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LSG EYE A WIN IN DHONI'S BASTION 12 SPORTS

BJP, Opposition lock horns over Modi remark EC's task force to tackle low poll turnout



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid concerns over rising temperature given the forecast of above normal maximum temperatures and heatwaves in certain parts of the country, the Election Commission on Monday decided to set up a task force comprising officials from concerned agencies that will review the impact of heatwave and humidity, five days before each polling phase for any concerning developments and mitigatory measures, if necessary. This comes after the India Meteorological Department (IMD) told the Election Commission that there is "no major concern" regarding heatwave for the second phase of Lok Sabha polls to be held on April 26. Director General, IMD, Mrutunjay Mohapatra also told the poll panel that the weather forecast is "normal" for the 13 States and Union Territories going to polls in phase two, according to an official statement. The Commission on Monday held a meeting with the agencies concerned involving Additional Secretary Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Head of Department, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and DG Meteorology, India Meteorological Department (IMD) to understand the developing weather situation and discuss measures to mitigate any risk due to hot weather conditions during



Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu addresses the media in New Delhi on Monday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP and Opposition leaders on Monday engaged in a war of words over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comments on 'redistribution of country's wealth by Congress favouring Muslims' made at an elections rally in Rajasthan a day earlier, with Opposition terming the remarks as communally divisive and also complained to the Election Commission of India while BJP saying the PM has called a spade and has echoed people's sentiments. While addressing a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara, Modi on Sunday suggested that if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute wealth to Muslims. Modi alleged that the Congress plans to give people's hard-earned money and valuables to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children."

Targeting Modi, the Congress on Monday accused him of attempting to create communal polarisation for electoral gains. AICC general secretary in-charge of organisation K C Venugopal said the prime minister was quoting something that wasn't there in the Congress manifesto and that he was attempting to create "communal polarisation" in the country for electoral gains. BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said that the opposition is in pain as Modi has shown them the mirror about its past. His remarks have resonated with people as for the opposition INDIA Bloc those who have illegally entered the country are more important than citizens if they happen to be Muslims, he alleged. Addressing a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara, Modi alleged that the Congress

plans to give people's hard-earned money and valuables to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children". In his remarks in Rajasthan, Modi had said, "Earlier, when their (Congress) government was in power, they had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's assets. This means to whom will this property be distributed? It will be distributed among those who have more children". Congress urged the Election Commission to take action against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his 'redistribution of wealth' remarks made at a poll rally in Rajasthan, alleging they were 'divisive', 'malicious' and targeted a particular religious community. They alleged that Modi was using religion to ask voters to refrain from voting for it and

was making false and defamatory statements against the Opposition party and its leaders. Congress accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of speaking in a "poisonous language" and said that he has several new tactics for diverting attention from real issues but the end of "business of lies" is near. Sharing the Congress' latest advertisement that focuses on rising prices and unemployment on Monday, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said, "Unemployment and inflation are at their peak in the country and Narendra Modi says 'everything is fine.' "He (Modi) has several new techniques to 'divert from the issues', But the end of the business of lies is near", Rahul Gandhi said in a social media

post. While CPIM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury said while the prime minister's remarks are atrocious, the silence of the Election Commission is worse, the Trinamool Congress leader Saket Gokhale also appealed to the people to write to the Election Commission over Modi's remarks. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut termed as "disheartening" the comments of Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggesting that if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute wealth of people to Muslims. "He even talked about mangalsutra (sacred thread worn around the neck by women). It means he is completely disillusioned and is going to lose this election," the Rajya Sabha member claimed.

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the period of Lok Sabha polls ending on June 1. The meeting also comes amid concerns that heatwave could affect voter turnout. Notably, low turnout during the first phase of polling on April 19, is attributed to hot weather or heatwave conditions in especially Hindi belt regions — Bihar, Western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh. The EC's data showed 65.5 per cent voter turnout for the first phase as compared to over 69 per cent in 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The officials said that it is difficult to identify sections of the voters turned low this time. Low voting percentage in the Hindi belt Western Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand has become a cause of concern for the political parties. The Opposition claimed that BJP core voters did come to cast their vote while some section of BJP supporters say people did not come to vote as it was clear that Modi is coming to power for the third time. "The Commission directed MoHFW to issue necessary instructions to health authorities in states to prepare for and extend assistance in case of heatwave conditions affecting election operations. The Commission will hold a separate review with State CEOs to ensure adequate arrangements at polling stations including shamiyana, drinking water, fans, and other assured minimum facilities, etc. as per its existing advisory dated March 16, 2024. IEC (Information, Education and Communication) activities shall be carried out amongst the public for precautionary measures (Do's & Don'ts) to mitigate the heat wave impact in polling station areas," the EC said in a statement.

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IMD advisory aids farmers amid climate threats

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

From mitigating water stagnation in the rain-hit Northeastern States like Arunachal Pradesh and Karnataka and Goa to protecting fruit orchards from hail damage in Telangana and ensuring light, frequent irrigation to mitigate heat stress in Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, East Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued tailored warnings to farmers of different regions in the country. The IMD advisory is for the next five days to help farmers mitigate as well as combat the adverse effects of weather conditions on their crops and maximise agricultural productivity. Climate change induced erratic weather threat looms large on the country's agriculture and its allied sectors which is the largest source of livelihood in India. Low yields can hit the rural

economy and push inflation in urban areas as well, say experts. Farmers in Telangana have been suggested to install hail nets or hail caps in fruit orchards to prevent mechanical damage. "Provide mechanical support to horticultural crops and stake vegetables," said the IMD circular issued on Monday. Light to moderate rains or thundershowers will be experienced in the next three days till April 24, post which the dry weather will prevail in the State. IMD has issued yellow alerts for various districts of Telangana, predicting thunderstorms accompanied with lightning and gusty winds of around 30-40 kmph in these places. Similarly, farmers in North Eastern States (e.g., Arunachal Pradesh) have been asked to drain out excess water from crop fields to prevent water stagnation.

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Setback for Mamata in WB

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In a major blow to the Trinamool Congress in the midst of general elections the Calcutta High Court on Monday ordered the cancellation of appointments of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff made through the recruitment process of State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal Government-sponsored and aided schools, declaring the selection process as "null and void". The court directed the "illegal recruits" to return their emoluments drawn in the past several years within four weeks.

As the order came barely a couple of days after Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari presaged a "massive explosion that will shake the foundations of the TMC," Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee immediately called the court order "illegal" and vowed to move the Supreme Court for justice. "Now you can see the relationship between what he (Adhikari) said about a possible explosion and the order that has come today... this is an illegal order... I am not talking about the Judges but the order... we do not accept this order dictated by the BJP... We do not accept this order that will throw 26,000 people out of their jobs affecting 1.5 lakh or even more people directly... we will go to the higher court," Banerjee said at an election rally in North Dinajpur. Bengal SSC Chairman



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign meeting for Lok Sabha polls, in North Dinajpur district

Siddharth Majumdar said that the SSC would move the Apex Court. "We will go through the 300-page order... discuss and understand the legal aspects," he said. Incidentally Adhikari had a couple of days ago said that "a big explosion is coming in the next week that will shake the very foundation of this corrupt and anti-people Government," leading Banerjee to tell the people in a different rally that the BJP was out to assassinate her and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee who is also the general secretary of the party. In the devastating order which is unprecedented in the history of Bengal and

probably rare in the Indian judicial history the Bench of Justice Debangshu Basak and Justice Shabbir Rashidi, the Court not only directed the entire panel of 25,750 teachers and non-teaching staff appointed through a School Level Selection Test in 2016 and asked the CBI to undertake further investigation on the appointment process, and submit a report within three months. The Bench also directed the CBI to investigate into the government proposal to regularize the services of allegedly illegally appointed teachers by creating supernumerary posts.

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Court rejects Kejriwal's plea for daily doctor consultation

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Rejecting Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea seeking daily consultations with his doctor through video conferencing, Special Judge Kaveri Baweja on Monday directed Director, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to constitute a medical board of a Senior Endocrinologist/ Diabetologist which will decide whether he needs insulin or not. Special Judge for CBI and ED cases Kaveri Baweja passed the order while declining Kejriwal's plea for video consultation with his doctor in the presence of his wife. The Court in its order said home-cooked food can be provided to Kejriwal but it must strictly adhere to the diet chart given by his doctor on April 1. The board will decide whether he should be administered insulin and also take a call on the diet and exercise plan he needs to follow, the court said. It said there shall be no deviations from the diet plan prescribed by the medical board. "The said Medical Board is further requested to prescribe a diet and exercise plan, if required, for the Applicant considering his medical requirements and relevant data regarding his vital statistics."

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BJP leader Mukesh Dalal receives the 'certificate of election' after he was elected unopposed from Surat Lok Sabha seat, in Surat, on Monday

BJP seals first election win as its Surat candidate elected unopposed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SURAT/NEW DELHI

In a sort of 'opening' its electoral account in the ensuing general elections, BJP candidate Mukesh Dalal was on Monday elected unopposed from Surat Lok Sabha constituency in Gujarat after all other nominees withdrew from the fray. "I declare that Mukeshkumar Chandrakant Dalal, sponsored by the BJP, has been duly elected to fill the seat in the House from Surat parliamentary constituency," District Collector cum election officer Saurabh Pardhi told media persons as he handed over the certificate of election to Dalal. Reacting to the development, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh claimed that democracy is under threat. The candidature of Congress' Nilesh Kumbhani from Surat seat was rejected on Sunday after the district returning officer prima facie found discrepancies in the signature of the proposers. The nomination form of Suresh Padsala, the Congress' substitute candidate from Surat, was also invalidated. Voting for all 26 constituencies in Gujarat is scheduled for May 7, but with the result of Surat seat already out, polling will be held on 25 seats. Except for Dalal, all 8 candidates in the fray from Surat-4 Independents, 3 from smaller parties and Pyarelal Bharti of Bahujan Samaj Party

withdrew their nomination papers on the last day, as per the Surat district election office. Congress on Sunday alleged that Kumbhani's nomination form was rejected at the behest of the BJP and said it would challenge the rejection in the High Court. "Surat has presented the first Lotus to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. I congratulate our candidate for Surat Lok Sabha seat Mukesh Dalal for getting elected unopposed," Gujarat unit BJP president C R Paatil posted on social media. In the 2019 polls, BJP won all 26 constituencies in Gujarat, the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Congress claimed the BJP was frightened by the anger of MSME owners and the business community and attempted "match-fixing" even in the Surat Lok Sabha seat which the ruling party has been winning since 1984. "Aap chronology samajhiye" (Understand the chronology): Surat District Election Officer rejects the Congress' candidate for Surat Lok Sabha Nilesh Kumbhani's nomination for 'discrepancies in the verification of signatures of three proposers'. On similar grounds, officials reject the nomination of Suresh Padsala, the INC's substitute candidate from Surat.

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Teenage chess prodigy Gukesh makes history

PTI ■ TORONTO

India's 17-year-old Grandmaster D Gukesh scripted history by winning the Candidates Chess Tournament here to become the youngest ever challenger to the world title, bettering a record created by the legendary Garry Kasparov 40 years ago. Gukesh played out an easy draw with American Hikaru Nakamura in the 14th and final round to finish with nine out of a possible 14 points in the tournament that is held to decide the

challenger to the world champion. The triumph entitles Gukesh a clash against reigning world champion Ding Liren of China in the last quarter of the year. The Chennai-based teen bettered Kasparov's record by quite a distance as the Russian great was 22 when he qualified in 1984 to clash with compatriot Anatoly Karpov. "So relieved and so happy. I was following this crazy game (between Fabio Caruana and Ian Nepomniachtchi), and



then I went for a walk with my second (Gregorz Gawezyk), I think that helped," Gukesh said after winning. Gukesh also won a cash award of 88,500 Euros (approx ₹78.5 lakh). The total prize fund of the Candidates was 5,00,000 Euros. He became only the second Indian after the great Viswanathan Anand to win the prestigious tournament. Five-time world champion Anand's triumph came in 2014. "Congratulations to @DGukesh for becoming the

youngest challenger. The @WacaChess family is so proud of what you have done. I'm personally very proud of how you played and handled tough situations. Enjoy the moment," Anand posted on "X" to congratulate the youngster, who like him, also hails from Chennai. Needing at least a draw, Gukesh gave nothing away to Nakamura, a clear signal that the teenager is ready for the big stage and is going to be the next biggest star in the chess world.

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LS manifesto: NCP promises caste based census, MSP to farmers

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A caste-based census, bestowing of posthumous Bharat Ratna to Maharashtra's late chief minister Y B Chavan, according to classical language status to Marathi and an increase in the annual grant to farmers under the "Kisaan Samman Nidhi" are some of the promises made in the Lok Sabha poll manifesto released by the NCP (Ajit Pawar) on Monday.

The NCP (AP) manifesto, released by the party's national president Ajit Pawar and working President Praful Patel, promises to widen the scope of Agricultural Crop Insurance Scheme, to increase the loans to Rs 20 lakh from Rs 10 lakh under the Mudra Yojana Scheme and according of Constitutional status to National Backward Classes Commission.

Seeking to touch the emotional chord of the Maharashtrians, the NCP (AP) has promised to bestow late chief minister Y B Chavan with the coveted "Bharat Ratna". Describing late Y B Chavan as the "Architect of 'United Maharashtra'", the NCP (AP) stated in its manifesto: "He is an inspiration to the NCP. His



political life is cultured and respected. As the nation's Deputy Prime Minister, Defence Minister, Chairman of the Eighth Finance Commission and the first chief minister of United Maharashtra, he has a lion's share in building the nation and Maharashtra," the manifesto said.

"NCP will play an important role in ensuring the Hon'ble Yeshwantrao Chavan Saheb is honoured with the Bharat Ratna," the manifesto added. Vowing to bring the deprived and backward sections into the mainstream of the society, the NCP said that it would demand a caste-based census. "Our party believes in the

right to live as a human irrespective of caste, creed and religion. It believes in equality and unity. The NCP has faith in social reformer Sane Guruji's quote, The true religion is to offer love to the world. We must bring the deprived and backward sections of society into the mainstream. We will demand for a caste-based census," the manifesto stated.

"We will continue to push for the implementation of measures and funds to ensure that the students from the minority communities will get opportunities of higher education, entrepreneurship and employment through the institution," the manifesto stated.

The NCP manifesto has promised to have Maulana Azad Research and Training Institute at the national level. Among other things, the party promises to make efforts for Maharashtra to become the skill development capital of India and to grow industries with modern skill development technology by increasing the scope of Vishwakarma Yojana for 12 Balutedar (artisans, craftsmen) classes. It will try to increase educated and skilled youth's remuneration to Rs 20,000 per month in private companies on contractual basis. The NCP (AP) proposes 50 per cent discount on railway and metro travel to senior citizens above 60 years all over the country and implementation of the Ayushman Bharat scheme for citizens aged above 70 years.

Promising to take up river-linking and river-purification projects on a large scale at the national level, the NCP (AP) said: "It is our endeavour to ensure that projects like Krishna-Bhima stabilization, Nar-Par scheme, and Western Ghats rainwater diversion to drought-prone areas are taken up as ambitious projects having a positive impact," the manifesto stated.



Former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu, founder of Sulabh International Bindeshwar Pathak and a host of other prominent persons were conferred with Padma Awards by President Droupadi Murmu at a ceremonial function held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here on Monday. Actor Mithun Chakraborty, singer Usha Uthup, former Uttar Pradesh governor Ram Naik and industrialist Sitaram Jindal were conferred with the Padma Bhushan

PTI

BJP seals first election win...

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The Congress is left without a candidate," Ramesh stated. "All other candidates withdrew their nomination except the BJP's candidate, Mukesh Dalal. The BJP candidate was declared 'elected unopposed' from the Surat Lok Sabha seat on April 22, 2024, nearly two weeks before polling on May 7, 2024," Ramesh added. He claimed that the "distress" of micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) owners and the business community in PM Narendra Modi's "Anyay Kaal" and their anger have "spooked the BJP so badly that they are attempting to match-fix" Surat Lok Sabha, which they have won consistently since the 1984 Lok Sabha elections!"

Setback for...

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"If required the CBI can take these decision makers up in the ladder he or she may be in custody for the sake of investigation," advocate Shamim said. Besides the defendant appointees were also asked

to return their financial benefits to the Government within four months. The Bench formed by the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court on a direction of the Supreme Court extensively heard numerous petitions and appeals relating to the selection of candidates for appointment

by the SSC in the categories of teachers of Classes 9, 10, 11 and 12, and Group C and D staffers. The Court earlier had directed the School Service Commission to find out the illegally appointed teachers but it failed to do so even as it failed to produce the hard copies of the OMR sheets and other digital and other digital and credible evidence to prove the bona fide of the exams. The appointments were

made through the recruitment process of the State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools. The recruitment scam has seen a number of senior bureaucrats and TMC politicians including the then number two in the Cabinet Partha Chatterjee going to jail along with MLA and TET chairman Manik Bhattacharya, and two other TMC legislators.

Different parts of Kashmir Valley abuzz with hectic political activities

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Different parts of Kashmir valley are abuzz with hectic political activities in the run-up to the third round of polling on May 7.

From organizing big election rallies to street corner meetings and taking out road shows the leaders are roaming freely and reaching out to the electorate with their party programs and slogans to woo them to cast votes in their favor.

To prevent any untoward incident the leaders have been advised to adhere to the standard operating procedures even as elaborate security arrangements remain intact.

Three former Chief Ministers Omar Abdullah, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Mehbooba Mufti are holding public rallies and attracting big crowds in their

election meetings. Leaders of the Peoples Conference and Jammu and Kashmir Apni party are also holding public rallies seeking votes and support for their party candidates. Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat will witness a tight contest between National Conference candidate Mian Altaf Ahmad and PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti. Jammu and Kashmir Apni party candidate Zaffar Iqbal Manhas is also in the fray and is banking heavily on the support from like-minded political parties who are not contesting the elections to prevent the division of votes.

On Monday Chairman of the Apni Party Altaf Bukhari announced unconditional support to the Peoples Conference leader Sajad Lone in Baramulla parliamentary seat of Jammu and Kashmir. Lone is contest-

ing against Omar Abdullah. In 2019 the National Conference candidate Mohd Akbar Lone defeated the Peoples Conference candidate Raja Aijaz Ali by a margin of over 30,000 votes.

Lone had urged Bukhari on Saturday to extend support and defeat the National Conference from the Baramulla constituency. On the other hand, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) President Mehbooba Mufti Monday said that Jammu & Kashmir needs a robust voice that will stand up against the "ill-designs" of New Delhi. She said the ongoing contest for Lok Sabha is not a fight limited to PDP or NC, rather it is a fight to raise the voice of Jammu and Kashmir to convince New Delhi that decisions taken after August 05, 2019,

were "illegal" and "unconstitutional" which need to be reversed. Addressing a public rally in Anantnag's Bijbehara, Mehbooba said that her existence is not limited to one place. "I am not confined to one place. Bijbehara is my



home town and Sirhama is my home. The people here have raised me," Mehbooba Mufti said. She said every contest remains tough for a candidate, but the love and affection she saw and received from Anantnag to Pir Pacha are heartwarming. "I am getting

reports that people have understood that they need a robust voice who will stand up to the powers in New Delhi and talk about the issues of Kashmir," she said.

While responding to a query, she said that the ongoing Lok Sabha election contest is not a fight between Mehbooba Mufti and Omar Abdullah, rather "This is the fight to take the voice of Jammu and Kashmir to New Delhi".

"People of Jammu & Kashmir will decide rightly while casting their votes," Mehbooba added. Omar Abdullah Monday targeted the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) President Mehbooba Mufti for joining the INDIA alliance to get the seat. Mufti selfishly tried to get a seat through the doors of Peoples

Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) and INDIA alliance", Omar said during a public rally in south Kashmir's Kulgam district. Omar reminded the Kashmiris "NC and Congress urged late Mufti Mohammad Sayed to accept their support to keep BJP out of Kashmir. However, Mufti Sayeed accused NC of trying to enter their Government through backdoor", he alleged.

Omar said that "in 2016 when Mehbooba Mufti's Government was in shambles, NC went to Raj Bhavan and urged the Governor not to allow breaking the government as NC was aware by such tactics of distorted manners what repercussions it prevails on the people. Was that our selfishness?", he questioned. He said "In 2018, Mehbooba

Mufti sent her party's leader Altaf Bukhari to us for our support, proposing as CM, it was Farooq Abdullah who swiftly endorsed and signed the document without hesitation, was that our selfishness?" "We still remember your speeches when you said there is only Narendra Modi who can solve Kashmir's issue but where is the solution, is there anything left without catastrophe? Our identity and existence is in danger", he said. Omar said when Mufti could have represented the people of Kashmir instead she jeered at them. People have not forgotten whom you rubbed the salt in their wounds. "What you did during your tenure as Chief Minister, bring some courage to apologize to the people for that", the NC Vice President asked.

Court rejects Kejriwal's plea for daily doctor...

From Page 1

The Medical Board may, as and when required, also physically examine the Applicant in Jail," the judge said. The judge asked the medical board to submit its report to the court at the earliest specifying as to whether Kejriwal required insulin to control his blood sugar levels.

"... the food items provided as home-cooked food are quite different from the diet prescribed by his own doctor of WHEALTH, Centre for Excellence in Diabetes and Weight Management," noted Baweja in her 15 pages order, adding that mangoes were not mentioned in the prescribed diet either.

Kejriwal had moved an application before the court, requesting online consultation with a private doctor every day for 15 minutes in the presence of his wife, Sunita Kejriwal, owing to his diabetic conditions. The Chief Minister has been lodged in Tihar Jail since April 1, following his arrest in the Delhi excise policy case by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21. Kejriwal had alleged he was not being administered insulin in jail leading to "alarming" rise in his blood sugar levels.

"The Medical Board of AIIMS is also requested to submit its report to this court at the earliest specifying as to whether there is any requirement of administering Insulin to the Applicant at this juncture. Further, in case there is need of any medical intervention for the Applicant by any specialist in future, the decision in this regard shall be taken by the Jail Authorities in consultation with the Medical Board. vi) Jail Authorities shall also send medical report of the Applicant, to this court regularly on a fortnightly basis, till further orders," the order

said. "The Applicant (Kejriwal) shall however, continue to be provided with home cooked food, subject to the condition that it shall strictly be in compliance with the diet as prescribed by the above mentioned Medical Board. Till the time such Board prescribes a diet plan for the Applicant, his family may provide home cooked food to him, though it shall be strictly as per diet chart of his private doctor and as permitted vide order dated 01.04.2024," the order said.

The ED had claimed on Friday the AAP leader was consuming sugar-laden food like mangoes and sweets on a regular basis to create grounds for medical bail. Kejriwal responded sharply, accusing the central anti-money laundering agency of acting "petty" and "politicising" what he ate. The reply filed by the Jail Authorities also highlights the medical facilities available in Jail for the inmates. It is further stated that presently there are nearly 1000 inmates with diabetes who are being provided requisite medication by the Jail doctors. It further said 26 such inmates are also being administered Insulin on the basis of their medical requirement. Further, the Jail has adequate stock of insulin and this fact has also been apprised by Director General (Prisons) to the wife of the applicant.

The Aam Aadmi Party on Monday welcomed a Delhi court order directing AIIMS to constitute a medical board with diabetes specialist to examine Kejriwal's health issues. AAP leaders Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj said that today's court order to constitute a medical board of specialist doctors to examine the Chief Minister has proved that there was no diabetologist in the Tihar jail so far.

IMD advisory aids...

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The farmers have also been suggested to postpone sowing of major crop maize and cowpea due to excessive moisture. (April 23)

Heavy to very heavy rainfall or snowfall will continue in isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh; heavy rains may lash Assam and Meghalaya, as per the IMD alert issued for Tuesday while scattered rain or snow with thunderstorms is predicted over Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. There will be isolated rain with thunderstorms over Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Jharkhand, West Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Konkan, Goa, Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada, Vidharbha, Chhattisgarh, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal and Karnataka, as per the MET Department. In Karnataka and Goa,

farmers have been directed to make arrangements to drain excess water from crop fields to prevent water stagnation and also store harvested produce in safer places to avoid damage. Farmers from Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh, North Interior Karnataka, South Interior Karnataka, Rayalaseema, Nagaland, and Manipur have been alerted to provide mechanical support to horticultural crops and stake vegetables to prevent further damage while those from Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, East Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, have been suggested to apply light and frequent irrigation to standing crops to tackle with heat stress.

These states are already reeling under intense heat waves and the temperature is likely to further soar in these States to touch as high as 45 degree centigrade. Currently, temperature has already crossed 40 degree centigrade.

BJP, Opposition lock horns over Modi...

From Page 1

"The possibility of electoral loss bothers him, and that is why such language...How can individuals having a certain number of kids be a campaign issue?" he said. The Shiv Sena (UBT) leader also asked why PM Modi has not discussed his government's performance over the last 10 years. Bhatia asked if the then prime minister Manmohan Singh had in 2006 not said that minorities, especially Muslims, have the first rights in the country's resources. He said the UPA was a black chapter in Indian democracy and if the INDIA alliance feels ashamed, so be it.

EC's taskforce to tackle low poll...

From Page 1

At a time when extreme weather events such as long heat waves and extreme rainfall events are regular occurrences, the Commission has been closely monitoring the weather reports and will ensure the comfort and well-being of voters along with polling personnel and security forces, candidates and political party leaders. The IMD on Monday predicted the intense heat wave scorching large parts of east India will continue for another five days. The ongoing spell of heat wave, the second this month, is

boiling parts of West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar. Increasing nighttime heat is even more common in cities because of the urban heat island effect, in which metro areas are significantly hotter than their surroundings. The threshold for a heat wave is met when the maximum temperature of a weather station reaches at least 4.5 degrees Celsius in the plains, 37 degrees in the coastal areas and 30 degrees in the hilly regions, and the departure from normal is at least 4.5 notches. A severe heat wave is declared if the departure from normal

temperature exceeds 6.4 notches. Director General of Meteorology of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said, "IMD is in continuous touch with the Election Commission of India.

Along with seasonal forecasts, we are doing monthly, week-wise and everyday forecasts and giving them forecasts about heat waves, and humidity levels. We are providing the ECI, inputs and forecasts about the places where elections are going to be held in different phases."

Previously, on April 11, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had chaired a meeting to review preparedness for the ensuing heat wave season.

The Prime Minister was briefed about the temperature outlook for the period from April to June 2024 including the forecasts for the upcoming hot weather season (April to June), the likelihood of above-normal maximum temperatures over most parts of the country, especially with high probability over Central India and western peninsular India.

Teenage chess prodigy Gukesh makes...

From Page 1

The black pieces did not matter much as Nakamura was at sea in the Queen's Gambit Accepted and did not find any ways to pursue playing for an advantage.

Gukesh won a pawn and Nakamura had to find the path to equality in the ensuing rook and opposite coloured Bishops endgame. The game lasted till move 71 but the result was never in doubt. With Gukesh ending on 9 points, all eyes were on the match between American Caruana and Russia's Nepomniachtchi.

"...Those 15 minutes were

probably the most stressful of this entire tournament, I was watching the commentary for sometime and then me and Gajevsky (his trainer) went for a walk and then my father came running," Gukesh revealed. "Obviously the support system is huge, coming to my team I would not like to take their names but they know how grateful I am to them," he said. The American outplayed Nepomniachtchi right from the opening and enjoyed a nearly winning position for several moves.

However, the clock did the talking here as Caruana

blundered on 39th move to allow a playable position. Things were far from over though, Caruana built his position all over again and was close to winning a second time when again his clock deceived him and he failed to find the correct continuation. The resulting position was a drawn queen and pawns endgame where Caruana kept pressing to no avail. Had any of these two players won, the tournament would have needed a tie-break as Gukesh and the winner would have ended up in joint lead. Caruana, Nepomniachtchi

and Nakamura all ended on an identical 8.5 points for the shared second place while Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa ended fifth on seven points defeating Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan. Vidit Gujrathi played out a quick draw with Firouzja Alireza of France in the final round to end on the sixth spot with six points in all. Alireza finished seventh on five points while Abasov ended last on 3.5 points in all. Gukesh has been making waves for a while now after becoming the third youngest in chess history to earn the Grandmaster title

at the age of 12. He later became the youngest to achieve an ELO rating of 2750.

The youngster's father Rajnikanth, who is an ENT surgeon but has stopped his practice to nurture Gukesh's chess dreams, accompanied him to the tournament. His mother Padma is a microbiologist. Last year, Gukesh won a silver medal at the Hangzhou Asian Games. The dates and venue for the world championship are yet to be finalised.

"I haven't really thought about it a lot I just got to know the result, the main

strategy will be to play good moves. Really look forward to all the preparation and being there," Gukesh said.

Results final round (Indians unless specified): Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 8.5) drew with D Gukesh (9); Fabiano Caruana (USA, 8.5) drew with Ian Nepomniachtchi (FIDE, 8.5); Nijat Abasov (Aze, 3.5) lost to R Praggnanandhaa (7); Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 5) drew with Vidit Gujrathi (6). Final standings: 1. D Gukesh 2-4; Nakamura, Nepomniachtchi, Caruana 5. Praggnanandhaa 6. Gujrathi 7. Alireza 8. Abasov.

Kejriwal writes to Tihar Superintendent seeking insulin daily

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday wrote to the superintendent of Tihar jail where he is lodged since April 1, claiming he has been asking for insulin every day and that AIIMS doctors never said there was no reason to worry about his diabetic condition. His letter to the superintendent comes a day after the Tihar administration issued a statement stating they had arranged his video conference with senior specialists from AIIMS during which neither "the issue of insulin was raised by Kejriwal, nor was it suggested by the doctors". The chief minister alleged that the Tihar administration

issued a "false and misleading" statement under "political pressure". There was no immediate reaction from Tihar jail authorities on Delhi chief minister's allegations. Delhi cabinet minister Atishi shared Kejriwal's letter on her X handle. The chief minister rejected the jail administration's claim that the issue of insulin was never raised by him in his consultations with the doctors. "This is false. I have raised the issue of insulin for 10 days, every day, multiple times. I showed my high sugar levels to every doctor who came to see me. I showed them that there were 3 peaks in the sugar level every day -- between 250-320," he said in his letter. "I also showed them that my



fasting sugar level was in the range of 160-200 every day. Almost every day, I demanded insulin. Then how could you make such a statement that I never raised the issue of insulin?" Kejriwal asked. The Delhi chief minister in his letter also contradicted Tihar administration's statement that the AIIMS doctors assured there was no "serious concern" regarding his sugar levels. "The AIIMS doctors never assured any such thing. They said that they will see all the data and then give their advice," Kejriwal claimed. The chief minister said he was "pained" that the Tihar administration issued a "false statement" under "political pressure" and hoped it will follow the law and Constitution

of the country. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has accused the Tihar administration of denying insulin to Kejriwal, who suffers from diabetes. The party has also alleged a "conspiracy" to "kill" him. The Tihar administration, in the statement said senior specialists from AIIMS provided consultation to Kejriwal during the video call on April 20. "After a 40-minute detailed consultation, Kejriwal was assured that there was no serious concern and was advised to continue with the prescribed medicines, which will be evaluated and reviewed regularly," a jail official had said. The video conference was organised by the Tihar Jail

administration on a request by the chief minister's wife Sunita Kejriwal. Apart from a senior specialist from the hospital, medical officers of the Tihar jail were also on the call. The AIIMS specialist was provided with a complete record of CGM (Glucose Monitoring Sensor) and the details of diet and medicines being taken by Kejriwal, the official said. "Neither the issue of insulin was raised by Kejriwal, nor was it suggested by the doctors," the official added. Kejriwal was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the Delhi government's now-scraped excise policy. He is lodged in Tihar jail since April 1.

HC dismisses PIL seeking bail for Kejriwal, slaps ₹75,000 cost

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday dismissed with Rs 75,000 costs a public interest litigation by a law student seeking "extraordinary interim bail" for Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is in judicial custody in relation to a money laundering case stemming from the alleged excise scam. A bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Manmohan remarked that the petition was "totally misconceived" and that the court cannot grant "extraordinary interim bail" to a person holding a high office. This court is of the view that the petitioner's claim of being custodian of people is devoid of any basis... The petitioner holds no power of attorney on behalf of the R5 to furnish any personal bond. In the present case R5(Kejriwal) has the means and wherewithal to file the case and proceedings which he has so done before this court as well as apex court. Consequently, this court is of the view that no relaxation of concept of locus standi is called for," the court stated. "Does he (the petitioner) attend classes in college? It seems he is not following principles of law," the bench also comprising Justice Manmeet PS Arora said.



The court remarked that the AAP leader has the means to take steps to avail his legal remedies and the petitioner holds no power of attorney to make submissions on his behalf. "Person is taking steps in accordance with law. Who are you? You have some exaggerated notion of yourself. You say you have veto power. That you will give an undertaking (to ensure Kejriwal does not influence witness)," the court stated. The court emphasised that the concept of equality and Rule of Law were enshrined in the Constitution and Kejriwal was in judicial custody pursuant to judicial orders which were not challenged. "Writ petition is dismissed with costs of Rs 75,000," the court ordered.

Senior advocate Rahul Mehra, appearing of Kejriwal, said the PIL was "ambush" litigation which was not maintainable and the petitioner has no locus. The petitioner's counsel sought "extraordinary interim bail" for the Delhi chief minister on the grounds that his safety was in danger as he was confined with hardcore criminals. The PIL said that to fulfil the responsibilities of the chief minister, Kejriwal's physical presence was required in his office and home to take quick decisions on all issues and to pass orders in the welfare of the public at large. The petitioner, a law student, mentioned his name as, "We, the people of India" in the plea claiming that he does not want any name, fame or money from this matter.

Congress leaders protest against LS candidate picks

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Resentment against the North West Delhi candidate Udit Raj and North East candidate Kanhaiya Kumar of Congress came out in open on Monday as a number of party's former MLAs and Councillors protested outside the Delhi Congress office amid a Press conference where all three Lok Sabha contestants for Delhi were present. Congress workers raised slogans of 'Baahari ummedwaar nahi chalega' (external candidate will not work) while demonstrating their anger through a protest outside Delhi Congress office, against the party's candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections 2024 in the national Capital. The ruckus came couple of days after AICC incharge Deepak Babaria and former East Delhi MP Sandeep Dikshit had convened a separate meeting to discuss about candidatures before the party announced. The press conference was cut short with loud slogans hurled outside office while Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely said that it is the only party that allows dissent in the open. It is being said that these were supporters of the former Delhi Minister Rajkumar Chauhan, who was also in the race for the reserved seat of North West Delhi.



In response, Raj alleged the protesters were "not of sound mind" and should be expelled from the party. "They are not of sound mind. I was an MP from 2014 to 2019 and now I have become an outsider. They have destroyed the party and should be expelled," Mr Raj said and added that he will win by a huge margin. JP Agarwal, who is a veteran leader and has won from the Chandni Chowk constituency thrice in 1984, 1989, and 1996, said that he has a relationship with every voter of the constituency. Attacking the BJP, he said that the MP of the saffron party has never made it a habit to regularly visit the con-

stituencies. "There are many problems that people face there, however nothing has been resolved. I will work towards them all." Udit Raj, who has been an MP of North West Delhi, is being called an 'outsider' by Congress workers because he won the 2014 elections as a BJP candidate. However, he says that although he was an MP, where he worked towards some issues, many things couldn't be completed because his proposals were never passed by the BJP. "Even when I was no longer an MP, I was active in the constituency," he said, adding that he will work for the vision of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi

and AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge. Former JNUSU President Kanhaiya Kumar, who contested unsuccessfully from Bihar's Begusarai against Union Minister Giriraj Singh on Communist Party of India (CPI) ticket, joined the grand old party in 2021. Kumar said that the INDIA alliance is fighting all 543 seats together to fight against the BJP regime. "Inequality in the country is rising, poverty is rising. The work of the UPA government has been halted. We have a positive agenda for all the seats in which we are thinking about all sections of the society," he added.

Attacking the two time MP Manoj Tiwari, he said that Tiwari talks about everything except what he has done for the constituency in the last 10 years as MP. Taking a jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comments on Congress appealing the Muslims, Kumar quipped that he is happy to hear the question and said that the Press can't ask the same from the PM since he doesn't hold any press conference. Delhi's seven Lok Sabha seats will go to the polls in the sixth phase on May 25. The BJP won all the seven seats in the 2014 and the 2019 elections. Barring two time MP Manoj Tiwari, all the faces are new. The saffron party has fielded Bansuri Swaraj from New Delhi, Manoj Tiwari from East Delhi, Praveen Khandelwal from Chandni Chowk, Kamaljeet Sehrawat from West Delhi, Ramvir Bidhuri from South Delhi, Yogendra Chandolia from North West Delhi and harsh Malhotra from North East Delhi seat. AAP and the Congress -- both constituents of the opposition INDIA bloc -- are contesting the general elections in an alliance in the national capital this time. The Congress has fielded candidates in the North East Delhi, North West Delhi and the Chandni Chowk seats while AAP is contesting from East Delhi, West Delhi, South Delhi and New Delhi.

Ghazipur landfill fire sparks political slugfest between AAP, BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A political slugfest erupted on Monday over the Ghazipur landfill fire incident with the BJP attacking AAP-led MCD over the blaze which left local residents gasping for breath and racked with other health issues. Delhi cabinet minister Atishi said the incident will be investigated to ascertain its cause. Meanwhile, plumes of thick, dark smoke continued to rise from the Ghazipur landfill site in the national capital on Monday, hours after a major fire broke out there last evening. Several residents living close to the landfill complained about breathing difficulties and irritation in the eyes and throat. Delhi Minister Gopal Rai directed its environment department to submit a detailed report on the causes of fire at the Ghazipur landfill site and the action plan to prevent similar incidents at such sites in the summer season. The order issued by Delhi Cabinet Minister Gopal Rai directed the principal secretary of environment and forests to submit the report within 48 hours. A major fire broke out at the landfill site in east Delhi on Sunday evening. Officials cited hot and dry weather



conditions as the likely trigger for the fire. Police have registered an FIR against unidentified persons. According to police, a case under section 336 (act endangering life or personal safety of others) and 278 (making atmosphere noxious to health) has been registered at Ghazipur Police Station and a probe has begun. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva visited the site and charged it was an example of "corruption" of the AAP government. "The Ghazipur garbage dump is a direct example of cor-

ruption by the Kejriwal government. They had promised to remove this mountain of garbage by 2023 but another has risen here. This is because of the MCD's corruption. More than half of the machines are non functional. Why were they not repaired?" Sachdeva said. "It will be removed within a year after the day BJP forms government in Delhi," he added. AAP councilor and mayor Shelly Oberoi, who also went to the site, said this is not the time for politics. On Sunday, deputy mayor Aaley Mohammad Iqbal had also

visited the site. A wall made of tin panels marking the boundary of the landfill also fell as a portion of garbage broke away. The several metres long wall was erected on the poultry market side. "It has been 15 hours since the fire broke out. This smoke is not any common smoke, it is very poisonous. We are unable to keep our eyes open due to irritation and are experiencing difficulty in breathing," Ram Kumar from Gharoli village, close to the landfill, said. Several residents said that due to the smoke they were not able to send their children to school. They accused the MCD and the city government of not taking any action to give a better life to them. "It has been 15 years. Ministers visit us only during elections. But after that not a single one returns to our door to know if we are facing any problem. This landfill is a curse for us. We are forced to suffer foul smells every day. And now this fire has caused several health problems for us. Why do they (ministers) want us to die?" Ilayas Khan said. Rakesh Kumar, a heart patient, said he had to move to his relative's place because he could not bear the suffocation any longer. "And this

is not only my condition, several people are leaving their house due to the same reason," he said. Bilkis, another resident, said the landfill still sits where it does because politicians never fulfilled their promises. "Now they will be here again, showing their concern just to take votes. Nothing will happen," she said. Mehfuz said when he purchased a house in the area around 20 years ago, the landfill wasn't this high. "There was nothing such as this huge landfill now. Why is the government not able to find any proper solution? We are even unable to send our children to school due to smoke," he said. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had, ahead of the 2022 MCD election, promised to clear the landfill site by December 31, 2023. All the same, the mountain of garbage continues to grow. In 2019, the height of the Ghazipur landfill was 65 metres, only eight metres less than the Qutub Minar. In 2017, a portion of the garbage at the dumping yard fell on an adjacent road, killing two people. Three incidents of fire were reported at the Ghazipur landfill in 2022, one of which, on March 28, took more than 50 hours to be doused.

DoV writes to Anti Corruption Branch seeking probe on former DJB consultant

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate of Vigilance (DoV) has written to Delhi government Anti Corruption Branch to probe Ankit Srivastava, who was removed from the post of Consultant in Delhi Jal Board last year and he continued to be on the administrative Whatsapp Group named 'Minister (Water) Group' and disallowed Senior Technical Officers of DJB from giving any technical advice. In the letter, the Special Secretary of the Vigilance department YVVJ Rajasekhar said, "Ankit Srivastava was removed from the post of Consultant, yet he continued to be a member of Whatsapp Group called 'Minister (Water) Group'. It also came to the notice that he while being the member of said WhatsApp Group, was engaging in giving instructions to various senior officials that including Chief Engineers and Additional Chief Engineers and was taking policy decisions, even though, he was private person and had no locus standi in any matters," adding that since it was a seri-



ous matter, a report was sought from Chief Vigilance Officer of DJB. Reacting to this, the AAP government said the Vigilance Department under BJP ruled Central Govt is witch-hunting every consultant or advisor or domain expert who have worked with the elected Government of Delhi. All secretaries, OSDs, Advisors, Consultants are being constantly hounded to force them to stop working for the welfare of people. The vigilance department in its letter said Srivastava, who was engaged as Consultant in DJB without the approval of Competent Authority i.e. Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, "had been

actively engaging in giving directions on Iradat Nagar Lake, tube-well installation, coordinating on behalf of Chief Minister Camp Office, receiving mails and access to CM Camp Office and passing instructions to Senior Officers of Delhi Jal Board." According to the vigilance department, he was found to have been issuing instructions to various officers of DJB at the behest of CM Camp Office and appeared to have access to the email of CM Camp Office. "It was also prima facie found to have not been allowing Senior Technical Officers of Delhi Jal Board to explain their views and was strangulating them from giving any technical advice," the letter stated. The department mentioned a Whatsapp message by Srivastava which reads "Kindly avoid making generic statements regarding treatment without proper references as such comments create confusion. There are no OPINIONS in the water treatment domain. CPHEEO/WHO manuals are there with specific recommendations".

LG Saxena wife chief guest of 52nd Raising Day of Police Families Welfare Society

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

On the 52nd Raising Day, 'UPAAN' of the Police Families Welfare Education and Social worker Sangita Saxena, who is the wife of Lieutenant Governor of Delhi Vinai Kumar Saxena, was the chief guest. On Saturday evening, at Adarsh Auditorium of Police

Headquarters in the national capital, a cultural programme which was the culmination of a week-long celebration conducted at various Welfare Centres all over Delhi was held. Performances by Delhi Police family members and students of Delhi Police Public School, Safdarjung Enclave was a part of the event. An audio visual showcasing

the various activities, schemes and facilities started by the PFWS for the family members of police personnel was displayed. The gathering was made aware about the year long activities conducted by the Society which included establishment of 'Smita' (Therapy Centre for specially abled children), Public Speaking Course, Sewing Course, Mission Olympics (



for nurturing the sports talent of children of police families) amongst other activities organised during last one year. President, PFWS also elaborated on how these activities have helped families of police personnel to become independent and also how the skill development has led to better placement of police family members in good organisa-

tions. The 8th Edition of the annual magazine of PFWS-'Koshish-EkAsha', along with a digital version of the magazine, was released. Delhi Police family members who have just cleared the prestigious UPSC Civil services examination were also honoured. Top three Welfare Centres which actively & successfully conducted various welfare activities

throughout the year were awarded for their excellence. Saxena praised the role of police families who stood rock solid behind the police personnel while performing their duties. She lauded the Police Families Welfare Society led by President Ritu Arora in continuously organising welfare activities for the families of police personnel.

Opposition resorting to appeasement politics: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP alleged on Monday that the Opposition has resorted to blatant appeasement politics, anti-Hindu agenda and joining hands with anti-India forces in desperation, as it is becoming clear that the ruling NDA will reach its target of winning over 400 seats in the Lok Sabha polls.



of them has been arrested and that the CBI should probe the case.

"Her father is himself saying that he has lost faith in the police but Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is shielding the accused," the BJP spokesperson alleged.

While BJP president J P Nadda met the victim's family members, no senior Congress leader such as Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra or the chief minister met them, he said. The BJP spokesperson claimed

that some people who raised 'the Jai Shri Ram' slogan during a Ram Navami procession were beaten up and said that there is a "jungle raj" in Karnataka.

Bhatia alleged that the Congress manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls seems to be inspired by Pakistan's founder M A Jinnah as it speaks of strengthening personal laws. Will the practice of triple talaq, which was banned and made a criminal offence by the Modi government, be brought back, he asked and also attacked the Congress for its leader P Chidambaram's assertion that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act will be repealed if the INDIA bloc comes to power. As the BJP's graph rises during the polls and it becomes clear that the ruling National Democratic Alliance will reach its target of over 400 seats, the opposition, especially the Congress, is turning desperate, Bhatia claimed.

Rajnath reviews military preparedness in Siachen

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday visited Siachen, the world's highest battlefield, and reviewed India's overall military preparedness in the region.

Singh's visit to Siachen came over a week after the Indian Army marked the 40th year of its presence in the strategically key region.

The defence minister, accompanied by Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande, reviewed the overall security situation in the region, officials said.

"Visited a forward post in Siachen. Had a wonderful interaction with the brave Army personnel who are guarding our nation in extremely challenging conditions," Singh said on 'X'.

"I laud their courage and professionalism in the line of duty," he said.

Singh also interacted with the soldiers deployed in Siachen. The Siachen glacier at the height of around 20,000 feet in the Karakoram range is known as the highest militarised zone in the world



where soldiers have to battle frostbite and high winds.

In his address to the soldiers, Singh lauded them for walking on the virtuous path of protecting the "motherland with valour and determination in extreme conditions." He emphasised that the nation will remain forever indebted to the armed forces personnel, as due to their sacrifices, every citizen feels

safe." We are leading a peaceful life as we have an assurance that our brave soldiers stand steadfast at the borders. In the times to come, when the history of national security is written, the acts of bravery and iron-clad will of our soldiers in the icy cold glacier will be remembered with pride," he said. "It will forever be an inspiration for future generations,"

he said.

The defence minister described Siachen as not an ordinary land, but a symbol of India's sovereignty and determination.

He stated that just as Delhi is India's national capital, Mumbai is the financial capital and Bengaluru is the technology capital; Siachen is the capital of courage, grit and determination.

The nation recently celebrated the 40th anniversary of the success of Operation Meghdoot.

Singh termed the operation, which was launched by the Indian Army in Siachen on April 13, 1984, as a golden chapter of the country's military history. "The success of Operation Meghdoot is a matter of pride for all of us," he said.

The defence minister also laid a wreath at the Siachen War Memorial, as a mark of solemn tribute to the brave hearts who have made the supreme sacrifice in service of the country.

Under its 'Operation Meghdoot' the Indian Army established its full control over the Siachen Glacier on April, 1984.

The Indian Army strengthened its presence in Siachen over the last few years.

In January last year, Captain Shiva Chauhan from the Army's Corps of Engineers was posted at a frontline post in Siachen Glacier, in the first such operational deployment of a woman Army officer at the key battlefield.

NSDC, ISKCON to provide vocational training to underprivileged youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a groundbreaking collaboration aimed at empowering marginalized communities, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is all set to provide vocational training to tribal and underprivileged youth across multiple states.

The strategic partnership will initially focus on skilling youth from tribal and marginalized communities in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh, with plans to expand to other regions in the future. Through jointly conducted short-term courses, participants will receive industry-recognized certifications via the Skill India Digital Hub platform, enhancing their employability prospects.

Upon successful completion of the training programmes, the skilled youth will have



access to employment opportunities within India. Furthermore, they will be eligible for international job placements facilitated by NSDC International, a subsidiary of NSDC specializing in global mobility and placement arrangements.

As part of the collaboration, ISKCON will establish a Culinary School to empower tribal youth from regions such

as Palghar and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, as well as neighboring states like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. Notably, the trained individuals will have the opportunity to be employed at the upcoming Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj in 2025, with provisions for international mobility facilitated in partnership with NSDC International.

The primary objective of this collaboration is to bolster local economies through the establishment of ECO villages and training centers, with a keen focus on providing skill development opportunities to tribal youth, women, and other marginalized communities.

Two additional projects will be implemented under the partnership, each designed to empower local youth and foster sustainable development. The first project aims to replicate the success of the Govardhan Eco Village (GEV) in Palghar, Maharashtra, by setting up similar self-sufficient and sustainable establishments in regions such as Nandurbar (Maharashtra), Jaipur Rural (Rajasthan), and Mandla and Balaghat (Madhya Pradesh), including areas surrounding the Kanha National Park.

The second project will focus on skill development to support the local economy, particularly in sectors such as Hospitality, Retail, and Logistics. By establishing Skill India Centers in

partnership with ISKCON, this initiative will equip local youth, including women, with the necessary skills for employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

NSDC's Skill India Centers have a proven track record of providing resources and support to empower youth in various sectors, facilitating their entry into the workforce and exploring international mobility opportunities. Through pre-incubation and entrepreneurship development training, budding entrepreneurs will receive crucial support in areas such as prototype development, accessing credit, mentorship, and establishing market linkages.

The collaboration between NSDC and ISKCON marks a significant stride towards fostering sustainable development through skill enhancement, ensuring that marginalized communities gain access to opportunities that lead to economic prosperity and overall social inclusion.

Indian universities demonstrate highest performance amongst G20 nations this year

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian universities demonstrated the highest performance improvement among all the G20 nations this year, a significant 14 per cent year-on-year improvement in their average ranking, according to QS president Nunzio Quacquarelli.

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was identified as the highest-ranked university in India in the coveted rankings announced by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the London-based higher education analytics firm. The university was ranked at 20th position globally for development studies.

The QS World University Rankings by Subject were announced earlier this month in which IIM-Ahmedabad figured among the top 25 institutions globally for business



and management studies while IIM-Bangalore and IIM-Calcutta were among the top 50.

"This year, Indian universities demonstrated the highest performance improvement among all G20 nations (a significant 14 per cent year-on-year improvement in their average ranking). In terms of research output, India has become one of the world's most rapidly expanding research centres," it said.

From 2017 to 2022, India's research output surged by an impressive 54 per cent, making it the world's fourth-largest producer of research, the QS president said. "India now ranks prominently across in 44 out of the 55 QS Subject Rankings. Standout performances were noted in Computer Science, Chemistry, Biological Sciences, Business Studies and Physics, among others.

More than 2,000 criminal cases against MPs, MLAs decided in 2023: SC told

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Special courts for trial of criminal cases related to Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly decided more than 2,000 cases in 2023, the Supreme Court has been informed.

In an affidavit filed by senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, who has been appointed amicus curiae in a PIL seeking expeditious disposal of criminal cases against MPs/MLAs, said that more directions are needed for speedy adjudication of pending trials and their investigation under strict monitoring by the respective high courts, as there are around 501 candidates with criminal cases who are contesting the Lok Sabha elections in



the first two phases.

Referring to a report of NGO 'Association of Democratic Reforms for the Lok Sabha elections 2024 Phase I and Phase II', Hansaria, assisted by advocate Sneha Kalita, said that out of 2,810 candidates (Phase I - 1618 candidates and Phase II - 1192 candidates), 501 (18 per cent) candidates have criminal cases against them, out of which, 327 (12 per cent) are serious criminal cases (punishable with

imprisonment of 5 years and more).

"The same was the position in 2019 Lok Sabha elections in which out of 7928 candidates, 1500 candidates (19%) had criminal cases, out of which 1070 candidates (13%) were serious criminal cases. However, out of 514 elected members of 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024), 225 members (44%) had criminal cases against them.

"Thus, the candidates with criminal cases have won more seats than candidates without criminal cases. In this context, it is necessary that this court may pass further orders for expeditious disposal of pending trials and investigation under strict monitoring by the respective high courts," the affidavit said.

Shoe insole technology to prevent diabetic foot ulcers unveiled

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A team of researchers has unveiled a novel shoe insole technology aimed at reducing the risk of diabetic foot ulcers, a serious complication that can result in hospitalization and even leg, foot or toe amputation.

Muthu B J Wijesundara, principal research scientist at The University of Texas at Arlington Research Institute (UTARI), explained that the innovation targets a major cause of these ulcers: skin and soft tissue breakdown due to repetitive stress during walking. Diabetes often damages the small blood vessels supplying nerves, leading to poor circulation and foot ulcers, affecting approximately one-third of individuals with the condition. Despite numerous attempts with shoe insoles to



address this issue, their effectiveness in preventing ulcers has been limited, as per Wijesundara

In an article in the peer-reviewed International Journal of Lower Extremity Wounds, Wijesundara and UTA colleagues Veyssel Erel, Aida Nasirian and Yixin Gu, along

with Larry Lavery of UT Southwestern Medical Center, described their innovative insole technology. After this successful pilot project, the next step for the research team will be refining the technology to make it more accessible for users with varying weights and shoe sizes.

In India as in the world, the burden of diabetes-related amputations is a serious issue.

According to a study by the Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism, the prevalence of diabetic foot ulcers in India is estimated to be between 15-25 per cent among people with diabetes. Yet another study, 'Lower limb amputation rehabilitation status in India: A review,' by Dr Raktim Swarnakar, Dr Shiv Lal Yadav, Dr Darshana Surendran from Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, AIIMS, Delhi, talks about the psychological impact of amputation which is profound, leading to a high prevalence of psychiatric disorders among amputees, ranging from 32%-84 per cent.

"Rates of depression vary from 10.4%-63.0%, while post-trau-

matic stress disorder rates range from 3.3%-56.3% compared to the general population's rates of 10%-15%. Amputation can have adverse psychological effects, including a decrease in self-confidence, a sense of inadequacy, the development of a negative self-concept, and a distorted perception of body image, ultimately affecting the overall quality of life," said the doctors. The study appeared in the World Journal of Clinical Cases. Diabetic foot is a leading cause of disability worldwide, and amputations in patients with diabetes account for a significant portion of all amputations, with an average percentage of 68.6 per cent. The age group most affected by amputations was the 20s and 30s, which represents the productive population of the country, as per the Indian study.

India is fourth largest military spender in world

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India is the fourth largest military spender in the world with its military expenditure 83.6 billion dollars in year 2023. This is 4.2 per cent higher than in 2022, said the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in its annual report released on Monday. The biggest spender is USA and other three nations are China, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Total global military expenditure reached \$2443 billion in 2023, an increase of 6.8 per cent in real terms from 2022. This was the steepest year-on-year increase since 2009. The 10 largest spenders in 2023—led by the United States, China and Russia—all increased their military spending, according to SIPRI.

World military expenditure rose for the ninth consecutive year to an all-time high of

\$2443 billion. For the first time since 2009, military expenditure went up in all five of the geographical regions defined by SIPRI, with particularly large increases recorded in Europe, Asia and Oceania and the Middle East.

"The unprecedented rise in military spending is a direct response to the global deterioration in peace and security," said Nan Tian, Senior Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme. "States are prioritizing military strength but they risk an action-reaction spiral in the increasingly volatile geopolitical and security landscape."

Russia's military spending increased by 24 per cent to an estimated \$109 billion in 2023, marking a 57 per cent rise since 2014, the year that Russia annexed Crimea. In 2023 Russia's military spending made up 16 per cent of total government spending and its

military burden (military spending as a share of gross domestic product, GDP) was 5.9 per cent.

Ukraine was the eighth largest spender in 2023, after a spending surge of 51 per cent to reach \$64.8 billion. This gave Ukraine a military burden of 37 per cent and represented 58 per cent of total government spending. Ukraine's military spending in 2023 was 59 per cent the size of Russia's. However, Ukraine also received at least \$35 billion in military aid during the year, including \$25.4 billion from the USA. Combined, this aid and Ukraine's own military spending were equivalent to about 91 per cent of Russian spending.

In 2023, the 31 NATO members accounted for \$1341 billion, equal to 55 per cent of the world's military expenditure. Military spending by the USA rose by 2.3 per cent to reach \$916 billion in 2023, representing 68 per cent of total NATO military spending. In

2023, most European NATO members increased their military expenditure. Their combined share of the NATO total was 28 per cent, the highest in a decade. The remaining 4 per cent came from Canada and Türkiye.

"For European NATO states, the past two years of war in Ukraine have fundamentally changed the security outlook," said Lorenzo Scarazzato, Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme. "This shift in threat perceptions is reflected in growing shares of GDP being directed towards military spending, with the NATO target of 2 per cent increasingly being seen as a baseline rather than a threshold to reach."

China, the world's second largest military spender, allocated an estimated \$296 billion to the military in 2023, an increase of 6.0 per cent from 2022. This was the 29th con-

secutive year-on-year rise in China's military expenditure. China accounted for half of total military spending across the Asia and Oceania region. Several of China's neighbours have linked their own spending increases to China's rising military expenditure.

Japan allocated \$50.2 billion to its military in 2023, which was 11 per cent more than in 2022. Taiwan's military expenditure also grew by 11 per cent in 2023, reaching \$16.6 billion. "China is directing much of its growing military budget to boost the combat readiness of the People's Liberation Army," said Xiao Liang, Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme. "This has prompted the governments of Japan, Taiwan and others to significantly build up their military capabilities, a trend that will accelerate further in the coming years." Estimated military expendi-

ture in the Middle East increased by 9.0 per cent to \$200 billion in 2023. This was the highest annual growth rate in the region seen in the past decade.

Israel's military spending—the second largest in the region after Saudi Arabia—grew by 24 per cent to reach \$27.5 billion in 2023. The spending increase was mainly driven by Israel's large-scale offensive in Gaza in response to the attack on southern Israel by Hamas in October 2023.

"The large increase in military spending in the Middle East in 2023 reflected the rapidly shifting situation in the region—from the warming of diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab countries in recent years to the outbreak of a major war in Gaza and fears of a region-wide conflict," said Diego Lopes da Silva, Senior Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme.

AFMS collaborates with IIT Delhi to develop medical devices

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Armed Forces Medical Services and IIT-Delhi on Monday joined hands to undertake collaborative research to develop novel medical devices and focus on solving health issues specific to serving soldiers in varied terrains.

AFMS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for collaborative research and training with the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi. "The scope of this MoU includes undertaking research and innovation to develop novel medical devices and focus on solving health issues specific to serving soldiers in varied terrains," the defence ministry said in a statement. The MoU was signed by Director General, Armed

Forces Medical Services, Lt Gen Daljit Singh and Director, IIT-Delhi, Prof. Rangan Banerjee.

IIT-Delhi has a robust biomedical research ecosystem which is ideal for providing the technical expertise required for research in the diverse medical challenges faced in the armed forces, including rehabilitation of amputees, officials said. Under the ambit of this agreement, faculty exchange programmes, joint academic activities and development of joint PhD programmes will also be planned, they said. On this occasion, Lt Gen Singh said AFMS is dedicated to providing the highest level of medical care to soldiers and collaboration with institutes of national importance like IITs is a significant step towards this commitment.

Modi Government has eliminated terrorism: Shah

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has eliminated terrorism from the country while Naxalism is on the verge of ending. Addressing an election rally in Chhattisgarh's Kanker town, Shah also asked Naxalites to surrender, or else they would be rooted out from the state in two years. He asked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi that four generations of his family were in power in the country, but what they have done for the poor people in Chhattisgarh. "The Congress says the minority (community) has the first right over the country's resources of the country, but we (BJP) say the poor, adivasis, Dalits and backwards have the first right over resources of the country," Shah said. He also said that Congress leaders did not attend the consecration ceremony of



Lord Ram's idol at the Ayodhya temple in lure of their vote bank. The Union minister hailed PM Modi, saying he has a "track record of 10 years and agenda for 25 years." "Narendra Modi ji has

previous Congress rule and the alleged involvement of the former chief minister in the Mahadev betting app scam). After the formation of the BJP government in Chhattisgarh, Vishnu Deo Sai was elected as the chief minister and Vijay Sharma as the state home minister. In the last four months, 90 Naxalites were neutralised under the BJP government, Shah said. While 123 Naxalites were arrested, 250 surrendered (during this period), he added. Under PM Modi's leadership, Naxalism has been eliminated from all over the country, including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, Shah said. "Elect Modi ji for the third term, the menace (of Naxalism) will be rooted out from Chhattisgarh in two years," he added. Shah appealed to the people to vote for BJP's Kanker Lok Sabha seat candidate Bhojraj Nag.

Rahul will come and try to create division, do not fall for it: Irani to people in Amethi



PTI ■ AMETHI (UP)

Union minister and local MP Smriti Irani on Monday alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will come to Amethi after April 26 and divide the people in the name of casteism and visit one temple after the other. Addressing roadside meetings during her election campaign in Bhetua and Bhadar areas here, Irani said, "After the voting in Wayanad on April 26, Rahul Gandhi will come here to tell everyone that Amethi is his family and stoke the fire of casteism in the society here." She added, "Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party

rejected the invitation for the consecration ceremony of Lord Shri Ram in Ayodhya but he will be seen roaming around the temples in Amethi. So there is a need to be careful and alert." In a major upset for the Congress in 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Irani wrested Amethi from Rahul Gandhi, who had held the constituency for 15 years. The Congress has not yet declared its candidate for the seat but local party workers are rooting for Rahul Gandhi to contest again. The Union minister also alleged that Rahul Gandhi

never raised issues of Amethi in the Parliament and was often missing from the House. She alleged that despite Rahul Gandhi being an MP for 15 years, 10 of them while there was UPA at the helm at Centre and UP under his ally (SP), still people in Amethi could not even get drinking water. People in Amethi could get drinking water supplied to their house only after Narendra Modi came to power, she claimed. It is the fifth day in Amethi of Irani, who is seeking a second term from the constituency on a BJP ticket.

Geeta Kora files nomination as BJP candidate for Singhbhum

PTI ■ CHAIBASA (JHARKHAND)

Geeta Kora on Monday filed her nomination papers as the BJP candidate for the Singhbhum (ST) Lok Sabha constituency in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district. Jharkhand BJP president Babul Marandi, senior party leaders and hundreds of party workers accompanied Kora as she submitted her nomination papers before the returning officer. Exuding confidence about her victory, Kora told reporters that the enthusiasm of party workers "showed that BJP would achieve 400 seat target." "Lots of work has been done for women by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He has a mission for development of women, tribals and others. I will take forward his mission of development in my constituency," Kora said. JMM has fielded former state minister Joba Manjhi in the Singhbhum Lok Sabha seat against Geeta Kora, who is the wife of former chief minister Madhu Kora.

Congress synonymous with corruption, family rule, appeasement politics: Piyush Goyal

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress is synonymous with corruption, family rule and appeasement politics, Union Minister and senior BJP leader Piyush Goyal alleged on Monday. Congress had made promises since the era of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to eliminate poverty in the country, but it did not happen, he said. He was addressing a rally in support of the BJP's Lok Sabha candidate from Telangana's Zaheerabad B B Patil. Patil, who is a current MP, was with the BRS and defected to the BJP on March 1, just 15 days before the Model Code of Conduct came into force. Goyal, who highlighted the Narendra Modi Government's pro-poor schemes and welfare measures including Ayushman Bharat, scheme aiming to provide free houses for four crore people, Jal Jeevan Mission and goal of constructing 11 crore toilets, alleged that the Congress only



means hollow promises. "Modi cares for the poor and the marginalised sections of society. Rahul Gandhi's grandmother (Indira Gandhi) promised to people that she will eliminate poverty. But, they did not work for the poor," he further claimed. "Rajiv Gandhi told the country that he sends Rs 100 from Delhi and that only Rs 15 reaches the poor with 85 per cent being eaten away by middlemen and corruption," he said, "Vut, the problem remained unresolved." He further attacked the Congress, saying, "Congress

Telangana for the Lok Sabha elections would be held on May 13.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

LOST & FOUND

I, Babli Devi Gusain W/o Hamender Singh Gusain R/o 42-A Pocket-D2 Kondli Gharoli Mayur Vihar Delhi-110096. Lost my property document 1- DDA Possession Letter 2- NOC 3- All Bank Chalan. If found please contact 09871635865. PD(377)A

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Surinder Kumar Kapoor S/o Krishn Gopal Kapoor R/o: 15/92, Second Floor, Vikram Vihar, Lajpat Nagar-IV, New Delhi 110024 Have Changed My Name From Surinder Kumar Kapoor To Surender Kapoor For All Future Purposes. PD(378)A

Kerala CM poses questions to Rahul over CAA



PTI ■ KANNUR (KERALA)

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday continued to accuse the Congress of not being part of anti-CAA agitations in the country and sought to know from senior leader Rahul Gandhi whether the national leadership had barred its state unit from participating in the protests. He alleged that the party's top brass had asked the state unit to withdraw from the anti-CAA agitations. "This is just our guess. It may be right or wrong. If we are wrong, they (Congress) can tell that. Rahul Gandhi is touring Kerala... He can tell that what you (CM) have said is not fact," Vijayan said. Gandhi was not saying anything against it, as it is a fact, the chief minister alleged. As Lok Sabha polls are just four days away in the state, Vijayan was addressing an election meeting in Mattannur, in this northern district. Targeting Gandhi, the Left veteran further said the



Congress leader was carrying out a tour across the country when the CAA came out. Though he had reacted to all the problems being faced by the country and the world, he did not respond to the contentious law, Vijayan alleged. The CM also claimed that the Congress could not raise his voice on such issues because of the presence of leaders with a Sangh-Parivar mindset with him. Lashing out at the BJP government at the Centre, he said no civilised nation in the world has made religion the basis of citizenship. He alleged that when everyone came forward protesting against the CAA and to safeguard secularism, the Congress did not raise any significant protests against the BJP government's move. "No civilised nation has decided citizenship on the basis of religion. No country divides refugees on the lines of their religion," Vijayan said. India is making religion the basis for deciding citizenship. It is destroying secular values, he charged. While several national leaders, including those from Communist parties, were arrested for protesting against the CAA in New Delhi years ago, no Congress leaders were among them, Vijayan alleged. The CM accused the 18 Congress-led UDF MPs from the state of attending a feast hosted by the party president on the day when the national capital witnessed the fiercest agitation against the CAA. Vijayan further asked why the Congress, which is claimed to be a secular party, cannot oppose the RSS agenda being implemented in the country. The LDF government in the state has been adopting a strong stand against dividing people on the lines of religion, he said. The Marxist veteran also claimed that the southern state is witnessing a pro-LDF wave during the election campaign and that the ruling front would achieve a remarkable success in the Lok Sabha elections to be held on April 26.

Public Notice

This is to inform the general public that Mrs. Suman Lakatawala the owner built on Property No. 127 in Block H Pocket 1 Sector 14Bina measuring 48 sq mtrs. Rohini, New Delhi-110089. She acquired the above property through Conveyance Deed dated 07/04/2003 executed by POI through DDA in favour of Smt. Suman Lata as Doc. No. 4194. She expired on dated 04/10/2021 and as per SMC shared with us, she was survived by Mr. Anil Kumar and Mr. Pankaj Kumar. Mr. Anil Kumar and Mr. Pankaj Kumar intend to transfer the ownership of Second Floor with roof rights of aforementioned property by way of Sale Deed to Smt. Tanya Malhotra & Sh. Manav Malhotra. Subsequently, Smt. Tanya Malhotra & Sh. Manav Malhotra are in the process of mortgaging the said property RBL Bank Limited. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07-days period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07-day period by contacting Law Ventures North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline (s): +910120-3101683; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in

Public Notice

This is to inform the public at large that Mr. Rajender Singh is the Record Owner of the ENTIRE SECOND FLOOR WITHOUT TERRACE OF FREEHOLD PROPERTY BEARING NO. K-151, & ENTIRE THIRD FLOOR ALONG WITH TERRACE, LAND AREA MEASURING 130.50 SQ. YDS., FREEHOLD PROPERTY BEARING NO. K-151, RES SCHEME IN THE LAYOUT PLAN OF S.P.O.T. COLONY, CHITTRANJAN PARK, NEW DELHI through Sale Deed dated 22.02.2024 vide doc No. 2024/10/1154, book no. 1, vol no. 17456, pages 122, dated 22.02.2024, SR-South East Mehrauli and same to be financed & mortgaged by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. If any Person having any type of claim/right/interest in the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP B-93B, Second Floor, Opposite SBI Bank Sector 2 Noida, UP-201301, Contact# 0120-4269379

Public Notice

This is to inform the public at large that Mr. Satyam Singh s/o Mr. Ramkishan Singh who is purchasing the Plot area measuring 70 sq yds., out of Khassa No. 439, situated in the revenue area of Village Sadda Nagar, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & District Ghazabad, U.P., from Mr. Narendra Tyagi s/o Mr. Mohd Chand, who is one of the co-owner of the land addressing 0.2780 Hectare, carved out of Khassa No. 439 vide Khatoni starting from Fasil year 1427-1432 as per records of revenue, and same to be financed & mortgaged by Ummeed Housing Finance Private Limited. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim/right/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP Plot No.136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049, Contact# 011-40466316

Public Notice

This is to bring to your notice that DEEPAK KUMAR SINGH / SHOBHA KUMARI (borrower/s) has availed Home loan facility vide facility agreement number LBNOD00002887789 located at FLAT NO 240111, 23RD FLOOR, TOWER-N OR BLOCK N, 14TH AVENUE, GC 14, PLOT NO GH-03, GAUR CITY-2, SECTOR-16C, GREATER NOIDA. The borrower/s has failed to pay the contractual amount to the builder as per the terms and conditions of the agreement. The Bank had informed the same to the borrower through letter dated April 15, 2024, informing that GAURSONS PROMOTORS PRIVATE LIMITED, has cancelled the allotment of the above mentioned property. You are therefore requested to resolve this matter with the builder within 7 days from the date of this publication. Please take further notice that post cancellation of the allotment of the said property ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any other allotment done by the builder. Dated: April 23, 2024 Place: Delhi/ NCR For ICICI Bank Limited Sd-

ICICI Bank

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

PUBLIC NOTICE: Builder Cancellation

This is to bring to your notice that DEEPAK KUMAR SINGH / SHOBHA KUMARI (borrower/s) has availed Home loan facility vide facility agreement number LBNOD00002887789 located at FLAT NO 240111, 23RD FLOOR, TOWER-N OR BLOCK N, 14TH AVENUE, GC 14, PLOT NO GH-03, GAUR CITY-2, SECTOR-16C, GREATER NOIDA. The borrower/s has failed to pay the contractual amount to the builder as per the terms and conditions of the agreement. The Bank had informed the same to the borrower through letter dated April 15, 2024, informing that GAURSONS PROMOTORS PRIVATE LIMITED, has cancelled the allotment of the above mentioned property. You are therefore requested to resolve this matter with the builder within 7 days from the date of this publication. Please take further notice that post cancellation of the allotment of the said property ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any other allotment done by the builder. Dated: April 23, 2024 Place: Delhi/ NCR For ICICI Bank Limited Sd-

KIND ATTENTION - RAIL PASSENGERS!

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

EXTENSION OF PERIODICITY OF SUMMER SPECIAL TRAINS

For the convenience of rail passengers, Railways have decided to extend the periodicity of run of following Summer Special Trains as per details mentioned below :-

Train No.	Station (From)	Station (To)	Frequency/ Days of Run	Period of Extension
07621	Hazur Sahib Nanded	Hazrat Nizamuddin	Saturday	04.05.2024 to 29.06.2024
07622	Hazrat Nizamuddin	Hazur Sahib Nanded	Sunday	05.05.2024 to 30.06.2024
02351	Patna Jn.	Anand Vihar (T)	Daily	23.04.2024 to 26.04.2024
02352	Anand Vihar (T)	Patna Jn.	Daily	24.04.2024 to 27.04.2024
03635	Gaya	Anand Vihar (T)	Daily	23.04.2024 to 26.04.2024
03636	Anand Vihar (T)	Gaya	Daily	24.04.2024 to 27.04.2024

Note: - Rest instructions will hold good

For detailed information regarding stoppages and timings of above trains, please call RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit enquiry website: www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in

RailMadad Helpline No. 139

Visit RailMadad website: www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in

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APPENDIX IV-A

Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 28.05.2024 from 04.00 P.M. to 05.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 28,91,015/- (Rupees Twenty Eight Lakh Ninety One Thousand Fifteen only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLNOI00339275, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 15.04.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 16.04.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from RAJJEET RAM and VIBHA DEVI. The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 15,50,000/- (Rupees Fifteen Lakh Fifty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,55,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Fifty Five Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

FLAT NO. SF 3, SECOND FLOOR WITH ROOF RIGHTS, REAR RIGHT PLOT NO. D7/14, DLF ANKUR VIHAR, LONI GHAZIABAD - 201102, UTTAR PRADESH.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 16.04.2024 Place : GHAZIABAD Sd/ Authorized officer Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

APPENDIX IV-A

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DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

FLAT NO. - UGF - 2 (M. I. G.), UPPER GROUND FLOOR (RHS), HAVING COVERED AREA 550 SQUARE FEET EQUIVALENT TO 51.09 SQUARE METRES, CONSTRUCTED UNDER PLOT NO. F - 94, KHASRA NO. 181, SITUATED IN SLF VED VIKAR, PARGANA AND TEHSIL LONI, GHAZIABAD - 201102, UTTAR PRADESH AND WHICH IS BOUNDED AS UNDER:

EAST : OTHER'S LAND NORTH : FLAT NO. UGF - 1 (MIG)
WEST : ROAD 9 METERS SOUTH : PLOT NO. F - 95

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 16.04.2024 Place : GHAZIABAD Sd/ Authorized officer Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

ICICI Bank

Regd. Office: ICICI Bank Limited, ICICI Bank Tower, Near Chakli Circle, Old Padra Road, Vadodra, Gujarat. Pin- 390 007. Corporate Office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra- Kurla Complex, Bandra (E), Mumbai- 400 051.

PUBLIC NOTICE - E-AUCTION OF ASSIGNMENT OF FINANCIAL ASSETS

In terms of the policy of ICICI Bank Limited ("ICICI Bank") on Sale of Financial Assets and in line with the regulatory guidelines, ICICI Bank hereby invites EOI from interested ARCs/NBFCs/Bank/FI for Purchase of below Two Non-Performing Assets ("Financial Assets") on the terms and conditions indicated herein under "Swiss Challenge Method". It is hereby clarified that confirmation of the name of successful bidder will be subject to final approval by the competent authority of ICICI Bank:

Lot number	Base/ Reserve Price/ Anchor Bid	Term of sale	Minimum Mark up
1	₹ 250.0 million	100% in Cash	5% of Base bid
2	₹ 32.5 million	100% in Cash	5% of Base bid

Note: Bid for both the lots to be submitted separately.

Schedule for E-Auction:

Sr. No.	Activity	Date & Time
1.	Submission of Expression of Interest ("EOI") and execution of Non-Disclosure Agreement ("NDA") (if not already executed with the Bank)	Till April 26, 2024 by 5.00 PM
2.	Release of Offer Document along with Preliminary Information Memorandum ("PIM")	April 26, 2024 (after submission of NDA with Bank)
3.	Access to data room for due diligence	April 26, 2024 till May 10, 2022
4.	Submission of Bid Form	May 14, 2024, latest by 5 PM
5.	Process of e-bidding	May 15, 2024 from 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM with auto extension of 5 mins. till sale is completed
6.	Declaration of the winning bidder	May 15, 2024 by 6.00 PM.
7.	Receipt of consideration amount and execution of Assignment Agreement and closure of transaction	Within 07 days from the date of acceptance of bid.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

1. The auction for the financial Asset(s) is under "Swiss Challenge Method", based on an existing offer in hand, who will have the right to match the highest bid. In case no bid is received which crosses the minimum mark up, Base Bid will be designated as the winning bid if it qualifies as per terms and conditions stipulated. 2. The sale of aforesaid Financial Asset(s) is on "As is Where is Basis", "As is What is Basis", and "Without Recourse Basis". 3. The e-bidding process, if required, will be conducted through M/s e-Procurement Technologies Ltd (Auction tiger) on the website of auction agency i.e. https://icicibank.auctiontiger.net as detailed above. The e-bidding process shall be subject to terms & conditions contained in the offer document which will be made available to Parties post execution of NDA. For any further clarifications with regard to data room, terms and conditions of the auction, kindly contact Mr. Jignesh Shelani (747821846 and for submission of EOI/Bids, email at jignesh.shelani@icicibank.com and vijaych.kumar@icicibank.com or send by post to Mr. Jignesh Shelani at ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra- Kurla Complex, Bandra (E), Mumbai- 400 051. ICICI Bank will not be responsible/liable in case of non-receipt of EOI by ICICI Bank for the reasons beyond the control of the Bank. Interested Parties are expected to take efforts to find out the status of communication sent by them to ICICI Bank to ensure their participation in the auction process. This notice and contents hereof are subject to any prevailing laws, rules and regulations of India.

Date : April 23, 2024 Place : Delhi/ NCR Sd/ Authorized Signatory For ICICI Bank Limited



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Cold comfort

All parties must own responsibility for the low voter turnout and work to reverse it

In the ongoing elections, a significant cause for concern has emerged with the low voter turnout, particularly in the Hindi heartland. This trend has set off alarm bells among political parties, forcing them to delve deeper into understanding the root causes of this apathy and strategise effectively to boost participation in the remaining phases. The Hindi heartland holds immense electoral significance. However, the voter turnout here was dishearteningly low on April 19. The polling of over 62 per cent, as per the Election Commission of India's figure, is lower compared to the first phase of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, when it stood at 69.43 per cent. The trend is not localised as voting was held in 102 Lok Sabha seats across 21 States and UTs. Was it the summer heat or other pressing engagements? If it is about the weather, it is understandable but if it is political disillusionment, then it is a matter of grave concern. It could well also be logistical challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, long queues at polling booths and difficulties in accessing polling stations. Despite several efforts by the ECI, voters in large numbers chose not to go out to cast their vote. We have had several elections during summers where voters thronged polling stations; so maybe, and it is yet to be validated, voters are losing interest in the political system. Many voters do feel disconnected from the political process, perceiving that their votes do not significantly impact policymaking or address their concerns.



This disenchantment often stems from the failure of political parties to fulfil their promises, leading to a sense of betrayal among the electorate. Traditionally, voting in the urban areas has always been low but now even voters in rural areas are giving it a pass. In such areas, where transportation facilities may be limited, reaching the polling booths becomes a daunting task for many individuals, particularly the elderly and physically challenged. Another aspect of voting in the first phase was zero voting in six districts of Nagaland. It is unprecedented and shocking, to say the least. It might have been a reaction of voters to what happened in Manipur or a call by disrupting elements; either way, it does not augur well for the country. We can agree on a few things which could have resulted in the voter's cold shoulder. Social and economic factors play a significant role in voter apathy. A large section of the population, especially in rural areas, faces issues like poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, which overshadow their engagement with the electoral process. Furthermore, the prevalence of identity politics and polarisation in the Hindi heartland may have contributed to a sense of disillusionment among voters. Divisive narratives propagated by certain political entities often sow seeds of distrust and alienation among communities, discouraging them from participating in the electoral process. Political parties must prioritise engaging with the electorate beyond election cycles, fostering dialogue and building trust through consistent communication and transparent governance.

On these seats, Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) leader and former Chief Minister Mayawati has trumpeted the old issue of a separate State for West UP, probably to remain electorally relevant in the times to come. Choosing the birth anniversary day of the man credited with the drafting of the Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar, Mayawati made a major announcement at a rally in Muzaffarnagar of according Statehood to western UP and also establishing a bench of the Allahabad High Court in the region, if voted to power at the Centre. This has once again brought the issue of Harit Pradesh, the name envisioned for western UP by late Chowdhary Ajit Singh, the erstwhile leader of the Rashtriya Lok Dal and heir of Chowdhary Charan Singh, the tallest leader of West UP.

PICTALK



People purchase clay pots from a roadside shop during the summer season, in Agra

Maya sees political grass greener in Harit Pradesh



SIDHARTH MISHRA

BSP leader and former Chief Minister Mayawati has once again broached the issue of statehood for western UP, probably to remain electorally relevant in the days ahead



The first phase of polling in western Uttar Pradesh is over. On April 19, the Lok Sabha constituencies of Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Nagina, Moradabad, Rampur and Pilibhit witnessed polling.

The next phase of polling is scheduled for April 26, when the constituencies of Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr (reserved), Aligarh, Meerut and Mathura would go to the hustings.

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The supporters of the formation of Harit Pradesh claim that it was Dr Ambedkar who had proposed the division of Uttar Pradesh into three separate States — Western, Central and Eastern — for better governance.

In 1955, Dr Ambedkar proposed the idea of splitting Uttar Pradesh into three States through his book, 'Thoughts on Linguistic States'. He suggested the creation of three States, with Meerut as the capital of the Western Region, Allahabad as the capital of the Eastern Region and Kanpur as the capital of the Central region. This is what the BSP had in mind while proposing the split in 2011. During her reign as the Chief Minister, Mayawati had backed a resolution which got passed in the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly for breaking the State into four smaller States — West, Central, East and Bundelkhand. One part of the undivided Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, consisting of hill districts, had already been carved out in 2000. However, unlike Dr Ambedkar's thought, Mayawati's push is based on the arithmetic of electoral politics.

When she proposes a separate State for western Uttar Pradesh, she has in mind the



IN 1955, DR AMBEDKAR PROPOSED THE IDEA OF SPLITTING UTTAR PRADESH INTO THREE STATES. HE SUGGESTED MEERUT AS THE CAPITAL OF THE WESTERN REGION, ALLAHABAD AS THE CAPITAL OF THE EASTERN REGION AND KANPUR AS THE CAPITAL OF THE CENTRAL REGION

substantial Dalit and Muslim population inhabiting the region. It was Mayawati's D-M (Dalit-Muslim) combination which had defeated the Samajwadi Party's M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) formation to wrest power in Uttar Pradesh in 2007.

Working as a reporter for this publication in the early part of this century, one still remembers how the dominating community of the Jats and other upper castes, by the way of landholding rights, managed to keep the Dalits at bay from electoral process. The late Editor of the paper, Dr Chandan Mitra, had once given a headline to this reporter's story which said, 'Fair polls, free of Dalits'.

It was only after the rise of the BSP, especially from the 2004 Lok Sabha election onwards, that the Dalit population of western UP got involved in the process not just in word but also in spirit. This is the time which also saw the emergence of D-M, which changed the electoral calculus of the State.

This area has also seen the rise in the Muslim population. As per the 2011 Census, the total population of western Uttar Pradesh is 71,217,132, out of which 72.29 per cent is Hindu and 26.21 per cent is Muslim. The population in the Khadioli region is 29,669,035 (Hindus 59.19 per cent and

Muslims 39.17 per cent) and the population of the Braj region is 29,754,755 (Hindus 82.78 per cent and Muslims 16 per cent). The districts speaking Khadioli, a slightly colloquial version of the Hindi language, include Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Shamli, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Meerut, Hapur, Amroha, Bijnor, some parts of Moradabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar and Bulandshahr. The Braj-speaking districts include Mathura, Hathras, Agra, Aligarh, Etah and some parts of Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr, Etawah and Mainpuri.

The Muslim population share in the eight districts of Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Moradabad, Rampur, Jyotiba Phule Nagar, Meerut and Bareilly has increased from 29.93 per cent in 1951 to 40.43 per cent in 2011. This has made the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) raise the demand for the population control Bill, fearing a loss for space for the Hindu groups.

No wonder there is a lot more than meets the eye than the mere explanation behind the demand for a separate State for good governance. It has more to do with politics than people.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UNIFIED STRENGTH

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Astrurturf | Mother symbolises convergence all nature driven energies", published on April 21, this is my response. The narrative delves into profound lessons encapsulated in the mythological portrayal of the Mother Goddess, particularly Durga, reflecting on the interplay of ego, collective responsibility and existential challenges. The symbolism of Durga's ten arms, each wielding a specific weapon offered by a Devata, signifies a unified approach to confront diverse energies and challenges emanating from all directions of existence. The analogy of the Mother's multifaceted role, akin to a nurturing mother tending to her child with selfless devotion, underscores the judicious and selfless application of power (Shakti) for the greater good. This portrayal transcends gender stereotypes, emphasising the universal essence of nurturing and protection inherent in the feminine principle.

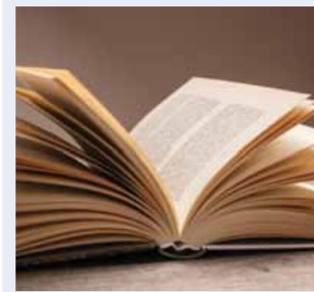
Moreover, the cyclical nature of creation and dissolution, mirrored in the evolution and devolution of nature-driven energies, underscores the perpetual flux of existence. The narrative urges a holistic understanding of existence, emphasising the imperative of harmonising individual virtues with collective existential needs for sustainable progress and evolution.

Aditya Banerjee | Kolkata

A GLIMPSE OF RURAL DYNAMICS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Govt schemes are transforming lives in rural Rajasthan", published on April 22, this is my response. The story of Loyara village in Udaipur district encapsulates the interplay of tradition and modernity, highlighting both progress and persistent challenges. Amba Bai's account resonates with the vital role of Government schemes in sustaining livelihoods, particularly for the elderly and economically vulnerable. The transition towards concrete structures mirrors urban influence, yet economic disparities persist, especially among

Celebrating literary legacies



Apropos the news article, "Celebrating World Book and Copyright Day", published on April 22, this is my response. Books serve as timeless vessels of human thought, bridging generations and cultures.

Scheduled Tribes. Education emerges as a beacon of change, empowering youth to navigate bureaucratic hurdles and advocate for their rights. However, gaps in access to essential services persist, as seen in Mangli Lal and Tulsiram's plight. Loyara's narrative embodies the complex tapestry of rural India, where strides in education and awareness intersect with enduring economic constraints. As the village evolves, bridging these gaps remains imperative for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Pooja Khanna | Bengaluru

NAVIGATING FOMO

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Understanding the impact of FOMO", published on April 22, this is my response. In a world fueled by constant connectivity, the fear of missing out (FOMO) has become a prevalent concern, particularly among the younger generation. Social media platforms play a central role, in shaping perceptions and fueling comparisons. It's striking how curated content can

trigger feelings of inadequacy, anxiety and loneliness. To counteract this, fostering digital literacy and promoting healthy social media habits is crucial. Encouraging offline connections and experiences, like sports or art, offers a reprieve from the digital noise. Setting boundaries for screen time and embracing mindfulness practices can cultivate gratitude and positive thinking.

Moreover, prioritising quality over quantity in social connections reinforces the importance of genuine interactions. Creating inclusive online communities emphasises authenticity and empathy, countering the superficiality often found on social platforms. Ultimately, combating FOMO requires self-love and the courage to prioritise personal well-being over digital validation. In a hyper-connected world, finding solace in one's thoughts is a brave endeavour worth pursuing.

Sangeeta Reddy | Hyderabad

Meera Krishnan | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

From tears to laughter: Navigating life's punchlines



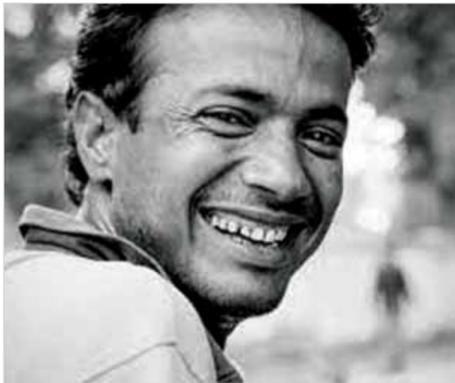
SANJAY CHANDRA

From childhood taunts to adult jests, the journey of one man's relationship with humour is a winding road filled with laughter and tears

Turned into an overweight boy very early in my life. I still remember an incident from my childhood. My younger brother called me 'Fatsy' in front of a couple of house helps, who burst out laughing. I rushed inside the house in tears. Even now, at a more mature age, I still seethe at one-liners directed at me.

More recently, my daughters attended a show by a famous stand-up comedian. My ignorance led me to find out more about the term. A stand-up comedian is a person, standing or sitting on stage, delivering tongue-in-cheek one-liners to an appreciative audience. Over a century, it has evolved into taking a punch at whatever the actor considers is wrong in the community - religion, beliefs, taboos and yes, the politician — that eternal punching bag.

There are so many anecdotes that one would lose count of politicians trading barbs at others of their ilk. We have heard of Disraeli insulting a rival politician, If Gladstone fell into the Thames, that would be a misfortune and if anybody



pulled him out, that, I suppose, would be a calamity. This one is beautiful when Lady Astor said to Churchill, if you were my wife, I'd drink it. Or the other one about Churchill, who quipped when berated by Bessie Braddock for being drunk, My dear, you are ugly, but tomorrow I shall be sober and you will still be ugly. Or this one about one of our politicians who wanted to make the roads in his

State as smooth as the cheeks of a heyday film star — though he was probably only trying to pay a compliment. Many of these might be considered sexist at the very least.

Recently, I sat with a few other authors addressing a group of young students during a literature festival. An erudite lady had an immediate connection with the appreciative audience as she spoke about her love for the Korean TV series — particularly her mention of the term Oppa. The students burst into loud laugh-

ter when one of their fellow authors wanted to know the meaning of the term. I only smiled knowingly, as if I understood the joke, not wanting to display my ignorance in public.

We tend to lose our funny bone when humorous barbs, at least from the viewpoint of the narrator, are directed at us. At the same time, we do not hesitate to laugh, or smile, or even smirk — as I did, at someone else's discomfiture, when it suits us. Life would be far simpler if only we make as much effort in developing our funny bones, as we do in discussing international affairs, politics, religion and much more.

Viktor Frankl, Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, summed it up almost a century earlier. The attempt to develop a sense of humour and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living. (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

A TALE OF HIDDEN WEALTH, REGRET AND LIBERATION

These poignant stories have wisdom of the ages and lessons for all



RAVI VALLURI

Once upon a time there lived a woman. She was struck with an unexpected tragedy as her husband passed away untimely. The lady was now left with only one son and precious jewellery. Since she was hounded by creditors to repay the debts accrued by her husband, she conjured a trick to hide the wealth. In sheer desperation to keep the jewellery safe from creditors, the lady wrapped the precious wealth in a piece of cloth and hid it under a tree. The mother and son lived in an impoverished State. Her mind was always disturbed by the fact that she did not share this piece of vital information with her only son. As it turned out, she carried this secret to the grave.

Consequently, the son inherited plenty of debt, a barren hut and a cot. The son had to work hard for sustenance and to repay the ever-rising liabilities. He toiled hard to survive and regretted his misfortune. 'Property is not the sacred right. When a rich man becomes poor it is a misfortune, it is not a moral evil. When a poor man becomes destitute, it is a moral evil, teeming with consequences and is injurious to society and morality,' opined Lord Acton. Indeed, the impoverishment of the poor is heart-wrenching.

One day while cutting the branches of a tree, he stumbled upon the jewellery. Dumbfounded and stupefied, the strapping youngster hid the bijouterie in a pit he dug in the hut, petrified that the creditors would appropriate the wealth. He too committed the cardinal mistake of not sharing the secret with his wife and carried it to his grave. The mother and son were not mindful and wakeful enough to be in the Present Moment and remained prisoners of their past and future.



Two Buddhist monks were once discussing a flag flapping in the wind. While one felt it was the wind moving, the other conjectured it was the flag fluttering. The imbroglia could not be resolved and they sought the intervention of a Zen Master. The master impassively said, 'It is the MIND that moves, neither the flag nor the wind.'

Humans need freedom from their past and future to be in the present. And being in the NOW or present is true enlightenment and mindfulness. The past is full of sorrows and regrets while the future brims with anxieties and worries and humans are caged in that mindset, thereby postponing their happiness quotient. To appreciate true happiness and joy, the human mind should not vacillate between the past and the future but remain in the present.

A young monk was once travelling in pursuit of happiness and truth. During his travels, he encountered a massive river that he could not cross. A short while later, he saw a senior monk on the other side of the river. He hailed him and sought assistance to cross the river to reach the other side. The senior monk pondered and replied, 'You are already on the other side'. This fact can be appreciated only when the mind is centred. Breathing techniques such as Sudarshan Kriya, Pranayama, Yoga, Meditation and Vipassana all help in dissolving the mind so that it becomes centred.

'True happiness is not possible without freedom. We have to learn the habit of being free. We do not allow our past, the future, our projects, or our fear to get hold of us. We are free. Every step is free. Every step is nourishment. Every step is healing. Every step is joy,' says Thich Nhat Hanh.

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

The timeless allure of bookstores

In a world of fleeting attachments and transient experiences, one traveller finds solace and sustenance in the enduring sanctuaries of literature



MIKE DOWNEY



I don't normally do nostalgia. The present is a place where I live and thrive and although thoughts of the past serve as a pleasant escape from reality, I tend to be very much permanently in the here and now in former times. I used to be convinced that if the psyche tends to dwell on past and romanticise it then could it be that the present isn't our current happy place and I want the future to continue to excite me. Complicated. I know.

Theatres, galleries and cinemas have come and gone in my life and as a rule, I have formed no specific sentimental attachment to them, even though much of my professional grown-up existence has been centred on these cultural havens. The one exception to that rule is the venerable bookshop. Of all these great edifices crucial to the health of our society the bookshop is the altar at which I worship — and which holds a timeless allure for me which occasionally translates into a wistful homesickness for the best that I have known in my life.

Having lived mostly a life of exile, first from my native Ireland and with more years in adulthood outside my native land than in it, from Belgrade to Munich and Paris to Istria and add to that the peripatetic life of the international film producer spending six months here in Prague, three months there in Iceland, Brazil and even India — sourcing quality English language literature outside of the Anglosphere has become a lifelong passion and quest. My global peregrinations, whether as a writer, theatre director or film producer have allowed me to cultivate relationships with some of the most amazing bookshops across the earth - I don't mean the Blackwells, the Shakespeare and Co's, the Dussmann's, the Strand's and the Foyle's of this world. I'm talking about havens much more intimate, personal and off the beaten track. Here are just a few of them as



INDIA'S EVER-POPULAR BOOK MARKETS REVEAL A PROFOUND NATIONAL LOVE FOR LITERATURE, FROM THE BOI-PARA IN COLLEGE STREET IN KOLKATA TO MOORE MARKET IN CHENNAI AND FLORA FOUNTAIN IN MUMBAI

a taster: How I long for The Book Exchange, Amsterdam. This a canal-side, Dickensian warren on Kloveniers-burghal in the Venice of the North's red-light district, presided over by the idiosyncratic Jeff Stone who took it over in 2005, having been founded in 1978. Its four long, thin, deep floors are home to an extraordinary collection of over 80,000 second-hand English language books sold at bargain prices, in a studios atmosphere marked by a chaotic Bohemian that is the antithesis of the Amazons of this world. The whiff of reefer as it wafts over from the Plug 3 coffeeshop improves greatly the William Burroughs and Paul Bowles sales, so I'm told. Moving on from Paul Bowles and his palace in the Casbah, we arrive at the Luxor Book Palace, Prague. Last week, while prepping my new movie about Franz Kafka I took time out to visit this old friend on the famed Wenceslas Square I have been buying books here for the last 25 years and am always amazed by the laid-back atmosphere, the super helpful and smiling staff and the extraordinary selection of new books often at prices less than in the UK or New York. I don't know how they do it, but the self-styled Palace, which runs over 4 massive floors, manages to feel like a small privately run enterprise, full of nooks, crannies and all manner of Kafka-esque dead ends. I once ended up in the storeroom, looking for the young adult section. I was escorted back to where I belonged. In the foreign adult section. Speaking of being found, The Lost Bookstore, Chiang Mai

is very easy to find in a highly prominent position on the Ratchamanka Road. I came across it when receiving a planned adaptation of an early Anthony Burgess novel and was shocked to come across such a richly sourced treasure trove for book lovers and a selection of 60,000 books, from old to new, from every genre imaginable. It was here found a dog-eared copy of John Griesemer's Nobody Thinks of Greenland, an anti-war novel set in the Arctic which I eventually adapted into a feature film with American Pie's Jason Biggs in the lead.

In addition to these beauties, there are a few others around the globe that once visited always gave me the unique Proustian involuntary memory moments on my return. They are in no particular order: Book and Bed, Kyoto; sleeping inside a bookshelf is all part of the experience at this bookstore/ hostel and it rushes me back to the Japan distribution of my film Deathwatch and a jacket I did there with Jamie Bell (Billy Elliot); the superb El Ateneo Grand Splendid, Buenos Aires, was an oasis of high culture at the end of a two-month research odyssey from Valparaiso in Chile around the coast of Patagonia in Darwin's reverse footsteps; Notting Hill Travel, London. I used to live around the corner from that lovely bookshop on Bleinheim Crescent. We all know the scene from the eponymous film in which Julia Roberts slowly pursues Hugh Grant between the shelves, followed by his infamous eye-turn and blushed slew of book recom-

mendations. But it is to India that I return. A five-year-long relationship with a Keralite Malayali, many many years ago, brought me into contact with the wonderful and varied book stalls of Thiruvananthapuram way back in the eighties.

I feel a deep nostalgia now as I write this for the timeless allure of the amazing book emporia of Palayam, next to the State Central Library, which at that time boasted 50-odd book stalls of all shapes sizes, creeds and colours. I could spend hours just sifting through the mazes of books just for the pleasure of discovering something, unique, precious and inspiring - something that no marketing campaign or advertising or critic's review could ever find for me.

It is the iconic book markets from all over India that bear witness to the extraordinarily diverse literary culture and heritage of the nation. India's ever-popular book markets reveal a profound national love for literature from the Boi-Para in College Street in Kolkata to Moore Market in Chennai and Flora Fountain in Mumbai.

Let's hear it for these affordable, yet rich havens for book lovers and seekers of literary gems and bargains. In the context of our theme of nostalgia and sentimentality - the huge success of the online book business may signal their death knell and they may not be with us for much longer.

(The writer is Chair of the European Film Academy and President of the LUX Prize of the European Parliament; view are personal)

Ladakh's path to autonomy: Overcoming adversity

Against the backdrop of historical marginalisation and neglect, Ladakh's journey towards autonomy has been marked by struggle, negotiation and triumph

The accession of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir to India on October 26, 1947, inflicted significant socio-economic and political setbacks on the Buddhist-dominated Leh district in the strategic Trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, renowned as "the roof of the world" and "the land of the Lamas". Likewise, the predominantly Buddhist Zaskar tehsil in the Karil district of Ladakh bore the brunt of these consequences, enduring even greater hardships than its counterpart, Leh.

The genesis of the Muslim-majority Kargil district in 1979 under Sheikh Abdullah's leadership aimed at fostering discord between



HARI OM

his co-religionists and the Buddhists, aiming to thwart the latter's aspirations for autonomy and union territory status for Ladakh. This move exacerbated the plight of the Buddhists, imperilling their religion, culture, societal fabric and demographic integrity due to two primary factors. Firstly, successive Kashmiri-dominated administrations viewed Ladakh as an

appendage to Kashmir, disregarding the political and economic aspirations of its Buddhist populace. Ladakh, akin to Jammu province, was seen as a colony by Kashmiri rulers, perpetuating a sense of marginalisation among the Buddhists. Secondly, the pernicious influence of the Kashmiri elite over New Delhi's corridors of power further marginalised the Buddhists' voices, with central authorities consistently favouring Kashmiri interests and dismissing Ladakh's concerns. In response to this systemic neglect, under the astute leadership of Head Lama Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, the Buddhists initiated protests in 1952, demanding meaningful political repre-

sentation and autonomy. Despite their fervent appeals and warnings, both Srinagar and New Delhi brushed aside their grievances, exacerbating disillusionment among the Buddhist populace. The culmination of discontent erupted in October 1989, with widespread protests and clashes between Buddhists and authorities. The resultant Tripartite Agreement of October 29, 1989, brokered by the central Government, temporarily assuaged tensions by establishing the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) at Leh. However, this resolution faced vehement opposition from Kashmiri leaders,



including Farooq Abdullah, who viewed it as a threat to Kashmiri hegemony. Despite the establishment of LAHDC Leh in 1995, the Buddhists remained dissat-

isfied due to continued interference from Kashmir-centric authorities, rendering the council ineffectual. Consequently, they intensified their agitation, advocat-

ing for Ladakh's Union Territory status and other demands, citing central rule as the sole recourse to address their grievances. The turning point came after June 19, 2018, when the central Government assumed direct control of Jammu and Kashmir, embarking on a series of measures to appease the Buddhist community. These included the establishment of the University of Ladakh, granting divisional status to Ladakh and ultimately, separating Ladakh from Jammu and Kashmir to fulfil the long-standing demand for Union Territory status. Additionally, substantial budgetary allocations were made to bolster Ladakh's development.

These initiatives underscored the efficacy of central rule in addressing the aspirations of the marginalised Buddhist population. Rather than pursuing Statehood, the Buddhists are urged to strengthen LAHDC Leh and collaborate with the Modi Government to safeguard their cultural heritage and counter demographic challenges. The period between 2018 and 2023 epitomises a transformative phase for Ladakh, wherein central intervention proved instrumental in redressing historical injustices and empowering its Buddhist populace.

(The writer is former Dean of Jammu University's Faculty of Social Science; views are personal)

Israeli Military Intelligence Chief resigns

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's Military Intelligence chief Major General Aharon Haliva resigned on Monday, taking responsibility for his unit's failures during the unprecedented October 7 Hamas attacks on the Jewish state. Haliva is the first General of the Israeli army's general staff to leave his position due to the failures that led to the massive attack by the Palestinian militant organisation Hamas and the subsequent war in Gaza. In his resignation letter written in Hebrew, Haliva said, "The Intelligence Division did not live up to the task we were entrusted with. Throughout my duties, I knew that alongside authority comes heavy responsibility." The General said he would like to "take responsibility" for what happened on October 7 and promised to do his best to complete as many of the war's goals as possible. Haliva also called for the establishment of a state investigative committee, "that can probe and find out in a thorough, in-depth, comprehensive and precise manner all the fac-



A photojournalist looks at part of the intercepted ballistic missile that fell near the Dead Sea in Israel, Sunday. The suspected Israeli killing of Iranian generals at an Iranian diplomatic compound in Syria on April 1 prompted Iran's retaliatory barrage last weekend of more than 300 missiles and drones that the U.S., Israel and regional and international partners helped bat down without significant damage in Israel. And then came Friday's ads apparent Israel. AP/PTI

tors and circumstances that led to the difficult events". At the same time, Haliva in the letter expressed his high appreciation for the performance of the Military Intelligence Directorate's personnel in the war. Confirming Haliva's resignation, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in a statement said, "In a decision with the Chief of Staff and with the approval of the Minister of Defence, Major General Aharon Haliva will conclude his role and retire from the IDF after appointing a successor through an orderly and professional process." "The Chief of Staff thanked Major General Aharon Haliva for his service over 38 years in the IDF, during which he contributed significantly as a fighter and commander for the security of the state," it said. Meanwhile, reacting to the MI Chief's resignation, Opposition Yesh Atid Party member, Vladimir Beliak, in a post on X demanded the immediate resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "The IDF Intelligence Directorate head was wise to resign.

First illegal migrants' flight to take off for Rwanda in 10-12 weeks: Sunak

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Monday announced that the first flight with illegal migrants will take off for Rwanda in 10 to 12 weeks "come what may" and claimed that all the preparation has been made for the process once the long-delayed legislation passes through Parliament. Stressing that he would not be giving out "sensitive operational detail" during a Downing Street briefing, the British Indian leader revealed that chartered commercial flights have been booked, an airfield has been identified and hundreds of escort officials trained to fly out the first set of migrants to Kigali while their asylum claims are processed. The press conference came as the government said Parliament will be sitting overnight on Monday for as long as it takes for the controversial Safety of Rwanda Bill to pass through all its stages to become law. The bill, which seeks to prevent legal

challenges by declaring Rwanda a safe country in law, has faced hurdles due to the House of Lords demanding amendments - something Sunak blamed on the Opposition Labour Party. "No ifs, no buts, these flights are going to Rwanda," Sunak told reporters. "The first flight will leave in 10 to 12 weeks. Of course, that is later than we wanted but we have always been clear that processing will take time and if Labour peers had not spent weeks holding up the Bill in the House of Lords to try to block these flights altogether we would have begun this process weeks ago," he said. "I can confirm that we have put an airfield on standby, booked commercial charter planes for specific slots and we have 500 highly trained individuals ready to escort illegal migrants all the way to Rwanda with 300 more trained in the coming weeks. We are ready. Plans are in place. And these flights will go come what may. No foreign court will stop us

from getting flights off," Sunak added. After the first flight takes off, Sunak said he expects a "steady rhythm" of such journeys over the course of the following months to meet his pledge for the policy to act as a deterrent and "stop the boats" of illegal migrants landing on the country's shores. "The priority is being able to deliver a regular rhythm, a drum beat of multiple flights a month over the summer and beyond because that is how you build a systematic deterrent and that is how you stop the boats," said Sunak. Asked if the UK would consider leaving the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) if the European court attempts to block such flights, Sunak did not rule out the possibility: "Now is the time for the flights to go and I am not going to let a foreign court, given all of that, block us from getting flights up and this deterrent up and running."

Muizzu's party secures 'super majority' in parliamentary polls

PTI ■ MALE

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's party won 71 seats and secured a "super majority" in parliamentary elections, preliminary results suggested on Monday, a victory seen as a strong endorsement of his pro-Beijing foreign policy, as both India and China closely watched the outcome of the polls in the archipelago nation. Muizzu-led People's National Congress (PNC) won 68 out of 93 seats in Sunday's polls and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively, which is more than two-thirds of the Parliament, landing the party an easy supermajority with the power to amend the Constitution. Local media, which has described his party's win as a "supermajority", said the PNC is set to celebrate its landslide victory here on an artificial beach on Monday night. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by former

president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who is seen as a pro-India leader, held 65 seats in the previous parliament but won only 15 seats this time, Mihaaru, a news website, reported. Muizzu, 45, known for his pro-China leanings, has said that he wants to reduce India's influence in his country. In the 2019 elections, the then-ruling MDP won a super majority in Parliament, with 64 seats while the then-opposition PPM-PNC coalition won just eight. The Democrats, as well as Adhaalath Party, failed to win any seats at all. A total of 368 candidates were in the fray, including 130 independent candidates, 10 candidates from Jumhoory Party (JP), 39 from The Democrats, Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) 4, Adhaalath Party (AP) 4, and Maldives National Party (MNP) 2 nominees in the parliamentary election in Maldives, which has a strategic location in the Indian Ocean. About 40 in numbers - 10.76 per cent - of the candidates

were women. Provisional results have shown that only three women candidates secured seats out of the 93 constituencies in the 20th People's Majlis. Fathimath Saudha from the ruling PNC won the Faafu Nilandhoo constituency, Asma Raasheed from the PNC won the Maafannu Medhu constituency, and Anara Naem, an independent candidate, won the Kaafu Huraa constituency. Saudha is a family member of Muizzu. Asma and Anara have previously served as MPs in the 18th People's Majlis. With about 75 per cent of the eligible voters casting their ballots, Sunday's election saw a record-low voter turnout, provisional results suggested. A total of 284,663 people were eligible to vote, but only 215,860 exercised their franchise. The turnout was 81.32 per cent in the 2019 parliamentary elections, with 215,053 out of 264,446 eligible voters coming to vote. PNC Chairperson and Special Advisor to the President Abdul Raheem Abdulla said the

results showed that Maldivians did not want the country to be driven into political unrest again. Raheem said the reason for PNC's super majority in Parliament was the solid policies put forth by Muizzu. Raheem, who won the Fonadhoo constituency seat, said his win showed that Maldivians had paved the path for Muizzu to fulfil the targets of his presidency. "The people have proved that they will not leave the country forever at the mercy of political squabbles, and challenges," he said. Raheem said Maldivians had learned over the past five months that President Muizzu is a leader who will not forget the pledges he makes. "The people have immense trust in President Muizzu," he said. Regarding MDP's loss, Raheem said the party failed to show tangible results despite winning the presidency twice. Meanwhile, main opposition MDP in a statement said despite their loss in Sunday's parliamentary election, they

will remain steadfast in their role of holding the government accountable and ensuring that democratic principles are upheld. Congratulating the winning candidates, the party called on them to uphold democratic values and work for the people's benefit. "As one of the key responsibilities of parliamentarians is to hold the government accountable, this party is confident that all who won [yesterday's] election will work to do so without hesitation," the statement read. Fayyaz Ismail, the opposition MDP Chairperson, congratulated the PNC for Sunday's success in parliamentary elections in a post on X: "Whilst today's result is disappointing this is a moment to reaffirm our commitment and work even closer with our communities." "MDP's MPs will be ready to work with the government for the betterment of our democratic values and to hold it accountable as a responsible opposition," the former economic minister said. MDP President and former foreign minister Abdulla Shahid said

the party's MPs "will uphold the responsibility entrusted to you with utmost determination." "We may not win every time. But today we can hold our heads high, and be proud of the work we did," Shahid added. The ruling coalition - PNC and Progressive Party of Maldives - said it will invite all Maldivian citizens to the ceremony it will host here on the Henveiru Artificial Beach on Monday to celebrate their indisputable win in the parliamentary election. The PNC said a special event named "Welcome - to the People's Nation's Majlis" will be held on Monday night for the people to commemorate and express their gratitude for the win. The election in the Maldives also came amidst deteriorating ties between the archipelago nation and India since Muizzu, 45, assumed power in November last year. During last year's presidential election, he had maintained a strident anti-India stand. While India was forced to withdraw most of its military

personnel manning three aviation platforms in the country, Muizzu travelled to China in January and met top Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping. China and the Maldives also signed a defence cooperation agreement and several other infrastructure development projects. The Maldives, India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), occupies a special place in its initiatives like 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' of the Indian government. On the other hand, China is expanding its footprints in IOR through its 'debt trap' diplomacy and 'String of Pearls' approach, a strategic initiative to create a network of military and commercial establishments in countries falling on the Indian Ocean. In 2013, Maldives joined China's "Belt and Road" initiative to build ports and highways to expand trade - and China's influence - across Asia, Africa and Europe.

China hails Muizzu's victory

Beijing (PTI): China on Monday congratulated Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's People's National Congress (PNC) which has secured an absolute majority in Sunday's Parliament polls and expressed its willingness to deepen the "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" between the two countries. Muizzu-led PNC won 68 out of 93 seats in Sunday's polls and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively, which is more than two-thirds of the Parliament, landing the party an easy supermajority with the power to amend the Constitution. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by former president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who is seen as a pro-India leader, won only 15 seats this time. The parliamentary majority by the PNC would give Muizzu the legislative backing to shape the foreign policy of the strategically placed archipelagic state in the Indian Ocean geographically located close to India's southern coast. Commenting on the PNC's victory, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here that Beijing wants to congratulate the Maldives on the successful parliament election and respect the choice made by the people. "China stands ready to work with the Maldives to carry forward traditional friendship, expand exchanges and cooperation in various fields, deepen China-Maldives comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership and speed up the building of a China-Maldives community with a shared future to deliver greater benefits to our two peoples," he said. Ever since his election as President in October last year, Muizzu, who defeated the pro-India incumbent Solih, moved closer to China signing what the two countries term as a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" besides 20 agreements to assist Maldives infrastructure after meeting with President Xi Jinping here in January. China also announced a USD 130 million grant besides promising to send more Chinese tourists to the tourism-dependent Maldives.

European nations with Patriots hesitate to give their missile systems to Ukraine

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union countries possessing Patriot air defence systems appeared hesitant on Monday to give any to Ukraine, which is desperately seeking at least seven of the missile batteries to help fend off Russian air attacks. Russia's air force is vastly more powerful than Ukraine's, but sophisticated missile systems provided by Kyiv's Western partners can pose a major threat to Russian aviation as the Kremlin's forces slowly push forward along the roughly 1,000-km (620-mile) front line in the war. Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot said the Netherlands is "looking at every kind of possibility at the moment" and is offering financial support to a German initiative to help Ukraine bolster its air defences and to buy more drones. Asked at a meeting of European Union foreign and defense ministers why the Netherlands is reluctant to send some of its

Patriot systems, Slot said: "We are looking again if we can deplete our store of what we still have, but that will be difficult." Last week, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the military organisation "has mapped out existing capabilities across the alliance and there are systems that can be made available to Ukraine". He did not name the countries that possess Patriots. The Patriot is a guided missile system that can target aircraft, cruise missiles and shorter-range ballistic missiles. Each battery consists of a truck-mounted launching system with eight launchers that can hold up to four missile interceptors each, a ground radar, a control station and a generator. A key advantage of the US-made systems, apart from their effectiveness, is that Ukrainian troops are already trained to use them. But Patriots take a long time to make - as long as two years, some estimates suggest - so countries are reluctant to give

them up and leave themselves exposed. Germany had 12, but it is supplying three to Ukraine. Poland, which borders Ukraine, has two and needs them for its own defenses. Asked whether his country would provide any, Swedish Defence Minister Pål Jonson said: "I don't exclude that possibility, but right now we're focused on financial contributions." He said Sweden would send other systems that could "relieve some of the pressure" on the need for Patriots. Jonson also noted that more US deliveries of air defence systems might come, after the US House of Representatives passed a package over the weekend of \$61 billion in support, including \$13.8 billion for Ukraine to buy weapons. Questioned about whether Spain might step up with Patriots, Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said that his country "will make its decisions based on the power it has in its hands to support Ukraine."

Prosecutors will make history with opening statements in Trump's hush money trial

AP ■ NEW YORK

For the first time in history, prosecutors will present a criminal case against a former American president to a jury Monday as they accuse Donald Trump of a hush money scheme aimed at preventing damaging stories about his personal life from becoming public. A 12-person jury in Manhattan is set to hear opening statements from prosecutors and defense lawyers in the first of four criminal cases against the presumptive Republican presidential nominee to reach trial. The statements are expected to give jurors and the voting public the clearest view yet of the allegations at the heart of the case, as well as insight into Trump's expected defense. Attorneys will also introduce a colourful cast of characters who are expected to testify about the made-for-tabloids saga, including a porn actor

who says she had a sexual encounter with Trump and the lawyer who prosecutors say paid her to keep quiet about it. Trump arrived at the courthouse shortly before 9 am, minutes after castigating the case in capital letters on social media as "election interference" and a "witch hunt". He faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records - a charge punishable by up to four years in prison - though it's not clear if the judge would seek to put him behind bars. A conviction would not preclude Trump from becoming president again, but because it is a state case, he would not be able to attempt to pardon himself if found guilty. He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing. Unfolding as Trump vies to reclaim the White House, the trial will require him to spend his days in a courtroom rather than on the campaign trail, a reality he complained about

Monday morning when he posted on Truth Social about being "stuck" at his trial. He will have to listen as witnesses recount salacious and potentially unflattering details about his private life. Trump has nonetheless sought to turn his criminal defendant status into an asset for his campaign, fundraising off his legal jeopardy and repeatedly railing against a justice system that he has for years claimed is weaponized against him. Hearing the case is a jury that includes, among others, multiple lawyers, a sales professional, an investment banker and an English teacher. The case will test jurors' ability to set aside any bias but also Trump's ability to abide by the court's restrictions, such as a gag order that bars him from attacking witnesses. Prosecutors are seeking fines against him for alleged violations of that order. The case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg

revisits a chapter from Trump's history when his celebrity past collided with his political ambitions and, prosecutors say, he sought to prevent potentially damaging stories from surfacing through hush money payments. One such payment was a USD 130,000 sum that Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer, gave to porn actor Stormy Daniels to prevent her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump from emerging into public shortly before the 2016 election. Prosecutors say Trump obscured the true nature of the payments in internal records when his company reimbursed Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal charges in 2018 and is expected to be a star witness for the prosecution. Trump has denied having a sexual encounter with Daniels, and his lawyers argue that the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses.

Japan's anti-monopoly body orders Google to fix ad search limits affecting Yahoo

Tokyo (AP): Japan's antitrust watchdog said Monday that US search giant Google must fix its advertising search restrictions affecting Yahoo in Japan. The Japan Fair Trade Commission said in a statement that its recent study of Google's practices showed it was undermining fair competition in the advertising market. Yahoo Japan Corp., which has since merged with the Japanese social media platform Line, began keyword-targeted search advertising services using Google's technology after the two companies formed a tie-up in 2010. The FTC alleges that Google had imposed restrictions in its search advertising agreement with Yahoo Japan

that for more than seven years hindered its ability to compete in targeted search ads. An FTC investigation into whether that violated the Anti-Monopoly Law led Google to drop the restrictions. Google said in an emailed statement that it has cooperated fully with the commission's probe, and stressed the commission has not found it had outright violated anti-monopoly laws. It promised to carry out the commission's directives to offer "valuable" search functions to Japanese users and advertisers. Line Yahoo declined comment. Google will be under review for the next three years, to ensure it carries out needed changes, the commission said.



Britain's Queen Camilla poses for a group photograph with The Royal Lancers, in Caterick, England. Queen Camilla undertakes her first visit to the Regiment since being appointed as their Colonel-in-Chief. AP/PTI

Wet wipes containing plastic to be banned for sale in UK

PTI ■ LONDON

Wet wipes containing plastic will be banned from being sold in the UK following legislation to be tabled in Parliament soon, the British government announced on Monday, as the world marked as Earth Day. UK Environment Secretary Steve Barclay said the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) will table the legislation for England before Parliament's summer recess in July. The devolved regions of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are expected to follow on with their legislation later in the year to make it a UK-wide ban as part of an aligned approach. "Wet wipes containing plastic are polluting our waterways and causing microplastics to

enter the environment," said Barclay. "Defra will introduce legislation before the summer recess to crack down on this unnecessary source of pollution, following our successful single-use carrier bag charge and ban on microbeads in personal care products... Plastic-free wet wipes are readily available, and several retailers have already stopped selling wet wipes containing plastic," he said. The minister said it was part of a "step change" needed to protect the country's waterways from pollution. "The ban builds on a raft of actions already taken to protect our waterways and hold water companies accountable - including accelerating investment, putting water company fines back into the environment

and quadrupling the number of inspections of water company sites," he added. According to DEFRA's Beach Litter Monitoring Data for 2015-2020, an average of 20 wet wipes were found per 100 metres of beach surveyed across the UK. Once in the water environment, wet wipes containing plastic can accumulate biological and chemical pollutants, increasing the risk of harm to the animals and humans who encounter them. Banning them is expected to reduce plastic and microplastic pollution and reduce the volume of microplastics entering wastewater treatment sites when wrongly flushed. The ban follows a public consultation on the issue, which showed overwhelming support for such a move.

Raisi, Sharif agree on joint efforts to eradicate terror

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and Iran on Monday agreed on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held talks with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and discussed ways to promote bilateral ties at political, economic, trade and cultural levels, months after the two neighbours carried out tit-for-tat air strikes against alleged terrorist hideouts on rival lands. Raisi, the first head of state of any country to visit Pakistan after the February 8 general elections, was welcomed by Sharif at the Prime Minister House where the Iranian leader inspected the Guard of Honour. During their talks, President Raisi and Prime Minister Sharif agreed on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism, state-run Radio Pakistan reported. It added that the two leaders also held discussions to increase trade and communication links between their countries.



In this photo released by Prime Minister Office, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, left, walks with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during a welcome ceremony in the prime minister house in Islamabad, on Pakistan

ty matters" during their meeting. He described Raisi as an "ocean of political intelligence and wisdom", and said Iran would progress further under his leadership. "Pakistan and Iran can prosper and our borders can see progress," Sharif said, expressing hope that the shared border can adapt for trade and business. He expressed hope for the relationship between the neighbours to be "firm and stable", noting that today was an opportunity to "make this friendship a happy and prosperous one". During the joint press conference, Sharif raked up the Kashmir issue and thanked Iran for its stance. However, President Raisi refrained from mentioning Kashmir and instead talked about Iran's support for those fighting against oppression especially in Palestine. Prime Minister Sharif and President Raisi planted a tree on the lawn of the Prime Minister House as the world marked Earth Day on Monday.

The two countries signed an MoU for establishment of a special economic zone whilst another was signed for film exchanges and cooperation between the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and Organization of Cinema and audio visual affairs of Iran. The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Ministry of Cooperatives, labours and social welfare of Iran as well as Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority and National Standards Organization of Iran also signed MoUs of cooperation. An MoU was also signed on legal cooperation. Raisi, who arrived in Pakistan on a three-day official visit to promote cooperation, was accorded a warm welcome at the Islamabad Airport and was received by Housing Minister Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada and Pakistan's Ambassador to Iran Mudassar Tipu, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted on social media platform X. Raisi, the first Iranian president to visit Pakistan in eight years, is accompanied by his spouse

and a high-level delegation comprising the foreign minister and other members of the Cabinet and senior officials. Separately, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar called on the Iranian President in Islamabad, where they discussed bilateral relations as well as regional and global developments, Radio Pakistan reported. Raisi and Dar "emphasised the importance of enhanced efforts to further consolidate bilateral relations in diverse fields", it said, adding that they also "affirmed commitment to peace and constructive dialogue for resolving regional challenges". President Raisi has an extensive programme in Pakistan and is scheduled to meet President Asif Ali Zardari, Senate Chairman Yusuf Raza Gilani and Speaker of the National Assembly Ayaz Sadiq. He will also visit Lahore and Karachi and meet with the provincial leadership, the Foreign Office said. "The two sides will have a wide-ranging agenda to further strengthen Pakistan-Iran ties and enhance cooperation in diverse fields including trade, connectivity, energy, agriculture, and people-to-people contacts," according to the FO statement.

The talks will focus on regional and global developments and bilateral cooperation to combat the common threat of terrorism. Pakistan and Iran enjoy strong bilateral ties anchored in history, culture and religion. This visit provides an important opportunity to further strengthen Pakistan-Iran relations, according to the Foreign Office. Raisi is visiting Pakistan months after the cordial ties between the two neighbours suffered a setback when Tehran shocked Islamabad by carrying out airstrikes against alleged militant hideouts in the restive Balochistan province in January. Pakistan swiftly responded by using killer drones and rockets to carry out "precision military strikes"

Imran urges Pak's top judge to intervene to safeguard rule of law, Constitution

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has urged Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa to intervene to safeguard the rule of law and supremacy of the Constitution in the country as he highlighted multiple issues including alleged rigging during the February 8 general elections. Khan, 71, in a letter dated April 20 highlighted seven key issues faced by the country, including the anti-corruption watchdog giving a clean chit to former premier Nawaz Sharif in the Toshakhana case and alleged rigging in the February general elections. Khan reminded the chief justice that the entire nation was looking at him and quoted the words of one of the greatest and most influential scientists of all time, Albert Einstein: "The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing." He stated that the rule of law and supremacy of the Constitution has fallen to a

new low in Pakistan under his watch, saying it has caused the gradual emergence of the "law of the jungle and the enactment of the primitive doctrine that might is right." "I have no doubt that if our superior judiciary, with your good self at its helm, would not meaningfully intervene as the custodian of the Constitution and the ultimate arbiter of justice, and if the foregoing situation were to prevail," Khan said, adding that "it would be fatal to any civilized order in the world." Among the seven issues, Khan urged the chief justice to take notice of the National Accountability Bureau's sudden decision to exonerate former premier Nawaz Sharif, saying the case was pursued for years and has now been dropped. Also, Khan called for an inquiry against NAB Chairman Nazir Ahmed Butt and sought his removal from office. Secondly, he urged the top judge to look into the Bahawalnagar incident, involving the alleged thrashing of

police by army soldiers, saying it should serve as an eye opener on the lop-sided state of unformed vigilante justice in Pakistan. Thirdly, Khan asked for action on the letter written by six judges of the Islamabad High Court, complaining about being subjected to blackmail, harassment and coercion by "members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies." Fourthly, he stated that 90 per cent of the people incarcerated and facing trial in connection with the May 9 incidents "did not indulge in any violence whatsoever". The state, however, is acting as judge, jury, and executioner in all these trials, he said. Khan said a constitutional petition on the issue has been pending in the Supreme Court since May 25, 2023, and urged that "this case must be fixed and decided upon on a priority basis." Khan also referred to a press conference of the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division on February 17, 2024,

regarding the alleged manipulation of election results on February 8, urging the top judge to look into the commissioner's subsequent retraction. He asked the chief justice to look into a series of petitions, including one filed by his party, pressing that, contrary to constitutional stipulations, the general election of February 8, 2024, was "not conducted honestly, justly, fairly and under law, and that corrupt practices were not guarded against therein". Lastly, he urged the chief judge to look into the issue of allocation of reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies, urging that the pending petitions on this subject must also be fixed. Khan during his tenure had tried to remove Justice Isa from his post as judge of the Supreme Court, and surprisingly he referred to the issue by stating that the chief justice had faced the wrath of the state in the form of a reference against him and urged him to take action to save "majority of populace" from the "wrath of the state".

Zardari has immunity against prosecution: Court told

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's anti-corruption watchdog informed an accountability court on Monday that President Asif Ali Zardari has immunity under law against prosecution in any case. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) submitted a report to the court which was hearing the Thatta water supply corruption case. The watchdog stated that the incumbent president enjoyed immunity under Article 248 of the Constitution. President Zardari's counsel Arshad Tabriz informed the court that a plea regarding the immunity was filed earlier and the NAB was supposed to respond. The counsel main-

tained that his client enjoyed presidential immunity, therefore, proceedings against him could not be carried out. Later, the court adjourned the hearing on the case till May 21. The case pertains to the special initiative department allegedly illegally awarding the Thatta water supply scheme contract to a private contractor. Other accused in the case include former secretary Ejaz Ahmed Khan, Ali Akbar, Ejaz Memon, Ali Akbar Abro, Khawaja Abdul Ghani Majeed, Manahil Majeed, Abdul Nadeem Bhutto, and others. Zardari had earlier also invoked presidential immunity in the Park Lane case in

which he was accused of influencing relevant authorities during his tenure as the president from 2008 to 2013 to obtain loans for his front companies. Zardari allegedly received a loan of Rs 1.5 billion released for Parthenon Private Limited "with ill intention", and the money was allegedly later transferred for his personal use through fake bank accounts. According to the NAB, Zardari's action caused a loss of Rs 3.77 billion to the national exchequer. Zardari, 68, became president last month for five years. It is the second time that he was elected as the president after serving from 2008 to 2013 in his first term.

Nawaz Sharif to 'undergo health check-up' in China: Report

Islamabad (PTI): Three-time former Pakistan premier Nawaz Sharif will embark on Monday on a five-day personal visit to China, where he will undergo a medical checkup, according to a media report. This will be 74-year-old Sharif's first international visit after he returned to Pakistan in October last year following a four-year self-imposed exile in the UK. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo will be accompanied by Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on his "personal visit", Geo News reported on Monday. Sharif's visit is personal and during the trip, he will undergo a medical checkup, the report said, quoting party sources.

US, Philippine forces launch combat drills in disputed SCS

AP ■ MANILA

American and Filipino forces launched their largest combat exercises in years Monday in a show of allied firepower near the disputed South China Sea that has alarmed Beijing. The annual exercises by the longtime treaty allies will run until May 10 and involve more than 16,000 of their military personnel, along with more than 250 French and Australian forces. While the Philippine military maintains that the Balikatan — Tagalog for "shoulder-to-shoulder" — trainings are not directed at a particular country, some of their main conflict scenarios are set in or near the disputed South China Sea, where Chinese and Philippine coast guard and accompanying ships have figured in a series of increasingly tense territorial faceoffs since last year. In encounters in disputed areas, Chinese coast guard vessels have resorting to water cannons, blocking and other dangerous maneuvers that

have caused injuries to Philippine navy personnel and damaged supply boats. The Philippine military said a key focus of this year's drills is territorial defence. "We're dead serious about protecting our territory — that's why we do these Balikatan exercises," Col. Michael Logico, who speaks for the Philippine military on the combat drills, told The Associated Press. As the disputes between China and the Philippines have escalated, President Joe Biden and his administration has repeatedly warned that the United States is obligated to defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if it is attacked. US Marine Lt. Gen. William Jurney said in the ceremony that the large-scale military exercises will demonstrate that the 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty between the US and the Philippines "is no mere piece of paper." Washington lays no claim to the contested waters but has declared that freedom of navigation and overflight and the peaceful resolution of the dis-

putes are in its national interest. Philippine military chief of staff Gen. Romeo Brawner, who opened the exercises in a ceremony, said that as Pacific coastal nations, the United States and the Philippines "understand the importance of maritime cooperation in addressing the complex challenges that threaten peace and security in our region." China strongly criticised the exercises, saying the Philippines was "ganging up" with countries from outside Asia in an obvious reference to the United States and its security partners, and warned that the drills could instigate confrontation and undermine regional stability. The combat drills will include a joint sail by the US, Philippine and French navies in and near disputed waters off the western Philippine province of Palawan, the sinking of a mock enemy ship by combined US and Philippine firepower, and the retaking of an occupied island off the northwestern Philippines, according to the Philippine military.

UK prosecutors charge two men with spying for China

AP ■ LONDON

Two men, including one who was reported to be a parliamentary researcher, were charged with spying for China, British prosecutors said on Monday. Police said Christopher Berry, 32, and Christopher Cash, 29, were charged with "providing prejudicial information to a foreign state, China." They will appear at Westminster Magistrates' Court on Friday. Police allege the two men collected, recorded or communicated information "prejudicial to the safety or interests of the state" and violated the Official Secrets Act between late 2021 and February 2023. "This has been an extremely complex investigation into what are very serious allegations," said Dominic Murphy, head of the Metropolitan Police counterterrorism command. Authorities did not release details about the two men. But Berry is reportedly an academic based in Oxfordshire, and The Sunday Times reported last year that Cash was a parliamentary researcher who held a pass

that allows full access to the Parliament buildings, issued to lawmakers, staff and journalists after security vetting. The report said Cash worked with senior lawmakers from the governing Conservatives, including Alicia Kearns, who now heads the powerful Foreign Affairs Committee, and her predecessor in that role, Tom Tugendhat, who is now security minister. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said last year that he raised the issue with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, saying he raised "very strong concerns" about interference in British democracy. At the time, Cash issued a statement through his lawyers maintaining his innocence. The Chinese Embassy issued a statement calling the allegations fabricated. Also on Monday, three people were arrested in Germany on suspicion of spying for China and arranging to transfer information on technology with potential military uses. British intelligence authorities have ratcheted up their warnings about Beijing's covert activities in recent years.

Kurdish separatists, water issues loom large in Erdogan Iraq visit

AP ■ BAGHDAD

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was set to make his first official visit to Iraq in more than a decade on Monday as his country seeks greater cooperation from Baghdad in its fight against a Kurdish militant group that has a foothold in northern Iraq. Other issues also loom large between the two countries, including water supply issues and exports of oil and gas from northern Iraq to Turkey, which have been halted for more than a year. Erdogan's last visit to Iraq was in 2011, when he was Turkey's prime minister. Iraqi government spokesperson Bassem al-Awadi said in a statement that Erdogan's visit will be a "major starting point in Iraqi-Turkish relations" and will include the signing of a deal on a "joint approach to security challenges" and a "strategic agreement on the water file", among other issues. Erdogan has said his country plans to launch a major operation against the Kurdistan

Workers' Party, or PKK, a Kurdish separatist movement banned in Turkey and with operations in Iraq, during the summer, with the aim of "permanently" eradicating the threat it poses. Turkey has carried out numerous ground offensives against the group in northern Iraq in the past while Kurdish jets frequently target suspected PKK targets in the region. Ankara now aims to create a 30- to 40-kilometer (19 to 25-mile) deep security corridor along the joint border with Iraq, Turkish Defence Minister Yasar Guler told journalists last month. The group, whose fight for an autonomous Kurdish state in southeast Turkey has claimed tens of thousands of lives since the 1980s, is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey and its Western allies. Baghdad has complained in the past that Turkish operations against the PKK violate its sovereignty, but appears to be coming closer to Ankara's stance. In March, after a meeting between the Iraqi and Turkish foreign ministers, Baghdad announced

that the Iraqi National Security Council had issued a ban on the PKK, although it stopped short of designating it as a terrorist organisation. The two countries issued a joint statement in which they said the group represents a "security threat to both Turkey and Iraq" and that its presence on Iraqi territory was a "violation of the Iraqi Constitution". Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani told journalists during a visit to Washington last week that Iraq and Turkey have "true interests with one another and common projects". He noted that the PKK has long had a presence in northern Iraq, "but we are not allowing any armed group to be on Iraqi territory and using it as a launch pad for attacks". Ankara has argued that the presence of PKK bases poses a threat to the planned construction of a major trade route, the Iraq Development Road, that would connect the port of Grand Faw in Basra, southern Iraq, to Turkey and Europe through a network of rail lines and highways.

North Korea fired missile into ocean, South says

Seoul (AP): North Korea fired a ballistic missile toward its eastern waters on Monday, South Korea's military said, the latest in a recent series of weapons launches by the North. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the launch occurred on Monday but gave no further details, such as how far the missile flew. North Korea in recent months has been maintaining an accelerated pace in weapons testing as it continues to expand its military capabilities amid stalemated diplomacy with the United States and South Korea. North Korea announced Saturday that it tested a "super-large" cruise missile warhead and a new anti-aircraft missile in a western coastal area on Friday. South Korea's military said that it has detected evidence that North Korea is preparing for its second spy satellite launch but there are no signs that a launch is imminent.

Chinese general takes a harsh line on Taiwan

AP ■ QINGDAO (CHINA)

INTERNATIONAL NAVAL GATHERING

One of China's top military leaders took a harsh line on regional territorial disputes, telling an international naval gathering in north-eastern China on Monday that the country would strike back with force if its interests came under threat. The 19th biennial meeting of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium opened in the port city of Qingdao, where China's northern naval force is based, providing a vivid backdrop to China's massive military expansion over the past two decades that has seen it build or refurbish three aircraft carriers. The four-day meeting has drawn representatives from partners and competitors including Australia, Cambodia, Chile, France, India and the US and comes amid heightened tensions over China's assertive actions in the

Taiwan Strait and the East and South China seas, and as China's navy has grown into the world's largest by number of hulls. Zhang Youxia, the vice chairman of the ruling Communist Party's Central Military Commission, which controls the armed forces, spoke of "common development" and said "decoupling, friction and confrontation will only divide the world into isolated islands guarding against each other with suspicion". However, he then turned to China's territorial claims, which have not been recognised under international law and in some cases have been denied. Beijing has ignored rulings not in its favour, particularly in the South China Sea, where it is in dispute with five other parties over islands, waterways and undersea

resources. Japan continues to defend its control over the uninhabited Senkaku island chain, called Diaoyu by China, in the East China Sea, against incursions by the Chinese coast guard. Taiwan last week reinforced its foothold in the disputed South China Sea by establishing satellite communications between the main island and its garrison on Taiping Island, also known as Itu Aba, the largest land feature in the highly contested Spratly Island chain. China has created seven artificial islands in the area by piling sand and cement on top of coral reefs and then equipping them with airstrips and other military infrastructure. Zhang said China's territorial sovereignty "brooks no infringement" and its core interests cannot be challenged. We do not provoke trouble, but we

will never flinch in face of provocation. The Chinese military will resolutely defend the reunification and interest of the motherland". Zhang has spoken in the past of Beijing's determination to take control of the self-governing island republic of Taiwan, which it claims as its own territory, using force if necessary. With its crucial high-tech economy, Taiwan has been building up its defences on its own and with help from the US, where Congress this weekend approved USD 8 billion in military aid for Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific. Taiwan is also building its own submarines and trainer aircraft and waiting on the delivery of upgraded versions of F-16 fighters, battle tanks and other hardware from the US. Zhang appeared to press

China's unilateralist approach to foreign relations and military conflicts as espoused by Xi Jinping, the top military commander, Communist Party leader and head-of-state for life, who has eliminated all dissenting views. China "remains committed to resolving maritime disputes with directly concerned countries through friendly consultations, but we will not allow our good faith to be abused", Zhang said. "Particularly over the self-governing island republic of Taiwan that Beijing threatens to use force to bring under its control. We will take justified actions to defend our rights in accordance with the law." Zhang's comments follow a major shakeup of the Chinese military in recent months that has seen the still-unexplained disappearance of former Defence Minister Li Shangfu and several top officers in the missile corps.

Mexico's presidential candidate stopped by masked men who ask for help in stemming violence

Tapachula (AP): Masked men stopped a vehicle carrying Mexico's leading presidential candidate while she was travelling between campaign stops Sunday to ask that she address the violence in the southern state of Chiapas if she wins the June 2 election. Former Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum, the governing Morena party's candidate, remained in the front passenger seat of the vehicle listening calmly with her window down. Masked men filmed the interaction on their cell phones and one shook her hand before letting her move on. The men, who identified themselves as local residents, said they felt "powerless" because the government has not done enough to provide security. They asked her to take action as president so that their township, Motozintla, along Mexico's southern border with

Guatemala, does not become a "disaster" like other communities in the region. During her campaign swing through Chiapas, Sheinbaum was escorted by the army and national guard. The border area of Chiapas has been plagued by violence as the rival Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation cartels battle for territory. Thousands of people have been displaced as the cartels work to control migrant, drug and weapons smuggling routes and forcibly recruit locals. Later Sunday, Sheinbaum confirmed the incident had occurred, but downplayed it and said she did not believe the men were part of an organized crime group. She described the encounter as "very strange" because she said a media outlet critical of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration first published it.

Sustained growth of 7 per cent feasible for India: RBI MPC member

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Sustaining the economic growth momentum of 7 per cent in 2024-25 and beyond is feasible on the back of favorable monsoon, higher farm productivity and improved global trade, RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) member Shashanka Bhide said on Monday. During 2023-24, the economy is likely to record a growth rate of near 8 per cent on account of good performance of manufacturing and infrastructure sectors. "India's economic growth in the current year is likely to be supported by agriculture with a favourable monsoon and improved global trade. Sustaining the growth momentum of 7 per cent seems feasible," he told PTI. Bhide further said that in the long-term, the need for

productivity improvements will remain the key factor to achieve food price stability. Asked what are some of the headwinds he is wary of, Bhide said one area of concern is the global environment. "The slow pace of recovery in global demand on one hand and supply chain disruptions on the other hand... If the ongoing geopolitical conflicts are not resolved quickly, (it will) pose significant challenge in terms of demand as well as input prices. "We should also be prepared for minimising the adverse impact of extreme weather events on output," he said. Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) raised India's growth projection to 6.8 per cent for 2024 from its January forecast of 6.5 per cent citing bullish domestic demand conditions and a rising working-age



population. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) also raised India's GDP growth forecast for the current fiscal to 7 per cent from 6.7 per cent earlier, saying the robust growth will be driven by public and private sector investment demand and gradual improvement in consumer demand. Asked what is the long-term solution for high food prices, Bhide noted that one aspect of high food inflation in the recent years has been the impact of weather conditions on the perishable commodities such as vegetables. According to him, although such price spikes may be short-term, their impact is significant. As many have pointed out, Bhide said processing and preservation of commodities that help in their storage

would be a part of the solution in the longer term, just as the supply-side measures that help raise crop resistance to adverse weather. While noting that the investments in market infrastructure, modernisation of markets for agricultural commodities to help improve supply response to changing demand conditions would also reduce the excessive price spikes, he said. "In the long-term, the need for productivity improvements will remain the key factor to achieve food price stability." The eminent economist observed that inflation has remained above the policy target for several countries. "There are also differences in the growth conditions, with some countries experiencing significant slowdown while some experiencing reasonable positive momentum," he said,

adding that the priority towards bringing down inflation rate to the target appears to be keeping the monetary policies restrictive. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has recently said the baseline projections show inflation moderating to 4.5 per cent in 2024-25 from 5.4 per cent in 2023-24 and 6.7 per cent in 2022-23. Responding to a question on slowing down of foreign direct investment in India, Bhide said the FDI inflows have been strong in the past few years in response to the various policy reforms along with the attraction of a fast growing economy. "One reason for the slowdown now may also be the slow pace of global demand recovery," he observed. While India's economy has grown rapidly, Bhide explained a weak global

demand may not broaden the scope or scale of opportunities for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Asked whether India has been able to leverage China-plus-one strategy, Bhide said India's strategies to support investments in new opportunities in terms of technology and energy have attracted attention. Domestic demand plus global demand appear to have gained attention, he added. FDI inflows to China have fallen dramatically from a share of 12.5 per cent in the first nine months of 2022 to only 1.7 per cent in the same period of 2023. Various other countries like the US, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Poland and Germany have witnessed significant gains in the global market share, following the decline of FDI flows to China.

Sensex climbs over 560 points



PTI ■ MUMBAI
Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty climbed nearly 1 per cent each on Monday amid a rally in Asian and European markets, decline in Brent crude oil prices and buying by foreign investors. Extending its previous day's rebound, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 560.29 points or 0.77 per cent to settle at 73,648.62. During the day, it advanced 679.47 points or 0.92 per cent to 73,767.80. The NSE Nifty went up by 189.40 points or 0.86 per cent to 22,336.40. From the Sensex basket, Larsen & Toubro, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, UltraTech Cement, Wipro, ICICI Bank, Infosys, HCL Technologies and Asian Paints were the major gainers. NTPC, JSW Steel and HDFC Bank were the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul,

Rupee rises seven paise against \$ in early trade

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee rises by 7 paise to close at 83.37 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday on positive domestic markets and a soft American currency. Forex traders said a decline in crude oil prices also supported the local unit. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.40 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.32 and a low of 83.45 against the



aggressions in the Middle East may cap sharp upside. Investors may remain cautious ahead of PMI and inflation data from the US this week. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.10 to Rs 83.60," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.02 per cent higher at 106.17. US Dollar eased as the

tensions between Israel and Iran seem contained over the weekend. The Dollar still managed to stay above the 106 mark on a hawkish US Federal Reserve, Choudhary added. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.69 per cent to USD 86.69 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 560.29 points, or 0.77 per cent, to settle at 73,648.62 points. The Nifty rose 189.40 points, or 0.86 per cent, to close at 22,336.40 points.

Representation of women apprentices in manufacturing sector to touch 40 per cent by year end: TeamLease

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
There has been a significant increase in demand for women apprentices in the manufacturing sector, as factories are increasingly adopting gender-agnostic recruitment practices, a sharp departure from traditional hiring norms and underscore the industry's commitment to fostering inclusive work environments. According to staffing company TeamLease, in the past 8-10 months, there has been a remarkable five-fold surge in demand for young women who have completed class 10/12 to be appointed as apprentices, reflecting a

shifting landscape in India's workforce dynamics. The surge in demand for women apprentices is primarily driven by the booming sectors of auto, Electric Vehicle (EV), electronics, and phone manufacturing. "This surge is anticipated to lead to a significant increase in the representation of women apprentices, reaching up to 40 per cent by the end of the year," said Sumit Kumar, Chief strategy officer at TeamLease Degree

(NEP) in a bid to further revolutionise India's education and vocational training landscape. According to Kumar, harmonising with the existing National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF), would enable seamless transitions for student trainees across different programs and levels of education, a move that will streamline the apprenticeship experience and foster a more inclusive and efficient apprenticeship network. "These reforms not only promise to address the current talent shortage but also significantly contribute to India's journey towards becoming a global skill

Corporate funding in global solar industry decline, says Mercom

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Corporate funding into the solar sector declined 4 per cent to USD 8.1 billion globally during January-March period due to factors like high input cost and supply chain issues, according to Mercom Capital. The sector had attracted USD 8.4 billion investments in the first quarter or Q1 in 2023, the US-based research firm said in a report on Monday. However, on a quarter-on-quarter (Q-o-Q) basis, the funding was 47 per cent over USD 5.5 billion raised in October-December or Q4 period of 2023, the report said. "The solar sector is experiencing peak uncertainty and a challenging investment climate. The sector is grappling with multiple hurdles, including the likelihood of prolonged high-interest rates, higher labour and construction costs due to inflation, and supply chain issues, coupled with trade disputes and tariffs," Raj Prabhu, CEO of Mercom Capital Group, said. In India, Ecofy secured an investment of USD 10.83 million, InSolare raised USD 8 million in a growth funding round, and Metafin secured USD 5 million equity funding through venture capital (VC) funding route. In the domestic debt financing segment, ReNew refinanced non-convertible debentures worth USD 288.3 million, AmpIn Energy Transition secured an investment totalling USD 26.9 million, and Husk Power Systems secured USD 20 million.

Competition Commission to conduct detailed study on AI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Fair trade watchdog CCI on Monday invited request for proposals from entities to carry out a detailed market study on artificial intelligence and its impact on competition that will cover various aspects, including the ways AI-driven personalised recommendations, services and pricing influence consumer choices. The proposed market study on 'Artificial Intelligence and Competition' also comes at a time when the growing use of AI across industries has given rise to novel questions around its implications for competitive dynamics in markets. Issuing the Request for Proposal (RFP) document to engage an agency/institution for conducting the study, the CCI said the transformative capabilities of AI have significant pro-competitive potential, both on the supply and the demand side, and at



the same time, there may be concerns with regard to potential competition risks stemming from the use of AI. The last date for submitting the bids is June 3 and after technical presentations by the entities, the deadline for the financial bids is June 28.

The new forms of collusion prompted by the use of AI such as self-learning algorithms and whether bias in AI algorithms can impact competition will also be examined during the study. Other elements that will be covered include "how do AI-driven personalised recommendations, services and pricing influence consumer welfare and choice", "what are the synergies and risks that may stem from M&As involving firms with AI capabilities" and "what are the specific factors/parameters that need to be considered in assessing competitive effects of such M&As". Through the study, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) will also seek to understand the main sources of competitive advantage and disadvantage for AI adopters and non-adopters, and how AI technologies influence the entry and exit barriers, market concentration, innovation

incentives, and market power of firms. Further, it will look to "understand trends and patterns of AI and to ascertain enforcement and advocacy priorities of the Commission with respect to AI and its application in markets," as per the document. Among others, the study will look at the existing and evolving regulatory/legal frameworks governing AI systems and applications in India and other major jurisdictions and also reach out to the relevant stakeholders. In a recent interview to PTI, CCI Chairperson Ravneet Kaur said that AI and machine learning can drive efficiency and innovation but also raise concerns related to market concentration and potential anti-competitive behaviour. The CCI has the mandate to promote competition and curb anti-competitive practices in the marketplace.

Zomato hikes platform fee to ₹5 per order

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Zomato has hiked its platform fee by 25 per cent to Rs 5 per order from Rs 4 in select markets, citing it as a part of business calls taken by the food tech giant. According to the company's app, it has also paused its intercity food delivery service 'Intercity Legends'. This comes days before it is slated to announce the results for the quarter that ended in March. When reached out for a comment, a Zomato spokesperson told PTI, "These are business calls which we take basis various factors from time to time". Notably, the food delivery platform has received various tax demand orders aggregating to Rs 227.85 crore since March 15, separate regulatory filings showed.



In February, Zomato reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 138 crore for the December quarter. The company is expected to announce the fourth (January-March) quarter results next month. According to company sources, the hike in platform fees applies to major cities like Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Mumbai and Hyderabad, among others. The company introduced a

platform fee last August, starting with Rs 2 per order, which has been increased gradually. Its main rival, Swiggy, already charges a platform fee of Rs 5 per order. When searching for its intercity delivery service 'Intercity Legends', the company on its app says, "Enhancements are underway! Please stay tuned as we will be back to serve you soon".

Internet users dissatisfied with data speeds, connectivity; wish to change service providers: Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Despite India's low-cost and expanding internet accessibility, a recent survey found that over half of internet users are dissatisfied with data speeds and experience connection issues. An overwhelming 70 per cent of these users expressed the desire to switch service providers, the survey said. According to the annual broadband survey by LocalCircles, 86 per cent of users in India primarily



connect to the internet at home via fiber, broadband, DSL, or fixed-line connection. However, more than half of these users — 56 per cent — reported

connection disruption or lower speeds than what they were promised or paying for. The survey, which gathered insights from over 7,000 broadband and fiber consumers across 286 Indian districts, revealed that 39 per cent of respondents said the "speed received is much lower than what we are paying for", while 47 per cent claimed that it took over 24 hours for their service provider to resolve their complaints. As per the survey, "70 per

cent among users, coupled with operators offering complimentary voice minutes within bundled plans, is driving the decline in average revenue per user (ARPU) of fixed voice operators in India," it said. LocalCircles said it plans to share the results with relevant government bodies such as the telecom regulator TRAI, the Ministry of Telecom, and the Department of Consumer Affairs to address the issues faced by consumers.

Vodafone Idea FPO subscribed 3.3 times, retail lags

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Debt-saddled telecom operator Vodafone Idea Ltd's Rs 18,000 crore follow-on offering (FPO) on Monday was subscribed more than 3.3 times, as institutional investors poured in money but the retail segment lagged. On the last day of the offering, as many as 4,212.56 crore shares were sought against the issue size

of 1,260 crore at 14.30 hrs, according to information on stock exchanges. The final numbers will be known when the issue closes on Monday evening. Qualified institutional buyers sought 8.71 times of their 360 crore shares reserved for them, while non-institutional investors bid for 2.7 times of the 270 crore shares earmarked for them.

Man United escapes with shootout win in FA Cup semifinal

AP ■ LONDON

It was nearly a comeback for the ages for Coventry. Instead, it ended in another gut-wrenching penalty shootout loss at Wembley for the second-tier team as Manchester United limped into another FA Cup final. Coventry pulled off one of the most unexpected fightbacks in FA Cup history by rallying from three goals down against United to force extra time after a 3-3 draw in Sunday's semifinal game, only to falter at the end and let Erik ten Hag's team escape with a 4-2 win in the shootout.

"It hurts a lot, especially coming back from 3-0 down and having the potential to win in extra time," Coventry striker Ellis Simms said. "To lose on penalties is gutting. ... We were unlucky but it just wasn't our day to get it."

Rasmus Hojlund scored the decisive penalty kick to save United from another embarrassing collapse after Callum O'Hare and Ben Sheaf had missed their spot kicks for Coventry.

"It was an incredible game, a strange game too," Ten Hag said. "We had total control for so long and then gave it away in the last part of the game."

It was another heartbreaking ending at Wembley for Coventry, which also lost on penalties to Luton in last year's Championship playoff final to miss out on promotion to the Premier League.

United's narrow escape sets up a second straight Manchester derby in the final against defending champion Manchester City, which beat Chelsea on Saturday. But it should never have been this close.

United looked to be cruising toward the final after Bruno Fernandes' deflected shot put them 3-0 up in the 58th minute against a Championship side that had defied the odds just to make the semifinals.

But Coventry is no stranger to comebacks, having scored twice in injury time to beat Wolverhampton in the quarterfinals, and staged an even greater one this time to set off wild celebrations in the sky-blue half of Wembley.

Simms gave Coventry a glimmer of hope by sweeping home a cross from Fabio Tavares in the 71st, O'Hare netted the second with the help of a lucky deflection in the 79th and Haji Wright equalized from the penalty spot in the fifth minute of injury time after a handball by



Aaron Wan-Bissaka. United had taken the lead in the 23rd through Scott McTominay and Harry Maguire then headed in the second from a corner. That lead soon looked insurmountable after Fernandes' shot took a deflection to sneak inside the near post for United's third. But no lead seems safe for this

United side.

This was a second late collapse in a matter of weeks after United gave up two injury-time goals in a 4-3 Premier League loss to Chelsea this month, when Ten Hag called on his team to learn how to close out games. They showed no signs of having learned that lesson, and Coventry came the closest to netting the winner in extra time against a shell-shocked United.

Simms first hit the crossbar with a stinging strike and Victor Torp then thought he had scored the winner in the 120th minute - setting off more wild celebrations by the Coventry players and fans - but it was ruled out by VAR for a narrow offside to set up the penalty shootout.

"We were 20 seconds away and a toenaill offside, it's ridiculous," said Coventry manager Mark Robins, the former Manchester United player who scored a crucial FA Cup goal in 1990 that helped Alex Ferguson win his first trophy at the club.

"Disappointed but we have to be really proud. Once the dust settles a lot of people will talk about that game for a long time."

Casemiro missed United's first penalty by shooting straight at goalkeeper Bradley Collins but Andre Onana saved O'Hare's spot kick before Sheaf sent his well over the crossbar.

The win gives United a chance to salvage what has been a disappointing season. United only has an outside chance of qualifying for the Champions League next season and an FA Cup trophy - at rival City's expense - could be the only thing that will convince new minority owner Jim Ratcliffe to keep Ten Hag in charge for next season.

The 71-year-old Ratcliffe was in the stands after running the London Marathon earlier in the day. Watching the last hour of United's performance may have been just as exhausting as the last part of that marathon.

United's players hardly even celebrated when Hojlund's decisive penalty went in, with only Christian Eriksen running over to celebrate with his fellow Dane. Most of the players remained by the halfway line, almost sheepishly shaking hands with the Coventry players - knowing how close they had come to one of the club's most embarrassing defeats.

Ten Hag, though, insisted that fans should look on the bright side after reaching back-to-back FA Cup finals.

Ruud beats Tsitsipas to win Barcelona Open

AP ■ BARCELONA

Casper Ruud took his revenge against Stefanos Tsitsipas by winning the Barcelona Open final in straight sets for his biggest career title, a week after losing to the Greek in the Monte Carlo Masters final.

Ruud won 7-5, 6-3 for his first title of the season after losing the three other finals he played this year.

"Honestly, this has been worth the wait," Ruud said after the triumph in Barcelona. "A lot of finals that I've lost have been tough, a bit disappointing, of course. Any time you reach a final, it's nonetheless a good week, so you can't be too hard on yourself, but this one has been a long time coming."

Seventh-ranked Tsitsipas had comfortably won in straight sets in Monte Carlo but this time Ruud prevailed, converting three of the six break points he earned.

"I'm super happy to do it here in Barcelona in front of a packed stadium and on Rafa Nadal Court," the sixth-ranked Ruud said. "It's special to me because I looked up to him (Nadal) all my childhood, came here myself as a 13-year-old boy to watch him and the others play here. It's a great feeling."

Ruud is eyeing next month's French Open after finishing runner-up at Roland Garros last year, one of three Grand Slam finals he has lost.

The 25-year-old Norwegian snapped a 10-match winning streak for Tsitsipas, who was 10-0 on clay this season and was seeking his 12th career title. Tsitsipas had lost all three of his previous Barcelona finals - in 2018, 2021 and 2023.

It was the 11th career title for Ruud, and the 10th on clay.

AP ■ LONDON

Liverpool stayed in the hunt for the Premier League title and moved level on points with leader Arsenal with a 3-1 victory over Fulham that was illuminated by a brilliant free kick by Trent Alexander-Arnold.

Liverpool bounced back from Thursday's exit to Atalanta in the Europa League quarterfinals and last weekend's home loss to Crystal Palace by winning at Craven Cottage after Jurgen Klopp dropped Mohamed Salah and Alexis Mac Allister to the bench.

Alexander-Arnold's curling free-kick in the 32nd was canceled out by Timothy Castagne's first goal for Fulham in first-half stoppage time.

Ryan Gravenberch and Diogo Jota scored in the second half

Liverpool stays in hunt for Premier League title with 3-1 win at Fulham

as Liverpool joined Arsenal on 74 points - one more than defending champion Manchester City, which has a game in hand.

Fulham academy graduate Harvey Elliott, who swapped London for Merseyside in 2019, was galvanized by jeers from the home fans as he helped his side create the first chance of the match.

The attacking midfielder player instinctively picked out Alexander-Arnold, whose cross could not be directed in by Luis Diaz's glancing header as the ball narrowly missed the inside of the post.

Alexander-Arnold then showed off his elite ball-



striking ability. First, he received the ball centrally and he delivered a first-time side-footed pass in behind Fulham full-back Antonee Robinson before Diaz's low cross to Jota was struck wide of the right-hand post.

Then, after Joao Palhinha brought down Jota on the counterattack, Alexander-Arnold stood over the set-

piece in an almost central position near the edge of the area and whipped the ball over the wall into the top left-hand corner.

The Cottagers had been quiet all half but they came alive in added time to equalize.

Rodrigo Muniz's blocked header off Alex Iwobi's cross fell kindly to the unmarked Castagne, who slammed his effort home from close range.

Parity did not last long as, in the 53rd minute, Liverpool punished a series of errors to retake the lead. Iwobi's wayward pass found Elliott in a dangerous position and he opted to lay the ball off to Gravenberch, whose first-time curled effort flew past Bernd Leno to make it 2-1.

Liverpool wrapped up the win in the 72nd after Cody Gakpo's pass split the defense and Jota finished with a strike into the bottom right-hand corner.



Bhavesh, Simranpreet win second 25m Pistol Olympic Selection Trials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bhavesh Shekhawat and Simranpreet Kaur Brar emerged winners in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol (RFP) and women's 25m pistol OST T2 trials respectively at the first-ever Olympic Selection Trials (OST) for Rifle and Pistol at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting ranges here on Monday.

Bhavesh shot 34 in the RFP final, comfortably holding off OST T1 winner Anish Bhanwala (29), to extend his good form in the trials. Vijayveer Sidhu was third with 22-hits.

Adarsh Singh (17) and Ankur Goel (13) finished fourth and fifth.

In the women's pistol, Simranpreet continued her good run in the trials, firing 37-hits in the 10 series of five-shots each, to emerge triumphant. She too held off OST T1 winner and Olympian Manu Bhaker who signed-off with 35-hits on the day.

Esha Singh with 30-hits took third and the final podium points available.

Rhythm Sangwan (24), the second quota holder in the event, finished fourth while Abhidnya Patil (16) was fifth.

Nottingham Forest cries foul play in inflammatory social media post

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Its 39 million views and counting for an inflammatory social-media post that might be unlike anything ever seen in English soccer.

The final whistle had just been blown on Nottingham Forest's 2-0 defeat at Everton in the Premier League on Sunday when a post on X, formerly Twitter, was published by the frustrated losing club.

It went beyond criticizing match officials for perceived incompetence for the failure to award three penalties for what Forest said were a trio of clear fouls in the area during the game.

It pointed to potential foul play by questioning the integrity of the VAR - Stuart Attwell - who, the club said, is a fan of a team, Luton, battling with Forest to

avoid relegation.

Signing off, the post said Forest will "consider its options" about how to proceed. This matter, it seems, is far from over, not least because the Premier League is likely to come down hard on Forest in the coming days for its insinuations.

Indeed, Forest - a two-time European champion - has rarely been out of the news since returning to the Premier League last season, after an absence of 24 years, under the stewardship of larger-than-life owner Evangelos Marinakis.

Signing a record 21 players at a cost of around USD 160 million in the first transfer window after promotion showed this was a club which would be doing things differently.

Forest has been made to pay for that wild spree, with the

club recently having been docked four points for breaching the league's financial rules. It is appealing against that sanction.

This season, with the team again under the threat of relegation and currently in fourth-to-last place, Forest has adopted an us-against-the-world mentality for what it perceives to be a series of poor refereeing decisions hurting the team. It has even hired a former Premier League referee, Mark Clattenburg, as a consultant this season.

Clattenburg has been scrutinizing the decisions of match officials and is answerable to Marinakis, a combustible Greek shipping magnate and media baron who - as the owner of Olympiakos, Greece's largest club - has been known for frequent public outbursts

against refereeing calls and run-ins with the Greek Football Federation.

In his column for the British newspaper *The Daily Mail*, Clattenburg wrote on Monday that Forest has had to "endure some egregious refereeing" this season and that the decisions at Everton made it "as grim a game as they have encountered since returning to the Premier League."

"It was a hat trick of howlers from the refereeing team and, unfortunately for Forest, a continuation of an unjust trend that has hampered their survival fight," Clattenburg wrote.

A previous incident that angered Forest - and led to Marinakis going down to the touchline to express his unhappiness and later approach referee Paul Tierney - came in the team's 1-0 home loss to Liverpool in

March.

The winning goal arrived in the ninth minute of stoppage time - just eight minutes had been allotted - and only after a controversial call by the referee, with Forest not getting the ball back when play was stopped after Liverpool defender Ibrahima Konate sustained a knock to the head at a Forest corner before the goal.

Tierney blew his whistle with Forest in possession on the edge of Liverpool's area. After Konate quickly recovered, the referee dropped the ball to Liverpool goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher, who then started the attack that eventually led to the goal.

Clattenburg pointed out that the ball should have gone back to the team that had possession when the game was stopped.

That appears to be a clear

refereeing error, like the one made in Liverpool's loss at Tottenham in October when there was a mix-up in communication between the on-field referee and the VAR.

After that mistake, Liverpool said it would "explore the range of options available, given the clear need for escalation and resolution."

Tensions are running high and the finances at stake in the lucrative Premier League are leading to clubs - and their fans on social media - getting bolder and more vocal with their complaints, especially about the use of a video review system that is not proving to be the solution that was promised.

Forest went too far, though, according to Jamie Carragher, a former Liverpool and England defender, who is now a leading pundit on British broadcaster Sky Sports.

Nelly Korda ties LPGA Tour record with 5th straight victory

AP ■ THE WOODLANDS (US)

Nelly Korda couldn't have imagined the incredible run she's put together this season while at home recovering from a blood clot that required surgery in 2022.

"Because obviously then I was just more scared for my health," she said. "Competing was kind of on the back seat. I was not thinking about competing at all. But I think all of the sad times and the health scares that I have gone through have made me who I am today."

Fully healthy now, Korda is seemingly unstoppable. The world's No. 1 player hasn't lost a tournament since January, and now she's a two-time major champion.

Korda etched her name in the LPGA Tour record books Sunday, winning her record-tying fifth straight tournament with a two-stroke victory in the Chevron Championship.

Korda joins Nancy Lopez (1978) and Annika Sorenstam (2004-05) as the only players to win five consecutive LPGA events. Her previous major victory was in 2021 at the Women's PGA Championship.

"It's been an amazing feeling these past couple weeks knowing that I can go on this stretch and that if I stay in my bubble and I keep golf in a sense simple and let it flow, then I can have so, so much fun out here," she said.

Korda shot a 3-under 69 in the final to outlast Maja Stark of Sweden, who birdied her final two holes to shoot 69 and pull within one. Korda stayed

aggressive on the par-5 18th, easily clearing the lake in front of the green and setting up an easy up-and-down birdie for a two-shot victory.

She had a four-day total of 13-under 275 at Carlton Woods.

Korda nearly aced the par-3 17th, with her tee shot hitting the hole and hopping in the air before settling within 10 feet. She settled for par to maintain her two-shot lead.

Korda wowed the large crowd, which followed her throughout the day, by chipping into the wind for birdie on the par-4 10th hole to take a four-stroke lead. The 25-year-old raised her club above her head with one hand and pumped her fist after the ball rolled into the hole.

Her parents - former Australian Open tennis champion Petr Korda and Regina Rajchrtova - beamed as she was presented with the trophy.

"She had a difficult '22 and '23 in certain ways," Petr Korda said. "She did not win a tournament in '23 and some things probably made her humble and (she) put a lot of work into where she is right now. Without the work and commitment, she would not be here. So seeing that, I'm very happy."

Korda's older sister, Jessica, is a six-time LPGA winner who's taking a break from golf after giving birth to her first child.

Korda took home \$1.2 million from a purse of \$7.9 million, a significant increase from last year's purse of \$5.2 million. That brings her season earnings to \$2,424,216 and her career earnings to \$11,361,489. Winners had been jumping into Poppie's Pond off the 18th green at Mission Hills since 1988, and



Korda became the second to do it in Texas by doing a cannonball off a small dock into brown-tinged water. World No. 2 Lilia Vu was first to jump into the pond here after her win last season. Vu withdrew from this year's tournament before the first round after experiencing "severe discomfort" in her back during warmups.

While still shivering from her post-win plunge Sunday, Korda confirmed she'll be competing in the JM Eagle LA Championship next week in Los Angeles. She was then asked about the possibility of becoming the first to ever win six straight LPGA tournaments.

"I'm going to enjoy this right now and then I'll think about that," she said. "But yeah, it's been an amazing time. Hopefully keep the streak alive. But I've been so grateful to compete week in and week out and get the five in a row, too."

Masters champion Scottie Scheffler is on a similar tear, on his way to a fourth victory in five starts until rain interrupted the final round of the RBC Heritage. He couldn't help but check in on Korda.

"I actually was checking the scores this afternoon when we were in the rain delay," he said. "I'm extremely happy for her and proud of her. That's some pretty special stuff. It's been a treat to watch."

Korda entered the last round one shot off the lead after completing the last seven holes of the weather-delayed third round early Sunday morning on a windy and unseasonably cool day. She was wiped out after her big win because she'd been up since 4 a.m. To prepare for the end of the third round.

She birdied two of her first four holes to take the lead. Lauren Coughlin birdied Nos. 13 and 14 to get within two strokes, but bogeys on the 16th and 17th holes put her four behind. She shot a final-round 68 to finish tied for third with Brooke Henderson.

Coughlin got emotional when discussing her best finish in a major.

"It's really cool to see all of the work that I've put in, especially with my putting and my short game, and putting specifically showed off this week, as well," she said. Henderson was tied with Korda for second to start the last round after she shot a 64 in the third round to set a scoring record for the tournament since its move from Mission Hills, California, to Texas last year. But the Canadian, who has 13 LPGA wins with two majors, also faltered early in the final round, with a bogey and a double bogey in the first four holes.

Haeran Ryu of South Korea shot a bogey-free 67 to enter the final round leading Korda by one. But the 2023 Rookie of the Year bogeyed the first two holes of the fourth round. She closed with a 74 and finished fifth.

Eighteen-year-old amateur Jasmine Koo provided an unlikely highlight on the 18th hole. Her second shot bounced off the advertising board in the water and back into play.



REVENGE ON CSK MIND AS LSG EYE A WIN IN DHONI BASTION

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Revenge will be on defending champions Chennai Super Kings' minds when they host an unpredictable Lucknow Super Giants here in their reverse IPL fixture on Tuesday with both the teams desperate to break out of the mid-table logjam. The last time the two teams faced off in Lucknow last week, KL Rahul and Quinton de Kock put up a record opening partnership which proved to be the difference as LSG joined CSK at eight points in the IPL standing. The Super Kings have been a force to be reckoned with at home and they will look to set the record straight this time. Following the away loss, CSK will be eager to redeem themselves in the three consecutive home ties to march towards the playoffs. For CSK, skipper Rituraj Gaikwad and Shivam Dube have done bulk of the scoring and their failure against LSG meant they didn't get a flying start and also struggled in the middle overs. While opener Rachin Ravindra's form is a concern,

CSK also promoted Ajinkya Rahane as the opener and as a result, Gaikwad pushed himself a spot down to three. Having scored three 50-plus scores as an opener so far, it would once again be a tricky call for Gaikwad to whether stick to the latest shuffle or promote himself back to the top. While Ravindra Jadeja stepped up with a composed fifty, which allowed Moeen Ali and MS Dhoni to produce the late fireworks and give the team a fighting total, CSK would hope their top-order gets their act together before they face LSG again. CSK's bowling unit was at their wits end against the rampaging duo of Rahul and Quinton the other day. Young Matheesha Pathirana was their best bowler but the onus will be on pacers Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande and Mustafizur Rahman to produce a better show when they face the same opposition again. Left-arm spinner Jadeja too struggled and will need to step up on their home turf, having done so in the past. For LSG, batting has been an



issue but they have shown how devastating they can be if their top-order fires. Rahul and Quinton were on a roll and they will once again have to do the heavy lifting at Chepauk. Also Nicholas Pooran has hit top gear when needed and LSG will bank on him a lot. In bowling, LSG will hope for the return of young pace sensation Mayank Yadav, who had to sit out of two games after suffering lower abdominal strain. Pacer Mohsin Khan and Yash Thakur did well to restrict CSK initially but found themselves in the firing line of Dhoni in the final overs, something they need to work on before they walk into his den. Matt Henry had a wicketless debut for LSG and he too will be eager to prove himself. In the spin department, Krunal Pandya's two wickets made a lot of difference in the middle-overs and he will have to take the lead again against CSK, while young Ravi Bishnoi will have to get over the thrashing that he received from Ali to find his mojo back. The visitors would be fancying their chances but LSG would

need consistency to pull off another win at CSK's fortress.

SQUADS:
Chennai Super Kings: Rachin Ravindra, Rituraj Gaikwad (c), Ajinkya Rahane, Daryl Mitchell, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Sameer Rizvi, MS Dhoni (wk), Shardul Thakur, Tushar Deshpande, Mustafizur Rahman, Matheesha Pathirana, Nishant Sindhu, Moeen Ali, Mitchell Santner, Shaik Rasheed, Aravelly Avanish, Maheesh Theekshana, RS Hangargekar, Simerjeet Singh, Mukesh Choudhary, Prashant Solanki, Ajay Jadav Mandal, Richard Gleeson and Deepak Chahar.
Lucknow Super Giants: Quinton de Kock, KL Rahul (c & wk), Deepak Hooda, Ayush Badoni, Marcus Stoinis, Nicholas Pooran, Krunal Pandya, Ravi Bishnoi, Mohsin Khan, Shamar Joseph, Yash Thakur, Manimaran Siddharth, Prerak Mankad, Arshad Khan, Krishnappa Gowtham, Amit Mishra, Kyle Mayers, Ashton Turner, Matt Henry, Naveen-ul-Haq, Devdutt Padikkal, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Mayank Yadav and Arshin Kulkarni.



Conversation with Virat Kohli really helped me during bad phase: Riyan Parag

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

When Riyan Parag first arrived on the scene, he was known more for his unabashed expression of opinions on social media than for his batting. But then came a "good 10-15 minutes" of advice from the great Virat Kohli, and things changed for the better. From facing criticism for speaking his mind instead of delivering drab cliches in media interaction or on social media, the 22-year-old player from Assam is now staking a claim for India selection with stellar performances this IPL season. On asking Kohli for advice, Parag told JioCinema, "In my second year, I was having a bad phase in the IPL. I was discussing with him on how to get out of that phase and how he used to handle similar situations, so I can learn from his experience as well. "He gave me a good 10-15 minutes of his time and shared a few things with me, I think that really helped me." Rajasthan Royals' Parag has been in top form this season, and is currently third in the list of highest run-scorers with 318 runs in seven

matches. Besides Kohli, Parag has also learned a lot from another cricket legend Rahul Dravid, who was previously associated with the RR franchise. "I learnt a lot. Cricket-wise, for his batting. But then came a "good 10-15 minutes" of advice from the great Virat Kohli, and things changed for the better. From facing criticism for speaking his mind instead of delivering drab cliches in media interaction or on social media, the 22-year-old player from Assam is now staking a claim for India selection with stellar performances this IPL season. On asking Kohli for advice, Parag told JioCinema, "In my second year, I was having a bad phase in the IPL. I was discussing with him on how to get out of that phase and how he used to handle similar situations, so I can learn from his experience as well. "He gave me a good 10-15 minutes of his time and shared a few things with me, I think that really helped me." Rajasthan Royals' Parag has been in top form this season, and is currently third in the list of highest run-scorers with 318 runs in seven

Starc is a superstar, do not think of him from investment standpoint: KKR CEO Mysore

+PTI ■ KOLKATA

Under scrutiny for his poor show in the ongoing season, IPL's costliest buy Mitchell Starc on Monday received the backing of Kolkata Knight Riders' managing director and CEO Venky Mysore, who said they don't think of him from an "investment standpoint". KKR had bought Starc for a record Rs 24.75 crore but it always came with a caveat as the Aussie left-arm quick had limited experience in the shortest format and was making a comeback to IPL after nine years. "He's a superstar and he's a quality player," Mysore said on the sideline of Knight Golf event at RCGC here.

"We don't think of it from an investment standpoint, because you go to the auction and things happen in the hands of the player, nor is it in the hands of anybody else. "We just felt that an addition to the team like Mitchell Starc would add a lot of value, which it has. I mean, his presence itself in the lineup adds a different dynamic to the team, and there were specific skills that the support staff were looking for. So, we think we had that." Starc's rustiness in the T20 format came to fore as he conceded 100 runs without taking any wicket from his eight overs in the first two matches. It turned from bad to worse on Sunday when he leaked 54



runs from 16 balls at Eden Gardens, and in the final over, RCB No 9 Karn Sharma with little batting pedigree smashed him for three sixes in four balls. Starc, however, managed to salvage some pride taking a low return catch to dismiss Karn that eventually sealed a dramatic one-run victory.

"There are times when games are up and down. Everybody gets taken to the cleaners at times, and there are other times they come and just do their thing and win games for the team. So we're super happy having him in the setup," Mysore said. With five wins from seven

matches at the halfway mark, the second placed KKR look a transformed side under mentor and two-time title winning former captain Gautam Gambhir. Gambhir, who last represented the side in 2017, returned to his former franchise as a team mentor, relinquishing the same position at Lucknow Super Giants this season. Mysore said Gambhir has added a lot of "weight" to the side. "I think the consistency that is shown, I think we look like a more balanced and settled side this year. Needless to say, Gautam (Gambhir) coming in adds a lot of weight purely from the intensity that he brings, the experience that he brings.



Du Plessis, Curran fined for IPL Code of Conduct breaches

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Faf du Plessis has copped a Rs 12 lakh fine, while Punjab Kings captain has been penalised 50 per cent of his match fees for their respective offences, the IPL announced on Monday. Du Plessis was fined for maintaining a slow over rate during RCB's thrilling one-run loss, their seventh of the ongoing season, to Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens on Sunday. "Mr Faf du Plessis, Captain, Royal Challengers Bengaluru has been fined after his team maintained a slow over-rate during Match 36 of the TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens, Kolkata on April 21, 2024," an IPL statement read. It was RCB's first over-rate offence of the season. Curran, on the other hand, was fined half of his match fees for a Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct which refers to "showing dissent at an umpire's decision" during PBKS' three-wicket loss to Gujarat Titans in Mullanpur on Sunday. "Curran committed a Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. He admitted to the offence and accepted the Match Referee's sanction. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding," an IPL media release stated. The loss against GT was Punjab's fourth on the trot, they are now languishing on the ninth place in the points table.

PTI ■ MULLANPUR

Punjab Kings' bowling coach Charl Langeveldt has urged his middle-order batters to step up and "get more runs on the board" following their three-wicket loss to Gujarat Titans in the IPL here. Punjab Kings made brisk start to reach 45 for no loss in five overs but their innings went downhill thereafter as they lost 7 for 47 runs to be all out for 142. GT overhauled the target in 19.1 overs. It was their sixth loss in eight games. "Disappointing. Players are hurt as well as the staff and the fans. We showed a lot of character with the ball. We had a good powerplay with the bat for the first time in three games but in the middle period, their spinners were too quality for our batters and we struggled. "We just need middle order upfront to get more runs. We were probably 20 runs short on that wicket," Langeveldt said at the post-match press conference. While Gujarat Titans used their spinners well with the trio of Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan and Noor Ahmad exposing the opposition with

We need middle order to get more runs: PBKS bowling coach Charl Langeveldt

their guile, PBKS picked Harpreet Singh Bhatia as their Impact Player due to the batting collapse even as Rahul Chahar stayed on the bench. "It was the idea, we could have another spinner [Rahul] Chahar to play in but obviously when you're batting and you've had a collapse like that, it's better to get the runs on board," Langeveldt said. "That's something we want to improve, get more runs on the board. We are going to travel now and we are going to play on better batting wickets and that would give the batters a bit more confidence going into the last few games. We take every game like a semi-final, final but yeah, it's one of those things. "The batters are definitely going to be happy about the next venue (Eden Gardens, Kolkata). The bowlers need to



step up as well when we play at different venues, higher scoring grounds. Hopefully our batters will come good for us."

While PBKS are languishing on the second last position on the points table, Langeveldt tried to look at the positives. "We still have that belief. We are a positive side, the boys showed a lot of character in the field. There's a lot to play for, we just need to win." Rahul Tewatia played an unbeaten 18-ball 36-run innings and scored the winning runs for GT and fast bowler, Mohit Sharma was lavish in his praise for the dashing finisher. "For the past three years, he (Rahul Tewatia) has been with the GT team. He's done it several times before (finishing games for his team). All credit goes to him," Mohit Sharma said. "He practices the same scenarios at the nets. It is also a challenge for us when we bowl to him. He played a crucial innings, which was undoubtedly the turning point in the game for us."

We may have got away with Kohli wicket: Phil Salt

PTI ■ KOLKATA

It was a rub of the green call that Virat Kohli was dismissed off a high full toss and Kolkata Knight Riders managed to eke out a narrow one-run win in their high-scoring IPL match against RCB on Sunday, says stumper-batter Phil Salt. The new Hawk-Eye technology to determine no-balls for height was used when TV umpire Michael Gough deemed a waist-high delivery from KKR's Harshit Rana fair. Kohli was in full flow, scoring a brisk 18 runs off just seven balls, before Rana took a return catch to dismiss the star batter, as it became a pivotal moment

in RCB's narrow one-run loss while chasing a challenging target of 223 at Eden Gardens. "It's split opinion, we know that. From our point of view, we feel like we may have got away with one there. It's the rub of the greens, one of those calls," said the world No 2 T20I batter at the Knight Golf event here. The Englishman further said leveraging technology in this manner is ultimately beneficial for the game as he hinted at the possibility of a future review to assess the effectiveness of these technological advancements. "They brought that data in, the no-ball data, for exactly that purpose. I feel like in 12

months' time maybe there'll be some sort of review. Is it working? Is it not working? Is it a new thing to the game? "But personally, from a player's point of view, any time you're using data and technology to be more precise and get the right decisions, that's a good thing for the game," Salt added. Salt and Sunil Narine, the two KKR openers, have scored the bulk of runs (535 runs from seven innings) for the team who have won five from their seven matches to be in the forefront of a playoff spot. "It's great batting with Sunil, he is a very, very low-key chill guy. He's got a very different sort of skill set when he's opening the



batting, as opposed to, up and down the order. "I suppose one of the good things for me is he takes the pressure off, and I don't have to strike at a rate of 200 in my first 10 balls. Some games I might, but I don't have to. "Normally, one of us gets going, and the other one feeds the strike. So, if we get a good start, we get a couple of boundaries away. You know, we can produce really big power plays, which is something that we've done." They have went about their ways with a meticulous approach, picking the right bowler to attack and relied on match-ups, Salt said.

"Our conversations are mainly, who's going to take what ball, you know, who likes to match up, left arm spin, right arm pace, all that sort of a things. "Normally one of us who wants to put their hand up and take that arm. We keep it very, very simple." Narine has been a revelation with the bat at the top of the order as the KKR spinner who was known as a pinch-hitter, has batted this time with poise and patience. Narine struck his maiden T20 century, scoring 109 against Rajasthan Royals the other day. **GAUTI INSPIRES CONFIDENCE IN NARINE: TENDO:** KKR fielding coach Ryan Ten Doeschate, a

member of their 2014 IPL title winning team under Gautam Gambhir, credited Narine's transformation to the former skipper who is now the mentor of the side. "To be dead honest, I think Gauti did convince Sunil to open the batting and that also comes from the chemistry they have. They've worked together. Sunil played under him. I think it was a pretty easy. "We've tried to get that up to order in other competitions as well. And he hasn't done it. But for whatever reason, Gambhir inspires a lot of confidence in Sunil. And he was happy to take the job on and hopefully that can continue," he added.