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MONEY 10 ZOMATO HIKES PLATFORM FEE TO ₹5 PER ORDER

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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



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.

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

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.



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

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

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."



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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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.



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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.



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. 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 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

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.)



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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

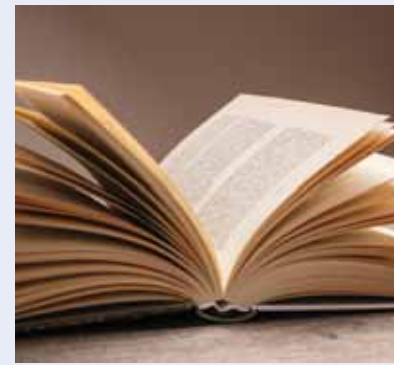
UNIFIED STRENGTH

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Astroturf | 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.

They embody the essence of our collective wisdom, offering insights into bygone eras while inspiring us to chart new territories of imagination. In today's digital age, they face both unprecedented opportunities and challenges. While e-books and digital formats enrich reading experiences, they also test the boundaries of copyright protection.

World Book and Copyright Day, observed on April 23rd, prompts reflection on the enduring value of literature and the necessity of upholding intellectual property rights. This year's theme, "Read Your Way," underscores the joy of reading while advocating for respect towards authors and publishers. As we commemorate this day, let's renew our dedication to safeguarding literary legacies, ensuring that the flame of creativity continues to illuminate our collective path forward. Sangeeta Reddy | Hyderabad

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. 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 'Fats' 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 imbroglio 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-burchal 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 studious 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)

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



greenback. The domestic unit finally settled at 83.37 (provisional) against the dollar, 7 paise higher from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee appreciated by 8 paise to close at 83.44 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias amid easing of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East which improved global risk sentiments. Retreating US Dollar and crude oil prices may also support the rupee. "However, any fresh

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.

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.



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.

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.

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.

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 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.



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.



Bhavesh, Simranpreet win second 25m Pistol Olympic Selection Trials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bhavesh Shekawat 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.

Nottingham Forest cries foul play in inflammatory social media post

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

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

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.

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.

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."

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 Ibrahim Konate sustained a knock to the head at a Forest corner before the goal.

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."

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.

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 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.

"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."

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.



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

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, Simarjeet 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 clichés 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



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.

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



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

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.