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Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 34 Issue 100
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, THURSDAY APRIL 11, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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Jolt for AAP as Delhi Minister quits party

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With the party supremo and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal behind bars, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday was hit by fresh trouble with one of its Ministers who was holding several departments including social welfare, Raaj Kumar Anand resigning from the post and party. He claimed that the AAP was born out of a movement against corruption, but today this party is mired in the "same quicksand of graft." Anand, who represents Patel Nagar Assembly constituency, alleged that Dalits were not given representation in the party.

Addressing a Press conference at his residence after tendering his resignation to party general secretary Sandeep Pathak, Anand said, "I had entered politics when Kejriwal had said if its politics changes, the country will change. But today, I say with much regret, that politics did not change but political leaders did. The AAP was born out of a movement against corruption, but today this party is mired in the same quicksand of graft." He also took a swipe at Kejriwal who is in Tihar jail after being remanded in judicial custody in an excise policy-linked money laundering case and has failed to get any relief from the Delhi High Court.

"From the Jantar Mantar, Kejriwal had said the country will change once politics changes. The politician hasn't changed but the politician has changed," Anand, who is an MLA from the Patel Nagar



Delhi Minister Raaj Kumar Anand speaks to the media after he resigned from the Cabinet and quit the AAP on Wednesday. Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

constituency, said. Meanwhile, Anand is under investigation by the Enforcement Directorate and DRI in an alleged money laundering case relating to unaccounted business investments in hawala payments sent to China in 2023.

ED alleged that evidence relating to unaccounted business investments and hawala payments sent to China in 2023 was recovered from some of his key employees. This, according to the agency, was apart from ₹74 lakh in cash along with various incriminating documents/digital records that were also recovered.



Kejriwal seeks early hearing in SC



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on Wednesday said he will look into Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's request for an early listing of his plea against a high court order upholding his arrest. He asked Kejriwal's lawyer to send an email. Earlier in the day, Kejriwal

moved the Supreme Court against the April 9 judgement of the high court.

"I will look into the e-mail (seeking early listing of plea). Please send the mail," CJI Chandrachud told senior advocate and Kejriwal's counsel Abhishek Singhvi.

"This is urgent and is regarding the Delhi Chief Minister. The arrest is based on an un-relied document and suppressed from us," Singhvi said.

In a massive blow to the Chief Minister, the Delhi High Court on Tuesday upheld his arrest in a money laundering case stemming from the alleged excise policy scam, saying the Enforcement Directorate (ED) was left with "little option" after he skipped repeated summonses and refused to join the investigation.

After his resignation, the Aam Aadmi Party hit back at the BJP, claiming that the resignation of Anand vindicated its stand that Kejriwal's arrest was aimed at finishing the party. Addressing a Press conference, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh alleged that the BJP was using the ED and the CBI to "break our Ministers and MLAs." "It is 'agnipariksha' (trial by fire) of AAP Ministers and MLAs," he said. Delhi Minister Saurabh

Bharadwaj claimed that Anand may have been threatened to quit AAP.

"Time and again we said the intention behind arresting Kejriwal was to break the party and Governments of Delhi and Punjab. Many of our colleagues will feel that we hate Anand and will call him dishonest and cheater. We will not say any such thing.... "Not everyone is Sanjay Singh. I believe that he was scared," Bharadwaj said. Continued on Page 2



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted during a public meeting ahead of Lok Sabha polls, in Mettupalayam, Tamil Nadu, on Wednesday. PTI

Modi's Southern push continues

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

In fiery speeches delivered at Villore and Mettupalayam in Tamil Nadu on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tore into the arrogance and corruption practiced by the DMK and the family controlling the party. The Prime Minister described the DMK and its ally the Congress as the embodiment of corruption, arrogance and malpractices.

In an apparent reference to a news report carried by The Pioneer that the demand for trifurcating Tamil Nadu was growing silently, the Prime Minister said that the Kongunadu region was crying for development. "I assure you that the NDA

during its third term would work with more vigour for the growth of Kongu region," said the Prime Minister.

Modi referred to the interview given by a leader of the DMK to a TV channel in which the Dravidian party leader humiliated and insulted K Annamalai, the Tamil Nadu chief of the BJP.

Though the Prime Minister did not name the DMK leader, it was clear that he was referring to

Dayanidhi Maran, former IT Minister in the Manmohan Singh Cabinet who had to resign in the aftermath of the 2G spectrum scam. The DMK leader was asked about Annamalai to which the former answered Annamalai who? I do not know any Annamalai. Continued on Page 2



Union Minister Rajeev sends legal notice to Tharoor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar has sent a legal notice to Shashi Tharoor, accusing the Congress MP of making defamatory statements against him on a TV channel recently. Chandrasekhar, who is facing off against Tharoor in the Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha constituency for the April 26 polls, has alleged that the Congress leader disseminated "patently false information" regarding bribing of key voters and influential figures such as parish priests, among others, by the BJP candidate.

The statements by Tharoor were made with intent to harm Chandrasekhar's reputation and image. His remarks also disrespected the entire Christian community of Thiruvananthapuram and its leaders, as he had accused them of engaging in cash-for-votes activities, the BJP leader charged.

The Congress MP's statements were also in violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). The notice further claimed the statements were also targeted at jeopardising the BJP leader's election campaign and benefitting Tharoor in the elections.

Continued on Page 2



Representational image

Special force personnel tattoos under scanner in Odisha

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Police have asked its special security battalion personnel to remove tattoos on their body within 15 days as these skin markings are easily noticeable with uniform and considered "obscene and derogatory".

The Deputy Commissioner of Police (security), Bhubaneswar issued an order to this effect on Tuesday and asked all officials concerned to prepare a list of SSB men having "easily noticeable tattoos" on their bodies. SSB personnel provide security coverage to vital installations like the Chief Minister's residence, Raj Bhavan, State Secretariat, Odisha Legislative Assembly and the High Court. They also provide security to VVIPs and dignitaries within the State and those visiting Odisha from the rest of India.

"A good number of unit men are found making tattoos on their body

which demeans the image of the battalion as well as Odisha Police since these are offensive, obscene and derogatory in nature. "Hence after careful consideration, it was decided that, from today onwards, tattoos that are visible while wearing a uniform are not permitted," the DCP (security) said in the order.

All guards who are in charge of the SSB personnel have been directed to make a list of men "having tattoos on their body parts easily noticeable while wearing a uniform and ask them to permanently remove the tattoos within 15 days from the date of receiving the order".

The DCP warned that if the order was not implemented, necessary departmental actions would be initiated against those who would not follow the directive.

He advised the SSB personnel to avoid getting inked on the face, neck and hand to maintain a level of professionalism.

In 10th list of BJP, sitting MPs dropped

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After days of speculation, the BJP on Wednesday released its 10th list of candidates dropping sitting MPs Kirron Kher, Rita Bahuguna Joshi, Virendra Singh and fielded former Union Minister Surendrajeet Singh Ahluwalia, Neeraj Shekhar, son of former Prime Minister Chandrasekhar for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The BJP announced the candidates for nine Lok Sabha constituencies — seven in Uttar Pradesh, one in West Bengal and Chandigarh's lone seat. Of them, eight are new faces.

Ahluwalia's name was among the nine in the tenth Lok Sabha candidates list announced by the BJP on Wednesday, from his home town in Asansol the country's oldest coalfields on the Bengal-Jharkhand border, taking on Trinamool Congress' leader and the incumbent MP from the B a r d h a m a n - D u r g a p u r constituency in the state.

It was believed that former MLA and Mayor of Asansol, Jitendra Tiwari, would replace him as the BJP wanted to field a Hindi-speaking candidate from Asansol to contest against Trinamool Congress heavyweight



Kirron Kher



Rita Bahuguna Joshi

Singh's refusal to contest from the constituency. Pawan Singh withdrew from the Lok Sabha race last month after he drew the ire of Trinamool Congress (TMC) leaders for allegedly "mocking and targeting" Bengali women in his videos and movies.

Ahluwalia is the incumbent MP from the B a r d h a m a n - D u r g a p u r constituency in the state.

It was believed that former MLA and Mayor of Asansol, Jitendra Tiwari, would replace him as the BJP wanted to field a Hindi-speaking candidate from Asansol to contest against Trinamool Congress heavyweight

Satrughna Sinha. Ahluwalia served as Minister of State for Urban Affairs and Employment (Department of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation) and Parliamentary Affairs in the P V N a r a s i m h a R a o Cabinet from September 15, 1995, to May 16, 1996.

He was also deputy Opposition leader in the Rajya Sabha from June 2010 to May 2012.

The party dropped two time sitting MP Kirron Kher from Chandigarh and has fielded Sanjay Tandon in her place. Sanjay Tandon, 60, is the son of a BJP leader from Punjab and former Governor of Chhattisgarh Balramji Das Tandon.



Major relief to Delhi Metro Rail Corporation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a major relief to Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), the Supreme Court on Wednesday set aside its own three-year-old judgment that awarded in favour of the Reliance Infrastructure's subsidiary, Delhi Airport Metro Express Private Limited (DAMEPL) in a dispute with Delhi Metro and asked the company to return about ₹2,500 crore it had already received, holding that the previous verdict caused "grave miscarriage of justice" to a public utility which was saddled with an exorbitant liability.

Allowing the curative plea of the DMRC against the 2021 judgement, a Special Bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said the order of the Delhi High Court division bench was a "well-

considered decision" and "there was no valid basis" for the Supreme Court to interfere with it. "...we have come to the conclusion that this court erred in interfering with the decision of the Division Bench of the High Court. The judgment of the Division Bench in the appeal under Section 37 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act 1996 was based on a correct application of the test under Section 34 of the Act".

"The judgment of the two-judge Bench of this court, which interfered with the judgment of the Division Bench of the High Court, has resulted in a miscarriage of justice.

"The Division Bench applied the correct test in holding that the arbitral award suffered from the vice of perversity and patent illegality. The findings of the



File Photo: The Pioneer

Division Bench were borne out from the record and were not based on a misappreciation of law or fact. This court failed, while entertaining the SLP under Article 136, to justify its interference with the well-considered decision of the Division Bench of the High Court," it said in its 39 pages order. The decision of this court fails to adduce any justification bearing on any flaws in the manner of exercise of jurisdiction by the high court's division bench under the Arbitration Act, it said.

"By setting aside the judgement of the Division Bench, this court restored a patently illegal award which saddled a public utility with an exorbitant liability," it said, adding that this warrants the exercise of the power under Article 142 in a curative petition, said the bench which

also comprised justices BR Gavai and Surya Kant. Now, the amount paid by the DMRC to the Reliance Infrastructure firm in pursuance of the award has to be paid back to the PSU.

As per the arbitral award, DAMEPL was entitled to ₹2782.33 crore plus interest in terms of the concession agreement. This amount had swelled up to ₹8,009.38 crore by February 14, 2022. The apex court had on September 9, 2021 upheld the 2017 arbitration award enforceable against DMRC and said there was a disturbing tendency of courts setting aside such awards. It had quashed the Delhi High Court order that set aside the arbitration award in favour of DAMEPL which pulled out of an agreement to run the Airport Express metro line over safety issues.

Continued on Page 2

Vote for Modi for continued peace, progress: Yogi at JK

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Star campaigner of Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday urged voters to elect Narendra Modi-led government for a third term for "continued peace and more development".

Addressing a Vijay Sankalp rally in support of MoS PMO Dr Jitendra Singh at Sports Stadium, Kathua the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister said that the Modi government at the Center has ended terrorism by abolishing Article 370.

Yogi said, 'I am grateful to PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah that they have eliminated terrorism and ensured that whether it is Red Fort in Delhi or Lal Chowk in Srinagar, there is excitement and enthusiasm everywhere as development is taking place all around.

Striking an emotional chord with the voters from Kathua, Yogi Adityanath, sporting a Dogra turban (pagdi) appealed to them to elect MoS PMO Dr Jitendra Singh, a close aide of the Prime Minister to ensure the all-round development of the region.

Yogi Adityanath was invited by Dr Jitendra Singh to bolster his poll campaign. On April 12, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also scheduled to address an election rally in Udhampur.

Without making mention of the rival candidate Choudhary Lal Singh, Yogi Adityanath also targeted the Congress Party and reminded the electorate how the Congress Party ill-treated Jammu and



Kashmir and left it at the mercy of God during its term in office.

Referring to the construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, Yogi Adityanath said that earlier people used to shy away from even taking the name of Ayodhya. He said a majestic Ram temple has been constructed now. When a good government is formed, the wait of five hundred years also ends.

Yogi said 'those who are accidental Hindus had even denied the existence of Ram and Krishna. The Congress party disrespected our faith. He asked the people, 'Could Congress have constructed Ram temple in Ayodhya? Congress says that Ram never existed and Krishna never existed.

In his half-hour-long speech, Yogi Adityanath also listed out the achievements of the Modi government and also pre-

sented a report card of his government in Uttar Pradesh. He said that a strong government in the country provided many facilities to the people. 80 crore people got free ration. Health facilities are also being provided to the citizens. National security has been accorded top priority and job opportunities have been created for the youth. Now even when firecrackers are bursting in the country, Pakistan clarifies that it has no involvement in it. Because he knows that now there is a strong government in India.

A total number of 12 candidates are in the fray from Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha seat. The fate of these candidates will be decided by over 16.23 lakh voters on April 19. According to the figures provided by the office of the Returning Officer, there are 16,23,195 registered voters in the Udhampur Lok Sabha seat including 8,45,283 male, 7,77,899 female and 13 transgender electors. The rival candidates are also trying their level best to woo the first-time voters totaling 84,468.

The prestigious seat is set to witness a triangular contest.

Taunting BJP candidate, campaign managers of Choudhary Lal Singh claimed on one hand Dr Jitendra Singh is claiming the Modi government has launched several development projects in the region for the welfare of the common electorate. On the other hand, the BJP poll machinery has deployed all the star campaigners for one constituency to help Dr Jitendra Singh score a hat-trick.

MNS leader slams Raj Thackeray, quits party

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray announced his unconditional support to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP-led MahaYuti, the party's general secretary Kirtikumar Shinde on Wednesday resigned from the primary membership of the MNS, saying that Raj's move "would not benefit the Marathi people in any way".

Taking a strong exception to the announcement made by the MNS chief at his "Gudi Padwa" (Marathi New Year) rally on Tuesday evening, Shinde said: "Raj Thackeray may have taken the decision to support to 'Bhamosha' (BJP-Modi-Shah) in his personal interest, but the decision will in no way benefit the people of Maharashtra. He might have taken the decision to ensure his own as well as the MNS' survival in politics. But, the truth is not the MNS chief's side".

At his "Gudi Padwa" rally, Raj had said that MNS had extended "unconditional support" to BJP-led MahaYuti to ensure Narendra Modi



becomes the prime minister for the third term".

"The country needs strong leadership. I have made it clear to both Devendra Fadnavis (deputy chief minister) and Eknath Shinde (chief minister) that I am not interested in seat adjustments for the Lok Sabha polls. Nor am interested in nominations to Rajya Sabha or Maharashtra Legislative Council polls. I told them that I have decided to extend my unconditional support to the MahaYuti - BJP, Shinde-led Shiv Sena and NCP (Ajit Pawar) only to make Narendra Modi the Prime Minister of the country for the third term," the MNS chief had

said at the rally.

In detailed Facebook post titled "Goodbye MNS", Shinde alluded to the stand taken by MNS chief at his rally and said that "a time when the country was passing through a decisive phase, Raj saheb has taken U-turn from the stand he had taken in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls" when he had opposed BJP, Modi and Shah vehemently.

"In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Raj saheb had launched a tirade against the BJP through his 'Laav Re Te Video' (Play That Video) campaign. I attended all his rallies, wrote detailed articles giving facts and the thoughts he expressed against the BJP-Modi-Shah and made sincere efforts to convey his stand to more and more people," Shinde said.

"The political analysts will tell you how wrong Raj saheb is or how right he is. Nowadays political leaders can play the role they want, whenever required. Raj saheb enacted his role at the Gudi Padwa rally. His political moves have come an 'unimaginable' full circle.

But the fighters (activists) who believe in their ideology are crushed. What about them?, Shinde asked.

He alleged that in the past 10 years, BJP-Modi-Shah had literally destroyed the country "The BJP came to power claiming transparency but is indulging in dictatorship with the ED, CBI, IT probes are being used like a washing machine to force political opponents to submission," he said.

Shinde said that though he wanted to meet the MNS chief and explain to him the reasons behind his quitting the party. "But that is not possible now... That's why I have decided to resign from my post as the general secretary and also from the primary membership of the MNS," Shinde wrote in his post.

While signing off, Shinde said that he had received immense love and affection from Raj Thackeray, son Amit Thackeray, the office bearers and party workers of the MNS. "They all treated me with honour and respect. I expect people not to label my decision to quit the MNS as a rebellion against the party leadership," he added.

Nana Patole escapes unhurt in road mishap, smells plot

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Congress President Nana Patole escaped unhurt after a speeding truck rammed into the car in which he was returning to his base camp after addressing an election rally in Bhandara district of eastern Maharashtra late on Tuesday night.

Talking to media persons on Wednesday, Patole said that the speeding truck attempted to overtake his car which swerved to avoid it near Bhilewada, en route to Sukli village.

"Though car my driver tried hard to avoid a collision, the truck grazed my vehicle. To avoid mishap my driver drove the car off the road and managed to bring it to a halt in the darkness," Patole said.

Though Patole and his driver managed to come out of the vehicle unhurt, the vehicle was

badly damaged. Later on Wednesday morning, the local police visited to the mishap site, carried out a panchnama, seized the truck and started an investigation into the matter. On his part, Patole expressed serious doubts if the mishap was genuine or was there any conspiracy behind it. "We have lodged a complaint with the police. We have asked the police to investigate and ascertain if it was a genuine mishap or was there any conspiracy behind the crash. We are not sure if the truck driver was under the influence of alcohol and if he had dozed off at the wheel," Patole said.

In a related development, the Maharashtra Congress on Wednesday demanded enhanced security cover for its important leaders during the ongoing electioneering for the Lok Sabha polls.

Two hurt in MLA cars road mishap

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Two persons were injured when at least two cars in the convoy of an MLA belonging to an Eknath Shinde-Shiv Sena MLA Ashish Jaiswal were involved in a road mishap in Bhandara district of eastern Maharashtra on Wednesday. Jaiswal was travelling in a car for a poll campaign when the mishap occurred near

Kanhan village in Bhandara district. Of the two vehicles, one white car was thrown off the road into a ditch beside it and it was badly damaged, while the second black car also suffered considerable damage.

Jaiswal, who was travelling by another was unhurt, while two of his aides suffered serious injuries in the accident. The cause of mishap is not yet clear.

In a letter written to Maharashtra's Director-General of Police Rashmi Shukla and the Election Commission of India (ECI), State Congress' chief Spokesperson Atul Londhe sought a detailed inquiry into the matter to ascertain whether it was a 'conspiracy' to eliminate

Patole. Londhe urged the DGP and ECI to provide for tight security for important Congress leaders like the Leader of Opposition Vijay Wadetiwar, Congress Legislative Party Leader Balasaheb Thorat, ex-CM Prithviraj Chavan and others.

Defence espionage, love jihad thrill up Kerala election trail

KUMAR CHELLAPAN N KOCHI

The campaign scene in Kerala is expected to reach a feverish pitch by Sunday with the CPI(M) fielding its two super mega stars Prakash Karat and Sitaram Yechury to address meetings and public rallies across the State. The schedule of the programs to be addressed by these global stars of the party have been finalized and the duo would set the State 'ablaze' with their scintillating speeches.

Two major developments that occupy the centerstage of Kerala politics are the move Kerala Story and the joint efforts by the Congress and the CPI(M) to derail the electoral express by name Anil Antony, the BJP candidate from Pathanamthitta who is also the son of A K Antony, the Bhisma Pitamah of the GOP.

Since the press meet addressed by Antony at Thiruvananthapuram on Monday asking the voters to defeat his son Anil did not make much impact, the Congress drafted the services of Nanda Kumar, a dubious character who is closely associated with the CPI(M) and made him level allegations against the junior Antony. Nanada Kumar charged that Anil had sold the defense secrets of the country to a foreign country for a price in 2013. Antony, Anil's papa was the defense minister at that time. Since the matter concerns the then union minister, it was expected that Antony would react to the allegations levelled by Nanda Kumar. But even after 48 hours, Antony has not uttered a single word about the so called trade off and Nanda Kumar's allegations fell flat despite the efforts of the media

to somehow make Anil a suspect. Former deputy chairman of Rajya Sabha P J Kurian too was brought into the controversy to substantiate the claims of Nanda Kumar. But Anil turned the tables on his detractors by Wednesday and said that Nanda Kumar was the deal maker between Kurian and the CPI(M) in a serious allegation levelled against the Congress leader. The CPI(M) had alleged that Kurian was the one who led the team of rapists who molested and raped an young girl from Suryanelli in Idukki district but the charges died a natural death once the main protagonists brokered peace with the services rendered by Nanda Kumar.

The allegation made by Nanda Kumar ended on Wednesday as Anil said that Kurian was the

one who cheated former chief ministers late K Karunakaran, Antony and Oommen Chandi in his bid to occupy the top seat in Kerala.

The Kerala Story, a film based on real life stories about "Love Jihad" in which Muslim boys play the role of Romeo and entrap girls from Hindu and Christian communities with the promise of marrying them and later dump them as jihadi fighters in Islamic State in West Asian countries has added spice to the poll campaigning. The CPI(M), the Muslim League and the Congress lambasted the official media Doordarshan for airing the film in its prime time slot last Friday. But this turned out to be counter productive as the Church ordered the screening of the movie in all Churches across the State and instructed to watch it without failure.

Modi's Southern push continues

From Page 1

"The answer to such arrogance will come from the people of Tamil Nadu when they vote against the DMK. Our Annamalai is a youth icon and role model for the country's youngsters. He was an officer of the Indian Police Service. But the DMK leader does not know who Annamalai is. My dear friends, this is the real DMK. The DMK leaders do not like Annamalai because he is intelligent, efficient, dedicated and devoted to the people. The DMK does not like the representative of a backward community rising in political and social hierarchy. This kind of arrogance is unheard of in Tamil Nadu. The people of Tamil Nadu will not allow this kind of humiliation and insult to its people," thundered the Prime Minister who literally smashed the DMK to smithereens.

Modi tore into the dynasty politics practiced by the DMK and termed it a dynasty party. "The DMK will not allow any youth who is likely to challenge its supremacy and hegemony. This is a party in which the father anoints the son as his successor and the latter coronates his son as his successor. No wonder, the DMK is rated as a corrupt entity and family enterprises," said the Prime Minister.

He began his speech by paying tributes to the valor of the people in the State. "The people's affection is immense. It is indicative of the direction in which Tamil Nadu's politics is heading," said Modi while addressing the election rally at Vellore. What followed the compliment was a fusillade of missiles. The Prime Minister said the DMK was indulging in hate and divisive politics.

"This is synonymous with corruption. The DMK has no concern for the State's

development. Both the Congress and the DMK are family parties. The Dravidian party has the first copyright on corruption and the family is intent on looting the State. The DMK divides people over language, region, faith, and caste. The DMK knows that the day people see through this, it will not get a single vote. I have decided to expose the decades-old dangerous politics played by the DMK," said the Prime Minister.

He also charged that the DMK Government was abetting and promoting religious fundamentalists operating from the State. He referred to a recent terror attack outside a temple in Coimbatore.

"The DMK is the other name of corruption and scam. Today the country is setting a world record in 5G but the DMK brought disrepute to the country through the 2G scam," said the Prime Minister.

In 10th list of BJP, sitting MPs dropped

From Page 1

Jaiveer Singh Thakur has been fielded from Mainpuri to take on the Samajwadi Party's Dimple Yadav, who is seeking another term in the Lok Sabha. The BJP has named Praveen Patel from the Phulpur constituency was replaced by Parveen Patel. B P Saroj, the sitting MP from Machhlishahr, has been renominated by the BJP.

MPs Vinod Sonkar and BP Saroj will contest from Kaushambi and Machhlishahr in Uttar Pradesh, respectively. In addition, Keshri Devi Patel from the Phulpur constituency was replaced by Parveen Patel. B P Saroj, the sitting MP from Machhlishahr, has been renominated by the BJP.

Modi Govt has done in 10 years what Congress could not do in 60 years: Chhattisgarh CM

PTI ■ MANDLA (MP)

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Wednesday said what the Congress could not achieve in 60 years of its rule in the country has been accomplished in just a decade by the Narendra Modi government.

He said the BJP has made a tribal and common party worker like him the CM of Chhattisgarh. Sai, who assumed office in December last year, is a member of the Baiga tribe and the first adivasi CM of his state. "What the Congress has not done in 60 years of its rule, Prime Minister Narendra Modi

has done more than that in just 10 years. I belong to the Baiga community and the Congress has always treated tribals as just a vote-bank. On the other hand, the BJP has made a common worker like me the chief minister to honour the entire Baiga community," Sai said. The Chhattisgarh chief minister was addressing an election meeting in Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh in support of BJP candidate and Union minister Faggan Singh Kulaste. He said by making Droupadi Murmu the President of the country, the BJP has honoured the entire tribal community. Sai noted the opposition, including the Congress,

has lost people's faith and that is why they are facing desertions in their ranks. Several prominent Congress leaders have switched sides and joined the BJP. The Congress, in its 60 years of rule at the Centre, engaged in corruption and cheated the people of the country, he alleged. Sai said under the leadership of Modi, the country has witnessed all-round development and historic works are being done to make the poor, youths, rural residents and farmers self-dependent. Mandla (ST reserved) is among half a dozen Lok Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh that will vote in the first phase on April 19.

Jolt for AAP as Delhi Minister quits party

From Page 1

The Social Welfare Minister further accused the AAP of not giving due respect to Dalits and individuals from backward communities in the Kejriwal-led party's organisation. "This party doesn't respect Dalit MLAs, Councillors and Ministers. In such circumstances, all Dalits feel cheated. We live in an inclusive society, but it is not wrong to talk about proportion. It is difficult for me to remain in the party with all these

things, hence I am resigning from the post," Anand said. (Ambedkar)'s picture in each Press conference, each Government office but when it comes to following his ideals. Reservation is mandated by law but when it comes to actual representation - not even a single one of our 13 MPs is a Dalit or someone from the backward communities," he said.

In response to a query on the timing

of his resignation, Anand said, "It is not about timing. Till yesterday, we were under the impression that we are being framed, but after the High Court verdict, it seems that there is something wrong at our end."

Reacting to the development, Delhi BJP secretary and New Delhi MP candidate Bansuri Swaraj said the resignation of Anand, who was with Kejriwal, testifies that today both the Aam Aadmi Party and Kejriwal himself have lost their political

credibility in Delhi.

Addressing the Press conference, Swaraj read out the portion of the recent Delhi High Court order which clearly stated how Kejriwal used the money from the liquor scam for the Goa elections. She said after yesterday's decision by the court, many people's illusions about Kejriwal have been shattered, many people's conscience is bothering them, and it is a major reason behind Anand's resignation.

Major relief to Delhi Metro Rail Corporation

From Page 1

Later on November 23, 2021, the top court had dismissed the DMRC's plea seeking review of its September 9, 2021 judgement saying no case for review is made out. Aggrieved by this order, DMRC

filed a curative plea, the last legal recourse in SC, in 2022 against the dismissal of the review petition. The case pertains to a 2008 concession agreement between DAMEPL and DMRC for Delhi Airport Express on a Build-operate-

transfer (BOT) basis. DAMEPL terminated the agreement in 2012 citing various structural defects in the metro line which were allegedly not cured by DMRC despite being pointed out by DAMEPL. DMRC invoked an arbitration clause

seeking to initiate arbitration. The main issue that arose for determination before the arbitral tribunal constituted under the concession agreement was the validity of the termination notice dated October 8, 2012.

Union Minister Rajeev sends legal notice to Tharoor

From Page 1

It sought Tharoor to "immediately withdraw" all the allegations made against Chandrashekhar on April 6, tender an unconditional public apology to him on print and electronic media. He should "cease, refrain and desist from

defaming, harassing, hampering the reputation" of the minister in the future. Failure to comply with the stated conditions within 24 hours of receipt of the notice would lead to initiation of appropriate criminal and civil proceedings in a competent court of law, the BJP candidate warned.

AMU Vice Chancellor Extends Eid Greetings

ALIGARH: The Aligarh Muslim University Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Mohammad Gulrez has extended heartfelt greetings on the auspicious occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr.



In his greetings, the Vice-Chancellor stated that while celebrating this festi-

val, we all hold steadfast to universal values of compassion, generosity and unity. On this blessed day, let us pray that there is peace, prosperity and good health in our country. The spirit of Eid may foster happiness and inspire us for developing greater understanding, tolerance and goodwill among all people.

val, we all hold steadfast to universal values of compassion, generosity and unity.

Delhi, Punjab police to discuss security plan for Mann, Kejriwal meet in jail

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police will meet its Punjab counterpart on Friday to discuss a security plan for the meeting of Chief Ministers Bhagwant Mann and Arvind Kejriwal in Tihar jail, who were expected to meet on Wednesday but could not as authorities cited 'security reasons'. Meanwhile, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh alleged that he and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann wanted to meet Kejriwal in jail but the meeting was cancelled by the prison authorities, even though a token number had been issued for it. "Prison Department, Delhi has fixed an advance security liaison meeting with Addl.

Director General (Police), Punjab, Delhi Police and Tihar Administration on 12.04.2024 at 11 am in the office of Deputy Inspector General (Prisons) at Tihar Prison Headquarters, Delhi," a press statement issued by the jail authorities said. "It is for making security arrangements and completion of codal formalities, as mandated in Delhi Prison Rules, to arrange a meeting of Hon'ble Chief Minister of Punjab with Arvind Kejriwal currently lodged in Tihar Jail," the prison authorities said. Earlier, when Mann wrote to the administration about meeting Kejriwal, the jail authorities said he can meet his Delhi counterpart, but as

a normal visitor in the 'mulakat jangla', which is an iron mesh which separates the inmate from the visitor in a room inside the jail. A visitor and an inmate can talk to each other by sitting on different sides of the mesh. "Mann can meet Kejriwal but it can happen as a normal visitor meet in the 'mulakat jangla' in Tihar jail. The officials can make security arrangements as Mann is a chief minister and enjoys Z+ security cover," an officer said. Addressing a press conference, Singh claimed that an inquiry has been launched into Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal sending messages to his MLAs through his lawyers from Tihar jail.



After Kejriwal sent a message to AAP MLAs asking them to visit their constituencies and solve people's problems, a "threat was issued" that his meetings with his lawyers and family members would be stopped, Singh claimed at a press conference without naming anyone.

Hitting at the Centre, Singh asserted that the government is behaving like Hitler and said, "Arvind Kejriwal, popularly elected with a resounding majority three times, is being held by the Modi government in jail through its Hitleresque means. They (Modi Government) want to

impose Hitler rules on him. They want to turn Tihar Jail in Delhi into Hitler's gas chamber. PM Modi is curtailing CM Arvind Kejriwal rights, which are even provided to the most dreaded criminals in jail." He said that while the CM gave a message to the AAP MLAs through legal channels, "urging them to engage with the people, hear their grievances, and seek solutions", a threat was issued that his meetings with his lawyers and family members would be stopped. The MP alleged that he and Mann wanted to meet Kejriwal in jail but the meeting was cancelled by the prison authorities. "It's clear that the jail authorities are not acting on their own, but

under pressure from the Modi government. The CM of Punjab and a MP from Delhi wanted to meet the thrice-elected CM in a usual manner. Initially, the jail administration allocated us a token number, stating that we would meet Arvind Kejriwal on today's date, then the meeting was cancelled," he alleged. The AAP leader also claimed that 8 to 10 policemen surrounded Kejriwal from all sides during his legal meeting with his lawyers in jail, which is against the rules of no one overhearing the prisoner's conversation with his lawyer. "Does Modi ji want to turn Delhi's Tihar Jail into Hitler's gas chamber? Do you want to turn Delhi's jail into a place of torture?" Singh said, adding

that the Modi government is punishing Arvind Kejriwal for providing free amenities to Delhiites. Kejriwal has given five names including his wife, two children, his personal secretary Bibhav Kumar and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak whom he can meet in the jail. An official said that Kejriwal will have to add one more name of Mann in the list of visitors. According to the jail manual, an inmate can give 10 names of visitors. Three of them can meet at one time, twice a week. On April 2, the AAP supreme talked to wife and children via video conference from the prisons. He has been meeting his lawyer daily in the jail.

Kejriwal weight has increased by one kg in jail, say jail authorities

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The ongoing debate surrounding Delhi Chief Minister and national convener of AAP Arvind Kejriwal's health and treatment while in judicial custody has stirred controversy with the Tihar jail authorities claiming that the inmate's weight has increased by 1 kg, contrary to earlier statements by his party leaders claiming a drastic weight loss of 4.5 kg.



On Wednesday, Tihar administration in its report on vitals of the Chief Minister showed that his weight has gone up by 1 kg, from 65 kgs to 66 kgs. Kejriwal's weight remained stable at 65 kgs from his arrival at the jail on April 1 to April 3 according to the jail authorities. On his arrival, his sugar level was 139 mg/dL followed by 182 mg/dL on April 2 and 140 mg/dL on April 3. His blood pressure was 120/82 on April 1, 121/83 on April 2 and 116/82 on April 3. However, the AAP has alleged that Kejriwal's blood sugar levels have deteriorated, pointing to fasting blood sugar levels

above normal parameters. AAP leaders, including Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament Sanjay Singh, have accused the Centre of subjecting Kejriwal to harsh treatment and infringing upon his basic rights. Singh's comparison of the situation to "Hitler's gas chamber" and claims of the BJP attempting to emotionally break Kejriwal underscore the heightened tensions and political rhetoric surrounding the case. Kejriwal has been lodged in jail number 2 of the Tihar prison since April 1 in the alleged money laundering linked excise policy scam. He will remain in judicial custody till April 15.

mg/dL while the normal should be 70 mg/dL. "Arvind Kejriwal, popularly elected with a resounding majority three times, is being held by the Modi government in jail through its Hitleresque means. They (Modi Government) want to impose Hitler rules on him. They want to turn Tihar Jail in Delhi into Hitler's gas chamber. PM Modi is curtailing CM Arvind Kejriwal rights, which are even provided to the most dreaded criminals in jail," Sanjay Singh said. He alleged that the BJP was trying to break Kejriwal emotionally, claiming that the jail authorities threatened to restrict Kejriwal meetings with his family and lawyer after he sent a message to AAP MLAs to visit their constituencies through his lawyers. The AAP leader also asserted that 8 to 10 policemen surrounded Kejriwal from all sides during his legal meeting with his lawyers in jail, which is against the rules of no one overhearing the prisoner's conversation with his lawyer.

HC slams repeated pleas for removal of Kejriwal as CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday expressed its displeasure over repeated filing of petitions seeking the removal of AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal from the post of the chief minister after his arrest. A bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Manmohan granted liberty to the petitioner to approach the lieutenant governor (LG). On Wednesday, Kumar's counsel argued that his case required interpretation of the Constitution and that on account of his arrest in a money laundering case, Kejriwal was now not qualified to hold the office of the chief minister. Justice Manmohan said if there was a grievance, an appeal should have been filed against the earlier decisions instead of filing a third petition on the same issue. As the petitioner's lawyer continued to argue and questioned where he must go if the government was not according to the Constitution, the court told him not to make political speeches. Please don't give a political speech here. Go to a corner of the street and do it over there. Please don't do that. Your client may be a politician and he may like to get involved in politics



nor's rule in the capital. Observing that the petitioner was "making a mockery of the system", the court said, "Rs 50,000 costs on you. We will pass the order." On March 28, the court had dismissed a PIL for Kejriwal's removal, saying that while the petitioner had failed to show any legal bar that prohibited the arrested chief minister from holding office, there was also no scope for judicial interference in such cases as it was for the other organs of the State to look into the issue. It also said it cannot declare a breakdown of the constitutional machinery in the national capital.

but we are not involved in politics. We stay out of politics," said Justice Manmohan. "You are making a mockery of the system. Don't reduce us to a joke. It is only because of people like you, your client, that we are reduced to a joke. We are imposing some heavy costs on you. Please don't come back with repeat litigation," added the judge. The court further said the petitioner was "persisting" in spite of the remarks made by a single judge while dealing with his petition earlier this week and said imposition of costs was the only way to "take care" of the petitions that are coming up on a "daily basis". This is enough. Look at the court. The court is packed with litigants. Have some courtesy," the court said. Kumar's petition was listed before the acting chief justice's bench after it was transferred to it from Justice Subramonium Prasad's court. While dealing with the petition on April 8, Justice Prasad had said it was filed for "publicity" and "heavy costs" should be imposed for it.

Court rejects Delhi CM plea seeking more time with lawyers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after facing a major setback as the Delhi High Court ruled against him in an excise policy case, another Delhi court on Wednesday dismissed Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supreme Arvind Kejriwal's application seeking more time with his lawyers, Special judge for CBI and ED cases Kaveri Baweja dismissed the application, saying the relevant rules were applicable equally to him and other inmates and that he allegedly used legal consultations allowed by the court to issue certain administrative directions. Special judge for CBI and ED cases Kaveri Baweja, while dismissing Kejriwal's application for five meetings with his lawyers every week, also said he failed to satisfy the court that he had been using the two permitted legal meetings per week



solely for the purpose of discussing the pending litigations with his counsel. "The status report/note filed by the ED indicates that the applicant had dictated certain directions for being passed on to the Water Minister, to one of his lawyers (whose name he refused to disclose to the ED) during the course of a legal meeting. It thus appears that the applicant is not even utilizing the permitted two legal interviews per week with his counsels solely for discussing his pending litigations and has rather used the allotted time for purposes other than legal inter-

views in the aforesaid manner," the judge said. The judge cited a Delhi High Court judgment, which said every citizen of India is entitled to protection of law, which shall also equally apply to him. The judge dismissed Kejriwal's submission that about 35 cases were pending against him across the country for which he needed more time with his lawyer for consultation, saying his application was bereft of necessary details of cases, including their number, the nature and stage of proceedings. "Though, in the course of arguments, it was submitted by counsel for applicant that there are about 30-35 litigations regarding which the applicant needs to have consultations and discussions with his counsels, but, there does not appear to be any objective criteria for assessing if five meetings with his lawyers per week would be sufficient to address the con-

cern of the applicant or that two meetings, which are permitted as per jail rules, are insufficient for this purpose," the judge said. "In the absence of any such objective criteria for assessment, the prayer of the applicant for five legal interviews with his lawyers per week not only appears to be whimsical but also seems to have been made without any statistical basis or objective standards for assessment," the judge said. Advocate Vivek Jain, representing Kejriwal, argued that the current allowance of half an hour twice a week for him to understand and provide instructions is insufficient, considering the 35 to 40 ongoing cases against him. Jain highlighted that there are about 35 to 40 cases pending against Kejriwal, asserting that one hour per week is insufficient for a person to understand and provide instructions in legal matters.

AAP to observe Samvidhan Bachao Divas on Ambedkar birth anniversary

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party on Wednesday announced it will observe 'Samvidhan Bachao, Tanashahi Hatao Divas' on the birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar on April 14 on the advice of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. In another message from the jail, Kejriwal has asked AAP MLAs and volunteers to work to ensure that the people of Delhi face no problems, party leader Gopal Rai told reporters. "Arvind Kejriwal has sent two messages from the jail for us. First, he has said even in the current difficult situation, the party has to continue serving the people of Delhi. He said all AAP leaders and workers should connect with people and try to solve their problems as much as possible," Rai said. "Secondly, he has said in the jail, we are ready to bear all



atrocities by this dictatorial government. But right now, it is all the more important to save the constitution and democracy of the country, which are currently in danger. So he has given the message that on April 14 on the birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar, the entire party should observe 'Samvidhan Bachao, Tanashahi Hatao Divas' across the country," Rai said. Rai said that on April 14, all

AAP workers across the country will gather in front of posters or photographs of Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, and take a pledge to save the constitution. The chief minister's wife Sunita Kejriwal, also a senior AAP leader, met him in Tihar jail on Tuesday and relayed his message at a party meeting that was attended by Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh,

Sandeep Pathak, and Saurabh Bharadwaj. Asked if Sunita Kejriwal has officially been entrusted with any of the party's responsibilities, Rai said, "Because party leaders were unable to directly communicate with the party's national convener after his arrest, yesterday, Sunita Kejriwal went to meet him in jail. Right now, she is carrying the responsibility of being a messenger between him and us. She conveys his messages to us, based on which we carry out further work." On a question if Sunita Kejriwal will be a star campaigner for the party in the Lok Sabha polls, Rai said a detailed plan for the campaigns will be chalked out by next week and her role will be decided accordingly. "A list of the star campaigners for the elections will be released by the next week," he added.

Traffic snarls in parts of Central Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The central parts of Delhi witnessed massive traffic snarls on Wednesday as roads towards DDU Marg were blocked due to the BJP's protest demanding the resignation of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who has been arrested in the excise policy case. The BJP held the protest near the AAP headquarters on DDU Marg. Police used water cannons to disperse the protesters. In the commotion, the party's Delhi unit chief Virendra Sachdeva was injured and was taken to RML Hospital. Commuters faced a harrowing time in the ITO areas as traffic moved at a snail's pace. The Delhi Traffic Police issued a traffic advisory ahead of a BJP protest. In a post on X, it said, "In view of the proposed protest at



DDU Marg, traffic will remain heavy at IP Marg, Vikas Marg, Minto Road and Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg. DDU Marg may remain closed for traffic movement from 11 am to 2 pm." The traffic police have urged the commuters to take alternative routes to avoid any inconvenience. Kejriwal was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case linked to the now-scraped Delhi excise policy. He is in judicial custody till April 15 and is currently lodged in Tihar jail. Since the arrest, the BJP has stepped up pressure on the Delhi chief minister for his resignation.

2,000 booths in Capital critical based on past cases: Police

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Of the 13,500 polling booths in Delhi, police have so far identified around 2,000 as "critical" based on past cases as well as the probability of deterioration of the law-and-order situation and extra security personnel would be deployed there, officials said on Wednesday. As many as 1.47 crore people are eligible to exercise their franchise at the seven Lok Sabha constituencies of the city where polling will be held on May 25. Ahead of every election, police prepare a list of polling booths marked as "critical" based on multiple parameters. The Election Commission then takes a final call on the list. In total, the city has around 13,500 polling booths which

will be probably located at around 2,700 locations across Delhi. "We have identified critical polling booths and polling stations in various districts of Delhi. We have already prepared a plan to deal with any kind of law-and-order situation," a senior police officer said. The officer added that there is a set of criteria on which the sensitivity of a polling booth is decided. "We usually assess it from the law and order point of view." According to data from different police districts, the New Delhi district has the least number of critical polling booths at five. The southeast district police has prepared a list of 53 critical polling booths while the northeast district has ear-

marked 55 in that category. Shahdara and northwest districts have prepared a list of 146 critical booths each. The Dwarka district has marked more than 50 booths as critical. There are 38 critical booths in the outer north district. Sharing details about the deployment of security personnel, another senior police officer said each polling premises marked critical will have two head constables and half a section of central paramilitary forces in addition to the normal deployment plan of a polling station. Last Thursday, Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora emphasised the need for proper coordination between the city police and Central Armed Police Forces to ensure smooth conduct of the coming general assembly elections.

Mayor, Deputy Mayor polls to be held on April 26

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The elections for Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has been announced to be held on April 26 on Wednesday, adding that the general house meeting will be held at 11 am. The general House meeting of MCD will be held at 11 am at the Aruna Asaf Ali Auditorium. According to the official notification, the nominations for the post of mayor and deputy mayor can be filed till April 18 in the office of the Corporation Secretary on any working day from 11 am to 5 pm. "The Ordinary April (2024) meeting of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi will be held on Friday, April 26, 2024 at 11.00 am in Aruna Asaf Ali



Auditorium, A-Block, 4th Floor, Dr. Shayana Prasad Mukherjee Civic Centre, Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg, New Delhi. Election of Mayor and Deputy Mayor will also be held in this meeting of the corporation. It is issued by order of the Mayor," MCD said in a statement. The post of Mayor of Delhi Municipal Corporation is

reserved for Scheduled Castes for the third year, it said. Currently the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) holds both the post of mayor and deputy mayor in MCD. Shelly Oberoi is the mayor and Aaley Mohammad Iqbal is the deputy mayor of the MCD. Oberoi was unanimously elected as mayor after BJP candidate Shikha Rai withdrew her nomination while Aaley Mohammad Iqbal also got another term as deputy mayor after BJP candidate Soni Pal withdrew her nomination. Meanwhile, Delhi CM Kejriwal has been in Tihar jail since April 1 in relation to the Delhi excise policy case. He was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). He has been in judicial custody since April 15. ED has called the AAP chief as the 'kingpin' of the alleged scam.

US envoy praises India's progress, developmental journey

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

US Ambassador to New Delhi Eric Garcetti praised India's progress and developmental journey, and said if people want to "see" and "feel the future", they should come to the country. Underlining this point at an event, he also mentioned his "great privilege" of being future-ready because of his position as the leader of the

United States's mission. "If you want to see the future, come to India. If you want to work on the future, come to India. I have the great privilege of being able to do that every single day as the leader of the US Mission," he said. US National Security Advisor (NSA) Jake Sullivan also commended the country's ties with India, saying the partnership has "gone to new heights".



Speaking to reporters at the White House, Sullivan said, "The partnership between the US and India, a country in BRICS, has gone to new heights with an engagement across technology and security and so many other dimensions." Garcetti also talked about the time he spent in India as a child and said his "deep emotional connection" with India never left his soul. Reiterating US President Joe Biden's message for the ties

between the two countries, he said the President told him that India "was the most important country in the world" and that Washington's ties with New Delhi were "the most consequential" for shaping the world order in this century. Garcetti said the ties between the US and India as "not an additive relationship but a multiplicative relationship" between the world's two largest democracies.



EC directs for identification of printers on poll materials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday directed clear identification of the printer and publisher on printed election-related material, including hoardings, in a bid to ensure accountability and transparency in poll campaigning. The poll authority said the decision was taken by it after representations were received stating that in hoarding spaces controlled by municipal authorities, hoardings without the identity of the printer or publisher have been noticed. The Aam Aadmi Party had also approached the EC on the issue recently. The EC pointed to section 127A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 which prohibits the printing or publishing of election pamphlets, posters, placards, or banners without prominently displaying the name and address of the printer and publisher.

This requirement of disclosing the identity of publishers serves as a cornerstone for regulating campaign financing and fixing of responsibility in case content is found unbecoming of the framework of the Model Code of Conduct or the statutory provisions, it underlined. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar had recently highlighted addressing the issue of misinformation as one of the challenges along with money and muscle power, for a level-playing field. Kumar had also read out a couplet to highlight the point that misinformation needs to be curbed. He had described misinformation as a "bubble" which "bursts" when touched. "With this directive, the Commission now has put the accountability on printers, publishers, licensees/contractors of urban local bodies renting out outdoor advertising space for political advertisements published on outdoor media," it said.

Nationhood comes from common sense of history: Doval



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Nationhood is constituted by people who share a "common sense of their history" and a "common vision of their future", National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval said as he released an 11-volume book series that charts different phases of the history of ancient India and its accomplishments. Addressing a gathering at the launch event here on Tuesday, the NSA said, "People who have got a different sense of history, 'if my hero is your villain', you and I cannot make a nation." Describing India as a "civilisation of antiquity" and "civilisation of continuity" spanning thousands of years, Doval also said it was a "paradox" that the narrative that has been brought is that probably, "the first chapter about Indian history in any western, this thing... Is that it starts with Alexander". After releasing the series 'History of Ancient India', published by Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) and Aryan Books, he said it consists of scholarly papers contributed by a "large body of scholars". Doval said nations or members of nationhood are "those people who share a common sense of their history, common sense of our ancestors, common sense of their achievements of their past, and a common vision of their future. All those who believe in that they make one nation. People who have got a different sense of history, 'if my hero is your villain', you and I cannot make a nation." There are a few aspects about Indian history that nobody questions, including "our detractors", he said. "One is its antiquity, that it is one of the oldest civilisations, and probably a human life had evolved, and society had perfected to a very high (level). Now, who did it? Were they the original people or they came from outside? "There may be a bias about

that but they will all say that this is a civilisation of antiquity. The second is its continuity. It has been continuing for thousands of years without disruption. And, the third feature, its vast expanse, where the footprint of the civilisation was very visible," he added. On Alexander's connection with India, Doval cited William Jones and said he was a big Sanskrit scholar who said that "nowhere in Sanskrit or Pali or Prakrit literature or local dialects, he could find any mention of Alexander". There is "no mention", the NSA added. It was a "non-event, it was a very small event of history" where some raiders on horseback, probably wanted to plunder, but faced resistance and returned. "But you make such a mountain of it as if the world history has changed with Alexander the great conqueror," he said. Foreign domination was "responsible to some extent" for the feeling of nationhood not developing, he said. Then, there was a deliberate attempt to "destroy" the vestiges of the proof of that. Now, it's not only the temple, the religious bigotry. But institutions like Nalanda or Taxila universities, or the libraries, etc., were the "prime targets", they had to be destroyed and any sources from where Indians could connect themselves to their glorious past, he added. But, there was another reason -- Indians' mindset. "For us events and personalities were very secondary," Doval said. "Now, this combination of these factors deprived us of our own existence and identity. And history is important for your identity," he said. He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was presented this work and told about it, and it has found "a place of prominence in his library". The prime minister suggested that these can be donated to libraries and that idea is still there.

History is witness to who joined forces to divide country: Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the BJP's 'Muslim League imprint' barb over the Congress manifesto, Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said history is witness as to who joined hands with the forces that wanted to divide the country and asserted that history does not change by "spewing lies" from political platforms. He said the 2024 Lok Sabha polls are a fight between two ideologies, with the Congress, which has always united India, on one side and those who have always tried to divide people on the other side. "This election is a fight



between two ideologies! On one side there is the Congress, which has always united India, and on the other side there are those who have always tried to divide people," the former Congress chief said in a post in Hindi. History is witness as to who joined hands with the forces that wanted to divide the country and strengthened them and who fought for the unity and independence of the country, Gandhi said. "Who stood with the British during the 'Quit India Movement'? When India's jails were filled with Congress leaders, then who was running the government in the states with the forces that divided the country?" he said.

The Congress has moved the Election Commission against his remarks while party chief Mallikarjun Kharge has said "there is a stink of RSS" in Modi's speeches. The Congress has alleged that the prime minister is resorting to the "cliched Hindu-Muslim script" as he is scared that the BJP may struggle to even cross the 180-seat mark in the Lok Sabha polls. The Congress has countered the BJP pointing out that Jan Sangha founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the president of the Hindu Mahasabha then, was himself part of the coalition government in Bengal with the Muslim League in the early 1940s.

First steel cutting of Fleet Support Ships for Indian Navy held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane on Wednesday presided over the first steel cutting of the Fleet Support Ships (FSS) for the Indian Navy at Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL), Visakhapatnam, Defence

Ministry said here. Giving details, officials said the FSS, under construction at HSL, is first-of-its-kind with displacement of 44,000 tons and will play a crucial role in replenishing the fleet at sea with fuel, water, ammunition, and stores, thereby extending the operational capabilities of



the Navy and enhancing its strategic reach. The Defence Secretary also laid the foundation stone for augmentation of slipway and major infrastructure modernisation to enhance capacity and capability of the yard. The ongoing infrastructure upgrades, including the

installation of a cutting-edge 300T Goliath crane and slipway upgrades, will further enhance HSL's capacity to undertake FSS and future projects like the Landing Platform Dock, reinforcing its role in meeting the defence and commercial sector requirements under the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative. In his address, Aramane termed HSL as an asset of the government. He stated that the present shipbuilding trend is showing an upcoming boom in orders from both defence and commercial sector and HSL should be geared up to take on any challenge.

Homeopathy has gained global recognition: President Murmu



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday emphasised the significance of research and proficiency in enhancing the acceptance and popularity of homeopathy. Speaking at a two-day symposium organised by the Central Council for Research in Homeopathy (CCRH) on World Homeopathy Day, she noted that homeopathy has gained recognition as a simple and accessible treatment method worldwide. Acknowledging the efforts of various institutions such as the Ministry of AYUSH, Central Council for Research in Homeopathy, National Commission for Homeopathy, and National

Institute of Homeopathy in promoting homeopathy in India, President Murmu underscored the increasing importance of research in the 21st century. She emphasized that the symposium's theme, "Empowering Research, Enhancing Proficiency," is highly relevant. President Murmu also highlighted the significance of presenting experiences of individuals who have benefited from homeopathy in a scientific manner, through factual analysis. She stressed the importance of authentic medical research in gaining recognition from the scientific community and increasing confidence in homeopathy among the public. "The importance of research is continuously increasing in the 21st century. Therefore,

CBSE to launch pilot for national credit framework for Classes 6, 9, 11



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will launch a pilot of the National Credit Framework for classes 6, 9 and 11 from the 2024-25 academic session and has invited its affiliate schools to participate, officials said on Wednesday. The government last year launched the National Credit Framework (NCF) as part of the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, to ensure seamless integration of school, higher and vocational education, and allow students to accumulate their credits from the pre-primary to the PhD level. Subsequently, the Central

Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) also developed its draft guidelines to implement the framework. "The CBSE developed and circulated draft NCF implementation guidelines, discussed them in multiple workshops, and received approval from the Union Ministry of Education. To further test, refine and assess their effectiveness in real-world contexts, a pilot implementation of these guidelines has been planned in schools affiliated to CBSE in classes 6, 9 and 11, with effect from session 2024-2025," the board said in a letter to school principals. "Principals of interested schools for this pilot programme are requested to share their contact details through the link (https://forms.gle/5AB2iuxa1k62rE3A)," it said. Students can earn credits from classroom teaching learning, laboratory work, projects, sports, performing arts, NCC, social work, vocational education and experiential learning, including relevant experience and professional levels acquired, among others.



IIMA top 25 institutions globally, JNU top in India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

IIM-Ahmedabad is among the top 25 institutions globally for business and management studies while IIM-Bangalore and IIM-Calcutta are among the top 50, according to the QS World University Rankings by Subject, announced on Wednesday. Jawaharlal Nehru University is the highest-ranked university in India in the coveted rankings announced by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the London-based higher education analytics firm. The university is ranked at 20th position globally for development studies. The Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences in Chennai is at 24th position globally for dentistry studies. QS CEO Jessica Turner said, "One of the biggest challenges faced by India is educational — providing high-quality tertiary education in the face of exploding demand: this much was recognised by 2020's NEP (National Education Policy), which set the ambitious target of a 50 per cent gross enrolment ratio by 2035. It should, therefore, provide some reassurance that the number of Indian programmes featuring across our 55 subject rankings and five broad faculty areas has increased this year — from 355 to 454." "QS also notes that several programmes at India's three privately-run Institutes of Eminence have made progress this year, demonstrating the positive role that well-regulated private provision can have in enhancing India's higher education sector.

Hospital conducts special hearing implant procedures

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Command Hospital (Southern Command) in Pune has conducted two piezoelectric Bone Conduction Hearing Implants (BCI) in a 7-year-old male child suffering from congenital external and middle ear anomalies with severe degree of hearing loss and one adult with Single Sided Deafness (SSD) recently. Thus, becoming the first government hospital across the country to procure and conduct such an



operation successfully. The ENT department of Command Hospital (Southern Command) is a designated Neurology centre of the Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS). The department has been providing implantable hearing solutions to dependent clientele for a number of years. The active piezoelectric bone conduction hearing implant system is an implantable medical electronic device for hearing-impaired patients [conductive loss (including aural atresia), mixed hearing

loss, and single-sided deafness]. The cost of the equipment has always been a concern, making its outreach limited, said a statement here. These patients were implanted successfully by a team comprising of Lt Col (Dr) Rahul Kurkure, Neurologist and Implant Surgeon under the guidance of Col (Dr) Nitu Singh, Senior Advisor and Head of Department. There are certain groups of patients with conductive/mixed hearing loss or patients with single-

sided deafness, who are not candidates for cochlear implantation and do not benefit with hearing aids or middle ear surgery. To reduce the associated disability, it is imperative to provide hearing augmentation for better academic outcomes in children and social life in adults. Bone conduction implantation is the definitive hearing solution in such groups of patients to rehabilitate them, and the Armed Forces Medical Services were quick to realize this, according to the

statement. DG Armed Forces Medical Services Lt Gen Daljit Singh and DGMS (Army) Lt Gen Arindam Chatterjee have congratulated the Command Hospital (SC) and wished many more laurels to the institute. The Command Hospital (SC), Pune is one of the premier institutes of AFMS, presently commanded by Maj Gen B Nambiar. The hospital was recently awarded the most prestigious "Raksha Mantri" trophy as the best hospital in the entire AFMS.



Kumaraswamy slams Congress after EC stops farmhouse feast



PTI ■ BENGALURU
Officials on election duty on Wednesday allegedly stopped the 'Hosa Todaku' programme at the farmhouse of JD(S) leader H. D. Kumaraswamy at Bidadi in Ramanagara district, citing violation of model code of conduct in force for the Lok Sabha polls. The programme is celebrated a day after Ugadi when many communities in the state have a non-vegetarian feast and the EC action elicited a sharp reaction from the former

Kumaraswamy, who is the NDA candidate from Mandya in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, said there was nothing special in him organising 'Hosa Todaku' ritual at his house and claimed that "it happens in every Hindu home". JD(S) sources said 'Hoda Todaku' was organised for the labourers of his farmhouse. "It was not a feast for the general public but a get-together of his workers in Bidadi. The election officers 'raided' on a complaint by some Congress leaders," a JD(S) leader said. "Now the feast has been stopped. We are worried that all the items that were cooked will go to waste," he added. Kumaraswamy alleged that the Congress has set its "jaundiced eye" on Hindu festivals. "The appeasement of castes and religions has stuck to the Congress party," he alleged. Meanwhile, responding to a question, Deputy Chief Minister and State Congress President D. K. Shivakumar said: "Our boys had arranged for food for 500 people and had taken permission, but they (JD(S)) filed a complaint. Now they have arranged for food... Let them do 'Varsha Todaku' (Hosa Todaku) or anything, I'm not bothered."

SP promises caste based census, MSP guarantee, scrapping Agnipath in poll manifesto

PTI ■ LUCKNOW
Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday unveiled the party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections, promising a caste-based census by 2025, a legal guarantee for MSP, and scrapping of the Agnipath scheme. The manifesto — 'Janta Ka Maang Patra - Humara Adhikar' — was released at the SP headquarters here in the presence of senior party leaders. The 20-page document has called for a PDA government this time. PDA is an acronym for Pichde (backward classes), Dalit and Alpasankhyak (minorities) that was coined by Yadav. The SP is a constituent of the opposition Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc. Addressing a press conference here, Yadav said a caste-wise census would be conducted after the formation of the INDIA bloc government at the Centre to fill all the vacant government posts of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes by 2025. He said the Agnipath

military recruitment scheme would be scrapped and regular recruitment in the armed forces would be introduced. The party also promised to restore the old pension scheme, ensure the participation of all sections of society in the private sector and completely eliminate poverty by 2029. The manifesto includes giving a legal guarantee of minimum support price to the farmers, waiving off agricultural loans of farmers, providing free irrigation facilities, and formation of a Farmers' Commission. A promise has been made to provide a pension of Rs 5,000 per month to all landless small and marginal farmers. Adopting a zero-tolerance policy towards crimes against women, along with a nationwide helpline, ensuring 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and Assemblies within two years of coming to power without waiting for delimitation, reserving 33 per cent government jobs for women were promised in the manifesto.

Shah slams Mamata for facilitating infiltrators

PTI ■ BALURGHAT (WB)
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of "misleading" people on the CAA and "facilitating" infiltrators for vote bank politics, emphasising that refugees should apply for citizenship without apprehension. Addressing an election rally in Balurghat, his first in Bengal since the Lok Sabha polls were announced, Shah slammed the TMC government "for trying to save the culprits in the Bhupatnagar bomb blast case" and for filing cases against NIA officials. "Mamata Didi is misleading people about the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). She is saying that if you fill out the

citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014. Referring to the recent incidents in Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas, where allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders have emerged, Shah said it is a matter of shame that "Mamata Banerjee, despite being a women chief minister, tried to protect the culprits." "You are a woman chief minister and you are doing politics over the incidents in Sandeshkhali. For years, atrocities continued right under your nose and when the ED went to arrest TMC goons, they were pelted with stones. To get some votes through appeasement, you are protecting the criminals of Sandeshkhali," he said.

Fortune tellers predict PMK candidate win in poll

PTI ■ CUDDALORE (TAMIL NADU)
Two roadside astrologers predicted the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) candidate's victory in the April 19 Lok Sabha election with the help of their parakeet but failed to foresee their impending trouble, were arrested for keeping parakeets caged. They were later released and four of their parakeets were freed, a forest department official said on Wednesday. Parakeet fortune telling is a kind of astrology practised in Tamil Nadu and it involves these trained birds to pick up a fortune card for the prediction. The parakeet is instantly rewarded by its owner with a grain of paddy or a piece of fruit for selecting the ideal card from among a bunch of cards each containing the images of gods and goddesses. And with the good deed done,



the bird is sent back to its cage. While on a campaign tour on April 7, film director-politician Thankar Bachan, the PMK candidate for Cuddalore constituency, consulted two such astrologers, who are brothers, to know about his fate in electoral politics. The astrologers used one of their four parakeets to select a card and read out the prediction that Bachan would win in the election. In the video of Bachan's consultation that went viral in social media, the candidate could be seen requesting the astrologer to feed the particular bird and

offering it a banana after the consultation. The viral video caught the attention of forest department officials who immediately launched a hunt to trace and arrest the brothers for keeping caged birds. On Tuesday, the forest department team located the brothers — Selvaraj and Srinivasan — near the Azhagu Muthu Ayyanar temple at Thennampakkam near Cuddalore where they were consulted by Bachan, and arrested them, a senior official said. Four parakeets kept in two cages were seized under the provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act and were released into the forest. The astrologer brothers were later let off with a warning, the official said. During the consultation, one of the astrologers released the parakeet from a cage and allowed it to pick up a card. And when the bird selected a card with an image of the presiding deity of Azhagu Muthu Ayyanar temple, the fortune teller interpreted it as an auspicious sign and said Bachan would win the elections. In the video, Bachan's supporters could be seen cheering loudly at the good news. PMK leader Dr Anbumani Ramadoss condemned the arrest of the duo and said it was unjust. He said such fortune tellers have traditionally been using parakeets to predict life's events and the action against the two astrologers who predicted PMK candidate's win was reprehensible. "People will teach a lesson to the DMK government for taking action on the fortune tellers who predicted Bachan's victory," Ramadoss said and wondered if similar action would have been taken had the astrologers predicted DMK's victory.

BJP changed public perception towards politicians, politics: Rajnath

PTI ■ SAHARANPUR (UP)
The BJP has changed the public's perception towards politicians and politics, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Wednesday. Speaking at a campaign rally for the BJP's Saharanpur candidate Raghav Lakhpal, he said, "A few years ago, there was a perception that politicians speak lies to seek votes and go away. They don't care about the public or the nation. This was the common perception towards politicians and political parties."



"We have changed this perception. It is our character that we do what we say. Earlier, it was the norm to think that a politician would lie but we changed this perception," Singh added. The defence minister said political parties make big promises in their manifestos but forget those after assuming power. "We have overcome the crisis of confidence in politics. We had promised to revoke Article 370 and we did it after assuming power. We had promised to abolish triple talaq and we did it after getting a majority in

Parliament," he said. Singh, a former Uttar Pradesh chief minister, said the perception of India has improved under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He claimed that Modi "halted" the war between Russia and Ukraine to ensure safe passage for Indian students stuck in the war-torn country. "In Qatar, retired Navy personnel awarded capital punishment were released after being pardoned by the government there. This shows the stature of India in the world," he added. Qatar released eight jailed former Indian Navy personnel 46 days after their death sentences, handed out last October, were commuted to jail terms of varying

BJP changed public perception towards politicians, politics: Rajnath

duration. Under Modi's leadership, India — once an importer of defence technology — is now exporting those, Singh said. The defence minister also praised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for improving the

state's law and order. Hitting out at the Samajwadi Party and the Congress, the senior BJP leader said, "In 2017 (assembly elections), the Samajwadi Party and the Congress ran a narrative that the backward classes were angry with the BJP.

In 2019 (Lok Sabha elections), they ran a narrative that the Brahmins were angry. During the 2022 assembly elections, they ran a narrative that the Jats were angry. Now, they are claiming that the Rajputs are angry."

Pawan Chamling in fray from two Assembly seats to seek ninth term as MLA

PTI ■ GANGTOK
Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) president Pawan Kumar Chamling is contesting from two assembly constituencies this election to seek a record ninth term as an MLA. The former five-term chief minister is in the fray from Poklok-Kamrang and Namcheyung assembly seats in Namchi and Gangtok districts respectively, dumping his traditional seat of Namchi-Singhihang in Namchi district. The 73-year-old politician is locked in a quadrangular contest in Poklok-Kamrang, where he is pitted against BJP's Arun Rai, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's Bhoj Raj Rai and Sanju Rai of Citizen Action Party-Sikkim (CAP-S). In Namcheyung assembly constituency too, the SDF chief is in a quadrangular contest against two women candidates, Pooja Sharma (BJP) and Severine Rai (CAP-S), and former bureaucrat Raju Basnet.

OK PLAY INDIA LIMITED													
Regd. Office: Plot No. 17, Roz-Ka-Meo Industrial Estate, Tehsil Nuh, District - Mewat, Haryana -122103, India													
E-mail : investor.relations@okplay.in, Website: www.okplay.in													
EXTRACT OF STANDALONE AND CONSOLIDATED AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND YEAR ENDED 31 st MARCH, 2024 (Rs. in Lakhs)													
Sl. No.	Particulars	Standalone				Consolidated							
		Quarter Ended		Year ended		Quarter Ended		Year ended					
		31.03.2024	31.12.2023	31.03.2023	31.03.2024	31.03.2023	31.03.2024	31.03.2023	31.03.2024	31.03.2023	31.03.2024	31.03.2023	31.03.2024
1	Total Revenue from operations	5,672.90	3,621.14	3,605.67	15,850.93	13,305.86	6,032.86	4,092.83	5,337.81	18,495.53	18,169.37		
2	Net Profit/(Loss) before Exceptional items and tax	768.23	8.92	(100.82)	919.30	30.53	366.56	174.30	274.08	662.60	308.11		
3	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional items)	592.57	9.42	(98.28)	740.59	7.69	190.91	174.80	276.62	483.90	285.27		
4	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional items)	426.33	9.42	(496.05)	574.35	(390.08)	(71.26)	106.79	(202.71)	113.20	(195.77)		
5	Total Comprehensive Income / (Loss) for the period (Comprising Profit/ (Loss) for the period (after tax) and other comprehensive income (after tax))	465.81	9.42	(552.63)	613.83	(446.66)	(31.78)	106.79	(259.29)	152.68	(252.35)		
6	Equity Share Capital	2,902.81	2,856.61	1,919.61	2,902.81	1,919.61	2,902.81	2,857.61	1,919.61	2,902.81	1,919.61		
7	Other Equity (Reserves excluding revaluation reserve)	-	-	-	-	2,036.51	-	-	-	8,398.84	1,708.88		
8	Earning per share (of Rs.10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations)												
	(a) Basic (in Rs.)	0.16	0.03	(2.88)	0.21	(2.33)	(0.01)	0.37	(1.35)	0.05	(1.31)		
	(b) Diluted (in Rs.)	0.13	0.03	(2.88)	0.17	(2.33)	(0.01)	0.29	(1.35)	0.04	(1.31)		

NOTES:
1 The above is an extract of the detailed format of Unaudited Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of quarterly financial results are available on the Stock Exchange website (www.bseindia.com) and on the Company's website (www.okplay.in).
2 The above Standalone and Consolidated financial results have been reviewed by the Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors at their meeting held on Tuesday, 9th April, 2024.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform the general public that Mr. Jai Pal Singh is the GPA Holder of land area measuring 450 sq ft., ie 50 sq yards, out of Total area 460 sq. yards, out of Kharsa no 297 situated in the colony known as Sainik Enclave, Vikas Nagar, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi. He acquired the above property through notarized GPS, ATS and will dated 17.05.2000 executed by Mr. Kailash Nath Aggarwal in favour of Mr. Jai Pal Singh intends to transfer the ownership by way of sale deed of aforementioned property to Mr. Rajesh Kumar Subsequently, Mr. Rajesh Kumar is in the process of mortgaging the said property to Aditya Biral Housing Finance Limited Any objections, or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07 days period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07 day period by contacting:
North (Advocates & Legal Consultants)
Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Noida, UP-201301
+910120-3101683, accounts@lvnorth.in

The Jammu & Kashmir Bank Limited
Impaired Assets Portfolio Management Department
Zonal Office (Delhi) Plot No. 132-134 Sector 44, Gurgaon: (T) 0124-4715800 Email: iapmd.delhi@jkbank.com

E-Auction Notice
(for Sale of Immovable Property/ies Under The Sarfaesi Act, 2002) "Appendix-IV-A, Refer Proviso To Rule 8(6)"
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and to the borrowers and guarantors in particular that the below mentioned property mortgaged to secured creditor (Jammu & Kashmir Bank Ltd), the possession of which has been taken by the Authorized officer of the Secured Creditor (Jammu & Kashmir Bank Ltd) under Section 13(4) of the SARFAESI Act, will be sold through E-auction on "AS IS WHERE IS" "AS IS WHAT IS" AND "WHATEVER THERE IS" basis on below mentioned dates, for recovery of amount as mentioned below due to the secured creditor from concerned borrower(s), mortgagor(s) and guarantors. The Reserve Price is mentioned below and earnest money to be deposited is mentioned respectively.

Name & Address of Borrower/ Guarantor	1. Ms. Shree Parsvnath Paper Prop: Mr. Paras Jain Unit Address: 127/6, FF Ward No. IX, Gali Batashan, Barshabulia Chowk, Chawri Bazar, Delhi - 110006
2. Mr. Paras Jain S/o Lt. Sh. V.K Jain Ro FF, 2181 Gali Hanuman Prasad, Masjid Khajoor, Chawri Bazar, Delhi-110006 (Borrower/Mortgagor)	
3. Mrs. Ranjana Jain W/o Sh. Paras Jain R/o H.No 2181, Gali Hanuman Prasad, Masjid Khajoor, Chawri Bazar, Delhi-110006 (Guarantor)	
Details of Security Charged covered under Auction	'Equitable mortgage of Shop No. 127/6 on first floor, part of property bearing municipal No. 127, ward No. IX, situated at Gali Batashan, Barshabulia Chowk, Chawri Bazar Delhi - 110006, with common entrance from property no. 118, Main Chowk Barshabulia Chowk, Chawri Bazar measuring plinth area of 6.90 Sq. Mtrs out of 76.23 Sq. Mtrs with proportionate rights in land underneath excluding roof rights, title, interests, claims, easements, privileges and appurtenances, etc.
Reserve price	Rs. 35.00 lakh
EMD Amount	Rs. 3.50 lakh
Bid Increment	Rs. 0.35 Lakh
Outstanding Dues	Rs. 30.79 Lakhs as on 31.03.2024.
Name & Number of Contact Person & Branch	Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Raju 9906965793 Branch : J&K Bank, Chawri Bazar, Delhi
Date & time of E-auction	15-05-2024 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Terms & Conditions of E-Auction are as under:
i. The E-Auction is being held on "AS IS WHERE IS" "AS IS WHAT IS" AND "WHATEVER THERE IS" basis and will be conducted online. The bid document/format containing full details of the property and all the terms and conditions can be had from, and submitted on, the website "http://sarfaesi.auctioneer.net" (contact person Ram Sharma - 9978591868, Contact no. 079-68136880/68136837 Mob: +91 9265662811/8 Email: support@auctioneer.net).
ii. To the best of knowledge and information of the Authorized officer, there are no encumbrances on the properties, except specifically disclosed herein. However, the intending bidders should make their own independent enquiries regarding the encumbrances, title of properties put on auction and claims/rights/dues affecting the property, prior to submitting their bid. The Authorized Officer/Secured Creditor shall not be responsible in any way for any third party claims/rights/dues. The bidders shall satisfy themselves as to the description, condition or accuracy of the details regarding the properties given hereinabove. The E-auction advertisement does not constitute and will not be deemed to constitute any commitment or any representation of the bank. The property is being sold with all the existing and future encumbrances whether known or unknown to the bank.
iii. The interested bidders shall submit their offer along with EMD through website https://sarfaesi.auctioneer.net (the user ID and password can be obtained free of cost by registering name with "http://sarfaesi.auctioneer.net") through their login ID and Password. The EMD 10% of RESERVE PRICE shall be payable through NEFT/RTGS (EMD remittance details given above) on or before 14-05-2024 at 5:00 PM. Please note that Cheques/Demand Drafts shall not be accepted as EMD amount.
iv. The sale shall be subject to rules/conditions prescribed under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.
v. The Authorized Officer is not bound to accept the highest offer and the Authorized Officer has the absolute right to accept or reject any or all offer(s) or adjourn/postpone/cancel the e-auction without assigning any reason therefor.
vi. The other terms and conditions of the e-auction are available on the website https://www.auctioneer.net

Date: 10.04.2024
Place: New Delhi
Sd/- Authorised Officer,
Jammu & Kashmir Bank Ltd.
Registered Office: Corporate Headquarters M.A Road Srinagar-190001, J&K, India
CIN: L65110JK1938GCO00048; T:+91(0)194 2481 930-35;
F: +91(0)194 248 1928; E: info@jkbank.com W: www.jkbank.com



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Up, up and away!

Proving India's resilience and potential, Sensex breaches the 75,000-mark for the first time

The Indian stock market is booming, and how! Putting a big smile on the faces of investors, Sensex — India's benchmark stock index — has unprecedentedly crossed the 75,000-points milestone. This surge is a testament to Indian economy's robustness and investor confidence in it. The Sensex jump to new heights can be attributed to a confluence of factors. One, the economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic has instilled optimism among investors. With the relaxation of lockdown measures and the successful rollout of vaccination campaigns, economic activities regained momentum and fuelled investor confidence. Corporate earnings have also played a pivotal role in driving the market rally. Many companies across sectors have reported stellar financial performances, which has bolstered investor sentiment and contributed to the bullish momentum. Favourable global trends have also provided tailwinds to the Indian stock market. Positive developments in global markets, coupled with liquidity inflows from foreign institutional investors (FIIs), have amplified the buoyancy of Indian equities. With happy indicators in major economies and accommodative monetary policies by Central banks, investors have increasingly turned their attention towards emerging markets.



The proactive stance of the Government in implementing structural reforms and initiatives to stimulate economic growth has also been instrumental in driving investor confidence. Measures aimed at enhancing the ease of doing business, attracting foreign investment and revitalising key sectors such as infrastructure have been received well by market participants. Though it is a great achievement for Indian economy, it is not

the only important thing. The policymakers must watch out for unemployment, rising inflation and rising numbers of MSMEs shutting down for one reason or the other. The Indian economy is still limping back to normal after the pandemic and any negative news could embolden bears, thus wiping off the gains overnight. It has happened in the past and it may happen in future. This perspective is not one of cynicism but of prudence. Investors have reaped substantial gains from the rally but they must exercise caution amidst heightened volatility. For corporates, favourable market conditions may present opportunities for fundraising and expansion. The buoyant stock market augurs well for the broader economy as it can spur consumption, attract foreign capital and stimulate economic activity. Looking ahead, market participants must remain attuned to evolving dynamics such as inflationary pressures, geopolitical tensions and other unforeseen eventualities. Policymakers must continue their efforts to address structural challenges and create an enabling environment for sustainable growth. Indeed, the historic breach of 75,000 points underscores the resilience of the Indian economy. As Sensex continues its ascent, it reaffirms India's status as an attractive investment destination and underscores the collective endeavour to shape a brighter future for the nation's economy.

PICTALK



Devotees offer prayers to the rising sun during the 'Chaitra Navratri' festival, in Moradabad

PTI

Cultivating sustainability through urban farming

Urban farming, encompassing the cultivation of crops within cities, not only yields locally sourced produce but also has environmental benefits

Climate change is no longer a distant concern but a current reality demanding immediate attention. Its effects, from extreme weather to rising sea levels and resource scarcity, are being felt globally. However, within these challenges lies an opportunity for eco-conscious decisions. Urban farming, once viewed as a niche, is now recognised as a practical response to mitigate climate change impacts. By converting urban spaces into sustainable ecosystems, urban farming has the potential to transform our environmental stewardship and build a more resilient future. The need to address climate change is urgent. The WHO estimates that by the 2030s, there could be an additional 250,000 deaths annually due to climate-related diseases like malaria and coastal flooding. Rising temperatures, melting ice caps and more frequent extreme weather events are among the outcomes of unsustainable practices. The time to take action is now and urban farming offers a promising path forward.



Urban Farming: Urban farming involves the cultivation of crops within and around cities. This practice not only provides fresh, locally grown produce but also has numerous environmental benefits. By reducing the need for long-distance transportation of food, urban farming helps to lower carbon emissions. In addition, the use of organic farming practices can improve soil health and biodiversity, further contributing to climate resilience.

Transforming City Spaces One of the key advantages of urban farming is its ability to convert underutilised city spaces into organic food production centres. Vacant lots, rooftops, balconies and even vertical surfaces can be

repurposed for farming, creating green spaces in the heart of urban areas. This not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of cities but also helps to mitigate the urban heat island effect, which can exacerbate the impacts of climate change.

Community Engagement Urban farming also promotes community engagement and social cohesion. By bringing people together to grow and share food, urban farms can strengthen social bonds and create a sense of belonging. It is time to embrace urban farming as a solution to climate change and work towards a more sustainable future.

underserved communities.

Policy Support

To fully realise the potential of urban farming, supportive policies and incentives are needed. While some state Governments have extended their support by providing subsidies and thus creating an enabling environment for urban farming, policymakers can help to scale up this sustainable practice and make it accessible to more people.

Bottomline

Urban farming has the potential to be a game-changer in the fight against climate change. By transforming city spaces into sustainable havens, urban farming can help reduce carbon emissions, improve food security and enhance the resilience of urban areas. However, realising this potential will require concerted efforts from policymakers, communities and individuals. It is time to embrace urban farming as a solution to climate change and work towards a more sustainable future.

(The writer is founder & CEO of CEF Group, views are personal)



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FIRST COLUMN

ESSENCE OF CHARITY: INSIGHTS FROM THE GITA

Charity, a cornerstone of compassion, transcends mere monetary transactions



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Charity is defined as the voluntary giving of help, typically in the form of money, to those in need. It is also kindness and tolerance in judging people; charity refers to a nice way to treat people. It is an activity or gift that benefits the public at large. Charity is what costs you a little, but can benefit someone greatly.

The Bhagavad-Geeta has lots of information about this topic. Lord Krishna has stated this activity in the three modes of goodness, passion and darkness. Beginning with charity in goodness, "The charity, which is given with a thought that one must donate and is given to someone from whom nothing is expected in return and is given at a proper place, on a suitable occasion and is given to a worthy person, that charity is said to be in goodness. (18.20) Lord Krishna has set five conditions for a proper donation. The first is a strong urge that one must donate. After all, it is a voluntary act or should be. Any compulsion of any kind is not really charity. The second requirement is that it must be given to someone from whom nothing is expected in return. If it was it is not a donation but an exchange. We give something and get something in return like a favour. The third condition is the place; it must be proper. Those in need of money gather outside religious places like temples on auspicious days like Janmashtami. One can donate to them whatever one can spare easily. Similarly, there are needy persons in dhams (sacred places) like Kedarnath. Donations in these places are highly beneficial to givers.



The fourth condition of the Lord is occasions like Mahashivaratri. These are excellent opportunities to donate. Additionally, people feel generous on personal landmarks like birthdays of self and family members when they like to spend money set aside for these purposes. This is very nice too. Others get associated with our happiness. The fifth condition of the Lord is very stringent. All charities must be given to worthy persons only. Before offering charity to someone, make sure that he is, in fact, needy and not just a pretender dressed like a beggar. Why? Many are not needy and are fit enough to earn a living for themselves, but choose to become burdens on society. They even train their children to become beggars. This cannot be encouraged. Similarly, there are sadhus, who have escaped their family responsibilities and have chosen to seek an easy way out to exist.

Now we come to the donation in passion. "But charity, which is either given in return for some favour earlier, or with an expectation of a future return in mind and is given grudgingly with a heavy heart, that charity is said to be in passion." (18.12) Lord Krishna has warned against two faults in donating. One is to make it an exchange deal as stated earlier, which is I do something for you and you do likewise. This in the cloak of charity is not to be practised. The other is to give a donation under some compulsion because there is a faulty emotion behind it.

There are five different ways to donate. These are money, material objects, personal labour, kind words and good emotions. There is not just one way. Even if we feel we don't have surplus money, there is something material we can definitely spare like clothes which we are not likely to ever wear. If that is also not possible, then, we can do some personal labour like assisting in the marriage arrangements of a relative or a friend. If that is also not convenient, we can say a few kind words, which mean a lot to someone in distress. And, lastly, our good emotions can bring cheer to someone. Different religions encourage doing charitable work. Lord Jesus taught that we should give food to the hungry, shelter to those, who have none and clothes to the poor. Charity in Islam is given to please God through generosity, love, compassion and faith. These acts are not necessarily physical or monetary. Simple good deeds such as a smile, or a helping hand are great acts of charity.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

Navigating Indian democracy's turbulence



J S RAJPUT

The very ideals of India's democracy — the sanctity of its Constitution, committed leadership and the celebration of its diverse culture — now seem elusive



I was an enthusiastic first-time voter in the 1962 general elections. I am eagerly awaiting to cast my vote this year also, as I have done in every intervening election. What would be churning in the minds of those in my age group as we slowly move towards the polling booth? Most of us shall certainly remember Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Netaji Subhash Bose, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Ambedkar; the images of the freedom struggle; and the constitution of India. As young university students, we were indeed inspired and proud of our national leaders, irrespective of their political affiliations. At the University of Allahabad and the city of Allahabad, it was a great opportunity to listen to the luminaries active not only in the political field but also those who had excelled in literary and cultural pursuits.

What makes my mind reverberate with the nostalgia of those days stands ignited by the manner in which a large number of the politicians, their spokespersons and leaders of today are determined to excel each other in lowering the ethos of democracy and the process of elections. Bitterness is in the air and it certainly is a consequence of frustrations, uncertainty and apprehensions. It is a universally accepted social responsibility that the elderly must ever remain conscious of the impact their approach, articulation and social behaviour would create on the young of the family, community and the nation. How could anyone ignore it? Is politics all about just somehow winning an election? It appears that for the ambitious politicians in a hurry, the only aim of democracy is to elevate some people to positions of power — power that makes them forget the people who put them on the pedestal! One would love



ONE OF THE PRIME NATIONAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF EVERY CITIZEN IS TO SINCERELY GIVE EQUAL RESPECT TO THE DIVERSITY OF INDIA, INCLUDING ALL RELIGIONS, FAITHS, PRACTICES AND PERSONS ADORED AND WORSHIPPED BY THE ADHERENTS OF EACH ONE OF THESE

to cite the example of a defeated candidate who after losing the Lok Sabha election reverts back to his constituency, works for another five years with greater enthusiasm and vigour and wins the hearts of people! The search is on!

One of the prime national and constitutional responsibilities of every citizen is to sincerely give equal respect to the diversity of India including all religions, faiths, practices and persons adored and worshipped by the adherents of each one of these. My religion is best for me, my neighbour's is best for him. No chance for any conflict; and this is what India has practised for ages! Why pollute this beautiful socio-cultural heritage? On 20th October 1927, Mahatma Gandhi wrote on Hinduism in Young India: "I have found it to be the most tolerant of religions known to me. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me inasmuch as it gives the votary the largest scope for self-expression.

Not being an exclusive religion, it enables the followers of that faith not merely to respect all other religions, but it also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in other faiths." It must be accepted that while the freedom fighters and the makers of the constitution of India were determined to eradicate untouchability, caste exclusions and religious bigotry, their successors exploited caste, religion and regionalism to the hilt to create a niche for themselves!

Having seen all this, the Indian voter is maturing fast and it is often indicated by the diametrically opposite voting patterns for Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies. Mature political discussions now take place even at the village Chaupal levels and the analysis is sometimes more incisive and decisive than in places like the India International Centre of New Delhi!

As one who completes his fifty years as a full Professor, I could — without being immodest — consider myself pretty senior in the world of teaching and learning. I probably deserve the liberty to state that when some Hon'ble Member of Parliament tears official papers in the House, mounts the table before the Chairperson/ Speaker and throws the torn pages on the face of the presiding officer, I feel ashamed! I feel let down, why do we as teachers not educate them on the basics of human behaviour and respect for the elders, seniors and those with greater experience? More than that, how could those sitting in the hallowed precincts of the parliament ever forget to show respect for the freedom fighters and the makers of the constitution of India?

Today's politicians seem more focused on winning elections at any cost rather than upholding the democratic ethos that our forefathers fought for. The air is thick with bitterness, fueled by frustration and uncertainty. As elders, we carry a responsibility to guide the younger generation towards a path of respect for

diversity and tolerance. While India's socio-cultural fabric has long thrived on inclusivity and tolerance, modern politics has often exploited divisions for personal gain. Yet, amidst the chaos, signs of a maturing electorate emerge. Villages engage in political discourse rivaling that of urban centers, indicating a growing political consciousness. Looking ahead, it becomes imperative for politicians to embody Gandhi's message in their lives and actions. India's democracy requires leaders who prioritise service over power, who embrace diversity and who lead with integrity. As we approach the upcoming elections, let us hope for a resurgence of these values, ensuring a brighter future for generations to come.

Over the years, I have witnessed practically every political party staging a Dharna before the Gandhi statue outside the parliament of India. One wonders how most of them could gather the courage to face Gandhi, having practically trampled all that Gandhi not only preached but practised throughout his life. Will some media house survey the coming elections to see how many of the elected members of parliament could repeat the words of Gandhi: "My life is my message" to their children, to their electors! India and its democracy need them in much bigger numbers than at present. (The author works in education, social cohesion and religious amity, views are personal)

Decacorn's fall signals startup governance crisis

Stakeholder discord and falling valuations in Indian startups prompt questions about the trajectory of the country's startup story

Earlier last month, the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) convened by Byju's was marked by notable discord and stakeholder boycotts, culminating in a decision to oust the company's founder, Byju Raveendran, from the role of chief executive officer. Spearheaded by influential shareholders such as Prosus NV and Peak XV Partners, this move signifies an intensification of the ongoing disagreement regarding the future direction of the erstwhile leading online tutoring platform.

Once the poster child of India's booming start-up ecosystem, the turn of events at Byju's has opened the floodgates for scrutiny of governance of startups in the coun-



SIDDHARTH SUBUDHI

try. The issues faced by Byju's are self-inflicted, but the damage caused has hurt the larger startup and edtech ecosystem in the country. These thoughts were echoed by Mr. Ronnie Screwala a little while back, who stated that one rotten apple should not affect the larger ecosystem. This is why only recently we are witness to how success for any startup in India is no longer measured

simply by how much funds they have raised, but by how they are utilising the money. The humour in the Byju's story is not lacking. Byju's heralded as an edtech success story, apparently generates the major portion of its revenues from the sale of tablets, SD cards and other tech products. The revenue earned from its course fees is a minor portion of its revenue and that's where the problems begin for Byju's. By gradually shifting from a core education company to a hardware sales company, the core value of Byju's products were lost. The wilful transition from a value generating edtech company, to a rabid sales focused company is perhaps one of the reasons for the notoriety Byju's is experiencing today.

India, which has proudly counted five decacorns among its ranks, a distinguished category comprising only 47 startups globally valued at over US\$10 billion. Among these, Byju's stood out as the most esteemed Indian decacorn. This is no longer the case now with Byju's valuations plummeting from \$22 billion in 2022, to estimates that suggest a fraction of the value at below \$1 billion—a 95 percent drop. Corporate governance issues are at the heart of this drop — of high losses, ambitious marketing spends and delayed submission of audited accounts. The decision at the EGM to reconstitute the board and removal of the founder marks a significant step toward reinstating



investor trust, fostering accountability and guiding the company toward a more sustainable and transparent operational framework. Investors have made it clear that they will not tolerate misdemeanours any longer. Albeit the decisions of the

EGM have been dismissed by Byju's and an interim stay order has been passed by the Karnataka High Court to this regard, the issues plaguing Byju's are bound to have rippling effects on investor-startup relations in the years to come. One way forward for

Byju's to salvage its position is by actually letting their investors take control of the company. After all, these investors have significant skin in the game and have already been part of the tumultuous rise of Byju's for many years. Also, going by past records, investors stepped into Bharatpe, another glorious startup which was impacted by governance issues and turned it into a profitable venture within a year. It is a precedence that underlines the structural benefits of letting investors take a larger role in turning around a company into which they have pumped in billions.

Whatever the outcome may be from the ongoing proceedings at the Karnataka High Court, or the NCLT judge-

ment on interim orders in the oppression and mismanagement plea filed by investors, the larger mission must be to protect what Byju's represents. It not only represents the potential of Indian startups, but also the aspirations of lakhs of Indian students in tier II and III cities who were able to access high quality english education from the comfort of their hometown. Whether it's the investors taking back Byju's under their control, or anyone else, the larger spirit must be towards reorienting the startup to an ed-tech company rather than a sales company.

The writer is Senior Policy Analyst at the Centre for Digital Economy Policy Research (C-DEP); views are personal

Netanyahu's approach to war a mistake: Biden

AP ■ TEL AVIV

US President Joe Biden called Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's handling of the war in Gaza a mistake and called for his government to flood Gaza with aid, ramping up pressure on Israel to reach a cease-fire and widening a rift between the two staunch allies that has worsened as the war has dragged on.

Biden has been an outspoken supporter of Israel's war against Hamas since a militant group launched a deadly assault on October 7. But in recent weeks his patience with Netanyahu has appeared to be waning and his administration has taken a more stern line with Israel, rattling the countries' decades-old alliance and deepening Israel's international isolation over the war.

The most serious disagreement has been over Israel's plans for an offensive in the southern-most Gaza city of Rafah and the rift has spiraled since, worsened by an Israeli airstrike last week on an aid convoy, which killed seven workers with the food charity World Central Kitchen (WCK), most of them foreigners.

Israel said the deaths were unintentional but Biden was outraged. Biden's comments, made in an interview that aired late Tuesday after being recorded two days after the WCK strike, highlight the differences between Israel and the US over humanitarian aid to people in Gaza, where a monthslong war has led to warnings of imminent famine.

"What he's doing is a mistake. I don't agree with his approach," Biden told Spanish-language broadcaster Univision.

He was responding to being asked if Netanyahu is prioritizing his political survival over the national interest.

Biden said Israel should agree to a cease-fire, flood beleaguered Gaza with aid for the next six to eight weeks and allow other countries in the region to help distribute the aid. "It should be done now," he said.

Hunger in Gaza is overshadowing the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, a typically joyous festival during which families celebrate the end of the holy month



Relatives of hostages held in Gaza and their supporters protest outside of the Prime Minister's office to call for an immediate release of the captives for the Jewish holiday of Passover as the war cabinet meets in Jerusalem, Tuesday. AP/PTI

of Ramadan. Israel halted aid deliveries to Gaza in the early days of the war, but under US pressure has slowly increased trucks allowed to enter the territory. Still, aid groups have complained that supplies are not reaching desperate people quickly enough, blaming Israeli restrictions, and countries have attempted other ways to deliver them including air drops and by sea.

Israel says its has steadily ramped up aid throughout the war, opening up more entry points for trucks to enter and to reach especially hard-hit areas like northern Gaza, an early target of Israel's in the war.

Israel blames aid groups for being too slow to deliver aid once it's inside Gaza. Those groups say logistical issues and the precarious security situation — underscored by the WCK strike — complicate aid deliveries. Israel and Hamas are currently engaged in talks meant to bring about a cease-fire in exchange for the release of hostages captured by Hamas and others who stormed across the border on October 7. But the sides remain far apart on key issues, including the return of Palestinians to hard-hit northern Gaza.

Netanyahu has vowed to achieve "total victory" in the war, pledging to destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities to

prevent a repeat of the October 7 attacks and to return the hostages. He says that victory must include an offensive in Rafah, which Israel says is Hamas' last major stronghold, but more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people are currently seeking shelter there.

Six months into the war, Israel is growing ever more isolated, with even its closest partner increasingly vocal about its discontent in the war's direction and longtime trading partners like Turkey taking potentially painful economic steps to express dismay. Netanyahu is under pressure to decide on a postwar vision for Gaza but critics say he is delaying because he doesn't want to anger his ultra-nationalist governing partners, who support resettling the Gaza Strip, which Israel withdrew from in 2005 and an idea Netanyahu has ruled out. Israel launched the war in response to Hamas' cross-border assault, where militants killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took roughly 250 people hostage, according to Israeli authorities.

More than 33,200 Palestinians have been killed in the relentless fighting, according to Gaza's Health Ministry which doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says most of the dead are women and children.

Khamenei vows retaliation for Iran's slain generals

AP ■ TEHRAN/JERUSALEM

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reiterated on Wednesday a promise to retaliate against Israel over the killings of Iranian generals in Syria. Khamenei spoke at a prayer ceremony celebrating the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, saying the airstrike that demolished Iran's consulate in Syria earlier this month was "wrongdoing" against a diplomatic post that is considered Iranian territory. "When they attack our consulate section it looked like they attack on our territory," Khamenei said. "The evil regime must be punished, and it will be punished." The strike killed 12 people: seven Iranian

Revolutionary Guard members, four Syrians and a Hezbollah militia member. Israel has not acknowledged its involvement, though it has been bracing for an Iranian response to the attack that was a significant escalation in their long-running shadow war. State TV broadcast Khamenei's remarks live. He did not elaborate on the way Iran would retaliate.

Khamenei also criticised the West, particularly the US and Britain, for supporting Israel in its war against Hamas in Gaza. "It was expected they (would) prevent (Israel) in this disaster. They did not. They did not fulfil their duties, the Western governments," he said.

Iran supports anti-Israeli militant groups like Palestinian

Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah. It does not recognize Israel. (AP)

ISRAEL THREATENS TO STRIKE IRAN DIRECTLY

Israel's foreign minister threatened Wednesday that its country's forces would strike Iran directly if the Islamic Republic launched an attack from its territory against Israel, as tensions between the rival powers flare following the killings of Iranian generals in a blast at the Iranian consulate in Syria. "If Iran attacks from its territory, Israel will respond and attack in Iran," Israel Katz said in a post on X in both Farsi and Hebrew.

The remarks came after Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reiterated early

Wednesday a promise to retaliate against Israel over the attack on its consulate in Damascus earlier this month. Tehran holds Israel responsible for the strike that leveled the building, killing 12 people. Israel has not acknowledged its involvement, though it has been bracing for an Iranian response to the attack, a significant escalation in their long-running shadow war.

Khamenei spoke at a prayer ceremony celebrating the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, saying the airstrike was "wrongdoing" and akin to an attack on Iranian territory. "When they attacked our consulate area, it was like they attacked our territory," Khamenei said, in remarks broadcast by Iranian state TV.

"The evil regime must be punished, and it will be punished." Neither Katz nor the Ayatollah elaborated on the way they would retaliate.

Among 12 killed in the blast on Apr 1 were seven Iranian Revolutionary Guard members, four Syrians and a Hezbollah militia member.

Khamenei also criticised the West, particularly the US and Britain, for supporting Israel in its war against Hamas in Gaza. "It was expected they (would) prevent (Israel) in this disaster. They did not. They did not fulfil their duties, the Western governments," he said.

Iran supports anti-Israeli militant groups like Palestinian Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah. It does not recognize Israel.

UN climate chief presses for faster action 'Humans have 2 years left to save world'

AP ■ OXFORD

Humanity has only two years left "to save the world" by making dramatic changes in the way it spews heat-trapping emissions and it has even less time to act to get the finances behind such a massive shift, the head of the United Nations climate agency said on Wednesday.

With governments of the world facing a 2025 deadline for new and stronger plans to curb carbon pollution, nearly half of the world's populations voting in elections this year, and crucial global finance meetings later this month in Washington, United Nations executive climate secretary Simon Stiell said he knows his warning may sound melodramatic. But he said action over the next two years is "essential."

"We still have a chance to make greenhouse gas emissions tumble, with a new generation of national climate plans. But we need these stronger plans, now," Stiell said in a speech at the Chatham House think tank in London. He suggested that climate action is not just for powerful people to address — in a not-so-veiled reference to

the electoral calendar this year.

"Who exactly has two years to save the world? The answer is every person on this planet," Stiell said. "More and more people want climate action right across societies and political spectrums, in large part because they are feeling the impacts of the climate crisis in their everyday lives and their household budgets." Crop-destroying droughts have increased the need for bolder action to curb emissions and help farmers adapt which could boost food security and lessen hunger, he said.

"Cutting fossil fuel pollution will mean better health and huge savings for governments and households alike," Stiell said. Not everyone is convinced such warnings will be helpful. "Two years to save the world" is meaningless rhetoric — at best, it's likely to be ignored, at worst, it will be counterproductive," said Princeton University climate scientist Michael Oppenheimer, who is also a professor of international affairs.

Levels of carbon dioxide and methane in the air last year hit all-time highs, according to United States government cal-

culations, while scientists calculate that the world's carbon dioxide emissions jumped 1.1 per cent. Last year was the hottest year on record by far, global temperature monitoring groups concluded.

If emissions of carbon dioxide and methane from burning of coal, oil and natural gas continue to rise or don't start a sharp decline, Stiell said it "will further entrench the gross inequalities between the world's richest and poorest countries and communities" that are being worsened by climate change.

And behind it all is money.

Stiell's speech comes just ahead of meetings of The World Bank and other big multinational development institutions, where poorer nations, led by Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley and Kenyan President William Ruto, are pushing for major reforms in the systems that loan money to poor nations, especially those hit by climate-related disasters.

In conjunction with that push, Stiell called for "a quantum leap this year in climate finance." He called for debt relief for the countries that need it the most, saying they are spending USD 400 billion

on debt financing instead of preparing for and preventing future climate change.

He called for more financial aid, not just loans, and more money from different groups like banks, the International Maritime Organization, and the G20, the world's 20 most powerful economies. Those countries are responsible for 80 per cent of the world's heat-trapping emissions, he said. "G20 leadership must be at the core of the solution, as it was during the great financial crisis," Stiell said.

"Every day, finance ministers, CEOs, investors, and development bankers direct trillions of dollars. It's time to shift those dollars from the energy and infrastructure of the past, towards that of a cleaner, more resilient future," Stiell said.

"And to ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable countries benefit." Officials said the climate finance problem needs to be fixed by the end of the year with November's climate negotiations in Baku, Azerbaijan, a crucial point.

Stiell is "absolutely right" that timing and finance are the heart of the matter, said long-time climate analyst Alden Meyer of European think tank E3G. The carbon action plans

submitted by next year will "determine whether we can get on the trajectory of sharp emissions reductions needed to avoid much worse climate impacts than those we are already suffering today," he said.

With so many elections and places where democracies are on the brink, "climate finance related to carbon policy is on the line," said Nancy Lindborg, president of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, at the Skoll World Forum, an ideas conference in Oxford, England. Climate Analytics CEO Bill Hare said Stiell was "listening to the science" — namely that global emissions must be halved by the end of the decade to meet the Paris climate accord's ambition of capping global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit).

"Governments are nowhere near that, and disastrously many are still supporting new fossil fuel development," Hare said. "We need to see a massive strengthening of action now - faster ramping up of renewables, electric vehicles and batteries - if we're to get serious reductions by 2030. The longer we wait, the more it will cost."

Exit polls suggest big win by South Korea's liberal opposition parties

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's liberal opposition parties were expected to win a landslide victory in Wednesday's parliamentary election, initial exit polls suggested, a result that if confirmed would make conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol a lame duck for his remaining three years in office.

The joint exit polls by South Korea's three major TV stations — KBS, MBC and SBS — showed the main opposition Democratic Party and its satellite party were forecast to win combined 178-197 seats in the 300-member National Assembly. They expected another liberal opposition party to win 12-14 seats.

The polls suggested the ruling People Power Party and its satellite party were projected to win 85-105 seats.

Wednesday's election was widely seen as a mid-term confidence vote on President Yoon, a former top prosecutor who took office in 2022 for a single five-year term. He has been grappling with low approval ratings and a liberal opposi-



A woman casts her vote for the parliamentary election at a polling station in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday.

tion-controlled parliament that has limited his major policy platforms.

Regardless of the results, Yoon will stay in power, but if his party fails to regain a parliamentary majority it could set back Yoon's agenda and further intensify conservative-liberal

fighting.

"What would matter to the People Power Party is whether it can become the biggest party or the second biggest party," said Choi Jin, director of the Seoul-based Institute of Presidential Leadership. "If his party loses the election, Yoon

will find it difficult to move forward even a single step on state affairs."

Of the 300 seats, 254 will be elected through direct votes in local districts, and the other 46 to the parties according to their proportion of the vote. Election observers say candidates in about 50 to 55 local districts are in neck-and-neck races.

In the months ahead of the election, the conservatives supporting Yoon and their liberal rivals exchanged toxic rhetoric and mudslinging. The conservative-liberal division deepened during the 2022 presidential election, during which Yoon and his main rival Lee Jae-myung spent months demonizing each other. Yoon eventually beat Lee by the narrowest margin ever for a Korean presidential candidate.

Lee, now the chairman of the opposition Democratic Party, is a harsh critic of Yoon's policies and is eyeing another presidential bid. He faces an array of corruption investigations that he argues are politically motivated and pushed by Yoon's government.

New exhibition explores life, legacy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in London

PTI ■ LONDON

A grand new exhibition that brings together many previously unseen works to explore the life and legacy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the 19th century founder of the Sikh Empire, opened at the Wallace Collection museum in London on Wednesday. 'Ranjit Singh: Sikh, Warrior, King' features historic objects from the legendary ruler's court, courtiers and family members, including those personally owned by the Maharaja and the most famous of his wives, Maharani Jind Kaur. Besides the glittering weaponry associated with the period of his reign between 1799 and 1849, the collection brings together intricate miniature paintings and exquisite jewellery from the Sikh Empire, drawn from major public and private collections.

"This show has been four years in the making, primarily looking at the Sikh arms and armour of the Wallace Collection as a window into the past and adding some context with portraits, textiles, jewellery, the fine objects from the period to tell the story

of the Lion of Punjab," Davinder Toor, guest curator of the exhibition, told PTI. "This exhibition is a unique opportunity, through adding context, to examine the period of time and also deconstruct how it is that we have got where we are today, particularly in diaspora communities exploring their identity. We look at the complex relationships that cross cultural boundaries and bring out themes of love, devotion, overcoming adversity," said the British Sikh scholar.

London's Wallace Collection is renowned as the home of one of the finest collections of arms and armour in the world and for the first time its Sikh treasure trove is placed in its historic and artistic context, complete with traditional music of the time.

"These works of art deserve to be better known by the public, and I am thrilled that they will be in the spotlight as we tell the incredible story of Ranjit Singh. As well as his military prowess and political genius, the Lion of the Punjab was known for the diversity and tolerance he fostered in his Empire, and celebrating this has never been more important," said Dr Xavier

Bray, Wallace Collection Director and co-curator of the exhibition. Themed across five rooms, the exhibition opens with a look at the warrior culture handed down to Ranjit Singh from the Sikh Gurus; the masters of war section explores his insatiable appetite for expansion; Lahore Durbar explores his reign as a popular ruler and family life with several wives; his modernising phase explores Ranjit Singh's cordial relations with foreign powers; and the legacy section examines the aftermath of the collapse of the Sikh kingdom, with his son and heir Maharaja Duleep Singh's bust marking the final object of the display.

The new exhibition, on till October, showcases a richly mounted sword in gold and gemstones thought to have belonged to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Other highlights include an incredibly fine miniature painting of Ranjit Singh, on public display for the first time from the Toor Collection, and the lavishly decorated golden throne of the ruler, on loan from the Victoria & Albert (V&A) Museum.

Switzerland will host Ukraine peace conference in June

Geneva (AP): Switzerland's government said Wednesday it will host a high-level international conference in June to help chart a path toward peace in Ukraine after more than two years of war, in hopes that Russia might join in the peace process one day. The lakeside Bürgenstock resort is expected to host the June 15-16 gathering. It's expected to draw top government officials from dozens of countries, following on a plan laid out by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis in recent months.

"The first country that we spoke with, after Ukraine of course, was Russia, because a peace process cannot happen without Russia, even if it won't be there for the first meeting," Cassis told reporters Wednesday in the Swiss capital, Bern.

Swiss daily Neue Zürcher Zeitung reported Wednesday that US President Joe Biden could attend. He is expected to be in Italy during that time for the G7 leaders meeting, though the White House has not said whether he would attend the Swiss conference.

The Swiss government said early talks toward arranging the conference involved the European Union and envoys from the so-called Global South, including Brazil, China, Ethiopia, India, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

"At its meeting today, the Federal Council took note of the results to date and discussed the next steps. There is currently sufficient international support for a high-level conference to launch the peace process," the federal government in Bern said in a statement.

It acknowledged "some unknowns" leading up to the conference, "but in view of Switzerland's long-standing diplomatic tradition and the encouraging feedback received during the exploratory phase, it considers it its responsibility to contribute to the peace process in Ukraine."

Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr with new clothes, treats and prayers

AP ■ JAKARTA

The Eid al-Fitr holiday marking the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan was celebrated by Muslims on Wednesday with family reunions, new clothes and sweet treats.

In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, nearly three-quarters of the population were travelling for the annual homecoming known locally as "mudik" that is always welcomed with excitement.

"Mudik is not just an annual ritual or tradition for us," said civil servant Ridho Alfian, who lives in the Jakarta area and was travelling to Lampung province at the southern tip of Sumatra island. "This is a right moment to reconnect, like recharging energy that has been drained

almost a year away from home." Before the Eid al-Fitr holiday, markets teemed with shoppers buying clothes, shoes, cookies and sweets. People poured out of major cities to return to villages to celebrate the holiday with their loved ones. Flights were overbooked and anxious relatives weighed down with boxes of gifts formed long lines at bus and train stations for the journey.

In Pakistan, authorities have deployed more than 100,000 police and paramilitary forces to keep security at mosques and marketplaces. People were shopping as usual Tuesday, with women buying bangles, jewelry and clothes for themselves and their children.

The Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the financial turnover during the



A Muslim woman shows her daughter how to pray as they attend prayers at National Mosque for the Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Wednesday. AP/PTI

Eid holiday this year will reach nearly \$10 billion and cross sectors including retail, transit and tourism.

For Arini Dewi, a mother of two, Eid al-Fitr is a day of victory from economic difficulties during Ramadan. "Eventually I'm happy in celebrating Eid holiday despite surge of food prices," she said.

Former Vice President Jusuf Kalla was among Jakarta residents offering prayers at the Al Azhar mosque yard. "Let's celebrate Eid al-Fitr as a day of victory from many difficulties... of course there are many social problems during fasting month of Ramadan, but we can overcome it with faith and piety," Kalla said.

On the night before the holiday, called "takbiran," Jakarta residents celebrated the eve of Eid

al-Fitr by setting off firecrackers on streets that were mostly empty as city residents travelled home.

On Wednesday morning, Muslims joined communal prayers shoulder-to-shoulder on the streets and inside mosques. Jakarta's Istiqlal Grand Mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia, was flooded with devotees offering the morning prayers. Preachers in their sermons called on people to pray for Muslims in Gaza who were suffering after six months of war. "This is the time for Muslims and non-Muslims to show humanitarian solidarity, because the conflict in Gaza is not a religious war, but a humanitarian problem," said Jimly Asshiddiqie, who chairs the advisory board of the Indonesian Mosque Council.

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Biden honours Prime Minister Kishida

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden welcomed Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to the White House on Wednesday for talks on the delicate security situation in the Pacific and for a glitzy state dinner, honoring a leader who has proven to be one of Biden's strongest allies in the face of international crises.



Kishida's official visit completes the administration's feting of the leaders of the Quad, the informal partnership between the US, Japan, Australia and India that the White House has focused on elevating since Biden took office. As administration officials put it, they saved the most pivotal relationship for last.

The visit also marks the realization of Japan's transformation from regional player to that of global influencer — with senior Biden administration officials noting appreciatively there is little the US does across the globe that Tokyo doesn't support. They pointed to Japan's eagerness to take a leading role in trying to bolster Ukraine against Russia's invasion and with the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Biden and Kishida are also kindred spirits as politicians, both confronting difficult political headwinds on the home front while trying to navigate increasingly complicated problems on the global stage. Like Biden, Kishida has been dogged by low approval ratings for much of his tenure.

Biden's reelection effort has been shadowed by an American electorate anxious about inflation, unease among some Democrats over his handling of the Israel-Hamas war, and concerns about whether at 81 he's too old to serve

another four years. The US economy got another blip of dour data on Wednesday with the government reporting that consumer inflation ticked up last month, boosted by gas, rents, auto insurance and other items. Kishida, meanwhile, is dealing with a Japanese economy that slipped to the world's fourth-largest after it contracted in the last quarter of 2023 and fell behind Germany. Polls in Japan show that support for Kishida, who was elected in 2021, has plunged as he deals with a political funds corruption scandal within his ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

"For President Biden, this is, of course, a chance to highlight and cement progress in the relationship, the most important bilateral alliance in the Indo-Pacific. It's a chance to sustain urgency and momentum in this relationship," said Christopher Johnstone, a former national

security official in the Biden administration who is now the Japan Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "For Kishida, it's a chance to showcase his ties to the US, to prop up support at home."

There are differences between the leaders. The visit comes after Biden announced last month that he opposes the planned sale of Pittsburgh-based US Steel to Nippon Steel of Japan. Biden argued in announcing his opposition that the US needs to "maintain strong American steel companies powered by American steelworkers."

Biden welcomed Kishida on Wednesday morning with a pomp-filled arrival ceremony on the White House South Lawn. The leaders will hold Oval Office talks and a joint press conference before the formal dinner, which will include a post-meal performance by singer-songwriter Paul Simon, a

favorite of both Kishida and first lady Jill Biden.

The Bidens hosted Kishida and his wife for dinner Tuesday evening, taking the couple to BlackSalt, a seafood restaurant in a tony neighborhood in the nation's capital.

The couples also exchanged gifts. The Bidens presented Kishida with a three-legged table handmade by a Japanese American-owned company in Pennsylvania.

The president also gave Kishida a custom-framed lithograph and a two-volume LP set autographed by Billy Joel. Jill Biden gave Yuko Kishida a soccer ball signed by the US women's national team and the Japanese women's national team.

Kishida gave Biden Wajima-Nuri lacquerware coffee cups as well as pens and Okinawan coffee beans. Yuko Kishida gifted Jill Biden a matching Takaoka copperware necklace, bracelet and earrings. The visitors gave the Bidens Nintendo items, including a stuffed Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach and Yoshi.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said the leaders will announce plans to upgrade US-Japan military relations, with both sides looking to tighten cooperation amid concerns about North Korea's nuclear program and China's increasing military assertiveness in the Pacific.

Kishida and Biden are also expected to confirm Japan's participation in NASA's Artemis moon program as well as its contribution of a moon rover developed by Toyota Motor Corp. and the inclusion of a Japanese astronaut in the mission. The rover, which comes at a roughly USD 2 billion cost, would be the most expensive contribution to the mission by a non-US partner to date.

The leaders are also expected to announce cyber initiatives and new educational partnerships, and Kishida is expected to take part in planting a cherry blossom tree on the National Mall, an administration official said.

Biden has heaped praise on Japan for its significant increase in defense spending and has tightened cooperation on economic and security matters throughout Kishida's tenure.

Japan was quick to step up in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, join the US and other Western allies in mounting aggressive sanctions on Moscow, and Japanese automakers Mazda, Toyota and Nissan announced their withdrawal from Russia.

Tokyo has been one of the largest donors to Kyiv since Russia's invasion, and Japan has surged its defense spending amid concern about China's military assertiveness.

Xi meets former Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jeou

AP ■ BEIJING



Chinese President Xi Jinping met with former Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou in Beijing Wednesday in a bid to promote unification between the sides that separated amid civil war in 1949.

Ma left office almost two decades ago and was largely excluded from the opposition Nationalist Party's failed campaign to retake the presidency in January, a concession to the electorate's strong opposition to political unification with China and politicians seen as willing to compromise Taiwan's security.

He follows a long line of politicians from the Nationalists, also known as the KMT, who have been invited to China by its authoritarian one-party government and given VIP treatment on visits around the country.

China claims Taiwan as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary. Beijing sends navy ships and warplanes around the island on a daily basis in hopes of wearing down Taiwan's defenses and intimidating the population.

"The people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are all Chinese. There is no dispute that cannot be resolved, there is no problem that cannot be discussed, and no force can separate us," Xi told Ma.

"Differences in systems cannot change the fact that both sides of the Taiwan Straits belong to the same country and nation," he added.

Ma responded that a new war between the two sides would be

"an unbearable burden for the Chinese nation."

"The Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait will definitely have enough wisdom to handle cross-Strait disputes peacefully and avoid conflicts," Ma said.

Independence leaning president-elect Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party won the January election handily and his vice president-elect Bi-khim Hsiao has been visiting nations friendly to Taiwan in Europe and elsewhere ahead of taking office.

Ma's 11-day trip, ostensibly at the head of a student delegation, underlines continued interactions in education, business and culture despite Beijing's threat to use military force against the self-governing island democracy to achieve unification.

Toward the end of his second term in 2015, Ma held a historic meeting with Xi in Singapore, which has close contacts with both sides. The meeting — the first between the leaders of China and Taiwan in more than half a century — produced few tangible outcomes, and Ma's Nationalist Party lost the next presidential election to Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP.

Lai Ching-te, currently vice president, is despised by Beijing for his opposition to unification. The Nationalists recovered a narrow majority in the legislature but their influence on foreign policy and other national issues remains limited. Taiwan has been boosting military relations with allies such as the U.S. and Japan while maintaining close economic ties with the Chinese mainland.

China says economy stable

AP ■ BANGKOK

China's Finance Ministry denounced a report by Fitch Ratings that kept its sovereign debt rated at A+ but downgraded its outlook to negative, saying Wednesday that China's deficit is at a moderate and reasonable level and risks are under control.

Risks to China's public finances are rising, Fitch said, as Beijing works to resolve mounting local and regional government debts and to shift away from heavy reliance on its troubled property industry to drive economic growth.

But while slower growth is adding to the challenges of coping with heavy borrowing, Fitch said it kept China's A+ rating due to its "large and diversified economy," its vital role in global trade and its huge foreign exchange reserves.

The Finance Ministry said it was a "pity" that Fitch had downgraded its sovereign debt and faulted its methods, saying it had failed to take into account Beijing's moves toward "appropriately intensifying, improving quality and efficiency" of its government spending.

"In the long run, maintaining a moderate deficit and making good use of precious debt funds will help expand domestic demand, support economic growth, and ultimately help maintain good sovereign credit," the ministry said.

Overall, our country's local government debt resolution work is progressing in an orderly manner and risks are generally controllable," it said.

Fitch's report noted that China's general government deficit was forecast to rise this year to 7.1 per cent of its GDP, up

from 5.8 per cent in 2023. The median for countries with an "A" rating is 3.0 per cent, it said.

China's average deficit to GDP ratio averaged 3.1 per cent in 2015-2019 but jumped to 8.6 per cent in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tax relief measures and weaker property investments, which are usually a main source of local tax revenue, have eroded the government's capacity to collect tax revenues to offset higher spending, the report said.

Fitch forecasts that China's economy will expand at a 4.5 per cent annual rate this year, down from 5.2 per cent last year, due to the downturn in the property sector and lackluster consumer spending, though it said higher government spending is likely to help make up for some of that weakness.

'Pak set to seek fresh IMF bailout package'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In its efforts to put the cash-strapped economy back on track, the Pakistan government has decided to formally approach the IMF for a medium-term Extended Fund Facility during the upcoming Annual Spring Meetings of Bretton Woods Institutions next week, a media report said on Wednesday.

Islamabad will make a request for the medium-term Extended Fund Facility (EFF) with the possibility of augmenting through climate finance as Pakistan's delegation led by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb will attend the meetings to be held from April 15 to 20 in Washington DC, The News International reported.

The Bretton Woods Institutions are the World Bank and the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) called so as both were set up at a meeting of 43 countries in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA in July 1944.

In mid-March, IMF's global team reached a staff-level agreement with the Pakistani authorities on the second and final review of Pakistan's stabilisation programme supported by the global lender's USD 3 billion standby arrangement approved in July last year. On March 26, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif too had indicated that his government is planning to approach the IMF for "another programme", days after the economic crisis-ridden country struck a staff-level agreement with the global lender regarding the disbursement of the final tranche of USD 1.1 billion.

"With the augmentation of the next bailout package through

climate finance, Pakistan is all set to make a formal request to IMF during the upcoming annual spring meetings," the report said, quoting top official sources.

The size and duration of the upcoming bailout package will be worked out by the IMF's review mission expected to hold talks, probably from the first week of May 2024, to finalise major contours of the upcoming bailout package, it said.

The sources said Pakistan decided to request augmenting the EFF through climate finance, so there was a possibility of securing USD 6 billion to USD 8 billion size of the upcoming programme.

"We are going to present our argument before the IMF management that Pakistan faced severe consequences of climate

degradation and deserved support from the international community and donor agencies," the report quoted sources as saying.

The sources said there was one IMF instrument under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) which provided affordable long-term financing to countries undertaking reforms to reduce risks to prospective balance of payments stability, including those related to climate change and pandemic preparedness.

"By reducing prospective balance of payment risks, an RSF arrangement aims to contribute to longer-term Balance of Payment (BoP) stability. In some cases, the RSF arrangements may also have an impact on short- and medium-term BoP needs," the newspaper said.

'Russian attack on Ukrainian village kills 14-year-old girl, 2 others'

Kyiv (AP)

A Russian attack struck a grocery store and a pharmacy in a Ukrainian village close to the border with Russia on Wednesday, killing three people including a 14-year-old girl, authorities said, as the Kremlin's forces kept up their barrages of urban areas of Ukraine. The strike on Lyptsy, some 10 km (6 miles) from the border, also injured a 16-year-old boy and a woman, officials in the northeastern Kharkiv region said. They did not specify what kind of weapons were used. Another strike with guided aerial bombs "completely destroyed" a hospital in Vovchansk, a town that also lies close to the border in the Kharkiv region, injuring a man, authorities said.

With the 1,000-km (620-mile) front line barely budging in recent months, Moscow's army has kept parts of eastern and southern Ukraine under relentless bombardment as the war stretches into its third year. The power grid has also been a common target.

That has prompted Ukrainian leaders to plea for more air defence systems and ammunition from Western partners.

Ukrainian air defence forces destroyed 14 out of 17 Shahed attack drones launched by Russia overnight Wednesday, a statement said. Some missiles got through. The attacks destroyed energy infrastructure in Mykolaiv and Odesa, according to the governors of the southern regions.

Four still missing as search continues as blast rocks Italy's hydroelectric plant

AP ■ ROME

Search and rescue operations were underway on Wednesday at a hydroelectric plant close to the northern Italian city of Bologna, after a devastating blast killed at least three workers, injured five, and left four missing.

Dozens of firefighters and divers continued operations overnight following the massive explosion on Tuesday afternoon that rocked the plant at about 40 metres (131 feet) below the water level, causing the collapse of parts of the structure and flooding. Rescuers said Wednesday they had few hopes to find the four

missing alive.

"We are working, but with a few hopes of finding missing people alive ... the scenario we are facing doesn't give us this impression," said Luca Cari, a spokesman for Italian firefighters.

"We are working in very complex and difficult conditions, the floor hit by the explosion was dry and now has 50 centimetres of water, we are reconsidering the intervention and evaluating safety considerations," Cari added. The explosion at power company Enel's Bargi plant, south of Bologna, happened during maintenance work and collapsed part of the nine-story underground

structure, sparking a fire and flooding at wide depths. The prefect of Bologna, Attilio Visconti, said a fire broke out when a turbine exploded on the eighth floor below the surface, flooding the floor below.

According to the first reconstructions of the accident by witnesses and survivors, the blast happened during a testing operation that involved about 15 workers, almost all employees of three external companies hired by Enel. The three men who died in the explosion were identified as workers, aged between 35 and 73, local media reported.

Local prosecutors are expected to launch a probe

Wednesday.

Marco Masinara, the mayor of the nearby town of Camugnano, said the structure was "a historic power plant for us," providing jobs for many families.

"Until today, nothing ever happened. Today, a drama occurred. Our world collapsed," he added, saying that three of the injured were in serious condition.

The artificial Suviana Lake was formed by the construction of a dam from 1928-32, and is located in a regional park. Operator Enel Green Power said in a statement Tuesday that there was no damage to the dam.

Russia puts more Kremlin critics on wanted list

Tallinn (Estonia) (AP)

Russian authorities have put more Kremlin critics on a wanted list as its crackdown against dissent reaches unprecedented levels since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine more than two years ago.

Independent Russian news outlet Mediazona reported Tuesday that it found women's rights activist Darya Serenko and prominent journalist and author Mikhail Zygar in the Interior Ministry's database of individuals wanted on criminal charges. The entries don't specify the charges or when they were added to the list.

Both Serenko and Zygar have long left Russia. The Kremlin's

crackdown against opposition activists, independent journalists and government critics has intensified during the war. Hundreds have faced criminal charges over protests and remarks condemning the war in Ukraine, and thousands have been fined or briefly jailed.

Serenko, a longtime activist and author, co-founded the Feminist Anti-War Resistance group shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 and moved to Georgia during the crackdown. Both she and the group were designated as "foreign agents", a label that comes with additional government scrutiny.

Zygar, an author and a found-

ing editor in chief of Russia's independent TV channel Dozhd, also left Russia after the invasion and was declared a "foreign agent". Unconfirmed Russian media reports earlier this year said Zygar could be facing charges of spreading false information about the army over a social media post about Russian atrocities in Bucha, a suburb near Kyiv occupied for several weeks by Moscow's forces.

Spreading false information about the army is a criminal offense punishable by up to 15 years in prison under a law Moscow adopted days after announcing that the Kremlin insists on calling a "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Chicago police fired nearly 100 shots in 41-second traffic stop, videos reveal

AP ■ CHICAGO

Plainclothes Chicago police officers fired nearly 100 gunshots over 41 seconds during a traffic stop that left one man dead and one officer injured, according to graphic video footage a police oversight agency released on Tuesday.

Five officers from a tactical unit who were in an unmarked police vehicle surrounded an SUV last month driven by Dexter Reed, allegedly for failing to wear a seatbelt. Video shows the 26-year-old Black man briefly lowering a window and then raising it and refusing to exit the vehicle as more officers arrived, yelled commands and drew weapons.

The Civilian Office of Police Accountability said preliminary evidence showed Reed fired first, injuring an officer in the Humboldt Park neighbour-

hood on the city's West Side. Then four officers returned fire, shooting 96 rounds.

The gunshots continued even after "Reed exited his vehicle and fell to the ground," COPA said in releasing the body-worn camera footage, 911 calls and police reports.

The videos released offer a fuller perspective than what police initially offered last month.

Police Superintendent Larry Snelling previously said the shooting on March 21 began with a traffic stop and described it as an "exchange of gunfire."

Family members have questioned authorities' account of the shooting, looking for answers about why Reed was pulled over. Andrew M. Stroth, an attorney for the family, said Reed's mother, sister, uncle and father saw the video

Tuesday and were emotionally distraught. He said they remember the young man as a talented high school basketball player with ambitions of being a sports broadcaster.

"I really can't explain the pain that me and my family is going through, but I just hope there are people out there who understand he was a son, he was a brother, he was an uncle, he had loved ones," Reed's sister, Porscha Banks, told reporters. "He was somebody very important."

Banks and other family members joined a demonstration Tuesday night outside the 11th District Police Station, where protesters demanded the firing of the officers who shot Reed. One person was hospitalised after some of the demonstrators clashed with a heckler, the Chicago Sun-Times reported.

Stroth called it an unconstitu-



tional police stop with plainclothes officers who did not announce they were police. He said the family wants to see a swift investigation and for the department to better comply with a court-supervised reform plan.

"Nothing is going to bring Dexter back, but certainly efforts should be taken to make sure this doesn't happen to another family," he said.

On Tuesday, police spokesper-

son Thomas Ahern said the department was cooperating with the investigation.

"We cannot make a determination on this shooting until all the facts are known and this investigation has concluded," he said.

The videos show multiple perspectives, including from the officer who was shot. But there isn't clear footage of Reed shooting. A gun was later recovered from the vehicle.

The tactical unit drives up to the scene with multiple officers screaming profanity-laced commands for Reed to first lower the window and then open the door.

Then gunshots erupt. A man calling 911 to report the shooting described it as "shooting like they're having a Vietnam War."

Reed exits the vehicle and slumps to the ground, ending

up facedown with his head near the rear passenger wheel and wearing only one shoe. Blood trails into a nearby gutter.

Footage of the car shows dozens of bullet holes. The other shoe sits just outside the driver's door.

"Don't move! Don't move!" the officers scream at Reed, lifting up bloody slumping hands in search of a gun but not finding one. They handcuff him as he remains facedown and unmoving.

"I don't know where the gun is," an officer says. They later use a flashlight to look into the vehicle and locate the weapon on the passenger seat.

"He started shooting at us," another officer says.

Afterward more officers and an ambulance arrive on scene.

"All of us were shooting," one officer says repeatedly.

Mayor Brandon Johnson

vowed a full investigation, saying Tuesday's release was part of an effort to be more transparent.

"Attempts to withhold or delay information are mistakes of the past," he said at a news conference with COPA and the Cook County state's attorney's office.

"As mayor and as a father, raising a family, including two Black boys on the West Side of Chicago, I'm personally devastated to see yet another young Black man lose his life during an interaction with police."

He said the city doesn't condone shootings against police officers and noted that the officer, who is also Black, suffered a wrist injury but could have fared far worse. Had the bullet gone a few inches in another direction, Johnson said he would be here "talking about the death of another Black man."

Sensex closes above record 75,000 mark

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex climbed 354 points to close above the record 75,000 mark for the first time while broader Nifty scaled a fresh lifetime high on Wednesday on gains in FMCG, energy and metal shares. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 354.45 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at an all-time high of 75,038.15. During the day, the index spurred 421.44 points or 0.56 per cent to hit a high of 75,105.14. Broader Nifty of the NSE advanced by 111.05 points or 0.49 per cent to close at a record peak of 22,753.80. During the day, it jumped

132.95 points or 0.58 per cent to reach a lifetime intra-day peak of 22,775.70. Key indices hit intra-day lifetime high levels on Tuesday with Sensex scaling the historic 75,000 mark for the first time but closed in the red following profit booking in index major Reliance Industries. "Indian markets sustained their upward momentum, buoyed by a robust performance in the broader market, albeit slightly lagging behind its Asian and European counterparts," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said. Investors' attention remains fixated on the release of the



FOMC minutes and US inflation data later on Wednesday, Nair added. From the Sensex basket, ITC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Asian Paints, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries and Nestle were the major gainers. Maruti, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the laggards. The majority of sectors were aligned with the move wherein FMCG, metal and energy were among the top gainers. The broader indices also edged higher after two days of pause and gained in the range of 0.7-0.9 per cent, Ajit Mishra, SVP — Technical

Research, Religare Broking Ltd said. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.89 per cent and smallcap index advanced 0.46 per cent. Among the indices, oil & gas jumped 1.74 per cent, energy by 1.71 per cent, metal by 1.66 per cent, commodities by 1.30 per cent and services by 1.15 per cent. Utilities and auto were the laggards. As many as 1,961 stocks advanced while 1,869 declined and 103 remained unchanged. In Asian markets, Tokyo and Shanghai settled lower while Hong Kong ended in the positive territory. Markets in South Korea were closed for

elections. European markets were trading in the green. Wall Street ended mostly with gains on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.18 per cent to USD 89.58 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 593.20 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark declined 58.80 points or 0.08 per cent to settle at 74,683.70 on Tuesday. The NSE Nifty dipped 23.55 points or 0.10 per cent to 22,642.75. Stock and money markets will remain closed on Thursday on account of Ramzan Id.

Air India to send narrow body pilots on deputation to Vistara

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Group-owned Air India is planning to send a set of first officers who can operate the narrow body A320 family planes to Vistara, which is grappling with pilot woes, according to multiple sources. The pilots will be sent to Vistara on deputation, subject to getting necessary regulatory approvals. Air India and Vistara did not offer any comments. The sources told PTI that some first officers who can operate A320 family planes will be sent to Vistara on deputation. Two of the sources said the number of narrow body pilots likely to be deputed to Vistara could be a little over 30. One of the sources said it will be the first time that pilots from Air India will be deputed to Vistara for operating narrow body aircraft. For operating Vistara's wide body Boeing 787 planes, around 24 pilots are already on deputation from Air India. They include 16 commanders and eight first officers, the source said. Vistara, a joint venture between the Tata Group and Singapore Airlines, has cut its



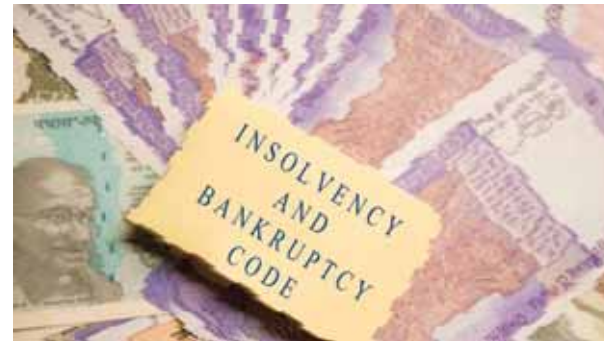
operational capacity by 10 per cent or 25-30 flights daily due to pilot issues. The full service carrier has around 6,500 staff, including 1,000 pilots and 2,500 cabin crew. The airline is in the process of merging with Air India. Recently, the airline faced significant flight disruptions due to non-availability of crew. Many pilots had reported sick to protest against the new contract that will result in pay revisions and there were also roster issues. Vistara has a fleet of 70 aircraft, including 53 Airbus A320 neos, 10 Airbus A321s,

and 7 Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft. On April 5, Vistara CEO Vinod Kannan told PTI that flight disruptions were mainly caused by a stretched roster for pilots and that the airline expects operations to normalise by May. The carrier has also deployed larger aircraft like B787-9 Dreamliner and A321 neo on select domestic routes to combine flights or accommodate more customers, wherever possible. In the ongoing summer schedule, Vistara is to operate 25.22 per cent more weekly flights at 2,324.

NCLAT upholds insolvency proceedings against Tulip Hotels

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has upheld the insolvency proceedings against Tulip Hotels, which had defaulted on Rs 450 crore corporate guarantees given for Cox & Kings and EzeeGo One Travel & Tours each. On May 16, 2023, the Mumbai bench of National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had directed initiation of a Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) against Tulip Hotels over a plea filed by Yes Bank, claiming a default of Rs 900 crore for two corporate guarantees issued by it. The order was challenged before appellate body NCLAT, which upheld the earlier order by NCLT, saying



when a corporate debtor gives a guarantee for a loan transaction, the right of the financial creditor to initiate action against it gets trigger the moment the principal borrower commits a default. Tulip Hotels was a corporate guarantor for two loans disbursed by Yes Bank to Cox & Kings and EzeeGo One Travel and Tours Ltd.

After they defaulted, the financial creditor Yes Bank invoked the guarantee of Rs 450 crore each given for both loans. "When default is committed by the principal borrower, the amount becomes due against both the principal borrower and the Corporate Guarantor and hence both become liable to pay the amount when the

default is committed," said NCLAT in its order on Tuesday while dismissing the appeal. The appellate insolvency tribunal further said, "the default by the principal borrower and the guarantor arises on the same date," unless, the terms of the contract of guarantee provide that the liability of the guarantor would arise in terms of the agreement. In the present case, Yes Bank had invoked the guarantee, therefore, the defaults had arisen on the issue of the demand notice as contemplated in the guarantee. In the present case, notice has been duly served upon the Corporate Guarantor demanding payment and there being a clear default on

the part of the Corporate Guarantor to clear the outstanding due, the Adjudicating Authority has rightly admitted the Corporate Debtor in its capacity as Corporate Guarantor into CIRP," said NCLAT. It further said there is a clear default on the part of the Corporate Guarantor (Tulip Hotels) to clear the outstanding due. "We are of the view that the Adjudicating Authority has rightly admitted the Section 7 application for initiation of the CIRP process after coming to the correct conclusion that Respondent No 1 (financial creditor) has successfully proved the financial debt and default on part of the Corporate Debtor as Corporate Guarantor.

NIIF invests \$200 million in Ibus to boost digital infra in India

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) on Wednesday announced a USD 200 million (about Rs 1,660 crore) investment in digital infrastructure player Ibus Network and Infrastructure. Ibus will be deploying the funds to scale operations in an organic way by expanding its capacities and for inorganic growth, according to a statement. The company aims to strengthen its position as a leader in in-building solutions, outdoor small cells and managed WiFi services and expand its presence in new emerging sectors like Internet of Things (IoT) solutions, it added. Part of the funds raised will also be deployed for developing new infrastructure solutions to address evolving

market demands and technological advancements. NIIF has invested in the company from its master fund. "We were looking for the right investment partner, and with NIIF, we found partners who are completely aligned with our vision," the company's group chief executive Ram Sellaratnam said. Master Fund's chief executive Vinod Giri said this is the eighth investment by the infrastructure fund and the second in digital infrastructure, which underscores the belief in the transformative power of digital technology for India's economy. The statement said about USD 35-40 billion in capital expenditure is expected in the digital infra sector in the next five years, creating a need for substantial investments in the space.

PhonePe partners with eSewa, HAN Pokhara to promote UPI in Nepal

New Delhi: Fintech firm PhonePe on Wednesday said it has partnered with Nepal's digital wallet service eSewa and the Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) Pokhara to promote digital payments through UPI on the Himalayan country's payment processor Fonepay Network. The partnership is a part of the Fewa New Year Festival which will be held from April 11-14 in Nepal. Over 3,000 merchants will participate in the festival with more than 1,00,000 visitors expected to visit. PhonePe in a statement said it will run on-ground activation aimed at raising awareness about digital payments among local merchants while demonstrating the convenience of digital payments for customers. PTI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Reliance Infrastructure on Wednesday tanked 20 per cent as in a major relief to the DMRC, the Supreme Court set aside its own judgement and held that the PSU firm was not obliged to pay over Rs 8,000 crore to the Delhi Airport Metro Express Private Ltd, a subsidiary of the firm, in pursuance of a 2017 arbitral award. The stock dived 19.99 per cent to settle at Rs 227.40 — its lower circuit limit — on the BSE. On the NSE, it slumped 20 per cent to hit the lowest trading permissible limit for the day of Rs 227.60. The company's market valuation eroded by Rs 2,250.02 crore to Rs 9,008.02 crore. Allowing the curative plea of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) against the 2021 judgement, a special bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud held that the top court erred in setting aside the Delhi High Court verdict. A division bench of the Delhi High Court, in 2019, had set aside the arbitral award passed against the DMRC. "By setting aside the Delhi



High Court judgement, this court (SC) restored a patently illegal award which saddled a public utility with an exorbitant liability," said the bench which also comprised justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant. The verdict said the amounts deposited by the DMRC till date shall be refunded and restored the parties to their position in which they were on the date of pronouncement of the Delhi High Court verdict. Anil Ambani's Reliance Infrastructure Ltd said no liability has been imposed on it by the Supreme Court order that set aside a Rs

8,000-crore arbitral award that was granted in favour of Delhi Airport Metro Express Pvt Ltd (DAMEPL). "Reliance Infrastructure wishes to clarify that the Order dated April 10, 2024, passed by the Supreme Court does not impose any liability on the company and the company has not received any money from DMRC / DAMEPL under the firm said in a stock exchange filing. While DAMEPL is a subsidiary of Reliance Infrastructure, it is a separate entity and the liability falls on it.

Paytm shares settle over one per cent lower



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of One97 Communications, Paytm's brand owner, on Wednesday, ended over 1 per cent lower after Paytm Payments Bank's Managing Director and CEO Surinder Chawla resigned from the company. The stock dipped 4 per cent to Rs 388 on both the BSE and NSE during the day. It ended at Rs 400.50, lower by 0.94 per cent on the BSE. The stock ended with a decline of 1.16 per cent at Rs 399.50 on the NSE. The company's market valuation eroded Rs 241.45 crore to Rs 25,448.32 crore. Chawla's resignation comes amidst Paytm Payments Bank Ltd facing prohibitory action from banking regulator RBI. "Surinder Chawla, Managing Director and CEO of PPBL has tendered his resignation on April 8, 2024, on account of personal

reasons and to explore better career prospects. He will be relieved from PPBL w.e.f. Close of business hours on June 26, 2024, unless changed by mutual consent," One97 Communications said in a regulatory filing on Tuesday. Chawla joined PPBL in January last year after the payments bank received approval from the Reserve Bank of India. In a major action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), RBI, on January 31, directed it to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTags, and other instruments after February 29. Subsequently, the deadline was extended to March 15. The direction follows persistent non-compliance and continued material supervisory concerns, the central bank had said in a statement. One97 Communications Limited (OCL) holds a 49 per cent stake in PPBL.

ACME Group inks pact to explore development of large scale hydrogen supply chain

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

ACME Group, one of the world's leading sustainable and renewable energy companies, and German pioneer in Liquid Organic Hydrogen Carriers (LOHC), Hydrogenious LOHC Technologies, have inked a pact to collaborate on a feasibility study to explore the joint development of large-scale hydrogen supply chains from ACME's projects in Oman to supply hubs in Europe using the innovative LOHC technology. "Green Hydrogen is emerging as a real opportunity that can transform the global energy systems and meet the decarbonisation goals of industry and governments.

"While some will continue to challenge the economic and technical feasibility, we have taken decisions on our Oman project and partnering with Hydrogenious to develop efficient logistics using LOHC is the next step in delivering cost effective value proposition for our customers," said Ashwani Dudeja, Group President and Director for ACME Group. "As companies, ACME and Hydrogenious are at the forefront of the energy transition and share the common goal of driving global decarbonisation. Our collaboration will contribute to making clean hydrogen from the MENA region and the US available to European off-takers in the mid to long term," it said.

NSE cautions against deepfake videos of its chief recommending stocks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) on Wednesday cautioned investors against deepfake videos of its MD and CEO Ashishkumar Chauhan giving stock recommendations. In a statement, the exchange said it has observed the use of the face or voice of Chauhan and NSE logo in a few investment and advisory audio and video clips falsely created using technology. Such videos seem to have been created using sophisticated technologies to imitate the voice and facial expressions of Chauhan, it added. "Investors are hereby



cautioned not to believe in such audio and videos and not follow any such investment or other advice coming from such fake videos or other mediums," NSE said. It may be noted that NSE's

employees are not authorised to recommend any stock or deal in those stocks. Additionally, the exchange said it is making efforts requesting these platforms to take down such videos,

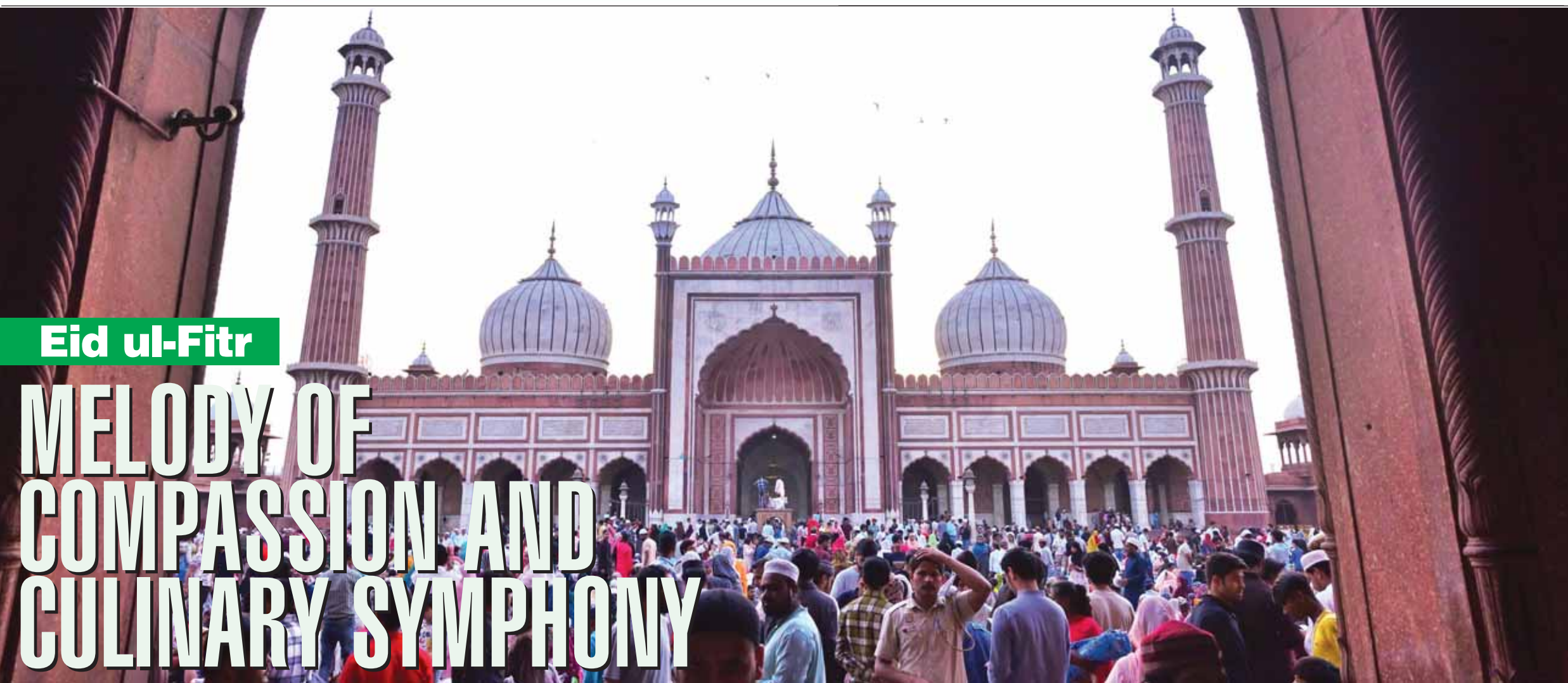
wherever possible. As per the NSE's process, any official communication is made only through its official website and the exchange's social media handles, the bourse said. The exchange has asked investors to verify the source of communication and content that is sent out on behalf of the NSE and to check the official social media handles. Deepfakes are manipulated videos or other digital representations that use artificial intelligence to create cogent videos or audio of individuals they never did or said, posing a risk of spreading misinformation and damaging their reputation.

InterGlobe Aviation shares rally for 4th day running

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of InterGlobe Aviation, the parent of IndiGo, jumped over 4.50 per cent on Wednesday, taking their rally to the fourth day running. The rally in the stock of IndiGo's parent InterGlobe Aviation comes at a time when air travel demand is on the rise and there are also capacity constraints due to Vistara flight cancellations and other factors. IndiGo commands 60.1 per cent market share as on February. The stock climbed 4.54 per cent to settle at Rs 3,796.55 on the BSE. During the day, it advanced 5 per cent to Rs 3,815.10 — its 52-week high. At the NSE, it jumped 4.43

per cent to Rs 3,795.30. In the past four days, the stock has zoomed 9 per cent, adding Rs 12,175.7 crore to its market valuation. Travellers will have to shell out more for domestic flights this summer season, with airfares surging 20-25 per cent amid Vistara flight cancellations and strong air travel demand, according to industry experts. Faced with pilot woes, Vistara has cut 25-30 flights daily, or 10 per cent of its total capacity. Jagannarayan Padmanabhan, Senior Director and Global Head, Transport, Mobility, and Logistics Consulting at CRISIL Market Intelligence and Analytics, said the impact of higher airfares on travellers is expected to be substantial.



Eid ul-Fitr

MELODY OF COMPASSION AND CULINARY SYMPHONY

As the crescent moon heralds the end of Ramadan, the historic quarters of Old Delhi come alive with the vibrant festivities of Eid ul-Fitr. At Jama Masjid, the focal point of these celebrations, centuries-old traditions blend seamlessly with contemporary fervour, uniting people of all faiths. **GYANESHWAR DAYAL** recounts the tale of long traditions while lensman **PANKAJ KUMAR** captures it all

THIS EID, 'Idgah,' a classic short story by Munshi Premchand comes to my mind. A young poor orphan boy Hamid goes to Idgah, the village fair, with a small amount of money his granny could spare to enjoy the fair. While his friends buy toys and enjoy sweets, he buys nothing. While returning home, he buys, guess what, a *chimta*, a roti flipper for his granny so that she would not burn her fingers while flipping the *rotis* on her *chulha* (an earthen stove). The story in essence encapsulates what Eid is all about—love compassion and empathy.

Walking down Chandni Chowk seeing young kids draped in kurta pyjamas wearing caps one is instantly reminded of Hamid. The kids are happy and everyone is in a festive mood, emptying pockets on the vendors to have what they have to offer; from clothes, shoes, ornaments, and eatables everything is neatly stacked by roadside vendors.

In the vicinity of Jama Masjid, the streets come alive with festivities as vendors set up stalls selling street food, toys, and trinkets. Children roam about, their faces beaming with joy, while musicians and performers entertain the crowds with lively tunes and performances. The atmosphere is imbued with an infectious energy, drawing people from all walks of life to join in the merriment. The streets of Old Delhi come alive with vibrant markets and bustling bazaars, adorned with colourful decorations and twinkling lights. Families and friends venture out to indulge in shopping for new clothes, accessories, and gifts, adding to the festive fervour.

In the bustling streets of Old Delhi, the festivities of Eid ul-Fitr bring an unparalleled vibrancy to the historic quarters of the city. Old Delhi retains its old charm, wearing that once-in-a-year glow that comes with Eid. The whole of old Delhi is crowded with people who fasted for a month and would celebrate Eid tomorrow. The moon would be cited tonight, hopefully.

As dawn breaks on Eid day, the faithful gather in mosques for special prayers, known as the Salat al-Eid, seeking blessings and divine mercy. After the prayers, the atmosphere is filled with joy and excitement as families exchange greetings, hugs, and gifts.

Eid, one of the most significant festivals in Islam, is celebrated with immense joy and fervour across the globe. In the heart of India, particularly in Old Delhi, Eid takes on a unique charm, blending tradition, spirituality, and communal harmony. As the crescent moon marks the end of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting, Muslims come together to celebrate Eid ul-Fitr, also known as the 'Festival of Breaking the Fast'. Beyond its religious significance, Eid is a time for expressing gratitude, fostering unity, and strengthening community bonds. It is also a time for charity and compassion, as faithfulness are encouraged to donate to those in need, ensuring that everyone can partake in the festivities.

What makes Eid celebrations in Old Delhi truly special is the spirit of unity and inclusivity that pervades the air. Despite the diversity of

EID SPECIAL RECIPES

BRAISED CHICKEN WITH SAVOURY BUTTER SAUCE

by Chefs **MARTIN YAN AND SANJEEV KAPOOR**
on behalf of American Pistachio Growers

YIELD

4 servings

INGREDIENTS

12 ounces boneless chicken, sliced

MARINADE

2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon cornstarch

SAUTÉED MIXTURE

- 1-1/2 tablespoons cooking oil
- 2 tablespoons ghee (clarified butter)
- 1/2 cup onion, diced
- 1/4 cup fresh cilantro stems, chopped
- 1 tablespoon ginger, minced
- 1 teaspoon garam masala
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/4 teaspoon Chinese five-spice powder
- 3/4 cup tomatoes, diced
- 1/4 cup plain yogurt
- 1 tablespoon oyster-flavored sauce
- 2 teaspoons chili garlic sauce
- 1/4 cup half and half or heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/4 cup pistachio kernels, chopped
- 1/3 cup whole pistachios

GARNISH

1 tablespoon cilantro, chopped, or green onions

INSTRUCTIONS

FOR THE MARINADE
Combine marinade ingredients in a bowl. Add the chicken; stir to coat. Set aside.

FOR THE SAUTÉED MIXTURE

Heat a wok or stir-fry pan over medium-high heat until hot. Add oil, swirling to coat sides. Add the chicken; stir fry until browned, about 2-3 minutes. Set aside. Add ghee, onion and cilantro; sauté until onion begins to sweat and soften, about 3 minutes. Add ginger; sauté until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add garam masala, cumin, coriander and five-spice; cook until fragrant, about 20 seconds. Add diced tomatoes, yogurt, oyster-flavored sauce and chili garlic sauce. Reduce heat and let simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Pour in half and half and sugar. Add chicken with juices and chopped pistachios; cook until sauce thickens, 3-4 minutes.

FOR THE GARNISH

Sprinkle with whole pistachios, chopped cilantro / green onions.



PISTA AND MANGO SABUDANA KHEER

by Chef **MEGHNA**
on behalf of American Pistachio Growers

INGREDIENTS

- 1 litre milk
- 4-5 cardamom
- 1/2 cup sabudana
- Condensed milk
- California Pistachio
- 2 Mangoes

PREPARATION

- take 1 liter of milk and bring it to boil
- Add 4-5 cardamom powder
- Once the milk comes to the boil, add 1/2 cup soaked sabudana (soaked for 4-5 hours)
- Let sabudana cook in milk till it becomes transparent
- Lower the heat and add condensed milk as per your taste (I added 1/4 cup, you may add more)
- Stir everything well
- And add 1/4 cup blanched California Pista (take pista, keep in warm water for 20-30 minutes & then gently remove the skin)
- Once the kheer comes to right consistency, turn off the heat and bring it to room temperature
- Then add 2 chopped mangoes; you may add mango pulp as well
- Keep kheer in fridge to chill
- Enjoy this kheer chilled with some more pista and mango garnishing



PISTA NIMBU KEBAB

by Chef **ASHISH BHASIN**
on behalf of American Pistachio Growers

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg Chicken (Boneless Thigh Pieces)
- 400 g California Pistachios
- 100 g Yellow chilli powder
- 50 ml Lemon juice
- 3 g Lemon zest
- 50 ml Cream
- 200 g Ghee
- 50 g White pepper powder
- 100 g Ginger and garlic paste
- 400 g Yoghurt (hung)
- 50 g Turmeric powder



- 1 no. Banana leaf
- Salt to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

- Cut the chicken into thin slices. Marinate it with little lemon juice, salt & ginger garlic paste.
- Keep the marinated chicken in the chiller for 1 hour.
- Blanch pistachio kernels and ensure that all skin is removed. Then make a fine paste (paste should be thick)
- Add pistachio paste, yogurt, white pepper, yellow chilli powder, turmeric, lemon zest, salt and little ghee to the marinated chicken. Mix well.
- Now, wrap the marinated chicken with banana leaves.
- Heat an Iron plate (tawa), put ghee and place the wrapped chicken in the ghee. Cook on slow flame till done.
- Serve hot.

RAMADAN KAREEM SPECIAL LAMB OUZI

by Chef **SACHIN MALIK**

Executive Chef Radisson Blu MBD Noida

FOR LAMB OUZI

- 2 kg Fresh labneh
- 150 ml Sunflower oil
- 100 gms Tomato paste
- Salt to taste
- White Pepper to taste
- 20 gms Ginger powder
- 20 gms Cardamom
- 20 gms Turmeric powder
- 10 gms Saffron
- 6-8 Piece Of Lamb Shanks (1200-1400 Gram)

FOR RICE

- 2 kg White rice
- 10 kg Chopped garlic
- 50 gms Ghee
- 1 kg Minced lamb
- 200 gms Onion, chopped
- Salt to taste
- 10 gms White pepper
- 20 gms Seven spices
- 5 pieces Whole cardamom
- 4 pieces Cinnamon sticks
- 4 Boiled Eggs
- 200 Gram Brown Onions

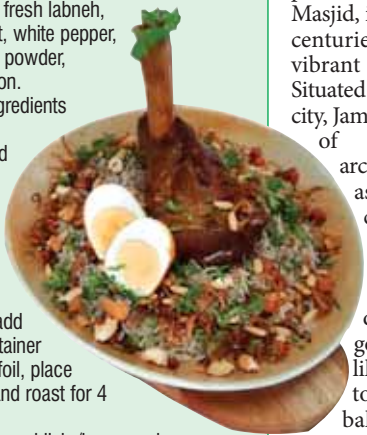
PROCEDURE

For Lamb ouzi marination

- ❖ In a mixing bowl place the fresh labneh, corn oil, tomato paste, salt, white pepper, ginger powder, cardamom powder, turmeric powder and saffron.
- ❖ Mix thoroughly until the ingredients are combined well.
- ❖ Clean the lamb Shanks and place them in a container then add the marinade to it.
- ❖ Allow to marinate in the refrigerator for at least 8 hours.
- ❖ Place in new a container, add 2 litres of water in the container and cover with aluminum foil, place the container in the oven and roast for 4 hours at 300 degrees F.
- ❖ The meat should become a reddish /brown color.

FOR RICE

- ❖ First put the rice in the bowl and keep it for half an hour in the hot water.
- ❖ In a hot cooking pot place the ghee, cinnamon stick, whole cardamom, chopped onion, chopped garlic, and minced lamb, and stir the ingredients well.
- ❖ Add white pepper, seven spices, salt and mix for 3 minutes until the ingredients are combined well.
- ❖ Strain the rice and mix with the ingredients for 4 minutes, and add hot water and cover. Also, Add half of the brown onions to it.
- ❖ Put the pot on slow fire for 20 minutes until the rice is cooked (Use Dum Cook Technique).
- ❖ After cooking serve on a big plate adding the ouzi lamb on top of the rice and garnish with fried mix nuts, Boiled Eggs, rest of the brown onions & Some Fresh Mint & Coriander



World War I. During Eid ul-Fitr in 1920, Mahatma Gandhi, a staunch advocate for Hindu-Muslim unity, attended Eid prayers at Jama Masjid in Delhi, along with other prominent leaders. His participation in Eid celebrations symbolised solidarity between Hindus and Muslims in their struggle against colonial oppression and religious discrimination.

Despite the partition of India in 1947, which led to communal tensions and violence, Eid continued to serve as a beacon of hope for communal harmony. In cities like Lucknow, Hyderabad, and Delhi, Hindus and Muslims have historically come together to celebrate Eid, exchanging greetings, sweets, and goodwill. This tradition has persisted through the decades, symbolising the resilience of India's secular ethos.

Celebrating Eid in Old Delhi, particularly around the iconic Jama Masjid, is an experience that blends centuries-old traditions with vibrant contemporary festivities. Situated in the heart of the walled city, Jama Masjid stands as a symbol of Islamic heritage and architectural grandeur, serving as the focal point for Eid celebrations in the area.

In the days leading up to Eid-ul-Fitr, Old Delhi transforms. Shopkeepers display an array of festive goods, from traditional attire like sharas and sherwanis to delectable sweets like baklava and gulab jamun. Families bustle about, purchasing new clothes and ingredients for the lavish feasts that await them on Eid day.

As the sun rises on Eid morning, the faithful gather at Jama Masjid for the special Eid prayers, known as the Salat al-Eid. The courtyard of the mosque overflows with worshippers, their colourful attire creating a kaleidoscope of hues against the backdrop of the majestic structure. The air resonates with the melodious recitation of Quranic verses and the collective murmurs of prayers, evoking a sense of serenity and spirituality. As the prayers conclude, embraces are exchanged, and heartfelt greetings of "Eid Mubarak" fill the air, reinforcing the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood among the worshippers.

No festival in India is complete without a feast to die for, Eid is no exception. After the prayers, families return to their homes to partake in the traditional Eid feast, known as the 'Eid ki Dastarkhwan'. Homes are filled with the aroma of aromatic spices and mouth-watering delicacies prepared to mark the occasion. From traditional dishes like biryani, kebabs, and sheer khurma to sweet treats like seviyan (vermicelli pudding), shahi tukda and sheermaal (sweet bread), the Eid feast is a gastronomic delight. To add yet another layer to the Eid feast we have a few recipes that you could try today. Curated from the best chefs around, these lip-smacking recipes can make your Eid memorable. But as you do so, do spare a thought for our friend Hamid who might be quietly celebrating his Eid somewhere with his granny with gur and rotis flipped by the *Chimta* he brought home this Eid from Idgah! Eid Mubarak!!

BANNO KABAB

by Chef **SUBROTO GOSWAMI**
on behalf of American Pistachio Growers

- 5 g Chaat Masala
- 15 ml Mint Chutney

INSTRUCTIONS

- First marinate the chicken tikka with ginger-garlic paste and lemon juice.
- Heat a pan, add oil, chopped ginger-garlic, green chilli and sauté for a minute.
- Add gram flour, spices and sauté for a few minutes.
- Now add milk to the mixture and cook till it is dry. Keep the mixture



aside for cooling. Add yogurt to the mixture when it cools down.

- Coat the marinated chicken with this mixture and leave it for at least 4 hours.
- Beat egg white mixture till frothy. Add chopped pistachios, cream

and fresh coriander to the mix.

- Cook the marinated chicken in tandoor till half done. Coat the chicken with the egg white mixture and cook again till fully done.
- Serve hot with mint chutney.

cultures and communities in the city, Eid serves as a unifying force, bringing people together irrespective of caste, creed, or background. It is a time when neighbours open their doors to one another, sharing meals and spreading joy. The spirit of brotherhood and solidarity extends beyond the Muslim community, with people of all faiths joining in the celebrations.

It is not uncommon to see non-Muslim friends and neighbours exchanging greetings and participating in the festivities, exemplifying the essence of India's secular fabric. Eid ul-Fitr is not merely a religious festival but a celebration of humanity, compassion, and togetherness. In Old Delhi, where history and tradition converge, the festivities of Eid resonate with a

sense of belonging and harmony. As families come together to offer prayers, share meals, and spread happiness, Eid in Old Delhi becomes a testament to the rich tapestry of cultures that define the city. It serves as a reminder that in the diversity of our traditions lies the strength of our unity. Historical examples of Eid celebrations fostering communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims

abound, especially in regions like India where these communities have coexisted for centuries. During the Mughal period in India, Eid celebrations were occasions of grandeur and magnificence. Mughal emperor Akbar famously celebrated Eid with great pomp and splendour, inviting people of all faiths to partake in the festivities. Akbar's policy of religious tolerance, as demonstrated through his

celebration of Eid and his interactions with Hindu kings like Raja Man Singh, set a precedent for communal harmony that reverberated throughout the empire. In the early 20th century, India witnessed the Khilafat Movement, a pan-Islamic campaign launched by Indian Muslims to protest the dismantling of the Ottoman Caliphate by the Allied powers after



DESPERATE TIMES FOR RCB

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Desperate Royal Challengers Bengaluru will be under tremendous pressure to get their act together against an equally struggling Mumbai Indians when the two teams face-off in an Indian Premier League match here on Thursday.

Four losses in five matches have not only vindicated how poor RCB were in the last IPL auction, but they have also missed the opportunity to make it up with better on-field showing. However, there is nothing much to separate the two teams as RCB are just a rung below MI in the points table at the ninth position with MI winning just one (29-run victory over Delhi Capitals) out of their four games so far. Virat Kohli's brilliance, notwithstanding, RCB's campaign is under threat of falling apart even before they could register enough wins to have a real shot at the



knockouts. With the halfway mark of the ongoing IPL approaching rapidly, it is imperative for RCB's overseas stars, including skipper Faf du Plessis (109 runs), Glenn Maxwell (32) and Cameron Green (68) to find form. Kohli's imperious form -- 316 runs with one century and two fifties at a strike rate of 146.29 -- has been the lone bright spot for RCB.

With the memories of his 50th ODI century in the World Cup semifinal at the Wankhede Stadium just five months ago still fresh, Kohli would be keen to flourish again at the same venue on Thursday. Any bowling attack would be left searching for answers if one of their part-timers is topping the list of wicket-takers. And in RCB's case, whose bowling looked threadbare even before they hit the ground running, Maxwell's four scalps neither provide any respite nor assurance. But their recent record against MI could boost RCB, who have won four of

their last five games. The overall record in 32 matches, however, is tilted in favour of the five-time champions, who enjoy 18 wins against RCB's 14. MI would know present circumstances provide them

with a ripe opportunity to build up on their recent success and move further up in the points table after a rough start. For a side which invariably starts IPL with a few losses, MI know their way around these lanes. A contest against a floundering RCB could bring about their second win on the trot and some further boost in confidence, before facing defending champions Chennai Super Kings.

But it would be imperative for MI not to get too far ahead, since they also have their share of concerns. Even though Rohit Sharma and Ishan Kishan have set the scoring tempo at the top, the middle-order has failed to carry the momentum for which skipper Hardik Pandya is answerable to a large extent. It remains to be seen if the anger of MI fans against Pandya persists when he takes the field next, as he got some respite in their last game which was attended by thousands of children and not regular supporters. Suryakumar Yadav's return amid a lot of attention ended in a damp squib, but the world's no. 1 T20 batter would be itching to hit the strides and get a big score. Romario Shepherd's blitz against Anrich Nortje for 32 runs in an over clearly proved to be the difference against DC here, since the visitors managed to go past the 200-run mark despite not looking threatening enough while chasing an imposing 235-run target.

Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Vishnu Vinod, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BENGALURU: Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh, Saurav Chauhan.

It progresses across ecosystem, Agarkar on Kohli fitness benchmark



PTI ■ MUMBAI
The fitness blueprint designed by Virat Kohli has had a ripple effect on the whole Indian cricketing ecosystem, said chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar, who has called MS Dhoni a pure instinct man of a sport that had embraced the use of data and insight long ago. Kohli might be 35 years old but he remains second to none when it comes to performing the most difficult fitness drills. "You look at guys like Virat (Kohli), he is one of those guys who set the benchmark. 10-15 years into his career, he has only got fitter, you can see the results. If someone like him sets an example and puts

forward certain things that you need or certain fitness levels that you need, gradually it progresses across the ecosystem. "Gradually it has progressed (to the younger generation). The one difference you have seen over the last 15-20 years or so is the fitness levels of players," said Agarkar on SportifywithPRG. Kohli has been in sublime form in the ongoing edition of the IPL, smashing a record-extending eighth century in the tournament over the years, while also leading the run charts with 316 from five games so far. Dhoni's instincts have seen him win five coveted IPL titles, and though he has

relinquished the position of skipper at Chennai Super Kings, his presence on the field is enough to infuse loads of confidence in his side. The former India cricketer felt that artificial intelligence cannot be a substitute to someone like Dhoni whose captaincy instincts are incredible. "The amount of data that's available, is incredible. You can plan a whole innings and I think everybody does it now, but it doesn't mean it will work all the time. You need a captain on the ground because not everything that you've planned is going to go your way. "On a particular day it might, but most days it won't. And that's where you need human instinct. That's why you call MS Dhoni a great captain because he had a feel for the game. He knew what was happening and how the game was changing," opined the 46-year-old former India pace bowler.

Was sidelined with three injuries, worked to become better version of myself: Suryakumar

PTI ■ MUMBAI
India and Mumbai Indians batter Suryakumar Yadav on Wednesday revealed that he battled three different injuries in the past three months but worked hard to become a "better version" of himself while going through a "boring" recovery process. The world No.1 T20 batter, who made his comeback last week in the Indian Premier League, revealed that apart from sports hernia for which he had to undergo a surgery and an ankle problem, he also endured an injury to his right knee. "I had two-three niggles together, sports hernia, ankle and then right knee. I had to take one step at a time, follow the small things and here I am, really happy to be on the ground," Yadav said in a video released by IPL. The 33-year-old said it was "boring" for him to follow the same routine during rehab work at the start but he decided to make the most of the opportunity. "It's actually a little difficult to describe the last three (or) three-and-a-half months. It was difficult, the first



two-three weeks, because I felt (it was) very boring doing the same things again and again (in) the rehab," he said. "But (by) the fourth-fifth week, I realised that it is important going forward." A conversation with his wife was helpful in giving him perspective. "When I spoke to my wife and all the people at NCA, they said it has to be a second version of yourself, you have to be a little different when you come back on the field. I started doing all those small things like sleeping on time, following a good diet - that was most important," he added. Yadav said time away from the game helped him focus on aspects he had neglected and that helped him recover faster. "I (had) never read a book in my life and I started doing that as well. Getting up in the morning, spending a good quality time at the rehab centre and focusing on everything, connecting myself, my brain and my body with the rehab and it helped me really well to recover a little faster," he said.

"I wanted to be a better version of myself, when I got injured, I realised what were the things I wanted to work on. I got 2-3 months to work on myself in terms of fitness and on my body as well," he said. "SKY" lauded the coaches and staff at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru for understanding and supporting him in his recovery phase, even when he did not like the grind. "I am really grateful to the support staff at NCA, everyone, right from trainers to physios who took care of me right from the morning. They took everything, whatever I said. "A few days I was feeling angry to do the rehab but then they took that in their stride and understood really well how I wanted to work," he said. Yadav, who had faced trouble clearing his fitness tests at NCA at the initial stage of this IPL, said he never felt he was not around the Mumbai Indians' team. "My whole cricketing journey started from here and when I entered the hotel and the ground, it never felt (like) that I (had) left this place," he said.

OTHER SPORTS

Neeraj to compete in Paavo Nurmi Games in Finland



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Superstar Indian javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will compete in the prestigious Paavo Nurmi Games in Turku, Finland on June 18, where he will be up against 19-year-old sensation Max Dehning of Germany, the latest entrant in the 90m club, the organisers said. The 26-year-old Chopra, who will begin his season in the Doha Diamond League Meeting on May 10, had won a silver in the 2022 edition of the Paavo Nurmi Games with a throw of 89.30m -- his career second best -- while he pulled out of the event in 2023 as he was recovering from an injury then. Chopra has a personal best of 89.94m. The Paavo Nurmi Games are

named after the legendary Finnish middle and long distance runner. It is a World Athletics Continental Tour Gold series event, one of the most prestigious single-day competitions outside the Diamond League Meeting series. "Javelin throw Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra will return to Turku in June. Chopra will compete in the Paavo Nurmi Games after a year's break and will meet a high-quality group of competitors. The competition will take place in Turku on June 18," said Arttu Salonen, who is responsible for athlete procurement at Paavo Nurmi Games, on the official event website. "In addition to Chopra, we already have a contract with German Julian Weber and spring's surprise Max Dehning. "The goal is to throw the toughest javelin competition of the summer in Turku before the Paris Olympics. Negotiations with others continue. Naturally, we want top domestic names to cover Turku, led by Oliver Helander (who won gold in 2022 edition with 89.83)."

Lakshya Sen loses to Qi, bows out in opening round of Badminton Asia Championships

PTI ■ NINGBO (CHINA)
Star Indian shuttler Lakshya Sen bowed in the opening round of men's singles at the Badminton Asia Championships after suffering a straight-game loss to local favourite and top seed Shi Yu Qi here on Wednesday. World Championships bronze medallist Sen gave a good account of himself and fought tooth and nail but the higher-ranked Chinese eventually proved to be too strong as the Indian lost 19-21 15-21 in the gruelling opener that lasted 53 minutes. The Indians didn't have the



desired start in the tournament as the talented Priyanshu Rajawat also crashed out in the men's singles opening round. Rajawat was no match for eight-seeded Lee Zii Jia of

Malaysia, losing 9-21 13-21 in 39 minutes. It was also curtains for the Panda sisters -- Rutuparna and Swetaparna -- in the opening round of women's doubles, losing 8-21 13-21

against seventh seeds Zhang Shu Xian and Zheng Yu W of China. Contrary to the final result, Sen gave his Chinese opponent a run for his money in the first game and didn't allow him an aggressive start. Sen showcased brilliant court coverage and indulged the Chinese in long rallies before picking up points with his smashes and inch-perfect drop shots to lead 11-7 at the change of ends. Sen kept his nose ahead till 14 points even as Qi started to claw back into the contest, firing out Sen with long rallies and then finishing the points with cross-court smashes.

Anandi wins bronze medal in Open Skiff EuroChallenge sailing competition

PTI ■ MUMBAI
India's 15-year-old Anandi Nandan Chandavarkar won a bronze medal in the mixed gender category and secured first place in the U-17 girls' division in the Open Skiff EuroChallenge sailing event held in Italy which featured 130 competitors for U-15 and U-17 age groups. The competition was held from April 5 to 7 at the Circolo Vela Arco on Garda Trentino and nearly 200 sailors from 10 countries participated in the competition, which serves as a prologue to the World Championship to be held from

July 28 to August 2. "These wins validate the hard work I have put into my sport, the gateway to my enthusiasm for the sport," Anandi said in a media release. Anandi, who had bagged a second consecutive gold medal at the Phuket King's Cup Regatta in Thailand last year, will now focus on preparing for the Open Skiff Nationals event in New Zealand. "Her commitment and perseverance have been rewarded, and I firmly believe she will continue to excel in her future endeavours," Anandi's coach Dipesh Nerpagare said.

Gukesh downs Abasov to jump into joint lead with Nepomniachtchi

PTI ■ TORONTO
Grandmaster D Gukesh grabbed a share of the lead alongside Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi by becoming the only Indian to post a win in the fifth round of the FIDE Candidates Chess Tournament, outwitting Azerbaijan's Nijat Abasov in a hard-fought contest here. With nine rounds still to come in the double round-robin event, the 17-year-old Gukesh and Nepomniachtchi share the

top spot with 3.5 points and they are followed by top-seeded American Fabio Caruana half a point behind. American Hikaru Nakamura was the other winner on the day against Firouza Alireza of France while Indian teen R Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with Caruana. Vidit Gujrathi also put an end to his losses by settling for a draw with Caruana. Praggnanandhaa and Nakamura share the fourth



spot with 2.5 points followed closely by Gujrathi on two points. Alireza and Abasov

share the last position on 1.5 points apiece. In the Women's competition, nothing changed in terms of standings with all the four games ending in draws. Praggnanandhaa's sister R Vaishali could not dent the defenses of Anna Muzychuk and Koneru Humpy recovered with a draw against Aleksandra Goryachkina of Russia. Tournament leader Zhongyi Tan of China was held to a draw by the continuously improving Nurgyul Salimova

of Bulgaria and Russian Kateryna Lagno signed peace with Tingjie Lei of China. Tan remained in front following the drawing melee with 3.5 points in her kitty and Goryachkina inched up to 3 points to remain right behind the leader. Lagno, Vaishali and Salimova shared the third spot with 2.5 points, half a point ahead of Humpy, Muzychuk and Lei. Gukesh started off with the King pawn and faced the Petroff defense.

The Indian ensured a complex middle game and had an edge right till the time the players hit the first time control. However, on the 40th move, Gukesh erred and what seemed like a walk-in-the-park became a tough game. Abasov fought hard and was close to a draw by the 80th move but a blunder by the Azerbaijani on the 83rd cast the die decisively in Gukesh's favour with an extra pawn in the queen and pawn endgame.