoed nationwide and abroad, with protests spanning from Boston to London. Asserting Kejriwal's integrity amidst accusations, AAP leaders vowed to combat what they perceive as BJP's authoritarianism. The imagery of Kejriwal behind bars adorned the stage, flanked by portraits of national icons.

The fast served not only as a protest but also as a call to action for AAP supporters to secure victory in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Atishi, a Delhi minister, accused the BJP of tyranny, promising electoral repercussions. As the fast concluded, AAP leaders emphasised resilience against perceived political persecution. They pledged to challenge the BJP's dominance, rallying supporters both domestically and internationally.

Khirabdi | Noida

TALIBAN'S OMINOUS AGENDA

Madam — Apropos the news article "Afghanistan under Taliban rule" published on April 6, this is my response. The Taliban's recent rhetoric, threatening to impose barbaric punishments on Afghan women, underscores their relentless assault on human rights. Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada's vitriolic remarks, vowing public floggings and stonings for alleged adultery, reveal a disturbing escalation in their oppressive tactics. Akhundzada's diatribe not only signals further atrocities against Afghan women but also exposes the Taliban's deep-seated animosity towards Western democracies. His depiction of Western representatives as "the devils" epitomises their extremist ideology. Moreover, the Taliban's expedited imple-

No end to controversies



Apropos the news article "CAA: Why the hulla-balloo?" published on April 7, this is my response. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) has become a pivotal juncture in India's legislative landscape, altering citizenship acquisition for religious minorities. Enacted in 2019, it notably reduces the residency requirement for certain groups from neighbouring countries seeking Indian citizenship. This legislation, however, has sparked widespread debate and protests, both domestically and internationally, primarily due to

its exclusion of Muslims and the timing of its introduction vis-a-vis elections. Critics argue that it violates constitutional principles of equality. The Supreme Court is now deliberating on various aspects of the CAA, including its constitutionality and potential repercussions. While proponents assert its necessity for addressing the plight of persecuted communities, opponents question its discriminatory nature and its compatibility with India's secular ethos. Amidst this legal and societal discourse, international reactions, notably from American Senator Ben Cardin, have further intensified scrutiny on India's internal policies, prompting robust defenses from Indian authorities. Ultimately, the fate of the CAA rests with the judiciary, reflecting the ongoing tension between upholding constitutional values and addressing humanitarian concerns.

Sarachana Desai | Narnaul

mentation of Sharia law across Afghanistan raises concerns about their broader ambitions. Akhundzada's ominous reference to a prolonged struggle suggests a potential expansion of their draconian rule beyond Afghanistan's borders, risking international conflict. Their systematic suppression of women's rights and collaboration with terrorist groups like al-Qaeda underscore the urgent need for global vigilance. As Afghanistan teeters on the brink of becoming a terrorist haven once again, the international community must confront the Taliban's reign of terror and stand in solidarity with Afghan women facing systemic oppression.

Jitu Majumdar | Kolkata

LAKHAMANDAL'S CHARM

Madam — Apropos the news article "Devotees marvel at reflective mystique of Lakhmandal Shivalinga" published on April 8, this is my response. Nestled merely a stone's throw away from Dehradun lies the enigmatic town of Lakhmandal, steeped in myth and spirituality. Echoing the grandeur of

Kedarnath, this sacred site boasts a myriad of Shivalingas, reminiscent of the Pandava's reverence in the Mahabharata. The Lakhmandal Temple, a testament to this divine legacy, proudly stands along the road to Yamunotri, its majestic Shivalinga drawing pilgrims and enthusiasts alike. Witnessing rituals of Jal Abhishek unveils a surreal spectacle: devotees glimpsing their reflections upon the Linga's surface, a testament to their unity with Lord Shiva. Yet, amidst the tranquility, lies a tale of rediscovery.

As whispers of its miraculous powers echo through the hills, Lakhmandal remains a beacon of spiritual enlightenment. Its intricate Nagara architecture and mythical narratives intertwine, inviting travellers to delve into its timeless allure. In the heart of Lakhmandal, where legends converge, lies a haven where the divine and mortal realms entwine, beckoning seekers from far and wide.

Neha Gupta | Delhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Ladakh's urgent cry for environmental protection



TSEWANG DOLMA

Activists in Ladakh, spurred by Sonam Wangchuk's climate fast, rally for urgent Government action to preserve the fragile environment

Ladakh has recently garnered attention due to Sonam Wangchuk's 21-day climate fast, followed by a 10-day fast by women advocating for Ladakh's statehood and the protection of its delicate Himalayan ecology. The primary objective is to urge the government to take decisive action to safeguard the fragile ecosystem of the Himalayan mountains in Ladakh, as well as the unique indigenous tribal cultures that flourish within its borders. Despite the pressing concerns of local residents regarding the fragile ecosystem of this snow desert, their voices have largely gone unheard by policymakers. Foremost among the challenges faced by Ladakhis is the looming water crisis. Diminished snowfall over the years, coupled with escalating consumption driven by the demands of tourism, has precipitated a severe water scarcity in the region.



Located on the banks of Indus River, Chuchot village is located approximately 18 kilometers from Leh's district headquarters. This village stands out as one of the rare few with improved irrigation systems supporting private farmland, supplied with water via channels connected to the Indus River. Unfortunately, this vital water supply is becoming increasingly contaminated, yet there is a glaring lack of monitoring efforts or plans to prevent its pollution. During a recent field visit to Chuchot, locals lamented the degradation of their water sources. They reminisced about drinking canal water during their childhood but now, due to contamination by tourists, they are forced to rely on jaljeewan water for drinking and cooking. Sadly, even this source is under threat due to rapidly receding glaciers, compounded by the influx of tourists who pollute the pristine waterways. The pollution of our water sources is primarily attributed

to inadequate sewage disposal practices. What was once recycled as manure is now flushed directly into our water bodies, rendering them unfit for use. With melting snow being our primary source of drinking water and low average rainfall exacerbating our reliance on glacier meltwater, Ladakh is facing an acute water crisis. However, amidst these challenges, there are glimmers of hope. Some villages have implemented water testing initiatives to ensure the safety of their water sources. Additionally, interventions like the Jaljeewan Mission have provided alternative water sources, mitigating the impact of water scarcity on communities. Yet, the role of local governance, represented by the

Sarpanch, is pivotal. It is imperative that all water management facilities are efficiently managed and maintained under their jurisdiction. However, freezing canals in winter and inadequate infrastructure pose additional challenges that must be addressed urgently. As a community, we must heed the warnings of environmentalists and activists who advocate for water conservation. The words of Nazer Husain, "Don't let the water run in the sink, our life's on the brink," resonate deeply. Water is indeed the essence of life, and it is incumbent upon us to protect and preserve it for future generations. In conclusion, the escalating threat of water pollution demands collective action and concerted efforts to safeguard our environment. Water conservation must become a cornerstone of our collective ethos, ensuring the sustainable future of Ladakh and its people. The voices of our people must be heard and respected.

(The Writer is a student at EJM College, Leh; views are personal. Charkha Features)



FIRST COLUMN

BATTLING CANCER AND EMOTIONAL TURMOIL

Yoga, pranayama and breathing techniques help in detoxifying the body



RAVI VALLURI

The grandparents were in possession of a ten-year visa for their annual trips to Europe and they were undergoing a medical check-up to be insured. An inconsolable mother rang up her sons in England and Holland to communicate that their father was suffering from cancer. The sons rushed to assuage the emotionally distraught parents. But where is the visa to combat cancer?

The father is currently undergoing chemotherapy and braving radiation therapy. The mother has been impacted psychologically and is a victim of innumerable ailments such as hypertension, high sugar levels, intermittent cough and has become a virtual nervous wreck.

"Why me?" Any patient will ask this question and it is gut-wrenching for the family to break the news. Cancer, also known as a malignant tumour or malignant neoplasm, is a group of diseases involving abnormal growth with the propensity to spread and ingress to other parts of the human body. The sun sign becomes an ailment!

The Geneva-based Union for International Cancer and Control, has around 800 members spread over 155 countries. The body emphatically alludes that early detection of the disease and palliative measures can challenge the sickness. WHO has analysed that there are around 7 lakh cancer deaths in India and around 10 lakh people contract the disease every year. Among women, claim oncologists breast cancer, cervical and ovarian cancer is extremely prevalent. Consumption of tobacco, smoking and excessive consumption of alcohol are other contributory factors which are leading to widespread increase in cancer.



The United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention describes tobacco use as 'the single most important preventable risk to human health in developed countries and an important cause of premature death worldwide'. Several countries have adopted stringent measures to control the consumption of tobacco with the usage and sale restrictions as well as bold warning messages printed on the packaging. Smoking causes cancers of the larynx and the mouth and hypertension, besides polluting the environment. Secondary smoking is equally debilitating for the passive smoker. WHO argues that cigarettes sold in underdeveloped countries tend to have higher tar content and are less likely to be filtered, potentially increasing the vulnerability of tobacco and smoking-related diseases. An anxious patient prays and hopes that the growth is benign. Sometimes, however, they are misplaced and the tumour is malignant. How is the news to be broken to the patient? It requires enormous skill and dexterity to reveal the truth to the patient and the family since both are under tremendous distress. Dr Ranjana Shrivastava, an oncologist from Australia, belabours that the news should be broken with extreme care, caution and a human touch. Apart from early detection and early cure, a change in lifestyle is fundamental in tackling this lethal disease.

Doctors arguably say no to smoking and advise the patient to refrain from alcohol. Individuals need to draw up a schedule of diet and exercise. Exercise releases endorphins that have an analgesic effect on the human body and mind. Practice of yoga (under a qualified practitioner), pranayama and breathing techniques such as Sudarshan Kriya help in detoxifying the human body. Whether diseased or healthy, humans should be surrounded by positive company and thoughts. Managing the mind to remain calm and contented provides roots to be mentally strong and sturdy. Reading inspiring literature of cancer survivors and their life stories acts as a lifeboat. "Time is shortening. But every day that I challenge this cancer, is a victory for me," said the talismanic actress Ingrid Bergman.

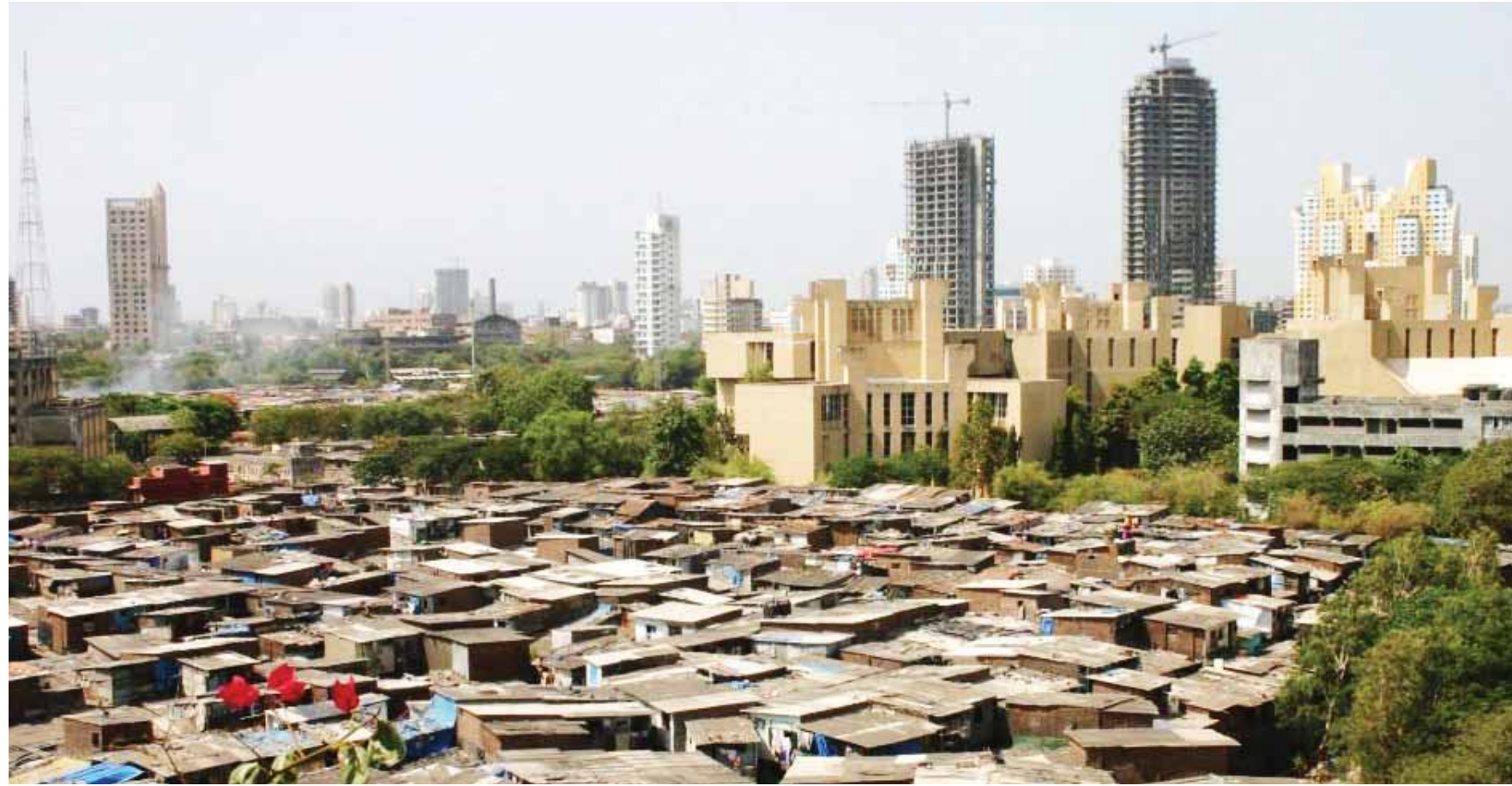
(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

India's wealth inequality is rising

The World Inequality Lab report says India's top one per cent of the population holds a staggering 40.1 per cent of the nation's wealth



AS MITTAL



In a diverse and democratic India, every citizen has an equal opportunity. A major global economic policy debate revolves around the pressing concern of wealth inequality in India. According to a recent research paper titled "Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj," released by The World Inequality Lab (WIL) at the Paris School of Economics, the top one percent of India's population held 40.1 per cent of the country's wealth in 2022-23, marking one of the highest levels globally.

At the 2023 annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, Oxfam International unequivocally released a report titled 'Survival of the Richest', revealing that the wealthiest one percent of individuals in India possess over 40 percent of the nation's total wealth. These findings have sparked significant concerns about the precision and influence of foreign research agencies' assessments of India's wealth inequality. The specific nature of these findings has had a profound global impact, singling out India's rapidly expanding economy. Clearly, the issue of wealth inequality demands a comprehensive examination and a far-reaching discourse.

The issue of wealth inequality is often discussed at the WEF summit in Davos, where influential individuals from various fields come together to address global challenges. While there may be doubts about the methodology and biases of these reports, they still provide insights for consideration and reflection. An individual's wealth is distinct from the wealth of the corporation they own. Corporate entities have various stakeholders, such as banks, shareholders, and financial agencies, and they also have liabilities. The wealth of a corporation



THE GOVERNMENT MUST ENSURE THAT EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAS A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO ACCESS RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP REDUCE POVERTY AND INEQUALITY. THE DEFINITION AND IDENTIFICATION OF BPL FAMILIES IN INDIA NEED TO BE RECONSIDERED

belongs to these stakeholders in proportion to their stakes.

There is a debate about why corporations' competitive returns on their large investments are being targeted for wealth inequality, and why there is advocacy for wealth and inheritance taxes. Corporations argue that they already pay their fair share of taxes, including Corporate Tax, Goods and Services Tax (GST), Import-Export Duties, and Income Tax. Furthermore, they claim to contribute to the economy by generating employment and fulfilling their corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Some people suggest restructuring the tax system to account for both income and wealth and imposing an additional 2 per cent super tax on the wealthiest individuals to address inequality and promote economic growth and job creation. However, proponents of this idea believe that corporate competitive growth is a natural phenomenon and contributes to the country's GDP growth. The export of goods and services as a percentage of GDP has increased from 6.3 per cent in 1984 to 22.79 per cent in 2022-23. This high growth has led to significant changes in the socio-economic fabric of civil society. Since liberalisation in the 1990s, the economy has become increasingly globalised. Before 1990, wealth creation in India was minimal, billionaires were rare, and extreme poverty was prevalent. However, today, billionaires are common, and extreme poverty is history. According to Forbes, the number of Indians with a net

wealth exceeding \$1 billion increased from just one in 1991 to 162 in 2022.

Why Corporates Are Being Targeted: It is a common but politically deliberated interpretation that corporations have exacerbated wealth inequality. There is a concern about the irrational international agencies catalysing conflict against Indian corporations, which are major contributors to the country's GDP and significant employers, especially when India ranks as the world's fifth-strongest economy.

It's important to note that existing inequalities based on gender, geography, ethnicity, race, caste, and religion already exist. Further disparities would not only harm our economy but also create a negative global public perception, hindering efforts to eradicate poverty. Extreme inequality is not inevitable and is often the result of political misgovernance, but it can be addressed through effective interventions.

When compared to many other countries, India is relatively better off in terms of income and wealth equality. Globally, the top one per cent of the richest individuals have accumulated 46 per cent of the world's wealth over the past two years. According to Credit Suisse's Global Wealth Report-2023, Russia has the highest wealth concentration, with the top one per cent holding 60 per cent of national wealth. Brazil's wealthiest one per cent holds 49.6 per cent, and in the USA, the top one per cent of households own 33 per cent of the country's wealth.

Way Forward: NITI Aayog claims that 25 crore citizens were lifted out of multidimensional poverty between 2013-14 and 2022-23, still around 23 crore below-poverty-line (BPL) families are there. The government's key task is to uplift the poor, and the support of the corporate is crucial for this. Creating enough well-paying jobs is essential for reducing poverty and inequality. However, much more needs to be done to make India a less unequal country.

The Government must ensure that every individual has a constitutional right to access resources that can help reduce poverty and inequality. The definition and identification of BPL families in India need to be reconsidered. The government should focus more on pro-poor policies for domestic resource mobilisation.

The latest updates from the World Poverty Clock indicate that extreme poverty in India has dropped to less than 3 per cent. It is imperative to address the perception of wealth inequality in the country, as reported by foreign research agencies. This raises questions about the government's commitment to poverty elimination, despite its much-touted slogan "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas." (The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman (Cabinet Minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council; views expressed are personal)

The unseen consequences of neglected eye care in women

Women's susceptibility to autoimmune conditions, often with visual implications and age-related hormonal fluctuations, underscores the urgency of eye care

Women, who typically live longer than men, are exposed to the risk of eye diseases for a more extended period, making them more susceptible to visual impairment and blindness. Reports indicate that two-thirds of all cases of blindness and visual impairment occur in women. This higher prevalence can be attributed to several factors. Women are more likely to suffer from autoimmune conditions, which often have visual side effects.

Additionally, regular age-related hormonal changes can affect women's eyes. For example, dry eye is more common in women, partly due to hormonal changes with aging. These factors underscore the importance of



MANDEEP SINGH BASU

regular eye exams and proactive eye care in women's health routines. Incorporating Ayurvedic practices can significantly benefit eye health. Ayurveda, an ancient Indian system of medicine that has been in practice for over 5,000 years, focusing on the balance of mind, body, and spirit. Ayurvedic treatments for eye care include eye exercises,

herbal remedies, and dietary recommendations that can help improve vision and prevent eye diseases. Ayurvedic treatments are tailored to the individual constitution (dosha) and ensure the restoration of balance and harmony in the body, which can positively impact eye health. Here are some essential measures women can incorporate with Ayurveda to safeguard their vision:

Regular Eye Exams: Dilation of eye which is the only way to know if your eyes are healthy and your vision is intact. Early detection and treatment of eye conditions can control vision loss.

Dietary and Lifestyle Recommendations as per Ayurveda: Ayurveda promotes holistic practices,

emphasising external treatments, physiological balance, and nutritional habits. Consuming various fresh fruits, mainly citrus fruits and green, leafy vegetables, supports optimal eye function and guards against age-related degeneration. Decreasing the use of electronic devices and minimizing digital visual distractions can also enhance eye health.

Additionally, incorporating non-meat protein sources like nuts and beans provides essential nutrients supporting eye health. Antioxidants such as vitamins C, E, and zinc protect your eyes from damage.

Ayurvedic Eye Care: Incorporating Ayurvedic interventions can help restore equilibrium and alleviate



symptoms through personalized treatment regimens. Kriya Kalpa, or Ophthalmic Kriya Kalpa, is a series of medical procedures for treating specific eye diseases. Tarpana, for example, involves using medicated ghee to nourish the eyes and manage certain eye diseases.

Putapaka, Seka, Ashchyotana, Bidalaka or lepa, and Pindi are other procedures that can benefit eye health. Practicing Nasya, which involves putting medicated oil or powder through the nasal route to cleanse the nasal passages, helps improve overall eye health.

Maintain a Healthy Weight: Obesity can increase the risk of developing diabetes, which can lead to diabetic retinopathy and vision loss. Manage Chronic Conditions: Conditions like diabetes and hypertension can affect your vision. Managing these conditions can help prevent eye complications.

Avoid Smoking: Smoking is linked to AMD, cataracts, and glaucoma. Quitting smoking can reduce your

risk of developing these conditions.

Know Your Family History: Many eye diseases are hereditary. Knowing your family history can help you and your eye doctor take steps to prevent or manage any potential issues.

Use Protective Eyewear and sunglasses: Protecting your eyes while performing regular household chores or yard work is necessary. Other than that, playing sports or working on a job involving flying debris, sparks, or chemicals needs to be checked. Therefore, start wearing safety glasses or eye guards made of polycarbonate. Sunglasses help in protecting your eyes from ultraviolet rays as prolonged exposure to sunlight can boost your risk of

cataracts and AMD. The best remedy is to go for sunglasses blocking out 99-100 per cent UVA and UVB rays.

By prioritising these preventative measures and incorporating holistic approaches to eye care, women can significantly enhance their chances of maintaining clear vision and reducing the risk of debilitating eye diseases. Neglecting eye health can lead to severe consequences, including vision loss and impaired quality of life. However, with increased awareness and proactive steps, women can take charge of their eye health and ensure optimal vision and overall well-being for years.

(The writer is Director, Dr. Basu Eye Hospital; views are personal)

Trump declines to endorse national abortion ban

AP ■ NEW YORK

Former President Donald Trump said he believes abortion limits should be left to the states, in a video released on Monday declining to endorse a national ban after months of mixed messages and speculation. "Many people have asked me what my position is on abortion and abortion rights," Trump said in the video posted on his Truth Social site. "My view is now that we have abortion where everybody wanted it from a legal standpoint, the states will determine by vote or legislation or perhaps both. And whatever they decide must be the law of the land — in this case, the law of the state." Trump, in the video, did not say when in pregnancy he believes abortion should be banned — declining to endorse a national cutoff that would have been used as a cudgel by Democrats ahead of the November election. But Trump's endorsement of the patchwork approach leaves him open to being attached to the



strictest proposed state legislation, which President Joe Biden and his reelection campaign have already been working to do. In the video, Trump again took credit for the US Supreme Court's decision to end Roe v. Wade, saying that he was "proudly the person responsible for the ending" of the constitutional right to an abortion and thanking the conservative justices who overturned it by name. While he again articulated his support for three exceptions — in cases of rape, incest and when the life of the mother is at risk — he went on to describe

the current legal landscape, in which different states have different restrictions following the court's Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization ruling on June 24, 2022, which upended the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision. "Many states will be different. Many will have a different number of weeks or some will have more conservative than others and that's what they will be," he said. "At the end of the day it's all about will of the people." The announcement declining endorsement of a national ban drew immediate condemnation from SBA Pro-Life America, one of the country's most prominent groups opposed to abortion rights. "We are deeply disappointed in President Trump's position," said the group's president, Marjorie Dannenfelser, in a statement. "Unborn children and their mothers deserve national protections and national advocacy from the brutality of the abortion industry. The Dobbs decision clearly allows both states

and Congress to act." Biden's campaign said Trump was "endorsing every single abortion ban in the states, including abortion bans with no exceptions." "And he's bragging about his role in creating this hellscape," campaign spokesperson Ammar Moussa said on X. Trump had suggested last month in a radio interview that he was leaning toward supporting a national abortion ban at around 15 weeks of pregnancy — early in the second trimester. "The number of weeks now, people are agreeing on 15. And I'm thinking in terms of that," he said on WABC radio. "And it'll come out to something that's very reasonable. But people are really, even hard-liners are agreeing, seems to be, 15 weeks seems to be a number that people are agreeing at." At the same time, Trump seemed reluctant to embrace a federal ban. "Everybody agrees — you've heard this for years — all the legal scholars on both sides

agree: It's a state issue. It shouldn't be a federal issue, it's a state issue," he said. Republican-led states have ushered in a wave of new restrictions following the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022. More than a dozen GOP-controlled states have banned abortion outright, while others have outlawed the procedure on increasingly diminishing timelines. Other reproductive-related procedures have faced restrictions, including in vitro fertilization, which quickly became a talking point in the campaign after the Alabama Supreme Court ruled this year that frozen embryos can be considered children under state law. Trump said he strongly supports IVF availability. Alabama lawmakers and Republican Gov. Kay Ivey agreed to protect IVF providers from legal liability. Democrats believe the fight over abortion rights helps them at the polls and have outperformed expectations in elections since. Voters in seven states have sided with abortion

rights supporters on ballot measures, and abortion is expected to be on the ballot in more states this year, including Florida, Maryland and New York. Trump had long argued that the Supreme Court's decision overturning Roe gave those who oppose abortion rights "tremendous power to negotiate". He said he wanted to use that leverage to strike a deal that he hoped would "make both sides happy" and bring the country "together" — even though the issue is one of the most contentious in American politics, with some opponents viewing abortion as murder and proponents seeing it as a fundamental women's right. Trump has tried to thread the needle on abortion throughout the campaign. He routinely takes credit for appointing the Supreme Court justices who overturned Roe v. Wade, which he has called a "moral and unconstitutional atrocity", and has called himself the "most pro-life president in American history".

British, French troops march in joint parades

London (AP): French troops joined their British counterparts in the famous Changing of the Guard ceremony outside Buckingham Palace for the first time on Monday, marching together in a display of solidarity between Britain and France amid the war in Ukraine. At a parallel ceremony in Paris, British soldiers wearing tall bearskin hats took part in an unprecedented joint military parade in front of the presidential Elysee Palace, as the French army choir sang the two national anthems, "God Save the King" and "La Marseillaise". The twin events were to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the Entente Cordiale, the 1904 diplomatic agreement between Britain and France that paved the way for their collaboration in both World War I and World War II. In a video message posted on social media on

Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron said the alliance serves as a foundation for deepening Anglo-French relations particularly at a time of the return of war. "Our Entente Cordiale remains as relevant as ever," Macron said. "Faced with the resurgence of war in Europe, we stand together to defend the values we share and to support Ukraine as it defends itself against its aggressor." British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and his French counterpart, Stephane Sejourne, issued a joint opinion piece published on Monday in the Daily Telegraph to urge allies to boost funding for Ukraine. "It is not for France and Britain alone to solve these challenges. But, together, we can rally others to join us in overcoming them," they wrote. "We must do even more to ensure we defeat Russia."

Palestinians returning to Khan Younis

AP ■ DEIR-AL-BALAH

Streams of Palestinians filed into the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis on Monday to salvage what they could from the vast destruction left in the wake of Israel's offensive, a day after the Israeli military announced it was withdrawing troops from the area. Many came back to the Gaza Strip's second-largest city to find their former hometown unrecognisable. With scores of buildings destroyed or damaged, piles of rubble now sit where apartments and businesses once did. Streets have been bulldozed. Schools and hospitals were damaged by the fighting. Israel sent troops to Khan Younis in December, part of its blistering ground offensive that came in response to a Hamas-led attack on October 7 into southern Israel. Israeli authorities say 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed and roughly 250 people taken hostage. The war, now in its seventh month, has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians, mostly

women and children, according to local health authorities, displaced most of the territory's 2.3 million people and left vast swaths of the beleaguered Gaza Strip uninhabitable. "Many areas, especially the city centre, have become unfit for life," said Mahmoud Abdel-Ghani, who fled Khan Younis in December when Israel began its ground invasion of the city. "I found that my house and my neighbours' houses turned to rubble." Israel's withdrawal of troops from Khan Younis signalled the end of a key phase in its war against Hamas and brought Israeli troop levels in the tiny coastal enclave to one of the lowest since the war began. Israel said the city was a major Hamas stronghold and says its operation over the past few months killed thousands of militants and inflicted heavy damage to a vast network of tunnels used by Hamas to move weapons and fighters. It also claimed to have found evidence that hostages were held in the city. With no military presence in the city, Hamas

could seek to regroup there as it has in other areas where the military has scaled back forces. The latest Israeli withdrawal also cleared the way for some Palestinians to make their way back to the area to comb through the mountains of debris to try to hold on to any possessions that remained. Najwa Ayyash, who also was displaced from Khan Younis, said she was unable to reach her family's third floor apartment because the stairs were gone. Her brother climbed his way up through the destruction and pulled down some possessions, including lighter clothes for her children. Bassel Abu Nasser, a Khan Younis resident who fled after an airstrike hit his home in January, said much of the city turned into rubble. "There is no sense of life there," the 37-year-old father of two children said. "They left nothing there." On Sunday, shortly after the military announced it had withdrawn, lines of Palestinians could be seen leaving Khan Younis with scant possessions. By foot

and on bicycle, they carried plastic bags and laundry hampers with whatever they could gather back to where they were displaced to. One carried a rolled-up mattress. Another a standing fan. One man used his bike to move plywood. The military exodus from Khan Younis comes ahead of an expected Israeli offensive in Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city where hundreds of thousands have fled fighting elsewhere to seek shelter and which Israel says is Hamas' last major stronghold. The city shelters some 1.4 million people — more than half of Gaza's population. The prospect of an offensive has raised global alarm, including from Israel's top ally, the US, which has demanded to see a credible plan to protect civilians. Allowing people to return to nearby Khan Younis could relieve some pressure on Rafah, but many have no homes to return to. The city also is likely filled with dangerous unexploded bombs left by the fighting. Israel's military quietly drew down troops in devastat-

ed northern Gaza earlier in the war. But it has continued to carry out airstrikes and raids in areas where it says Hamas regrouped, including Gaza's largest hospital, Shifa, leaving what the head of the World Health Organisation called "an empty shell." Israel blames Hamas for the damage, saying it fights from within civilian areas. Khan Younis' main Nasser Hospital has also been that target of Israeli raids, with troops storming it earlier this year because the military said the remains of hostages were inside. The precise state of the hospital after the troops' withdrawal was unclear. Video from the hospital showed the emergency building appearing to be intact, but debris was strewn around its interior where thousands of displaced people once sought shelter before being forced to evacuate by the military. Israel says its war aims to destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities and return the roughly 130 remaining hostages, a quarter of whom Israel says are dead.

Red Sea navy commander hopes for more ships to repel Houthi attacks

AP ■ BRUSSELS

The commander of a European Union naval mission in the Red Sea wants to significantly increase its size to better defend against possible attacks by Houthi rebels based in Yemen, as just four warships are patrolling an area twice the size of the 27-nation bloc. The EU mission — dubbed Aspides, from the Greek for "shield" — has escorted 68 ships and repelled 11 attacks since it was established less than two months ago. It only defends civilian vessels and does not take part in any military strikes. The southern part of the Red Sea is deemed a high-risk zone. "Just a single transit of one of our ships between the two larger distances to the area might take about 10 days, and also to cross the high-risk area takes almost two days," Greek navy Rear Admiral Vasilios Gryparis, the commander of the mission, told reporters in

Brussels on Monday. He said the high-risk zone "has seen multiple attacks in the past months" ranging from threats and intimidation to "complex attacks" using "shore, air and sea-based assets, drones and ballistic missiles." No one has been hurt. Nineteen of the 27 EU nations are involved in the mission but only four frigates are patrolling. Iran-backed Houthi rebels, which control much of Yemen's north and west, launched a campaign of drone and missile attacks on shipping in the Red Sea in November. They have also fired missiles toward Israel, although those have largely fallen short or been intercepted. The attacks have hit maritime trade to Egypt and Europe, with only around half the usual number of ships moving through the area. It's added up to two weeks of transit time for vessels that want to avoid the Suez Canal, hiking transport costs and shipping insurance.

The rebels have described their campaign as an effort to pressure Israel to end its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The ships targeted by the Houthis, however, largely have had little or no connection to Israel, the US or other nations involved in the war. Their campaign has continued despite more than two months of US-led retaliatory airstrikes. The EU mission also remains "very vigilant" for any spike in attacks following last week's airstrike, widely blamed on Israel, which destroyed Iran's consulate in Syria, killing 12 people, including two elite Iranian generals, Gryparis said. Top Iranian officials have promised to retaliate. "We call on Iran to show restraint and to use its influence to avoid escalation, and in particular, with relation to the Houthis," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said, but he added: "I don't think Iran has full control (of) the Houthi decision-making. They have become quite autonomous."

S Korea launches its 2nd military spy satellite

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea has launched its second military spy satellite into space, days after North Korea reaffirmed its plan to launch multiple reconnaissance satellites this year. The Koreas each launched their first spy satellites last year — North Korea in November and South Korea in December — amid heightened animosities. They said their satellites would boost their abilities to monitor each other and enhance their own missile attack capabilities. South Korea's second spy satellite was launched from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Sunday evening local time, which was Monday morning in Seoul. South Korea's Defense Ministry said in a statement that the satellite was successfully separated from a rocket. It said it will check whether the satellite functions properly via its communications with an overseas ground station. Under a contract with SpaceX, South Korea was to launch five spy satellites by 2025. South Korea's first spy satellite launch



In this photo provided by South Korea Defense Ministry, South Korea's second military spy satellite lifts off from the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., on Sunday. AP/PTI

on Dec. 1 was made from California's Vandenberg Space Force Base. South Korea in 2022 became the world's 10th nation to successfully launch a satellite with its own technology by using a homegrown rocket to place what it called a "performance

observation satellite" in orbit. But experts say it's economical to use a SpaceX rocket to launch spy satellite and that South Korea needs more launches to ensure the reliability of a rocket. North Korea is also eager to acquire its own space-based

surveillance network to cope with what it calls military threats posed by the United States and South Korea. After two launch failures earlier in 2023, North Korea placed its Malligyong-1 spy satellite into orbit on Nov. 21. North Korea has since said its satellite had transmitted imagery with space views of key sites in the U.S. and South Korea, including the White House and the Pentagon. But it hasn't released any of those satellite photos, and foreign experts doubt whether the North Korean satellite can transmit militarily meaningful imagery. On March 31, Pak Kyong Su, vice general director of the North's National Aerospace Technology Administration, said North Korea is expected to launch several more reconnaissance satellites this year. During a key political conference in late December, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to launch three additional military spy satellites in 2024. The U.N. bans North Korea from conducting a satellite launch, considering it as a disguised test of its long-range missile technology.

US Army will hold combat training in Philippines

AP ■ MANILA (PHILIPPINES)

The US Army is introducing a joint battlefield training in the Philippines to improve combat readiness including by ensuring adequate supply of ammunition and other needs in difficult conditions in tropical jungles and on scattered islands, a US general said. The Biden administration has been strengthening an arc of military alliances in the Indo-Pacific to better counter China, including in any future confrontation over Taiwan. The US moves dovetail with Philippine efforts to shore up its territorial defences amid disputes with China in the South China Sea and ability to respond to frequent natural disasters. About 2,000 US and Philippine army forces will join the days-long combat drills backed by helicopters and artillery fire against armed adversaries in a jungle setting in the northern Philippines in June, Maj. Gen. Marcus Evans, commanding general of the US Army's 25th Infantry Division,

said on Sunday. The combat training will be held in the Philippines for the first time at Manila's request. It's not clear whether the longtime treaty allies would decide to turn the maneuvers into an annual exercise, Evans said. The drills from June 1 to 10 come at the conclusion of two larger back-to-back exercises between the allied forces — the Salaknib army-to-army exercises, which opened on Monday, and the Balikatan, which will start later in April and involve about 16,000 US and Philippine forces. Several countries including Japan will send observers. "We have to be prepared to respond to humanitarian crisis, natural disaster crisis, and that is what this training affords us the opportunity to do," Evans told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. "While we feel confident in our overall readiness and training path, it's something that we can never be complacent in." The combat-readiness drill in June "provides an excellent venue

for us to get better in terms of our warfighting readiness, to enhance our partnership and then strengthen both our army profession by working together in a very challenging environment", Evans said. The training was designed to be monitored live to show, for example, how much ammunition, batteries for two-way radios and food would be carried by US and Philippine forces and how they planned for resupplies in a remote battlefield. "It really is a way for soldiers, leaders and units to be able to see themselves during a simulated combat environment scenario," Evans said. Such past combat training in Hawaii has led to better information-sharing by smaller and more agile combat units and improved combat endurance, he said. It bolstered "the ability to sustain ourselves in a jungle and archipelago environment because there are not ground lines of communications, so we have to rely heavily on air or maritime assets to be able to move supplies."

US treads carefully in responding to HK's new security law

Washington (AP): The US has denounced Hong Kong's new national security law as a tool to potentially silence dissent both at home and abroad, but so far the action from Washington has been notably muted, disappointing those fighting for the Chinese territory's democracy and freedoms. Since the law's swift passage on March 19, the US has announced visa restrictions on an unspecified number of unnamed Hong Kong officials but taken no further action. That's a far cry from 2020, when Beijing imposed national security restrictions to end months of unrest on Hong Kong streets. The U.S. responded by hitting the city's highest-ranking officials with sanctions and depriving the territory of its preferential trading status. While the new law, known as Article 23, now expands the Hong Kong government's powers to go after those it accuses of spying and to target dissidents anywhere in the world, Washington has been treading carefully. The State Department declined to preview or comment on any potential actions but said it is considering all options. Analysts suggest the Biden administration may not want to rock relations with China in an election year, especially when the impact of the law might take a while to manifest itself and any punitive U.S. measures would be unlikely to bring about meaningful change. "U.S. policymakers appear resigned to the fact that China's takeover of Hong Kong is, for all intents and purposes, complete and irreversible," said Craig Singleton, senior China fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a research institute based in Washington. "Moreover, it's not entirely clear that any specific actions from Washington would prompt Beijing to meaningfully reassess its approach towards Hong Kong, with Chinese policymakers having more or less signaled that Hong Kong's fate is not up for debate."

Huge crowds await solar eclipse in North America

AP ■ MESQUITE

Millions of spectators along a narrow corridor stretching from Mexico to the US to Canada eagerly awaited Monday's celestial sensation — a total eclipse of the sun — even as forecasters called for clouds. The best weather was expected at the tail end of the eclipse in Vermont and Maine, as well as New Brunswick and Newfoundland. It promised to be North America's biggest eclipse crowd ever, thanks to the densely populated path and the lure of more than four minutes of midday darkness in Texas and other choice spots. Almost everyone in North America was guaranteed at least a partial eclipse, weather permitting. "Cloud cover is one of the trickier things to forecast," National Weather Service

meteorologist Alexa Maines explained at Cleveland's Great Lakes Science Center on Sunday. "At the very least, it won't snow." The cliff-hanging uncertainty added to the drama. Rain or shine, "it's just about sharing the experience with other people," said Chris Lomas from Gotham, England, who was staying at a sold-out trailer resort outside Dallas, the biggest city in totality's path. For Monday's full eclipse, the moon was due to slip right in front of the sun, entirely blocking it. The resulting twilight, with only the sun's outer atmosphere or corona visible, would be long enough for birds and other animals to fall silent, and for planets, stars and maybe even a comet to pop out. The out-of-sync darkness lasts up to 4 minutes, 28 seconds. That's almost twice as long as it was during the U.S.

coast-to-coast eclipse seven years ago because the moon is closer to Earth. It will be another 21 years before the U.S. sees another total solar eclipse on this scale. Extending five hours from the first bite out of the sun to the last, Monday's eclipse begins in the Pacific and makes landfall at Mazatlan, Mexico, before moving into Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and 12 other U.S. states in the Midwest, Middle Atlantic and New England, and then Canada. Last stop: Newfoundland, with the eclipse ending in the North Atlantic. It will take just 1 hour, 40 minutes for the moon's shadow to race more than 4,000 miles (6,500 kilometers) across the continent. Eye protection is needed with proper eclipse glasses and filters to look at the sun, except when it ducks completely out of sight during an

eclipse. The path of totality — approximately 115 miles (185 kilometers) wide — encompasses several major cities this time, including Dallas, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Buffalo, New York and Montreal. An estimated 44 million people live within the track, with a couple hundred million more within 200 miles (320 kilometers). Add in all the eclipse chasers, amateur astronomers, scientists and just plain curious, and it's no wonder the hotels and flights are sold out and the roads jammed. Experts from NASA and scores of universities are posted along the route, poised to launch research rockets and weather balloons, and conduct experiments. The International Space Station's seven astronauts also will be on the lookout, 270 miles (435 kilometers) up.



An amateur astronomer prepares her telescope a day before a total solar eclipse in Mazatlan, Mexico, Sunday. AP/PTI

'US will push China to change job policy'



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, left, shakes hands with Governor of the People's Bank of China Pan Gongsheng as they meet at the People's Bank of China in Beijing on Monday

AP ■ BEIJING

The Biden administration will push China to change an industrial policy that poses a threat to US jobs, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Monday after wrapping up four days of talks with Chinese officials.

She also said in Beijing they had "difficult conversations" about national security, including American concerns that Chinese companies are supporting Russia in its war in Ukraine. But the focus of her trip was industrial policy, and what the US and Europe describe as manufacturing overcapacity in China.

Wealthy nations fear a wave of low-priced Chinese exports that will overwhelm factories at home. Yellen cited the manufacturing of electric vehicles and their batteries as well as solar energy equipment — sectors that the US administration is trying to promote domestically — as areas where Chinese government subsidies have driven rapid expansion of production.

"China is now simply too large for the rest of the world to absorb this enormous capaci-

ty. Actions taken by the PRC today can shift world prices," she said, using the acronym for China's official name, the People's Republic of China. "And when the global market is flooded by artificially cheap Chinese products, the viability of American and other foreign firms is put into question." It's unclear how China will respond to such calls. European officials have repeatedly raised the issue on visits to China with no sign of any change on the Chinese side. Moreover, one of leader Xi Jinping's major goals is to build the nation into a major power so it doesn't feel compelled to bend to outside pressure.

But overcapacity also affects China — price wars in the electric vehicle sector are expected to drive some makers out of business — and experts have called for better coordination of policies designed to promote new technologies. The government agreed during Yellen's visit to start talks on what the two sides called "balanced growth."

"We intend to underscore the need for a shift in policy by China during these talks,"

Yellen said at a news conference held outdoors on a balmy spring day at the US ambassador's residence in Beijing. On Saturday, the official Xinhua News Agency said that the Chinese side had "responded fully to the issue of production capacity" during Yellen's talks with Vice Premier He Lifeng, the lead person for China-US economic and trade affairs.

More than a decade ago, the treasury secretary said, a flood of "below-cost Chinese steel ... decimated industries across the world and in the United States. I've made clear that President Biden and I will not accept that reality again." On the war in Ukraine, Yellen warned that any banks that facilitate the sale of military or dual-use goods to Russia could face US sanctions.

"I stressed that companies, including those in the PRC, must not provide material support for Russia's war and that they will face significant consequences if they do," she said. Yellen, the former chair of the US Federal Reserve, met with China's central bank governor, Pan Gongsheng, earlier on Monday.

Ukraine denies claim of drone strikes on N-plant

AP ■ KYIV

A senior Ukrainian official has denied Russian accusations that his country's army fired exploding drones at Europe's largest nuclear power plant, which the Kremlin's forces have been occupying and running in southern Ukraine since shortly after the war began more than two years ago.

Andriy Yusov, the spokesperson for Ukraine's military intelligence agency suggested there had been no attack, saying Russian forces routinely fabricate strikes on the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. However, the strikes on this occasion were confirmed by UN's atomic watchdog agency, though it didn't attribute responsibility for the attack to either side.

The plant has repeatedly been caught in the crossfire since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and seized the facility shortly after. The

International Atomic Energy Agency, a UN body, has frequently expressed alarm about the facility amid fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe. The plant's six reactors have been shut down for months, but it still needs power and qualified staff to operate crucial cooling systems and other safety features.

The UN's atomic watchdog agency on Sunday confirmed drone strikes on one of the plant's six reactors, causing one casualty. The IAEA team did not observe structural damage to the "systems, structures and components" important to the nuclear safety of the plant, it said. They reported superficial scorching to the top of a reactor dome.

The damage "has not compromised nuclear safety, but this is a serious incident (with the) potential to undermine (the) integrity of the reactor's containment system," the IAEA said on X, formerly Twitter.



File: The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, Europe's largest, is seen in the background of the shallow Kakhovka Reservoir after the dam collapse, in Enerгодar, Russian-occupied Ukraine, on Tuesday

IAEA chief Rafael Mariano Grossi said the main reactor containment structures took at least three direct hits. "This cannot happen," he said on X. Zaporizhzhia is one of four regions that Russia illegally

annexed in September 2022. The Institute for the Study of War, a think tank based in Washington, said Russian authorities are seeking "to use Russia's physical control over the (plant) to force interna-

tional organizations, including the IAEA, to meet with Russian occupation officials to legitimize Russia's occupation of the (plant) and by extension Russia's occupation of sovereign Ukrainian land."

UK Foreign Secretary to urge US speaker to back help for Ukraine

London (AP): British Foreign Secretary David Cameron is expected to urge US lawmakers to approve a new package of aid for Ukraine when he visits Washington this week, warning Congress that it is putting the security of the West at risk by continuing to hold up the funding.

The trip is a chance for Cameron to personally deliver the message he posted on social media last week in which he called on Western leaders to put pressure on House Speaker Mike Johnson and Republicans in Congress to approve additional aid for Ukraine, as Britain and the European Union have already done.

"Speaker Johnson can make it happen in Congress," Cameron said in a video posted on social media platform X. "I'm going to go and see him next week and say, 'Ukraine needs that money. It is American security, it's European security, it's Britain's

security that's on the line in Ukraine, and they need our help." A USD 95 billion aid package for Ukraine has been bogged down in the House of Representatives for months as populist conservatives seek to block further funding for the two-year-old conflict and some mainstream Republicans demand concessions on border security before supporting the bill. Cameron's trip to Washington comes after he and his French counterpart, Stéphane Séjourné, issued a joint rallying cry on Monday for Ukraine's allies to come up with more funding.

Their article, published in Britain's Daily Telegraph, marks 120 years of the Entente Cordiale, a series of agreements between France and the UK that paved the way for improved cross-Channel relations. "We are both absolute-ly clear — Ukraine must win this war. If Ukraine loses, we all lose," the pair wrote.

Lavrov visits Beijing to emphasise ties with strongest political ally

AP ■ BEIJING

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arrived in Beijing on Monday to display the strength of ties with close diplomatic ally China amid Moscow's grinding war against Ukraine.

The two continent-sized authoritarian states, increasingly in dispute with democracies, seek to gain influence in Africa, the Middle East and South America. China has backed Russia's claim that President Vladimir Putin launched his assault in 2022 because of Western provocations, without producing any solid evidence.

Russian state news agency Tass said the ministers would "discuss the situation in Ukraine and the Asia-Pacific region, issues of bilateral cooperation and interaction in the international arena," quoting Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova.

Lavrov is expected to meet with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, who has visited Russia during the conflict and maintained

China's line of not dubbing the Russian war in Ukraine an invasion. China has at times taken an equally combative tone against the US and its allies. China and Russia have held joint military drills, and are seen as seeking to supplant democracies with dictatorships in areas where they wield influence.

Despite its clear backing of Russia in the Ukraine war, China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told reporters Monday that "China has an objective and fair position on the Ukraine issue."

"We have been actively promoting peace talks and political solutions. China is not a creator or party to the Ukraine crisis, and we have not and will not do anything to profit from it," Mao told reporters at a daily briefing. China has also said it wasn't providing Russia with arms or military assistance, although it has maintained robust economic connections with Moscow, alongside India and other countries. "We have always controlled the export of dual-use

items in accordance with the law," Mao said, referring to industrial items that can be used for both industrial or military purposes, such as drones. "The relevant country should not smear or attack the normal relations between China and Russia," Mao said. "The relevant country" was a reference to the US, Russia and China's chief geopolitical rival.

In a phone call last week with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, US President Joseph Biden pressed China over its defense relationship with Russia, which is seeking to rebuild its industrial base as it continues its invasion of Ukraine. And he called on Beijing to wield its influence over North Korea to rein in the isolated and erratic nuclear power. Adding to the tension between the two countries, US lawmakers generated new legislation that would ban TikTok, the popular social media application, if its China-based owner ByteDance doesn't sell its stakes in the platform within six months of the bill's enactment.

China accuses US of deporting its students without valid evidence

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Monday accused the US of forcibly deporting Chinese students without any valid evidence and warned of "resolute measures" to safeguard the interests of its nationals. The US has been overstretching the concept of national security and without any valid evidence, arbitrarily cancelled Chinese students' visas, banned them from entering the US and forcibly deported them, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here.

Asked about reports that Chinese students and scholars were interrogated and forcibly deported when entering the US border at the Washington Dulles Airport and the Dallas Airport, Mao said, the US moves inflicted enormous damage on the persons concerned and obstructed people-to-people exchanges between China and the US.

"The recent cases show that the US law enforcement personnel are bent on making excuses for deporting Chinese personnel. These are typical cases of selective, discriminatory and politi-

cally motivated law enforcement," Mao said. "China will take resolute measures to safeguard the legitimate and lawful rights and interests of Chinese citizens. The US needs to immediately stop unjustifiably harassing," she said. China's state-run Global Times quoted Chinese Ambassador to the US Xie Feng alleging that dozens of Chinese arriving in the US, including students, were being denied entry every month over the past few months.

They held valid visas, had no criminal records, and were returning to school after travelling elsewhere or reuniting with their family in China, he said. But when they landed at the airport, what awaited them was an 8-hour-long interrogation by officers, who prohibited them from contacting their parents, made groundless accusations against them, and even forcibly deported them and banned their entry, Xie alleged.

According to the US Department of Homeland Security reports, last year Indian students overtook the Chinese in American educational institu-

'Sex change surgery, surrogacy grave threats to human dignity'

AP ■ VATICAN CITY

The Vatican on Monday declared sex change operations and surrogacy as grave threats to human dignity, putting them on par with abortion and euthanasia as practices that violate God's plan for human life.

The Vatican's doctrine office issued "Infinite Dignity," a 20-page declaration that has been in the works for five years. After substantial revision in recent months, it was approved March 25 by Pope Francis, who ordered its publication. In its most eagerly anticipated section, the Vatican repeated its rejection of "gender theory" or the idea that one's gender can be changed. It said God created man and woman as biologically different, separate beings, and said they must not tinker with that plan or try to "make oneself God."

"It follows that any sex-change intervention, as a rule, risks threatening the unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception," the document said.

It distinguished between transitioning surgeries, which it rejected, and "genital abnormalities" that are present at birth or that develop later. Those abnormalities can be "resolved" with the

help of health care professionals, it said. The document's existence, rumoured since 2019, was confirmed in recent weeks by the new prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Argentine Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, a close Pope Francis confidant.

He had cast it as something of a nod to conservatives after he authored a more explosive document approving blessings for same-sex couples that sparked criticism from conservative bishops around the world, especially in Africa.

And while rejecting gender theory, the document takes pointed aim at countries — including many in Africa — that criminalise homosexuality. It echoed Francis' assertion in a 2023 interview with The Associated Press that "being homosexual is not a crime" making the assertion now part of the Vatican's doctrinal teaching. The new document denounces "as contrary to human dignity the fact that, in some places, not a few people are imprisoned, tortured, and even deprived of the good of life solely because of their sexual orientation."

The document is something of a repackaging of previously articulated Vatican positions. It

restates well-known Catholic doctrine opposing abortion and euthanasia, and adds to the list some of Francis' main concerns as pope: the threats to human dignity posed by poverty, war, human trafficking and forced migration.

In a newly articulated position, it says surrogacy violates both the dignity of the surrogate mother and the child. While much attention about surrogacy has focused on possible exploitation of poor women as surrogates, the Vatican document focuses almost more on the resulting child. "The child has the right to have a fully human (and not artificially induced) origin and to receive the gift of a life that manifests both the dignity of the giver and that of the receiver," the document said. "Considering this, the legitimate desire to have a child cannot be transformed into a right to a child" that fails to respect the dignity of that child as the recipient of the gift of life."

The Vatican published its most articulated position on gender in 2019, when the Congregation for Catholic Education rejected the idea that people can choose or change their genders and insisted on the complementarity of biologically male and female sex organs to create new life.

Pakistan court directs Imran Khan's counsel to file contempt plea

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Islamabad High Court on Monday expressed displeasure over the jail authorities' failure to comply with its orders regarding the arrangement of a meeting between jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi during Eid.

Khan, 71, is lodged in the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi while Bushra Bibi remains incarcerated at the PTI founder's Bani Gala residence, which was declared a sub-jail following the couple's multiple years' sentences in the Toshakhana expensive gift case and the iddat case which declared their marriage as un-Islamic.

Justice Miangul Hasan Aurangzeb, inquiring why the court order was not complied with, instructed PTI counsel Usman Gul to file a contempt petition, Dawn News reported.

Justice Aurangzeb expressed displeasure at the jail administration for not permitting the beleaguered couple to meet and not transferring Khan's wife to Adiala jail.

At the outset of the hearing, Justice Aurangzeb said the

court had already disposed of the matter with directions.

The petitioner's counsel told the court that the couple was seeking the execution of the same order. The failure to comply with the court order irked the judge, who then directed the petitioner's counsel to file a contempt petition. "We will take action, how can court orders be ignored?"

The petitioner's lawyer urged the court to direct the jail authorities to arrange a meeting between Khan and Bushra on the occasion of Eid as the matter came under their jurisdiction. The court further directed the Advocate General's Office to contact the concerned authorities and inform them regarding the matter. It also summoned the Islamabad advocate general.

As the court resumed hearing the matter following a short break, it asked the advocate general why the court order was not implemented. The court also directed the state counsel to respond after contacting the chief commissioner's office, Adiala jail authorities, and other related entities.

Lanka Freedom Party to face long legal battle in factional clash

Colombo (PTI): The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) is set to get into a long legal battle this election year with separate factions trying to gain control of it as Nimal Siripala de Silva, an incumbent minister, was on Monday appointed the party's acting chairman in place of former president Maithripala Sirisena. SLFP is one of the major and most well-known political parties in Sri Lanka which has ruled the island nation for many years.

"Today we took important decisions to carry out party functions without interruptions. The central committee meeting decided to elect an acting chair," Duminda Nissanyake, the party's national organiser, told the media.

Last week, Sirisena was clamped with a restraining order as the leader of the party after he dropped from party posts de Silva and two others, who are also ministers in President Ranil Wickremesinghe's government.

The trio has already obtained the court's interim orders suspending the action of Sirisena, the 72-year-old former prime minister.

Rwanda leader concerned over perceived US ambiguity about genocide victims

AP ■ KIGALI (RWANDA)

Rwandan President Paul Kagame said on Monday he was concerned by what he saw as a US failure to characterise the 1994 massacres as a genocide against the country's minority Tutsis.

Kagame told reporters that the issue was an "element of discussion" in talks with former US President Bill Clinton, who led the American delegation to a ceremony Sunday commemorating the 30th anniversary of the genocide in which Hutu extremists slaughtered about 800,000 people, most of them Tutsis, in a government-orchestrated campaign.

Many Rwandans criticised US Secretary of State Antony Blinken for failing to specify

that the genocide targeted the Tutsis when he wrote late Sunday: "We mourn the many thousands of Tutsis, Hutus, Twas, and others whose lives were lost during 100 days of unspeakable violence."

Responding to a journalist's question about Blinken's post on the social platform X, Kagame said he believed he had reached an agreement with US authorities a decade ago for them not to voice any criticism on the genocide anniversary. "Give us that day," he said, adding that criticism over "everything we are thought not to have at all" is unwanted on the genocide anniversary.

Rwandan authorities insist any ambiguity on who the genocide victims were is an attempt to distort history and disrespects

the memory of the victims. US officials did not comment on Monday. President Joe Biden issued a statement on Sunday, saying, "We will never forget the horrors of those 100 days, the pain and loss suffered by the people of Rwanda, or the shared humanity that connects us all, which hate can never overcome."

The question of how to memorialise the genocide stems from allegations that the Rwandan Patriotic Front — the rebel group that stopped the massacres and has ruled Rwanda unchallenged since 1994 — carried out its own revenge killings during and after the genocide.

Kagame has previously said that his forces showed restraint. He said in a speech Sunday that

Rwandans are disgusted by what he described as the hypocrisy of Western nations that failed to stop the genocide. The genocide was ignited when a plane carrying then-President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was shot down over Kigali on April 6, 1994. The Tutsis were blamed for downing the plane and killing the president, and became targets in massacres led by Hutu extremists that lasted over 100 days. Some moderate Hutus who tried to protect members of the Tutsi minority were also killed.

As part of week-long commemorations, flags flew at half-staff and public places across Rwanda were told to keep entertainment quiet. Rwandan authorities also face questions over how to present

commemoration activities in a way that acknowledges the efforts of some Hutus to protect their Tutsi neighbours. "You see, those who are denying the genocide are saying, 'Ah, to commemorate? It's a big serious barrier to unity. We have to move forward, to forget about commemoration,'" said Naphtal Ahishakiye, executive secretary of a prominent group of genocide survivors in Kigali. "Those are wrong. They have genocide ideology. They don't want to remember what happened."

The government has long blamed the international community for ignoring warnings about the killings, and some Western leaders have expressed regret. French President Emmanuel Macron said last

week that France and its allies could have stopped the genocide but lacked the will to do so. Macron's declaration came three years after he acknowledged the "overwhelming responsibility" of France — Rwanda's closest European ally in 1994 — for failing to stop Rwanda's slide into the slaughter.

Although Kagame is a US ally and has friendly relations with many Western leaders, he is under growing pressure over Rwanda's military involvement in eastern Congo, where tensions have flared recently as the two countries' leaders accuse one another of supporting armed groups.

In February, the US urged Rwanda to withdraw its troops and missile systems

from eastern Congo, for the first time describing the M23 as a Rwanda-backed rebel group.

UN experts have said they had "solid evidence" that members of Rwanda's armed forces were conducting operations there in support of M23, whose rebellion has caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in Congo's North Kivu's province.

Kagame said on Monday that the M23 are fighting for the rights of Congolese Tutsis, with at least 100,000 of them now seeking shelter in Rwanda after fleeing attacks in eastern Congo. Rwandan authorities say they want to deter rebels, including Hutu extremists responsible for the genocide, who fled to eastern Congo.

Rwanda's ethnic composition remains largely unchanged since 1994, with a Hutu majority. The Tutsis account for 14 per cent and the Twa just 1 per cent of Rwanda's 14 million people. Kagame's Tutsi-dominated government has outlawed any form of organisation along ethnic lines, as part of efforts to build a uniform Rwandan identity. National ID cards no longer identify citizens by ethnic group, and authorities imposed a tough penal code to prosecute those suspected of denying the genocide or the "ideology" behind it. But some observers say the law has been used to silence critics who question the government's policies, including how to build lasting unity and reconciliation.

Need for greater participation of banks in rupee derivatives in India, abroad: Das

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday stressed the need for greater participation of Indian banks in rupee derivatives market, both domestically and offshore, while being prudent. The governor noted that participation of domestic banks in derivative markets remains limited with only a small set of active market-makers. Also, participation of Indian banks in global markets is growing but it is quite small. "Domestic banks are dealing with market-makers in global markets rather than with end clients and are yet to emerge as market-makers of note globally," Das said in his keynote address at the

FIMMDA-PDAI Annual Conference in Barcelona. Of course, he added banks need to do their own due diligence, assess their risk appetite, and then move forward carefully in this direction. "Going forward, our focus should be on enhancing and widening the participation of Indian players in markets for INR derivatives, both domestically and offshore, while being prudent," the governor said. He noted that the recent financial market reforms undertaken by the Reserve Bank are aimed at providing a strong bedrock for markets to move to the next trajectory for meeting the growing funding requirements in the economy, providing cost-effective hedging options and

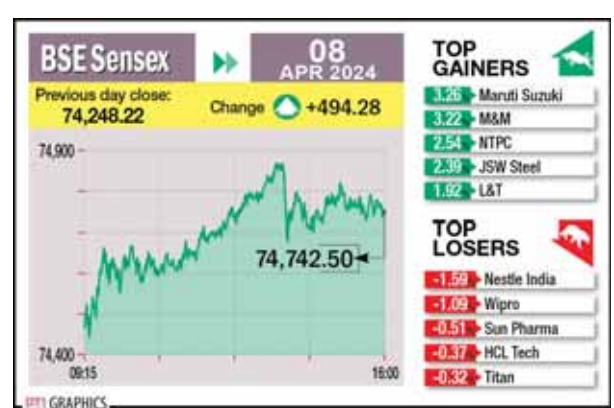


competing effectively in global markets. There are, however, some areas which call for attention, he said, while highlighting specific areas where more can be done.

Das said transparency in pricing remains work in progress and more can be done. "The retail customer is yet to get a deal at par with large customers. There is a need for

effective market-making and finer pricing for smaller deals on NDS-OM," he said. Divergence in pricing in FX markets for small and large customers is wider than what can be justified by operational considerations, Das said, and added that banks may need to do more to facilitate the use of the FX Retail platform. "We continue to see banking channels being used by certain persons or entities to fund activities on unauthorised FX trading platforms. This warrants enhanced vigilance by the banks," the governor said. He further said efforts are being made to leverage technology for achieving greater efficiency while also meeting the objectives of market reforms. The Reserve Bank, he added

remains engaged with stakeholders to assess the need for the introduction of new products and infrastructure based on evolving market developments. "Innovation has been sought to be promoted through a move towards principle-based regulation, widening of the participant base, introduction of new products and platforms as well as enabling access to offshore markets," Das said. In his address, the governor also dwelt upon the journey of the Reserve Bank, especially in the context of its role in developing the financial markets in India in the recent period. The RBI has entered its 90th year of its formation on April 1, 2024.



Sensex, Nifty hit fresh peaks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty reached their fresh record highs on Monday, amid optimism in global markets and foreign fund inflows. Buying in index major Reliance Industries also fuelled the rally in equities. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 494.28 points or 0.67 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 74,742.50. During the day, it zoomed to reach a record intra-day high of 74,869.30. The NSE Nifty climbed 152.60 points or 0.68 per cent to 22,666.30. During the day, it jumped 183.6 points or 0.81 per cent to hit a lifetime high of 22,697.30. From the Sensex basket, Maruti, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, JSW Steel, Larsen & Toubro, Reliance Industries, Axis Bank, and Power Grid were the major gainers. Nestle, Wipro, Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank, Titan, HCL Technologies and Infosys were the laggards. "Global equities posted mostly modest moves as investors prepared for a busy

week that includes US inflation data, and European Central Bank interest rate decision," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.26 per cent while smallcap index dipped 0.06 per cent. Auto index climbed 1.65 per cent, oil & gas jumped 1.51 per cent, energy (1.24 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.14 per cent), realty (1.21 per cent) and utilities (0.90 per cent). Services, tech and IT were the laggards. A total of 266 stocks hit their 52-week high while 12 hit their 52-week low on the BSE. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading in the positive zone. Wall Street ended with gains on Friday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,659.27 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.81 per cent to USD 90.43 a barrel.

India coffee exports rise 13.35 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coffee shipments from India rose 13.35 per cent to 1,25,631 tonnes during January-March period of this year on higher demand for Robusta coffee, according to the official data. The country had exported 1,10,830 tonnes of coffee in the same period in 2023. India, Asia's third-largest producer and exporter, grows Arabica and Robusta varieties of coffee. Arabica coffee bean has lesser caffeine content than the Robusta. Arabica has a sweet and smoother taste, while the Robusta is generally more bitter and harsher on the taste buds. According to the Coffee Board of India's latest data, export of Robusta coffee bean rose by 18 per cent to 69,637 tonnes in the first quarter of the 2024 calendar year from 59,050 tonnes in the year-ago period. However, the shipment of Arabica coffee bean declined to 13,419 tonnes from 15,468 tonnes in the said period. Instant coffee exports rose 16,218 tonnes during January-March of this year as against 15,238 tonnes in the year-ago period, while re-



export of coffee also increased to 26,239 tonnes from 20,952 tonnes in the said period. In terms of value, total coffee exports were at Rs 3,644 crore during January-March of 2024, higher than Rs 2,604.44 crore achieved in the year-ago period. The unit value realisation was Rs 2,90,057 per tonne. Italy, Russia, the UAE, Germany and Turkey are the major coffee export destinations for India. In its post-blossom estimate, the board has projected the country's total coffee production at 3,74,200 tonnes for the 2023-24 marketing year (October-September), higher than the actual output of 3,52,000 tonnes in the previous year. In the full 2023 calendar year, India's coffee exports had declined by 5.4 per cent to 3.77 lakh tonnes.

Gold hits record high of ₹71,700 per 10 gram

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices in the national capital hit an all-time high on Monday and jumped Rs 350 to Rs 71,700 per 10 grams following a pick-up in safe-haven demand for the precious metal, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal prices have seen remarkable gains so far in 2024, becoming costlier by over Rs 7,700 per 10 grams. In the previous session, gold had ended at Rs 71,350 per 10 grams. Silver prices also soared Rs 800 to scale a fresh peak of Rs 84,000 per kg. In the previous trade, it had settled at Rs

83,200 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at a record high of Rs 71,700 per 10 grams, up Rs 350, taking bullish cues in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at COMEX was trading at USD 2,336 per ounce, up USD 7 from the previous close. Traders didn't pay attention to the upbeat US jobs report and instead focused on the bullion's upward trend that has been going on for a few weeks. This caused the price of gold to



reach another record high on Monday, Gandhi added. Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst at LKP Securities, said, "Gold prices continued their upward trajectory, supported

by a surge in global COMEX prices, which touched USD 2,350 per ounce in the early morning hours. "The ongoing buying of gold by global central banks has provided significant support to prices, along with sustained geopolitical tensions and the anticipation of imminent interest rate reversals. While the overall price outlook remains bullish, some correction may be expected towards Rs 69,500 during the course of this week." In addition, silver prices also trading higher at USD 27.80 per ounce. In the previous session, it had closed at USD 27.45 per ounce.

Colending AUM nearing ₹1 lakh crore: Crisil

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The overall assets under management through the co-lending model is nearing Rs 1 lakh crore in the last five years, a domestic rating agency said on Monday. However, regulatory curbs on unsecured lending are expected to result in a decrease in the share of personal loans -- the highest contributor to the co-lending model -- going forward, the

report by Crisil Ratings said. Personal loans occupy a third of the overall AUM at present, and the growth in these loans is likely to be impacted because of the RBI's measures adopted last year, it said. "While co-lending books for all asset classes will grow, the pace of growth for personal loans is expected to be slower than that seen in the recent past," the agency said. The revision in the risk weight of unsecured

consumer credit to 125 per cent from 100 per cent earlier will moderate the growth for unsecured loans to 25-35 per cent in FY25 from an estimated growth of 35 per cent in FY24. "With recalibration in growth of personal loans following increase in risk weights, the share of personal loan in the co-lending book could decline in FY25, and that of MSME and home loans should go up," its Director

Malvika Bhotika said. Over the medium term, the co-lending model will witness a growth of 35-40 per cent on the back of higher interest in the avenue from both banks and non-bank lenders. Calling it a win-win model that allows for sharing of risks and rewards, the agency's senior director Ajit Velonie said, "For NBFCs, particularly for mid-sized and smaller ones, it enables access to bank funding as well as

diversification in funding avenues." Additionally, NBFCs have the opportunity for growing in a capital efficient manner, while for banks, meeting the priority sector lending requirements and hand, access to niche customers and geographies is a draw, Velonie said. Going forward, the partners in such tie-ups may increase their focus on other asset classes such as loans to micro, small and medium

enterprises (MSME) and home loans, given higher risk weights for personal loans, the agency said, adding that the two account for 13 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, of the AUM currently. While sustenance of asset quality will be the key to long-term success of the co-lending business model, the manner in which regulations governing co-lending evolve will also bear watching, the agency added.

JLR reports 22 per cent rise in retail sales in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Motors-owned Jaguar Land Rover on Monday reported a 22 per cent year-on-year increase in its retail sales at 4,31,733 units for fiscal ended March 31, 2024. During the last fiscal, the company's wholesales rose 25 per cent to 4,01,303 units against 2022-23 financial year, Tata Motors said in a regulatory filing. The wholesale volumes and retail sales of the UK-based automaker were higher in all regions as compared to the preceding year, it added. Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) wholesales in the fourth quarter stood at 1,10,190 units, up 16 per cent as against it was a year ago. Retail sales in the January-March quarter stood at 1,14,038 units, up 11 per cent from FY23. Compared to the prior year, retail sales in the quarter were 32 per cent higher in the UK, 21 per cent in North America, and 16 per cent in the Overseas region.

Telecom subscribers grow marginally to 119.7 crore in February: TRAI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The number of telecom subscribers in India increased 0.38 per cent to 119.7 crore in February 2024 as compared to the previous month, according to a TRAI report published on Monday. The urban telephone subscription increased to 66.37 crore while rural subscription increased to 53.13 crore with a sequential growth rate of 0.40 per cent and 0.34 per cent, respectively. The total broadband subscribers also increased from 91.10 crore at the end of January to 91.67 crore at February-end, as per the monthly subscriber report published by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). Top five service providers constituted 98.35 per cent of the total broadband subscribers. The service provider are Reliance Jio Infocomm (52.2 per cent), Bharti Airtel (29.41 per cent), Vodafone Idea (13.80 per



cent), BSNL (2.69 per cent), and Atria Convergence (0.24 per cent). All circles in both wireline and wireless segments registered growth in subscriber base in February, the report said. The wireline subscriber base at the end of February increased to 3.31 crore with a monthly growth rate of 1.73 per cent. "The overall wireline tele-density in India increased from 2.33 per cent at the end of January 2024 to 2.37 per cent at the end of February 2024. Urban and rural wireline tele-density were 6.10 per cent and 0.31 per cent, respectively during the same period," it said.

Aadhar Housing Finance gets Sebi nod to garner ₹5,000 crore via IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd, which is backed by private equity major Blackstone, has received Sebi's go-ahead to raise Rs 5,000 crore through an initial public offering (IPO), an update with the markets regulator showed on Monday. The proposed IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 1,000 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of Rs 4,000 crore by promoter BCP Topco VII Pte Ltd, an affiliate of Blackstone Group Inc, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP). Currently, BCP Topco holds a 98.72 per cent stake in Aadhar Housing Finance. Aadhar Housing Finance, which filed preliminary IPO papers with the markets regulator in February, has obtained its observation on April 5, an update with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) showed. Sebi's observation means it's a go-ahead to float the IPO. Going by the draft papers, the company proposes to utilise



the proceeds from the fresh issue to the tune of Rs 750 crore for meeting future capital requirements towards onward lending and a portion will also be used for general corporate purposes. Aadhar Housing Finance offers a range of mortgage-related loan products, including loans for residential property purchase and construction; home improvement and extension loans; and loans for commercial property construction and acquisition. The company is a retail-focused HFC focused on the low income housing segment, serving economically weaker

and low-to-middle income customers, who require small ticket mortgage loans. It has a network of 471 branches, including 91 sales offices, as of September 30, 2023. The company benefits from the resources, relationships and expertise of Blackstone, one of the world's leading investment firms. Aadhar Housing filed draft papers with Sebi in January 2021 to raise Rs 7,300 crore through an initial share sale. It had received the regulator's nod to float the public issue in May 2022, however, it did not go ahead with the launch.

NTPC aims for five GW capacity addition in FY'25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned power giant NTPC on Monday said it is eyeing 5 GW power generation capacity addition in financial year 2024-25. NTPC aims to add 3 gigawatt (GW) of renewable energy (RE) capacity, exemplifying its steadfast dedication to environmental stewardship, a company statement said. Simultaneously, the power major aims to add 2 GW to its thermal energy capacity. According to the statement, NTPC has set a target to add 5GW of installed capacity reflecting its commitment to providing clean, reliable, and affordable energy solutions. In FY24, NTPC successfully added 3,924 MW of new capacity to its portfolio, bringing its cumulative installed capacity to nearly 76 GW. Presently, the group has an operational RE capacity of 3.5 GW, with an extensive pipeline exceeding 20 GW. By 2032, NTPC is looking to expand its non-fossil-based capacity to 45-50 per cent of the company's portfolio that



will include 60 GW RE capacity with a total portfolio of 130 GW. NTPC Ltd is India's largest integrated power utility, contributing 1/4th of the power requirement of the country. With a diverse portfolio of thermal, hydro, solar, and wind power plants, NTPC is dedicated to delivering reliable, affordable, and sustainable electricity to the nation. The company is committed to adopting best practices, fostering innovation, and embracing clean energy technologies for a greener future.

BMW sales rise 51 per cent to 3,680 units

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

BMW Group India on Monday reported its highest-ever first quarter car sales at 3,680 units in the three months to March 2024. The company sales rose 51 per cent in the first quarter of this fiscal as compared to

2,440 units in the January-March quarter of 2022-23. Besides, BMW Motorrad sales stood at 1,810 units in the first quarter. "Our key car models are at the top of their game and with significant new launches in the pipeline, we will raise the heat in luxury market," said BMW.

RBI imposes curbs on Shirpur Cooperative Bank

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday imposed several restrictions on Maharashtra-based Shirpur Merchants' Co-operative Bank, including withdrawal of funds by customers, in the wake of the lender's deteriorating financial position. In a statement, the RBI said

from the close of business on Monday, the bank will not grant or renew any loans and advances, make any investment, incur any liability, transfer or otherwise dispose of any of its properties or assets, without prior approval of the central bank in writing. "Considering the bank's present liquidity position, no amount from the total balance



across all savings bank or current accounts or any other account of a depositor, may be allowed to be withdrawn, but are allowed to set off loans against deposits subject to the conditions stated in the above RBI directions," the central bank said. The RBI further said the eligible depositors would be entitled to receive deposit

insurance claim amount of his/her deposits up Rs 5 lakh from the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC). The restrictions on The Shirpur Merchants' Co-operative Bank will remain in force for six months from the close of business on April 8, 2024, the RBI said. The directions by the RBI

should not per se be construed as cancellation of banking licence, it said. "The bank will continue to undertake banking business with restrictions till its financial position improves," it said. The Reserve Bank may also consider modifications of the directions depending upon circumstances, the central bank added.

Liverpool avoids damaging defeat to Man United

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Having ended Liverpool's quadruple challenge, Manchester United looked set to deliver a major blow to Jurgen Klopp's hopes of bowing out at the end of the season with a second Premier League title. Time will tell how damaging a 2-2 draw at Old Trafford on Sunday will be to the Merseyside club in the three-way fight at the top, but it could have been so much worse if not for Mohamed Salah's late penalty.

"We should have won the game, that is clear," Klopp said. "As far as I'm concerned, we have a point more than we did before."

It wasn't only the prospect of defeat at the home of Liverpool's fiercest rivals that felt so significant, but the nature of it. Klopp's team had totally dominated by raining down shots on United's goal in a mismatched first half, but only managed to lead 1-0 at the break through Luis Diaz's goal.

The atmosphere totally changed when Bruno Fernandes struck a stunning equalizer from inside the center circle after a Liverpool mistake and Kobbie Mainoo curled a superb shot into the top corner to give United the lead.

After victories for Arsenal and Manchester City on Saturday, Liverpool was heading toward a second defeat to United, after losing in the quarterfinals of the



FA Cup last month. That was until Aaron Wan-Bissaka's reckless lunge at Harvey Elliott led to referee Anthony Taylor pointing to the spot and Salah converting.

The draw moved Liverpool level on points with first-place Arsenal, but behind on goal difference. City is a point behind in third in an ever-tightening title race.

"You shouldn't do what we do today constantly, that won't be enough. Definitely not," Klopp said.

Klopp said in January that he would step down at the end of the season. He has already led

Liverpool to the English League Cup and the club is still in contention to win the Europa League. Klopp is hoping to win the Premier League title for a second time after ending the club's 30-year wait for the trophy in 2020.

United has been a bogey team for Liverpool this season - with two draws in the league and victory in the FA Cup.

Arsenal still has to travel to Old Trafford in the league, but Klopp predicted a similar performance by United would be punished by Mikel Arteta's league leader.

"I'm really sorry to say it, but we should have won both games and

didn't. That's our fault," Klopp said.

UNITED FIGHTS

Erik ten Hag needed a performance from his players in front of new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe.

A desperately disappointing week had seen his team blow winning positions in stoppage time at Brentford and Chelsea to deliver blows to United's chances of qualifying for the Champions League.

While this was another late setback, United's response to being totally outplayed in the first half will have provided some

encouragement to the manager. "When you put yourself three times in a week in a winning position, just before the end of the game, but then drop points, it is very disappointing," Ten Hag said.

Pressure is on Ten Hag to salvage a campaign that has failed to live up to expectations. Ratcliffe is overhauling United's soccer operations in an attempt to end its wait for the title, having last lifted the trophy in Alex Ferguson's final season in 2013. That won't happen this year, but Ten Hag could still win the FA Cup with his team playing second-tier Coventry in the semifinals later this month.

He still has hopes of qualifying for the Champions League, with fifth place potentially being enough, dependent on how English teams perform in Europe this season.

"We will keep fighting and we have to do the same and learn from the moments," Ten Hag said.

LATE DRAMA

On Thursday, it was Chelsea pulling off a late comeback to stun United.

On Sunday, Mauricio Pochettino's team was on the wrong end of stoppage-time drama as last-place Sheffield United fought back to earn a 2-2 draw at Bramall Lane after Ollie McBurnie's equalizer in the third minute of added time.

Chelsea twice squandered the lead after opening the scoring through Thiago Silva and going

in front again through Noni Madueke. While Sheffield United looks almost certain to be relegated this season, it showed fight in front of its home fans.

Jayden Bogle leveled the game in the first half before McBurnie's late effort. "Today is not about finding excuses, in the last few minutes we needed to kill (the game), that is the reason we are in the position we are," Pochettino said. "We are scoring and the problem is we are conceding a lot, we are going to keep working and believing."

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Tottenham moved up to fourth after a 3-1 win against Nottingham Forest to take charge of the race for the last guaranteed Champions League place.

Spurs moved above fifth-place Aston Villa on goal difference and also has a game in hand on its closest rival.

Forest, meanwhile, missed the chance to move further clear of the relegation zone and is above 18th-place Luton on goal difference alone.

An own-goal from Murillo put the hosts ahead at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium before Chris Wood leveled for Forest in the first half.

But two goals in the space of six minutes from Micky van de Ven and Pedro Porro after the break sealed the win for Ange Postecoglou's team.



Dean wins LIV Golf after Sergio blunders

AP ■ DORAL (FLORIDA)

Dean Burmester of South Africa won for the first time on the LIV Golf League by closing with a 4-under 68 and beating Sergio Garcia in a playoff Sunday when the Spaniard hit into the water on the second extra hole at LIV Golf Miami.

It was the third time Garcia has lost a playoff in LIV Golf, and the second time this year.

The former Masters champion, who has yet to win since joining the Saudi-funded league when it launched in 2022, looked to have this one in hand when he holed a 40-foot birdie putt on the 17th hole and then took the lead when Burmester bogeyed the 18th at Trump National Doral.

Garcia badly missed a 4-foot par putt on the 18th hole and shot 70. They finished at 11-under 205, one shot ahead of Matthew Wolff.

Both made par on the 18th on the first playoff hole. The second time around, Garcia came up short of the green and into the water. Burmester made a 3-foot par putt for the win, giving him the \$4 million prize.

"I've been at the receiving end of this," Burmester said. "I felt like I played great. I haven't got it done. Sergio gave me a lifeline."

Burmester won for the third time in the last five months. He won the Joburg Open and South African Open late last year, events co-sanctioned by the European and Sunshine tours.

Masters champion Jon Rahm heads to Augusta National without having won in a year, at least as an individual.



Brest beats Metz 4-3

AP ■ PARIS

Brest held on to beat struggling Metz 4-3 and consolidate second place in the French league on Sunday, moving the unheralded club closer to qualification for the Champions League for the first time.

The home side led 4-1 but got pegged back to 4-3 after Georgia forward Georges Mikautadze struck two late goals. Brest trimmed Paris Saint-Germain's big lead to 10 points with only six games left.

Brest has never finished higher than eighth in its history, and Europe's elite competition is within reach for the small club from Brittany. Governing body UEFA recently visited the 15,000-seater Stade Francis Le Blé amid concerns it will not meet the norms to host Champions League games.

Metz took a surprise lead after six minutes when defender Ismaël Traoré turned in Lamine Camara's corner.

But the home fans enjoyed a 3-1 halftime scoreline thanks to goals from defender Brendan Chardonnet, midfielder Kamory Doumbia and striker Steve Mounié. Uruguayan forward Martín Satriano headed in the fourth goal on the hour mark.

Metz again showed good attacking intent but is 17th in the 18-team league, with only six rounds left to avoid relegation after just one season in the top league.

Also Sunday, third-place

Monaco beat Rennes 1-0 to stay within one point of Brest, with midfielder Maghnes Aklouché hitting a first-time shot from a left-wing cross in the 25th.

Both sides had a player sent off: Rennes forward Martin Terrier in the 47th for a dangerous tackle on Aklouché, and Monaco defender Thilo Kehrer for a second yellow in the 64th.

OTHER MATCHES

Nantes is just above the relegation zone after losing 3-1 at home to 10th-place Lyon in the late game, despite leading in the 16th minute through forward Matthis Abline.

Former France and Tottenham midfielder Moussa Sissoko was given too much room and advanced unchallenged before spreading the ball right to Florent Mollet, whose cross from the right was neatly headed inside the right post by Abline.

Veteran striker Alexandre Lacazette equalized in the 75th for French Cup finalist Lyon with his 14th league goal of the season, before 19-year-old forward Malick Fofana scored two minutes later and Gift Orban wrapped up the win seven minutes into injury time.

Fifth-place Nice drew 0-0 at Reims, and Toulouse vs. Strasbourg also finished scoreless.

Téji Savanier's second-half penalty and an injury-time goal from substitute Yann Karamoh gave 13th-place Montpellier a 2-0 home win against Lorient.

Korda wins 4th straight LPGA Tour start

AP ■ NORTH LAS VEGAS (NEVADA)

Nelly Korda is on a roll not seen on the LPGA Tour in 16 years.

She won four of the first seven holes, largely making the rest of the final Sunday in the T-Mobile Match Play a formality in beating Leona Maguire 4 and 3 at Shadow Creek.

Lorena Ochoa in 2008 was the last player to win four consecutive starts. Korda, the world's top-ranked player, will try to tie the record of five - set by Nancy Lopez in 1978 and matched by Annika Sorenstam in

2004-05 - in two weeks at the season's first major, The Chevron Championship outside Houston.

Because Korda took seven weeks off after winning in January in her hometown of Bradenton, Florida, this victory was her third straight in a scheduled event. Four players share the record of four in a row, with Mickey Wright doing it twice.

Korda also became the first American since Kathy Whitworth in 1969 to win four of her first five starts in a season.

"I can't even wrap my head around it," Korda said. "Such a whirlwind of the last three



weeks. I just feel like I was just in go-mode constantly." This was the first head-to-head match-play singles event between Korda and

Maguire, but they have experience against each other in similar settings at the Solheim Cup. The Irish player is 3-1 while representing Europe in team match-play events against Korda. Korda birdied Nos. 5-7 for a 4-up lead. She was 5 up after 12, saw Maguire take 13 and 14 with pars, and ended the match with a par win on the par-4 15th.

"It's always nice to get a lead, kind of like a cushion," Korda said. "But it's Leona. She's such a fiery competitor. I knew when I lost those two holes in a row, 13 and 14, that I really needed to put my foot down to finish the

match off." Korda earned \$300,000 for her 12th career victory.

"You know you're going to have to make birdies if you want to beat her," Maguire said. "Unfortunately, I didn't make enough today. Hats off to her. She is an incredible player and she is playing some great golf right now. All I could do is play my own game, and that wasn't good enough today."

This tournament was entirely match play the first three years and played in late May when temperatures often are in the high 90s. Many of the top players opted not to compete.

Danielle follows Miami title with championship at Charleston Open

AP ■ CHARLESTON (SOUTH CAROLINA)

Danielle Collins is loaded with confidence and belief in what she can accomplish in her final season after following her Miami Open title with the Charleston Open championship on Sunday.

Collins powered past 11th-ranked Daria Kasatkina for a 6-2, 6-1 victory Sunday, her career-best 13th straight match win as she became the first since Serena Williams in 2013 to follow a hard-court victory at Miami with one on the green clay of Charleston.

And she's open to even more in what is the 30-year-old's final season on tour.

"I'm just trying to keep this train rolling," Collins said after winning her fourth WTA title. "Really be myself out there and not think too much about what's next."

No one's been more dominant the past two weeks than the "Danimal," the nickname she coined when she signed up for Instagram out of college.

She showed that again this week, dropping just one set in six matches - it was a second-set loss to 2023 Charleston winner Ons Jabeur - to lift a second straight trophy.

She led 3-0 in the opening set, where she broke Kasatkina's



serve twice as the crowd cheered the American's every move.

Collins didn't let up in the second set, taking a 5-0 lead before the Russian held serve. Collins closed the match with a volley at the net, pumping her fist as her face broke into a smile.

Kasatkina, who is ranked 11th, played with a heavy wrap on her right thigh. She struggled with her serve throughout, regularly putting herself behind.

The way Collins has played, it was an impossible hole from which to dig out.

"At first, I wanted to say I'll miss you on tour but after this match I'm not sure," Kasatkina said during the trophy ceremony. "To be honest, I'm going to miss you because you're such a character. Your personality is amazing. Tennis is going to lose a lot after you're done."

Collins had dealt with painful endometriosis, where tissue in the uterus grows outside the uterus. It can cause difficulty getting pregnant if not treated and Collins made a life decision to end her career for other goals like

having children.

Her recent success has not changed her perspective or plans for retirement.

"I'm really happy that I can showcase my best tennis in these last couple of events, because I think that's the way I want to go out," she said. "I want to go out with my best results. I know everyone has a different way of retiring and ending their career, but for me I want to try to go out playing my best tennis."

Collins never thought about cancelling plans for Charleston after her success at Miami. She drove home to Tampa, then drove herself to Charleston. She does not have a full-time coach or many of the staffers that some WTA players travel with.

"I guess, I'm just a low-maintenance gal," she joked. She did have her boyfriend, Bryan Kipp in the stands, along with her beloved dog, Quincy, who she shouted out to the crowd after receiving the trophy.

"I better wrap this up, but he sees me," Collins said.

Collins, who is ranked 22nd, has won 26 of her past 27 sets. She will take a few days off before playing in Madrid later this month.

"Hopefully," said Collins, "when Madrid comes around, I am back in Danimal mode."



Rudi to stay on as Germany sporting director

AP ■ FRANKFURT (GERMANY)

Rudi Voller is set to stay on as Germany's national soccer team through to the 2026 World Cup, with coach Julian Nagelsmann's future still uncertain.

Voller was initially hired early last year, initially only until this year's European Championship, as a response to Germany going out of the 2022 World Cup in the group stage. He oversaw the signing of Nagelsmann in September to replace Hansi Flick.

After a slow start, Nagelsmann led Germany to friendly wins over France and the Netherlands last month to lift the spirits around the Euro 2024 host team.

Nagelsmann's future remains unclear with the coach only contracted through the end of the tournament amid reported interest from some of Europe's major clubs.

The 63-year-old Voller won

the World Cup as a player with what was then West Germany in 1990 and coached Germany to the World Cup final in 2002.

In a statement Monday, Voller said his return as sporting director "perhaps began initially out of a feeling of obligation," but he had grown to enjoy his new role.

"Together, we now want to create a wonderful European Championship in Germany and then keep that momentum with us for further challenges," he added.

Before Nagelsmann's arrival, Voller briefly returned as caretaker coach for one game, overseeing a 2-1 win over France in September.

Germany's next games are pre-European Championship friendlies against Ukraine on June 6 and Greece four days later.

XGermany has been drawn against Scotland, Hungary and Switzerland in the group stage.

Shubhankar is peaking at right time: Coach Jesse

PTI ■ GREATER NOIDA

India's number one ranked golfer Shubhankar Sharma is peaking at the right time and will be among the favourites to win a medal, including a gold, at the Paris Olympics, feels his coach Jesse Grewal.

Grewal, the only golf coach to be conferred with the Dronacharya Award, said he has full confidence in his ward to do well at his favourite golf course in Paris.

"I think he is going to have a good year. He has almost qualified for the Olympics and needs to maintain his level. Yes, he can be the first Indian to win a gold in golf at the Olympics as he

is peaking at the right time," Grewal told PTI at a Five Iron Golf India event in Greater Noida.

"He has 100 per cent chance. I am just not hopeful, I know he can do it. He is a player who has some favourite golf courses and Le Golf National (2024 Paris Olympics Golf venue) is one of his favourites."

Grewal, who will be accompanying Shubhankar for the Olympics, plans to go early to Paris as part of their preparation for the Games.

"This time we are going a bit early there. He will train in Europe from the beginning of June or May end to prepare hard for the Olympics. The focus is clearly on the Olympics. So that



he is prepared in July," he said.

Grewal feels Shubhankar's iron play will be crucial at the Olympics.

"His iron play has to be on song. He is a very good iron player and he has to do well with it. He has to do well with the driver. Putter and driver are the keys to create that. Iron play is his standout play and this will play a very big role at the Olympics."

"So when his drivers and putters get good in a week, he is going to win. Winning gold is like winning a tournament and he can do it."

The Chandigarh-based coach demonstrated a few golfing skills to budding golfers during a session here. He also highlighted the importance of

having top golf simulation centres like Five Iron Golf India which can help not just the rookies and amateur golf enthusiasts but also professionals alike.

"We definitely need more of these places. They help golf become popular among people from all walks, and help budding golfers improve their game. The simulation centres can also help the amateurs to turn into professionals," Grewal said.

Five Iron Golf India, India's first urban golf entertainment venue, along with its corporate partner, Top Golf Callaway Brands, organised a two-day event which included several contests, demos and club fittings culminating with the Jesse Grewal Master Class.



Yash credits his match winning haul to backing of Rahul

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Unlike many, Yash Thakur quite likes the burden of expectations. So, when his Lucknow Super Giants skipper K L Rahul saw a match-winner in him after Mayank Yadav's injury breakdown, the young pacer got the impetus he needed to fetch his maiden five-wicket haul in the IPL.

The 25-year-old from Vidarbha had the spotlight firmly planted on him after pace spearhead Yadav suffered a side strain and left the field mid-match against Gujarat Titans here on Sunday night.

Thakur returned figures of 5/30, including the wicket of GT captain Shubman Gill. This was his maiden five-wicket haul in the IPL and helped his team defeat Gujarat Titans by 33 runs, besides earning him the player of the match honours. "Mayank is an extraordinary player and the speed he generates. I know my limitations and I know my strength and I only back my strengths," Thakur said of his teammate, who has bowled



the fastest delivery of this IPL. Giving an update on Yadav, Thakur said his now famous teammate is doing fine. "Nothing is wrong. All good," he said. Thakur, who wanted to be a wicketkeeper at the beginning of his cricket journey,

credited his match-winning haul to the backing of Rahul. "After Mayank left the field, (KL) Rahul bhai only said that 'may be this is your day, you can win the match for us.' He said, 'don't think much and keep faith in yourself'. He said, we'll only focus on the

controllables and not waste time on external factors like what has happened to whom," he revealed. "I don't take the pressure of expectations as a concern. Rather I'm happy when people outside or my team expects me to win games. I

enjoy this responsibility of winning games for the team." Thakur said he varied his deliveries, bowling a few slower ones and bouncers to unsettle the batters, which ultimately fetched him success. "We knew that the wicket was slow, so the plan

that we discussed, we stuck to it. Even if we got hit for runs, we would stick to it (the plan). KL told us we will get success. "The variations, the slower ones, the bouncers I used, I kept getting success," added Thakur.

GT's Vijay Shankar rues lack of collective effort

Reflecting on the loss, Gujarat Titans all-rounder Vijay Shankar conceded that lack of a collective effort was hurting the Shubman Gill-led side. Shankar was among the underwhelming performers, managing just 17 in the team's 130-run total while chasing 163.

"Last match we batted really well as a team (against Punjab Kings, scoring 199), this match we bowled really well (to restrict LSG). Sometimes it is just a collective thing.

"When both together if we can bring it up in one game, that's when we'll start winning it. That is what we missed in the last two games," said Shankar during the post-match press conference.

"We are trying our best. It's not the end of the road for us; it's a very long tournament," he added.



Kohli value beyond strike rate: Lara

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Legendary Brian Lara asserted that Virat Kohli's value transcends cold numbers, and the West Indian virtuoso has little doubt that the star batter should be a part of India's T20 World Cup squad.

Kohli stood in the eye of a social media storm after making a 67-ball hundred for Royal Challengers Bengaluru against Rajasthan Royals in their IPL 2024 match at Jaipur, which was the joint slowest hundred in the competition alongside Manish Pandey's century in 2009.

"The strike-rate depends on position, and for an opener strike-rate of 130-140 is pretty alright. But if you are coming in the middle-order then you may be required to hit at 150 or 160. As you have seen in this IPL, batsmen are hitting at 200 in the latter part of an innings.

"But an opener like Kohli always has the chance of starting at 130, bat through the overs and finish at 160 or even higher, which is alright," Lara said on Monday during the Star Sports Press Room which was also attended by former India batter Ambati Rayudu.

"But if you ask me, India's top three in the World Cup should be Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Shubman Gill irrespective of all these. And for RCB, it should not be about one person, as it has to be a team effort," said Lara.

The Trinidadian said opening the innings with Kohli and Rohit in the T20 World Cup could be a tempting option, but strongly advocated India pairing a younger name with the experienced player at the pole position.

"I think Rohit and Virat going as openers to the West Indies (for WC) will serve India very well. Though, I think that you

should have some youthful punch in the opening. One of the younger players, showing their mettle, and having one of those experienced players shepherd the innings in the middle-order.

"Having that whole experience up front, it could have a negative effect if they get dismissed early, so I will use one at top, but use the other at No. 3," said the left-hander. That brought up the topic of Yashvi Jaiswal's lean patch for the Rajasthan outfit.

Jaiswal entered this IPL after a stunning Test series against England but he has so far failed to contribute anything worthwhile. The left-hander has made just 39 runs from four matches, averaging a meagre 9.75.

Lara felt that the young star might be a bit anxious because of the impending team selection for the T20 World Cup.

"He had a very, very special Test series for India earlier this year. But I think he is a bit too anxious (about selection). It reflects in batting as there is not a lot of body or foot movement. He certainly has the ability but he is rushing to play the shots," said Lara.

The 54-year-old West Indian, who has scored upwards of 20,000 international runs, said Jaiswal should focus on the task at hand.

"It is quite natural that the young players like Jaiswal or Gill or Abhishek Sharma or Rryan Parag are a bit anxious. They know that if they score runs here, they can get into (India's) World Cup team. But you need to separate those two thoughts.

"I had struggled with that in my playing days. My advice to them is to focus on the IPL, do your best to get runs and the World Cup (selection) will take care of itself," he added.



Jadeja rips apart KKR in eight balls

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Ravindra Jadeja worked his magic taking three wickets in a space of eight balls to rip the heart out of KKR's batting as Chennai Super Kings were left to chase a manageable target of 137 for 9 in an IPL match here on Monday. Having lost back to back games on the road, CSK were back in their element on a familiar Chepauk turf where the ball gripped and allowed Jadeja (3/18 in 4 overs) and Maheesh Theekshana (1/28 in 4 overs) were absolutely brilliant with both their line and length.

While KKR lost Phil Salt (0) cheaply off the very first delivery, Sunil Narine (27 off 20 balls) and young Angkrish Raghuvanshi (24 of 18 balls) continued from where they had left against DC, chancing their arms and adding 56 in Powerplay but once spinners came into operation it all fell apart. With the ball gripping and not coming onto the bat,

Narine's lofted shot was holed out in the deep and Raghuvanshi's inexperience never got going and Rinku Singh (9 off 14 balls) and Andre Russell (10 off 10 balls) couldn't up the ante as the canny Mustafizur Rahman (2/22) and Tushar Deshpande (3/33) were fantastic at the death. Both took pace off the deliveries and bowled wide lines which was out of the hitting range of the two finishers. The catching in the deep was also top notch for CSK as KKR batters had a forgettable day in office.

Shreyas Iyer (34 off 32 balls) never got going and Rinku Singh (9 off 14 balls) and Andre Russell (10 off 10 balls) couldn't up the ante as the canny Mustafizur Rahman (2/22) and Tushar Deshpande (3/33) were fantastic at the death. Both took pace off the deliveries and bowled wide lines which was out of the hitting range of the two finishers. The catching in the deep was also top notch for CSK as KKR batters had a forgettable day in office.

Inconsistent Punjab face unpredictable SRH

PTI ■ MULLANPUR

An inconsistent Punjab Kings will hope to come out with an attacking display to match the ultra-aggressive approach of Sunrisers Hyderabad as the two teams clash in a mid-table battle in the IPL here on Tuesday. Both SRH and PBKS have two wins and two losses from their four matches to be tied with two other teams in the middle with four points and they will be desperate to break out of the mid-table logjam first.

While SRH have been unpredictable sometimes they have displayed their might with the bat with their top-order firing on all cylinders on most occasions. But the same cannot be said about the Kings.

SRH recorded the highest team total in the history of the IPL en route their win over Mumbai Indians, while they also notched up a convincing six-wicket win over reigning champions Chennai Super Kings on Friday.

The likes of Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen and Aiden Markram have consistently taken the attack to the opposition bowlers, providing the team with blistering starts.

PBKS too have plenty of big-hitting potential with their batting line-up boosting off Shikhar Dhawan, Jonny Bairstow, Liam Livingstone. But apart from the skipper, none has been able to consistently put up a show so far. Punjab will hope that



their Indian players -- Prabhsimran Singh and Jitesh Sharma -- step up just like Shashank Singh, who pulled off a jailbreak in their last match against Gujarat Titans with his highest ever T20 score -- 61 runs from 29 balls.

Both the teams are coming into the match after a win and it could well be a battle of the powerplay when they face off at the newly-built Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Cricket Stadium, which will host only its second IPL game on Tuesday.

Bowling department remains a concern for both teams. While Punjab has struggled at the death overs, Sunrisers faltered with the new ball. South African pacer Kagiso Rabada emerged as their best bowler with six wickets, but inconsistencies of the likes of death-over specialist Arshdeep Singh and Harshal Patel is a concern. Leg-spinner Rahul Chahar has also been expensive though Harpreet Brar has done well so far.

Hyderabad: Jaydev Unadkat, Jhatavedh Subramanyan, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Pat Cummins (c), Washington Sundar, Shahbaz Ahmed, Sanvir Singh, Glenn Phillips, Nitish Reddy, Marco Jansen, Abhishek Sharma, Upendra Yadav, Rahul Tripathi, Aiden Markram, Heinrich Klaasen, Travis Head, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Agarwal, Abdul Samad, Akash Maharaj Singh, Wanindu Hasaranga, Umran Malik.

Punjab Kings: Shikhar Dhawan (c), Matthew Short, Prabhsimran Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidwath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajan, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.

for Hyderabad, the likes of Jaydev Unadkat, Mayank Markande and Bhuvneshwar Kumar have conceded too many runs. Despite all his experience, Bhuvneshwar has struggled with the new ball though he managed a wicket in the last game. T Natarajan, who returned after missing two games in between, has also claimed four wickets so far. Skipper Pat Cummins, who has taken five wickets in four games, has looked good but he will need consistent support from his other bowlers.

The Sunrisers bowlers dished out a lot of variations like cutters and slow balls to trouble the batters and they would hope to keep the momentum against the Kings.

It is a 3-2 head-to-head count between SRH and PBKS in the last five meetings, indicating that a tight battle is likely to be on the cards on Tuesday.

Squads: Sunrisers Hyderabad: Jaydev Unadkat,

Injured Mayank likely to miss LSG next match

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Young pace sensation Mayank Yadav in all likelihood will miss Lucknow Super Giants next IPL match against Delhi Capitals at home on April 12 because of an abdominal niggle which will require monitoring over the week, the franchise's CEO stated on Monday.

Mayank suffered the niggle during LSG's 33-run win over Gujarat Titans at Lucknow on Sunday night. "Mayank felt soreness in lower abdominal area and as a

precaution we are managing his workload over the next week. We hope to see him soon on the field," said Vinod Bisht, the CEO of the Super Giants in a statement. However, the statement meant that Mayank might be a non-starter even in LSG's weekend game (April 14) against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens.

With Bisht being non-committal about his possible return to action, things aren't exactly looking great for the injury prone speedster. While one match absence is safely on cards, lower abdominal injuries



for fast bowlers does take more time to heal. On Sunday night, Mayank walked off the field with LSG physio after bowling just one over against the Titans.

The ultra-quick pacer, who generally crosses the 150 kph mark effortlessly, could barely go past 140 kph in his lone over, fourth of the GT innings, in which he conceded 13 runs.

He did not return to the field for the rest of the night. At that time, his absence was attributed to a side strain.

After the match, LSG all-rounder Krunal Pandya had said that Mayank looked alright.

"I don't know what is happening. I had a brief chat and he seemed okay, which is a positive. Whatever conversation I have had, whatever we see, he has a good head on his shoulder. Really excited to see how his carer pans out," Krunal said in the post-match presentation ceremony.

Mayank, who made his IPL debut against Punjab Kings in this IPL, had taken six wickets from two matches before limping out in the

third game. Legendary West Indian batter Brian Lara on Monday appreciated Mayank's abilities but said the young Turk needed to work closely with a senior pace like Jasprit Bumrah.

"He has to stay a step ahead. He's got to learn. He's got to talk to big bowlers like Jasprit Bumrah. He's got to get as much information as possible, stay one step ahead. I think he's got all the goods to become a great fast bowler," Lara said in the Star Sports Press Room.