



OPINION 6
IGNORING NEIGHBOURS TO EMBRACE THE WORLD

WORLD 8
SUNAK FACES RESISTANCE OVER SMOKING BAN PLANS

MONEY 10
MARKETS SLUMP FOR THIRD DAY

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Modi, Mamata faceoff in Bengal



(Left to right): Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP candidate Sukanta Majumdar during a public meeting ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Balurghat and West Bengal on Tuesday; Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign rally ahead of Lok Sabha polls, at Hill Cart road in Siliguri on Tuesday



(Left to right): Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP candidate Sukanta Majumdar during a public meeting ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Balurghat and West Bengal on Tuesday; Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign rally ahead of Lok Sabha polls, at Hill Cart road in Siliguri on Tuesday

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA
Bengal witnessed a virtual duel between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee even as the former accused the Bengal Government of stopping Ram Navami celebrations and honouring those who throw stones at Ram Navami processions while the latter asked the people, particularly the minorities not to walk into the trap of the BJP which is trying to trigger communal riots in Bengal. The Prime Minister, who was addressing election rallies at Balurghat and Raiganj in North Bengal, alleged how the Bengal administration has

been doing everything to spike the Ram Navami celebrations. "Tomorrow the entire nation goes to celebrate the Ram Navami ... but here the Trinamool Congress has always tried to stop it from taking place in Bengal ... they tried many conspiracies. And we were forced to get permission from the High Court and tomorrow, with devotion and faith, we will celebrate Ram Navami," the Prime Minister said. "It has always been that the TMC stops such religious programmes and promotes and honours those people who throw stones at these processions," he said.

However, the Chief Minister hit back from a rally at Moinaguri in Jalpaiguri district asking people to remain alert against the "evil designs of the BJP to trigger riots in the name of festivals." In a statement that most Opposition parties, including the BJP read as a bid to act the messiah of the Muslims before elections, Mamata said, "Bengal is for every religion but here are some people who are trying to play communal politics by triggering riots I ask the people, particularly my minority brothers and

sisters to keep your cool and do not walk into the trap laid by them ... some people are spreading fake videos ... but if you hear such slogans keep your cool and pray to Allah so that things pass off without fuss ... because Ram Navami is a festival of mutual respect and honour." The BJP sends NIA in Bengal to disturb and victimise the innocent people, she said. Earlier the High Court had allowed Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Anjani Putra Sena to take out processions,

but under certain conditions, the maximum participants should not be more than 200 and that there would be no play of arms or DJs. Tuesday's development came against the backdrop of weeks' long riots at Howrah, Serampore and Dalkhola in the days following Ram Navami. The Modi-Mamata spar came at a time when in a major development the Jadavpur University authorities on Tuesday allowed the celebrations of Ram Navami at the campus even as sources said "if Saraswati Puja can be organised why Ram Navami cannot be celebrated here." This is the first time that such

celebrations would be allowed inside the campus. Elsewhere in North Bengal the Chief Minister warned the people against the Citizenship Amendment Act, comparing it with the head of a big fish which has a tail in the National Register of Citizens. "If it is a big fish then the CAA is the head and NRC is the tail and the Uniform Civil Code is its torso," Mamata said accusing the BJP government of playing "dirty politics of polarisation." Attacking the Centre for "defaming Bengal with allegations of corruption," she demanded a white paper to be released on the issue.

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Chattisgarh encounter leaves 29 Naxals dead

PTI ■ **KANKER**
At least 29 Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district on Tuesday, police officials said. Three security personnel suffered injuries in the fierce gun-battle and a large quantity of weapons was also recovered from the spot, they said.



The gunfight took place at around 2 pm in Hapatola forest between Binagunda and Koronar villages under Chhotethiya police station limits, when a joint team of the Border Security Force (BSF) and the state police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said. The operation was launched based on inputs about the presence of senior cadres of north Bastar division of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) Shankar, Lalita, Raju and others, he said. During patrolling in the area, a fierce gun-battle broke out between the two sides, the senior IPS officer said. "Bodies of 29 Maoists along with a huge cache of weapons, including AK-47, SLR, Insas and .303 rifles, were recovered from the spot," the IG said. Polling in the Naxalite-hit Bastar Lok Sabha seat will take place on April 19 in the first phase, while the Kanker constituency, part of the Bastar region, will vote in the second round of general elections on April 26. The search operation was still underway in the area amid intermittent firing between security personnel and Naxalites, said Sundarraj. "Three security personnel sustained injuries in the gunfight and their condition was stated to be out of danger," he said, adding they were referred to hospital for treatment. After the latest encounter, 79 Naxalites have been killed in separate gun-battles with security forces in the Bastar region, comprising seven districts, including Kanker, so far this year. On April 2, as many as 13 Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Bijapur district.



Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

MNREGA workers turn into political campaigners

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW
In an unexpected turn during the Uttar Pradesh (UP) election season, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) workers are witnessing heightened demand, not for their traditional manual labour, but as foot soldiers for political campaigns. This trend has ignited a discourse on the exploitation of these workers for political purposes, not by a particular party but by parties of all hues. Typically earning around ₹250 per day for their labour, MGNREGA workers are now being tempted into election rallies and canvassing with promises of ₹300 wages, supplemented with three meals a day and even evening liquor. The surge in pay, coupled with additional perks, has resulted in a scarcity of MGNREGA workers willing to partake in their usual tasks, such as pond digging or rural development work, across various regions of UP. Raja Bhayya, head of the Vidya Dham Samiti NGO in Banda, UP, noted that in the Bundelkhand region, these workers are engaged in election campaigns for as low as ₹200-250 per day. "They are attracted by the promise of three meals a day and evening liquor. And this is sufficient incentive for them to work at lower rates," he told The Pioneer, adding "these workers are doubling up as political karyakarta". Sukhai Ram, a MGNREGA job card holder, was assigned to work on a pond and culvert construction project in Gram Sabha Karonda, Barabanki, but has declined, citing the allure of higher wages and "shaam ki diwai," referring to alcohol. The Department of Rural Development



in Lucknow has received complaints from several districts regarding the disruption of MGNREGA work due to elections. "Labour shortages are common during elections. Diversion is inevitable, and the Government has limited control over it," a senior official informed. These workers are tasked with carrying election materials, waving flags at rallies, and participating in roadshows. The exploitation of MGNREGA workers for political ends has drawn condemnation from various quarters, raising concerns about the moral implications of such practices. Political analyst Dr Rajesh Sharma remarked, "The exploitation of MGNREGA workers for election purposes raises serious ethical questions. These vulnerable workers are being lured with temporary benefits to serve political interests, undermining the essence of the employment guarantee scheme." This issue has reignited debates about

the efficacy of MGNREGA in combating rural unemployment and poverty, with some arguing that the scheme's objectives are being compromised for short-term political gains. The ramifications of this trend are evident on the ground, as rural development projects suffer from labour shortages, impacting the pace and quality of work in various UP regions. In response to criticism, political parties have defended their actions, citing the need for manpower during election campaigns and asserting that they are providing job opportunities to MGNREGA workers. "With soaring temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius, people prefer staying indoors. We require foot soldiers and have recruited some from villages," stated Rupesh Kumar, a BJP leader, although he claimed ignorance about whether these recruits are MGNREGA workers.

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Jailed Kejriwal, Sisodia and Jain: AAP's Star Campaigners

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI
On a day the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) took a cue from a Bollywood movie and pronounced "My name is Arvind Kejriwal and I am not a terrorist", it has named top leaders who are in jail, including the Chief Minister as the star campaigners for the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls, in apparent push to its 'Jail ka Jawab Vote Se' campaign. AAP leader and a Rājya Sabha member Sanjay Singh said the AAP convener has shared his message "...Kejriwal...not a terrorist..." from Tihar Jail and slammed the BJP for the treatment being meted out to him in custody. The AAP on Tuesday announced a list of 40 star campaigners in Gujarat which also mentioned the names of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain all of whom are imprisoned, as the party's star campaigner in Gujarat ahead of the Lok Sabha elections 2024. The list includes names of Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Raghav Chadha, Isudan Gadhvi, Atishi, Saurabh



Bharadwaj, Pankaj Gupta, Gopal Rai, Kailash Gahlot, Imran Hussain and Alpesh Kathirya. However, names of Rājya Sabha MPs Harbhajan Singh who is also an ace cricketer and Swati Maliwal are missing from the list. Meanwhile, the Delhi BJP targeted the AAP over the inclusion of Sunita Kejriwal's name in the list of its star campaigners. "Along with corruption, nepotism is also welcome in the AAP," said Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva. Notably, Harbhajan Singh is currently busy in IPL 2024. On Tuesday, the party kicked off a mega campaign called Jail ka Jawab vote se Sankalp Sabha.

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Aditya tops UPSC exams, Animesh second, Donuru third

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI
The announcement of civil services results 2023 on Tuesday stirred up more excitement than usual. Social media platforms were agog with compliments, best wishes, filmy dialogues, gyan and pravachan on the mother of all examinations conducted by Public Services Commission (UPSC). Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his entire Council of Ministers, BJP contestants in the Lok Sabha, other political figures from ruling and Opposition sides were first time on the same page wishing the toppers and successful candidates who cleared the exams held last year. In fact the UPSC results were trending on various media platforms. Aditya Srivastava, originally selected for the Indian Police Services (IPS) last year, added another feather to his cap as he secured the top rank in the UPSC Civil Services Examination 2023. Hailing from Lucknow, Srivastava's journey has been remarkable, characterised by his stint in the corporate world before pursuing civil services, reflecting his resilience and dedication. Joining Srivastava in this remarkable achievement are Animesh Pradhan from Odisha, a Bachelor of Technology degree holder in computer science from NIT Rourkela, and Telangana native Donuru Ananya Reddy, a graduate from Delhi University's Miranda House College with a degree in geography, securing the second and third ranks respectively. Soon after the results were announced, Modi congratulated those who cleared the examination, emphasising their hard work, perseverance, and dedication. "I congratulate all those who have successfully cleared the Civil Services Examination, 2023. Their hard work, perseverance and dedication has paid off, marking the start of a promising career in public service. Their efforts will shape the future of our nation in the times to come. My best wishes to them," the



(Left to right): Aditya Srivastava (All India Rank (AIR) 1), Uttar Pradesh; Animesh Pradhan (AIR 2), Odisha and Donuru Ananya Reddy (AIR 3), Telangana

Prime Minister wrote on X (previously Twitter). Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi too joined in congratulating the candidates, "Congratulations to all the candidates who have successfully cleared this year's UPSC Civil Services Examination. With dedication and commitment, you are now entrusted with the responsibility of serving our great country. My best wishes for your future endeavours." Among the 1,016 recommended candidates, comprising 664 men and 352 women, the top five positions are evenly distributed, with three men and two women. An IPS trainee from Kerala PK Sidharth Ramkumar

secured the fourth rank with anthropology as his optional subject, while a Gurugram resident Ruhani secured the fifth rank with economics as her optional subject. Among the top 25 candidates, there are 10 women and 15 men, reflecting a diverse range of educational backgrounds, including engineering, humanities, science, commerce, business administration, architecture, and law from premier institutions such as IIT, IIM, NIT, University of Delhi, and National Law University. The selected candidates also include 30 people with benchmark disabilities, reflecting the UPSC's commitment to inclusivity.

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INDIA Block exploited voters in JK, says Shah

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Launching a scathing attack on the constituents of the INDI Alliance in Jammu and Kashmir, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday appealed to the people in Kashmir not to vote for the Congress, National Conference and PDP, saying they have been exploited.

Alleging that these three parties did not allow democracy to grow in Jammu and Kashmir... on the pretext of security, Shah said they only exploited our Kashmiri youth and handed over guns to them. Addressing a Jan Ashirwad Maha Rally in Jammu in support of sitting MP Jugal Kishore Sharma Amit Shah said, "I want to ask (National Conference president) Farooq Abdullah and the PDP as to under whose rule most of the fake encounters took place? And who fired on the children of Kashmir, and handed over guns to them? "These are the three parties responsible for all this. Prime Minister Narendra Modi restored peace in Jammu and Kashmir and paved the way for the region's development. J and K slipped into backwardness due to terrorism and agitations for the past 70 years. Modi facilitated the end



of terrorism, stone-pelting, and separatism and paved the way for development in JK," he said. Reaching out to the Kashmir-based common voter Union Home Minister said the BJP believes in winning the hearts of people which will ultimately lead to the 'lotus', his party's poll symbol, blooming across the Valley. Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the BJP's rival parties have asked people not to vote for the BJP and its 'proxies', claiming the ruling party was more interested in the land of Kashmir than the welfare of its people. "I want to clear the misgivings, being created among Kashmiri youths that the BJP wants to take the land of Kashmir by force. The BJP is not among those who occupy land by force but believes in winning

the hearts of people". Shah said the BJP is in no haste as it knows that the party's symbol 'lotus' will bloom on its own in the Valley with the love of people. Meanwhile, Congress leader Sachin Pilot also addressed an election rally in Kathua in support of the party candidate Dr Jitendra Singh, who is seeking a third consecutive term from the electorate. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also addressed public rallies to bolster Dr Jitendra Singh's campaign as some of his public meetings witnessed thin attendance during the campaign trail in some of the pockets of Kathua and Udhampur districts. On the other hand, Choudhary Lal Singh of the Congress party is relying heavily on his charisma and support of the alliance partners including the

Curtains down on campaigns in Udhampur

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The curtains came down on the two-week-long high-decibel campaign by leaders of political parties to woo the electorate in Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha constituency on Tuesday. Over 16.23 lakh voters will decide the fate of 12 candidates in Udhampur-Doda constituency on April 19. The Lok Sabha seat is set to witness a three-cornered contest even though the battle lines are drawn between Rajput candidates of the BJP and the Congress. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself spearheaded the campaign in support of the party candidate Dr Jitendra Singh, who is seeking a third consecutive term from the electorate. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also addressed public rallies to bolster Dr Jitendra Singh's campaign as some of his public meetings witnessed thin attendance during the campaign trail in some of the pockets of Kathua and Udhampur districts. On the other hand, Choudhary Lal Singh of the Congress party is relying heavily on his charisma and support of the alliance partners including the

National Conference and the PDP in the Chenab Valley region to give a tough fight to the sitting BJP MP. His election meetings were attended by a sizable number of people and were more vibrant. Former Rajasthan Deputy CM Sachin Pilot and star campaigner Raj Babbar also campaigned in support of Choudhary Lal Singh. The prestigious Lok Sabha seat is set to witness a triangular contest with the entry of GM Saroori of the Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) in the fray. Former CM Omar Abdullah also took out a roadshow and addressed a series of election meetings in his support across the three districts of the Chenab Valley region to counter the impact of the DPAP campaign strategy aimed at dividing the secular vote to help the BJP candidate gain a sizable margin. Saroori may not be in a position to win, but he may prove to be a spoiler for his erstwhile party. Both BJP and Congress candidates, presently in the fray, have won it (Udhampur) twice and that too for consecutive (two) terms. Lal Singh bagged the LS seat in 2004 and 2009 while Dr Singh wrestled it from Congress in 2014 and 2019.

Uddhav slams Modi for Congress Muslim League imprint remark

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra's former chief minister and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday came down heavily on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for linking the Congress with the Muslim League (ML), charging that the BJP had a "better experience" with the ML than any other political party. Speaking at a news conference called to launch a song for the party's new symbol Mashaal (Flaming Torch), Uddhav dismissed Modi's criticism that the Congress' Lok Sabha poll manifesto carried the imprint of Muslim League and said: "The BJP has a better experience working with the Muslim League. During the pre-Independence i.e. between 1940-42, Jan Sangh founder Shyamprasad Mukherjee was against going with the Congress that was fighting for the country's freedom. That's why he teamed up with Muslim League in West Bengal and formed a government." "How can we forget RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat visited Masjid. Even Narendra Modi visited Masjid," the Sena (UBT) chief said. It may be recalled that Prime

Minister Narendra Modi, while reiterating his charge that the Congress' manifesto carried the imprint of Muslim League, had said in an election rally at Chandrapur in eastern Maharashtra on April 8: "The Congress is indulging in the politics of divide and rule... Its manifesto carries the language of the Muslim League. Their MPs are talking about another partition of India. People from the INDI alliance are threatening to separate South India. The DMK party in the INDI alliance talks about ending Sanatan by calling it 'dengue malaria' ". Heaping praise on the Congress' Lok Sabha poll manifesto, Uddhav said: "The Congress has come out with a 'good' and an 'all-inclusive' poll manifesto. The manifesto has a lot of good things for Maharashtra. If need be, we will include more Maharashtra-centric issues in the manifesto." Dwelling upon his party's new manifesto, the Sena (UBT) president said: "Mashaal is not just a poll symbol. The anger within the people against the Modi government will burn like Mashaal and it will reduce this dictatorial and 'jumalebaazi' Modi government to ashes in the Lok Sabha polls".

BJP to EC: Stop Congress Ghar Ghar initiative

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Tuesday slammed the Congress' "Ghar Ghar Guarantee" outreach to people as a corrupt practice amounting to bribery and urged the Election Commission to stop the initiative. The BJP said the initiative was unveiled on April 3 by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and its workers are distributing "guarantee cards" to households, presenting them application papers for accessing the party's promised benefits. "To further confound the wrong, the cards bear the promissory signatures of prominent leaders of the Indian National Congress, namely Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge, as an official endorsement," stated the BJP's communication to the poll panel. The ruling party claimed that such an initiative is akin to manipulation of voters' trust and misrepresentation of guarantee cards as legitimate instruments for accessing promised "freebies, largesse and utopian promises". "Allowing such practices openly contradicts the principles of free and fair elections, and sets a precedent where only registered political supporters may be entitled to government schemes, and not the remaining ones," it said.

Firing at Salman house: Cops arrest two from Bhuj

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Less than 48 hours after they fired in front of Bollywood super star Salman Khan's Bandra residence, the Mumbai police crime branch sleuths arrested two shooters from Bhuj town in Gujarat and brought them to Mumbai, where they were remanded by a city court to police custody till April 25. Identifying the two arrested shooters as Vicky Gupta (24) and Sagar Shrirojendra Pal (23), Joint Police Commissioner (Crime) Lakhmi Gautam said that acting on the technical inputs, a team of Mumbai police — along with the Gujarat police — traced the two accused to Bhuj town in Gujarat where they were hiding in a temple. After their arrest on Monday, the two accused were flown to Mumbai in an aircraft on Tuesday morning. Later in the day, the two were produced before a city court which sent them to police custody for nine days. Two motorcycle-borne miscreants, who were covering their faces with helmets, had opened five rounds of fire outside his Bandra (west) residence "Galaxy Apartment" in north-west Mumbai at 4.50 am on Sunday, before speeding away immediately after the shoot-out. Talking to media persons here,

Gautam said: "After the firing incident, incarcerated gangster Lawrence Bishnoi's younger brother Anmol Bishnoi had in a Facebook post claimed responsibility for the firing near Salman Khan's home. During the investigations, we found that the two accused had fled to Gujarat. Immediately thereafter, we sent two teams to Gujarat." "While on the trail of the two accused, we found the location of them in Bhuj. Since we learnt that the two accused were in possession of dangerous weapons, we did not want to take chances. Together with the Bhuj police, we arrested the two accused," Gautam said. Both Gupta and Pal belong to Champaran in Bihar. "Ahead of the firing incident, the accused had carried out a reconnaissance of Salman Khan's house at least thrice," Gautam said. After the incident, the accused abandoned the motorbike and they headed to Bandra Railway Station. "They first took a train to Santa Cruz, from where they went to Mira Road by an autorickshaw. Later on, they proceeded to Surat from where they took a train to Bhuj," a senior police officer said. Having scanned the footage of the CCTV cameras located in northern suburbs of the city, the investigators made the most of the tech-intel and

inputs received from their informers to zero in on the two accused in a temple at Bhuj. The city police had formed 15 teams to crack the case. One of the teams managed to track the motorcycle and its registration to the neighbouring Raigad district. The Navi Mumbai Police detained the two persons who claimed they had sold it to the two shooters. The investigations have revealed that Gupta and Pal had rented a flat at Navi Mumbai and lived there for 25 days and did reconnaissance of Salman's residence thrice, before committing the shootout outside Khan's residence early on Sunday morning. In the initial questioning, Gupta and Pal have reportedly confessed to the firing. The police have recovered a pistol and other items of the crime from the two accused. In a related development, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde visited Khan's Bandra (west) residence "Galaxy Apartment" in north-west Mumbai and assured the Khan family that there was nothing to fear. "The Maharashtra government and the police are responsible for your safety and security. The police will investigate the incident thoroughly and ensure that the culprits are punished," the Chief Minister told the Khan family.

CM Pinarayi refutes Modi charges of financial swindling in State

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi unleashed an attack on the Kerala CPI(M) for the alleged pay-off by a sand mining company and the swindling of money from the cooperative banks in the State, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is on a fire fighting mission. Prime Minister Narendra Modi while election rallies at Thrissur and Kattakkada on Monday had said that poor people's hard earned money worth one lakh crore rupees which was invested in the cooperative banks in Kerala has been embezzled by the CPI(M) leaders. "It was the Centre which cautioned the State Government about this massive misappropriation of public money following the Kerala's allegation that the State's coffers were empty," the Prime Minister had said. The CPI(M) leadership, shocked over the charge, remained incommunicado till Tuesday afternoon about the charge levelled by Modi. By afternoon, while addressing a media meet, Chief Minister Vijayan claimed that there was no financial misappropriation of any kind. "If the cooperative banks report about any loss, the State Government would take up the issue and the money would be returned to the



investors," said Vijayan. But the chief minister turned furious when reporters asked him about the Enforcement Directorate registering a case against the monthly pay-off by a Kochi based sand mining company. The chief minister shouted down the media reporters who raised the issue. The beleaguered Marxists roped in the services of former party secretary Prakash Karat who questioned the intervention of the ED in this case. "The ED has no authority to investigate issues associated with the payment made by a company to another. The ED could investigate only cases linked to Prevention of Money Laundering Act," said Karat while speaking to reporters at Thiruvananthapuram. The Marxist leader and his spouse Brinda Karat would travel across Kerala to convince the electorate that there was no

pay-off or misappropriation of money from the cooperative banks. The ED's charge is that the private sand mining company paid hundreds of crores to persons in the government including the close relations of the chief minister. On Monday, the ED had summoned the managers of the company for questioning. There were media reports that Veena Mohammed Riyaz, daughter of chief minister Vijayan has been listed as a beneficiary of the monthly pay-off by the sand mining company. Hundreds of crores rupees have been paid by the sand mining company to Exalogic Solutions, the Bangalore based company owned by Veena Riyaz. Neither Vijayan nor the CPI(M) have been able to give a convincing reply to the question what kind of services were rendered by a software company to a sand mining company.

College student killed, two injured as car falls 50 ft off flyover in Gurugram

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

A college student was killed while his two friends were severely injured here after a car they were travelling in hit a flyover divider and fell 50 feet below on the Delhi-Gurugram expressway, police said on Tuesday. The car got badly damaged in the accident and the injured are being treated in the Medanta Hospital here, they added.

According to the police, the accident took place around 10 pm on Monday when the three youths were going from Delhi towards Jaipur in a car. As soon as the car reached the flyover of Jharsa Chowk, Rishabh Guleria, who was in the driver's seat, lost control of the vehicle. The car jumped over the four-foot high divider of the flyover and fell 50 feet below into an empty space, the police said.

Aditya tops UPSC...

Among the successful candidates, 347 are from the general category, 115 from economically weaker sections, 303 from other backward classes, 165 from Scheduled Castes, and 86 from Scheduled Tribes. Overall, nationwide as many as 14,624 candidates qualified for appearance in the written (Main) examination, which was held in September, 2023. "A total of 2,855 candidates qualified for the personality test of the examination," the commission said. In Delhi, 31 aspirants of Jamia Millia Islamia's Government funded Residential Coaching Academy (RCA) cleared the exams. Professor Egbal Hussain, Officiating Vice Chancellor, Jamia said thirty one candidates who received coaching and training in the RCA cleared the exams, an increase of eight from last year. Eleven out of 31 selected candidates are girls, he said. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, Om Birla Lok Sabha Speaker, Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State for Science & Technology were among many others who congratulated the candidates, underscoring the significance of their achievement and responsibility towards serving the country.

Congress leads in complaints to EC

From Page 1 Data showed the other political parties have filed 90 complaints, out of which action has been taken in 80. Notably, a total of 2,68,000 complaints have been filed on e vigil, the commission's portal on violations for citizens. Of these, action has been taken in 2,67,762 cases and 92 per cent were resolved in less than 100 minutes. Several political parties from the INDIA Bloc had approached the poll panel, accusing the Government of using probe agencies to target their leaders. Sharing details of action taken by the poll body, the Commission said suo motu removal of DGP West Bengal as he was barred from election duty in previous elections also.

in Punjab, Haryana and Assam because of their kinship or familial association with the elected political representatives," it said. The EC said on complaint from the Congress and the AAP, directive to MeitY to stop transmission of Government of India's Viksit Bharat Message on WhatsApp post announcement of elections. "On complaint from DMK, FIR was registered against a BJP Minister Shobha Karandlaje for her unverified allegations on Rameshwar Blast Café," it said. The EC said it has taken action on a complaint from the Congress and issued directions to the Cabinet Secretary for compliance of its instructions on removing defacement from Government/public premises including hoardings, photos, and messages from DMRC trains and petrol pump, highways, etc. It further stated that directions were issued to Central Board of Direct Taxes for verification of any mismatch in assets

declaration by Union Minister Chandrasekharan in his affidavit. During the one-month period, 16 delegations from 7 political parties met the commission to lodge their complaints on alleged violations of Model code and related matters. Many delegations met in the States at the level of Chief Electoral Officer. It also stated that on the complaint of TMC, notice was issued to BJP leader Dilip Ghosh for objectionable and disrespectful remarks towards Mamata Banerjee. Similarly on the complaint of WJP, notice was issued to Supriya Srinate for objectionable remarks towards BJP candidate Kangana Ranaut and Hema Malini respectively. An FIR was lodged against remarks made by Anitha R Radhakrishnan, DMK leader towards Narendra Modi. The poll body asserted that while it remains committed to protecting level playing field and campaign entitlement of parties and candidates, it has not found

it correct to take any step that could overlap or overrun the legal judicial process. In a statement, the poll body said it was guided by constitutional wisdom when presented with "live situations" involving political persons which have been under active consideration and orders of the courts based on criminal investigations. "The guidelines plugging gap in law has been issued, on a complaint from AAP against anonymous advertisements in hoardings cum billboards in Delhi Municipal Commission area without giving names of publisher. Giving wider amplitude to the meaning of pamphlet and poster in the existing law by including hoardings, guidelines have been issued to Chief Secretaries of all States and UTs mandating the clear identification of printer and publisher on printed election-related material including hoardings, ensuring accountability and transparency in c a m p a i g n communications," it said.

Modi, Mamata faceoff in...

From Page 1

Mamata's statement came hours after bystanders cried "Chor! chor (thief! thief)" at her cavalcade. She said, "They were calling me thief... had it not been election times I would have pulled out their tongues who call me thief." The BJP had sent 300 Central teams to enquire into alleged MNREGA and other frauds but failed to find any, she said.

Jailed Kejriwal, Sisodia and Jain: AAP's Star...

From Page 1

Sunita, a former Indian Revenue Services (IRS) officer, gained attention with her digital briefings, where she read out messages from Kejriwal, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on March 21 in connection with the Delhi liquor policy money laundering case. She has addressed three digital briefings so far in which she read out Kejriwal's messages from ED custody and Tihar jail, where he is currently lodged. She also attended the Opposition INDIA Bloc's 'Loktantra Bachao' rally on March 31 and read out her husband's letter. "Sunita Kejriwal is likely to visit Jharkhand to campaign for INDIA Bloc ally Jharkhand Mukti Morcha," an AAP source said. JMM chief and former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren was arrested by the ED in January in a money laundering case. His

wife Kalpana Soren had met Sunita Kejriwal when she had come to Delhi to attend the March 31 INDIA Bloc rally. Interestingly, the name of Swati Malwal was not in the list of star campaigners, raising eyebrows that all is not well between Malwal and Kejriwal since his arrest. Kejriwal, also listed as a star campaigner, is currently in judicial custody in Tihar jail and has been running the Government from prison. Currently in judicial custody at Tihar jail, his absence reverberates through the AAP's strategy for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Gujarat. His custody has been extended until April 23. Sisodia and Jain are also lodged in Tihar jail in connection with money laundering case. The Lok Sabha elections in Gujarat will be held in a single phase on May 7 and the last date for filing nomination papers is April 19.

Earlier, the AAP launched a mega campaign called Jail ka Jawab vote se Sankalp Sabha. AAP convener Gopal Rai said the campaign will continue till May 23. Under this, all party MLAs will hold meetings in areas falling under the national capital's four constituencies - East, South, West and New Delhi. "I will kickstart the campaign tomorrow (April 16) from the Vishwas Nagar Assembly constituency, and hold 40 sabbas... till April 22. Similarly, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh will begin the sabbas from Ambedkar Nagar, which will continue till May 23... All leaders will hold such sabbas and take a pledge against the arrest of Kejriwal," Rai said. He said, "The schedule for the sabbas as well as the MLAs will be released soon... Our target is to get 1 lakh people to take a pledge in the 'Jail ka jawab vote se sankalp sabha'.

MNREGA workers turn into political campaigners

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However, civil society organisations and activists have called for enhanced oversight and accountability to prevent the exploitation of MGNREGA workers and uphold the integrity of the employment guarantee scheme. As the election season progresses, the debate surrounding the utilisation of MGNREGA workers for election campaigns is expected to persist, underscoring the intricate dynamics between politics, labour, and rural welfare schemes in India.

LG slams Kejriwal Government for water woes in letter

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst the rift between AAP-led Delhi Government and the Raj Niwas, Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Tuesday implicated the Kejriwal Government over the water woes in the national Capital that has also led to killing of consumers and hostilities between neighbours and colonies. In an open letter to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who is in jail and a direct communication in present circumstances is not possible, the Lieutenant Governor said there has been no effort whatsoever during the last 10 years for plugging the leaks but the Delhi government seem to be spending thousands of crores in pumping water "into a leaking bucket". Saxena said more than two crore (over 80 percent) people are deprived of drinking water

supply in varying degrees, especially in unauthorized colonies, slum clusters and to a lesser extent, even in organized developed colonies and seemingly, 10 years of inaction have resulted in thousands of crores of tax-payers money going down the drain. Atishi hit back at Saxena over the open letter, holding him responsible for the stoppage of Delhi Jal Board (DJB) works. The Delhi water minister had a few days ago written to the L-G, asking him to suspend the CEO of Delhi Jal Board (DJB) after a woman was killed following a quarrel with her neighbour over fetching water from a common tap in the Farsh Bazar area of northeast Delhi. In the note, Atishi urged Saxena to "institute an independent enquiry into the acts of omission and commission of the chief secretary, as well as officers of the finance department, urban development department and DJB". "I was deeply distressed at the insensitive communication from the Minister for Water... Atishi on Sunday. While I was yet to receive the letter, it characteristically found its way on various social and mainstream media platforms, the moment it was signed. She has chosen to use the unfortunate death of a woman in East Delhi for narrow and partisan political goals," he charged. "Her note indeed is a prima facie admission of guilt, inaction and inefficiency over the past almost 10 years," he said in the letter. "In the last nine years, Rs. 28,400 Cr. has been spent as Capital Expenditure by the Delhi Jal Board which is also indulged in a scam involving AAP leaders. The accumulated loan and interest liability of DJB stands at a staggering Rs 73,000 crores. Preparation of

the annual statement of accounts is a statutory obligation under section 70 of the Delhi Jal Board Act 1998. Non preparation of balance sheets and avoiding CAG audit appears to be part of a design to escape public accountability," read the letter. The Lieutenant Governor further said that the rich in the city staying in affluent colonies



have round the clock water supply, as high as 500 litre per person per day- which translates to nearly 35 buckets of water per person per day. "On the other extreme are poor people in slums and unauthorized colonies, barely receiving a trickle. Many of these settlements receive water supply for barely half an hour a day. In some cases, water is supplied

on alternate days. Water availability is less than 50 litre per person per day in poor colonies, even as, you and your Ministers kept making false assurances of giving 24x7 water supply. In effect, while you promised free water to poor, they ended up getting no water". He said it would be educative to know that in Singapore, "unaccounted for water" is just 5 percent, compared to Delhi's 58 percent. Even other Indian cities fare much better- Chennai (35 percent), Mumbai (27 percent), Pune (35 percent). By contrast, Delhi has seen an inexcusable decline from 45 to 58 percent. It simply points to the fact that there has been no effort whatsoever during the last ten years for plugging the leaks and we seem to be spending thousands of crores in pumping water "into a leaking bucket". The LG said the deplorable

quality of water supply reaching people's home has major health consequences. After spending thousands of crores from the public exchequer, the water in residential areas is contaminated with sewage. "In many instances, people, mostly poor, who are unaware of the bad water quality, end up falling sick. The extent of water borne disease- diarrhoea, dysentery and cholera adds up to huge out of pocket expenses for the poor. Last year, there were 34,979 cases of acute diarrheal disease, which was a 23 percent increase over the previous year. There were 23,423 cases of typhoid, which was a 52 percent increase in a single year. Hepatitis A cases shot up by 89 percent. Poor water quality impacts people living on the margins of society most adversely. This reflects the priority that government accords to the poorest of the poor".

"Your Ministers are perpetually busy addressing Media, spinning falsehoods. Daily multiple press conferences, making wild allegations and filing court cases against all and sundry seem to be the primary job of your Ministers at the cost of governance. They barely find time to attend public grievances and official work. Had even a fraction of their time been used for productive activity, the situation would not have been so grim". "This is not an isolated instance, where a Minister has publicly berated senior officers, without a proper authentication of facts. On the smallest provocation, they decide to seek the suspension of officers who have put in more than three decades of service.. This appears to be a deliberate attempt to weave a one-sided public narrative with an aim to mask their own failures", read the letter.

Man guns down cop, kills self in Nand Nagri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 44-year-old man allegedly shot dead an assistant sub-inspector and then killed himself on Tuesday in the Nand Nagri area of northeast Delhi, police said. According to police, they received a PCR call around 11.40 am reporting multiple bullet rounds being fired at the Meet Nagar Flyover that killed ASI Dinesh Sharma and injured another person. ASI Sharma was posted in the Special Branch of the Delhi Police and was travelling on his motorcycle when the incident occurred. Another victim, Amit Kumar (30) was also travelling on his scooter when he was shot by the accused, Mukesh, Deputy Commissioner of Police (northeast) Joy Tirkey said. Mukesh was a resident of Nand Nagri area of northeast Delhi, police said. According to an eye-witness, Mukesh first shot dead Sharma and then shot Kumar who was injured on his leg. He then boarded an auto-rickshaw and asked him to take



him away from the spot. "However, the driver refused and the accused fired at him, but he escaped unhurt. When the crowd started gathering on the spot, he shot himself dead," the eye-witness said. "We have recovered a 7.65 mm pistol on the rear seat of the auto. Multiple live rounds and empty shells were also found at three different locations on the flyover," he said.

The bodies were sent for post-mortem and the injured was rushed to a hospital where he is undergoing treatment and is in a critical condition, police said. "We have registered a case of murder, attempt to murder and Arms Act against the accused at Jyoti Nagar police station and started further investigation into the matter," the DCP said.

Three held for extorting money, jewellery from Naval officer wife

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Three men were arrested for allegedly extorting money and jewellery from the wife of a naval officer by posing as seers and threatening her with a dummy snake in Delhi's RK Puram area, police said on Tuesday. The accused were identified as Debu Nath (20), Vinod Kamat (45), and Rajender Sharma (50), police said. On April 5, the accused, posing as seers, extorted money and jewellery from the wife of a Naval officer near African Avenue Road, Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Rohit Meena said. The accused first asked her to put money in a metal pot for blessings, the DCP said. "As the complainant did this, the accused threatened her with a snake for life and took away her gold cum platinum ring which she was wearing. Following a complaint, an FIR was registered and further investigation was taken up," the DCP said. The police studied the modus



operandi of the accused and traced them, he said. "The team checked more than 100 CCTV cameras on entry and exit routes. After continuous checking of CCTV cameras, the team obtained the registration number of the auto-rickshaw, which was found registered in the name of Sunita Devi. On questioning, she said that she had given it to one of the accused Kamat on a rental basis," he said. During the investigation, the police found that Nath and his associates would cheat people by showing dummy snakes in public places, he said.

During interrogation, Kamat told the police that a few days ago, the accused met him and hired his auto rickshaw permanently for Rs 800 from 8 am to 2 pm. He used to pick them up from Shakurpur Basti in West Delhi and drop them at different locations where they committed the crimes, Meena said. "He also used to help them to escape from place of occurrence. The team later arrested Debu Nath, who told police that he had sold the ring to the jeweller shop of Rajender and recovered a platinum ring," Meena said, adding that further investigation is underway.

Karol Bagh, Najafgarh hotels announce 20 per cent discount to eligible voters

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to boost voter turnout in the Lok Sabha elections, hotels located in the Karol Bagh and Najafgarh zones here have announced a 20 per cent discount offer for eligible voters, officials said on Tuesday. The Lok Sabha elections here are slated for May 25. "This initiative underscores the crucial role of voter participation in strengthening democracy and nurturing civic responsibility," Abhishek Mishra, Deputy Commissioner of Karol Bagh Zone, said. Under this scheme, voters must provide the proof of their participation by displaying the ink mark on their finger to avail of the discount. Emphasising the significance of every vote, Mishra said, "The initiative aims to encourage citizens to actively engage in the democratic process and fulfil their civic duty. By providing tangible benefits to voters, the associations hope to drive up



the voter turnout and promote civic engagement in the Karol Bagh and Najafgarh areas." He also said that the Public Health Department of MCD is approaching traders in the Karol Bagh area to explore the possibility of extending similar "enticing" offers. Echoing similar sentiments, Deputy Commissioner of Najafgarh Zone, Badal Kumar also asked the Hotel and Guest House Association of Mahipalpur to offer the discount on room rents to voters. Eligible voters can avail of the discount by booking their accommodations within 24 hours of casting their votes, Kumar added.

RERA penalises real estate promoter Vatika Limited

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

The Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) court of Gurugram penalised a real estate promoter Vatika Limited for violating the builder-buyer agreement provisions laid under Section 13 of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act of 2016. The landmark order of the RERA court passed by SK Arora has come as a big relief for the five complainants. "The Authority establishes the violation of Section 13 of the Act 2016 on the part of Vatika Limited and hereby imposes a penalty under Section 61 of Rs 1,00,000/- in each complainant and further directs the promoter to execute the registered



buyer's agreement as per the model agreement provided in the Real Estate Regulation and Development Rules 2017 within 30 days from the order failing which the Authority shall be bound to invoke penal

action under Section 63," said the order. Section 13 states that a promoter shall not accept a sum more than 10 per cent of the total cost of an apartment, plot, or building as the case

may be an advance payment or an application fee from a person without first entering into a written agreement for sale with such person and register the said agreement for sale. "Whereas, in the instant matter the respondent (Vatika Limited) has taken 100 per cent of the consideration without executing the BBA," the order said. The court also has imposed a penalty of Rs 250000/- on each complainant to be paid within 30 days from the date of this order under Section 63 of the Act 2016 for non-complying with the directions of the Authority vide its order dated 23.02.2024. All the five complainants cum allottees had approached the RERA Court in October 2022

seeking justice after they failed to get any desired relief from Vatika Limited. The complainants had booked commercial units in the Vatika India Next project in 2018 and paid full consideration to the promoter without executing the builder-buyer agreement (BBA). A year later, Vatika transferred their units without their consent to a different project Vatika One at Sector 16, Gurugram and also reduced the unit sizes to 500 sqft from the original size of 1000 sqft. In a big relief to complainants, the RERA court has also directed Vatika Limited to pay interest for every month of delay from the due date of possession till a valid offer of possession at the prescribed rate.

JNU students go on strike over unmet demands

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Many students at the Jawaharlal Nehru University here on Tuesday participated in a strike to protest against the administration's neglect of their demands, including "inaction" over a sexual harassment complaint. Classes in various departments, including Social Sciences, Physical Science, School of International Students and School of Language, Arts and Aesthetics, and Computer Sciences, were stalled amid the strike. The protest call was given by the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU), which has demand-



hours of the day. The union has also asked the administration to take necessary steps to ensure the safety of the victim against alleged attempts at intimidation. "The JNUSU will observe a complete university strike on April 16 if JNU VC fails to address pressing concerns of students by April 15," it had said on Saturday. The students union has also released a charter of demands, including reinstatement of the now-scrapped Gender Sensitization Committee Against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) and inclusion of JNUSU in all committee meetings taking decisions related to students, among others.

ed an expeditious investigation into a sexual harassment incident and action against those accused. On March 31, a woman JNU student filed a complaint with the administration against four individuals, including two former 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

37 years old woman arrested for selling stolen high end SUVs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi police has arrested a 37-year-old woman from Bihar for allegedly selling stolen high-end Sports Utility Vehicles (SUV), police said on Tuesday. The accused, identified as Lovely Singh, a resident of Patliputra in Bihar, was nabbed on April 3 after an operation was launched following the arrest of her husband, Govind last year, with a stolen Maruti Brezza, Deputy Commissioner of Police (east) Apoorva Gupta said. "On interrogation, Govind revealed that his wife, Lovely, had received numerous stolen luxury vehicles from Delhi and had further sold or supplied them to others in Bihar and Jharkhand," the DCP said. Several police teams were formed to arrest Singh but she kept dodging them by changing her residence, the DCP said. She also resided in well-



known societies to avoid suspicion. "A Non-Bailable Warrant was issued against her and was further declared as a proclaimed offender on December 20, 2023, by the Court. On April 3, Lovely was arrested from the Patliputra area and her transit remand was obtained," the DCP said. During interrogation, Lovely told the police that after completing her graduation, she began with an insurance company where she came across people who were engaged in the selling and purchasing of stolen vehicles, the DCP said. "She and her husband,

Govind, started engaging in the sale and purchase of stolen vehicles. She revealed that she was arrested in Ranchi in Jharkhand, in a case involving stolen vehicles and robbery in 2021," she said. She also established connections with auto lifters and other receivers of stolen luxury cars, engaging in the purchase and sale of such vehicles, she said. The police have seized nine SUVs including Toyota Fortuner and Hyundai Alcazar. Further investigation is underway, she added.

700 inmates got jobs after jail terms: Tihar prison chief

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Around 700 inmates are employed and 1,200 more are presently getting training to work in various sectors after coming out of jail, Tihar's Director General (prisons) Sanjay Baniwal said. In an interaction with PTI editors at its headquarters on Monday, Baniwal, a 1989 batch IPS officer, said that he is happy to see inmates, who get employed after spending their jail term. Beniwal, who had a stint of Chandigarh DGP, has been posted as Tihar DG since November 2022. Replying to a question over jail reforms during his tenure in Tihar, Baniwal said, "We have started skill development programme with the help of Urban Development Ministry inside the prisons. Under this programme, around 700 inmates have got the job in hotel industry and 1,200 are getting training to get the job in hospitals." According to jail officials, an infrastructure is provided



comprise central jails. "May be we can look for other options or better ways of punishing, at least who are delinquent," he said. Citing an example, he said that a young man was recently caught for stealing Rs 300 in pick pocketing and was brought to Tihar. He stayed here for five months before getting bail. "I am spending Rs 800 per inmate per day which costs us around Rs 24,000 per month. For that 300 rupees theft punishment I spent your money (exchequer) costing about Rs 1,20,000 in five months. Is it right? That is the question we need to ask," Baniwal said. The proposed jail in Narela, Delhi, will cost us about Rs 170 crore for odd 250 inmates, which is an expensive affair, he said. The Tihar prisons chief said the current model provision act of jail does provide the power to put the anklets for tracking the movements of those inmates who are released on furlough.

JJP to field Haryanvi singer from Gurugram Lok Sabha seat

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

The Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) decided to field Haryanvi singer Rahul Yadav alias Rahul Fazilpuria from the Gurugram Lok Sabha constituency. The JJP on Tuesday announced the names of five Lok Sabha poll candidates for Haryana. Recently, Rahul Fazilpuria's name came to the fore after a Gurugram court ordered the Gurugram Police to register a case against Fazilpuria and Bigg Boss OTT winner Elvish Yadav for allegedly using rare species of snakes and a .32 bore pistol in a music video. The case was registered under various sections including the Cruelty to Animals Act, Wild Life Act and Gambling Act at the Badshahpur police station. The BJP has already announced Rao Inderjeet Singh, Union Minister and sitting MP from the Gurugram Lok Sabha seat for the upcoming LS polls to be scheduled on May 25. Meanwhile, the Congress and

Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) are yet to finalise their candidate's name for this seat. "I would like to thank senior leaders of the party who deemed me worthy. Being a local youth I will raise issues related to the youth. I also would like to put forward the demand of an Ahir Regiment in the Indian Army and will also support the farmers' agitation," Fazilpuria told The Pioneer. "In the past, I have participated in a lot of social activities and if I am elected I would like to work for the people of the constituency," he added. On being asked about the tough contest expected from BJP candidate Rao Inderjeet Singh, the singer said he is also popular across Haryana and this popularity will help him. On the FIR that was registered against him for using rare species of snakes and a .32 bore pistol in the music video, Rahul said, "In the video, nothing we used was original. We used special effects and other things during shooting. During the shooting necessary permission was taken, no one was hurt."

BJP releases fresh list of seven more candidates for Lok Sabha polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Tuesday released the 12th list of seven more candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, fielding Udayanraje Bhosale, a descendant of Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji, from Satara in Maharashtra and Abhijit Das Bobby as the candidate for the Diamond Harbour constituency in West Bengal. The BJP dropped Union Minister Som Parkash from Hoshiarpur in Punjab but decided to field his wife Anita Som Parkash to keep the influential local leader's support intact. With the new list, the party has named its candidates for around 430 seats for the polls to 543 seats starting from April

19. The BJP's 12th list has focused on Maharashtra, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal seats. The party also released its second list of 21 candidates for the Odisha assembly polls, fielding former minister Dilip Ray from Rourkela. The BJP has fielded Abhijit Das Bobby from Diamond Harbour Parliamentary constituency in West Bengal against Trinamool Congress candidate Abhishek Banerjee, nephew of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Diamond Harbour has been Abhishek Banerjee's stronghold since 2014. Previously known as Hajipur, its name was changed to Diamond Harbour by the British. According to the 2011 census, the population of this

parliamentary constituency, which is part of the South 24 Parganas district, is 2,221,470. Among these, 49.07% live in villages and 50.93% are urban dwellers. The proportion of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes among them is 20.63% and 0.18% respectively. There are seven Assembly seats under Diamond Harbour, including Falta, Satgachhia, Bishnupur, Maheshtala, Budge Budge, Metiabruz and Diamond Harbour. It is among the keenly watched match-ups with the BJP's Das squaring off against the incumbent TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee. In both the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Banerjee won with huge vote margins, proving his popularity and influence in



The seat. In 2019, he beat his nearest rival by a staggering margin of 3.20 lakh votes. Bhosale is the 17th holder of the title of Chhatrapati which was founded by the Maratha

emperor Chhatrapati Shivaji on his coronation in 1674. In 2019, Bhosale was elected to the Lok Sabha from Satara on an NCP ticket. In Uttar Pradesh, the party has

fielded Vishwadeep Singh from Firozabad and Shashank Mani Tripathi from Deoria, dropping its sitting MPs from the two seats. The party fielded Anita Som Parkash from the Hoshiarpur reserve parliamentary constituency, according to the list of candidates. Anita thanked the party leadership for entrusting her with the responsibility. The BJP won the seat in the 2014 and 2019 polls. The party's Vijay Sampla had won it in 2014 while Som Parkash had defeated Congress nominee Raj Kumar Chhabwal in 2019. Hoshiarpur is one of the three seats which BJP had been fighting when it was in alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal. But the saffron party is fighting the 2024 Lok Sabha polls on

its own. Anita Som Parkash will face AAP nominee Raj Kumar Chhabwal in the coming polls. The Congress and the SAD are yet to name their candidates from Hoshiarpur. As expected, the BJP fielded former IAS officer Parampal Kaur Sidhu from Bathinda parliamentary seat, currently held by SAD MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal. Sidhu is the daughter-in-law of senior Akali leader Sinkar Singh Maluka. She recently joined the BJP along with her husband Gurpreet Singh Maluka in Delhi. Before joining the saffron party, Sidhu, a 2011-batch IAS officer, had put in her papers. She is pitted against Congress candidate Jeet Mohinder Sidhu and AAP's Gurmeet Singh Khudian. The Shiromani Akali

Dal is yet to name its candidate from Bathinda seat. The Bathinda seat is considered a SAD stronghold. Harsimrat won the Bathinda seat in 2009, 2014 and 2019. In the last Lok Sabha polls, she had defeated Congress candidate Amrinder Singh Raj Warring. The BJP fielded former MLA from Baba Bakala seat Manjit Singh Manna Mianwala from the Khadoor Sahib Lok Sabha seat. Khadoor Sahib seat is currently held by Congress MP Jasbir Singh. The AAP has fielded Laljit Singh Bhullar from this seat. The electoral process spans from April 19 to June 1, 2024, across seven phases, with results slated for June 4, ahead of the 17th Lok Sabha's term conclusion on June 16, 2024.

West Asia: Airlines told to make risk assessment for flights

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid escalating tensions in the Middle East, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has asked airlines to carry out their own risk assessment on international flight operations. Air India, Vistara, IndiGo and various international airlines have opted for alternative flight paths to the West and are avoiding the Iranian airspace against the backdrop of tensions flaring up between Iran and Israel.



Civil Aviation Secretary Vumlungam Vualnam on Tuesday said that airlines have been asked to make their own risk assessment with respect to their flight operations. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is handling and interacting with the airlines, and also in touch with the external affairs ministry, he added. The secretary was responding to a query on whether there is an advisory by the ministry or the DGCA to airlines amid the crisis in the Middle East. Air India is operating some of its international flights on alternative flight paths to and from India, and Vistara has also made changes to flight paths for some of its flights due to the Middle East situation.

Also, Air India has temporarily suspended its flights to Tel Aviv. The alternative flight paths have increased the duration of some of the international flights by around half an hour. About the Middle East crisis, Suprio Banerjee, Vice President & Sector Head, Corporate Ratings at ICRA, said commercial airlines may have to take a longer route in order to comply with no-fly regulations, leading to higher fuel expenses. "This will also impact international air travel to the directly affected and potentially affected nearby geographies during the upcoming summer holiday season if the issue persists," Banerjee said. Manan Bajoria, Group VP Growth at travel portal ixigo, said re-routing of flights due to

the current geopolitical tensions can result in longer routes and higher expenses for airlines that run flights to and from Europe, Middle East, and Southeast Asia. "Lengthy diversions will add to airline fuel costs and may lead to an increase in airfares across these routes," Bajoria said. Banerjee also said the ongoing geopolitical developments in the Middle East region will continue to exert pressure on crude oil prices and, in turn, on ATF prices, which have been on an elevated level compared to the pre-Covid era. During the weekend, Iran launched dozens of drones and missiles at Israel in a retaliatory attack. On Monday, Israel said it will respond to Iran's weekend attack.

Court upheld Centre decision to dissolve Maulana Azad Education Foundation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday upheld the Centre's decision to dissolve the Maulana Azad Education Foundation (MAEF), which was set up in 1989 for promoting education among educationally backward minorities, holding there was no impropriety or irregularity in arriving at it. A bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Manmohan dismissed a PIL by Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, John Dayal and Daya Singh and said several welfare programmes for the minority communities are being carried out devotedly by the Ministry of Minority Affairs and it could not be said that the interest of the minority communities was being hampered due to the dissolution. Maintaining that the decision to dissolve the MAEF was "well considered" and in accordance with the legal framework, the court said it cannot sit in appeal and examine the appropriateness of a policy of the government. "The decision to dissolve the MAEF has been duly taken by the General Body of the MAEF and this court finds no impropriety or irregularity in the process adopted by the



said General Body in arriving at the said decision," the bench, also comprising Justice Mini Pushkarna, said. "This Court finds no merit in the present petition and is not inclined to interfere in the considered decision taken by the respondents. Accordingly, the present petition is dismissed," the court said. The petitioners had approached the high court against the February 7 order of the Ministry of Minority Affairs which instructed the MAEF to carry out the closure process at the earliest and submit copy of the closure certificate issued by the Registrar of Societies of the Delhi government on completion of all procedures, as per extant laws. The Centre had defended its decision in the court, saying

MAEF has become "obsolete" when there is a dedicated ministry holistically executing schemes for the benefit of the minorities. The ministry's order was issued in reference to a proposal received from the Central Waqf Council (CWC) on January 21 to close the MAEF. The court had reserved its verdict on the PIL on March 13 after hearing both the sides. The petitioners had said in their PIL that the ministry's order not only deprived the deserving students, especially girls, from availing the benefits of the schemes of the MAEF but is also without jurisdiction, completely mala fide, arbitrary and a colourable exercise by authorities.

President expresses happiness at 60 per cent IES officers in 2022, 2023 batches being women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday expressed happiness that more than 60 per cent of the Indian Economic Service (IES) officers from the 2022 and 2023 batches were women and urged them to champion initiatives that foster the holistic empowerment of women across the States while ensuring inclusive development of the country. "Increasing participation of women will help in fulfilling the resolve of inclusive development of India," she said, calling it a significant achievement that reflects a positive trend towards greater gender diversity and inclusivity in the workforce. She was addressing a group of probationers of the Indian Economic Service (2022 and 2023 batches), who had called on her at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here. Murmu said that economic growth is an important component in the country's development. "Macro and micro economic indicators are considered useful parameters of progress. Therefore, the role of economists is important in making government policies and schemes effective and use-

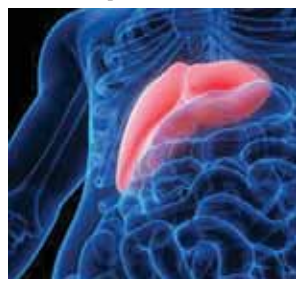


ful," she added. Murmu told officers that as India is moving towards becoming the third largest economy in the world, they will get countless opportunities in the times to come to enhance their capabilities and utilise them to the fullest. She expressed confidence that they will make a significant contribution to the development of the country by taking proper advantage of these opportunities. The president urged the young officers to keep in mind the interest of the poor and backward sections of the country while giving policy related suggestions or taking any decision in their workplace, a statement issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan said. Murmu said that economic service officers are expected to provide appropriate advice for economic analysis and design of development programmes as well as for strengthening the resource distribution system and evaluating schemes.

Viral hepatitis second leading infectious cause of death worldwide, says WHO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With 1.3 million deaths annually, viral hepatitis stands as the second leading infectious cause of death worldwide, trailing only tuberculosis. Hepatitis B is responsible for 83 per cent of these deaths, with hepatitis C accounting for the remaining 17 per cent, according to the World Health Organization's 2024 Global Hepatitis Report released recently. Despite advancements in diagnostic tools and treatments, coverage rates for testing and treatment have stalled. However, achieving the WHO's elimination goal by 2030 remains feasible with urgent action, as per the report which reveals that there are 254 million people who are afflicted with hepatitis B, and 50 million with hepatitis C in 2022. "Half of the burden is among people aged 30-54, with 12 per cent among children under 18. Men constitute 58 per cent of all cases. New infections have slightly decreased, with 2.2 million new cases in 2022, down from 2.5 million in 2019." However, what is a matter of concern is that diagnosis and treatment coverage rates are far below the global targets for both hepatitis B and C. Data shows that only 13 per cent of people with chronic hepatitis B and 36 per cent with hepatitis C have been diagnosed. "Treatment rates are even lower, with only 3% receiving antiviral therapy for hepatitis B and 20% receiving curative treatment for hepatitis C," says the report, attributing the low rates to disparities in pricing and service delivery. The report said that many countries fail to procure affordable generic medicines, leading to pricing disparities. "Service delivery remains centralized and vertical, with out-of-pocket expenses for many affected



populations," it said. "This report paints a troubling picture: despite progress globally in preventing hepatitis infections, deaths are rising because far too few people with hepatitis are being diagnosed and treated," said WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "WHO is committed to supporting countries to use all the tools at their disposal - at access prices - to save lives and turn this trend around." New incidence estimates indicate a slight decrease compared to 2019, but the overall incidence of viral hepatitis remains high. In 2022, there were 2.2 million new infections, down from 2.5 million in 2019. These include 1.2 million new hepatitis B infections and nearly 1 million new hepatitis C infections. More than 6000 people are getting newly infected with viral hepatitis each day. The revised estimates are derived from enhanced data from national prevalence surveys. They also indicate that prevention measures such as immunization and safe injections, along with the expansion of hepatitis C treatment, have contributed to reducing the incidence. Across all regions, only 13% of people living with chronic hepatitis B infection had been diagnosed and approximately 3% (7 million) had received antiviral therapy at the end of 2022. Regarding hepatitis C, 36% had been diagnosed and 20% (12.5 million) had received curative treatment.

Extra judicial confession loses significance in absence of substantive evidence: SC

PT ■ NEW DELHI

Extrajudicial confession by its very nature is a "weak piece" of evidence and it may be used as a corroborative piece of evidence in tandem with substantive evidence, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday while acquitting a man who was convicted in a 1998 murder case. The apex court allowed an appeal filed by the man challenging the verdict of the Punjab and Haryana High Court which had affirmed the trial court's May 1999 order convicting and sentencing him to life imprisonment. The prosecution alleged that

the appellant had in June 1998 murdered a man at a cinema hall in Bhiwani as he bore a suspicion that the victim was involved in illicit relations with his wife.

A bench of Justices B R Gvai and Sandeep Mehta noted that the prosecution's case was primarily based on the testimonies of two witnesses -- the victim's brother and another person who claimed that the accused had made a confession before him. Referring to the evidence in the case, the bench said both these witnesses fall within the category of "wholly unreliable witnesses" and it would be unsafe to place reliance on their evi-



dence so as to affirm the guilt of the accused. Dealing with the purported extrajudicial confession made

by one of the witnesses, the bench said it was contradicted by the evidence of another prosecution witness. "Even otherwise, extra judicial confession by its very nature is a weak piece of evidence. It may be used as a corroborative piece of evidence in tandem with substantive evidence," the bench said. "In wake of the discussion made above (in the judgment), we have no hesitation in holding that the prosecution failed to bring home the charge and establish the guilt of the accused appellant beyond reasonable doubt," it said. The bench noted that the incident had taken place around 11:30 am. And the victim's brother had admitted in his cross-examination that the body was lifted from the spot

at about 4 p.m. It said there cannot be any doubt that the victim's brother could not have decided at the first blush that the deceased had expired as a result of a knife blow. "The natural reaction expected from a brother in such a situation would have been to take immediate steps for taking the victim to the hospital so as to save his life," it said, adding the victim's brother did not make any such attempt, and in this background, his presence at the crime scene was doubtful. The apex court, which quashed the verdicts of the high court and the trial court, acquitted the appellant.

INS Talwar seizes 940 kg of contraband narcotics: Navy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Naval ship INS Talwar, mission deployed in Western Arabian Sea for Maritime Security Operations as part of Combined Task Force 150 led Focused Operation Crimson Barracuda successfully apprehended a suspicious dhow on April 13 and seized 940 kg of contraband narcotics, navy said here on Tuesday. Giving details, officials said the ship's specialist boarding teams and MARCOs seized 940 kgs of contraband narcotics. The drugs are being disposed off as per CPMF SOPs. The seized drugs included 453 kg of methamphetamine, 416 kg of hash and 71 kg of heroin from a dhow as part of Focused Operation Crimson Barracuda. The Indian Navy joined CPMF last November. "I commend the crew of INS Talwar for their efforts throughout this Focused Operation and their hard work has paid off with this seizure of 940 kg of drugs," said Royal Canadian Navy Capt. Colin Matthews, Commander,



Combined Task Force 150. "This seizure, the fourth of this Focused Operation, demonstrates the effectiveness and professionalism of CPMF and of the Indian Navy, in deterring and disrupting criminal and terrorist activities at sea." Crimson Barracuda, which concluded on April 15, focused on countering terrorist and criminal organizations' use of the high seas to conduct smuggling operations in the Western Indian Ocean region. CTF 150 is one of five task forces under Combined Maritime Forces, the world's largest international naval partnership. CTF 150's mission is to

deter and disrupt the ability of non-state actors to move weapons, drugs and other illicit substances in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman. Combined Maritime Forces is a 42-nation naval partnership upholding the international rules-based order by promoting security and stability across 3.2 million square miles of water encompassing some of the world's most important shipping lanes. Relentless efforts of Indian Navy as a CPMF partner reaffirms its commitment towards ensuring a drug free neighbourhood.

EC bars Surjewala for 48 hours for derogatory remarks against Hema Malini

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Tuesday barred Congress leader Randeep Surjewala from campaigning for 48 hours over his alleged derogatory remarks against BJP MP Hema Malini. This is the first campaign ban imposed by the poll body in this Lok Sabha election cycle. The Election Commission last Tuesday issued a show-cause notice to Surjewala for his alleged "undignified, uncivilised and vulgar" remarks against Malini. The poll body said it has carefully gone through the contents and averments made in the reply of Surjewala. "The commission without prejudice to any order/notice issued or to be issued subsequently to him in the matter relating to MCC violations, hereby, strongly condemns the impugned statement made by him during the election campaign held in Haryana and repudiates Randeep Surjewala



for the misconduct," the poll watchdog said. The commission, under Article 324 of the Constitution and all other powers enabling in this behalf, bars Surjewala from holding any public meetings, public processions, public rallies, road shows and interviews, public utterances in media (electronic, print, social media) etc. In connection with ongoing elections for 48 hours from 6 pm on April 16, it said. In its notice to Surjewala, the EC had said that on careful examination, the comments were found to be "highly undignified, vulgar and uncivilised" and to be prima facie violative of the provisions of the MCC and the poll panel's advisory issued to parties last

Oldest IAF pilot dies at 103



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Air Force (IAF)'s oldest living pilot Squadron Leader Dalip Singh Majithia died at the age of 103 at his farm in Rudrapur, Uttarakhand on Monday. His wife Joan Sanders Majithia passed away in 2021 at the age of 100. The couple is survived by two daughters. Majithia was born in Shimla on July 27, 1920 and joined the IAF volunteer reserve in 1940 during World War-II. He joined the 4th Pilot's Course at the Initial Training School (ITA) in Walton, Lahore, in August 1940 and three months later awarded the best pilot trophy. He was then posted to the No. 1 Flying Training School in Ambala to continue advanced flying training. After serving in various capacities, he retired from the IAF in 1947.

Contribute fully in 400 seats goal: PM to Bengal Lok Sabha elections: INDIA Bloc candidate

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi resumed his electoral campaign in North Bengal once again giving out a 400-seat-call so as to enable him translate his "trailer" of a performance into a full-fledged act of making India the third largest economic power in the world.



who attack and injure them when they come in search of operations." Saying that the Mamata Banerjee Government had given a freedom to the criminals Modi said how "the TMC has given Bengal in lease" to the anti-social elements and infiltrators.

"All these years you have seen introducing a whole lot of schemes for the people but that was all a trailer... this time if you vote me to power the whole picture will unfold before you," the Prime Minister said from twin rallies of Balurghat and Raiganj in North Bengal adding the people of Bengal had made up their minds to help the BJP go beyond 400 seats this time around.

"Come June 4, and Bengal has decided to help the BJP breach the 400-seat mark... this large gathering conveys this message to me that the people of Bengal will definitely bless us to achieve that feat," of 400 seats, the Prime Minister said. However, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who was holding a rally barely 200 km away at Jalpaiguri said "let them cry hoarse for 400-seats... but they will not get more than 200 this time round," wondering "if they are so confident of getting 400 seats then why are they sending agencies and sending opposition leaders to jail."

"An unrelenting Prime Minister on the other hand continued to fire salvoes at the Trinamool Congress for turning Bengal into a 'free zone of the corrupt and criminals.'" Asking the people to shun the party that was committed to change the demography of Bengal, the Prime Minister said "the TMC Government has been playing an open game of corruption which we have seen in the every strata of the administration... the school teachers' recruitment is a big example."

"Even the investigating agencies are not spared by the Trinamool Congress goons" PD(370)A

Amendment Act which was made to provide citizenship to genuine people the Prime Minister said, "they are misleading the people on CAA and promoting infiltrators" which would ruin the future of the people of Bengal.

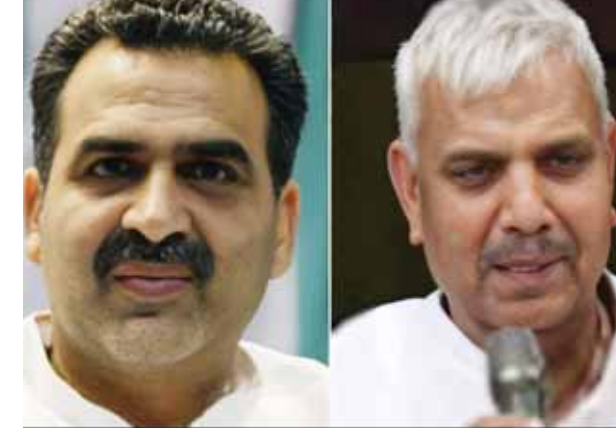
In an apparent bid to wean back the women voters that had of late been siding with the TMC, thanks to the women-centric schemes like Kanyashree and Laxmi Bhandar the Prime Minister Sandeshkhali and reminded how the women of this State were being oppressed and dishonored.

Whatever happened at Sandeshkhali sent shivers down the entire nation," the Prime Minister said adding how the TMC leaders grabbed people's lands and sexually exploited their women.

PTI ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP)

Samajwadi Party leader Harendra Singh Malik, who is contesting the Lok Sabha election from Muzaffarnagar as INDIA bloc nominee, said the RLD aligning with the BJP will not have any poll impact in the constituency.

The former Rajya Sabha member is pitted against BJP's Sanjeev Balyan, whom he described as an "accidental leader". Both Malik and Balyan belong to the influential Jat community of western Uttar Pradesh.



(RLD)switched sides to leave the INDIA bloc and align with the BJP. The move left many in the region surprised. In the 2019 polls, Balyan had defeated Chaudhary's father and former RLD chief Ajit Singh

in Muzaffarnagar. "So that (RLD) is no factor here... The BJP will not get any benefit from this (RLD's support)," the Jat leader told PTI at his home here.

Malik recalled "political FIRs" that were lodged by Muzaffarnagar police during the 2019 elections, including one related to an attack on the convoy of Jayant Chaudhary's wife Charu Chaudhary.

where he may align with anyone he wants to. Now even Farooq Abdullah is praising the BJP. But the truth is that supporters of Chaudhary Charan Singh are with us," Malik claimed.

"If they speak in favour of anyone, it is definitely going to have an effect on the poll outcomes," Malik said. On the issues he is taking up in the biggest among them is 'samman' (respect) and claimed that the people have been "insulted" in the last 10 years.

PUBLIC NOTICE: Chetan Swara, S/o Late Sh. Madan Swara, R/o B-117, Second Floor, Sadrajung Encave, New Delhi-110029, have lost my document...

PUBLIC NOTICE: My clients Omdutt Pindwal S/o Sh. Rabber Singh and Smt. Premwati W/o Sh. Omdutt Pindwal, both R/o N.C. 1-168, Gali No. 15, Khajoori Khas, North-East, Delhi-110094, have severed all relation from their son Paras and his wife Priti...

PUBLIC NOTICE: To be known to all that I, Deepika Bhatia W/o Vijayender Kumar Bhatia R/o, DDA Built-up SFS Flat No. 334 First Floor Pocket-Cat-II Sheikh Sarai Phase-1 New Delhi, Moh. 9810493433, Email: Deepikabhatia@yahoo.com, has applied for the conversion of aforesaid property...

PUBLIC NOTICE: The general public is hereby informed that Mr. Mukesh Kumar Garg has retired from the partnership firm named M/s Bikaner Namkeen Wala Food Products as on 01/04/2024 through execution of Addition and Retirement Deed dated 01/04/2024.

PUBLIC NOTICE: Flat No. D6-1104 (Now D5-12A04) Sector 53 Gurugram was purchased by Mr. Manmohan Malik S/o Sh. C.S. Malik & Sangita Malik And Flat No. D5-503 Sector 53 Gurugram was purchased by Mr. Sanjay Kakkar S/o Sh. H.R. Kakkar & Anika Kakkar...

Indoor Medical Records of the Patients admitted during period of 01/04/2015 to 11/07/2017 are scheduled to be disposed of as per hospital policy.

PUBLIC NOTICE: The Public at large is hereby notified that my client intends to purchase Built up Property No. 503 situated at Functional Industrial Area, Delhi-110092 from Sri Dwarka Das Agarwal (Dwarka Das Agarwal) S/o Shri Shiv Shankar Agarwal who represented himself as the sole owner of the said property by virtue of CONVEYANCE DEED duly registered in the office of S.R. VII, Delhi.

SAHLI ARORA (ADVOCATE) Office No. 107, First Floor, M.S. Chambers, Aruna Park, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110092

ICICI Bank SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE: The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

ICICI Bank PUBLIC NOTICE: A notice is hereby given that the following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non Performing Assets (NPA). The notice were issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses as provided to the bank by them, that in addition thereto for the purposes of information of the said borrowers enumerated below, the said borrowers are being informed by way of this public notice.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS CHANGE OF NAME: I, Anand Kumar S/o Omkar Nath R/o H.No-946, Bhooor Colony, Near Bharti Public School, Kheri Kalan (113), Old Faridabad, Haryana-121002, hereby declare that Anand Kumar and Anand is a same and one person, In future I shall be known as Anand Kumar for all future purposes.

ICICI Bank SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE: The above-mentioned borrower(s)/ guarantor(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

ICICI Bank SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE: The above-mentioned borrower(s)/ guarantor(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

ICICI Bank PUBLIC NOTICE: A notice is hereby given that the following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non Performing Assets (NPA). The notice were issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses as provided to the bank by them, that in addition thereto for the purposes of information of the said borrowers enumerated below, the said borrowers are being informed by way of this public notice.

NORTHERN RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE: Sr. DEE/EMU/GZB for and on behalf of President of India, invites open e-tender for the under noted work: 1. Tender Notice No. 232-Elect-EMU-WC-13-23-24

ICICI Bank SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE: The above-mentioned borrower(s)/ guarantor(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

ICICI Bank PUBLIC NOTICE: A notice is hereby given that the following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non Performing Assets (NPA). The notice were issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses as provided to the bank by them, that in addition thereto for the purposes of information of the said borrowers enumerated below, the said borrowers are being informed by way of this public notice.

FORM NO. INC-26 Advertisement to be Published in the Newspaper (Pursuant to rule 30 of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014) NOTICE BEFORE REGIONAL DIRECTOR, NORTHERN REGION, NEW DELHI In the matter of the Companies Act, 2013, Section 13(4) of Companies Act, 2013 and Rule 30(6) (a) of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014 AND IN THE MATTER OF M/s FESTIN FOODS & BEVERAGES PRIVATE LIMITED A COMPANY HAVING ITS REGISTERED OFFICE AT E-26/47, BLOCK-26, RAJIV CAMP, MINI MARKET, TRILOK PURI, EAST DELHI - 110093

ICICI Bank SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE: The above-mentioned borrower(s)/ guarantor(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

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PRINCE GUPTA (DIRECTOR) By Order of the Board For FESTIN FOODS & BEVERAGES PRIVATE LIMITED DIN-09028833

PIRAMAL CAPITAL & HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED Registered Office Address: Unit No.601, 6th Floor Piramal Amiti Building, Piramal Agastya Corporate Park, Karama Junction, Opp Fire Station, LBS Marg, Kurla (West), Mumbai-400 070. CIN: L65910M1984PL0332639, Website: www.piramalfinance.com

ICICI Bank PUBLIC NOTICE: A notice is hereby given that the following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non Performing Assets (NPA). The notice were issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses as provided to the bank by them, that in addition thereto for the purposes of information of the said borrowers enumerated below, the said borrowers are being informed by way of this public notice.

Shower of blessings

For the first time in a decade, IMD predicts above-normal rainfall across the nation

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has marked a significant milestone by releasing its long-term forecast. For the first time in a decade, the IMD has predicted above-average rainfall across almost the entire expanse of the country. This forecast carries profound implications for various sectors, ranging from agriculture to water resource management and beyond. Policymakers and farmers will welcome this news, although ordinary individuals may find themselves contending with a more pronounced monsoon season than usual. It would indeed be a sigh of relief for all farmers. The agricultural sector, which forms the backbone of India's economy, is heavily reliant on timely and adequate rainfall. Adequate precipitation is essential for the cultivation of crops and the sustenance of agricultural activities. With an anticipated surplus in rainfall, farmers can expect better soil moisture levels, leading to improved crop yields. Additionally, the forecast offers them an opportunity to plan their cropping patterns and maximise agricultural output. Besides, India's water resources are intricately linked to the monsoon patterns. Above-normal rainfall augurs well for the replenishment of reservoirs, lakes and groundwater aquifers. It provides the much-needed boost to water levels, especially in regions grappling with water scarcity. Adequate rainfall can alleviate the stress on water resources, ensuring better availability for domestic, industrial and agricultural purposes. A bountiful monsoon also facilitates the generation of hydroelectric power, thus contributing to the energy sector. However, it may be too early to celebrate a normal or above-normal monsoon. Weather forecasts are probabilistic in nature; even a good monsoon across the country is a rare occurrence. While above-normal rainfall brings several benefits, it also presents certain challenges. Excessive precipitation can lead to flooding, particularly in low-lying areas and regions prone to inundation. Flooding not only causes damage to property and infrastructure but also poses risks to human life. Therefore, authorities must undertake pre-emptive measures such as strengthening infrastructure, improving drainage systems and implementing effective flood management strategies. Heavy rainfall increases the risk of soil erosion and landslides, particularly in hilly terrains. Adequate soil conservation measures and afforestation efforts are essential to mitigate these risks and safeguard vulnerable ecosystems. Also, authorities need to ensure efficient water management practices to prevent wastage and optimise the utilisation of water resources. The IMD's forecast heralds promising prospects for farmers to enhance productivity and for authorities to address water scarcity concerns. By adopting a comprehensive approach that combines preparedness, conservation and sustainable practices, India can harness the benefits of abundant rainfall while minimising associated risks, paving the way for socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.



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PICTALK



Devotees stand in a queue to offer prayers at Dakshineswar Kali Temple on Bengali New Year, in Kolkata. PFI

Reflections on class and age discrimination

From a childhood encounter at a political rally to navigating workplace dynamics, an individual's journey unveils lessons in equality and empathy

The then Prime Minister was to address a public rally in Ghaziabad. My father, posted as the head of the electricity department in the city, was responsible for the electrical arrangements at the venue. He took us to listen to her speech from a vantage point. I do not remember the speech. What I do remember is that my father came back immediately after the event ended and rushed us from the venue. He kept looking back surreptitiously, asking us to walk faster. I was to learn that a supervisor working under my father and wanting to make a good impression, was also pursuing us to introduce his family. Much later, at a more mature age, I could understand that this was an incident of class discrimination prevalent in our society. I was to learn quite a few life-altering lessons a few years later as I joined Indian railway services. During my first posting in Calcutta, I was asked to study an old machine and propose measures to improve its productivity, taking the assistance of an experienced supervisor. The two of us



SANJAY CHANDRA

spent innumerable hours studying the machine. I became an apprentice to a more knowledgeable person, even though he was lower in the hierarchy. Then and even later in my subsequent postings, or even after I quit an active professional life, I learnt a lot about handling work-related issues and even man management, from my junior colleagues, by not dwelling on the so-called finer nuances of a superior status. I also learnt empathy for others. In yet another posting, as a branch head, I was approached by irate union leaders who complained about the rude language by a junior colleague. His fault was that he had used the term 'turn to address a worker rather than the more respectable aap. This was Bengal, where everyone is expected to use a respectful salutation when talking to another person, whatever the status. I tried to assuage the hurt sentiments by pointing out that the junior colleague came from north India where it was a common practice to use the more affectionate 'turn even while addressing parents. The representatives were not done. They pointed out that I was

always respectful even though I was from the same region. This was another lesson learnt, never to be forgotten, about the futility of status discrimination. We were visiting relatives a few days back. My wife's uncle, now nearing 80, narrated a recent experience. He had gone to some office for work, where a much younger person jumped the queue. The uncle objected which was rudely brushed aside by the young man, "How is it material? Have I pointed a gun at you?" This was a status discrimination of another kind - a perceived superiority of the youth against old age. Or was it the gun power? We ought to remember what Nelson Mandela said, "No one is born hated another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

Ignoring neighbours to embrace the world

The BJP Government has put Neighbourhood First Policy on backburner, leaving it underperforming amid rising anti-India sentiments in the region

BJP government has made foreign policy a key election issue: Prime Minister Modi has stated, 'Neighbour first and Act East second.' Foreign Minister S Jaishankar is campaigning how G20 has enhanced India's image and influence as a global player. Quest for High Table has shifted focus from Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP). S Jaishankar explained that politics can go up and down in neighbourhood but people generally have good feelings for India. That is certainly not the ground reality today when in almost every country, anti-India feeling is prevalent. NFP which was formally launched in 2008, has not performed optimally due to internal and external factors. Act East appended later has also failed to take off. Followed several add-ons: *sab ka saath sab ka vikas*; SAGAR; Vishva Mitra; First Security Responder and so on. Former Minister Jaswant Singh in his book *Defending India*, has noted that India is strategically confined by Macmahon Line, Durand Line, LAC and LoC. Still it was once the regional hegemon having promulgated the Indira Doctrine and employed military force in national interest. India's geography and asymmetry with neighbours are both asset and liability. Congenital problems with Pakistan and later China have made it the least connected South Asian region. NFP was designed to shape the neighbourhood, especially the periphery, extending the neighbourhood to Mauritius and Iran in the West and Myanmar in the East. Curating friendly regimes, winning the goodwill of people through economic linkages and connectivity, creating strategic assets, minimising liabilities and most of all, being sensitive to genuine concerns of neighbours were some objectives of NFP. Rubbing neighbours the wrong way was not, nor meshing domestic politics with diplomacy. That an aspirational India would create glitches for NFP was not envisioned. China, gate-crashed after hiding its strength and biding its time arriving with deep pockets, BRI, MSR and Wolf Warrior



ASHOK K MEHTA

diplocracy. With ups and downs in politics regional rivalries were in full flow. Nepalese scholars were first to note change. The founding father, King Prithvi Narayan Shah had observed that Nepal is a yam between two boulders: China and India. They corrected that gospel to three boulders, adding US. Till late last year, Maldives followed India First policy, the only country to publicly proclaim the choice. That has changed to India Out with President Muizzu demanding the 88 Indian soldiers leave before elections next month. He even hinted that Delhi tried bullying Male. Its strategic geography is pivotal in the Indian Ocean. Maldives is for now China First but India could have been more gentle with its smallest neighbour. Raking up the Kachhathevu issue that the government admitted it was settled in 2015, was a self goal but both Modi and Jaishankar wished to politically embarrass the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu and INC. Instead it has infuriated Sri Lankan media and ordinary Lankans, especially fisherfolk among the lakhs of Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils. US Assistance Secretary of State for South Asia and Central Asia, Donald Lu has called Sri Lanka's economic recovery a "comeback story" with concessional loans from India and USAID. That story



MOST, IF NOT ALL, REGIONAL COUNTRIES WANT SAARC TO BE REVIVED, BUT INDIA'S IRON-CLAD POLICY OF NOT DEALING WITH PAKISTAN UNTIL TERRORISM FROM ITS SOIL STOPS HAS BEEN AGGRAVATED BY THE REMOVAL OF ARTICLE 370

will suffer a setback lead to revival of anti-India sentiment and further tilt towards China to whom Lanka owes USD 10 bn. In Bangladesh BNP has started an India Out campaign. China is heavily invested in projects including constructing a submarine port near Cox's Bazar adequate for 8 to 10 submarines. Bhutan was within a whisker of a land swap with China by the previous government. Otherwise Doklam could have been lost to the Chinese which would have endangered Siliguri Corridor, the India-Bhutan-China trijunction dispute. The new Lotay Tshering government might delay the Doklam swap. In Myanmar, the military is rapidly losing ground in the civil war with Ethnic Armed Organisations and NUG. It has lost border control with China, Bangladesh, India and Thailand to EAOs. Most critical for India is Sittwe Port vital for the multi-modal Kaladan project and also the trilateral highway to Thailand. Reuters reported that junta troops nearby have fled and an attack on Sittwe is imminent. But Sohail Kazan, executive director, Bharat Freight, said last week that Sittwe will be safe following a deal between junta and Rakhine state government. If true, that is good news. Kaladan project was contracted in 2008 and is nowhere near completion dislocating India's two signature Act East projects. Delhi has to rethink its relations with the junta. Most if not all regional countries want SAARC to be revived. But India's iron clad policy of not dealing with Pakistan till terrorism from its soil stops has been aggravated by removal of Article 370. Trade potential according to World Bank between Pakistan and India is between USD 15 and 20 bn. India's NFP has not worked because its global ambitions have diluted its zeal for the neighbourhood. Further, it has been unable to compete with China despite geography being on its side. Under NFP and Act East, India has concentrated mainly in the maritime domain resulting in neglect of inland connectivity. The Government brags about North East shining (Manipur is a shame) but little progress is seen over connectivity of BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan India Nepal) or South East Asia. The Bangladesh-China India Myanmar (BCIM) is also dead. India's focus on neighbourhood has wavered, failing to secure the periphery. Some diplomats have advocated India setting red lines? Winning over neighbours is now a huge challenge. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Constitutional Morality: The Pillar of India's Democracy", published on April 15, this is my response. India's electoral fervour every four years embodies the essence of democracy, echoing the aspirations of its constituent assembly. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of constitutional morality as the cornerstone of governance rings true today. It's a conscious cultivation, not merely a natural sentiment, vital for a vibrant democracy. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud aptly emphasises the judiciary's role in upholding constitutional values like dignity and equality. This jurisprudence, evolving alongside societal dynamics, ensures the Constitution remains a living document. Recent landmark judgments, from LGBTQ+ rights to adultery laws, highlight the judiciary's commitment to constitutional morality over popular sentiment. Yet, navigating societal and religious intersections, as seen in the Sabarimala case, poses ongoing challenges. The court's role in reconciling evolving beliefs, evident in decisions on euthanasia and abortion rights, underscores its pivotal position in shaping India's moral landscape. As we navigate these complexities, constitutional morality stands as a beacon, guiding our journey towards a more just and equitable society.

Sunandna Sharma | Hisar

HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Unravelling the Roy family's legacy", published on April 15, this is my response. The political landscape for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections reveals not just contemporary rivalries but also echoes of Bengal's tumultuous past. Amidst accusations and justifications, the saga of Siraj-ud-Daula's downfall resurfaces, highlighting the intricate web of alliances and betrayals that shaped the region's destiny. Delving into history, one confronts the pivotal Battle of Plassey in 1757, altering the trajectory of Bengal's identity. The

Revitalising railway realms



Apropos the news article, "Desolate railway tracks transformed into a verdant oasis", published on April 15, this is my response. The transformation of a once-ignored stretch of land into the lush oasis of 'Evergreen Nursery' is a testament to human innovation and environmental stewardship. This verdant haven, nestled amidst the bustling railway tracks, not only rejuvenates the landscape but also symbolises a paradigm shift in urban con-

servation efforts. The metamorphosis from a crime-ridden wasteland to a vibrant botanical sanctuary reflects the power of collaborative endeavours between public and private entities. The partnership between the Delhi Division of Northern Railway and Evergreen Nursery exemplifies a shared commitment to sustainable development and beautification. Moreover, the altruistic purpose behind the nursery, where plants are nurtured not for profit but for communal enrichment, resonates deeply with the ethos of community service. It serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness between humanity and nature, where each leaf and bloom embodies a story of renewal and hope. As we traverse through these green corridors, we are reminded not only of the beauty of flora but also of our collective responsibility to safeguard our planet for future generations.

Neeraj Shah | Delhi

clash between Bengali and Islamic cultures, symbolised by Siraj-ud-Daula's reign, echoes through the ages. The triumph of Clive and the merchant princes ushered in a new era, fostering a renaissance that birthed luminaries like Tagore and Bose. The revelation from Atlee underscores the lesser-known role of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, a beacon of resistance against British rule. His legacy, intertwined with Bengal's ethos, stands as a testament to the region's indomitable spirit, shaping not just India's past, but its future. In this electoral battleground, as parties jostle for power, Bengal's historical tapestry reminds us of the enduring struggle for identity and freedom.

Roshan Kumar | Bhubaneswar

CAFFEINE CHRONICLES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Exploring the world of single origins, flat whites and beyond!", published on April 14, this is my response. Melbourne's caffeinated landscape is a saga of passion, history and innovation, woven into the

city's very fabric. With an abundance of cafes that surpass a thousand, each sip of espresso unveils a narrative steeped in Italian heritage and modern-day craftsmanship. Monique Bayer's guided tour offers a portal into this world, where every alleyway hides a treasure trove of coffee delights. From the legacy of Pellegrini Espresso Bar to the emergence of artisanal roasters like Industry Beans, Melbourne's coffee evolution is palpable. Monique's curated journey delves deep, introducing nuances like filter coffee and cold drip variants, enriching the sensory experience. In this city, coffee isn't just a beverage; it's a cultural phenomenon. From paleo-friendly butter coffee to innovative frozen concoctions, Melbourne's cafes cater to every palate. With terms like cupping and AeroPress echoing through the streets, it's evident that coffee here is more than a drink—it's a way of life.

Kundan JM | Bhopal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN STRIVE TO DEVELOP FAITH

The pursuit of guidance from the Divine holds the promise of revelation



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let me start with why we often don't endeavour to develop faith, as is commonly observed. Lord Krishna has aptly stated, "Out of thousands of men, hardly anyone strives for perfection" (The Bhagavad Gita 7.3). The essence of a perfect life lies in becoming a devotee of God, for He is the ultimate controller of the entire world. There exist numerous reasons, or perhaps excuses, for this reluctance. Beginning with a straightforward argument: who has truly seen Him? If God holds such significance, why does He not present Himself so that we may behold Him? In this age of the internet, one might argue that He could easily make His presence felt. Some may argue that God is unmanifest, yet we lack any tangible experience of such an entity. If God is indeed a reality without whom we cannot thrive, then why do some ideologies, such as communism, appear to manage so well, especially in certain countries? Why is there pervasive poverty and suffering in the world? If God possesses omnipotence as described, why does He not rectify these injustices? We encounter many ascetics on the streets, leading some to conclude that only those who have failed turn to God, while they believe they can manage without divine intervention. Perhaps they might consider turning to God later if the need arises. These excuses, however, varied, ultimately lead us to a sense of emptiness. In reality, it is often our ego that serves as the primary hindrance. We struggle to accept an entity so vast and incomprehensible, leaving us feeling insignificant and powerless. Another significant barrier lies in the acceptance of spiritual practices, which may seem unfamiliar and daunting. Yet, all these excuses only serve to deepen our sense of emptiness. Why not begin by praying for what we deeply desire? Even a child can pray and often does. If our prayers are sincere and aligned with righteousness, God may consider them.



The next step involves seeking guidance from God, who is eager to provide it. Given His omniscience, God communicates in various ways; to advanced devotees, He may impart intuition or even speak directly, while beginners may receive guidance through mediums such as family members, friends, or even seemingly random occurrences like messages in newspapers. It should be evident that following God's instructions is a wise course of action, yielding manifold benefits. Let us now explore some basic practices that are both accessible and highly rewarding. My personal favourite is 'darshan' — simply gazing upon an image or idol of God. Observing God's benevolent countenance, we can feel His attraction towards us. However, it's crucial to remember that adherence to righteousness, or 'dharma,' is of paramount importance to God. While deity forms or images serve as focal points, God's presence transcends physical limitations, permeating all existence. Another simple yet profound practice is offering 'namaskar' — paying homage to God with folded hands. This act serves to humble our egos, which often obstruct our connection with the divine and hinder our interactions with fellow beings. As we persist in these practices, we will gradually experience God's responses, not necessarily through miraculous events, but through subtle yet discernible manifestations. We can liken this experience to connecting to the internet—where there is a network, there is connectivity. Similarly, God, omnipresent as He is, can be experienced in various ways. God's subtle presence is accessible to all. He eagerly awaits our approach, desiring nothing but our well-being. Let us cast aside our doubts and excuses and wholeheartedly commit to forging a deeper connection with the divine.

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

Iran strikes threaten regional stability



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

The assault, though primarily symbolic in nature, highlights the mounting tensions in the region. However, the US endeavours to uphold a balance of power



REUTERS

At a time when people in several countries in South Asia and East Asia were celebrating the traditional New Year, Iran, the second-largest country in West Asia, launched a series of missile attacks targeting its arch-enemy Israel. Jordan and Saudi Arabia supported Israel and intercepted most of the missiles fired by Iran. The attack appears to be symbolic, aimed at boosting the morale of organisations such as Hamas in Palestine, Yemen's Houthis, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon, all of which have declared war against Israel in West Asia, as well as countries like Lebanon and Syria, rather than engaging in an official war against Israel. This attack serves as a morale booster. Shortly after the attack, Hamas rejected the Cairo agreement, a result of discussions between top intelligence agencies, the CIA and Mossad, together with other stakeholders mediated by Egypt, concerning Israeli hostages. However, many encouraged Israel to respond quickly. However, United States President Biden stated that he would not yield if attacks were made against Iran. It is seen as a matter of prior agreement by both parties rather than a threat. The truth is, that the US administration cannot afford to assist Israel in another war at this point. At a time when the country's reputation has been tarnished at the international level and when Biden's political power is extremely weak if the United States makes such an unwise decision, it will have to face unprecedented consequences shortly, similar to how the United States has caused irreversible damage to world peace and order. Elon Musk's recent statement that the possibility of the United States becoming the victim of a September 11-style surprise attack is very high seems to hold deep truth. The consequences of these conflicts may not only affect Washington or New York but also American military bases around the world. The likelihood of an attack similar to the one on Pearl Harbor is high. The United States cannot always continue to create military conflicts in other countries for its war trade and keep its superpower status as it desires. The superpower, as history has proven, will inevitably crumble at any



THE ATTACK BY IRAN WAS RETALIATION. IT IS A RESPONSE TO THE ISRAELI PROVOCATION AT THE IRANIAN CONSULATE IN SYRIA, A GROSS VIOLATION OF THE VIENNA CONVENTION, WHICH CLAIMED THE LIVES OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS

given point. Compared to its lifespan, the United States is a relatively young superpower in the grand scheme of civilisation, considering the collapse of great empires. Throughout history, mighty empires have risen and fallen, leaving lasting legacies. The Roman Empire, spanning from 27 BC to AD 476, peaked in the 2nd century AD, but internal strife, economic instability and external invasions, such as by the Visigoths and Vandals, led to its fragmentation. The Ottoman Empire, dominant in the 16th and 17th centuries across the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and Western Asia, declined due to internal conflicts and challenges from European powers like Russia and Austria. The Mongol Empire, founded by Genghis Khan in the 13th century, stretched from Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean, but internal divisions and the death of key leaders led to its fragmentation by the late 14th century. Lastly, the British Empire, spanning from the 16th to the 20th century, faced economic strain and nationalist movements, ultimately dissolving due to internal weakness and external pressures. These collapses, driven by political, military and socioeconomic factors, reshaped the world, underscoring the transient nature of power and the enduring impact of history on modern geopolitics and civilisation. However, the deep state of the United States has certainly studied and comprehended global history better than many other countries. That is why the basic strategy of the United States has been to create new wars while talking about peace and turn those wars into long-term tragedies to keep uncertainties. This strategy can weaken its rivals and maintain its power continuously. These issues become clear when many conflicts are understood in their political and economic context. The ideology that Israel has contin-

uously pursued against Iran in national and international forums is not a single opinion or rivalry of Israel, but it is a long-term propagation through carefully selected facts and objectives together with the United States. On one hand, the West fuels wars against hostile countries. On the other, it manufactures internal crises in those nations by imposing international sanctions. This remains a persistent behaviour of the West. The thing that should not be forgotten here is that the attack by Iran was a retaliation. It is a response to the Israeli provocation on the Iranian consulate in Syria, a gross violation of the Vienna Convention, which claimed the lives of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Iran's calculation, as some analysts pointed out, was that if it did not respond, Israel would seek to push back and degrade the axis of resistance across the region. However, it is unreasonable to think that Israel miscalculated its attack on the Iranian diplomatic site in Syria as Israel continues to keep deep intelligence penetration of IRGC and Hezbollah networks in Syria, making those networks highly vulnerable to Israeli attacks. Iran must uphold its reputation among its allies and address internal political crises effectively. Therefore, prioritising attacks conducted through proxies is advisable, while occasional skirmishes from both sides should be acknowledged. Moreover, it is very important to consider the government's domestic policies and openly mention Iran's inherent weaknesses amid escalating tensions among some politicians and officials in Iran. They highlighted the many crises facing the Iranian government and warned against engaging in direct conflict with Israel without first addressing these pressing issues, which they argued would only worsen the situation. They emphasised the impor-

tance of prudent governance and effective crisis management and the need to mitigate ongoing crises to prevent system collapse. Economic challenges and psychological instability in society are urgent issues that need to be addressed as they are now breeding grounds for enemy penetrations. They advocated the adoption of conciliatory policies to reduce tensions and promote harmony and empathy in Iranian society. The regime's repressive domestic policies, particularly regarding the mandatory hijab enforcement campaign, have fuelled widespread discontent and delegitimised the government. Recent anti-Israel actions, like seizing a cargo ship, have caused Iran's markets to react negatively. The national currency's value has hit a record low. President Ibrahim Raisi faces criticism and calls for a cabinet reshuffle to address economic hardships affecting many Iranians. Over the years, Israel has demonstrated its capability in targeting Iranian nuclear scientists and infrastructure. Notably, the Stuxnet cyber-attack, jointly orchestrated by the United States and Israel, delivered a significant blow to Iran's nuclear ambitions. This proves that national interests are never compromised for domestic political issues, except for former President Trump. Stuxnet marked a pivotal moment, ushering in the era of cyberwarfare, where lines of code wielded the power to reshape geopolitical landscapes. Its impact reverberated globally, highlighting the evolving nature of warfare and the formidable role of technology in modern conflicts. In this situation, Iran cannot continue to be silent. It must prove its power numerically. Therefore, the recent attack was more a reputational-preservation move than a declaration of war. (The writer is a Sri Lankan Journalist. Views are personal)

Uttarakhand women: Agents of change in State politics

From leading environmental crusades to confronting social injustices head-on, they embody the spirit of the region, epitomising resilience and fortitude

Women in Uttarakhand are renowned for their extraordinary resilience and hard work, characteristics deeply rooted in their Himalayan heritage. Despite grappling with the challenges of life in this rugged terrain, Uttarakhand's women have consistently been at the forefront of social and environmental movements, epitomized by figures like Gaura Devi of the Chipko movement and Tinchari Mai (Deepa Nautiyal), who spearheaded the Anti-Liquor movement. These women have fearlessly confronted injustice, embodying the spirit of Uttarakhand. This article seeks to underscore the political engagement of women in Uttarakhand, shedding light on their role in bol-



SHEETAL ARYA

stering democracy. The political participation of women in Uttarakhand can be delineated into two primary spheres: first, women assuming leadership positions within the political domain and second, women exercising their electoral rights as voters. Since the inception of the state, the representation of women in the legislative assembly has seen a significant

albeit gradual rise. From four women members in the first assembly, the number has increased by 50% in the 2022 elections, marking a commendable stride. However, despite this progress, women remain a minority in the assembly, constituting a mere fraction of the total members. Presently, the legislative assembly boasts eight women members, including three Dalit women, the highest number in Uttarakhand's history. Notably, Smt. Ritu Khanduri serves as the speaker, while Smt. Rekha Arya is the lone female minister in the cabinet. Despite these advancements, the disparity in political representation persists, underscoring the challenges women face in accessing political power. While women's representa-

tion in the parliamentary arena remains scant, with only two female MPs out of eight, the discrepancy between the female population (49%) and their political representation is stark. Despite their active participation in grassroots movements, women's presence in formal politics remains disproportionately low. Women in Uttarakhand constitute the backbone of the rural economy, grappling with issues like migration, environmental degradation and inadequate healthcare services. However, societal norms and economic constraints often deter their political involvement. Moreover, political parties' reluctance to field female candidates exacerbates this disparity. For instance, in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha



elections, the Congress has not nominated any female candidates, while the BJP has nominated only one, Mrs. Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah. Nevertheless, women voters in Uttarakhand have emerged as a formidable force, outnumbering men in recent elections. Their increasing political awareness, fueled by issues directly affecting their lives,

coupled with higher literacy rates and government initiatives like reservation quotas, has galvanized their participation. Policies such as 30% horizontal reservation in government jobs and 50% reservation in Panchayats have bolstered women's political agency, enabling them to assume leadership roles at the grassroots level. In the run-up to the 2024 Parliamentary elections, both major parties are vying for women's support, employing diverse strategies. Congress has pledged financial assistance and job reservations for women, emphasizing women's security and justice. Conversely, the BJP highlights its implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) as a milestone for women's rights,

coupled with grassroots mobilization efforts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal among women voters, attributed to his grassroots connect and initiatives like the Women Reservation Bill, further consolidates BJP's electoral prospects. The "Modi factor" has resonated with Uttarakhand's women, contributing to BJP's continued dominance since 2017. To bolster women's empowerment, the state government has allocated a substantial gender budget for 2024-25, earmarked for bridging gender disparities and promoting equality. Additionally, measures like deploying women employees to oversee polling booths and facilitating pregnant women's access to voting booths underscore the commitment to

inclusive governance. In conclusion, Dr Ambedkar's assertion that a community's progress is contingent upon women's advancement holds for Uttarakhand. While women have historically been instrumental in social movements, their underrepresentation in formal politics remains a pressing concern. Addressing these challenges is imperative for ensuring women's political representation and expediting the state's development. As Uttarakhand gears up for the upcoming Chunav Kauthig, with women comprising 48.1 per cent of the electorate, their increased participation promises to be a harbinger of democracy's triumph in the state. (The writer is a research scholar; views are personal)

Trump to return to court after no jurors picked on first day

AP ■ NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump will return to a New York courtroom Tuesday as a judge works to find a panel of jurors who will decide whether the former president is guilty of criminal charges alleging he falsified business records to cover up a sex scandal during the 2016 campaign.

The first day of Trump's history-making hush money trial in Manhattan ended with no one yet chosen to be on the panel of 12 jurors and six alternates. Dozens of people were dismissed after saying they didn't believe they could be fair, though dozens of other prospective jurors have yet to be questioned.

It's the first of Trump's four criminal cases to go to trial and may be the only one that could reach a verdict before voters decide in November whether the presumptive Republican presidential nominee should return to the White House. It puts Trump's legal problems at the center of the closely contested race against President Joe Biden, with Trump painting himself as the victim of a politically motivated justice system working to deprive him of another term.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records as part of an alleged effort to keep sacrosanct — and, he says, bogus — stories about his sex life from emerging during his 2016 campaign. On Monday, Trump called the case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg a "scam" and "witch hunt."

The charges center on \$130,000 in payments that Trump's company made to his then-lawyer, Michael Cohen. He paid that sum on Trump's behalf to keep porn actor Stormy Daniels from going public with her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier. Trump has denied the sexual encounter ever happened.

Prosecutors say the payments to Cohen were falsely logged as legal fees. Prosecutors have described it as part of a scheme to bury damaging stories Trump feared could help his opponent in the 2016 race, par-



ticularly as Trump's reputation was suffering at the time from comments he had made about women.

Trump has acknowledged reimbursing Cohen for the payment and that it was designed to stop Daniels from going public about the alleged encounter. But Trump has previously said it had nothing to do with the campaign.

Jury selection could take several more days — or even weeks — in the heavily Democratic city where Trump grew up and catapulted to celebrity status decades before winning the White House.

Only about a third of the 96 people in the first panel of potential jurors brought into the courtroom on Monday remained after the judge excused some members. More than half of the group was excused after telling the judge they could not be fair and impartial and several others were dismissed for other reasons that were not disclosed.

Another group of more than 100 potential jurors sent to the courthouse Monday was not yet brought into the courtroom for questioning. Meanwhile, Supreme Court on Tuesday is taking up the first of two cases that could affect the criminal prosecution of former President Donald Trump for his efforts to overturn his election loss in 2020. Hundreds of charges stemming from the Capitol riot also are at stake.

The justices are hearing arguments over the charge of obstruction of an official proceeding. That charge, stemming from a law passed in the aftermath of the Enron finan-

cial scandal more than two decades ago, has been brought against 330 people, according to the Justice Department. The court will consider whether it can be used against those who disrupted Congress' certification of Joe Biden's 2020 presidential election victory over Trump.

The former president and presumptive nominee for the 2024 Republican nomination is facing two charges in the case brought by special counsel Jack Smith in Washington that could be knocked out with a favorable ruling from the nation's highest court. Next week, the justices will hear arguments over whether Trump has "absolute immunity" from prosecution in the case, a proposition that has so far been rejected by two lower courts.

The first former U.S. president under indictment, Trump is on trial on hush money charges in New York and also has been charged with election interference in Georgia and with mishandling classified documents in Florida.

In Tuesday's case, the court is hearing an appeal from Joseph Fischer, a former Pennsylvania police officer who has been indicted on seven counts, including obstruction, for his actions on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol in a bid to keep Biden, a Democrat, from taking the White House. Lawyers for Fischer argue that the charge doesn't cover his conduct.

The obstruction charge, which carries up to 20 years behind bars, is among the most widely used felony charges brought

in the massive federal prosecution following the deadly insurrection. Roughly 170 Jan. 6 defendants have been convicted of obstructing or conspiring to obstruct the Jan. 6 joint session of Congress, including the leaders of two far-right extremist groups, the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers. A number of defendants have had their sentences delayed until after the justices rule on the matter. Some rioters have even won early release from prison while the appeal is pending over concerns that they might end up serving longer than they should have if the Supreme Court rules against the Justice Department. That includes Kevin Seefried, a Delaware man who threatened a Black police officer with a pole attached to a Confederate battle flag as he stormed the Capitol. Seefried was sentenced last year to three years behind bars, but a judge recently ordered that he be released one year into his prison term while awaiting the Supreme Court's ruling.

The high court case focuses on whether the anti-obstruction provision of a law that was enacted in 2002 in response to the financial scandal that brought down Enron Corp. can be used against Jan. 6 defendants.

Fischer's lawyers argue that the provision was meant to close a loophole in criminal law and discourage the destruction of records in response to an investigation. Until the Capitol riot, they told the court, every criminal case using the provision had involved allegations of destroying or otherwise manipulating records. But the administration says the other side is reading the law too narrowly, arguing it serves "as a catchall offense designed to ensure complete coverage of all forms of corrupt obstruction of an official proceeding," including Fischer's "alleged conduct in joining a violent riot to disrupt the joint session of Congress certifying the presidential election results."

Smith has argued separately in the immunity case that the obstruction charges against Trump are valid, no matter the outcome of Fischer's case.

raised going towards further enforcement. "This historic legislation will consign smoking to the 'ash heap of history,'" said Deborah Arnott, head of the charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). The Tobacco and Vapes Bill would also give the government new powers to tackle youth vaping by restricting flavours and regulating the way that vapes are sold and packaged to make them less appealing to children. The UK's Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said while vaping can play a useful role in helping adult smokers to quit, non-smokers and children should never vape. The long-term health impacts of vaping are unknown, and the nicotine contained within them can be highly addictive, it warned. According to official figures, responsible for around 80,000 deaths annually, smoking is the UK's single biggest preventable killer and costs the NHS and economy an estimated GBP 17 billion a year — more than the GBP 10 billion annual revenue from tobacco taxation.

Tensions rise in Aus after bishop, priest wounded in knife attack

AP ■ SYDNEY

A teenager has been accused of wounding a Christian bishop and a priest during a church service in the second high-profile knife attack to rock Sydney in recent days, leaving communities on edge, leaders calling for calm and a besieged church urging against retaliation. The 16-year-old was overpowered by the shocked congregation at Christ the Good Shepherd Church after he allegedly stabbed Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel and the Rev. Isaac Royel during a service on Monday night that was being streamed online.

Police have not commented on reports that the boy's fingers were severed by parishioners in the Orthodox Assyrian church in suburban Wakeley, but confirmed his hand injuries were "severe."

Video of the attack spread quickly on social media and an angry mob converged on the



A police forensic officer works at a crime scene at the Christ the Good Shepherd Church in suburban Wakeley in western Sydney, Australia on Tuesday. AP/PTI

church demanding vengeance. They hurled bricks, bottles and fence boards at police, who temporarily barricaded the boy inside the church for his own safety. Many in the crowd chanted "an eye for an eye" and

"bring him out." Several people including police officers required hospital treatment following the hours-long riot. The church said in a statement on Tuesday it "denounced

retaliation of any kind." Police stood guard around mosques in parts of Sydney on Tuesday after reports that text messages were circulating urging the Assyrian Christian community to retaliate against Muslims.

Sydney's Lakemba Mosque, Australia's largest, has hired additional private security for the next week after receiving fire bomb threats on Monday night. Police and community leaders said public anxiety had been heightened by a lone assailant's knife attack in a Sydney shopping mall on Saturday that killed five women and a male security guard who attempted to intervene. The 40-year-old assailant, Joel Cauchi, had a history of mental illness and trouble with women and a fascination with knives. He was shot dead by police.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese urged the public not to take the law into their own hands. Bridge demonstration and traffic resumed shortly after noon, according to the California Highway Patrol. The agency said officers were making arrests at two points on the interstate, including one spot where roughly 300 protesters refused orders to disperse.

Protesters blocked roadways in Illinois, California, New York and the Pacific Northwest on Monday, temporarily shutting down travel into some of the nation's most heavily used airports, onto the Golden Gate and Brooklyn bridges and on a busy West Coast highway. In Chicago, protesters linked arms and blocked lanes of Interstate 190 leading into O'Hare International Airport around 7 am in a demonstration they said was part of a global "economic blockade to free Palestine," according to Rifqa Falaneh, one of the organizers.

Traffic in the San Francisco Bay Area was snarled for hours as demonstrators shut down all vehicle, pedestrian and bike traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge and chained themselves to 55-gallon drums filled with cement

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators shut down airport, Chicaco key bridges

AP ■ CHICAGO

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across Interstate 880 in Oakland. Protesters marching into Brooklyn blocked Manhattan-bound traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge. In Eugene, Oregon, protesters blocked Interstate 5, shutting down traffic on the major highway for about 45 minutes. O'Hare warned travelers on the social platform X to take alternative forms of transportation with car travel "substantially delayed this morning due to protest activity."

Some travelers stuck in standstill traffic left their cars and walked the final leg to the airport along the freeway, trailing their luggage behind them. Among them was Madeline Hannan from suburban Chicago. She was headed to O'Hare for a work trip to Florida when her and her husband's car ended up stalled for 20 minutes. She got out and "both ran and speed walked" more than a mile (1.6 kilometers). She said she made it to the gate on time,

but barely. "This was an inconvenience," she said in a telephone interview from Florida. "But in the grand scheme of things going on overseas, it's a minor inconvenience." While individual travelers may have been affected, operations at the airport appeared near normal with delays of under 15 minutes, according to the Chicago Department of Aviation. Inbound traffic toward O'Hare resumed around 9 a.m.

Near Seattle, the Washington State Department of Transportation said a demonstration closed the main road to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. Social media posts showed people holding a banner and waving Palestinian flags while standing on the highway. State authorities urged people to use light rail instead. About 20 protesters were arrested at the Golden Gate

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Sunak faces resistance over smoking ban plans

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faces very vocal resistance against his plans to effectively ban smoking for anyone aged 15 and younger as a new bill comes up for a vote in the House of Commons on Tuesday. The British Indian leader proposed the Tobacco and Vapes Bill last year and declared his vision for creating a "smoke-free generation" by making it an offence to sell tobacco products to anyone born after January 1, 2009, which covers children aged 15. Once it clears its parliamentary journey, the new legislation will introduce some of the world's strictest anti-smoking laws in the country.

"I propose that in future we raise the smoking age by one year, every year. That means a 14-year-old today will never legally be sold a cigarette and that they — and their generation — can grow up smoke-free. We know this works," Sunak had declared at the Conservative Party conference in October last year. As there is Opposition backing for the



bill in Parliament and governing Conservative MPs have a free vote on the bill, any Tory votes against the bill will not be seen as a full-blown rebellion against the Prime Minister.

But two of Sunak's immediate predecessors, Liz Truss and Boris Johnson, have been leading a very vocal group of Tories who plan to vote against the bill as "un-Conservative" and taking away choice from the public.

"The truth is that there is no safe level of tobacco consumption. It is uniquely harmful, and that is why we are taking this important action today to protect the next generation," said UK Health Secretary Victoria Atkins.

"This Bill will save thousands of lives, ease the strain on our NHS [National Health Service], and improve the UK's productivity," she said.

Under the new law, smoking itself would not be criminalised, and anyone who can legally buy tobacco will not be prevented from doing so.

The ban aims to stop people from smoking even before they start as the government pointed to its highly addictive nature, with four in five smokers picking it up before the age of 20, remaining addicted for life. If passed, the bill will progress to the next stage, bringing the UK closer to creating the first smoke-free generation, the government says. Under the plans, trading standards officers would get new powers to issue on-the-spot 100-pound fines to shops selling tobacco or vapes to children, with all the money

raised going towards further enforcement.

"This historic legislation will consign smoking to the 'ash heap of history,'" said Deborah Arnott, head of the charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). The Tobacco and Vapes Bill would also give the government new powers to tackle youth vaping by restricting flavours and regulating the way that vapes are sold and packaged to make them less appealing to children.

The UK's Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said while vaping can play a useful role in helping adult smokers to quit, non-smokers and children should never vape.

The long-term health impacts of vaping are unknown, and the nicotine contained within them can be highly addictive, it warned. According to official figures, responsible for around 80,000 deaths annually, smoking is the UK's single biggest preventable killer and costs the NHS and economy an estimated GBP 17 billion a year — more than the GBP 10 billion annual revenue from tobacco taxation.



President Joe Biden, right, meets with Prime Minister Petr Fiala of the Czech Republic in the Oval Office at the White House, Monday. AP/PTI

Indian-origin principal wins legal challenge over school prayer ban

PTI ■ LONDON

An Indian-origin school principal, often referred to as "Britain's strictest headmistress", on Tuesday welcomed a UK High Court ruling that upheld her ban on prayer rituals after a Muslim pupil sought to legally challenge it as discriminatory. Katherine Birbalsingh, of Indo-Guyanese heritage, had told the court that Michaela School — a "secular" secondary school for boys and girls in Wembley, north London — did not allow religious prayers in keeping with its ethos of promoting an "inclusive environment". While half of the pupils at the school are Muslims, it also has large numbers of Sikh, Hindu and Christian pupils.

"As the Governing Body is aware, the School does not provide a prayer room for use by pupils, for various reasons. These reasons include that a prayer room would foster division amongst pupils, contrary to the School's ethos, lack of available space and available staff to supervise pupils and that pupils would miss important School activities, including during the lunch break if they were to spend time in a prayer room," Birbalsingh told the court. "Unacceptable segregation or division, contrary to the whole ethos of the school, was taking place as a result of permitting prayer. An intimidating atmosphere was developing. Our strict disciplinary policies, on which the ethos and great success of (the) School is based,

were at risk of being undermined," she said.

Justice Thomas Linden, in an 80-page judgment following a hearing in January, ruled in the school's favour.

"In my judgment, the starting point is that the School was right to take the view that the issue was whether to permit and facilitate ritual prayer indoors: in effect, to reverse its longstanding policy of not providing a prayer room," it reads. "She (the unnamed pupil) knew that the School is secular, and her own evidence is that her mother wished her to go there because it was known to be strict... Her evidence has focussed on her preferences and what she supposes the position would be elsewhere," it notes.

'Substantial increase in attack on Hindus in US'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Observing that there is a substantial increase in attacks against Hindus in the US, an Indian-American Congressman has said that this was just the "beginning of a coordinated anti-Hindu attack", as he asked the community members to unite against hate crimes. Congressman Shri Thanedar's remarks came during a news conference held at the National Press Club here on Monday.

"Today I am seeing in the United States a substantial increase in attacks on Hinduism. A lot of misinformation is being circulated whether it is online or otherwise," Thanedar said. Thanedar and four other Indian-American lawmakers — Ro Khanna, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ami Bera and Pramila Jayapal — had recently



written to the Department of Justice seeking an investigation on the recent surge in attacks on Hindu temples and places of worship. At the press conference organised by HinduAction, a non-profit body, Thanedar complained that no action has been taken against those responsible for the attacks and no arrests have been made either.

"We have experienced substantially more events of this kind in recent months. I have a feeling that this is just the beginning of a very coordinated attempt against this community and the community must stand together. The time has come and I will stand with you," Thanedar said. "Having practised Hinduism, having grown up as a Hindu in a Hindu household, I know what Hinduism is. It is a very peaceful religion," he said, adding that it is not a religion that attacks others.

However, this community continues to be misrepresented, misunderstood, sometimes deliberately, he said. "I recently joined four of my Indian-American colleagues to write to the Department of Justice. You know, one of the concerns that we had was the rising attacks on places of worship," Thanedar said.

"We've seen those happening in California, we have seen those happening all the way in New York and all across America. It appears to be a very coordinated effort to attack these places of worship, which has created a lot of fear in the community," he said. Thanedar alleged that often local law enforcement enters into these investigations which go nowhere.

He said it leaves the community feeling like they have nobody who cares about them. That means that the community continues to live in fear. The community continues to live in an adverse situation with essentially no help from law enforcement, he added.

Thanedar said that there is a need to coordinate efforts between the local law enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Department of Justice. "A higher priority needs to be assigned to such hate crimes against this peaceful community," he said. "That is what we have asked the Justice Department to do and it is time for the whole community to come together and make sure that we demand equality, that we demand justice. We will not tolerate such hate against Hinduism.

Thanedar said he has introduced a resolution in the United States Congress on "anti-Hindu attacks".

"Through the resolution and the letter that we wrote to the Department of Justice, we continue to put pressure on this administration to ensure that the Hindu community has a right to live in peace," he said. Utsav Chakrabarti from HinduAction described it as a historic resolution in the fight against "anti-Hindu crimes" in the US.

'Pak needs years to implement IMF-advised structural reforms'

Cash-strapped Pakistan would need two or three years to implement structural reforms prescribed by the IMF...

— doesn't go through the structural reforms, the country would still be looking for another programme, the report said...

reforming the Bretton Woods twins — the IMF and the World Bank. "We are dealing with adaptation and financing and to the extent that these institutions come in to help countries like Pakistan from inclusive growth perspective...

Inquiry commission gives clean chit to ex-ISI chief Gen Hamid

Pakistan's former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general Lieutenant General (ret'd) Faiz Hamid has been exonerated by the inquiry commission established to investigate the 2017 sit-in by a hardline religious group here and Rawalpindi, it emerged on Tuesday...



Syed Akhtar Ali Shah, a former civil servant, who also served as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's police chief and included Tahir Alam Khan, a former Islamabad police chief and Khushal Khan, an additional secretary at the Ministry of Interior. It was tasked to identify those...

who planned, financed, and supported the protest and also recommended legal action against its planners and executives which disrupted life in Rawalpindi and Islamabad between November 6 and November 27, 2017. The commission in the report of 149 pages, 57 annexures & sub-annexures and one appendix claimed to have examined all relevant evidence but described it to be an elaborate case study on the style of governance in Pakistan.

'Russia's invasion of Ukraine threatens global security'

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told Chinese leader Xi Jinping who hosted him in Beijing on Tuesday that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine threatens global security...

which has threatened to spread into a regional conflict and has disrupted energy and global food supplies and other trade. Russia's actions "violate a principle of the United Nations Charter and the principle of the inviolability of national borders," Scholz was quoted as saying by German media.

community. Despite that, China continues to insist that the United Nations charter should prevail in international affairs and that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations be respected...

ministers and business executives visited a partially German-funded company and other sites in the vast city, which is a production base for China's auto and other industries.

Shanghai that borders "must not be moved by force." "We should not be afraid of our neighbors," he said, emphasizing the importance of international institutions such as the World Trade Organization.

'Pak sustained its N-programme despite economic turmoil'

Pakistan sustained its nuclear modernisation efforts last year despite its economic turmoil as its contentious relationship with India continues to drive its defence policy, the top US intelligence official has told Congress. The remarks by Lt Gen Jeffrey Kruse, Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency came during a Congressional hearing on China on Monday.

China's GDP grew by 5.3% in 1st quarter of 2024

China's economy grew at 5.3 per cent in the first quarter, making a stronger-than-expected start to the year even as the downturn of its property market continued while the domestic demand remained subdued.

Sheng mentioned positive factors during this period, such as rising production demand, stable employment and prices, and growing market confidence. "These positive factors driving economic recovery are accumulating and strengthening, laying a good foundation for full-year growth," he said.

from stable to negative a week after it cut its projection for the country's sovereign credit rating, reflecting pessimism in the world's second-largest economy and concerns over Beijing's capacity to support its biggest lenders.

More homes flooded in Kazakhstan

Nearly 14,500 homes have been flooded in a Russian region bordering Kazakhstan after water levels spiked in a local river, local authorities said Tuesday. The floods sparked evacuations of thousands in the Orenburg region, located some 1,200 kilometers (745 miles), southeast of the capital of Moscow after a dam on the Ural River burst last week under the pressure of surging waters.

according to officials. The situation is more dire in the southwest of the region near the Kazakh border, where authorities said the river there has risen to a dangerous level in the town of Ileik.

'Singapore PM Lee to continue to be part of govt after stepping down next month'

Singapore (PTI): Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will stay in the Cabinet as Senior Minister after stepping down as the leader of the government on May 15, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, who will succeed him, said on Tuesday. "There won't be many changes to the rest of the line-up for now," Wong, who would be the fourth prime minister of the economically prosperous city-state of Singapore, said.

Ukrainian pres signs law to boost conscription to fend off Russia's aggression

Kyiv (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a controversial law Tuesday, days after it was passed by parliament, potentially helping Kyiv to boost conscription to replenish depleted forces to fend off Russia's continued aggression. The mobilisation law, published on Ukraine's Parliamentary website, is expected to take effect in a month and make it easier to identify every draft-eligible man in the country.



bat. Authorities said a separate bill on demobilisation and rotation would be prepared in the coming months. But the delay caused public outrage among Ukrainians whose relatives have been fighting without breaks for two years. Exhausted soldiers have no means of taking a break from front-line work because of the current scale and intensity of the war.

Heavy rains lash UAE, death toll in Oman flooding rises to 18

Dubai (AP): Heavy rains lashed the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, flooding out portions of major highways and leaving vehicles abandoned on roadways across Dubai. Meanwhile, the death toll in separate heavy flooding in neighboring Oman rose to 18 with others still missing as the sultanate prepared for the storm.

over 120 millimeters (4.75 inches) of rainfall had soaked the city-state — the typical average for a year in the desert nation — with more expected in the coming hours. Police and emergency personnel drove slowly through the flooded streets, their emergency lights flashing across the darkened morning.

largely working remotely if able. Many workers stayed home as well, though some ventured out, with the unfortunate stalling out their vehicles in deeper-than-expected water covering some roads. Authorities sent tanker trucks out into the streets and highways to pump away the water. Water poured into some homes, forcing people to bail out their houses.

UK criminalises creation of 'deepfake' images without consent

London (PTI): Despicable people who create sexually explicit "deepfakes" will face prosecution under a new law going through its parliamentary journey, the British government said on Tuesday. Deepfake refers to images and videos made to look hyper-realistic, with the victim usually unaware and unable to give their consent.

is then shared more widely, offenders could be sent to jail. "The creation of deepfake sexual images is despicable and completely unacceptable irrespective of whether the image is shared," said Laura Farris, UK Minister for Victims and Safeguarding. "It is another example of ways in which certain people seek to degrade and dehumanise others - especially women. And it has the capacity to cause catastrophic consequences if the material is shared more widely. This government will not tolerate it. This new offence sends a crystal-clear message that making this material is immoral, often misogynistic, and a crime," she said.

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Markets slump for third day

On fears of escalating tensions in Middle East; IT stocks drag

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty continued to slump on Tuesday dragged down by heavy selling in IT stocks amid weak global trends and fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East.

Outflow of foreign fund also dented investors' sentiment. Continuing its downtrend for the third day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 456.10 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,943.68. During the day, it slumped 714.75 points or 0.97 per cent to 72,685.03.

The NSE Nifty declined 124.60 points or 0.56 per cent to finish at 22,147.90. From the Sensex basket, Infosys, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Wipro, HCL Technologies, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, and Larsen & Toubro were the major laggards.

Titan Company, Hindustan Unilever, HDFC Bank, Maruti, ITC, Power Grid and Reliance Industries were the gainers. "The domestic market sustained its consolidation trend for the



third consecutive day, amid apprehensions regarding geopolitical tensions and drop in the probability of a rate cut in the short-term. Heightened concerns arose following stronger-than-anticipated US retail sales, amplifying the assumption that the US Federal Reserve might delay rate cuts, leading to a notable uptick in the dollar index and US bond yields. "The IT sector saw the most significant decline, primarily due to expectations of earnings

being affected by the weak discretionary spending in the US and muted domestic Q4 results," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.57 per cent and midcap index advanced 0.05 per cent. Among the indices, IT declined 2.32 per cent, teck (2.09 per cent), bankex (0.50 per cent), metal (0.36 per cent), capital goods (0.26 per cent) and commodities (0.24 per cent). Energy, consumer discretionary,

healthcare, industrials, consumer durables, oil & gas, and power were the gainers.

Stock markets would remain closed on Wednesday for Ram Navami. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were quoting in the red. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Monday.

Israel's military chief said on Monday that his country will respond to Iran's weekend attack, but he did not elaborate on when and how as world leaders urged against retaliation, trying to avoid a spiral of violence in the Middle East.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.26 per cent to USD 89.87 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,268 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark tanked 845.12 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at 73,399.78 on Monday. The NSE Nifty declined 246.90 points or 1.10 per cent to finish at 22,272.50.

Petrol sales up 7 per cent, diesel declines 9.5 per cent in April

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's petrol consumption soared 7 per cent in the first half of April but diesel sales were down 9.5 per cent ahead of the onset of a harsh summer season that is set to crank up fuel demand, preliminary data of state-owned firms showed on Tuesday.

Petrol sales of three state-owned firms, which control 90 per cent of the fuel market, rose to 1.22 million tonnes during April 1 to 15 when compared to 1.14 million tonnes of consumption in the same period last year.

Diesel demand dropped 9.5 per cent to 3.14 million tonnes. While petrol sales were up mostly due to an increase in use of personal vehicles on the back of a price cut, crop harvesting season as well as the onset of summer which will increase the demand for air conditioning in cars is likely to reverse the trend in diesel demand. Petrol and diesel prices were last month reduced by Rs 2 per litre, ending a nearly two-



year-long hiatus in rate revision. Month-on-month petrol sales dropped 3.6 per cent when compared to 1.27 million tonnes of consumption in March 1-15. Diesel demand too was down 2.7 per cent month-on-month when compared to 3.22 million tonnes in the first half of April. Diesel is India's most consumed fuel, accounting for almost 40 per cent of all

petroleum product consumption. Transport sector accounts for 70 per cent of all diesel sales in the country. It is also the predominant fuel used in agriculture sectors, including in harvesters and tractors. Petrol consumption has consistently shown a year-on-year rise, diesel consumption has been on a see-saw - rising in one month and falling in another. Consumption of petrol

during the first half of April was 9.2 per cent more than in the COVID-marred April 1-15, 2022, and 56.5 per cent more than in the first half of April 2020.

Diesel demand was up 4.7 per cent over April 1-15, 2022, and 27.9 per cent compared to the first half of April 2020. Jet fuel (ATF) sales rose 10.4 per cent year-on-year to 3,35,700 tonnes during April 1-15, 2024. But this was 1.2 per cent lower month-on-month.

Like petrol and diesel, ATF demand too is now firmly above pre-Covid levels. ATF consumption was 34.3 per cent more than in April 1-15, 2022, and 18.4 per cent more than in the first half of April 2020.

Cooking gas LPG sales were up 8.8 per cent year-on-year at 1.2 million tonnes in April 1-15, 2024. LPG consumption was 15.3 per cent higher than in April 1-15, 2022, and 28.3 per cent more than in the first half of April 2020. Month-on-month, LPG demand fell 11.6 per cent against 1.36 million tonnes of LPG consumption.

India's unemployment rate to decline 97 basis points by 2028: ORF Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's unemployment rate is likely to decline by as much as 97 basis points by 2028 as the country's economy hits the USD 5 trillion mark, fuelling a rise in employment, a new report said on Tuesday.

Unemployment rate -- the percentage of people in the labour force who are without jobs -- is projected to fall from 4.47 per cent in 2024 to 3.68 per cent in 2028, the India Employment Outlook 2030 report by thinktank Observer Research Foundation (ORF) said.

"India's job market is experiencing a transformation as the country has become the world's fastest growing large economy in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic," the report said.

The country's young population, whose median age is 28.4 years, holds a key to fuelling economic expansion.

"With a GDP growth rate of 7.8 per cent, India

could potentially achieve its target of becoming a USD 5-trillion economy by 2026-27, with such growth being underpinned by strong private consumption and public investment," it said. India's gross domestic product (GDP) size is estimated at just under USD 4 trillion in 2024.

An ORF press statement said the report identifies sectors that the country's 600-million-plus population of people aged 18-35 years regard as aspirational, as these sectors could act as engines of growth in the years ahead.

"The report forecasts that as India approaches its USD 5 trillion goal, overall employment could rise 22 per cent, while unemployment could decline by 97 basis points by 2028," the statement said.

The service sector in particular is set to witness significant job creation with each unit rise in services output expected to contribute to a substantial 0.12 per cent increase in employment. The report singles out ten especially high-opportunity sub-sectors in the services space.



These include digital services, financial services, and services related to health, hospitality,

consumer retail, e-commerce, and renewable energy. Other areas poised for rapid growth are global capability centres, and MSME and startup ecosystems.

The burgeoning service sector also offers encouraging avenues for women's employment. Hence, investing in women's skilling, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship needs to be prioritised further, argues the report.

"The projections for India's manufacturing sector are less optimistic. In spite of the US' growing imports from India, India's competitive cost structures and labour resources, and the government's push for manufacturing through flagship schemes such as Make in India, employment in the sector appears to have declined.

"Technological advances and increased automation continue to cast doubts upon the country's ability to absorb its expanding workforce," the statement said.

In this context, transitioning towards industrial

value chains associated with the service sector could help rejuvenate employment.

Nilanjan Ghosh, a director at ORF and one of the authors of the report said, "Policymakers and public sector schemes could partner more closely with other stakeholders to identify employability and skill gaps. The next step would be to upgrade curricula and skills to make India's talent pool more industry ready."

Ghosh added that nurturing entrepreneurship would be crucial for improved next-gen employment. "A new class of entrepreneurs could stimulate job creation, expand India's startup ecosystem, spur innovation, and promote youth participation. But we also need to ensure that the workplaces of the future are gender-sensitive and inclusive," he said.

The report concludes that a multistakeholder approach towards employment generation and enhancement could help realise India's vision of a digitally empowered, skilled, innovative, and self-reliant economy.

Heating equipment maker JNK India IPO to open on April 23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Heating equipment maker JNK India Ltd is set to open its initial public offering (IPO) on April 23.

The initial share-sale will conclude on April 25 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on April 22, according to the red herring prospectus (RHP) filed on Tuesday.

The IPO is a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth up to Rs 300 crore and an Offer-for-Sale (OFS) of up to 84.21 lakh equity shares by promoters and an existing shareholder.

Those offloading shares in the OFS are promoters -- Goutam Rampelli, Dipak Kacharalul Bharuka, JNK Heaters Co. Ltd and Mascot Capital and Marketing Pvt Ltd. -- and a shareholder Milind Joshi.

Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used for funding working capital requirements and for general corporate purposes.

JNK specialises in processed heaters, commanding a market share of about 27 per cent within the Indian heating equipment market for new order bookings during fiscal year 2023, according to F&S Report.



As of March 2023, it had an order book of about Rs 868 crore, way higher than the over Rs 143 crore order book in March 2021.

In terms of financials, the company's consolidated revenue from operations surged by 37.42 per cent to Rs 407.30 crore for the fiscal year 2023, from Rs 296.40 crore a

year earlier and net profit increased by 29 per cent to Rs 46.36 crore in fiscal 2023 from Rs 35.98 crore in fiscal 2022.

IIFL Securities and ICICI Securities are the book-running lead managers of the public issue. The equity shares are proposed to be listed on BSE and NSE.

India fastest growing economy during last three years, says Sitharaman



PTI ■ JAIPUR

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said here on Tuesday that India has been the fastest growing economy in the last three consecutive financial years and this growth can continue in the coming years as well. She said the next 25 years will be critical for India. In the financial year 2023-24, India witnessed a growth rate of eight per cent in three quarters and is expecting a similar level of growth in the fourth quarter, she said, adding it has been a sustainable growth. "India has been the fastest growing economy in the last

three consecutive financial years and this growth can continue in the coming years as well. The next 25 years will be very critical for India," Sitharaman said in a dialogue programme with industrialists and businessmen. She said that foreign investors are coming to invest in India due to the credibility of its economy. "Due to the economic policy, larger macroeconomic stability, stable government, stable taxation policy, transparent tenders and procurement, there has been immense credibility of India's economy abroad. So, the investors are coming here to invest," she said.

Gold, silver prices hit fresh peaks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Extending gains for the second day in a row, gold and silver prices hit fresh all-time high levels on Tuesday, tracking strong trends in the international markets amid fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East.

According to HDFC Securities, gold prices zoomed Rs 700 to hit its lifetime high of Rs 73,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday.

It had closed at Rs 73,050 per 10 grams on Monday.

Similarly, silver price jumped Rs 800 to hit a record high of Rs 86,500 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at a new record high of Rs 73,750 per 10 grams, up by Rs 700, taking positive cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,370 per ounce, up by USD 15 from the previous close. Gold rose as demand for the haven asset grew amid fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East following Iran's unprecedented attack on Israel last week.

RupeeQ aims to treble loan disbursement portfolio to ₹300 crore by 2027

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Home-grown platform for online loans and credit cards RupeeQ aims to treble digital loan disbursements portfolio to Rs 300 crore by 2027 on the back of government's push towards high-speed internet services in semi-urban and rural areas.

Talking to PTI, Neeru Puri, Managing Director and Chief Financial Officer of RupeeQ, said, "It is estimated that total value of digital lending business in India will exceed USD 1 trillion over next 5 years. At RupeeQ, we expect to treble our loan disbursement portfolio by 2027, while in fiscal 2023-24 we clocked about Rs 100 crore."

According to reports, India shall have 900 million active internet users by 2025, while 56 per cent of all new internet users will be from rural areas, and 65 per cent of new internet users will be female.

Puri opined that the government's push on digitalisation and penetration of high-speed internet even in semi-urban and rural areas will help the company materialise its goal.

Puri said the digital lending space in India saw a phenomenal growth in value from USD 270 billion in 2022 to an estimated worth of USD 350 billion by end of next year with a remarkable compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 39.5 per cent.

In the current financial year, the digital footprint of financial services consumers would increase to 75 per cent (from current 50 per cent). This is primarily due to the explosion of smartphones as well as mobile internet, Puri explained.

As per a recent Boston Consulting Group's (BCG) report, loan disbursement models in the last few years have seen frenetic activity. There are a few fundamental drivers which are all coming together to turbo-charge this space.

First, consumer behaviours are changing dramatically, shaped by experiences offered by internet giants. Second, there have been some rapid technological advances, led by the ever increasing penetration of smartphones as well as the proliferation of data.

Road execution to grow 5, 8 per cent in FY25: Icra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Road execution in India is likely to grow 5-8 per cent to 12,500-13,000 km in the current fiscal, after recording a robust expansion of 20 per cent in 2023-24, rating agency Icra said on Tuesday.

It added that the pace of execution in this fiscal will be supported by a healthy pipeline of projects, increased capital outlay by the government and focus on completion of projects by Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH). Icra noted that road execution was impacted in the first half of FY24

on account of a prolonged monsoon in certain geographies, which affected productive days.

According to Icra, the ministry's project award pipeline is healthy, at above 45,000 km as of March 2024. This is despite the awarding being significantly impacted in FY24 amid delay in approval from the Cabinet for the revised cost estimates of Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase 1 (BMP), it added.

Consequently, the overall awards declined by 31 per cent to 8,551 km in FY24 from 12,375 km in FY23. Icra pointed out that a similar trend was seen in FY19 before the last general elections, when the project



awarding had declined by over 67 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

The rating agency said engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) mode continues to be the mainstay of this process, accounting for 70-75 per cent of the awards in FY24, followed by Build, Operate, Transfer (BOT)-Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM), accounting for 25-30 per cent share.

"There were no awards under BOT-Toll in FY2024," Icra said, adding that in March 2024, the ministry amended the BOT-Toll model concession agreement to improve its attractiveness.

Neuralix Inc, VIT AP University announce collaboration to advance AI research

PNS ■ AMARAVATI, ANDHRA PRADESH

Neuralix Inc. and VIT-AP University announce strategic collaboration to advance Artificial Intelligence (AI) knowledge and research. Neuralix Inc., a leading AI startup specializing in digital transformation across various industries, and VIT-AP University, with its commitment to academic excellence and technological innovation, have formalized a collaboration aimed at



advancing education, research, and innovation in Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between Neuralix.ai and VIT-AP University signifies a shared commitment to exploring and advancing AI across diverse areas

Goal Palmer scores four in 6-0 demolition of dismal Everton

AP ■ LONDON

Cole Palmer put on an unstoppable display with a perfect first-half hat trick and a fourth in the second half as Chelsea demolished Everton 6-0 in the English Premier League. Palmer scored with his left foot, head and right foot in the 13th, 19th and 29th minutes on Monday to become the first Chelsea player to score in seven successive home games. "It all happens so fast," Palmer told Sky Sports. "We started well and I scored another hat trick - buzzing. First one was my favorite, my right foot was a bit of a swinger." The Manchester City reject

stroked home a superb first from just outside the box and nodded in the second from close range after Jordan Pickford could only parry Nicolas Jackson's shot. His third was a wonderful 35-yard lob after Pickford needlessly gifted him possession. Nicolas Jackson added a fourth a minute before halftime, and Palmer made it 5-0 from the penalty spot in the 64th. Substitute Alfie Gilchrist's first goal for the club made it six in injury time. Palmer's goals took his season tally to 20 in the league, tied with Manchester City's Erling Haaland. The result extended a depressing few days for



Everton. Just hours before kickoff, the club lodged an appeal against a two-point deduction for a second breach of the Premier League financial rules. Everton was docked two points last week for overspending in a

three-year spell up to the end of the 2022-23 season. It was a second deduction this season for Everton, which had six points removed - reduced from 10 following an appeal - for breaching spending limits from 2019-20 to the 2021-22

season. "We've already agreed that's gone, we have to get on with it," Everton manager Sean Dyche said. "(The points deduction) is out of our control." Dyche described Monday as a "collective down day" and said his team was miles off the pace. "We can't perform like that at a place like this. The key moments when they got chances, finding the back of the net, we haven't done that all season." The Liverpool club sits in 16th place, only two points and two places above the relegation zone. After running its unbeaten streak to eight, Chelsea was in ninth place, only one point behind West Ham.



SABALENKA TO FACE GOOD FRIEND BADOSA IN STUTTGART OPENER

AP ■ STUTTGART, GERMANY

Paula Badosa battled past Diana Shnaider 6-3, 6-4 to set up a match with friend and world No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka at the Porsche Grand Prix. Shnaider fended off four match points before former No. 2 Badosa took her fifth opportunity at the clay-court tournament on Monday. Badosa's 10 double faults allowed Shnaider eight break point opportunities. The 20-year-old Russian was unable to

take any of them on the center court in Stuttgart. Sabalenka has finished runner-up on her last three appearances in Stuttgart, losing the final to former No. 1 Ashleigh Barty in 2021 and current No. 1 Iga Swiatek in 2022 and 2023. Sachia Vickery of the United States defeated Aliaksandra Sasnovich of Belarus 7-6 (2), 7-5 and will next face compatriot Coco Gauff, the world No. 3. Veronika Kudermetova of Russia outlasted Barbora Krejčíková 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 for a

second-round meeting with No. 4 Elena Rybakina. Kudermetova was a break down in the deciding set but fought back and took her first match point to prevail after 3 hours, 6 minutes - one of the longest ever matches in Stuttgart. Gauff, Sabalenka, Swiatek and Rybakina all received first-round byes. Eight of the top 10 women are at the tournament. Swiatek is bidding to become the first three-time champion in Stuttgart since Maria Sharapova won from 2012-14.



Muddappa begins season with double victory

PTI ■ PUNE

Multiple-time national champion Hemant Muddappa of Mantra Racing began the season with a double victory at the summer edition of the Valley Run 2024 at Ambay Valley here on Tuesday. Bengaluru's Muddappa was also adjudged as the fastest rider of the day. Muddappa, the 12-time national champion, punched above his weight as he won the unrestricted class with a 1000cc bike, the BMW S1000RRR, and managed to set a national record of 09.480 seconds for this category. He edged past seasoned rider Mohammed Riyaz from

Hyderabad. In the four stroke 851 to 1050cc Open class, Muddappa clocked 09.692s to take the second gold ahead of Riddhihi Patil of Mumbai but had to be content with a second place in the third category he took part. Astride a Dayatona, Riyaz won the 4-stroke 551 up to 850cc Open class in 10.421 seconds, pushing Muddappa's Kawasaki Ninja 6R to second place. The FMSCI event was scheduled to run concurrently with the first round of the Nationals, but since the MMSC event was postponed, Elite Octane and Sportsraft, the organisers of this race, successfully completed the 2024 edition.

Australian aggression can be countered with better innovative passing: Rupinder Pal Singh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The recent 0-5 drubbing notwithstanding, former drag-flick specialist Rupinder Pal Singh feels the Olympic-bound Indian men's hockey team can counter Australia's aggressive style of play with better defensive coordination and some innovative passing. India were blanked in the five-Test series in Perth some days ago, a disappointing outing for the team, which did reasonably well in the FIH Pro League before that and is expected to better or match its bronze from Tokyo Olympics at the Paris Games in July-August. Singh, who was part of the 2014 Asian Games gold-winning side, is not too concerned by the final result as he felt the team kept improving with every game. "We lost the first match 5-1, after that the team improved and the score-lines were close, we missed some chances, some work needs to be done prior to the Olympics. The series was a preparation for Paris Olympics, as new variations and players were tried out," he told PTI Videos. Asked how should the team counter Australia's attacking style of play, he said innovative passing could do the trick.



He described current India captain Harmanpreet Singh as one of the best drag-flickers in the world. He was, however, concerned about the penalty corner conversion rate of the women's team, which is seeking to rebuild itself after its stunning failure to qualify for the Olympics. "That's a worry (Penalty corner conversion), its penalty corner is an important tool in today's hockey we need to work on that," he said. Singh was speaking on the sidelines of a three-day training program organised by Hockey India. It was also attended by former India goalkeeper Yogita Bali, along with India goalkeepers Adrian D'Souza, Bharat Chetri, Helen Mary, Dipika Murty, Akash Chikte, and PT Rao. Apart from Singh, the other eminent former India drag-flickers who attended the training were Gurjinder Singh, VR Raghunath, and Jaspreet Kaur. The former stars have drawn up a curriculum on the basics

of drag-flicking and goalkeeping which would be implemented across all academies and centres in the country. **FUTURE BRIGHT FOR WOMEN'S HOCKEY:** Despite the Olympic heartbreak, women's hockey will do well, according to Bali, who picked Manipur's Bichu Devi Kharibam as the successor for long-serving goalkeeper Savita Punia. "In Bengaluru, we trained with top six goalkeepers of India, and I found Bichhu to be the best in India after Savita. She could be India's number one after Savita," Bali said. Bali said Indian women's hockey has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years. "Compared to when I started playing, there are a lot more facilities, now there are scientific advisors, nutrition experts to help the development of the players. "Earlier Indian Railways was the prominent employment provider for hockey players, now several departments are offering jobs, so things are going well," she said.

Four titles in seven months, success of Kolkata Big Three will have huge impact: AIFF president

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The success of Kolkata's 'Big Three' — Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting — will not just have a massive impact on state football but will also have a positive effect on the sport in the country, said All India Football Federation president Kalyan Chaubey on Tuesday. Seven months, four titles, and the 'Mecca of Indian football' was celebrating after Mohun Bagan's maiden League Winners Shield triumph following their 2-1 win over Mumbai City FC at the packed Salt Lake Stadium here on Monday. "Bringing home the ISL Shield, I-League Trophy, Super Cup and Durand Cup to West Bengal is a sign of new-age football in the state, and adaptability of these clubs to the newer norms of

football," Chaubey told PTI. "The three giants of Kolkata enjoy enormous fan support in West Bengal, India and globally. I'm sure the success of MB and EB, along with Mohammedan Sporting joining the two in ISL next season, will have a massive impact on Indian football." It all began with Mohun Bagan starting the season with their first Durand Cup title in 23 years, defeating arch-rivals East Bengal 1-0 on September 3 last year. East Bengal made amends to win the Super Cup, beating Odisha FC 3-2 in Bhubaneswar on January 29. It marked the end of their 12-year trophy drought. Having faced multiple relegation, Mohammedan Sporting came back from oblivion to defeat Shillong Lajong FC 2-1 earlier this month to win the I-League with a round to spare and



confirm their promotion to ISL. Mohun Bagan then went on to lift the ISL Shield in front of a record 61,000-plus home crowd at the Salt Lake Stadium. The Green and Maroon brigade will now aim to finish season by lifting the ISL Trophy, which would be a 'High

Five' for the Maidan 'Big Three'. Mohun Bagan is the oldest club in India, having been established in 1889, while Mohammedan Sporting came into existence two years later in 1891. East Bengal (established in 1920) also recently celebrated their centenary year. "They are the 'Big Three' of Kolkata football. With historic milestones and to have ruled Indian football for decades, the three have centuries-old football culture and I'm just glad that they have all come around once again to help the city earn the bragging rights," he said. "It's a remarkable year for Kolkata football to bring home four titles this season." "Millions of football fans, having their loyalties to these Big Three, have joined in to reverberate Kolkata's legacy," he added.

Paris bound Olympians look forward to a post COVID Games with fans in stands

AP ■ NEW YORK

The biggest races, routines and games for many of this generation's Olympic athletes were contested in front of mostly empty stands, largely devoid of coaches to help them out or friends and family to cheer them on. That was three years ago at the COVID-19 Summer Olympics and two years ago at the COVID-19 Winter Olympics. Now that they're preparing for the Paris Olympics that begin in July - and a return to something that feels normal - the Americans heading back to the Games know they can never take for granted the screaming fans and a hug from Mom or Dad. "I think it's super important to be able to share these massive moments with people you care about," said BMX rider Alise Willoughby, who has been to the last three Olympics. Willoughby and about 100 other U.S. Athletes are doing interviews and photo shoots this week at the Team USA media summit at a hotel in

Times Square - an event that itself was made impossible in the lead-up to the Tokyo Games in 2021 amid the coronavirus pandemic. One topic of conversation this week is how grateful the bikers, rowers, gymnasts and the rest are to be past the days of contact tracing, quarantines and daily swabbing or spitting for COVID-19 tests inside the so-called Olympic bubble. In Paris, there will be celebrations with relatives and one-on-one contact with coaches, most of whom were not allowed into the venues three years ago. The USA House - a traditional stop for athletes to wind down and kick back, especially after they're done competing - will be doing brisk business once again. Mostly, athletes are looking forward to the chance to soak in the feeling from the crowd, an element sorely missing in the cavernous and largely unfilled venues in Tokyo. "I'll be able to see the audience's emotions. I want to build that with them and I can tailor my routines to



that," said American rhythmic gymnast Evita Griskenas, who plans French music to accompany one routine and "All-American" number for another, all with the goal of getting fans caught up in the moment. Griskenas said she already feels a different vibe. Preparing for the Olympics in Tokyo - Games that were initially delayed by a year, then held in an atmosphere nobody quite recognized - became a largely solitary, and joyless, affair. "It turned into training in my basement and throwing things outside," she said. This year, a different

experience awaits, and some athletes are even looking forward to a crowd rooting against them because, hey, at least it's a crowd. "The boys have been saying, 'We want to play France in, like, the semifinals,'" rugby player Perry Baker said. "You just visualize how big that can be, and how fun that can be. Their crowd. Our crowd. We live for those moments." With crowds, naturally, come other issues that were mostly set on the sideline in 2021. On Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron said the much-touted opening ceremony scheduled for the Seine River could be

viewing audience, the rise of streaming services and the 13-hour time difference between New York and Japan. But also: COVID-19. "Even for those who were back home, it wasn't the most important thing going on for us at that time," USOPC CEO Sarah Hirshland said of the renewed possibilities presented by the first COVID-19-free Games since 2018. "This is about an opportunity to really focus on this incredible thing called Olympic and Paralympic sport. It brings us together almost like nothing else." The way things went in Tokyo took some of the luster away from what was nearly a perfect experience for indoor volleyball player Jordyn Poulter. Yes, she won a gold medal in her first Olympics, three years ago. Yes, it was a once-in-a-lifetime type of triumph. Still, there was something missing. "Not being able to relish in that moment with friends and family in that immediate time - it's something that I'm looking forward to in this next one," she said.

Beijing half marathon results under investigation after runners appear to hand win to Chinese star

AP ■ BANGKOK

Organisers are investigating a half marathon race in Beijing after three African runners appeared to let China's top long-distance runner move ahead of them shortly before the finish line and sprint to victory, sparking public speculation that the result was rigged. There was a flood of public reaction online expressing suspicion about the race after video from the final moments of Sunday's Mengniu Beijing Half Marathon circulated online. On Monday, organizers of the race issued a statement saying they would investigate the results. "The organising committee attaches great importance to the issue raised by netizens about the results of the (race)," organisers said. "A special investigation team has been set up to conduct an investigation, and the results of the investigation will be released to the public in a timely fashion." The Beijing Sports Bureau, which was in charge of the race, did not respond to a

request for comment. He Jie, who won the marathon at the Asian Games and holds the Chinese national record in the event, was trailing behind three runners from Kenya and Ethiopia as they approached the finish line. One of the runners then seems to gesture for the others to slow down as He moves in front and sprints to the finish line. One of the other runners, Willy Mnangat of Kenya, told BBC Sport Africa that they allowed He to win but that they had been hired to serve as pacemakers and were not competing to win the race. However, all three had entered the race as official competitors rather than as pacemakers. "I was not there to compete," Mnangat was quoted as saying. "My job was to set the pace and help the guy win but unfortunately, he did not achieve the target, which was to break the national record." He finished with a time of 1 hour, 3 minutes, 44 seconds, which was more than a minute slower than the Chinese half marathon record.



GUJARAT TITANS, DELHI CAPITALS SEARCH FOR CONSISTENCY

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Gujarat Titans will be striving for much needed consistency when they meet Delhi Capitals in an Indian Premier League match here on Wednesday. Unlike the past two editions, the Titans have not been able to play like a well-oiled machine though they still have time to fix the flaws. A last ball win over table leaders Rajasthan Royals on April 10 was just the kind of result the Titans needed to infuse fresh life to their campaign. They have only managed only two wins from their first six games but with another eight matches remaining, the Shubman Gill-led team has enough time to turn things around. The absence of Mohammad Shami has hurt them but they must best use the available resources. Umesh Yadav has taken seven wickets but has leaked more than 10 runs per over. His new ball partner

Spencer Johnson and the seasoned Mohit Sharma too can improve on their economy rate. Star spinner Rashid Khan has been at his frugal best but would like to have more wickets in his kitty. His cameo in the last game helped Titans seal a thrilling win and the team would also be expecting more out of him with the bat. Delhi Capitals, on the other hand, have struggled to assemble their playing eleven due to form and fitness issues. After four losses in five games, they got a much needed boost with the win against Lucknow Super Giants but they still have a lot to sort out if they are to push themselves for a place in the play-offs. The presence of a fit again Kuldeep Yadav made a huge difference as he broke the backbone of the opposition with three timely strikes in Lucknow. Kuldeep, who has added more speed to his craft, seems to be at the peak of his powers and it could be difficult



for Titans batters to face him, especially against his googlies. In Jack Fraser-McGurk, Capitals seem to have found an able number three and will be hoping that the Australian builds on the success of his maiden IPL game. Anrich Nortje, who has been taken to the cleaners by the batters so far in the IPL, did not play the last game. Mukesh Kumar has conceded 10 runs per over in the five games and was also expensive in his comeback game against LSG. The biggest positive for the team has been the batting form of skipper Rishabh Pant, who seems to be getting better with every outing. It would be fair to say that the southpaw is in prime position to make India's squad for the T20 World Cup despite stiff opposition from the likes of Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan. Thin on Indian bating talent, the Capitals rely heavily on the likes of David Warner, who would itching to make an

impact after not contributing much in the last three games. **THE TEAMS (FROM):** Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Wriddhiman Saha, Sai Sudharsan, Shahrkh Khan, Matthew Wade, Kane Williamson, Azmatullah Omarzai, Abhinav Manohar, Rashid Khan, Vijay Shankar, Rahul Tewatia, Spencer Johnson, Kartik Tyagi, Joshua Little, Darshan Nalkande, Noor Ahmad, Ravirivivasan S Kishore, Mohit Sharma, Jayant Yadav, Umesh Yadav, Sushant Mishra, Sandeep Warrier, Sharath BR, Manav Suthar. Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Abhishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kushagra, Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Rasikh Dar Salam, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dubey, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Mitchell Marsh, Lalit Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk.

We want to attack Power Play: Head says, revealing SRH batting philosophy



through that middle-order," Head added. It wasn't a mere tall claim as a quick check will reveal SRH's power play scores in six matches this season as 65/1, 81/1, 58/1, 78/1, 40/3 and 76/0, and none of the other nine teams have come close to those numbers. But it was not blind hitting. Head revealed his approach in the initial six overs. "Depending on the field positions, I try to sum up what the bowlers are trying to do. In the power play, with just two fielders out, I try to think about hitting the ball 360, around the whole ground, as you only have to go over the infield or through the infielders for boundaries. "I'd worked on a few things over the last couple of days. I did not execute the way I would have liked (in the last two matches). But today, especially in the power play, I was able to strike the ball the way I wanted," said the left-hander.

PTI ■ BENGALURU

A crestfallen Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Faf du Plessis conceded that a string of defeats had taken a toll on the team and the confidence had hit an all-time low after losing by 25 runs to Sunrisers Hyderabad in a match where a plethora of batting records were eclipsed. SRH posted an all-time IPL record total of 287 for 3 and then restricted RCB to 262 for 7 as 38 maximums were hit across two innings. The match also entered the record books for the highest cumulative match total of 549 scored by both teams. "It's crazy the amount of runs scored today, a world record. I wouldn't say 270 is par, Danny. It's tough (to bowl on a day like this), we tried a few things and they weren't quite working,"

No way to hide when your confidence is low: Faf du Plessis

Du Plessis said at the post-match presentation ceremony. Just like winning provides a lot of confidence, back-to-back defeat can also rob teams off it, feels the former Proteas skipper. "There's no way to hide when your confidence is low. The fast bowlers found it quite difficult out there. Similar to the batting perspective, we need to work on a few areas. Need to make sure the run rate doesn't go down after powerplay. The guys put up their hands and never gave up (in the run chase). "It was good to see the fight, 30-40 runs from the bowling perspective was a bit too



much." Du Plessis admitted that the pressure is way too much and mind could explode at any time. "It's important to go away and freshen your mind, it's such a

Winning skipper Cummins, who was the best bowler on view among the two teams, also said in jest how he wished that he was a batter on days like these. "Wish I was a batter," Cummins could afford to smile after his team emerged victorious. The SRH skipper said that when his team scored 277 a few weeks back, he never thought that total could be surpassed. "Against Mumbai a few weeks ago, I thought it won't happen again, but it has happened again. Give me a few more years please (on whether bowlers will go extinct)! It feels like you bowl an over for seven or eight feels great." The Chinnaswamy track seemed a bit slower in earlier games but things have indeed changed. "I've given up trying to read the pitches," Cummins said.

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Sunrisers Hyderabad have Staken T20 batting to the next level with sustained range-hitting in the Indian Premier League, and Travis Head said maximising Power Play segment was central to their aggressive approach. Head, whose 39-ball 100 led SRH to a record-setting 287/3 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday, underscored that approach with a fifty inside the Power Play. It was also the second time Head completed a half-century within the first six overs. "We've definitely got a lot of power through our top and

middle-order and I think we've sort of got to tailor the way we want to play around that power that we've got, especially in power play," said Head in the post-match press conference. The Australian opener has a perfect ally at the top in an equally belligerent Abhishek Sharma, who blunts slower bowlers upfront while Head goes about destroying the pacers. "I guess Abhi and I at the top of the order try to maximise that (Power Play) as much as we can. It may be fours, it may be sixes. "But yeah, we want to try to attack the power play with the two of us and then obviously we've got a lot of power

Every game is like semifinal for us now: RCB coach Flower

PTI ■ BENGALURU

After his side's sixth defeat in seven matches in the ongoing Indian Premier League, Royal Challengers Bengaluru head coach Andy Flower confessed that each of their remaining seven matches will have to be treated like a semifinal. In the latest setback to their playoff aspirations, RCB went down by 25 runs against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Monday. "It is obviously knockout time and every game is like a semifinal for us now. But we will have to think that we will come back stronger," Flower said on RCB Game Day. RCB conceded the highest-ever IPL total - 287 for three - as the Hyderabad batters went



skipper Faf Du Plessis' 28-ball 62. The Zimbabwean wanted to build on them in the coming matches. "I am really proud of the way we fought with the bat out there in the middle. We lost the game but I was really proud of the way we fought," said Flower. The former England coach lauded Karthik for the way he took on SRH bowlers, and said it would not be surprising if the wicketkeeper batter made it to India's T20 World Cup squad. "Dinesh Karthik is really making a push for the World Cup team (of India) as well and is only getting better on the field," he added. RCB will next face Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens on April 21.



RCB SRH game was one of sixes, not of batsmanship: Finch

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Sunrisers Hyderabad and Royal Challengers Bengaluru unleashing a barrage of sixes in their IPL match left little room for batsmanship and what mattered was who hit the most number of sixes, said Australia's T20 World Cup-winning skipper Aaron Finch. Travis Head's maiden T20 ton and Heinrich Klaasen's pillaging 67 drove SRH to a record-breaking 287 for three, which helped them go past their own 277/3 against Mumbai Indians at Hyderabad this March 27. Dinesh Karthik then smashed a blazing 35-ball 83 but RCB ended up losing the match in which 38 sixes were hit all around the park. "It was never going to be a game where you talk about batsmanship. It's a game where you talk about who hit the most sixes and that was the difference," Finch said on Star Sports. "They (RCB) had to start at 14 (runs per over). And if you have one bad over it goes to 16." Finch said the Hyderabad side used the Powerplay segment well. "They (SRH) were getting lucky in the first powerplay and they needed those sixes and Travis Head was the difference there. "He started off well, his intent to get the ball rolling and then a courageous move to keep Klaasen at No. 3 and say we need

to keep going, we have a deep batting line-up and we are going to put the bowlers to the sword here," added Finch. Head's destructive hundred, crafted off 39 balls, was the fourth fastest in the tournament, the cornerstone of SRH's 25-run win. Finch said IPL teams had started changing their strategies by bringing in big-hitters like Klaasen up the order as they play fearless cricket. "A lot of times teams think that Klaasen has so much power to the back end, let's hold him back. Like (RCB's) Glenn Maxwell at times, you don't want to expose him right now because if he gets out, then we've got to rebuild. Teams don't think like that anymore. " (SRH coach) Dan Vettori has talked about that, play aggressively, play fearlessly and bear the consequence if it doesn't go right. If it does go right, you don't lose." Dinesh Karthik once again underlined his value making a 35-ball 83 at a strike-rate of 237. Finch said the ability to strike the ball comes naturally to Karthik, given his more than two decades of experience in the game. "Well, once you've got 20-25 years of experience behind you, and you've got that bulk of balls you've hit throughout your whole career since you were five years old, you don't lose that ability to bat.

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bengaluru all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has decided to take an indefinite "mental and physical" break from the Indian Premier League, blaming his wretched batting form for the decision. Maxwell's absence from RCB's match against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Monday was initially attributed to a finger injury he suffered during the previous match against Mumbai Indians. But he later admitted to dropping himself from the squad. "It was a pretty easy decision. I went to Faf and the coaches after the last game (vs Mumbai Indians) and said it was probably time we tried someone else (in his place)," Maxwell said in the post-match press meet. "It's actually a good time to give myself a bit of a mental and physical break, get my body right. If I'm required to get in during the tournament, I can, hopefully, get back into a solid mental and physical space where I can make an impact," he added. This is the second time in his career that Maxwell has opted out of competitive cricket in order to gather himself. He had taken a similar break in October 2019, stating that he felt men-

RCB Maxwell takes mental and physical break from IPL 2024

tally and physically ruined at that time. The 35-year-old made his comeback a couple of months later. In the ongoing IPL, Maxwell has been quite underwhelming with the bat in the six matches he has played this season, contributing just 32 runs at an average of 5.33 and a strike-rate of 94. Twenty eight of those 32 runs came against Kolkata Knight Riders alone, helped to a great degree by two dropped catches. "I have been in this situation in the past where you can keep playing and get yourself deeper into a hole. We have had a pretty big deficiency after the power play, which has been my area of strength over the last couple of seasons. "I felt like I wasn't contributing with the bat, and with the results and the position we find ourselves on the table, I think it's a good time to give someone else an opportunity to show their wares, and hopefully, someone can make that spot their own," a candid Maxwell said.



The big-hitting Australian, however, still hopes to return and make an impact in the later stages of the tournament. "The management here has been outstanding. I don't think I've had a better six months in cricket leading into

this tournament. "So, it's frustrating when it ends up like this. But if I can get my body and my mind right, there's no reason I can't finish the tournament well if I do get another opportunity," he said.

The sudden dip in his form was surprising, considering the hot run he had in the run-up to the IPL. Maxwell had made 552 runs from 17 T20s from November onwards, averaging 42 and his strike-rate was an impressive 185. But the Victorian started the IPL with a first-ball duck against Chennai Super Kings in an away match, and from that point his fortunes plummeted. "T20 cricket is a pretty fickle game. Even if you look at the first game, I ran one off the middle of the bat to the keeper. I picked up the length, saw a scoring opportunity, but opened the face a little bit too much. "When you are going well, that goes wide of the (wicketkeeper's) gloves, you get a boundary. You are 4 off 1, and you are away for the tournament," he noted. Maxwell said luck was not on his side in this tournament. "I probably just haven't got away. In the first few games, I feel I made reasonably good decisions (for shot selection). But I was finding ways to get out.

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