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DHONI IN SPOTLIGHT AS CSK, MI RESUME RIVALRY

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INDIA CAUGHT IN IRAN ISRAEL CROSSFIRE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Saturday said it is in touch with Iran after it seized a cargo ship MSC Aries with 17 Indians nationals onboard. The Israel-linked ship was seized by Iran's commandos near the Strait of Hormuz. "Iran will bear the consequences for choosing to escalate the situation any further," Israel military spokesman Daniel Hagari said in a statement. As for Indians, official sources said India is in touch with Iranian authorities through diplomatic channels, both in Tehran and in Delhi, to ensure the welfare and early release of the Indian nationals. The Iranian action came amid increasing fears that Tehran may launch an attack on Israeli soil in retaliation to a strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria 12 days ago. "We are aware that a cargo ship 'MSC Aries' has been taken control by Iran. We have learnt that there are 17 Indian nationals onboard," said a source. "We are in touch with the Iranian authorities through diplomatic channels, both in Tehran and in Delhi, to ensure security, welfare and early release of Indian nationals," it said. Reports said Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards seized MSC Aries on Saturday morning when it was sailing through the Strait of Hormuz. Reports indicated MSC Aries is



a Portuguese-flagged container ship. According to news agency AP, commandos from Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard rappelled down from a helicopter onto an Israeli-affiliated container ship near the Strait of Hormuz and seized the vessel, the latest in a series of attacks between the two countries. West Asia had braced for

potential Iranian retaliation over a suspected Israeli strike earlier this month on an Iranian consular building in Syria that killed 12 people, including a senior Guard general who once commanded its expeditionary Quds Force there. Iran's State-run IRNA said a special forces unit of the Guard's navy carried out the attack on the vessel, which other media in the country widely identified as

the Portuguese-flagged MSC Aries, a container ship associated with London-based Zodiac Maritime. Zodiac Maritime is part of Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer's Zodiac Group. Zodiac declined to comment and referred questions to MSC, which did not immediately respond. Earlier, a West Asia defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss

intelligence matters, shared a video of the attack with AP. In it, the Iranian commandos are seen rappelling down onto a stack of containers sitting on the deck of the vessel. A crew member on the ship can be heard saying, "Don't come out." He then tells his colleagues to go to the ship's bridge as more commandos come down on the deck. **Continued on Page 2**

Air India flights avoid Iranian air space

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid soaring tensions in West Asia due to the Iran and Israel conflict, Air India flights have started taking a detour as they are now avoiding operations in the Iranian airspace. According to sources, now, all Air India flights bound for Europe could take up to two hours longer to reach the destinations. This comes a day after the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) "advised" Indian nationals to not travel till further notice to Iran and Israel — the two countries teetering on the brink of a major military escalation. According to Flightradar24 website, Air India flight that took off from Delhi at 4.30 am on Saturday did not overfly Iran and took an alternate route to London. Instead of the usual India-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey-Black Sea route to Europe, Air India took a northern route. Air India flights to the Middle East, however, will not be impacted as they fly South of Iranian airspace. Besides, Air India, Germany's Lufthansa have already started avoiding Iranian air space since Thursday while Australian airline Qantas said on Saturday it would redirect its long-haul flights between Perth and London to avoid Iran's airspace amid soaring Middle East tensions. On Friday, Lufthansa flight to Mumbai took the Greece-



Mediterranean Sea-Saudi Arabia-Persian Gulf-Arabian Sea route to Mumbai. Earlier it used to take the Black Sea-Iran-Pakistan route to Mumbai. Lufthansa on Thursday said it had suspended flights to and from Tehran until probably April 13, extending its suspension by two days. Notably, the increased geopolitical tensions have added more routes to the no fly zones for airlines. Commercial airliners avoid Afghanistan ever since the country was taken over by the Taliban; Russia's war in Ukraine has made both the countries no overflying zones for most western airlines; US carriers have been avoiding Iran for some time now. Now airlines would have to avoid the airspace of Iran. **Continued on Page 2**



Chaos at Sydney mall as six people stabbed to death

AP ■ SYDNEY

A man stabbed six people to death at a busy Sydney shopping centre Saturday before he was fatally shot, police said, with hundreds fleeing the chaotic scene, many weeping as they carried their children. Eight people, including a 9-month-old, were injured. New South Wales police said they believed a 40-year-old man was responsible for the Saturday afternoon attack at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Bondi Junction, in the city's eastern suburbs. They said they were not able to name him until a formal identification had taken place but that they weren't currently treating the attack as terrorism-related. The man was shot dead by a female police inspector after he turned and raised a knife, New South Wales Assistant Police Commissioner Anthony Cooke told reporters.

LG refutes AAP's claim of Kejriwal being tortured in Tihar

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh claimed on Saturday that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is being tortured inside the Tihar jail at the behest of the Central Government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena rejected Singh's claim and said a false narrative is being created by a person occupying Membership of Parliament. Singh alleged the jail administration, which

officially falls under the purview of the Delhi Government, has refused to allow Kejriwal's wife Sunita to meet him in person. The AAP leader said, according to jail rules 602 and 605, jail administration has the right to let an implicated person conduct any meeting face-to-face. Reacting on his remark, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said Singh should "have knowledge about the jail manual as he came out recently after spending months there".



AAP leader Sanjay Singh addresses a Press conference in New Delhi on Saturday PTI

Sachdeva said the Kejriwal Government had made the Delhi Jail Manual in 2018, which clearly states in Rule 602 that meetings with inmates will be conducted

by not only members of a particular political party, but also Ministers sworn to the constitutional oath of office. "Inside the jail, Kejriwal is being tortured at the behest of the Government of India and Modi. "Action is being taken to break his morale. As per the rule and as mentioned in the jail manual, the jail administration has been granted the right to let the people in jail meet the visitors face-to-face. In the case of Kejriwal, his wife is not allowed to meet him face-to-face," Singh said, addressing a Press conference. **Continued on Page 2**

BJP to unveil its Sankalp Patra today

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP is set to unveil its 'Sankalp Patra' (manifesto) for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections on Sunday at its party headquarters in Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior party leaders will be present at the event, coinciding with the birth anniversary of Baba Saheb Ambedkar, a towering leader from the Dalit community and an architect of the Indian Constitution. The manifesto will focus on 'Garib' (poor), 'Kisan' (farmer), 'Yuva' (youth), and 'Nari Shakti' (women power) under a politically



acronym of 'GAYN'; in addition to 'Swasthya' (health), 'Shiksha' (education), and 'Sashaktikaran' (empowerment) as the 3S, are among the prominent resolutions likely to feature in the BJP's manifesto.

The theme of the manifesto will be "Modi's Guarantee: Developed India 2047," with a focus on cultural nationalism. According to party sources, the party pledges to fulfil only those promises that are achievable. As the BJP Government has fulfilled most of its core ideological promises, including the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the repeal of Article 370, all eyes will be on how the ruling party's larger cultural and Hindutva agenda figures in the manifesto. Sources hinted that the BJP may include

some special resolutions on 'Garib Kalyan' (poor welfare) and 'Bharashtachar-mukt' (corruption-free), citing what Modi had outlined in the 2019 manifesto. The BJP had appointed a manifesto committee headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh that met twice to deliberate on its contents after the party had launched multiple exercises, including vans sent across the country and social media campaigns, to seek people's suggestions. **Continued on Page 2**



Rahul Gandhi not to use Congress flag in Wayanad

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Indian National Congress on Saturday made a public genuflection in front of the Muslim League by openly declaring that the grand old party would not use its flag during the election campaign in Wayanad from where Rahul Gandhi is seeking reelection in the Lok Sabha poll. This has been one of the preconditions set by the Muslim League for its support to the Nehru-Gandhi scion. The announcement that the Congress would not be using the party flag at Wayanad was made by M M Hassan, the president-in-charge of the KPCC on Saturday. "We will not use the party flag during election campaigning at Wayanad but we will use the emblem of the party. I am not able to explain more than this," said Hassan. When Rahul visited Wayanad to file his nomination papers, the absence of Congress flags was conspicuous during both the roadshow and the

campaign rally. Wayanad is a Muslim-dominated area where the influence of the Islamist party permeates throughout the constituency. When Jawaharlal Nehru, the great-grandfather of Rahul, visited Kerala during the early 1950s, he described the Muslim League as a dead horse. By preventing the Congress from waving its flags at election rallies, the Muslim League is chucking at the embarrassment it has caused the Congress. Political commentators are of the view that this is a major setback to the Congress party. "During the 2011-2016 tenure of the UDF Government, the Muslim League had made the Congress to dance to its tunes and made the then Chief Minister Oommen Chandi to appoint a League nominee as fifth Minister though the initial agreement was to give four Ministries to the party," said the commentator who did not want his name to be quoted. **Continued on Page 2**

CAA, Modi emerge as a beacon of hope for mini Bengal in Pilibhit

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PILIBHIT

In the rural expanse of Pilibhit, where the tranquility of village life intermingles with the echoes of a tumultuous past, a vibrant community has carved out its own enclave, fondly referred to as 'mini Bengal' which seamlessly mingles with the rural plains of Uttar Pradesh. Here, amidst the verdant landscapes and rustic charm of Ramnagri village, the identity struggle of its residents, mostly migrants

from Bangladesh, finds expression in a profound question that cuts through the air: "Apni ki Bangali (Are you Bengali)?" This question encapsulates the identity struggle of the majority of residents. For the approximately 1 lakh migrants who sought refuge in India during the tumultuous 1970s, fleeing religious persecution and strife, Pilibhit became a sanctuary. There are 10 gram panchayats — Kundannagar, Bidhipur, Najaulia Natka, Gabia, Maharajpur, Nagoria Lalpur,

Ramnagra, Sela, and Dhuria — where they all reside, transforming these villages into 'mini Bengal', where their lifestyle matches that of any village in Bengal. They communicate with each other in Bangla and even dress like the villagers of rural Bengal. Subal Das, 82, a patriarch of the community, encapsulates their journey, stating, "We have left our land... but not our culture. Our culture is our strength, no matter where we are." This sentiment reverberates through the alleys of Ramnagri, where Bengali traditions intertwine



with the rhythms of rural life. Sripal Biswas, a custodian of community history, recounts the trials of their parents' migration, highlighting the precariousness of their status amidst uncertainty. He says most of the natives here came from Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, Dhaka, and Barishal districts of erstwhile East Pakistan during the 1971 war. The majority of the residents of these villages belong to Namasudra and Poudra communities — a group that historically faced untouchability in Bengal —

but are treated as a general category. "Our children were born here and grew up here only, but still they were denied voting rights," said Biswas. Amidst this backdrop of uncertainty, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) emerges as a beacon of hope. Deepanker Mistri, 24, a tech-savvy entrepreneur, explains its significance, stating, "The CAA has come as a breath of fresh air for us. It provides a pathway to citizenship for many who have lived in limbo for decades." **Continued on Page 2**

Choudhary mounting a tough challenge to MoS PMO

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Two back-to-back election rallies addressed by the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Kathua and Udhampur districts have further lifted the morale of the Bharatiya Janata Party workers ahead of the first round of polling on April 19. So far, the road shows and street corner meetings of the BJP candidate from the Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha seat have not received enthusiastic responses in some of the pockets of Kathua and Udhampur districts. On the other hand, the Congress party candidate Choudhary Lal Singh is gradually intensifying his poll campaign across the Chenab Valley region and in the plain areas of Kathua district to upset the appellation of Dr Jitendra Singh. The poor response of the party workers had left them worried, especially after witnessing the charged-up atmosphere at the election meetings of the rival candidate Choudhary Lal Singh. To lift the morale of the party workers and boost the campaign of MoS PMO Dr Jitendra Singh, the election rallies of star campaigners were planned. The campaign managers while reviewing the day-to-day progress of the campaign were able to figure out the reasons. According to a senior BJP leader, non-cooperation by some of the angry BJP workers



created a piquant situation for the party. Some of the local MLAs who were not on the same page with Dr Jitendra Singh had decided to maintain a low profile during the electioneering. The BJP leader said the campaign committee of the party has sorted out the issues at the ground level emphasising the role of the booth level workers on the day of polling. Former Chief Minister and National Conference Vice President Omar Abdullah is also scheduled to join the poll campaign in support of Lal Singh in the Chenab Valley region. On Saturday Congress campaigner Raj Babbar and AICC Incharge J&K Bharat Singh Solanki also addressed a massive rally in Udhampur in support of Lal Singh. In the last leg of the campaigning Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is also scheduled to visit Basohli on April 15 to campaign in support of Dr

Jitendra Singh. In Kashmir valley, the National Conference candidate Mian Altaf Ahmed Saturday issued a video statement in which he stated that he is ready to contest elections for the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat. In the video, Mian Altaf has dispelled the rumours and said that he is doing fine now. "I was unwell for the last few days. Initially, the doctors said that it might be a case of jaundice, however, then it was detected to be a case of mild fever, I have recovered a lot during the last few days," Mian Altaf is heard saying in this fresh video. The former MLA of Kangan Ganderbal said, "I do not know who spread these rumours. I will not back out from the Anantnag-Rajouri seat. Omar Abdullah, the party vice president, had also come to see me." Earlier, it was rumoured that Mian Altaf may pull out of the competition from the Anantnag-Rajouri seat.

Kerala polls: Strong under currents to throw in surprises

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

With election to the Lok Sabha from the State is hardly a fortnight away, campaigning has reached a feverish pitch in Kerala. On Monday, Narendra Modi will make a whirlwind tour to the State, becoming the first Prime Minister visiting Kerala to extend Vishu Greetings to the people. The ruling CPI(M) has fielded the country's two most intelligent and scholarly leaders, Prakash Karat and Sitaram Yechury to take on Modi. The CPI(M) commissars, popularly known as "carrot and beetroot" of Indian politics are coming with a mission to win in as many seats as possible as it is important for the party to have a reasonable number of MPs to remain in reckoning as a national party. The duo is likely to tour all the 19 constituencies except Wayanad from where Congress scion Rahul Gandhi is seeking reelection. Though the initial phase of the election campaign saw the LDF (led by the CPI(M)) and the INDI alliance led by the Congress engaged in a straight bout, things have taken a change and the BJP has emerged as a strong contender in Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur and Kasaragod. Sasi Tharoor, the Congress candidate from Thiruvananthapuram who had hoped for a smooth sailing has lost his initial advan-



age as BJP's Rajeev Chandrasekhar derailed the glamour boy's claims by exposing the fact that the capital city of Kerala has not been benefitted during his 15 years long tenure as MP. "Sasi Tharoor has become a butt of jokes with his claims that it was he who taught Gautam Adani the significance of Vizhinjam Container Terminal. There were instances when Tharoor was drive away by his own party-men when he went to campaign," said Valsa Mony senior editor, Kala Kaumudi, a popular Malayalam political weekly. According to Valsa, grand daughter of Sukumaran, the founder of Kerala Kaumudi, the BJP was not in contention all these years because of the inefficiency of the Kerala leadership of the party. The average voter in the State is fed up of the corruption indulged in by the CPI(M) while the popularity of the Congress has reached a nadir because of the party's in-fighting and policy of appeasement, said Valsa.

But P Rajan, author and veteran editor of Mathrubhumi said he was doubtful of the BJP winning even a single seat in the hustings. "If the Hindutva party manages third position in at least three constituencies, that itself is an achievement," said Rajan who too blamed the incapability of the State leadership of the BJP. The PDP led by Abdul Nazar Madani, an Islamic zealot who was in jail for years in connection with the 1996 serial blasts that killed hundreds of people in Coimbatore announced on Friday that his party would vote for the CPI(M)-led front in the Lok Sabha election. A bomb blast at Panoor which claimed the life of a CPI(M) youth has put the Marxists in a spot. All those who were arrested in connection with the blast were CPI(M) activists and the police has been quoted as saying that the blast occurred while the bombs were being manufactured. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in his speeches in election campaigns caution the voters that if Narendra Modi wins this election, there would not be any more elections in future. This is what his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal was telling during the 2019 general election. On Saturday, the CPI(M) issued a stern warning to media houses who through their surveys had forecast that the Congress-led front would majority of the seats in Kerala while the CPI(M) would be relegated to the background.

Centre under utilising budget for North East, alleges Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Saturday accused the Centre of under-utilising the budget for the northeast and said it is the only political party that can deliver justice to the states in the region. "The Modi government's 'Bluff and Rule' policy continues to unravel. The Modi government has a history of allocating big budgets to the North East and then chronically underutilising these budgets in the last 10 years," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said in a social media post. He said since 2014, the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has utilised the full budget for the northeast only on two occasions. "While the UPA consistently utilised around 90 per cent of the budget, the Modi government's utilisation falls to a mere 60 per cent regularly. "In FY23, the budget was Rs 2,755 crore. However, in June 2023, a report from the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) revealed that the ministry utilised only Rs 989 crore (35.9 per cent) of its allocated budget," the former Union minister said. In 2020-21, the fund utilisation in the case of the North East Road Sector Development scheme was 52 per cent, Ramesh claimed, adding that for the North East Special Infrastructure Development



scheme, only 34 per cent of the funds were utilised. The Congress leader said the Modi government boasts that the PM-DevINE scheme launched in 2022 outlays Rs 6,600 crore for the period from 2022-23 to 2025-26 for the holistic development of the northeastern region. He said on December 7, 2023, the DoNER (Development of North Eastern Region) ministry informed the Rajya Sabha that only over 10 per cent of the funds (Rs 855.85 crore) under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE) were sanctioned. "In January 2023, in the run-up to elections in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura, the Modi government 'doubled' the budget for the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. Given its history of bluffing with its big fund allocations and dramatic under-utilisations, we await the details of how much in funds has actually reached the North East. "@INCIndia is the only political party that can deliver justice to the states of North East India," Ramesh said, using the hashtag "#HaathBadlegaHalaat".

India made HPV testing kits to undergo validation across various study centres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

For the first time, India-made testing kits for the human papillomavirus (HPV), the leading cause of cervical cancer, will undergo validation across multiple study centers using global samples to ensure accuracy. Spearheaded by AIIMS, Delhi, this project will commence by examining 1,200 samples from France sourced from the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) biorepository. According to Prof. Neerja Bhatla, the lead investigator on the project, this groundbreaking initiative will evaluate the effectiveness of HPV screening test kits against international quality benchmarks. "Once validated, these kits can significantly benefit millions of women in India and other low- and middle-income countries by enabling early detection of cervical cancer at affordable prices. Currently, available HPV test kits are priced between Rs 1,500 and Rs 3,000,



but the indigenous kits are expected to be more cost-effective," she said. The study will be conducted with the support of DBT-BIRAC Grand Challenges India in collaboration with IARC. The testing will be performed at AIIMS, New Delhi, National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research (NICPR) Noida and ICMR-National Institute For Research In Reproductive and Child Health Mumbai. The lab activities will begin from Monday. Dr Bhatla said, "Cervical cancer continues to be a major problem globally. Altogether

127,000 of the 600,000 cases per year are in India. Of the 300,000 deaths across the world, 80,000 deaths are from India." "That's why an indigenous HPV test was developed to make it user-friendly, operable and accessible even in the periphery hospitals," she added. These validation studies are important to avoid false results and eliminate the margin of error. "It's not that simple to validate these testing kits as it involves stringent international standards. The clinical versus analytical validity is something

we need to balance. We need to follow the international criteria that have been laid down and it was something that was raised by the NITI Aayog as well," Dr Bhatla said. It is similar to a Pap smear test and the sample will be collected by brush or a swab from the cervix. "In a Pap smear, we stain the sample so that we can read the cytology or the map of cells. This will be a molecular test like that of COVID," said Dr Bhatla. Presently, HPV tests are expensive and need elaborate laboratory setups. They should meet international standards to receive WHO prequalification and have necessary quality assurance, she said. Worldwide, cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women. In India, it is the second most common cancer among women after breast cancer. Every two minutes, a woman dies of cervical cancer around the world, Bhatla said. In India, there are approximately 1,27,526 new cases and 79,906 deaths per annum, Bhatla stated.

IATO suggests presenting Indian democratic process to foreign tourists

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), representing the tourism industry nationally, has suggested presenting the world's largest democratic process which unfolds in seven phases to international tourists in four culturally vibrant cities: Delhi, Varanasi, Jaipur, and Kochi. This initiative, envisioned as a model project, seeks to provide foreign visitors with an insight into India's democratic process slated from April 19 to June 1. From voter registration to campaigning, polling, and counting of votes, global tourists will have the opportunity to engage with various aspects of the electoral process, IATO said in a letter to the Union Tourism Ministry. Talking to The Pioneer, IATO President Rajiv Mehra said that he has suggested that the four cities can be selected as a pilot project as model cities where tour operators



can take foreign tourists to show them as to "How the elections are conducted in our country". This will build a strong image of our country all over the world." Just as festivals are celebrated with enthusiasm and participation, showcasing the democratic process can be an enriching experience for tourists. Through guided tours and interactive experiences in these model cities, visitors can witness firsthand how elections are conducted in India, said Mehra, who is also the Director of Delhi-based Uday Tours and Travel Pvt. Ltd. Moreover, by selecting cities

with diverse cultural backgrounds and historical significance, such as Varanasi with its spiritual heritage and Jaipur with its regal charm, tourists can gain a deeper understanding of how democracy thrives amidst India's rich tapestry of cultures and traditions, he added. By offering foreign tourists the chance to participate in this festival of democracy, India can not only showcase its commitment to democratic principles but also promote cultural exchange and international understanding. Through this initiative, visitors can witness the vibrancy of India's democratic spirit and carry home memories of a truly unique and enlightening experience. India's national elections are a giant exercise in democracy and logistics that take over a month to complete. About 968 million people are eligible to vote — more than the populations of the United States, the European Union and Russia combined. Even as the Tourism Ministry

is still assessing the feasibility of the IATO's proposal, there are reports that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on its part has invited the Conservative and Labour parties of the United Kingdom and the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats of Germany. From among the neighbouring countries, the ruling Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League besides prominent political parties of Nepal have been invited, as per the reports. As of now, the BJP has sent invitations to political parties of at least 25 nations who have been requested to send their representatives to witness India's electioneering. Thirteen parties have accepted the invitation so far, according to the reports. Polling will unfold over seven phases around the country, beginning on April 19 and ending on June 1. All the votes from the country's 28 states and eight union territories will be counted and results released on June 4.

Rahul Gandhi not to...

From Page 1
Though the Congress is numerically stronger in the Legislative Assembly, it is the Muslim League which calls the shots in UDE. The League had demanded that it be given three seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and the Congress had to do a lot to pacify and mollify the Islamic outfit. The Congress had assured the League that it would be allocated the next Rajya Sabha seat from the State.

LG refutes...

From Page 1
"When the wife of Kejriwal applied to meet him, she was told that you cannot meet him face-to-face but through a window. I am saying with full responsibility that even the dreaded criminals are allowed to meet in the barrack, but a three-time CM of Delhi is allowed to meet his wife through a window having a glass in between," he added. The AAP leader claimed that Kejriwal's rights were being snatched away. Singh said, "In the same Tihar jail, many meetings take place... but Kejriwal, a three-time elected Chief Minister, is being humiliated and made to meet his family through the jangla. This is happening at the behest of the BJP-led Central Government." The 'mulakat jangla' 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. "Look at the history of Tihar Jail, people are allowed to have face-to-face meetings. In this same jail, Subrata Roy of Sahara used to have meetings via the internet, phone, office facilities, etc. In this same jail, Chandra Brothers used to have regular meetings and sign many documents. Those they wanted to meet were allowed

to meet them. But in Tihar Jail, efforts are being made to break Kejriwal's morale," he said. There was no immediate reaction from the Tihar administration. "Today, the fight is to save democracy and the Constitution. I would request Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah not to take away the rights of Kejriwal, which are guaranteed constitutionally, democratically, legally and under the prison rules. Don't try to be a dictator," he added. Kejriwal has been arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case stemming from the alleged excise policy scam. He is in judicial custody till April 15 and is currently lodged in Tihar jail. On Friday, the jail authorities scheduled Kejriwal's meeting with his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann for April 15, saying that he can meet the AAP convener, but as a normal visitor in the 'mulakat jangla'. The Chief Minister met his wife Sunita Kejriwal and personal secretary Bibhav Kumar inside Tihar Jail on Tuesday. The LG also took note of the AAP's propagation that the scheme and subsidies pertaining to 'free' electricity, water and bus rides for women will be stopped, since Kejriwal is in jail under judicial custody.

CAA, Modi emerge...

From Page 1
With the CAA taking center stage in Pilibhit's political discourse, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership garners unwavering support. Manoranjan Das, a vocal proponent of Modi, asserts, "We will vote for Modi, whoever the candidate is. His leadership gives us hope for a brighter future." Despite political promises, disillusionment prevails among the residents. "Beyond words, nothing has been done to change our lives," laments a resident. Manoj Bishai echoes this sentiment, expressing skepticism towards political

rhetoric. "We voted for the Congress after Indira Gandhi helped us, but her successors and local Congress leaders have not been helpful at all," he remarks. Despite strides made in obtaining voting rights for some through naturalisation, discrimination persists. Narayan Mahato, 78, highlights the challenges faced by his children, denied voting rights due to their migrant status. "PM Modi has given us the CAA weapon, which will certainly end our woes and help our children lead a better life," he states, hopeful for recognition and respect.

Air India flights...

From Page 1
Meanwhile, India, France, and Russia among other countries have advised their citizens against traveling to the region, which is already tense due to the ongoing seven-month war in Gaza. In an advisory, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) also urged the Indians residing in Iran and Israel to exercise utmost precautions about their safety and restrict their movements to minimum. "In view of the prevailing situation in the region, all Indians are advised not to travel to Iran or Israel till further notice," it said.

construction sector. The first batch of 64 Indian workers had left for Israel earlier this month and over 6,000 construction workers from India were to leave for Israel in April and May. In an advisory, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) also urged the Indians residing in Iran and Israel to exercise utmost precautions about their safety and restrict their movements to minimum. "In view of the prevailing situation in the region, all Indians are advised not to travel to Iran or Israel till further notice," it said.

INDIA CAUGHT...

From Page 1
One commando can be seen kneeling above the others to provide them potential cover fire. The helicopter used also appeared to be a Soviet-era Mil Mi-17 helicopter, which both the Guard and the Iranian-backed Houthis of Yemen have used in the past to conduct commando raids on ships. The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations described the vessel as being "seized by regional authorities" in the Gulf of Oman off the Emirati port city of Fujairah, without elaborating. The MSC Aries had been last located off Dubai heading toward the Strait of Hormuz on Friday. The ship had turned off its tracking data, which has been common for Israeli-affiliated ships moving

through the region. Iran since 2019 has engaged in a series of ship seizures and attacks on vessels have been attributed to it amid ongoing tensions with the West over its rapidly advancing nuclear programme. In previous seizures, Iran has offered initial explanations about their operations to make it seem like the attacks had nothing to do with the wider geopolitical tensions - though later acknowledging as much. In Saturday's attack, however, Iran telling offered no explanation for the seizure other than to say the MSC Aries had links to Israel. For days, Iranian officials up to and including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have been threatening to "slap" Israel for the Syria strike. Western Governments have issued warnings to their citizens in the region to be prepared for attack

their agenda, priorities, and proposed solutions to societal challenges. Manifestos also hold parties accountable post-election. Voters can refer back to the promises made and assess if the party fulfills its commitments, promoting transparency in governance. Meanwhile, the Opposition party, the Indian National Congress, has already released its manifesto titled "Nyay Patra." Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, and Rahul Gandhi have highlighted 25 guarantees to the public, with a key promise to provide annual financial assistance of

Rs100,000 to the poorest women in families. The upcoming general elections in India are scheduled to take place from April 19, 2024, to June 1, 2024, to choose the 543 representatives for the 18th Lok Sabha. Around 970 million individuals, out of a total population of 1.44 billion are eligible to take part in the elections. The legislative Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim will coincide with the general election. Additionally, there will be by-elections for 35 seats across 16 States.

BJP...

From Page 1
The BJP has received over 1.5 million suggestions for its manifesto, including more than 400,000 through the NaMo app and over 1.1 million through videos. An election manifesto is a comprehensive declaration of a party's policies, objectives, and proposed actions if they come into power that serves as a roadmap for voters to understand the party's stance on various issues. Political parties release manifestos to communicate

In 2014, BJP stormed to power by winning 282 seats in the Lok Sabha. Its coalition NDA secured 353 seats. The Congress was reduced to just 44 seats in the Lok Sabha, its lowest ever tally in history. In terms of vote share, BJP managed to secure 31 per cent of the total votes while Congress won 19.3 per cent of the total votes cast. In 2019, the BJP improved its tally even further, winning 303 seats in the lower House. It was the first time in over three and a half decades that a party managed to cross the 300-seat mark in the Lok Sabha elections.

Electricity, water, bus ride subsidies to continue: LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor (LG) V K Saxena has taken serious note of patently false and deliberately misleading statements issued by not only Members of a particular political party, but also Ministers sworn to the constitutional oath of office, wherein it is being propagated that the scheme and subsidies pertaining to 'free' electricity, water and bus rides for women will be stopped, since the Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is in jail under judicial custody.

Earlier, Delhi Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj has assured the people of Delhi that the welfare schemes by the party will continue to be provided to them amid the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) demanding Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's resignation. These demands by the opposition



the poor will be discontinued and appealed to them to not pay heed to the statements and rumours being spread by political vested interests. The people should reject any attempts at misleading them, the LG appealed on Saturday. Saxena underlined that these schemes are paid from the consolidated fund of NCT of Delhi and not from the account of any individual or political party.

These schemes are funded by the people of Delhi themselves, who contribute to the NCTD's consolidated fund by way of taxes. The Lt Governor emphasised that the aforementioned subsidy schemes are those of the Government and not driven by or dependent on any individual holding any position and therefore, because of any individual being in jail, the question of a scheme getting affected does not arise

have started to gain momentum as the AAP chief is lodged in Tihar jail in the alleged excise policy linked money laundering scam. "As long as Arvind Kejriwal is the Chief Minister of Delhi, all the work and free schemes for people will continue," Bhardwaj asserted. The purported imaginary stoppage of these schemes in future is being attributed to the Central Government and Saxena has assured the people of Delhi that none of the subsidy schemes benefiting

Rain in parts of city brings respite from heat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 22 flights headed towards Delhi were diverted on Saturday due to inclement weather as rains hit parts of Delhi-NCR on Saturday evening, bringing respite from the heat. Of them, 9 flights were diverted to Jaipur, 8 to Lucknow, 2 to Chandigarh, and 1 each to Varansi, Amritsar and Ahmedabad. The official said 9 flights of IndiGo, 8 flights of Air India, and 3 flights of Vistara were among those that were diverted. The flights were diverted between 1500 hours and 1830 hours, the official added. The Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) in the national capital handles around 1,300 flight movements daily.

Earlier, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) had predicted light and moderate rain along with gusty winds in Delhi and NCR regions including Bahadurgarh, Noida, Greater Noida, Gurugram, and



Manesar early in the day. It has advised people to stay indoors, close windows and doors and avoid travel if possible. Several stretches witnessed heavy traffic jams due to rains in the Delhi and NCR. "Thunderstorm with light to moderate intensity rain and heavy intensity rain over isolated places and gusty winds with speed of 30-50 Km/h would occur over and adjoining areas of many places

of Delhi, NCR (Bahadurgarh, Noida, Greater Noida, Gurugram, Manesar)...Sonapat, Rohtak, Kharkhoda, Bhiwani, Charkhi Dadri, Mattanhail Jhajjar, Farukhanagar, Kosali, Mahendargarh, Rewari (Haryana), Bhiwari (Rajasthan)" during the next two hours," IMD said on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). However, with the sudden change in weather as many as

17 flights were diverted at the Delhi airport on Saturday evening due to bad weather. The diversions happened after 5 pm in the evening. According to an official, 17 flights have been diverted due to bad weather as of now. The maximum temperature in the national capital was recorded at 39 degrees Celsius, three notches above the season's average. IMD attributed the rains to an active western disturbance over northwest

India and has also forecast light rain accompanied by gusty winds on Sunday. Scientist and Head of the Regional Weather Forecasting Centre Kuldeep Srivastava said, "The temperature in the capital will drop by nearly 33 per cent, with overcast skies and winds reaching speeds of 30 to 40 kmph due to an active western disturbance that hit northwest India on April 12." The effects of the western disturbance will be felt until April 18-19. The temperature will not reach 40 degrees Celsius until then. After April 18, the temperature will begin to increase day by day, he said. The relative humidity in Delhi oscillated between 71 percent and 31 percent during the day. Urging people to stay indoors, IMD issued an advisory for thunderstorms and lightning over Delhi-NCR and asked people to close windows and doors and avoid travelling. Additionally, the advisory recommended seeking safe shelters and avoiding taking shelter under trees.

AAP to observe Samvidhan Bachao, Tanashahi Hatao Divas today: Rai

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP leader and Delhi minister Gopal Rai on Saturday said the party will observe 'Samvidhan Bachao, Tanashahi Hatao Divas' across the country on the birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar on April 14. The party workers will read the preamble of the Constitution and an oath to save the founding document of the country, Rai said at a press conference on Saturday. While the Delhi BJP has slammed the AAP, saying the Arvind Kejriwal's party has now dragging the names of the nation's dignitaries into their political disputes. This shows how desperate this party after the arrest of the Kejriwal linked to the money laundering case in the liquor scam policy. It is very sad and condemnable to announce a political campaign under the name of 'Save Constitution' on the day of Dr. Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar's Jayanti, as done by



Minister Gopal Rai today," Sachdeva said. Earlier, Rai said that the BJP-led central government is "attacking our democracy and constitution". To counter that, we need to be united, Rai said. "On Sunday, we will be holding a one-day programme -- Samvidhan Bachao, Tanashahi Hatao Divas -- where the AAP workers will gather at party offices in their states and take an oath to save our democracy and constitution," he said.

The event will be held at the party offices in the state capitals across the country, the AAP leader said. The programme is being held on the advice of Kejriwal. In another message from the jail, Kejriwal had asked AAP MLAs and volunteers to work to ensure that the people of Delhi face no problems, Rai told reporters on Wednesday. Rai had 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. "Arvind Kejriwal and his associates are swearing by the Constitution today, why did they not pay attention to the respect of the Constitution when they were arbitrarily changing government policies by neglecting constitutional provisions, making arbitrary appointments to government positions, and disrupting Republic Day by neglecting the Constitution?", said Sachdeva while reacting on the AAP. The AAP's national convener Arvind Kejriwal is lodged in Tihar jail in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. Terming the act as misuse of agencies by the central government, the AAP has carried out protests and agitation in Delhi and other parts of the country.

Shah seeks support for Gautam Buddha Nagar BJP candidate via telephonic speech

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday sought electoral support for the BJP's Gautam Buddha Nagar candidate Mahesh Sharma through a telephonic speech that was played out on loudspeakers after he skipped an in-person visit here due to inclement weather. Shah made in-person appearances for poll campaigns in Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan earlier in the day and was scheduled to reach Noida in the evening. However, since he could not visit Noida due to bad weather in Delhi-NCR, the Union home minister addressed the gathering here through a brief telephonic call and solicited voters' support to ensure that Narendra Modi becomes prime minister for a third term. "During the last 10 years, Modi has worked on a range



of issues from the welfare of the poor to urban and infrastructure development in the country. The team of Mahesh Sharma and Narendra Modi got an airport in Noida and connected the area with several highways. Sharma has made a huge contribution to the com-

prehensive development of Noida," Shah said. "PM Modi and (UP Chief Minister) Yogi (Adityanath) have strengthened law and order in Uttar Pradesh and with this opened paths for new developments in the state. I do not want to talk for long

now and apologise for not being able to come there in person. But I promise I will be there for Mahesh Sharma's victory procession," Shah said. The BJP's western Uttar Pradesh unit president Satyendra Singh Sisodia, Gautam Buddha Nagar in-charge Kapil Dev Agarwal, Noida chief Manoj Gupta, Gautam Buddha Nagar chief Gajendra Mavi, Noida MLA Pankaj Singh, and Mahesh Sharma stood around the dais as Shah addressed the rally over phone call for about 2 minutes. Gautam Buddha Nagar has over 26 lakh registered voters and goes to polls on April 26. The BJP's Mahesh Sharma won the Lok Sabha polls here in 2014 and 2019. This time, he is facing competition from Samajwadi Party's Mahendra Singh Nagar and Bahujan Samaj Party's Rajendra Singh Solanki, among others.

SC to hear Kejriwal plea against HC order upholding his arrest by ED

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea against a High Court order that has upheld his arrest in a money-laundering case stemming from the alleged excise policy scam. According to the cause list uploaded on the apex court's website, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta will hear on April 15 Kejriwal's petition challenging the Delhi High Court's April 9 order. In a massive blow to the chief minister, the high court has upheld his arrest in the money-laundering case, saying the Enforcement Directorate (ED) was left with "little option" after he skipped repeated summonses and refused to join the investigation. The high court has dismissed the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader's petition challenging his arrest by the ED and subsequent remand in the federal agency's custody. The matter pertains to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22 that was later scrapped. Kejriwal was arrested by the ED on March 21, hours after the high court refused to grant him protection from coercive action by the federal anti-money laundering agency. He is in judicial custody till April 15 and is currently lodged in Tihar Jail. Kejriwal has described his arrest by the ED ahead of the general election as an "unprecedented assault on the tenets of democracy" and urged the apex court to release him by declaring the case against him as "illegal". In the appeal filed in the top court, Kejriwal has said his arrest on March 21 after the announcement of the Lok Sabha polls was "obviously motivated by extraneous considerations".



"The intervention of this court is urgently warranted, as over and above the issue of illegal curtailment of liberty, the petitioner's arrest also constitutes an unprecedented assault on the tenets of democracy, free-and-fair elections and federalism, both of which form significant constituents of the basic structure of the Constitution," the plea has said. The arrest was made solely relying on subsequent, contradictory and highly-belated statements of the co-accused who have now turned approvers, it has said. Moreover, such statements and material were in possession of the ED for nine months and still the arrest was made illegally days before the general election, Kejriwal has said in his plea. "The petitioner's arrest bears serious, irreversible ramifications for the future of electoral democracy in India and if he is not released forthwith to participate in the upcoming elections, it will establish a precedence in law for ruling parties to arrest heads of political opposition on flimsy and vexatious charges before elections, thereby eroding the core principles of our Constitution," the plea has said. Assailing the high court order, it has said the judgment failed to appreciate that statements made before a probe agency are not held to be the gospel truth

and can always be doubted by the courts. "The ED has allowed its process to be used and misused by vested interests as an instrument of oppression to not only invade the liberty of the political opponents in the midst of general elections 2024 of such vested interests but also to tarnish their reputation and self-esteem. Such lawlessness cannot be allowed to be perpetrated under any circumstances," the plea in the top court has said. The high court had cited the ED's claim that Kejriwal conspired and was actively involved in the use and concealment of the proceeds of crime to reject his petition against his arrest. It had chastised the AAP leader, alleged to have been involved in money laundering in his "personal capacity" and in his capacity as the national convener of a political party, for questioning the timing of his arrest and underlined that an investigation against the "classes and masses" cannot be different. It had also rebuked Kejriwal for "casting aspersions" on the judicial process with his claim about an approver making donations to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the Centre through electoral bonds, saying the law relating to approvers is more than 100 years old and it was not enacted to implicate him.

Meeting of CM with prisoner not common thing: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said here on Saturday meeting between a State Chief Minister with a jailed prisoner is not a common practice. Moreover, nor do ordinary or high-security leaders insist on meeting prisoners in jail in this way as Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann is doing, BJP leader claimed. Mann will meet Arvind Kejriwal in Tihar jail on Monday. Despite problems, officials of Tihar Jail, which is Delhi government's jail, have arranged a meeting between jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Bhagwant



Singh Mann, Sachdeva claimed. He said Arvind Kejriwal's government itself made the Delhi Jail Manual in 2018, which clearly states in Rule 602 that meetings with

inmates will be conducted through the glass wall and intercom for the safety of the inmates. It is written in the Delhi Jail Manual made by the Arvind Kejriwal government in 2018

that face-to-face meetings will only be between inmates and registered lawyers and Chief Minister Kejriwal too is availing this facility. The Delhi BJP President said when Kejriwal entered the jail, he had not listed the names of Sanjay Singh and Bhagwant Singh Mann among the 10 expected visitors, so it took time for these meetings to be scheduled, and now they will be conducted according to the Jail Manual. Sachdeva said Sanjay Singh is only trying to spread misinformation. He himself has spent a long time in jail, can he tell whether his meetings with visitors used to happen face-to-face daily or through the glass wall. The Delhi BJP President said

prisoners in jail are kept according to the manual made by the government, and only the court can grant them any concession, and Kejriwal has already been given many facilities, including home-cooked food, by the court. Sachdeva said it seems Kejriwal wants certain privileges and facilities in jail, similar to the ones his minister Satyendra Jain was caught availing in 2022. Delhi BJP President claimed some of their sources indicate that Kejriwal does not even want to meet Sanjay Singh anymore because he wants to break legislators and become the Chief Minister, while Kejriwal wants to keep the Chief Minister's post within his family.

JNU calls for strike on April 16

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU) on Saturday alleged that the university administration denied meeting with its members regarding issues concerning students, including "inaction" over a sexual harassment complaint, and called for a strike on April 16. The union said it has launched a "Suggest Your Union, Demand From Admin" campaign, soliciting student input to draft a Charter of Demands aimed at addressing pressing issues affecting the student community. Among other demands, the students' union has called for an expeditious investigation into a sexual harassment incident and action against those accused. The union has also demanded steps to ensure the safety of the victim against alleged attempts at intimidation. On March 31, a female JNU student filed a complaint with the administration against four individuals, including two for-



mer students of the university, for allegedly passing sexually derogatory comments at her while she was taking a walk at the JNU Ring Road in the early hours of the day. The students union claimed that it was excluded from the administration meetings on matters concerning students and decisions were taken without its representation. "The JNUSU will observe a complete university strike on April 16 if JNU VC fails to address pressing concerns of students by April 15," the student body said in a statement. It also demanded the reinstatement of the now-scrapped Gender Sensitisation Committee Against Sexual Harassment on campus.

YouTuber couple jumps to death from high rise apartment after argument

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A live-in Youtuber couple allegedly committed suicide and died by jumping from the seventh floor of a high-rise apartment in Haryana's Bahadurgarh area after coming back from shoot on the morning of Saturday. The couple has been identified as Garvit, aged 25-year-old, and Nandini, aged 22-year-old who were content creators and running their own channel on different social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Facebook. The couple moved to Bahadurgarh, which is about 20 km from the national capital, from Dehradun along with their team. They had rented a flat on the seventh floor of Ruheela Residency, where they were residing with five of their teammates. According to the police, the couple died by suicide around 6 am on Saturday. They had returned home late after a



shoot, and an argument ensued between them over an undisclosed issue. Upon receiving information about the incident, the police reacted promptly and reached the spot. Both their bodies have been sent for post-mortem. Police is still investigating the reason for committing suicide by the couple. A forensics team was also pre-

sent at the scene, collecting evidence to investigate the circumstances leading to the couple's decision. CCTV footage from the area is being scrutinised to understand the sequence of events leading up to the incident. "We are looking into the incident, and further action will be taken accordingly," Jagbir, the investigating officer of the case, said.

NHRC flags human rights violations in Sandeshkhali

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has flagged, "numerous instances of atrocities," suggesting a clear "violation of human rights" in Sandeshkhali in West Bengal due to "neglect" in preventing such occurrences. The NHRC report following a spot inquiry into the incident also noted that the "widespread fear of retaliation, compounded by existing power dynamics, acted as a significant obstacle," hindering individuals from expressing their grievances. The rights panel has put forward several recommendations and has requested an action taken report (ATR) within eight weeks on each recommendation from the West Bengal government, as stated in a statement released by the NHRC on Saturday.

"The Commission's spot inquiry has revealed several instances of atrocities inflicted upon the victims, which clearly demonstrate, prima facie, that there was a violation of human rights due to negligence in the prevention of such violation or abatement thereof by the public servant," it said. The Commission has sent its spot inquiry report to the chief secretary and DGP, West Bengal for submitting the ATR. The NHRC report made an observation that the "atmosphere due to the atrocities by the alleged accused persons rendered the victims silent," and intimidation, and terror made them "reluctant to seek justice". This "climate of terror" not only "perpetuates the cycle of abuse" but also underscores the urgent need to create a safe and supportive environment for victims to "break free from the shackles of silence," it has



observed. The rights panel has also made an observation that the "atmosphere of fear" not only affects the victims but also has a "negative impact" on the growth and health of the children who constantly witness the ordeals of their parents at the hands of these alleged accused. On February 21, the NHRC had taken suo motu cognisance of print and electronic media reports that in Sandeshkhali, North 24th Paragana, "innocent and impoverished women have been harassed and sexually assaulted by a group of local gang of a political person". As a result, for the last few days, local villagers had started protesting, seeking appropriate legal action against the "perpetrators of horrific crimes indulged by various goons and anti-social elements, when the local administration failed to take appropriate legal action against the perpetrators of

crime," it added. In addition to seeking reports from the state government, the Commission, considering the gravity of the situation, had deputed an investigation team for a spot inquiry, headed by one of its members. "In response, thereto, the DG and IGP, West Bengal vide communication dated 29.02.2024, revealed that a total of 25 cases were registered among which seven cases were on alleged complaints of a sexual offence against women and 24 accused persons were arrested," it said. Efforts were also being made to arrest the absconding perpetrators of the crime. The overall situation of the entire Sandeshkhali police station area and Nazat police station area was described to be "well under control". The NHRC investigation team found that there is a need to "uproot the fear" of these persons from the hearts of the vic-

tims to enable them to live their normal lives with their families and gain the confidence to live in society with dignity and pride. It is the duty of the district authorities, being arms of a welfare state, to take consistent measures to instil confidence in the residents of the area in general, and victims in particular, so that others who have been victims of crimes may come forward and file their complaints, the statement said. The NHRC, in its statement, said its team also interacted with the police and administration at Sandeshkhali and requested for further information, "but despite reminders, no reply has been given to date". The recommendations given by the NHRC team include "reinstating trust in the rule of law and confidence in authorities" and ensuring witness protection and redressal of grievances.

Indian Army celebrates 40 years of Operation Meghdoot on Siachen Glacier

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Army and IAF have significantly enhanced their combat capabilities to guard the Siachen glacier, world's highest battlefield located at a height of more than 20,000 feet. India secured the strategically important heights on the glacier on April 13, 1984 as part of Operation Meghdoot thereby gaining edge over Pakistan. Highlighting some crucial improvements undertaken to further improve operational readiness, officials said here on the 40th year of Operation Meghdoot, measures include induction of heavy-lift helicopters and logistic drones, deployment of all-terrain vehicles and laying of an extensive network of tracks. The Siachen glacier at the height of around 20,000 feet in the Karakoram mountain range is known as the highest militarised zone in the world where soldiers have to battle frostbite and high winds. It is 78 kms in length. Under its "Operation Meghdoot", the Indian Army established its full control over the glacier on April 13, 1984. "The Indian Army's control over the Siachen glacier has not only been a story of unparalleled valour and determination but also an incredible journey of technological advancements and logistical improvements that transformed it from one of the most formidable terrains into a symbol of indomitable spirit and innovation," said an official.



The initiatives, especially laid out in the last five years, have made significant strides in improving the living conditions and operational capabilities of the personnel deployed in Siachen, he said. There has been a noteworthy improvement in the aspect of mobility in Siachen with the development of an extensive network of tracks and the introduction of all-terrain vehicles (ATV), have significantly improved mobility across the glacier," he said. Another official said innovations like the DRDO-developed ATV bridges have enabled the Army to overcome natural obstacles, while high-quality "Dyneema" ropes in aerial cableways ensure seamless supply lines to even the most remote outposts. The induction of heavy-lift helicopters and logistic drones

has vastly improved the supply of essentials to the personnel deployed in posts that are cut off, especially in winters, he said. The availability of special clothing, mountaineering equipment and advanced rations has enhanced the ability of the soldiers to withstand the harsh conditions of the world's coldest battlefield, the official added. He said gadgets, such as pocket weather trackers, with each soldier provides timely weather updates and warn them about possible avalanches. There has been a focus on improvement in mobile and data connectivity in the region as well and introduction of the VSAT technology has revolutionised communication on the glacier, providing the troops with data and internet connectivity.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has established telemedicine nodes that provide critical medical support not only to the troops but also to the local populace and tourists in the Nubra valley. Operation Meghdoot was launched when the Indian Army and IAF advanced to the Siachen glacier to secure the heights dominating the Northern Ladakh region. The operation involved the airlifting of Indian Army soldiers by the IAF and dropping them on the glacial peaks. Although the operation began in 1984, IAF helicopters were already operating in the Siachen Glacier since 1978, flying the Chetak helicopters which was the first IAF helicopter to land in the Glacier in October 1978. By 1984, Pakistan's cartographic aggression in the

uncharted territory of Ladakh, allowing foreign mountaineering expeditions in Siachen, was becoming a cause of concern. Having received intelligence inputs about an impending Pakistani military action in the area, India decided to thwart Pakistan's efforts to legitimize its claim on Siachen. The Indian Army launched Operation Meghdoot, to secure strategic heights on Siachen with the deployment of troops. Playing an irreplaceable role in this effort, IAF's tactical and strategic airlifters, An-12s, An-32s and IL-76s transported stores and troops and air-dropped supplies to high altitude airfields, from where Mi-17, Mi-8, Chetak and Cheetah helicopters ferried men and material to dizzying heights on the glacier, far above the limits set by the helicopter manufacturers. Soon, about 300-odd troops were positioned on the strategically important peaks and passes of the glacier. By the time the Pakistan army reacted by advancing its own troops, the Indian Army was occupying strategically crucial mountain peaks and passes, thereby gaining a tactical advantage. Nearly all the aircraft of the IAF including Rafale, Su-30MKI, Chinook, Apache, Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) Mk III & Mk IV, Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) Prachand, MiG-29, Mirage-2000, C-17, C-130J, IL-76 and An-32 operate in support of Operation Meghdoot.

Modi tries his hand at gaming during meet with top gamers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Not often would one see a Prime Minister indulging in video games but, during an interaction with some of the country's top gamers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday not only addressed issues facing the e-sports and gaming industry but also played VR (virtual reality) and other mobile games. He also remarked in jest "Bhagwaan kare mujhe iski aadat na lage (I pray to god I do not get addicted to this)" after a few rounds of gaming. Impressed by his humour, the gamers called him the "coolest PM" and "country's biggest influencer." Incidentally, his comments on word 'noob' turned into a slug fest between political parties. During the interaction with the gamers, Prime Minister Modi burst out laughing and took a dig at the Opposition when one of the participants mentioned the word 'noob'. Noob is a slang word that refers to someone who is new to a game, concept, or idea, implying a lack of experience in that field. In a video posted by the Prime Minister on X, the gamers are seen telling him some gaming terminologies like "grind" and "noob". Upon hearing the word "noob", Modi is seen bursting into laughter. "If I use this word during elections, people will wonder who am I referring to. If I say it, you will assume it for a particular person," Modi says without naming any leader.



The remark led to a sort of war of words between Congress and BJP. "These are just political tactics of the BJP around the elections. This will backfire," veteran Congress leader Pramod Tiwari told a TV channel. BJP leader Shehzad Poonawalla took to X to slam Congress. "PM Modi did not name anybody, but why are Congress leaders reacting and confirming who the noob of politics is?" Poonawalla said. Kangana Ranaut also responded, asking, "Who is the noob?" Meanwhile, in the free-wheeling interaction regarding the future as well as the challenges before the e-gaming industry, the prime minister posed curious questions to the gamers while also trying his hands at some of the games. "People have offered different solutions. I have an alternative solution called Mission LIFE, which advocates for changing our daily lifestyle to benefit the environment. Now, envi-

sion a game aimed at addressing global climate issues, where the gamer must explore various methods and solutions to identify the most sustainable approach," Modi told the gamers during the interaction. "What are these steps? How do we navigate through it and choose the best approach for success? Take swachhata as an example, the game theme could revolve around cleanliness and every child should play this game. Youngsters should embrace Indian values and understand their true significance," he said. The gamers discussed new developments in the gaming industry with the prime minister, who stressed how the government has recognised the creativity of the gamers, promoting the gaming industry in India. They also engaged on issues concerning gambling versus gaming while discussing the participation of women in the gaming industry.

BJP Government has legalised corruption through electoral bonds, alleges Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Countering Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attack on the Opposition on the issue of corruption, the Congress on Saturday alleged that the BJP has consistently hampered anti-corruption efforts across the country. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh alleged that the BJP Government has

"legalised" corruption through electoral bonds, politicised anti-corruption efforts by unleashing probe agencies against political opponents and slowed down the legal process against politicians who join the BJP. "It takes a special kind of hypocrisy for PM Modi to parade himself around the country screaming 'Bhrashtachar Hatao'. No one has done more to legalise and normalise corruption than Prime Minister Modi," he alleged. In his election speeches, Modi has made a strong pitch on the issue of corruption, claiming that while he wants to finish the menace, the Congress and other opposition parties were targeting him for it and have come together to protect the corrupt. Ramesh claimed that in July 2018, the Modi government amended the Prevention of Corruption Act, rendering anti-graft bodies ineffective. "Six years later, 65 per cent of anti-corruption probes in Maharashtra are still pending approval. "How the BJP rendered anti-corruption bodies ineffective: In July 2018, the Modi Sarkar introduced Section 17(A) to the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) to supposedly protect government servants from frivolous complaints. The legal process is an inquiry to FIR to the chargesheet. "Before this new 'safeguard'

सूचना

हमने अपने पुत्र गौरव शर्मा उम्र 33 साल व उसकी पत्नी श्रीमती मेधा शर्मा को गलत व्यवहार के कारण अपनी सभी चल-अचल सम्पत्ति से बेदखल करते हैं। भविष्य में अपने कार्यों के लिए वे स्वयं जिम्मेदार होंगे। सुरेश चन्द्र शर्मा पुत्र शंकर लाल शर्मा एवं श्रीमती अवधेश शर्मा पत्नी सुरेश चन्द्र शर्मा निवासी गण एन-590, सेक्टर-25, जलवायु विहार, नोएडा नौतमबुद्धनगर उत्तर प्रदेश

was added, Section 19(A) of the PCA required anti-corruption bodies to seek approval from the government/department before filing a charge sheet, the last step in the legal process," the Congress leader claimed. He said the Modi government amendment requires anti-corruption bodies, including the CBI, to seek approval even before launching an investigation, the first step in the legal process. "It's a tremendous weakening of the powers of anti-corruption agencies," he alleged. Ramesh said the amendment required the government to make their decision within a maximum of four months, but it does not mention what action can be taken if the time limit is not followed. "This, unsurprisingly, has been wisely misused. Out of 354 Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) cases currently pending approval before the state of Maharashtra, only two were addressed within the time limit. "In the remaining 352, the ACB has not heard from the concerned government or department for more than four months," he claimed. The Congress general secretary also claimed that Maharashtra has the lowest conviction rate in the country under the PCA - just 11 per cent in 2021, and just nine per cent in 2022 according to National Crime Records Bureau data.

ment of an egalitarian society and struggled for the upliftment of the downtrodden. "On this occasion, let us adopt the ideals of Dr Ambedkar and work collectively for the inclusive development of our country," President Murmu said. Born on April 14, 1891, in a Dalit family in Maharashtra, Ambedkar rose from a humble background to become a leading voice of the marginalised people during the freedom struggle and is credited with introducing several social reforms. In a message, the President said, "On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the architect of our Constitution and one of the most eminent nation builders, I extend my warm greetings and best wishes to all fellow citizens."

President Droupadi Murmu greets citizens on eve of Ambedkar birth anniversary



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday greeted citizens on the eve of the birth anniversary of Dr B R Ambedkar, the architect of India's Constitution, and asked all to adopt his ideals to work collectively for the inclusive development of the country. Babasaheb Ambedkar, a pioneer of social change and a versatile personality, made exceptional contributions to our country and society as a jurist, educationist, economist, social reformer and political leader, she said. Even today, his strong belief in the constitutional system is the foundation of our democracy and good governance, the president said. She said, Dr Ambedkar devoted his entire life to the estab-

lishment of an egalitarian society and struggled for the upliftment of the downtrodden. "On this occasion, let us adopt the ideals of Dr Ambedkar and work collectively for the inclusive development of our country," President Murmu said. Born on April 14, 1891, in a Dalit family in Maharashtra, Ambedkar rose from a humble background to become a leading voice of the marginalised people during the freedom struggle and is credited with introducing several social reforms. In a message, the President said, "On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the architect of our Constitution and one of the most eminent nation builders, I extend my warm greetings and best wishes to all fellow citizens."

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

OF NAME

I, Prerana Arora D/o Anil Arora R/o C-55, Sector-26, Noida-201301 have changed my name Prerana Arora to Prerna Arora for all future purposes.

PD(365)A

NORTHERN RAILWAY

TENDER NOTICE
Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)

N.I.T. No.	234545
Name of work and its location	Tender for "Provision for Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) FOR 18 Nos of Platform Trucks at RCNKS/SNP for a period of two years."
Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 3411079.50 including GST (Rs. Thirty Four Lakh Eleven Thousand Seventy Nine Hundred Only)
Earnest Money	Rs. 68200.00/-
Completion period of Work	24 months of date of execution of work
Cost of Tender document on cash/by post	NIL
Date and Time for submission of tender and opening of tender	Upto 15:00 hrs on 02.05.2024 Opening of tender at 15:00 hrs.
Website particulars notice board location complete details of tender can be seen	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in

No. 234545 Dated: 11/04/2024

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 1094/24

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public at large hereby informed that My Client Sh. Sital Kumar Bansal, S/O Late Sh. P. P. Bansal & Late Smt. Shakuntla Bansal W/o Sh. Sital Kumar Bansal are the owner of Freehold MH Flat No. 51-B, Ground Floor, Pocket-4, Mayur Vihar Phase-I, Delhi by virtue of by Sale Deed duly registered as Do.No.6200 dated 15.04.2010.

(1) Original Handing Over Possession Letter issued by DDA in favour of Sh. V. N. S. Agrawal (2) Original Letter dated 15.11.2000 issued by DDA in favour of Sh. V. N. S. Agrawal regarding including the name of his Son Sh. Vivek Agrawal as a Co-Alottee in respect of the captioned property is informed as lost and lost report filed with P.S. Crime Branch vide LR No.1636805/2024 dated 12.04.2024.

It is hereby notified that any person or entity, firm/company/Bank, financial institution having claim any charge, interest or lien or claim on the basis of documents mentioned above or otherwise and/or objection thereof, he/she/they may lodge/notify the same to the undersigned with documentary proof within 15 days from the date of publication, failing which the title shall be deemed to be clear and marketable without any defect, encumbrance, flaw and impediment.

NIRMAL KUMAR (ADVOCATE)
Ch.No. 599, Patiala House Court, New Delhi
Mobile No.: 956789197
Email: nr2verma@gmail.com

Gopi Thotakura to become 1st Indian space tourist

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Gopi Thotakura, an entrepreneur and a pilot, is set to become the first Indian to venture into space as a tourist on Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin's NS-25 mission. Thotakura was selected as one of the six crew members for the mission, making him the first Indian space tourist and the second Indian to venture into space after the Indian Army's Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma in 1984. The flight date is yet to be announced, the aerospace company said. This mission will be the seventh human flight for the New Shepard programme and the 25th in its history. To date, the programme

has flown 31 humans above the Karman line, the proposed conventional boundary between Earth's atmosphere and outer space. New Shepard is a fully reusable sub-orbital launch vehicle developed for space tourism by Blue Origin. According to Blue Origin, "Gopi is a pilot and aviator who learned how to fly before he could drive." He is the co-founder of Preserve Life Corp, a global centre for holistic wellness and applied health located near Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. In addition to flying jets commercially, he pilots bush, aerobatic, and seaplanes, as well as gliders and hot air balloons, and has served as an international medical jet pilot.



A lifelong traveller, his most recent adventure took him to the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Andhra Pradesh-born Thotakura is a graduate of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Other crew members of the flight include Mason Angel, Sylvain Chiron, Kenneth L. Hess, Carol Schaller, and former Air Force Captain Ed Dwight, who was selected by President John F Kennedy in 1961 as the nation's first Black astronaut candidate but was never granted the opportunity to fly to space. During the flight, each astronaut will carry a postcard to space on behalf of Blue Origin's foundation, Club for the Future.

This programme gives students access to space on Blue Origin's rockets, including an all-digital method to create and send postcards. The Club's mission is to inspire and mobilise future generations to pursue careers in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) for the benefit of Earth. From an environmental standpoint, nearly 99 per cent of New Shepard's dry mass is reused, including the booster, capsule, engine, landing gear, and parachutes. New Shepard's engine is fuelled by highly efficient liquid oxygen and hydrogen. During the flight, the only byproduct is water vapour with no carbon emissions, the company said.

Chaos at a Sydney mall as 6 people stabbed to death

Suspect fatally shot by police

AP ■ SYDNEY

A man stabbed six people to death at a busy Sydney shopping centre Saturday before he was fatally shot, police said, with hundreds fleeing the chaotic scene, many weeping as they carried their children. Eight people, including a 9-month-old, were injured. New South Wales police said they believed a 40-year-old man was responsible for the Saturday afternoon attack at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Bondi Junction, in the city's eastern suburbs. They said they were not able to name him until a formal identification had taken place but that they weren't currently treating the attack as terrorism-related.

fall afternoon, began around 3:10 p.m. and police were called soon after. "They just said run, run, run — someone's been stabbed," one witness told ABC TV in Australia. "(The attacker) was walking really calmly like he was having an ice cream in a park. And then he went up the escalators... and probably within about a minute we heard three gunshots." Six of the victims — five women and a man — and the suspect died. Commissioner Karen Webb said the eight injured people were being treated at hospitals. The baby was in surgery, but it was too early to know the condition, she said. "We are confident that there is no ongoing risk, and we are dealing with one person who is now deceased," Webb said in a later briefing. She added: "It's not a terrorism incident." Witnesses were shocked at the rare outburst of violence. Australia enacted strict gun laws after a man killed 35 and wounded another 23 in 1996, in Tasmania.

He said police arrived quickly and told everyone to stay put. Singh said he saw the man running just metres away as he wielded a knife. "I didn't hear him say anything," he added. "Just a random guy stabbing people. Mad guy." Roi Huberman, a sound engineer at ABC TV in Australia, told the network that he sheltered in a store during the incident. "And suddenly we heard a shot or maybe two shots and we didn't know what to do," he said. "Then the very capable person in the store took us to the back where it can be locked. She then locked the store and then she then let us through the back and now we are out." As the attack unfolded, panicked individuals streamed out of the shopping centre, many with children in their arms. Paramedics treated injured people at the scene. The shopping centre and the surrounding area remains in lockdown as police piece together what went on. "It's been an incredibly distressing day for so many people in our community, people who went to the shops today, a packed shopping centre, and then got caught up in something we could never imagine here, something so disturbing and terrifying for many," Kellie Sloane, a local lawmaker, said.

Israel finds body of missing teen

AP ■ AL-MUGHAYYIR (WEST BANK)

Israel's army said on Saturday the body of a missing Israeli teen was found in the West Bank after he was killed in a "terrorist attack," as violence escalated across the Israeli-occupied territory where tensions have simmered for months.

ers were wounded in the attack on al-Mughayyir village, Palestinian health officials said. On Saturday, Israeli troops delayed for several hours the ambulance carrying the 26-year-old man's body for burial, witnesses said. Dozens of Israeli settlers returned to the village's outskirts on Saturday, burning 12 homes and several cars.

The Associated Press, saying he had been there. "The army came but unfortunately, the army were protecting the settlers," he said, asserting that it fired tear gas and rubber bullets at Palestinians trying to confront and expel them. The Israeli military did not immediately comment. The Palestinian Red Crescent said six people were injured by gunfire but did not say who fired.

Israel's offensive, according to Gaza health officials. Hamas since then has been trying to ignite other fronts, including in the West Bank, in hopes of exerting more pressure on Israel. Such efforts have largely failed, though more than 460 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank since October 7, most in clashes sparked by army raids but some by vigilante settlers. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the killing of the Israeli teen.

The disappearance of 14-year-old Binyamin Achimair sparked attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian villages on Friday and Saturday. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant in a statement on social media urged people not to take the law into their own hands.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said three people from the village were injured, one critically. Border police fired tear gas toward villagers who gathered, trying to disperse them. In the nearby village of Douma, Israeli settlers set fire to around 15 homes and 10 farms, the head of the local village council, Slieman Dawabsheh, told

Tensions in the West Bank have been especially high since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in nearby Gaza on October 7, sparked by the Hamas attack on southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people and took 250 hostages. More than 33,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed in

According to Israeli media, the teen was last seen leaving the settler outpost of Malachei Shalom early Friday to tend to livestock nearby. The sheep returned to the outpost hours later without him, reports said.

Militants kill 11 in Pakistan's Balochistan

PTI ■ KARACHI

At least 11 people, nine of them from Punjab province, were shot dead by militants in Pakistan's restive Balochistan in two separate incidents, authorities said on Saturday, as the region witnessed a surge in terror attacks in recent days. Nine of the deceased were travelling in a bus on the National Highway from Quetta to Taftan when they were stopped by unknown militants, who pulled them out of the bus and killed them later, an official said.

"The bodies of these nine men were later found with bullet wounds in the nearby mountainous areas near a bridge," he said. "The bus was going from Quetta to Taftan when armed men stopped it and after identifying passengers took the nine men to the mountainous areas," he added. The victims were from Wazirabad, Mandi Bahauddin, and Gujranwala in Punjab province.

In a separate incident, a car was fired upon on the same highway in which two passengers were killed and two others injured. Condemning the attacks, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif sought a report of the incident from authorities.

FBI hikes reward for info on Indian wanted for killing wife

PTI ■ NEW YORK

The FBI is now offering a reward of up to USD 250,000 for information leading to the arrest of a 33-year-old "extremely dangerous" Indian national who is wanted in the US for allegedly killing his wife in 2015.

federal agency announced a reward of up to USD 250,000 for information leading to his arrest. Initially, the FBI had offered a USD 100,000 reward for information about Patel.

worked the night shift at the doughnut shop of one of his relatives. Investigators believe Patel killed his wife, who was 21 at the time, in a back room of the shop just before midnight on April 12, 2015. Patel allegedly stabbed his wife multiple times and fled by a rear door.

n't want her to leave," said Special Agent Jonathan Shaffer, who was investigating the case from the FBI's Baltimore Division. "It's possible he thought he would be disgraced by her leaving and returning to India." Although the motive remains unclear, Shaffer noted that after the crime, Patel's "actions show a very cool and calculated mentality about escaping the scene and fleeing the area."

Bhadreshkumar Chetanbhai Patel, who was last known to be in the Newark area of New Jersey, is wanted for allegedly killing his wife Palak Patel by striking her multiple times with an object when they worked at a doughnut shop in Hanover, Maryland. Patel is on the FBI's list of "Ten Most Wanted Fugitives" and the

A federal arrest warrant was issued in the Maryland district court on April 20, 2015, after Patel was charged with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution. According to a 2017 FBI press release, Patel and his wife

According to the FBI, investigators theorise that Palak Patel wanted to return to India — their visas had expired the month before — and her husband was against the idea. "The best guess is that he did-

After the murder, a customer who entered the shop realised something was wrong when no one came to take his order. He alerted a Police Department officer who discovered Palak Patel's body. "It was horrific

what had been done to this young woman," Shaffer said. Realising that Patel was an international flight risk, local police requested FBI assistance, and several days after the murder, a federal arrest warrant was issued charging him with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution.

Investigators believe that Patel could be with distant relatives in the US or that he could have fled to Canada. "Or he could have travelled through Canada back to India," Shaffer said. "Those are among the plausible options we are exploring," according to the press release issued in 2017.

Pak has highest living cost in all of Asia with a 25 per cent inflation rate: ADB

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Pakistan has the highest living cost in all of Asia with a 25 per cent inflation rate and its economy may grow at the fourth lowest pace of 1.9 per cent in the region, according to a new Asian Development Bank (ADB) report. The report was released on Thursday in Manila. The Express Tribune reported that the Asian Development Outlook also painted a gloomy picture for the next fiscal year as well, projecting a 15 per cent inflation rate for the next fiscal year — again the highest among 46 countries and a 2.8 per cent growth rate — the fifth lowest for FY 2024-25. The Manila-based lending agency stated that the inflation

rate in Pakistan is expected to be 25 per cent in the current fiscal year — the highest in all of Asia. This makes Pakistan the most expensive nation in Asia. Earlier, the cost of living in Pakistan used to be the highest in South Asia. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and federal government had set the inflation target at 21 per cent for this fiscal year but they are going to miss it despite inflicting huge losses in the shape of a 22 per cent interest rate. The ADB said during the current fiscal year, the country's economic growth rate might remain at 1.9 per cent — the fourth lowest after Myanmar, Azerbaijan and Nauru. Pakistan is in a stagnation phase for a prolonged period and the World Bank too said

last week that another 10 million more people might fall into the poverty trap because of any adverse shocks. About 98 million people are already living a poor life in Pakistan. In the past, the ADB gave a rather optimistic economic scenario close to Pakistan's official forecasts. However, the latest ADB report stated that Pakistan would continue to face challenges from substantial new external financing requirements and the rollover of old debt, exacerbated by tight global monetary conditions. The Manila-based lender said political uncertainty that affected macroeconomic policy-making would remain a key risk to the sustainability of stabilisation and reform efforts.

It said with Pakistan's large external financing requirements and weak external buffers, disbursement from multilateral and bilateral partners remained crucial. "Further IMF support for a medium-term reform agenda would considerably improve market sentiment and catalyse affordable external financing from other sources," the report added. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb is set to meet the IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva next week in Washington to request a new bailout package. The IMF MD said this week that Pakistan was in discussions for a potential follow-up programme. However, she said that there are "very important issues" to be

solved in Pakistan: the tax base, how the richer part of the society contributed to the economy, the way public spending is being directed, and creating a more transparent environment. The ADB said low confidence, a surge in living costs, and the implementation of tighter macroeconomic policies under the IMF programme would restrain domestic demand in Pakistan. It said the government's goal was to achieve a primary surplus of 0.4 per cent and an overall deficit of 7.5 per cent of GDP in FY2024, with both declining gradually in subsequent years. However, the World Bank said last week that Pakistan would miss both these budget targets, reported The Express Tribune.

Shelling in Russian-occupied Ukraine claims 10 lives

AP ■ KYIV

At least 10 people, including children, died after shelling late on Friday struck a Russian-occupied town in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region, a local Kremlin-installed official said, blaming Ukraine for the attack. Meanwhile, Ukrainian officials reported at least three civilian deaths elsewhere in the country that they said resulted from Russian attacks. Russian emergency services on Saturday were working in the rubble in hopes of saving civilians trapped underneath the debris of their homes in Tokmak, in a part of southern Ukraine that Moscow has illegally annexed from Kyiv, according to the Kremlin-installed regional head Yevhen

Balitsky. The Tokmak municipal administration reported on Telegram that the shelling struck three apartment blocks on Friday evening. Five people were pulled alive from the rubble, Balitsky said, and a total of 13 people were hospitalised. As of early afternoon on Saturday, Ukraine had not commented on the allegations. Elsewhere in Ukraine, at least two civilians died as a result of Russian shelling on Friday and overnight, according to officials. Both deaths occurred in the front-line Donetsk region in the east, according to Telegram posts by local Gov. Vadym Filashkin. On Saturday, Russian forces also shelled a car making food

deliveries in the northern Chernihiv region, killing its civilian driver, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Chaus said. In the Kharkiv region in the northeast, overnight Russian shelling left a man trapped under rubble and also wounded a second man, according to local Gov. Oleh Syniehubov and Ukrainian emergency services. Both have been hospitalised, according to a Telegram update by the state emergency service. Local Ukrainian officials reported over a dozen civilians were wounded by Russian shelling on Friday and overnight in the country's north, south and east. It was not immediately possible to verify the claims by Balitsky or the Ukrainian authorities.

Trump to host rally on Biden's home turf in northeast Pennsylvania

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump plans to hold a rally Saturday in northeast Pennsylvania, venturing into an area President Joe Biden considers his home turf in what will be the Republican's last rally before his criminal hush money trial begins Monday. The presumptive GOP nominee and former president is scheduled to speak at the Schnecksville Fire Hall in Lehigh County. It will be Trump's third visit this year to the vital swing state, one that could decide who wins this year's presidential race. He also plans to attend a fundraiser in nearby Bucks County before the event. Pennsylvania is a critical battleground in the rematch between Trump and Biden, with both candidates expected to visit the state frequently through November. Trump flipped the state to the Republican column in 2016 but lost it four years after to Biden, who was born in the northeast

city of Scranton and has long talked about his roots in the city. Biden plans to deliver a major address Tuesday in Scranton on tax fairness. Trump is navigating four separate criminal prosecutions while running to avenge his loss to Biden, creating an unprecedented swirl of legal and political chaos. Jury selection starts Monday in New York in his trial where he is charged with seeking during his 2016 campaign to bury stories about extramarital affairs by arranging hush money payments. It will be the first criminal trial ever of a former US president. And it will limit Trump's availability on the campaign trail, though he is expected to speak to the media after court often and has for months foundered and campaigned on the felony charges he faces, arguing political opponents are pursuing them to stop him from winning the White House again. Biden has argued Trump lies about losing the 2020 election



are dangerous for the country. He has said Trump poses a fundamental threat to democracy and U.S. alliances abroad — rhetoric that Trump has argued applies to Biden.

In recent weeks, both candidates have tried to stir up their voting bases and tear apart their opponent's coalitions, a strategy that will be tested over the coming months.

Trump recently said that any Democratic-leaning voters who support Israel should back him instead, as Biden has criticized Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's actions

in his war against Hamas. The Republican said Wednesday that "any Jewish person who votes for a Democrat or votes for Biden should have their head examined." He also has new ammunition to criticize Biden's handling of the economy, as the government said Wednesday that inflation jumped 0.4% in March to 3.5% annually. But Biden has also put Trump on the defensive over the issue of abortion, a key weakness for the GOP as many voters have opposed new restrictions that some states have placed on the procedure after justices that Trump appointed to the Supreme Court helped overturn Roe v Wade in 2022. Trump tried to defuse the controversy and appease women voters by saying the matter should be settled by the states, instead of the federal government. But that argument became problematic this past week as Arizona's top court ruled that the state could enforce an 1864

law criminalizing abortion, prompting Trump on Wednesday to suggest the 19th century law was too restrictive for his taste. Trump has instead tried to make immigration the central issue of the campaign. The Republican has sought to portray Biden as feckless on border security, given the record-high numbers of individuals who have crossed the southern border illegally during his administration. He also attacked the president for not doing more to ramp up oil drilling, even though domestic production is at an all-time high. The area around Lehigh County has enjoyed job growth under Biden. The Bureau of Labor Statistics said it contains 445,200 jobs, up from a pre-pandemic total of 429,900 jobs during the Trump administration. The area's unemployment rate is a healthy 3.9%, meaningfully better than the 4.6% achieved before the coronavirus pandemic struck during Trump's presidency.

Pak opp alliance to launch drive against govt

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party under the umbrella of a "grand opposition alliance" on Saturday announced a countrywide movement against the alleged rigging in the February 8 election and the government established by tampering of the mandate. The launch of the movement indicates that the dream of post-election peace and political stability will be willing sooner than expected. The six-party alliance that includes Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, in a late-night meeting that continued till the early hours of Saturday decided to come together under the banner of Pakistan Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP), a movement to protect the Constitution of Pakistan.

Foreign funds shy away from real estate

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Institutional investments in real estate declined 55 per cent annually in January-March this year to USD 552 million as cautious foreign investors stayed away, pumping in only USD 11 mn, according to Vestian. The real estate sector had attracted USD 1,238.3 million (USD 1.23 billion) in the January-March period of 2023 calendar year, as per the report, which was released on Saturday. The latest data by global property consultant Vestian showed that the institutional inflow from foreign funds in the country's real estate plunged 99 per cent to just USD 11 million in the first quarter of 2024 from USD 791.4 million in the year-ago



period. Domestic investors pumped in USD 541.1 million in the Indian real

estate in January-March 2025, up 21 per cent from 446.9 million in the year-ago

period. Vestian CEO Shrinivas Rao, said, "Domestic investors are

bullish about India's growth story, and continue to pour in investments in the real estate sector. On the other hand, foreign investors are cautious due to global macroeconomic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions." Commercial assets (office, retail, co-working, and hospitality projects) garnered the highest investments of USD 231.6 million in the March quarter, as against USD 484.8 million in the year-ago period. Institutional investments in residential assets fell 33 per cent to USD 225 million from USD 337.7 million. Investments significantly decreased 73 per cent in the industrial and warehousing sector to USD 58.9 million in the January-March period from USD 215.8 million a

year ago. Bengaluru dominated the institutional investments during the quarter with USD 299 million, followed by Delhi-NCR at USD 110 million. Both cities together accounted for around 74 per cent of the total investments received in the current quarter. Edelweiss Capital turned out to be the most active investor during the quarter with over USD 300 million worth of investments across the asset classes and geographies, Vestian said. "The Indian real estate sector is expected to garner increased investments in the coming months on the back of a strengthened economic scenario and robust demand," Rao said on the investments outlook.



Gas based plants told to be operational from May 1 as power demand surges

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has directed all gas-based power generating stations to operationalise their plants from May 1 to June 30 in view of rise in electricity demand due to a likely prolonged heat wave this summer. A significant portion of Gas-Based Generating Stations (GBSS) is currently unused, primarily due to commercial considerations. The ministry has projected 260 GW peak power demand this summer (April to June 2024). Peak power demand had touched an all-time high of 243 GW in September last year. The decision to operationalise GBSS is part of a series of measures taken to a power ministry statement, the order shall remain valid for generation and supply of electricity from May 1, 2024 to June 30, 2024. "To ensure maximum power generation from Gas-Based Generating Stations, the government has issued directions to all Gas-Based Generating Stations under Section 11 of the Electricity Act, 2003, under which the appropriate government may specify that a generating company shall, in extraordinary circumstances operate and maintain any generating station in accordance with the directions of that government," the statement said. The order under

Section 11, which is on similar lines as done for imported coal-based power plants, aims to optimise the availability of power from GBSS during the ensuing high demand period. As per the arrangement, GRID-INDIA will inform GBSS in advance, of the number of days for which gas-based power is required. GBSS holding Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with distribution licensees shall first offer their power to PPA holders. If the power offered is not utilised by any PPA holder, then it shall be offered in the power market. GBSS not tied to PPAs must offer their generation in the power market. A high-level committee headed by Chairperson, Central Electricity Authority has been constituted to facilitate the implementation of this direction. Other measures taken by the government to meet the summer demand include planned maintenance of power plants to be shifted to monsoon season; new capacity additions to be fast-tracked and partial outages of thermal power plants being brought down. India's electricity demand has been rising rapidly, driven by economic growth, particularly during hot-weather and high-demand periods. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted above-normal maximum temperatures over most parts of the country during the 2024 summer.



Petregaz India commissions its LPG import, storage terminal

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Petregaz India, a subsidiary of Petredec Group has commissioned its new state-of-the-art LPG Import and Storage Terminal that has been set up at an outlay of Rs 600 crore, the company said on Saturday. The new facility located within the Adani Krishnapatnam Private Port at Krishnapatnam in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh would benefit private marketers as well as residential, commercial, industrial, and automotive consumers. The newly commissioned facility, with an investment of Rs 600 crore, enables Petregaz to deliver cost-effective, and dependable solutions to LPG marketers, the company said in a statement. With an annual capacity of over 1.5 million metric tonnes, the facility has excellent road connectivity to the hinterland of Tamil

Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. The terminal also has two refrigerated storage tanks, a modern jetty with no congestion and capable of berthing all types of LPG vessels, 16 truck loading bays among others. "Government-run oil companies can utilise our terminal's capacity to improve LPG supplies in the hinterland, optimising logistics and strengthening India's LPG landscape," said Petregaz India CEO Susheel Raina. This new facility would benefit private marketers and bottlers by improving access to LPG infrastructure, Raina said. Petredec Group is an integrated LPG company that owns and operates a modern fleet of 35 LPG carriers. It has a presence in the LPG downstream sector with three LPG import terminals in the Indian Ocean, the statement added.

HMPL board approves ₹486 crore fundraising plan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Infrastructure company Hazoor Multi Projects Ltd (HMPL) on Saturday said its board has approved a proposal to raise Rs 486 crore through the issuance of warrants. The plan was approved by the board of the company at a meeting on Friday, HMPL said in a regulatory filing. The board has approved fundraising of Rs 4,860 million through issuing and allotting up to 1.62 crore fully convertible warrants to the persons belonging to the 'non-promoter' and 'public' category on a preferential basis at an issue price of Rs 300 per warrant, the company said. The proposal is subject to the approval of shareholders and other regulatory authorities, HMPL added. "Upon issue of Warrants in accordance herewith, an amount equivalent to 25 per cent of the total issue size shall be called upfront from the proposed allottees," it noted. The company said it looks to utilise the proceeds to enhance financial resources to fund its growth. Besides, the constitution of a fundraising raising committee was among the several proposals approved by the board. HMPL is into building road projects on an engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) basis. Anita Goel

224 flats in Gurugram project sold in 15 minutes for ₹440 crore: Ashiana Housing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Ashiana Housing on Saturday said it sold 224 luxury flats in Gurugram for Rs 440 crore within 15 minutes of its launch. The project is located at Sector 93 in Gurugram, Haryana. In a statement, the company said it has "sold out the entire phase 3 of its prestigious project, Ashiana Amarah within 15 minutes of launch." "We are very happy with the incredible response to Ashiana Amarah phase 3 launch. We started registration at 11 am and we had received 800 cheques for 224 units by 11.15. In 15 minutes it was oversubscribed four times," Ashiana Housing Joint Managing Director Ankur Gupta said. He attributed the oversubscription to the



company's brand value and execution track record. "Our novel kid-centric concept is also working. People want their children to be brought up in better places, with better amenities and quality of life and that is what Amarah is promising. "So there is a lot of excitement in the market. Ashiana is also planning to launch phase 4 in the coming quarter," Gupta said. Ashiana Housing is one of

India's leading real estate firms, listed on the stock exchanges. Present in nine cities in India, Ashiana Housing has constructed and delivered over 23 million (230 lakh) sq ft to over 17,000 buyers. According to PropTiger, sales of residential properties in Delhi-NCR jumped more than three times during the January-March period to Rs 12,120 crore from Rs 3,476 crore in the year-ago period.

CBI FIR against second biggest electoral bond buyer Megha Engineering in alleged bribery case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has registered an FIR against Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd, which was the second-biggest buyer of electoral bonds worth Rs 966 crore, in an alleged bribery case. Eight officials of the NISP and NMDC and two officials of MECON were also named in the FIR for receiving alleged bribe of around Rs 78 lakh in clearing bills of Rs 174 crore of Megha Engineering in connection with works related to Jagdalpur integrated steel plant, officials said Saturday. Megha Engineering had emerged as the second-biggest buyer of electoral bonds and donated the highest amount of about Rs 586 crore to the BJP, according to the data released by the Election Commission on March 21. The company also donated

Rs 195 crore to BRS, Rs 85 crore to DMK, and Rs 37 crore to YSRCP. The TDP got about Rs 25 crore from the company, while the Congress got Rs 17 crore. The JD-S, Jana Sena Party and the JD-U got smaller sums ranging from Rs 5 crore to Rs 10 crore. According to the FIR made public on Saturday, the CBI had registered a preliminary enquiry on August 10, 2023 about the alleged bribery in Rs 315 crore project related to works of intake well and pump house and cross-country pipeline at the integrated steel plant Jagdalpur which was awarded to the company. Based on the findings of the preliminary enquiry, a recommendation was made on March 18 to register a regular case into the alleged bribery which was filed on March 31. The CBI has named eight

officials of NISP and NMDC Ltd — retired executive director Prashant Dash, director (production) DK Mohanty, DGM PK Bhuyan, DM Naresh Babu, senior manager Subro Banerjee, retired CGM (finance) L Krishna Mohan, GM (finance) K Rajshekhar, manager (finance) Somnath Ghosh, who allegedly received Rs 73.85 lakh bribe. The agency has also named two officials of MECON Ltd - AGM (contracts) Sanjeev Sahay and DGM (contracts) K Illavarsu — who allegedly received payment of Rs 5.01 lakh against the payment of Rs 174.41 crore by NMDC Ltd to MEIL against 73 invoices from Subhash Chandra Sangras, general manager, MEIL and Megha Engineering and unknown others. Chandra and Megha Engineering have also been named as accused in the case.

Need to create new breed of financial planning professionals: FPSB



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country needs a "new breed of financial planning professionals" who can act as consultants for customers, Financial Planning Standards Board (FPSB) India CEO Krishan Mishra said. India currently has 2,731 certified financial planners (CFPs) who are currently working in the industry as well as practising individually, FPSB said in a statement. "Most people who are in the industry might be navigating their organisations very well but when it comes to their personal finances they also struggle, be it CEOs, CFOs, CHROs. "This is why we need to create a new breed of financial planning professionals who can be consultants for customers," Mishra said. Mishra was speaking to PTI on the sidelines of the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between FPSB India and Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), Delhi on Friday to launch the Executive and Regular PG programs, integrated with Certified

Financial Planner (CFP) certification. "The collaboration underscores our shared commitment to excellence in education and our dedication to nurturing the next generation of financial planners equipped with a globally recognised CFP certification," Mishra said. "The beauty of the industry is that it not only helps you with employability but also with your entrepreneurship practice," said Mishra. The programme is designed to equip working professionals and students with the essential knowledge and skills required to excel in the field of financial planning, FPSB said. The course delves into investment planning in the first module, insurance, retirement and tax planning in the second module and estate planning and risk management in the third module, it said. FPSB India is a leading financial planning body in India and is dedicated to establishing, upholding, and promoting professional standards in financial planning throughout India.

Varun Beverages starts commercial production of carbonated drinks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Varun Beverages, leading bottler of beverage major PepsiCo, on Saturday said it has started commercial production of soft drinks and energy drinks from its production facility at Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. The Jaipuria family-promoted

firm will also start juices and value-added dairy products from the Gorakhpur facility, Varun Beverages Ltd (VBL) said in a regulatory filing. "Our company has today started commercial production of carbonated soft drinks & energy drinks (juices and value added dairy products to be started) at its production

facility at Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh," it said. VBL said it is investing about Rs 1,100 crore for the greenfield project. In its latest annual report statement, VBL said it is expanding production capacities in the juices and value-added dairy products segments in 2024.

Payment mechanism for traders importing pulses from Myanmar simplified: Government

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Saturday said the payment mechanism for traders importing pulses from Myanmar has been eased and simplified. The importers have been asked to utilize Rupee/ Kyat direct payment system using Special Rupee Vostro Account (SRVA) through Punjab National Bank, the consumer affairs ministry said in a statement. India depends on imports of pulses to meet the domestic shortage. The country imports tur and urad dals from Myanmar. Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare discussed with Indian Mission in Yangon issues relating to pulses



imports from Myanmar such as import prices in the wake of revised exchange rates and stocks held by importers in Myanmar, it said.

The ministry said that the Indian Mission informed the secretary that the Rupee/Kyat Settlement Mechanism has been operationalised from

January 25 this year to simplify trade transactions and to make them more efficient. The Central Bank of Myanmar released guidelines for payment procedures under SRVA on January 26, 2024. The Indian Mission also informed the secretary that the new mechanism will apply for both sea and border trade and for trade in goods as well as services. "Adoption of the mechanism by traders will reduce costs associated with currency conversions and eliminate complexities related to exchange rates by eliminating the need for multiple currency conversations," the ministry statement said. It said "dissemination about

the operationalization of this mechanism among trading communities especially pulses importers is being separately done wherein they are being requested to utilize Rupee/ Kyat direct payment system using SRVA through Punjab National Bank." Meanwhile, the government has asked importers and other industry players like millers, stockists, retailers etc to honestly declare their stock of pulses, including imported yellow peas, on a weekly basis on a portal <https://fcainfoweb.Nic.In/psp/> from April 15. The ministry has also warned that anyone found to be indulging in forward trade of pulses would be dealt with firmly as per various

provisions of Essential Commodities Act. States and Union Territories have also been asked to enforce weekly stock disclosure by all stockholding entities and verify the stocks declared by them. Stocks in warehouses located in major ports and in pulses industry hubs should be verified from time to time and strict action should be taken on stockholding entities found to be reporting false information on stock disclosure portal, the statement said. The feedback from the industry and inputs from market intelligence relating to the stock position with various market players have been collated for further verification, it added.

India suffer 0-5 whitewash in Australia

PTI ■ PERTH

The Indian men's hockey team failed to avoid a 0-5 series whitewash after going down 2-3 in the fifth Test against Australia, completing a nightmare of a tour here on Saturday. The Indians entered the final game of the series after losing their previous four matches 1-5, 2-4, 1-2 and 1-3. The rubber was significant as far as preparation is concerned ahead of the upcoming Paris Olympics. Skipper Harmanpreet Singh (4th) and Bobby Singh Dhama (53rd) were the goal scorers for India, while Australia sounded the board through Jeremy Hayward (20th), Ky Willott (38th) and Tim Brand (39th). The Indians started the game with an attacking mindset. Jugraj Singh lobbed the ball up to Harmanpreet Singh in the Aussie half but failed to connect with the forward line. India took the lead in the fourth minute through Harmanpreet from a penalty corner as he registered his third goal of the series.



Australia equalised in the 20th minute through Hayward, who scored his seventh goal of the series from a set piece.

India's reserve custodian Suraj Karkera made a fine save to deny Nathan Ephraums. Seconds from the half time,

Australia secured a penalty corner but Suraj Karkera kept India in the hunt by making an excellent save with his right

leg to deny Hayward. India started brightly after the change of ends and secured a penalty in the 37th minute but

Harmanpreet's flick missed the target. The Kookaburras stunned the visitors once again by taking the lead a minute later through Willott, who deflected the ball in front of the Indian goalkeeper Krishan Bahadur Pathak from Nathan Ephraums's inch-perfect pass. Australia added salt to India's wounds by extending the lead through an unmarked Brand who shot home from Eddie Ockenden's assist. The Indians had chances and secured another penalty corner in the 42nd minute but Amit Rohidas shot wide. The hosts too got two more penalty corners but the Indians defended well. India meant business and looked to put pressure on the Australian defence in the final quarter. Their efforts bore fruit when Dhama scored his first international goal with a reverse hit past Andrew Charter seven minutes from the hooter. But that was all India could manage as the Australian defence didn't commit any more mistakes, even though the visitors pressed hard.



Gaurav finishes Day 1 of Otago Rally in top three

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's fastest rally driver in the morning stages, and now we're trying to become better at maintaining our rhythm on the trickier parts. We are up against cars more powerful than ours. That makes a difference, and the settings are ideal for them. "We are happy with our performance today and will try to replicate the same tomorrow, ensuring a podium finish," he added. The Otago Rally is amongst the most historic racing events in the world and has been held every year since 1976. This year, the rally has drawn a field of 117 cars, the largest in four years. A customary mix of challenging sections in the rally comprise 16 special stages. Over 144 km of competitive stages, the contestants demonstrated their driving prowess on Saturday. On Sunday, another 130 kilometres will be driven. Gill is competing at the Otago Rally for the first time. He is a three-time winner of the Rally of Whangarei, which also takes place in New Zealand.



Dominant Radhika reaches women 68 kg final

PTI ■ BISHKEK (KYRGYZSTAN)

Radhika was the lone Indian woman wrestler who assured herself of a medal, her second at the senior Asian Championships, by reaching the 68kg final here on Saturday. Radhika, who won a silver at the U23 Asian Championships last year and also finished second at the senior Asian Championships



in 2022, put up a dominant show in her weight category. She won the first bout by technical superiority against Kazakhstan's Albina Kaigeldinova and then pinned Kyrgyzstan's Gulnura Tashtanbekova. She will now face Japan's Nonoka Ozaki in the gold medal bout. Shivani Pawar (50kg) lost her quarterfinal 'by fall' to Ziqi Feng but made it to the bronze medal round after

the Chinese entered the final. In 55kg, Tamanna lost her qualification round by a comprehensive 0-9 margin to Moe Kiyooka but since the Japanese reached the final, the Indian bounced back into medal contention. Pushpa Yadav (59kg) and Priya (76kg) also have a chance to end on the podium as their vanquishers also reached the finals to open the doors for them.

Lazio booed by own fans

AP ■ ROME

Lazio players were booed by their own fans but they restored some pride after a recent poor run to beat bottom club Salernitana 4-1 and climb to seventh place in the Italian league. The capital club came into the match on the back of losses to rivals Juventus and Roma and fans displayed a banner reading "You Are Not Worthy Of Wearing Our Shirt" before the game. Recently appointed coach Igor Tudor was without a number of top players, Ciro Immobile and Matteo Guendouzi among them, but the home side showed character and was 2-0 up within 14 minutes against a team that has not won a game since December last year. Felipe Anderson opened the scoring with a solo goal on Friday after just six minutes and then Matias Vecino doubled Lazio's lead eight minutes later. Loum Tchaoua pulled one back for the visitors two minutes later with a powerful header but Anderson restored the two-goal cushion when he finished off an intricate passing move 10 minutes before the break. Danish winger Gustav Isaksen completed the rout three minutes from the final whistle just seconds after coming on as a substitute. The win did little to appease the angry home crowd but it moves Lazio a point above Napoli and one behind Atalanta, both of whom have games in hand. The result was another unhappy night for Salernitana in an already grim season. The club sits bottom of the table with just 15 points from a possible 96 and relegation is almost assured.

Amit returns to Indian squad for last boxing Olympic qualifiers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World Championships silver medallist Amit Panghal has returned to the Indian squad, which saw wholesale changes for the final Olympic qualifying event, set to be held in Bangkok from May 25 to June 2. After Indian boxers' horrid run at the Olympic qualifiers in Italy last month, when not even one boxer could secure a quota, as many as five pugilists have lost their spot in the team for the second World Qualification Tournament. The dismal show also led India's High Performance Director Bernard Dunne to

step down from his post. In the latest assessment, 2023 World Championships bronze medallist duo of Deepak Bhorla (51kg) and Mohammad Hussamudin (57kg), the six-time Asian Championships medallist Shiva Thapa (63.5kg), reigning national champion Lakshya Chahar (80kg) and 2022 Commonwealth games bronze medallist Jaisimine Lamboria (60kg) have lost their spot in the Indian team. The country's lone men's world championships silver medallist (2019) Panghal, who won gold at the 2022 Commonwealth Games and the 2024 Strandja Memorial tournament, will get his first

and final chance to seal his passage to his second Olympic Games, having competed in the Tokyo edition. He had lost out to Bhorla repeatedly in the assessment, hence missing out on the two qualifying events for the Paris Olympics -- the Asian Games and the first World Olympic Qualifiers. Another Strandja gold medallist and national champion Sachin Siwach (57kg) has also returned to the squad, replacing two-time CWG medallist Hussamudin. Sachin had also competed at the Asian Games last year. Himachal Pradesh's Abhinash Jamwal, who has dropped



down from 67kg, scored more than the seasoned Shiva to earn a chance to compete in the light welterweight (63.5kg) category, while Abhimanyu Loura replaced

Lakshya in 80kg. Worlds bronze medallist Nishan Dev (71Kg), the lone boxer to go beyond his opening round in Italy, Sanjeet (92kg), and

Hangzhou Asian Games bronze medallist Narender Berwal (+92kg) have retained their spots. No male boxers from India have won a quota till now. In the women's category, Ankushita Boro, who failed to win a quota in the 66kg weight class in Italy has dropped to the 60kg category. She replaces Jaisimine, whose performance has been disappointing at the international level. Reigning national champion and two-time world junior medallist Arundhati Choudhary emerged as the top performer in the 66kg weight class. India have secured four 2024

Olympic quota places so far with Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg), Parveen Hooda (57kg) and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) clinching their places at the Asian Games last year. India had nine boxers competing in the Tokyo Olympics. Squad: Men: Amit Panghal (51kg), Sachin Siwach Jr. (57kg), Abhinash Jamwal (63.5kg), Nishant Dev (71kg), Abhimanyu Loura (80kg), Sanjeet (92kg), Narender Berwal (+92kg) Women: Ankushita Boro (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (66kg).

Indians still in hunt at Candidates Chess

PTI ■ TORONTO

Indian Grandmasters R Praggnanandhaa and D Gukesh would look to bridge the gap with leader Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia when they restart their campaigns in the eighth round of the Candidates chess tournament here. Teen sensation Praggnanandhaa will be up against Frenchman Firouza Alireza, while Gukesh will take on compatriot Vidit Gujrathi when the tournament resumes on Saturday. While all three Indians have had a decent outing in the open section so far, it is defending champion Nepomniachtchi who is in prime position to complete a hat-trick of titles at the halfway stage. With 4.5 points to his credit, Nepomniachtchi would be happy with his performance

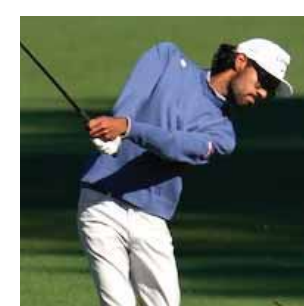


and stands as the favourite with half point more than nearest rivals Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh and top seed Fabiano Caruana of United States. Gujrathi on 3.5 points is known to rise towards the end of tournaments and one can expect him to come firing in the second half along with Hikaru Nakamura, who shares the fifth spot with him. Alireza comes next in standings on the seventh spot with 2.5 points, a half point clear of Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan.

Theegala ensure weekend action, Woods sets cuts record at Augusta

PTI ■ AUGUSTA

Indian-Americans Akshay Bhatia and Sahith Theegala handled the tough and windy conditions on the second day to make the 36-hole cut at the 88th Augusta Masters here. Bhatia, 22, who won the Valero Texas Open last week, shot (72-75) to be T-30, while Theegala (74-74) was T-35, despite a triple bogey after the second round. "The wind, the swirling winds was tough. Certainly, there's not a lot of options to hit it close. It's a pretty tough stretch from 10, 11, 12, and I haven't taken advantage of the par-5s really," said Bhatia, who is playing his first Masters. World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler held on in strong winds for an even par 72 that included three birdies and three bogeys. Scheffler, who won the Masters in 2022, shared the lead with overnight leader



Bryson DeChambeau (65-73) and Max Homa (67-71) at 6-under 138. Tiger Woods, meanwhile, made more Masters history by making the cut for a record 24th consecutive time after carding a 72 to sit on 1-over. He is just seven shot behind the leaders on T-22. Before the tournament, Woods jointly held the record for most consecutive cuts at tournaments played with Fred Couples and Gary Player on 23.

"I'm here. I have a chance to win the golf tournament," said the 82-time PGA TOUR winner and five-time Masters champion. "I don't think anyone is going to run off and hide right now, but it's really bunched. The way the ball is moving on the greens, chip shots are being blown, it's all you want in a golf course today." On the physical challenge, he added, "Yeah, I'm tired. I've been out for a while, competing, grinding. It's been 23 holes, a long day. But I really did some good fighting today, and we've got a chance." Nicolai Hojgaard (67-73) was fourth at 4-under, while Cam Davis (69-72) and Collin Morikawa (71-70) after a long time came into contention in a Major, and they were T-5th. Ludvig Aberg was the only one to shoot under 70 with a 69 and he was 2-under after two rounds in seventh spot.



Japan advances to Billie Jean King Cup finals

PTI ■ LONDON

Japan has advanced to the Billie Jean King Cup finals without Naomi Osaka needing to play a second singles match. With Japan leading 2-0 after the opening day of singles play on Friday at Tokyo, Nao Hibino beat Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7) to clinch the match for the home side on Saturday and advance Japan to the Cup finals in November in Seville, Spain. On Friday, Osaka hit 15 aces with a 6-2, 7-6 (5) win over Putintseva. It was the four-time Grand Slam champion's first match in the team competition since February 2020. Osaka's later singles match against Anna Danilina, who Hibino beat on Friday, was not played. Australia also advanced to the Seville finals earlier Saturday with a 3-0 win over Mexico. A total of 16 nations are involved in the qualifiers. Eight teams will join defending champion Canada, 2023 runner-up Italy, host Spain and wild-card selection Czech Republic in the 12-country Finals field.

Naomi, Iga and Emma earn wins in Billie Jean King Cup

AP ■ LONDON

Grand Slam title winners Naomi Osaka, Iga Swiatek and Emma Raducanu all won in Billie Jean King Cup qualifying. Osaka hit 15 aces and put Japan a step away from reaching the BJK Cup Finals with a 6-2 7-6(5) win over Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva on Friday. It was the four-time Grand Slam champion's first match in the team competition since February 2020. Osaka, back on tour after becoming a mother last July,

saved all three break points she faced and compiled a 31-16 edge in winners. Her win on an indoor hard court in Tokyo followed Nao Hibino's 6-1, 6-0 victory over Anna Danilina and gave Japan a 2-0 lead in the best-of-five-match qualifying round. Two other singles matches and one in doubles are scheduled for Saturday. A total of 16 nations are involved in qualifiers Friday and Saturday, with the winners advancing to the Billie Jean King Cup Finals in Seville, Spain, in November. Those eight teams will join defending champion Canada, 2023 runner-up Italy, host Spain and wild-card selection Czech



Republic in the 12-country Finals field. The first team to move out of the qualifying round was Australia, which eliminated Mexico in Brisbane early Saturday, when Taylor Preston easily won 6-1 6-1 over Marcela Zacarias to make the overall score 3-0. With 2011 US Open champion Sam Stosur serving as Australia's captain for the first time, Arina Rodionova beat Mexico's Giuliana Olmos 3-6 6-3 6-1, and Daria Saville defeated Zacarias 6-1 6-0 for

the hosts on an outdoor hard court Friday. Australia, the runner-up twice in the last five years, is seeking its first title since 1974. In other action, No. 1-ranked Swiatek and Poland went ahead 2-0 at Switzerland, 2021 US Open champion Raducanu helped Britain finish Day 1 tied 1-1 at France, the United States led Belgium 2-0, Ukraine won both matches against Romania, Germany was ahead of host Brazil 2-0, host Australia took a 2-0 lead over Mexico, and Slovakia was up 2-

0 against visiting Slovenia. In Orlando, on an outdoor hard court, Jessica Pegula and Emma Navarro both turned around deficits to beat 19-year-old Belgian opponents as the Americans got off to a 2-0 start in Lindsay Davenport's debut as the U.S. Captain. Pegula escaped with a 4-6 6-2 6-3 victory against Sofia Costoulas, before Navarro topped Hanne Vandewinkel 4-6 6-4 6-3. In Amelia Island, Florida — where Ukraine chose to play these matches because of its

war with Russia back home - Elina Svitolina was a 6-3, 7-5 winner over Romania's Jaqueline Adina Cristian on an outdoor clay court, and Lesia Tsurenko beat Ana Bogdan 3-6 6-2 6-0. In Biel, Switzerland, Swiatek - who has won three championships at the French Open and one at the U.S. Open - broke Simona Waltert five times on an indoor hard court to win 6-3, 6-1, before Magdalena Frech came back to beat Celine Naef 6-7(8) 7-5 6-3.



Dhoni in spotlight as CSK, MI resume rivalry in new era



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni will be in the spotlight in what could be his final game at the iconic Wankhede Stadium when defending champions Chennai Super Kings take on Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

Dhoni returns to the hallowed turf of Wankhede for the first time ever as a non-captain of the CSK, potentially in his last IPL season. It will also be his first appearance as just a play-

er for any team since November 2005. Even at 42, Dhoni's glove-work remains impeccable and so does his assessment of the game like always. But CSK will hope that his tactical acumen also helps them improve a dismal away record this season, having suffered two defeats on the road.

CSK would also hope their recent record against MI — four wins in last five matches including their seven-wicket win here last season — holds them in good stead. Two of IPL's most successful

teams with five titles each, both sides are witnessing a tectonic shift of leadership change with Hardik Pandya taking over the mantle from Rohit Sharma at MI and Ruturaj Gaikwad succeeding Dhoni at CSK, but there is nothing that suggests their intense rivalry would expect any such shift.

If anything, CSK's bowlers could be put to sword by the rampaging MI batters who have gone hammer and tongs at the flat pitches here, scoring in excess of 230 against Delhi Capitals and chasing down

nearly 200 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru with more than four overs to spare. Pandya's MI have found their footing after a jittery start. Their batters have done well in the last two outings and Suryakumar Yadav's 17-ball fifty against RCB provides an ominous sign to CSK bowlers, who have shown mastery on slow, turning pitches at the Chepauk but remain untested on flat, batting-friendly surfaces.

Ishan Kishan (161 runs) and Rohit's opening stand would thus be crucial in the scheme

of things but CSK would also have a lot of assurance with their own batting.

Skipper Gaikwad may not be a marauder with the bat but he can be the silent enforcer in the CSK line-up, which has the exuberance of Rachin Ravindra at the top, sturdiness of Daryl Mitchell in the middle and explosiveness of Shivam Dube (176 runs), Ravindra Jadeja and Dhoni in the death overs.

CSK would also be aware that seeing off the dexterous Jasprit Bumrah (10 wickets) and going after the rest of the MI



Ponting advised me to focus on timing the ball: Fraser

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Delhi Capitals young batting sensation Jake Fraser-McGurk says if he could handle the nerves on his IPL debut, the credit goes to coach Ricky Ponting, who advised him to time the ball instead of swinging his bat wildly.

Fraser-McGurk, who turned 22 on Thursday, was handed debut on Friday against Lucknow Super Giants. Fraser-McGurk, who holds the record for the fastest List A century in 29 balls, seized the opportunity with both hands, smashing a 35-ball 55 to set up their six-wicket win, that helped move up from the bottom of the standings. "My instincts are aggressive, but before I went out to bat, Ricky said just focus on the timing, middle ball, don't try to hit it too hard," said the Victorian.

"That sort of helped me ease my nerves, went out there and had a great innings, and hopefully continue doing it." He began by hitting six off Yash Thakur in the very second ball he faced, then he hammered Arshad Khan for a 96-metre six. But his biggest assault came against India spin bowling all-rounder Krunal Pandya when he spanked him for

three sixes in a row to virtually kill the contest. "It's just the same thing I've been doing in every other game for the last eight months -- watch the ball, react to it and play to your instinct," Fraser-McGurk, who struck five sixes and two fours during his innings, spoke about his approach. Having gone unsold at the auction, the young Aussie top-order batter, who has two ODI appearances, was signed at his base price of Rs 50 lakh as a replacement for Lungi Ngidi.

Before IPL, the youngster played three matches for Dubai Capitals in the ILT20 this season where he scored 109 runs in his three innings at a strike rate of 213.72.

A surreal moment

"It was a surreal moment, obviously it hadn't sunk in yet playing in the IPL. It's just an amazing team and organisation to be part of," an elated Jake added while talking about his memorable debut. "It's an amazing feeling being able to contribute to Delhi Capitals' win and hopefully we keep this going. The atmosphere out here is unbelievable, stadiums are massive, so many people and always loud. It's a lot different to back home," he concluded.

KKR seek home comfort against Mayank less LSG

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Two-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders will seek home comfort in their bid to return to winning ways when they face a depleted Lucknow Super Giants in an Indian Premier League match here on Sunday.



The match will be KKR's first of the five matches at home on the trot and the Gautam Gambhir-mentored side will be fully aware this can prove decisive to clinch the play-off spot for the first time since 2021. In the points tally, nothing separates the two teams, both of whom have secured three wins each, and lost their respective last-round matches. KKR's over-reliance on their Caribbean ageing duo of Sunil Narine and Andre Russell was exposed by defending champions Chennai Super Kings when they lost by seven wickets in their previous outing.

Narine (27) and Russell (10) failed with the bat and the team, who had posted two 200-plus scores from three matches on the back of the Caribbean duo's blazing form, could manage an under par 137/9 at Chennai.

ter Venkatesh Iyer has three single digit scores this season to go with one odd fifty against Royal Challengers Bengaluru and the team, it seems, doesn't have a clear role for him. From batting at No. 3 in their IPL opener against Sunrisers Hyderabad, Iyer was seen in the finisher's role at No. 7 and No. 5 in their last two matches. Ramandeep Singh also had a lean run after an impressive 35 against SRH.

The 2022 U-19 World Cup winning Angkrish Raghuvanshi has impressed the most following his 54 against Delhi Capitals. And he will like to return among runs after failing to convert his start against CSK.

The Aussie speed gun has an economy of 11.00 and took his first wicket of this IPL against DC after giving away 100 runs in the first two matches.

Rahul, Langer backing motivated me: LSG batter Badoni

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Young Lucknow Super Giants batter Ayush Badoni credited skipper KL Rahul and coach Justin Langer for keeping faith in him despite his disappointing run early in the ongoing IPL season, saying their support helped him perform against the Delhi Capitals, albeit in a losing cause. The 24-year-old Badoni struck an unbeaten 55 off 35 balls to help resurrect LSG's innings and post a competitive 167 for 7, a target which the Delhi Capitals achieved in 18.1 overs here on Friday.



"The start of the season was not good but I was doing well at the nets. So I am thankful to KL Rahul and Justin Langer for backing me and giving me chance," Badoni said at the post-match press conference. "While I was batting I was just thinking of taking the game deep and then attack because if we bat till 20 overs we can score 150 plus. I think we were 20 runs short."

"I was quite motivated because I was batting well at the nets so I was just backing myself. I was just waiting for the knock which came today," Badoni said he shares a good bonding with both the skipper and coach and that has helped him in improving his game. "I spoke a lot to KL Rahul and he backs me everytime. He tells me you are best player and you can finish well. I also share a good bonding with Justin. I went to Australia last year and there also he made learn a few things and improved my game," he said.

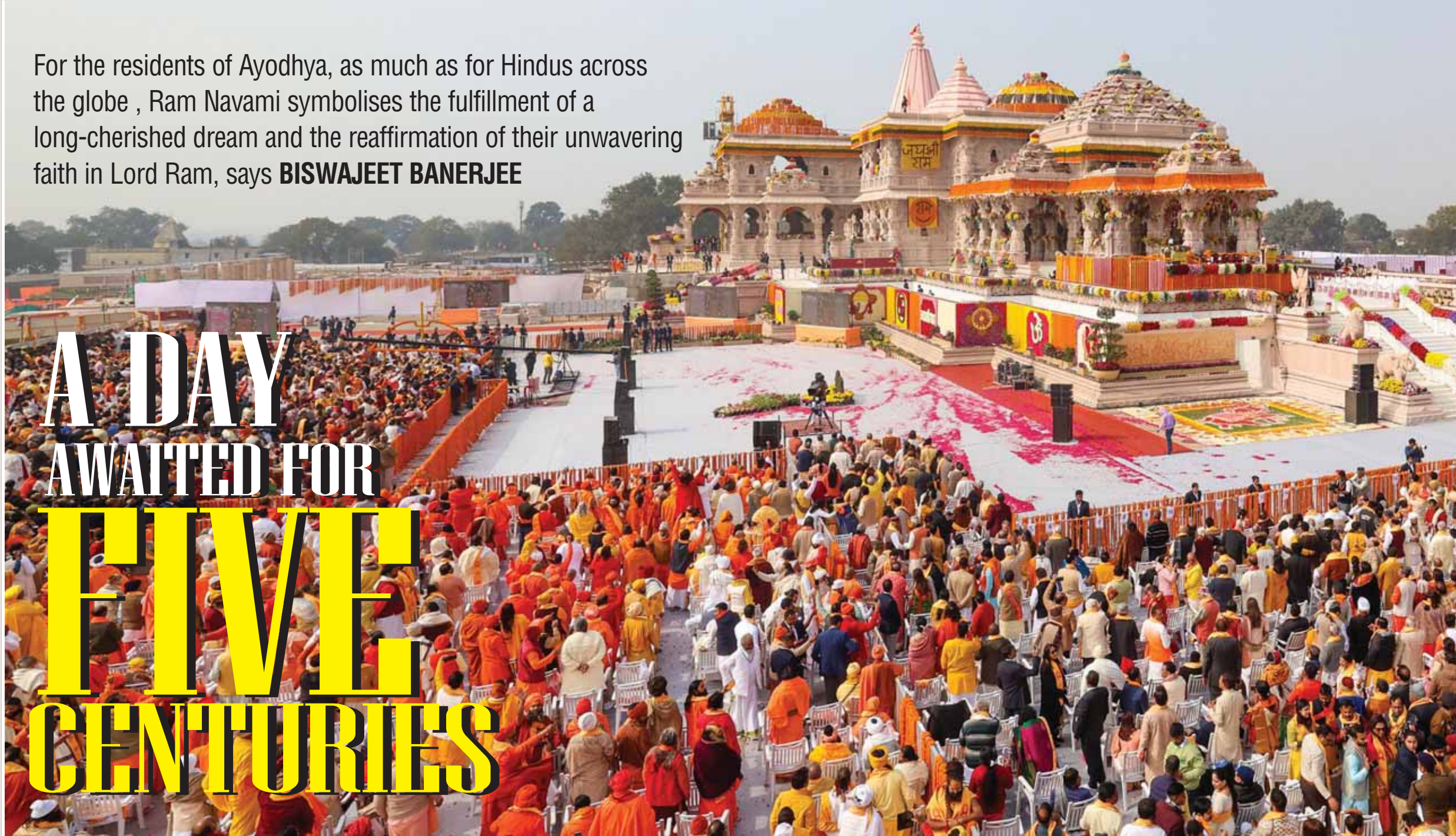
"I went to Australia in September last which was facilitated by LSG where we had a training camp with Justin for 10 days and that helped me a lot," Badoni said DC spinner Kuldeep Yadav (3/20) turned out to be match-winner. "Kuldeep was bowling well. He broke our momentum," he said. DC assistant coach Pravin Amre believes Jake Fraser-McGurk's whirlwind knock in

"So long as you have food
in your mouth, you have
solved all questions for the
time being"
— Franz Kafka



For the residents of Ayodhya, as much as for Hindus across the globe, Ram Navami symbolises the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream and the reaffirmation of their unwavering faith in Lord Ram, says **BISWAJEET BANERJEE**

A DAY AWAITED FOR FIVE CENTURIES



AYODHYA,

the ancient city steeped in the rich tapestry of Hindu mythology and history, is poised to witness an unparalleled spectacle as it gears up to celebrate its first Ram Navami following the consecration of the majestic Ram Mandir. The air is filled with anticipation and reverence as devotees from all corners of India flock to this sacred land to partake in the festivities honoring Lord Ram, the epitome of righteousness and virtue.

Months of meticulous planning and fervent preparations have culminated in the grandeur that envelops Ayodhya today. The city, adorned with vibrant colors and resounding chants of "Jai Shri Ram," exudes an aura of spirituality and devotion that is palpable in every nook and cranny.

The consecration of the Ram Mandir, a momentous event that resonated deeply with millions of devotees across the globe, has added an extra layer of significance to this year's Ram Navami celebrations. For the residents of Ayodhya, it symbolizes the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream and the reaffirmation of their unwavering faith in Lord Ram.

Radha Sharma, a local resident, encapsulated the sentiments of many when she said, "This Ram Navami holds a special place in our hearts. It's not just about celebrating the birth of Lord Ram; it's about witnessing the fruition of our faith and devotion."

As the countdown to Ram Navami begins, devotees throng the Ram Mandir, eager to offer their prayers and seek the blessings of the divine. The atmosphere is electric with fervent devotion as chants of "Jai Shri Ram" reverberate through the streets, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers.

Ramesh Singh, a pilgrim from Bihar, echoed the sentiments of countless others as he remarked, "Ram Navami is not just a festival; it's a spiritual journey. Being here in Ayodhya, amidst the sacred surroundings, fills my heart with joy and peace."

At the heart of the celebrations lies the Ram Mandir, believed to be situated at the very spot where Lord Rama, the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu, was born. For devotees, it is not merely a structure but a sacred sanctum that serves as a beacon of hope and divine connection.

ADMINISTRATION STRATEGY

As Ayodhya braces itself for the influx of around 50 lakh devotees in all nine days of Ram Navami, the administration has meticulously crafted a comprehensive crowd management strategy to ensure the safety and convenience of all participants. The maximum rush of 25 lakh-30 lakh devotees is expected on the Ram Navami day of April 17 – when people take a dip at river Saryu.



Ram Navam A Celebration of Faith and Virtue

Ram Navami transcends the realms of mere festivity; it embodies a profound reaffirmation of faith and the timeless virtues exemplified by Lord Rama. Though revered as a deity, Lord Rama epitomizes the human manifestation of a divine force, embodying qualities of righteousness and compassion that resonate with every individual. The celebration of Ram Navami serves as a spiritual compass, guiding devotees towards a path of benevolence and virtuosity, fostering personal growth and evolution. As the culmination of the nine-day Chaitra Navratri celebrations, Ram Navami holds a special significance, particularly in Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Rama. The Hindu month of Chaitra, heralding the transition from spring to summer, sets the stage for this auspicious occasion, elevating its sanctity and joy.

The celebration unfolds with a prayer to the sun at the break of dawn, symbolizing the dawn of enlightenment and spiritual awakening. At midday, a special prayer commemorates the divine birth of Lord Ram, invoking blessings and divine grace upon all. The spirit of celebration extends beyond the temples, as Rath yatras or chariot processions of Lord Ram, accompanied by his consort Sita, brother Lakshman, and devoted Hanuman, traverse the streets, spreading joy and spiritual fervor. The devotees converge on the banks of the sacred Sarayu River, immersing themselves in its purifying waters, seeking spiritual rejuvenation and divine blessings.

BRING SATTU TO STAY COOL

As temperatures soar in anticipation of Ram Navami, the Ram Mandir Trust has issued a special plea to devotees: bring along Sattu. Recognized for its cooling properties, Sattu, a traditional flour, promises respite from the scorching heat, ensuring the well-being and comfort of pilgrims during their visit to Ayodhya. Champat Rai, the Convener of the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, underscored the significance of hydration and maintaining a cool



demeanor amidst the festivities. He urged devotees to embrace Sattu as a means to combat the sweltering temperatures, emphasizing its effectiveness in beating the heat.

With the welfare of devotees at the forefront, the Trust's initiative aims to ensure a pleasant and comfortable experience for all pilgrims as they partake in the sacred celebrations of Ram Navami in Ayodhya.

(Additional reporting done by BP Singh from Ayodhya).

In anticipation of the monumental crowds expected to throng the city, a strategic deployment of magistrates and police personnel has been planned. Heightened security measures will be implemented at sensitive areas and major temples, including the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, to prevent any untoward incidents. Efforts are underway to facilitate smooth entry and exit at the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, with the Trust exploring multiple entries and exits to avoid potential stampede-like situations. Additionally, arrangements have been made to provide water and mats on open floors, considering the approaching hot weather conditions, ensuring the comfort of devotees. To address any medical emergencies, round-the-clock medical facilities with extra beds will be available in both government health institutions and private hospitals. Traffic management will be streamlined, and vigilant monitoring will be conducted to identify and segregate any criminal elements.

The administration is leaving no stone unturned to enhance safety and convenience for devotees taking a dip in the sacred Sarayu River during Ram Navami. Additional fiber motorboats have been deployed, and barricades will be set up in the river to regulate the flow of people, facilitating secure access for devotees. Moreover, elaborate arrangements are being made for public toilets and regular cleaning, with over 2,000 sanitation workers mobilized for this purpose. Chief Secretary Durga Shankar Mishra affirmed, "We have taken all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of pilgrims and residents alike. Our priority is to facilitate a peaceful and joyous celebration of Ram Navami."

ECONOMIC STIMULUS THROUGH FESTIVITIES

The festivities have not only kindled the flames of spirituality but have also breathed new life into Ayodhya's economy. Local businesses have witnessed a surge in sales

of religious artifacts, sweets, and traditional attire, as tourists and pilgrims alike immerse themselves in the spiritual ambiance of the city.

Ram Gupta, a local businessman, remarked, "The consecration of the Ram Mandir has brought prosperity to Ayodhya. We've seen a significant increase in sales, and tourists are eager to experience the cultural heritage of our city." Behind the scenes, skilled artisans have toiled tirelessly to craft intricate idols and decorations for the celebrations. From colorful rangolis adorning the streets to ornate idols of Lord Ram, Sita, and Lakshman, their craftsmanship adds a touch of elegance to the festivities, showcasing Ayodhya's rich cultural heritage to the world.

Ram Das, one such artisan, shared his sentiments, "For us, this Ram Navami is not just about business; it's about contributing to something larger than

ourselves. Crafting these idols is a way of expressing our devotion to Lord Ram and our love for our heritage."

Footfall in these days is tremendous bringing smiles on the faces of hoteliers. Sharad Kapoor, Director, Shaane Awadh Hotel told this reporter that not a single room is available till Ram Navami. "All the hotels, home stays and dharmshalas are booked, and the hospitality sector is doing very well since January 22," he said. Ram Navami is not merely a commemoration; it is a transformative journey, a celebration of faith, virtue, and the eternal triumph of good over evil. As the devotees unite in reverence and devotion, Ayodhya reverberates with the timeless chants of "Jai Shri Ram," echoing the enduring legacy of Lord Rama's divine grace and benevolence.



NAVRATRI

A FESTIVAL OF TRADITION, INNOVATION, AND WELLNESS

Beyond its religious significance, Navratri embraces fasting practices that promote detoxification, improved digestion, and overall wellness. **DIVYA BHATIA** explores how this nine-day celebration intertwines spiritual devotion with a mindful approach to nourishment

Navratri, a nine-day festival celebrated in Northern India, holds immense significance, dedicated to Goddess Durga. Derived from Sanskrit, 'Navratri' signifies 'nine nights,' with each day devoted to one of Durga's nine forms. Falling twice a year, Navratri marks the onset of joyous festivities after the spring or during the harvest season.

Legend surrounds Navratri, with stories of Goddess Durga's triumph over evil. Whether battling Mahishasura for nine days or seeking refuge in a cave at Vaishno Devi, fasting and feasting rituals commemorate these tales. Regardless of the narrative, Navratri heralds a season of exuberance, marked by vibrant celebrations and abundant sweets.

During Navratri, adherents observe dietary restrictions, abstaining from grains and opting for satvik foods like Sabudana, kuttu, and rajgira. Fasting typically involves consuming only once or twice daily, with a focus on water, dairy, and fruits. Some prefer meals made from buckwheat or water chestnut flour, reflecting individual fasting preferences.

Health experts advocate controlled fasting, citing benefits such as reduced inflammation, improved digestion, and enhanced overall well-being. Despite myths surrounding weight gain, Navratri fasting encourages a healthier lifestyle, emphasizing fruits, salads, and detoxification practices.

In recent years, the F&B industry has recognized Navratri's potential, leading to innovations in Navratri cuisine. Evolving with changing dietary trends, Navratri food offerings now cater to health-conscious consumers, featuring lighter cooking methods and nutritious ingredients. As people prioritize health during the festival, Navratri continues to inspire culinary creativity while promoting well-being.

Adding to this spiritual significance, Chef Mani Mohan Pathak of Pilibhit House, Haridwar- IHCL SeleQtions, emphasizes the festival's evolution in the culinary world, stating, "Fasting is performed from ancient times, there are certain restrictions on fasting. Now fasting is getting fashioned, business, innovation and popular trends. Now the trend is towards healthier Navratri food options, with dietary preferences. The incorporation of superfoods like Makhana, quinoa and chia seeds, as well as creative twists on traditional recipes using ingredients such as sweet potato, sabudana, and buckwheat flour. Additionally, an emphasis on lighter cooking methods such as baking, or air frying, to reduce oil consumption. Overall, there's a growing awareness of nutrition and a desire to enjoy Navratri festivities without compromising on health goals."

Agreeing with Chef Pathak, Chef Sreenivasan Govindarajan, Director Culinary, Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport, shared, "In recent years, Navratri food trends have seen a steady focus on tradition with a subtle shift towards health consciousness and innovation. However, the fundamental choices in Navratri cuisine have remained largely unchanged. What's notable, though, is the growing emphasis on hygiene and the meticulous preparation of dishes. People today are more conscious about the cleanliness of their food, reflecting a broader trend towards prioritizing health and well-being even during cultural celebrations. This nuanced approach ensures that while the flavors remain traditional, each dish is prepared with care and attention to hygiene, meeting the evolving tastes and standards of modern times."

While Navratri presents chefs with challenges, including limited ingredients, Chef Ashutosh Bisht of Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla remains undeterred. He explains, "Creating a menu that is both healthy and tasty within the constraints of limited ingredients poses a significant challenge. With a restricted palette of options, the key lies in maximizing flavor and variety despite the constraints." This sentiment is echoed by Chef Sreenivasan Govindarajan, who emphasizes the importance of balancing taste and nutrition in Navratri cuisine.

He said, "Balancing taste and nutrition becomes paramount, requiring careful selection and preparation of ingredients to ensure that each dish is not only fulfilling but also delicious. Overcoming this challenge demands creativity and ingenuity in the kitchen, as chefs strive to craft flavorful Navratri meals that satisfy both the palate and the nutritional



Photo: Pankaj Kumar

SPIRITUAL FOOD

CHEF ADITI DIXIT, a culinary virtuoso at CYK Hospitality, is renowned for her innovative approach to gastronomy. With a passion for crafting exquisite dishes that tantalize the taste buds, Chef Dixit elevates dining experiences to new heights. Chef Aditi Dixit talked about Navratri offerings. Excerpts



What trends have you observed in Navratri food over recent years, particularly in response to increasing health consciousness and a desire for innovative dishes?

In recent years, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, several noteworthy trends have emerged in Navratri cuisine. These trends are predominantly driven by a growing awareness of health considerations and a desire for culinary innovation. One significant trend involves the use of healthier ingredients, where there has been a notable shift away from refined flours towards alternatives such as buckwheat flour, amaranth flour, kuttu flour, and water chestnut flour. These alternatives, being gluten-free and often considered healthier options, have gained popularity among health-conscious individuals.

Moreover, there has been an increasing adoption of low-oil cooking techniques to reduce overall calorie intake and create lighter meals. Techniques such as baking, steaming, and air-frying have become preferred methods during Navratri, aligning with health-conscious dietary preferences.

What benefits does Navratri food offer, and what challenges do you face when creating a menu that is both healthy and tasty within the limitations of ingredients?

Navratri fasting offers several benefits when approached mindfully. It encourages the consumption of a diverse array of foods, including fruits,

fasting can also support weight control by emphasizing lighter, plant-based foods and avoiding processed and high-calorie options.

However, creating a Navratri menu that is both healthy and flavorful comes with its challenges. Fasting during Navratri imposes restrictions on certain ingredients such as grains, pulses, onions, garlic, and common spices, necessitating creativity in utilizing alternative ingredients without compromising taste and nutrition. Additionally, maintaining a balanced nutritional profile, particularly in terms of protein intake, can be challenging due to limitations on traditional protein sources like lentils and beans. Hence, increasing the incorporation of dairy products, nuts, seeds, and plant proteins becomes crucial.

Moreover, catering to individual allergies, intolerances, and dietary preferences adds another layer of complexity when designing a menu that caters to a diverse group of people observing Navratri fasting.

Could you share one of your most unique Navratri dishes that you've created recently, which has been particularly popular?

Certainly! We recently introduced an extensive Navratri menu featuring innovative dishes such as sweet potato & amaranth kebab, vegan millet tikki, arbi tuk chaat, hasselback aloo chaat, paan rose lassi, and kesar pista lassi. Among these offerings, the sweet potato and amaranth kebab stands out for its unique and versatile flavour profile. It has garnered significant popularity among our patrons and remains a personal favourite of mine as well.

Which ingredient do you find most versatile in Navratri cuisine?

For me personally, sabudana, also known as tapioca pearls or sago, is an incredibly versatile ingredient commonly used during Navratri fasting. Its adaptability lends itself to a myriad of beloved dishes, including sabudana khichdi, thalipeeth, kheer, vada, salad, chiwda, and papad, making it an indispensable element in Navratri cuisine.



HEALTHIER SHIFT IN NAVRATRI CUISINE

With a passion for blending traditional flavors with modern techniques, **CHEF GAURAV** has carved a niche for himself in the culinary world. His dedication to quality ingredients, attention to detail, and commitment to culinary excellence have earned him accolades from both diners and peers alike. Here he talks about Navratri food. Excerpts.

What trends have you observed in Navratri food over recent years, particularly in response to increasing health consciousness and a desire for innovative dishes?

Over recent years, we've noticed a significant shift towards healthier ingredients in Navratri cuisine. Millets like Foxtail and Rajgira are now replacing refined sabudana in dishes like khichdi, offering a more nutritious alternative. Moreover, there's been an increased emphasis on incorporating fruits and vegetables, such as Buckwheat flour rotis stuffed with veggies and salads featuring ingredients like lotus stem and water chestnuts. Additionally, alternatives to dairy like almond milk, coconut milk, and soy milk are being used in dishes like halwa, cheela, and puddings. These changes reflect a growing desire among people to celebrate Navratri while maintaining a

healthy lifestyle. **What kind of benefits does Navratri food offer? What challenges do you face when creating a menu that is both healthy and tasty with limitations of ingredients?**

Navratri food, despite its limitations in ingredients, offers a surprising range of health benefits. The focus on whole grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables provides a detoxifying effect, improves digestion, and boosts immunity. However, creating a menu that is both healthy and tasty can be challenging due to restrictions such as no onions, garlic, or certain grains. The key lies in getting creative with spices, herbs, and alternative flours to craft flavorful dishes that satisfy the palate while meeting dietary requirements.

Could you share one of your most unique Navratri dishes that you've

created recently, which has been super popular?

Certainly! One of our most beloved Navratri dishes is our Tandoori Sweet Potato Chaat. We start with tandoor-roasted sweet potatoes, which are then tossed in a vibrant medley of mint chutney (crafted without onion and garlic), sweet and tangy dates chutney, a touch of rock salt (sendha namak), crushed black pepper, a squeeze of lemon juice, and chopped green chilies. Finally, we add a delightful crunch of roasted peanuts and crispy fried potato laccha.

It's a harmonious blend of textures and flavors that has quickly become a Navratri favorite among our patrons.

Which ingredient do you find most versatile in Navratri cuisine?

Chef: Black pepper.



requirements of the fasting period."

While it's often said that Navratri can ward off evil, Chef Deshraj Punia, Executive Sous Chef at Citadines Paras Square Gurugram, highlights another aspect. He emphasizes that Navratri food possesses the ability to cleanse the body of toxins and impurities. He emphasized, "I want to mention that Navratri food is healthier than what we eat every day. It's not too heavy on the stomach, so it keeps you feeling fit and energetic all day long. Surprisingly, it also helps boost the immune system and reduces the risk of cancer and heart attacks for those who fast. We don't really face any challenges because Navratri has been around for a long time, so it's part of our culture. We're used to the ingredients used in Navratri food, and since we're living in a time where health is important, it encourages us to try new and creative dishes. It's always good to explore new things instead of sticking to the same old dishes."

Despite challenges, chefs remain undeterred in their quest to create unique dishes and push culinary boundaries. For example, Kuttu Lapsi by Chef Ashutosh Bisht, Executive Sous Chef, Crowne Plaza New Delhi Okhla is an innovative dish. "We created this dish using raw kuttu in its early stage of



Photo: Pankaj Kumar

ripening. This innovative twist has yielded fantastic results, offering a healthy and delicious alternative to traditional Navratri fare," he shared. Whereas, Mr. Kamal Kanth, Executive Chef, Sambarpot, defines his 'Kashmiri dum aloo with stuffed paneer, khoya & dry fruits' as the person's favorite from Navratri thali. What surprised us were Sabudana Dumplings that are created by Chef Deshraj Punia, who shared with pride, "We give them a unique twist by

shallow frying them, which makes them look like a fusion dish. They're cooked in desi ghee, which is good for both your skin and stomach, and they taste really delicious and light."

Bringing out the best dish also depends on the ingredients used in creating the best dish. But with limitations of options, innovation is key to success. Ingredients like Potato, Sweet Potato, Buckwheat, all are there, but which ingredients are most versatile? Chef Ashutosh Bisht thinks it's curd as he rightly pointed out its benefits. It can be used to create refreshing drinks, flavorful subzi preparations, or even desserts. Additionally, it's a great source of energy that can be digested quickly, making it an ideal component for Navratri meals.

According to Chef Mani Mohan Pathak, the key ingredient is potato/ sweet potatoes and sabudana. Potato is been used plain boiled/ fried and roasted. Further, potato is used in sabudana khichdi, tikkis, sabzi, and even kuttu ki puris or parathas made from potato flour.

Overall, we can say that Navratri brings with it a delightful culinary experience that caters to both tradition and taste. This vibrant festival has brought out the creative side of the F&B world and continues to inspire many without compromising on health.

MY WIFE NEELAM IS A NORTH INDIAN, SO SHE WILL MAKE NORTH INDIAN FOOD, WHILE MY MOTHER WILL MAKE BENGALI FOOD
—RONIT ROY

SHUBHO NOBO BORSHO

Today is *Poila Boishakh*, a day when Bengalis across the globe usher in their new year. And what better way to celebrate than food. **SHOBORI GANGULI** joined the feast and festivities at Hyatt Gurugram with critically acclaimed **CHEF ANANYA BANERJEE** whose signature take on a traditional Bengali feast made it a special day indeed



The first day of the Bengali New Year is not just another date on the calendar to mark for rituals and ceremonies. It is all about cultural bonhomie, dance and music, a day to let your hair down, meet friends and family over a grand meal, a day when even the most humble of kitchens becomes the fulcrum of all celebrations, with everyone on the lookout for a feast to remember. Truth be told, nothing can vie with the spirit that enwraps all of Bengal this day. But for *probashi* (non-resident) Bengalis like me, scattered across the country, we crave to partake of a sumptuous spread, course by course, from a traditional kitchen this special day which, for many of us, dwells only in the realms of nostalgia.

In this context one draws immense consolation from the fact that roving itinerant chefs like Ananya Banerjee are rewriting centuries old traditional manuscripts, rich with secret spices and untold innovations, for a generation that is clawing back to find its roots today.

The Chef's Bengal Bhoj at Hyatt this weekend provided that opportunity. For my generation, Chef Banerjee's creations are a warm and nostalgic embrace from a distant past when our tiny lives revolved around our grandmother's or mother's kitchens, a time when festivals meant food, each meal a feast. Little did we know back then that as we grew older we would simultaneously travel far away from those kitchens, from their aromas and flavours.

It is therefore heartening to know that someone like Chef Banerjee, while keeping her much wider international clientele in mind, has carved a unique niche for herself in her quest to recover the history and philosophy that informs Bengal's exquisite culinary heritage. As



CHEF ANANYA BANERJEE

she puts it, that while going traditional, "I tend to be very progressive when I curate a Chef's table."

True to her promise, the Chef laid out a lavish *Poila Boishakh* spread, from a live Bengali street food counter of *Phuchkas* and *Churmur* to appetizers like *Chicken Kobiraji*, *Mochaar Chop* and *Bhetki Paturi* or the vegetarian alternative of *Paneer Paturi*.

The main course meandered its delectable way through *Phulko Loochi*, *Chholar Daal*, *Kosha Maangsho* and *Aloo Posto*. Accompanied by steamed rice were Chef Banerjee's innovative twists to the traditional *Prawn Malai Curry* and *Lebu Lonka Murgi*.

Bengalis are never far behind when it comes to desserts. Even after a rich and sumptuous meal, there's always space left to accommodate some *mishiti* to sign off a great feast. Chef Banerjee's Baked *Roshogulla* with *Jhola Nolen Gur* (a liquid syrup of date jaggery) delicately poured on top was really an elixir from heaven. So was the *Patishapta*, crepes with a rich filling of grated coconut and *khejurer gur* (date jaggery). The *Mango Baked Yogurt* too beckoned our undivided attention.

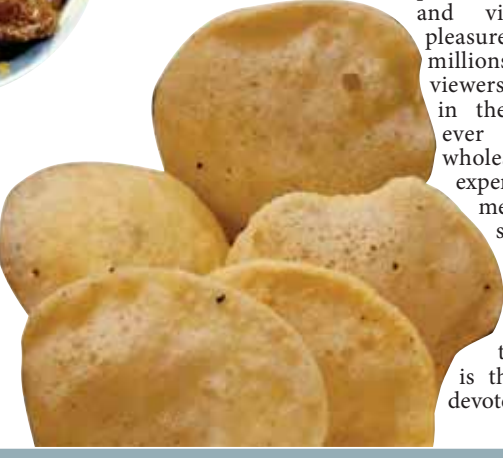
Even as technology takes over our time and lives, and reels and Instagrams provide instant and vicarious pleasure to millions of viewers, nothing in the world can ever replace the wholesome sensory experience of enjoying a good meal real time, even as our senses come alive to the sight, aromas, textures and sounds of a live kitchen.

The one attribute that sets Chef Banerjee apart from the rest of her tribe is the personal attention she devotes to every guest. She flits



around the entire dining hall, at times personally mixing the magical *phuchka* filling to the guests's satisfaction, or taking them on a guided tour through her handcrafted menu, her play with spices and herbs writ large on the fare she puts out. Chef Banerjee's energy and vivacity is truly infectious, her culinary creations "something to live for," as a friend at the table put it.

A very Happy New Year to all of you out there!
(Please reach out for the May Edition of our magazine EXOTICA for a detailed story on the above)



EXPLORING THE WORLD OF SINGLE ORIGINS, FLAT WHITES, AND BEYOND!

Melbourne boasts an abundance of café choices that can enchant even the most dedicated caffeine enthusiasts

BY RUPALI DEAN

Savouring a meticulously crafted single origin and a robust house blend espresso, Monique gently unveiled the rich history of Melbourne's coffee culture, tracing its origins back to the 1950s with the iconic Pellegrini Espresso Bar—a legacy brought forth by Italian immigrants infusing the city with their profound love for coffee. The Italians' indelible influence catalysed a coffee revolution, paving the way for a proliferation of expert roasters and skilled baristas in the early 2000s. Today, Melbourne stands as a coffee connoisseur's haven, where the alluring aroma of freshly brewed espresso dances through laneways and spills onto bustling streets. Amidst this caffeinated symphony, as I indulged in various espresso creations, my palate gravitated towards the comforting familiarity of the house blend complemented by a hint of milk, embracing the city's love affair with coffee—one fragrant sip at a time.

A PLETHORA OF PASSION

Hailing from Tasmania, the industrious Bayer curates around three tours weekly, meticulously orchestrating bespoke experiences for small groups of no more than ten individuals. The genesis of her guided tours can be traced back to a leisurely café expedition with like-minded coffee enthusiasts in September 2012, sparking the



inception of her immersive walking adventures. Immersed in the ambrosial world of coffee, I found myself savouring a potent single origin espresso, a departure from my usual cup of joe. As Monique divulged the emerging predilection for filter coffee—a gentle brewing method that

intrigued my taste buds—she promised to introduce me to this nuanced approach during our escapade. The art of coffee filtration, she explained, unfolds like a scientific exploration, offering an array of techniques to unlock diverse flavours and aromas. Monique's insatiable quest for hidden local treasures



Monique Bayer



A local coffee maker

unearthed gems like Bean by Workshop Bros, discreetly marked by a modest overhead sign, and Industry Beans, celebrated for its trendy ambience and revered for concocting the velvety Aussie Flat Whites. In her relentless pursuit of culinary marvels, she unveils these well-kept secrets, enriching our expedition with tantalizing discoveries at every turn.

COFFEE LOVE

Immersed in the vibrant tapestry of Melbourne's coffee culture, I found myself navigating a world of tantalizing options tailored even to those adhering to a paleo diet. The allure of butter coffee, touted for its purported benefits of heightened vitality and

drive, beckoned from establishments like Patch Café in Richmond and Seedling in Flinders Lane, promising a unique caffeinated experience. Enlightened by Monique's insights, I learned that a true Melbournian's relationship with coffee hinges on quality, with subpar brews failing to captivate discerning palates. Amidst the lively chatter of coffee aficionados, terms like cupping, siphon, AeroPress, and pour-over resonated across the eclectic coffee shops lining our path, each method a testament to Melbourne's fervent coffee affair.

Our sojourn led us to Maker, where I indulged in the intricate

art of filter coffee, opting for the elaborate cold drip variant—a meticulous 12 to 24-hour extraction process that accentuates the bean's essence while tempering bitterness. Here, I unearthed the enchanting novelty of frozen coffee, a departure from the conventional iced coffee of my homeland, where coffee is customized, frozen, and preserved until beckoned for consumption. In Melbourne, coffee transcends mere refreshment; it is a sacred ritual, where reverence for the brew and the bean intertwine seamlessly. As the day unfolded with myriad caffeine-infused revelations, this latest discovery stood as a crowning jewel, a testament to a city that embraces coffee with a sanctity unmatched elsewhere.

(Awarded the "Best food writer in the country" by the Indian culinary forum, WACS and the ministry of Tourism, Rupali Dean writes on food and travel.)





YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

This week, you're poised for financial prosperity and professional advancement, bringing a sense of contentment to your life. Your innate curiosity and inventive outlook keep you feeling rejuvenated and passionate, contributing to a youthful vigor. Family joy is amplified, especially through the achievements and joy that come from younger members, reinforcing your belief in the simplicity and joy beyond material possessions. Your naturally independent spirit allows you to navigate changes with ease, adding to your happiness. However, the sphere of romantic connections presents challenges. Although there's potential for new beginnings and the stirrings of deep feelings, these early stages of companionship might not culminate in lasting fulfillment. Efforts to strengthen existing bonds may also encounter obstacles, requiring patience and understanding to navigate.

Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Magenta
Lucky day Friday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

This week, you find yourself deeply engaged in spiritual practices, embracing these moments with joy. However, a shadow of discord and unfriendly intentions looms over you, casting a pall. You may encounter a situation where your accomplishments are threatened by those with a crafty mindset, presenting a significant challenge to navigate. In the face of such adversity, it's crucial to guard your steps carefully, leaving no openings for exploitation. Despite the hard work you've invested without immediate signs of change, a reflective pause can reveal the progress you've made, boosting your determination. Financial gains mid-week signal a phase of abundance, enhancing your sense of material security. Moreover, the week promises joyful occasions, with gatherings and celebrations marking the fulfillment of personal aspirations, reflecting a harmonious blend of success across different facets of your life.

Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour Mint
Lucky day Saturday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

This week, you embody an exceptional level of inner fortitude and intellectual acumen, thinking expansively and aiming high. Demonstrating courage, patience, and a disciplined approach to your desires signifies a deep-seated resolve. This kind of inner strength and radiance speaks to a profound connection with your inner self. You find great significance in engaging deeply with practices that enhance your inner power, reflecting a strong inclination towards spiritual growth. Many find that embracing a path of spiritual enrichment leads to a greater sense of stability and a transformative uplift in their overall outlook and lifestyle. Adopting practices like meditation can significantly benefit your holistic wellbeing, aligning your physical, mental, and spiritual facets harmoniously. As the week concludes, the diligent pursuit of your goals begins to bear fruit, rewarding you with prosperity and robust health.

Lucky number 17 | Lucky colour Burgundy
Lucky day Wednesday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

Your creativity and boundless imagination empower you to sculpt your reality to your desires. This week, anticipate joyful milestones that symbolize new beginnings and growth. At your core, you embody the essence of love, kindness, and empathy. You seek harmony and are adept at avoiding discord and disputes. Although you might appear contemplative and reserved, you possess an underlying courage and resolve. You embrace the power of your dreams, striving to turn the seemingly impossible into reality. Expect an unforeseen positive shift that will pleasantly surprise you, marking a significant turn in your journey. New endeavors related to your career or business are on the horizon, promising substantial rewards that will elevate your self-assurance. Having invested considerable effort into achieving balance, you now find yourself in a place of calm and contentment.

Lucky number 21 | Lucky colour Lime
Lucky day Monday



VirGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This week calls for quick, determined moves on your part. A fresh wave of vitality is set to sweep aside any haze of uncertainty or negative vibes, paving the way for open dialogues and the initiation of new endeavors. There's a strong chance for progress in plans involving travel abroad, with preparations now complete, signaling readiness for a new journey. Moreover, you're on the cusp of a profound shift in your beliefs and values, leading to a more aligned and coherent view of your life's direction. Embrace the opportunity to forge new connections, for without the warmth of shared experiences, you may find yourself wrestling with feelings of isolation. A thoughtful approach towards finances and social interactions promises significant benefits during this opportune time. Seize this moment to thrive.

Lucky number 14 | Lucky colour Navy
Lucky day Thursday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This week heralds a period of significant fruition and accomplishment for you. The cosmic rhythm aligns in such a way that your abilities are amplified, enabling you to seize the myriad opportunities that arise. Your belief in higher energies fuels your journey. Your innate creativity is set to flourish, heralding major achievements such as the successful completion of projects, ventures, and other personal milestones. You're surrounded by an aura of well-being, with harmony pervading both your personal and professional environments. Life, in its myriad expressions, offers you abundance and joy. You find satisfaction in your current state, laying a solid foundation for future endeavors. Past concerns are now shadows, leaving you free to embrace an optimistic outlook. Emotional, physical, and deeper pleasures are fully aligned, ensuring contentment on every level.

Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Cream
Lucky day Friday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

This week challenges you to pour your energy into your commitments, leaving little room for personal life and relaxation. Your dedication is unwavering, yet your ambitions still seem distant, casting a shadow of monotony and fatigue over your daily routine. Your tolerance for minor annoyances is thin, causing fluctuations in your emotional state. At times, the desire for guidance or therapeutic support becomes apparent, highlighting the importance of self-care amidst the hustle. Meanwhile, adversaries appear more proactive, posing potential threats to your image and efforts. It's crucial to navigate this period with discretion, making pivotal choices independently to shield against the malicious intentions of others. Staying vigilant and trustful in your judgment will be key to mitigating any detrimental impacts during these times.

Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Ivory
Lucky day Wednesday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week, you find yourself navigating a sea of emotional turbulence, with past wounds and worries keeping you restless. The shadow of regret looms large, highlighting vulnerabilities that seem acute. Your path through this turmoil begins with distinguishing between unfounded fears and genuine issues. Tackling real challenges head-on will dissipate the clouds of anxiety, leading to a serene end to your week. Amidst this emotional upheaval, a calm oasis awaits, offering you space to heal and find clarity. This tranquil period is a chance to soothe your spirit and banish doubts. Additionally, the potential for journeys, whether physical or spiritual, presents itself, inviting you to transcend both positive and negative emotions. By facing and overcoming your fears, you'll emerge with renewed self-esteem and a clearer sense of direction.

Lucky number 18 | Lucky colour Peach
Lucky day Saturday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

An unseen guiding force is poised to illuminate your path, offering clarity and insight during moments of quiet reflection. This phase ushers in a surge of inspiration, energizing you to embark on new ventures that demand your swift action and undivided focus. Now is the moment to harness your potential and sculpt the success you've envisioned. A wave of well-being and vitality is set to envelop you, promising recovery and rejuvenation for those facing health challenges. Relish in this renewed strength. For those who collaborate with others, your integrity and inventive spirit will earn you admiration, fostering a harmonious and fertile ground for shared endeavors. Your dedication and resilience will empower you to overcome obstacles, securing triumphs from the most daunting situations.

Lucky number 20 | Lucky colour Violet
Lucky day Sunday



CANCER June 21-July 22

This week, you find yourself remarkably perceptive and deeply in tune with your surroundings, blessed with an expansive imagination that often carries you into realms of fantasy. Your ability to perceive beyond the surface could rival that of a seer, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach in decision-making—relying on both intuition and intellect. Watch your spending closely; exceeding your budget could lead to financial strain, especially with unforeseen expenses on the horizon. You're juggling numerous projects, stretching across both your personal and professional life, necessitating a reassessment of your priorities. Embracing flexibility and a commitment to self-improvement are key to navigating this period successfully. This balanced approach will not only foster personal growth but also protect you from potential stress and emotional upheaval amidst life's inevitable changes.

Lucky number 19 | Lucky colour Beige
Lucky day Monday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

This week invites deep introspection and a gentle approach to personal challenges. You may encounter moments of low spirits and introspection, highlighting the importance of nurturing close family bonds, especially with maternal figures. Embracing practices such as meditation, yoga, and engaging with inspirational literature can significantly aid in rejuvenating your sense of inner calm and strengthening your cognitive abilities. Midweek, it's essential to stay vigilant about your well-being, as a tendency towards sluggishness could become prominent. Maintaining an optimistic perspective is crucial, as your aspirations and goals are within reach, awaiting realization. For those engaged in professional endeavors, opportunities for advancement or favorable job prospects are on the horizon, signaling a period of swift and positive transitions.

Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour Fuchsia
Lucky day Monday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

This week, you'll radiate a compelling presence, effortlessly capturing the attention and admiration of those around you. Your self-assurance is rooted in a deep understanding of your strengths and the clarity of your purpose. You excel in articulating your thoughts and leading with finesse, ensuring that you steer your life in the direction you desire. This period presents an opportunity for you to achieve recognition and success, as you embrace growth and the joy of discovery. By embracing new perspectives and expanding your horizons, you'll find innovative solutions to challenges, enhancing your intellectual prowess. Your commitment to personal values and generosity not only enriches your own life but also makes a lasting impact on those you encounter, further amplifying your influential energy.

Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour Amber
Lucky day Wednesday

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Reinvent yourself during Navaratra

Greet valued readers on the solemn occasion of Chaitra Navaratra beginning on Hindu New Year, and hence its importance. Hindu annular calendar provides for 4 Navaratri of which the one held during the Hindu month of Ashvin is most sought after. A good number of devout also observe Chaitra Navaratra. Very few pursue the other two. All festivities have their story lines and religious spirit. Be that as they may. But they are so designed and timed as to help one periodically reinvent oneself. It will be interesting to note that the Navaratri coincide with solar ingress into 4 different cardinal signs of the natural zodiac. They are marked with major transition in the cosmic energy pattern, which in turn, set off four major seasons in India. Evidently, the seasonal changes shall have related bearing on life cycle on earth. Every seasonal transition brings in new opportunities in so far as our productive aspirations are concerned, but not without posing fresh challenges. And we have no choice than to keep pace with the callings of emerging times. Accordingly, we need to be well

geared up to take on the callings of emerging times in all strength with ease and comfort. It is in this spirit that the devout subject themselves to a 9 day prayer regime, with focus on Mother Goddess Durga, the epitome of Shakti. The irony, however, is that Shakti is like a double edged weapon. If rightfully applied, it will prove rewarding and fulfilling. If misused, it could lead to disastrous consequences. Here comes the role of the state of mind. The way mind is inherently ordained is how it uses Shakti. If positively oriented, it is directed towards productive aspirations. If, otherwise, negatively driven, it may prove disastrous. That makes it incumbent upon us to keep our mind in shape. Navaratri are such occasions when we periodically work upon our mind self. Navaratri prayer regime first helps purify the mind of all its limitations, following which its wholesome powers could be positively used to our advantage. In the process one's faith gets rekindled. Our individual energy structure gets recharged, worth doing justice to the callings of priority pre-



ferences. Keeping away from indulgences, the devout follow an austere life. Strict dietary restrictions are observed. Ordinarily we follow a particular dietary habit. The digestive system gets used to secrete a particular set of enzymes to digest them. During the festive season, when the dietary regime undergoes change, the digestive system has to accordingly readjust itself to suit the occasion. In the process, the bowel regime undergoes cleansing so that it could secrete the desired enzymes. We, thus strengthen

our dietary system, vital to a healthy life ahead. The occasion also has valued educative import for us. If you look at the imagery of Mother Goddess Durga, in an exploratory mode, it will offer an interesting reading. First, the allegory running around Goddess Durga. It is believed that Demons drove away the Devas from Devaloka, their place of abode. In a state of desperation the devatas approached Lord Brahma, the God-personified for creation for help. Brahma led them all to Lord Vishnu, the God-personified assigned with the task to administer. Realising that enormous power was needed to counter the might of Demons, Lord Vishnu in turn, led them all to Lord Shiva, the epitome of Shakti. Lord Shiva asked all the Devas to share their individual Tejas (shakti-radiance). Their tejas pooled in together turned into a huge fire, out of which emerged the all-powerful Mother Goddess Durga. The Devas also offered their respective weapons for Mother's use. She then took on and humbled all the demons. She, however, did not do it single-handed. She was

assisted by many other Goddesses in Her mission, all of them originating from the mainframe of Durga herself. After completing their respective tasks, they reverted back to their source-frame. The question now is: how comes the Devas, the individually evolved beings, known for their righteous conduct had to face the humiliation of being driven away by evil-forces from their homeland? Evidently, either the Devas were not strong enough to match the might of demons, or else, there had to be something wrong in them, which brought them to such a pass. One possibility is that being overtaken by egotistic sense of being superior ones; they mistook themselves to be unassailable. Also, engrossed in their individualistic pursuits, righteous though, they lost their sense of alert about the impending danger and their collective obligations. The inevitable had to happen. *The issue continues* The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com