

OPINION 6

THE MARGINALISATION OF DISABLED IN POLITICS

WORLD 8

TRUMP TO ATTEND HUSH MONEY TRIAL IN NY

MONEY 10

INDIAN HOUSING MARKET OUTLOOK BULLISH: REPORT

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KKR BOWLING WOES UNDER SPOTLIGHT 12 SPORTS



EC questions Modi, Rahul's poll conduct

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Taking cognisance for the first time of a model code conduct violation complaint against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Election Commission has issued notice to BJP national president JP Nadda and sought his response by April 29. The commission has also served a notice to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, asking him to respond to the complaints filed by the BJP against him and the main Opposition party's senior leader Rahul Gandhi regarding their remarks. Both the BJP and the Congress had raised allegations of causing hatred and division based on religion, caste, community, or language.



BJP supporters during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's election campaign rally for Lok Sabha polls, in Agra, on Thursday PTI

Rahul or Kharge, but the representations received by it were attached to the respective letters and they contained details of allegations against the three leaders. In the notice sent to Nadda, the EC sought his response by Monday to the complaints filed by the Congress, CPI, CPI (ML) and civil society groups regarding the remarks made by Modi on April 21 in Banswara 21 where he dubbed Muslims as infiltrators and alleged that the party will redistribute country's resources among the community.

Continued on Page 2

Stage set for Phase II LS polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid heat waves in most parts of the country, voters will have to brave the searing heat when they step out to exercise their franchise in the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections on Friday. Second phase of Lok Sabha polls will be a litmus test of sorts for the Narendra Modi Government as over 8.08 crore people are set to cast their vote. The key issues facing the BJP are whether it will be able to end its electoral drought in Kerala. Will a spike in political temperature following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's sharp attack on the Congress boost turnout? Will controversy over heritage bill work in favour of BJP? Will controversy over Muslim being given reservation in SCs, STs and OBCs quota help BJP's voters? Will voting in Manipur violence free? Will the consecration of Ram Temple have an impact on voting trends on BJP's southern sojourn? These are some of the questions weighing on people's minds as 88 Lok Sabha seats go to the polls on Friday. After Friday's phase, polling will be over in Kerala, Rajasthan, and Tripura. As many as 1,202 candidates, including prominent faces such as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad, Shashi Tharoor and Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar from Thiruvanthapuram, Ramayan serial actor Arun Govil from Meerut, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's brother DK Suresh (Cong) from Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha constituency, former Karnataka chief minister HD Kumaraswamy (JDS)

STARS IN FRAY		
CONSTITUENCY	CANDIDATES	PARTY
Wayanad	Rahul Gandhi	Congress
	K Surendran	BJP
	Annie Raja	CPI
Thiruvanthapuram	Sashi Tharoor	Congress
	Rajeev Chandrasekhar	BJP
Bengaluru Rural	DK Suresh	Congress
	Dr C N Manjunath	BJP
Jodhpur	Karan Singh Uchiyada	Congress
	Gajendra Singh Sekhawat	BJP
Meerut	Arun Govil	BJP
	Sunita Verma	SP
	Devvrat Kumar Tyagi	BSP
Gautam Budh Nagar	Dr Mahesh Sharma	BJP
	Mahendra Nagar	SP
	Rajendra Singh Solanki	BSP
Mathura	Hema Malini	BJP
	Mukesh Dhangar	Congress
Purnia	Beema Bharti	RJD
	Santosh Kumar Kushwaha	NDA
	Pappu Yadav	Independent

from Mandya will try their electoral luck in the second phase while BJP's OM Birla from Kota, Hema Malini from Mathura, and Gajendra Singh Sekhawat from Jodhpur seeking a hat-trick of wins from their respective constituencies.

Continued on Page 2

MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) of ECI is a set of guidelines issued to regulate political parties and candidates prior to elections. The rules range from issues related to speeches, polling day, polling booths, portfolios, the content of election manifestos, processions, and general conduct, so that free and fair elections are conducted. Political parties or candidates can be criticised based only on their work record and no caste and communal sentiments can be used to lure voters. Mosques, Churches, Temples or any other places of worship should not be used for election campaigns. MCC evolved as part of the ECI's drive to ensure free and fair elections and was the result of a consensus among major political parties. It has no statutory backing which means anybody breaching the



MCC can't be proceeded against under any clause of the Code. Everything is voluntary. The EC uses moral sanction or censure for its enforcement. urge parties to refrain from personal attacks and foul language. No-go areas in speeches are defined to maintain civility. Let us not cross lines in our rivalry. We have issued an advisory for the political parties, they are encouraged to foster a political discourse that inspires

IN HIGHLIGHTS FORMAT ADVISORY ISSUED BY ELECTION COMMISSION (MARCH 16, 2024)

- To foster political discourse which inspire rather than divide
- Issue-based campaigning
- No hate speeches
- No caste or religious appeals
- No criticism of any aspect of private life
- Pattern of past MCC violations to prepare grounds for civilised campaigning in the general elections
- To refrain from unverified and misleading ads
- No masquerading of advertisements as news
- Restraint on social media posts vilifying rivals
- Responsibility on start campaigner to maintain decorum

rather than divides. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, who requested political parties to maintain decorum during campaigning, while announcing General Elections 2024 on March 16, 2024. CEC also advised political parties against hate speeches, caste or religious appeals, criticism of any aspect of private life, masquerading of advertisements as news and social media posts vilifying or insulting rivals. Wherever there will be a case of violation against anyone, however renowned the politician may be, we will not sit back. We will take action. Earlier, we used to morally censor but now we will take action," CEC Rajiv Kumar. March 16, 2024 while responding to a media query about allegations of bias in dealing with MCC violations.

All eyes on North East

RAHUL DATTA ■ NEW DELHI

After observing less enthusiasm in the first phase of polls in some of the North East constituencies, the Election Commission, local administration and political parties in the fray have coordinated for an encouraging second phase of Lok Sabha elections on Friday. Several constituencies in the sensitive areas including Manipur and Tripura will witness polling. Parts of Manipur saw violence in the first phase of polling on April 19 as militants miscreants fired at a polling booth in the State causing panic and disturbances. Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were vandalised and coercion and intimidation allegations were levelled. The state has witnessed unrest for the last few months. A key bridge on National Highway 2 connecting the State capital Imphal and cities in neighbouring Assam and Nagaland was damaged in multiple bomb attacks by insurgents on Wednesday. The sabotage had stranded over 150 trucks on the highway. The security forces carried out a combing operation in villages near the damaged bridge in the Kuki-Zo-

dominated district. In the foothills of neighbouring Sekmai, some 22 km from Kangpokpi, gunfights had been going on between armed groups for the past two days. The attack on the bridge also comes two days before voting in the remaining seats of Outer Manipur reserved Lok Sabha constituency, amid the nearly one-year-old ethnic violence between the Kuki-Zo tribes and the valley-dominant Meiteis. Moreover, arms and ammunition were recovered on Wednesday in a joint operation of the Indian Army and Manipur Police in the violence-hit state's Imphal East district. In Manipur, tensions between the Kuki-Zo tribes and Meiteis have been lingering for 11 months since clashes broke out between the two communities over a cataclysmic disagreements on land, resources, political representation, and affirmative action policies. Meanwhile, all necessary measures have been taken to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections in the Tripura East parliamentary constituency that will go to polls in the second and final phase on Friday.

Continued on Page 2

Kerala ready for election battle

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

As the countdown for Friday's polling for Lok Sabha election from Kerala is in full progress, candidates and party managers spent the penultimate day devising new strategies to ensure maximum votes in their kitties and to embarrass the rivals. Though the day was peaceful as no untoward incidents getting reported from anywhere in the State, the inspection wing of

the Election Commission seized deadly weapons like iron rods, machetes, knives and swords from the campaign vehicle of K Radhakrishnan, the CPI(M) candidate contesting from Alathur early Thursday morning. But Radhakrishnan, a Minister in Pinarayi Vijayan's government, claimed that they were gadgets for removing the flex boards and posters which have been put up as part of campaigning.

K Muraleedharan, the Congress candidate at Thrissur said his party could organise public meetings in support of Hamas soldiers fighting against Israel. "We do not have a military of our own and whatever military is there is under the command of Prime Minister Modi. Had we been ruling India, situation would have

been different," said Muraleedharan who has taken a vow that he would not allow the BJP candidates anywhere in the State to come to the third place. Shobha Surendran, the BJP candidate at Alappuzha, made a startling disclosure on Thursday that a prominent CPI(M) leader was in touch with BJP leadership to crossover to the Hindutva

party but he called off the move following death threats from the Marxists. Though she refused to divulge the name of the "leader", K Sudhakaran, the Congress candidate contesting from Kannur declared that E P Jayarajan, the LDF convenor, who is cut up with the CPI(M) leadership was the one who was about to jump fence. Jayarajan was upset over the CPI(M) leadership ignoring his claims

to the post of Kerala secretary and electing M V Govindan, a lower primary school drill master for the post. Elsewhere in the State, pollsters and observers took stock of the intensity of the campaign and most of them were unanimous in their view of a UDF sweep. P Rajan, author and former senior editor of Mathrubhumi said that the Congress-led UDF has a discernible advantage.

Continued on Page 2

Electoral showdown in North Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The fates of 47 candidates, including two sitting BJP MPs — Sukanta Majumdar the State BJP president, his Darjeeling counterpart Raju Bista — will be decided even as three North Bengal constituencies of Darjeeling, Balurghat and Raiganj go to second phase polling on Friday. In order to conduct free, fair and peaceful polling the Election Commission of India has deployed 272 companies of Central forces out of which 111 would be posted at Raiganj, once a Congress stronghold sending the then Union Minister PR Dasmunshi to Parliament. Usually considered to be a violence-prone district, Raiganj has 418 sensitive booths most of which are around Goalkpokhar, Chakulia and Dalkhola bordering Bihar. The area witnessed massive violence in last year's panchayat elections when two persons were killed in political clashes. BJP has fielded Kartick Paul replacing former



Union Minister and sitting MP Debashree Chowdhury — who has been shifted to Kolkata South seat — from Raiganj. Paul is facing Trinamool Congress' Krishna Kalyani — who has a dubious record of shuttling between the TMC and the BJP — and comparatively stronger Congress candidate Ali Imran Ramz backed by the Left. A former MLA Ramz joined the Congress from his old party Forward Bloc. There are twenty candidates including one woman in Raiganj.

Continued on Page 2

Congress, BJP clash in Karnataka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress and BJP will lock horns on the electoral battleground again for the 14 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka that go to polls on Friday. It's going to be a straight fight between the ruling Congress and the BJP-JD(S) combine unlike the Assembly elections in May last year which witnessed a triangular contest among the three parties. The State has a total of 28 Lok Sabha constituencies. The second phase of polling in the remaining 14 seats is on May seven. A total of 247 candidates — 226 men and 21 women — are in the fray for the first phase in most of the

southern and coastal districts. More than 2.88 crore voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in 30,602 polling stations where polling will take place between 7 am to 6 pm. While the Congress is contesting in all 14 seats, BJP has fielded nominees in 11 and its alliance partner JD(S), which joined the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in three — Hassan, Mandya and Kolar. Besides the three, segments where elections will be held on Friday are: Udupi-Chikmagalur, Dakshina Kannada, Chitradurga, Tumkur, Mysore, ChamaraJanagar, Bangalore

Rural, Bangalore North, Bangalore Central, Bangalore South and Chikkaballapur. Having scored a thumping victory in the Assembly elections, the Congress now appears determined to put up a strong show. Karnataka is the most important State for the BJP in south India as it's only here that it had held power in the past. In fact, out of the total 30,602 polling stations in the first phase, 19,701 will be webcast, and 1,370 covered via CCTVs. Chikkaballapur has a maximum number of 29 candidates, followed by 24 in Bangalore Central, and Dakshina Kannada has the least number — nine.

Continued on Page 2

Akhilesh Yadav enters LS poll arena

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

After a prolonged period of Aspeculation and internal discord, Samajwadi Party (SP) President Akhilesh Yadav has taken a decisive step by filing his nomination from the Kannauj parliamentary constituency. This move signifies a concerted effort to reclaim the political stronghold lost to the BJP in the previous election, driven primarily by intense pressure from party workers and local leaders dissatisfied with the initial candidate, Tej Pratap Yadav, due to his perceived lack of grassroots connectivity. The decision to field Akhilesh Yadav himself was prompted by a series of events that underscored the growing unrest within the party regarding the choice of candidate for the pivotal Kannauj constituency. Initially, Tej Pratap Yadav, scion of the SP legacy as the grandson of Mulayam Singh Yadav and nephew of



Akhilesh, was nominated for the seat on April 22. However, his scheduled visit to Kannauj on April 23 was abruptly cancelled amidst internal opposition, signalling discord within the party ranks. Concerns were raised over Tej Pratap's lack of familiarity with the local populace, which could potentially weaken the party's position in the region. The workers then requested Akhilesh to contest the election. Local journalist Sateyendra Yadav, highlight the deep-rooted connection between the workers in Kannauj and Akhilesh, viewing him as their natural leader.

Continued on Page 2

Delhi LG in the dock

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/NEW DELHI

Ahead of the second phase of voting on Friday, the Congress on Thursday asked the Election Commission to take action against Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena for visiting various Church leaders in Kerala ahead of the Lok Sabha election, in violation of the Model Code of Conduct. Recently, West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose had called off his proposed visit to Cooch Behar heeding the advice of the EC. Leader of the Opposition in

the Kerala Legislative Assembly VD Satheesan VD Satheesan claimed that Saxena, who is on a two-day visit to Kerala, requested an audience with the heads of the Syro Malabar Church, Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Cardinal George Allencherry and others. He also met bishops of the Believers' Church. The Believers' Church, which is a Pentecostal church, has come out in support of the BJP. Satheesan on Thursday urged the EC to take action against the LG for allegedly visiting heads of churches in the southern State.

Continued on Page 2

CBI files first FIR in Sandeshkhali case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has registered the first case in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali related to the land grab and sexual assault allegations against five influential people there, officials said on Thursday. The case pertains to a land dispute where women of the victim's family had to allegedly face sexual assault from influential people in the area, they said. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has not yet disclosed the identity of



the five accused and the victims. The Calcutta High Court on April 10 had ordered a court-monitored CBI investigation into allegations of crimes

against women and land grabbing in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali, saying an "impartial inquiry" was required in the interest of justice and fair play. The CBI had circulated an email ID for people to make complaints in such cases in which a large number of complaints were received. The agency had dispatched a team to Sandeshkhali to ascertain allegations and proceed with the registration of cases where allegations could be prima facie verified.

Continued on Page 2



Maharashtra LS polls: Sena vs Sena dominates polls, BJP fights to retain four seats

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

As Maharashtra goes to the second phase of Lok Sabha polls in eight constituencies—five in Vidarbha region and three in neighbouring Marathwada on Friday, the ruling Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena will be slugging it out with the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena in three of the constituencies, while its senior partner BJP appears to have a tough task on hand to retain of its four sitting seats. The Congress, which had failed to win even one seat from among the eight currently poll-bound seats in the 2019 polls, has something to cheer this time around, as it may end up bagging at least a couple of seats in the second phase of polling—especially after Rahul Gandhi's electioneering at Amravati where he managed to elicit enthusiastic response from a huge crowd gathered at his rally and the anti-incumbency factor at Nanded in the

neighbouring Marathwada. Like in the first phase of Lok Sabha polling in five Lok Sabha constituencies of Vidarbha held on April 19, there's absolutely no wave of any kind in Buldhana, Akola, Amravati, Wardha, Yavatmal-Washim—all in Vidarbha region, Hingoli, Nanded, and Parbhani—in Marathwada region, where an approximate 1.5 crore voters will choose eight winners from 299 candidates in the fray. In a way, it is going to be a litmus test for the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, which is taking on the Shiv Sena (UBT) in the constituencies of Buldhana, Yavatmal-Washim and Hingoli. This is the second election that the Shiv Sena outfits are fighting against each other after Shiv Sena split after senior party leader Eknath Shinde rebelled against Uddhav Thackeray, walked out of the party along with 40-odd MLAs teamed up with the Opposition BJP to form a government in Maharashtra in June 2022. In the first election which was by-

poll held on November 6, 2022, the Shiv Sena (UBT) had won the Andheri (East) Assembly seat. Between the two Shiv Sena outfits, the Shinde Sena has an advantage over the Uddhav Sena as it has managed to retain the parent party's symbol of Bow and Arrow. The Sena (UBT), which is reaching out to the voters with a new symbol "Mashaal" (Flaming Torch), has already had a run-in with the election authorities who have ordered the party to remove words "Jai Bhavani" and "Hindu" from the song brought by the party to promote its new party symbol. In Buldhana, Shiv Sena (UBT), three-time Shiv Sena MP Prataprao Jadhav is taking on Narendra Khedekar of the Sena (UBT). In the neighbouring Yavatmal-Washim, the Shinde Sena has dropped its five-time MP Bhavana Gwali and fielded Rajashree Patil, wife of the party's Hingoli MP Hemant Patil against Sanjay Deshmukh of the Sena (UBT). In Hingoli,



the Shinde Sena has nominated Baburoo Kolatkar against Nagesh Patil Ashtikar of the Sena (UBT). Amravati—where actress-turned sitting MP Navneet Rana of the BJP is fighting an admittedly tough battle against LS poll debutant Balwant Wankhede of the Congress—has come into sharp focus after Rahul Gandhi's rally on April 24. At the Amravati, Rahul—in a retaliation to the bogey of "redistribution of wealth" used by the ruling BJP against his party, had said that the



Narendra Modi government in its ten years' rule had waived the loans worth a staggering Rs 16 lakh crore "22 to 25" super-rich persons and made them into billionaires and if the Congress-INDIA was voted to power, it would make crores of people in the country "lakh-patis". Rahul's identical speeches at Amravati and Solapur created buzz across the state, because his address went well with the women voters. Much to the embarrassment of the BJP leadership, a video clip in which the party candidate

from Amravati Navneet Rana saying at a rally—"that there is 'no Modi wave', that she was speaking the truth, it reflected the mood of the people on the ground and that the party will have to fight the election as if it was a gram panchayat election—went viral. Friday's polls will provide an opportunity to former chief minister and late Union Home Minister S B Chavan's son Ashok Chavan, who quit the Congress and joined the BJP in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls, to prove his popularity in his home constituency of Nanded, where sitting BJP MP Prataprao Patil Chikalkar is pitted against another two-time sitting MLA Vasant Chavan of the Congress. Ashok Chavan is no longer a force to reckon with on his home turf. No wonder, he is trying hard to redeem himself by ensuring the victory of the sitting BJP MP. Incidentally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing a rally at Nanded, had slammed Congress leader

Rahul Gandhi, by saying that Shehzada" and his team were waiting for the polling to get over in Wayanad, from where he is contesting, to find another safe seat for him, and predicted that he (Rahul) will "run away" from Kerala like he did from Amethi. It remains to be seen if Modi's staunch criticism of Rahul will have an impact on the voters in Nanded. Akola is another seat which has evoked a lot of interest among the people across the state, because Prakash Ambedkar, the grandson of late B R Ambedkar and founder-chief of Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), is seeking entry to Lok Sabha for the third time. After unsuccessful efforts to rope him into the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), Prakash Ambedkar has fielded seven out of the eight poll-bound seats while he himself is candidate in Akola, his brother Anandraj Ambedkar is contesting from Amravati as the Republic Sena nominee.

In Akola, Prakash Ambedkar is locked in a three-cornered contest against Anant Dhote of the BJP and Abhay Kashinath Patil of the Congress. The Akola seat is currently held by the BJP in Lok Sabha. Known for Gandhi's Sevagram Ashram, Wardha is another seat where keen contest is expected. Here, two-time sitting BJP MP Ramadas Tadas is battling it out with three-time MLA Amar Kale of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP. He faces severe anti-incumbency. Intra-party dissent is also threatening to affect his poll prospects. In Parbhani, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena candidate Sanjay Jadhav is sitting pretty as there is no ruling MahaYuti candidate here. He is taking on relatively weak Rashtriya Samaj Paksha (RSP) candidate Mahadev Jankar. Though the ruling MahaYuti has announced its support for him, it remains to be seen if the ruling alliance's support will translate into votes in this constituency.

SC to share information about filing, listing of cases through WhatsApp: CJI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant step towards digitalisation, Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud on Thursday announced that the Supreme Court will share information relating to cause lists and filing and listing of cases to advocates through WhatsApp messages, saying it will have a "big-bang impact" and will go a long way in saving paper and the earth. The announcement on integration of WhatsApp with its Information and Communications Technology (ICT) services was made by the CJI before a nine-judge bench headed by him commenced the hearing on the vexed legal question arising from the petitions about whether private properties can be considered "material resources of the community" under Article 39(b) of the Constitution, which is a part of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPP). In the 75th year of its existence, the Supreme Court launches a small initiative. It

has the potential to have a big-bang impact. WhatsApp messenger has been a ubiquitous service in our daily lives and has taken the role of a powerful communication tool. To strengthen the right to access to justice and enhance transparency in the judicial system, the Supreme Court announces integration of WhatsApp messaging services with its IT services," the CJI said. Elaborating further, Justice Chandrachud said under this initiative, the Advocates-on-Records (AoRs) and the litigants, who appear in person before the top court, will get automated messages regarding electronic filing of cases, cause lists, orders and judgements. "The cause lists will be sent to all members of the bar by the registry as and when published. The orders and judgements available on the website will also be sent through WhatsApp," he said. A cause list features the cases to be heard by a court on a



given day. "This is another revolutionary step..." Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said. The CJI also shared the top court's official WhatsApp number 8767687676 and said it will not be receiving any messages and calls. "This will bring a significant change in our working habits and will go a long way in saving papers and our planet Earth," Justice Chandrachud said. The CJI, referring to digitisation of judicial functions, said now more and more lawyers will have access to the courts and "even people from remote

areas can access simple cases involving citizen issues as well." "We are also migrating all our services into Meghraj cloud 2.0 which is the cloud infrastructure created by National Informatics Centre (NIC)...The data is preserved on servers in India," he said. Taking note of the submissions of a lawyer that high courts and tribunals are not on the same page as the Supreme Court on the issue of technological advancement, he said, "Some high courts say tell us 48 hours in advance for video conference links and you can get only if you are above 60 years of age (and have difficulty attending the proceedings physically). We had to pass a judicial order saying what this is and how it can be done." Underscoring the importance of video conferencing facilities, the CJI said if the investigation officer (IO) of a case has been transferred, he should be able to appear virtually. The trial court proceedings need not be adjourned if the IO has been

shifted, he said. "We are moving rapidly by pushing the high courts to do this and there is financial backing also. And now the money goes straight from the central government through the e-court committee of the high courts," he said. The top court, under the leadership of CJI Chandrachud, has been taking steps to digitise the functioning of the judiciary. He said the Centre has sanctioned Rs 7,000 crore for the e-court project. The solicitor general shared the views of the central government and the prime minister and said they were committed to digitisation of the judiciary to enhance the access to justice for common litigants and lawyers. "There is a direction from the prime minister that gives first priority to digitisation because access to justice is possible to the common man if there is digitisation and this is the priority of the government too," the top law officer said.

All eyes on North...

From Page 1

A total of 13.96 lakh voters are eligible to exercise their franchise. Out of them, 7.02 lakh are males, 6.94 lakh are females and 13 are transgenders. The constituency has 38,245 service voters, and 8,942 voters above 85 years

old. As many as 16,260 Bru voters, settled in different locations, will cast their votes in the parliamentary constituency. Assam is all set to witness a triangular and a direct contest for the second of the three-phased polls in five constituencies to decide the fate of 61 candidates in the fray on Friday

Electoral showdown in North...

From Page 1

Neighbouring Balurghat seat has been a traditional RSP stronghold which slipped into the hands of the TMC in 2009 before being wrested by BJP's Sukanta Majumdar in 2019 by more than 30 thousand votes. Majumdar faces a tough challenge from State minister Biplab Mitra who too had shuffled between BJP and TMC. The RSP backed by the Congress has fielded Joydeb Siddhanta. Cut to cooler climes at Queen of Hills, Darjeeling where BJP's Raju Bista is facing TMC's Gopal Lama

and Congress' Munish Tamang who is being supported apart from the Left and CPRM Humro Party chief Ajoy Edward. While Bishta faces challenge from his own party MLA Bishnu Prasad Sharma who is contesting as an Independent after the BJP refused to field him as a Bhumiputra he has the support of Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (Gurung) and JKLF. The TMC is backed by the Benay Tamang faction of the GJM which is presently ruling the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration. The number of sensitive

booths at Darjeeling is 308 out of which most are in the plains of Siliguri, sources say. According to ECI sources 88 companies of CAPF have been deployed in Darjeeling which 73 companies have been sent to Balurghat. Apart from this 12,983 State police personnel will also be deployed by the Commission. On the possibilities of the parties winning the seats local sources said while in Raiganj all the three groups were equally placed at Darjeeling and Balurghat the BJP was a tad ahead with the TMC next in tow.

EC questions Modi, Rahul's poll...

From Page 1

These complaints had referred to Modi's allegations that the Congress wanted to redistribute the wealth of the people to Muslims and that the opposition party won't even spare the 'mangalsutra' of women. The speech led to a major political slugfest with the Congress and other opposition parties accusing the prime minister of making false claims and the BJP alleging that the Congress was nursing an agenda of Muslim appeasement at the cost of weaker sections of the society. Addressing the poll rally, Modi had said: "The Congress manifesto says they will calculate the gold with mothers and sisters, get information about it and then distribute that property. They will distribute it to whom—Manmohan Singh's government had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's assets." Officials said it is the first time that the panel has taken cognisance of a complaint against any prime minister. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the EC had given a clean chit to Modi on complaints lodged by the opposition parties. Then election commissioner, Ashok Lavasa, gave a dissent note on some of the decisions taken by the EC on complaints against the prime minister. In its notice, the EC has invoked Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act and held the party presidents responsible, as a

first step, to reign in star campaigners. The EC said it has taken a view that while individual star campaigners would continue to remain responsible for speeches made by them, the Commission will address party chiefs "on a case-to-case basis". Reacting to this, the Congress said the Election Commission is "super, super cautious" when it comes to complaints against Modi. "Star Campaigners are expected to contribute to a higher quality of discourse by way of providing an all-India perspective, which sometimes gets distorted in the heat of the contests at the local level. Thus, the expectation from Star Campaigners is to provide corrective action or a sort of healing touch, when intensity of local campaign disrupts or inadvertently crosses over such boundaries," wrote Senior Principal Secretary Narendra N. Butolia in the letter to Nadda. Thus, the expectation from Star Campaigners is to provide corrective action or a sort of healing touch, when intensity of local campaign disrupts or inadvertently crosses over such boundaries. The Star Campaigners are thus expected to utilize this privilege for "propagating the programme of the political parties" and, therefore, their speeches in the campaign space necessarily needs to be judged at a higher threshold of compliance," it added.

Akhilesh Yadav enters...

From Page 1

He asserts that Akhilesh's candidacy is vital for maintaining the party's strength and enthusiasm among supporters, particularly considering the significance of Kannauj as a historical bastion of the SP, which suffered a setback in the 2019 elections. Analysts predict that Akhilesh Yadav's decision to contest from Kannauj will have profound implications, not only within the constituency itself but also in neighboring regions such as Mainpuri and Etawah, reshaping the dynamics of electoral competition in central Uttar Pradesh. Akhilesh Yadav's association with Kannauj dates back to his earlier political career, having been elected MP for the first time in a by-election held in 2000, followed by successful tenures in 2004 and 2009. His wife, Dimple Yadav, also entered the political arena through Kannauj, winning unopposed

in a by-election in 2012 after Akhilesh resigned to assume the role of Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Despite Dimple's victory in the 2014 general elections, the BJP's Subrata Pathak secured the seat in 2019 by a narrow margin. SP leaders view Akhilesh Yadav's candidacy as a strategic maneuver with multifaceted benefits. As the current Leader of the Opposition in the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, Akhilesh's potential victory in Kannauj would serve to galvanize party morale and energize workers in adjoining constituencies, thereby augmenting the party's electoral prospects. Furthermore, the strategic plan to have Akhilesh contest in Kannauj and subsequently pass the baton to his protegee, Tej Pratap Yadav, post Lok Sabha elections, is perceived as a calculated strategy to ensure the party's sustained presence and relevance in the region.

Kerala ready for election...

From Page 1

"If the BJP manages to increase the vote share, it may help the LDF to win three or four seats. But the interesting point to note is that Kerala voters have learned to vote in a discriminate

manner and that is the reason why we see a change in pattern during assembly and Lok Sabha polls in the State," said Rajan. The octogenarian poll pundit also made it clear that his assessment was based on newspaper and TV channel reports. Kevin Peter, founder, CASA, an umbrella organization of all Christian sects in the State said there would be many surprises once the election results are declared on 4 June. "The

Congress, BJP clash...

From Page 1

JD(S) leader H D Kumaraswamy from Mandya, his brother-in-law and noted cardiologist C N Manjunath from Bangalore Rural on a BJP ticket, erstwhile Mysuru royal family scion Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar from Mysore, also from the BJP, and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar's brother and MP D K Suresh of Congress from

Bangalore Rural, are among the prominent candidates in the fray in the first phase. Also in the fray are BJP MP Tejasvi Surya from Bangalore South against Minister Ramalinga Reddy's daughter Sowmya Reddy of Congress, Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje on BJP ticket from Bangalore North against former IIM Bangalore professor M V Rajeev Gowda of Congress. M

CBI files first...

From Page 1

After preliminary verification during a field visit in the area, the CBI has registered the first FIR in such allegations of land grab and assault on women handed over to it by the Calcutta High Court. The High Court had also directed the CBI to file a comprehensive report on the alleged illegal conversion of agricultural land into water

bodies for pisciculture after conducting a thorough inspection of revenue records and physical inspection of land alleged to have been converted. The central agency has been tasked to investigate allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali and submit a comprehensive report to it at the next date of hearing on May 2.

Delhi LG...

From Page 1

He claimed that the LG is visiting them to "lure" them to take a stand in favour of BJP in the Lok Sabha elections on April 26. Satheesan, in a letter to the Commission, alleged "blatant violation of the model code of conduct" by the Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena through his

meeting of church heads in Kerala. "I am writing to invite your attention to the blatant violation of the model code of conduct by the Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena by visiting various church heads in Kerala to lure them to take a stance in favour of BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections," the opposition leader said in his complaint. Pointing out that as a "constitutional head" of a state,

the L-G is "restricted from involvement in any political activity", Satheesan said, "The Delhi Lieutenant Governor visiting various Church heads in Kerala just ahead of the Lok Sabha elections to garner votes for the BJP is a blot on democracy and its founding values." It may be recalled that the Election Commission has not allowed the West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose to visit Cooch Behar on April 18

and 19 as the silence period for the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls. In its communication to the governor's office, the poll body said that under the Model Code of Conduct and because April 19 is a poll day, no local programme can be organised for the governor, said people familiar with the matter in the EC. "As per reports, leaders of some of the churches have declined to meet the Lieutenant Governor," he said.

Stage set for phase II LS...

From Page 1

The BJP is relying on actor Raveesh Gopi, Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar and Anil Antony, the son of veteran Congress leader A K Antony, to open its account in Kerala which has never elected an MP from the party. A day before the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls,

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday urged people to support his party and asserted this is an election to save democracy and the Constitution which he alleged the BJP-RSS are trying to "destroy". Rahul who is seeking a second-straight term from Wayanad in Kerala, in a video appeal said this election is to save democracy and the Constitution. "On one hand there is the BJP and the RSS that are trying to finish democracy and destroy the Constitution and on the other hand there is the Congress and the INDIA alliance that is saving democracy and the

Constitution," he said. Notably, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday warned of heatwave to severe heatwave conditions in parts of West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh during the next five days. It has issued a red warning for West Bengal and Odisha and an orange alert for Bihar and parts of Karnataka. The Met office said high humidity could add to people's inconvenience in Tripura, Kerala, coastal Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Assam, Meghalaya and Goa.

More than 16 lakh polling officials have been deployed across 1.67 lakh polling stations for over 15.88 crore voters, the EC said. Voters include 8.08 crore males, 7.8 crore female and 5,929 third gender electors. As many as 34.8 lakh first-time voters are registered to cast their votes. Additionally, there are 3.28 crore young voters in the age group of 20-29 years, it said. There are over 14.78 lakh registered 85+ years old, 42,226 voters above 100 years and 14.7 lakh PwD voters for phase 2 who have been provided the option to vote from the comfort of their homes.

The EC said three Helicopters, four Special trains and nearly 80,000 vehicles have been deployed to ferry polling and security personnel. It further said that 251 Observers (89 General Observers, 53 Police Observers, 109 Expenditure Observers) have already reached their Constituencies days before the polls. They serve as the eyes and ears of the Commission to exercise utmost vigilance. Additionally, Special Observers have been deployed in certain states. 9. A total of 4553 Flying Squads, 5731 Static Surveillance

Teams, 1462 Video Surveillance Teams and 844 Video Viewing Teams are keeping surveillance round the clock to strictly and swiftly deal with any form of inducement of voters. 10. According to EC, a total of 1237 inter-state and 263 international Border check posts are keeping strict vigil on any illicit flow of liquor, drugs, cash and freebies. Strict surveillance has been kept at sea and air routes. Around 4195 Model polling stations are being set up across the 88 PCs with local themes. More than 4100 Polling stations will be completely managed by

women including security staff and at over 640 Polling stations by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). In 2019, the BJP had won 53 and its existing allies 12 of these seats, including seven of eight in Uttar Pradesh, all 13, eight and seven in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh respectively, and four of the five seats each in Assam and Bihar. The constituents of the now INDIA bloc had won 23 seats in the last general election. The first of the seven-phase elections held last Friday for 102 seats across 21 states and Union territories saw a voter turnout of around 65.5 per

cent. In the first phase on April 19, polling was completed in all seats of Tamil Nadu (39), Uttarakhand (5), Arunachal Pradesh (2), Meghalaya (2), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1), Mizoram (1), Nagaland (1), Puducherry (1), Sikkim (1) and Lakshadweep (1). In 2019, the NDA had won 56 of these 89 seats and the UPA 24. Six of these seats have been redrawn as part of the delimitation exercise. It may be recalled that polling for 29-Betul PC in Madhya Pradesh was rescheduled in the third phase due to the death of a candidate from Bahujan Samaj Party.

MCD Mayoral polls postponed

SAUYMA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Polls to elect the new Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), scheduled for Friday, has been postponed due to non-appointment of presiding officer following a letter on behalf of Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday, stating that he "does not deem it appropriate to exercise his power as administrator to appoint the presiding officer in absence of the inputs from chief minister". The MCD said even though it got the Election Commission's nod to hold the mayoral polls, the appointment of the presiding officer has not taken place. Therefore, it may not be possible to conduct the elections for mayor and deputy mayor,

the MCD said in its order. Saxena, in a letter, attributed the reason for the postponement to the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal being in the Tihar jail and said, "Given the current circumstances, this is out of the realm of possibility and any deviation in the process of obtaining such advice would only be questionable. These are peculiar and unprecedented circumstances where the serving Chief Minister is under judicial custody as an under trial prisoner involving a corruption case and therefore cannot discharge his constitutional obligations functions." He said that "after thoughtful consideration of the matter and for upholding the sanctity of aforementioned provision of law and constitution", he is postponing the appoint-



ment of the Presiding Officer. Further, Saxena informed that the incumbent Mayor and Deputy Mayor will continue to hold the offices until the elections are held. Taking a dig at Bharadwaj, the Lieutenant Governor said, "The Minister (UD) in his aforementioned note to me has also underlined the same and stated that the Chief Minister is under judicial custody and therefore can not be involved in the disposal of the proposal. The

Minister has sought to appropriate the decision in this regard, upon himself." Meanwhile, the opposition has raised concerns on the postponement and accused the BJP-led Centre of hatching a conspiracy to halt the mayoral polls and oust AAP from the MCD. "The BJP got this election cancelled despite there being permission from the Election Commission. The LG office has cancelled the polls saying he works on the advice of the chief minister. There have been previous instances where he has not followed the aid and advice of the chief minister," AAP MCD in-charge Durgesh Pathak claimed. The Congress had supported the AAP candidate for Mayor in a bid to fight against BJP united. Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee in

charge of MCD Jitender Kumar Kochar said that the LG's decision to put on hold the election, despite the ECI's nod, was at the behest of the BJP, fearing a defeat in the MCD with the Capital gearing up for the Lok Sabha elections. "The LG's decision was an anti-Dalit move as this year, the Mayoral election was for the reserved category candidate, and the decision to postpone the election has hurt the sentiments of the Dalit community," he said. The post of the mayor in the second term is reserved for councillor from reserved category. "People of Dalit community are calling for this development. This shows that BJP is anti-Dalit. Even in 2019 when the Lok Sabha polls were on, mayors were elected," Rajendra Nagar MLA Pathak said.

Kejriwal under round the clock surveillance: Sanjay to PM, LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Thursday wrote letters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, alleging Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal lodged in the Tihar jail was put under round the clock CCTV camera surveillance. The senior AAP leader also charged that Tihar Jail has been turned into a "torture house" for Kejriwal. Kejriwal, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21 in a money laundering case, is lodged under judicial custody in Tihar Jail since the beginning of this month. Singh said that the treatment meted out to Kejriwal was against "democratic dignity" and needed to be

stopped immediately. The three-page letter penned by Singh in Hindi also attacked the two while raising the issue of alleged 24-hour CCTV surveillance and "harassment" of Kejriwal citing that the chief minister was provided insulin for high blood sugar after 23 days in jail. "His each activity is being watched as if he was being spied by some big time spy," Singh alleged. Citing former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the AAP MP wrote, "It is very important

to have opposition in a democracy. Governments will come and go, political parties will be formed and disintegrated but the country should survive and democracy should always remain." Singh questioned was it Kejriwal's "crime" that he gave good education to the poor children of Delhi, provided good treatment to people, made electricity and water free, planned a scheme for providing Rs 1,000 per month to women. He said the people of Delhi are "very sad" due to Kejriwal's arrest. "Kejriwal ji's old parents are also extremely saddened by your atrocities. His wife Sunita Kejriwal is taking his message to the entire country in this hour of grief. Her heart is also deeply saddened by your unjust conduct," he said.

AAP planning bigger role for Sunita in LS poll campaign

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Since the election campaign is gaining momentum day by day in the national capital, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is planning bigger role for Sunita Kejriwal, wife of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. The party's campaign team is planning for roadshows and other modes of campaign for Sunita Kejriwal in absence of the CM who is in jail in connection with liquor excise policy 'scam'. Party leaders said that Sunita will be attending her first roadshow in East Delhi's Kondli constituency in the coming weekend. Sunita is slowly emerging out of the shadows to assume a bigger role to give a fillip to the AAP's campaigning which has been affected by Kejriwal's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case in March. The Delhi chief minister's judicial custody has been extended till May 7. "The chief minister's wife is scheduled to attend her



first roadshow in Kondli reserved assembly constituency represented by Kuldeep Kumar, who is the AAP's East Delhi Lok Sabha seat candidate, in the coming weekend," said a party functionary. Sunita will also attend roadshows in the other three Lok Sabha seats contested by the AAP in Delhi, he said. Delhi AAP convener Gopal Rai said the next phase of party's Lok Sabha campaign 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' (response to imprisonment of Kejriwal) with vote, will begin from April 27. "Sunita Kejriwal, the wife of Chief Minister and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, will also go among the people," Rai said.

AAP candidate from East Delhi Kuldeep Kumar told PTI, "This is my good fortune that she chose East Delhi to start the Lok Sabha campaign and she specially chose that area where I started my political career and from where I have got love and blessings. People of Delhi and the Kondli area are standing with her during this time." He said that she was standing "rock solid" against the "authoritarian regime" in the country and inspired the AAP volunteers. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said in a press conference that Sunita Kejriwal will campaign in different areas of Delhi. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will also campaign in Delhi, he added. Singh said the AAP's main slogan is 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se'. Kejriwal, who is like a son of Delhi people and who arranged free education, health, water, electricity facilities, has been put in jail by the BJP government and he must be released from there, Singh said.

AAP launches LS campaign song in view of Kejriwal arrest

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday launched its Lok Sabha campaign song titled 'jail ke jawab mein hum vote denge', aiming to generate sympathy in view of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest. The over two-minute long song, penned and sung in rap style by AAP MLA and party's chief whip in Delhi Assembly Dilip Pandey, was launched by the party leaders at the AAP headquarters.



Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said the public will not support the AAP and they will suffer a crushing defeat. "No matter how many pamphlets the Aam Aadmi Party distributes or songs they play, the public will not support them anymore and they will suffer a severe defeat in the Lok Sabha elections," he added. The party's Lok Sabha campaign has a similar theme and is titled 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' (we will respond to jailing Kejriwal through voting).

Speaking at the song launch, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh called upon the workers to work hard to convert the "anger" among the countrymen over Kejriwal's arrest into votes. He said that a chair was left vacant for Kejriwal. "Whatever programmes were held in this courtyard, whether it was a demonstration, movement or preparation related to the election, we could see him during that time. He stood firmly with the

party workers, Delhiites and worked together with them raising his voice," Singh said. Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in an excise policy-linked money laundering case on March 21. He is currently lodged under judicial custody in Tihar Jail in connection with the case till May 7. Pandey said all election campaign songs of the AAP launched so far have reflected the sentiments of the public. "Our campaign song

reflects the feelings of the people. The things mentioned in the title of this song are the reality of this society. Exactly the same is happening under the misrule of the BJP. Those who opposed the BJP were put in jail," he said. Pandey said that former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren was put in jail, Congress' account was frozen and AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyender Jain and Vijay Nair were arrested. The AAP leader said that those who raised their voice against the BJP were arrested and those who gave money to the saffron party were acquitted. "The BJP has sold everything, including Coal India, ONGC. Sports grounds are being auctioned. The BJP is against Baba Saheb's Constitution. This song also talks about the fact that this country will not be run by a person sitting in Nagpur," Pandey said. "This song tells about the upcoming dangers that if the BJP comes to power by any means, the Constitution of

this country will change. This election will be the last in the country," he added. AAP Delhi State Convener Gopal Rai said the party started the first phase of door-to-door election campaign in Delhi on April 8. Since then, about 200 teams are continuously going door to door with Kejriwal's message, he added. "We have been successful in reaching his message to about seven lakh houses. After the door-to-door campaign, we have started the 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' and 'Sankalp Sabha' campaign in the second phase," Rai said. He said the AAP is launching the theme song to take the election campaign forward more strongly so that Kejriwal's message can be conveyed to the public. "The next phase of the party's election campaign is going to start from April 27. Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal will also go among the people with his message. The whole party will fight together against the dictatorship, oppression and tyranny going on in the country," Rai said.

Over 300 programmes conducted under SVEEP in Noida

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI/NOIDA

Over 300 programmes were conducted under SVEEP in Noida in the run up to the Lok Sabha polls in a bid to increase voter turnout, officials on Thursday said. The programmes included cyclothon, marathon, all-women rally, drives by trans-genders, youth, specially-abled persons, they said. The officials said that the campaigns were also carried out in collaboration with the residents welfare associations in sectors and apartment owners associations in housing societies to check "urban apathy". Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) is the flagship programme of the Election Commission of India for voter education, spreading voter awareness and promot-



ing voter literacy. Gautam Buddh Nagar constituency, which comprises the cities of Noida and Greater Noida, has witnessed low voter turnout in Lok Sabha polls so far. It recorded a voter turnout of 67.40 per cent in 2019, 60.47 per cent in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, 60.38 per

cent in 2014 and an abysmal 48 per cent in 2009, according to the Election Commission statistics. The constituency has consistently recorded voter turnout lower than the national average of 67.40 per cent in 2019, 66 per cent in 2014 and 58 per cent in 2009, the data showed.

"We have made all arrangements at polling booths and expect voter turnout in large numbers. Widespread awareness campaign has been held here," District Magistrate and District Election Officer Manish Kumar Verma told PTI. While announcing the imposition of the model code of conduct on March 16, Verma had noted the "urban apathy" among some citizens in the constituency resulted in low voter turnout here in the past. District Social Welfare and SVEEP officer Shailendra Bahadur Singh since the MCC came into effect, around 300 big and small voter awareness programmes have been held in the constituency. "We have reached out to students in schools and colleges, held campaigns in markets, cinema halls, bus stands and

auto stands to raise awareness," Singh said. "This is the first time that voting booths will be set up inside some of the large group housing societies in Noida and Greater Noida. We have reached out to residents in sectors and in societies, in villages," he added. The officer said that as part of the awareness drive, all-women rally and marathons were held, special rallies were also conducted by trans-genders, youth, specially-abled. "Nukkad natak" and "prabhat pheri" were also held at various locations in a bid to raise awareness and encourage voters to use their right to franchise," Singh added. Gautam Buddh Nagar goes to polls on Friday and has 26.75 lakh registered voters, including 14.50 lakh males, 12.24 lakh female and 119 third gender, according to official data.

AAP completely lost touch with people of Delhi: Sachdeva

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Thursday claimed here that due to nine years of development inertia and corruption, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has completely lost touch with the people of Delhi. The truth behind Arvind Kejriwal's claims of free electricity and water has now been revealed, and there is no hope of the Aam Aadmi Party getting votes on these issues either, he charged. "Today, middle-class families in Delhi are forced to buy electricity at Rs 8 per unit, and shopkeepers at Rs 13 per unit, Sachdeva said. Today, the situation of water supply in Delhi is so dire that in unauthorized colonies, it has



become common for people to be assaulted when fetching water from tankers or public taps, and recently, a woman was murdered over water filling, he added. "After Arvind Kejriwal's involvement in the liquor scam corruption, the support for the Aam Aadmi Party has completely waned, and even volunteers associated with the party are distancing themselves from it," state BJP chief

said. Sachdeva said in such a situation, the AAP is trying to save its political existence by portraying Arvind Kejriwal's arrest for corruption as a political martyrdom, but now, not only Delhi but also the people of all those 21 seats in the country where they are contesting elections have decided to reject "AAP". "Today, not just Delhi, but even the people of Punjab are distressed by the development stagnation and rapid corruption under the Aam Aadmi Party's rule," he said. The Delhi BJP President said that no matter how many pamphlets the AAP distributes or songs they play, the public will not support them anymore, and they will suffer a severe defeat in the Lok Sabha elections.

Two arrested for abducting man, throwing him from eighth floor of building

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two men were arrested for allegedly abducting a 30 year old man and throwing him from the eighth floor of a building in South Delhi's Lodhi Colony over money. According to the police on Thursday, the accused have been identified as Ahmad Salman, aged 29 years old, and Dharmesh Malik, aged 33 years old. Salman was found to be involved in two criminal cases, including an attempt to murder according to the police. "We got to know that the victim, identified as Chandan, took around Rs 8.9 lakh on high interest from Malik, but could not pay back due to which Malik and his associates were pressurising him." Additional Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch) Sanjay Bhatia said. He added that on April 20 around 11 am, both Salman and Malik, along with their



associates, kidnapped Chandan and his friend from Sarai Kale Khan in a car. They took them to the eighth floor of the NDMC building in Lodhi Colony and demanded money. "When Chandan asked for more time, the accused beat him and his friend. They then pushed Chandan from the same floor of the building and fled," the ACP said. A case has been registered under sections 302 (murder), 365 (abduction), 506 (criminal intimidation), and 34 (common inten-

tions) of the IPC, and a team was formed to nab the accused. On the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday, a tip-off was received and a trap was laid at Indrapuram in Ghaziabad from where the accused were nabbed, police said, adding, efforts are being made to nab the remaining accused. Malik during interrogation claimed that Chandan was involved in opening and supplying fake bank accounts which were used in online frauds and betting.

Ice cream vendor stabbed to death over suspected love affair

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 25 year old ice cream vendor was stabbed to death near India Gate, which is a high-security area in central Delhi, on Wednesday in a suspected case of love triangle. The police arrested the accused identified as Ajay from Uttar Pradesh's Noida in the early hours of Thursday, an official said adding that the minor girl has also been apprehended for questioning. The victim, identified as Prabhat, aged 25 years old, was standing near his ice cream cart when he was attacked by Ajay, alias Akshay, at the C-Hexagon of India Gate at around 9 pm. Passersby informed the police after they saw Prabhat lying on the ground in an unconscious state, the police official said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Devesh Mahla said due to the sensitivity of the case, around 12 police teams were formed and multiple CCTV cameras and



technical evidence were analysed. The accused Ajay was arrested within eight hours from Noida. Prabhat's two mobile phones were recovered from the possession of the accused. However, the knife used in the commission of crime is yet to be recovered, according to the police. The police said that Prabhat and Ajay were in a relationship with a teenage girl who lives in south Delhi. "During interrogation, Ajay confessed to killing Prabhat and revealed that he was introduced by the girl to Prabhat as she wanted to get rid of him," the DCP said.

The minor girl has also been apprehended for questioning. The technical evidence proved the role of the girl in the conspiracy, the officer said, adding, she told police that Prabhat used to force her not to talk with Ajay. The officer said the girl was in regular touch on the phone with the accused on the day of the incident. Ajay also called her after he stabbed Prabhat and fled, the person said. The girl was produced before the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) before being sent to a correctional home for minors, the officer said. The police said Prabhat, hailing from Etawah in Uttar Pradesh, was staying in south Delhi's Sangam Vihar. He used to sell ice cream on his cart in South and New Delhi. Ajay, a native of UP's Gonda, used to work in a tent house in Noida. "On Wednesday night, Ajay came with a knife and stabbed Prabhat multiple times and fled from the scene," the police official said.

BSP announces candidates for six LS seats of city

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) on Thursday announced candidates for six out of seven Lok Sabha seats of Delhi. The party has given ticket to Abul Kalam Azad from Chandni Chowk, Ashok Kumar from North East Delhi, Rajendra Kumar Pal from East Delhi, Satyaprakash Gautam from New Delhi, Vijay Baudh from North West Delhi and Vishakha Anand from West Delhi Lok Sabha constituency. The party has not announced its candidate from South Delhi seat. In the last Lok Sabha election held in 2019, these smaller parties along with independents managed to secure only 2.3% of the vote share. The largest of these, the BSP got just 1.1% of the vote, a major decline from the 5.34% the party had received in 2009



and the 14.05% they had received in the 2008 Delhi assembly elections. In recent years, the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi have become a triangular contest between the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). As a result of this, smaller parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Janata Dal (United) and the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) have been pushed to the fringes of politics.

NCBC to summon Karnataka Chief Secretary over quota to Muslims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) would be summoning the Karnataka chief secretary over the "blanket reservation" given to the Muslim community in the State, chairperson Hansraj Ahir said on Thursday. The NCBC has criticised the Karnataka Government's decision to categorise the entire Muslim community as a backward caste for reservation purposes saying such blanket categorisation undermines the principles of social justice. "All castes/communities of Muslim religion in Karnataka are considered socially and educationally backward classes of citizens and are categorised as Muslim Caste sepa-



rately under Category IIB in the State List of Backward Classes," NCBC chairperson Ahir said. "This classification enables them to receive reservation in educational institution admissions and in appointments to posts and vacancies in the services of the State, as per Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution of India," he said. The NCBC has emphasised that while there are indeed underprivileged and histori-

cally marginalised sections within the Muslim community, treating the entire religion as backward overlooks the diversity and complexities within Muslim society. Ahir said the response received from the state government on the matter has not been satisfactory and he would be summoning the Karnataka chief secretary to give an explanation over the move. According to the data submit-

ted by the Karnataka Backward Classes Welfare Department, all castes and communities within the Muslim religion have been enlisted as socially and educationally backward classes under Category IIB in the State List of Backward Classes. The commission, during a field visit last year, examined Karnataka's reservation policy for OBCs in educational institutions and government jobs. While Karnataka provides 32 per cent reservation to backward classes in local body elections, including Muslims, the NCBC stressed the need for a nuanced approach that accounts for the diversity within these communities. According to the 2011 Census, Muslims constitute 12.92 per cent of the population in Karnataka.

US report on rights violations in Manipur deeply biased: MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday described a US State Department report citing alleged incidents of human rights violations including in Manipur as "deeply biased" and said it reflects a poor understanding of India and it attach no value to it. This reaction by Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) came in response to the annual report of the State Department which highlighted instances of human rights abuses in Manipur following the outbreak of ethnic conflict. "This report is deeply biased and reflects a poor understanding of India," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "We attach no value to it and urge you to do the same," he



said at his weekly media briefing. The report also mentioned the raids by Indian tax authorities on the office of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The India section of the report said local human rights organisations, minority political parties and affected communities criticised the coun-

try's government for the delayed action to stop violence and provide humanitarian assistance in Manipur. According to the report, there were a number of press and civil society reports of representatives of political parties using disinformation tactics against civil society organisations, religious minorities, such as Sikhs and Muslims, and the political opposition, sometimes depicting them as security threats. Referring to the tax raids on BBC offices, the report said although tax authorities described the searches as motivated by irregularities in the BBC's tax payments and ownership structure, officials also searched and seized equipment from journalists who were not involved in the organisation's financial processes. "The government invoked emergency powers to ban screening of the documentary, forced media companies to remove links to the video, and detained student protesters who organised viewing parties," the State Department alleged, referring to a BBC documentary on the 2002 Gujarat riots, the screening of which was banned in India.

Kharge seeks time from Modi to explain him Congress Nyay Patra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and sought time from him to explain in person the party's 'Nyay Patra'. In his two-page letter, he told the Prime Minister that he is being misinformed by his advisors about things that are not even written in the 'Nyay Patra' - the Congress manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections. The letter comes after the prime minister attacked the Congress over its manifesto, alleging that the party aims to "redistribute the wealth" of people and give it away to "infiltrators". Modi also accused the Congress of snatching women's "mangalsutra". In his letter, Kharge said the Congress' 'Nyay Patra' aims at providing "nyay (justice)" to the youngsters, women, farm-



ers, labourers and marginalised people across all castes and communities. "It has become your habit to seize on a few words taken out of context and create a communal divide. You are lowering the dignity of the chair by speaking in this manner. You are being misinformed by your advisors about things that are not even written in our manifesto. I would be more than happy to meet you in person to explain our 'Nyay Patra' so that, as Prime Minister of the country, you don't make any statements that are false," he added. The Congress chief also said he

is neither shocked nor surprised by the language used by the prime minister in his recent speeches. "It was expected that you and other leaders from your party would start speaking in this manner after you saw the dismal performance of the BJP in the first phase of the elections," Kharge said in the letter. The Congress has been talking about the deprived poor and their rights ("nyay"), he said and added, "We are aware that you and your government do not have any concern for the poor and dispossessed." "Your 'suit-boot ki sarkar' works for the corporates whose taxes you reduced while the salaried class pays higher taxes. The poor pay GST even on food and salt and the rich corporate claim GST refunds. That is why, when we talk of inequality between the rich and the poor, you are purposely equating it with Hindu and Muslim," Kharge claimed.

Ten Indians working with Russian Army have returned to India: MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ten Indian nationals working as support staff with the Russian military have been released and have returned to India, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday. Giving this information here, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said New Delhi has been pressing Russia to ensure the return of all other citizens serving in similar positions in the Russian military. "Ten such individuals have come back to India and they have been released and they have returned home," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing. After two Indians, working as support staff with the Russian military lost their lives, India last month called on its nationals to not risk their lives by taking up such jobs. Jaiswal said the Indian side is



very actively pursuing the case of all Indians serving with the Russian military at various levels, including with the foreign ministry, defence ministry and several other organisations in Russia. "We are committed to bring back all the people who so far have got in touch with us and want to be released and repatriated and return back home," he said. "We have been assured by the Russian side that the other Indians who are there, they'll also be released and will return home. We are working out

Modi knows polls have slipped out of his hands, says Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday claimed the difference between his party's guarantees and 'Modi Ki Guarantee' is clear and added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi knows that the elections have "slipped out of his hands". In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi said the Congress guarantees a 'government of Indians.' Listing some promises made by the Congress, Rahul Gandhi said women will get Rs 8,500 per month, youth will get a job that pays Rs 1 lakh per year, recruitment will be carried out for 30 lakh vacancies and legal MSP will be provided to farmers. "Modi's guarantee: Adanis' government - The country's wealth in the pockets of billionaires; donation business



extortion gang; Constitution and democracy are over; farmers facing a paucity of finances; the difference is clear!" the former Congress chief said. "Congress will create crores of millionaires in India and Modi ji knows that the election has slipped out of his hands," he said. Addressing a rally in Amravati, Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday had claimed that ten years of the Modi government saw only 22-25 persons becoming billionaires on the back of a Rs 16 lakh crore loan waiver, but if the INDIA bloc comes to power, it will make crores of people "lakhpatis".

112 AFMC graduates of 58th batch commissioned into Armed forces: Officials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 112 medical graduates of the 58th batch of the Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC), Pune, have been commissioned into the armed forces, officials on Thursday said. Of these 112 cadets commissioned into the Armed Forces Medical Services, 87 are Gentlemen Cadets and 25 are Lady Cadets. 81 of them were commissioned into the Army, 10 commissioned into the Navy and 14 commissioned into the Indian Air Force, the Defence Ministry said in a statement. "In a spectacular ceremony one hundred and twelve medical graduates of the 58th batch of the Armed Forces Medical College, Pune, were commissioned into the Indian Armed Forces on April 25 at Capt Devashish Sharma, Kirti Chakra Parade Ground, AFMC," the ministry said.



The chief guest at the ceremony was Director General, Armed Forces Medical Services (DGAFMS) and Senior Colonel Commandant, Army Medical Corps, Lt General Daljit Singh. The DGAFMS reviewed the Commissioning parade that was commanded by medical cadet (now Lieutenant) Sushil Kumar Singh, the statement said. Congratulating the newly commissioned officers, Lt Gen Singh exhorted them to serve the country and the armed forces with utmost dedication and wished them a bright and prosperous future.

Modi pays tributes to Parkash Singh Badal on his death anniversary



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday paid tribute to former Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal on his first death anniversary, saying his indelible spirit and boundless dedication to service are greatly remembered. "Remembering the great Parkash Singh Badal Sahab on his first Punya Tithi. His indelible spirit and boundless dedication to service are greatly remembered," Modi said in a post on X, sharing an article he had written on the stalwart Akali Dal leader after his passing last year. Badal, a widely respected leader, died at the age of 95 in 2023.

Project Cheetah poised to expand to Gandhisagar Sanctuary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As Cheetah pugmarks eagerly anticipate venturing beyond the boundaries of their first home, Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, attention now shifts to the nearby Gandhisagar Wildlife Sanctuary in the State, where the ambitious Project Cheetah is poised to expand. Plans are afoot to release five to eight felines into a fenced area for breeding and conservation efforts later this year. This was shared by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), a pivotal statutory body entrusted with overseeing the protection and preservation of big cats in the country, in its recent post on social media X, former known as Twitter. Five to eight cheetahs will be released into a fenced area in the new areas of Gandhisagar Wildlife Sanctuary in the State also known as Healthland of India possibly in the second half of the year with a focus on the breeding of animals, the NTCA posted



on the social media platform. Gandhi Sagar is about a six-hour drive from Kuno. It is spread across 368 square kilometres and has an additional 2,500 sq km area surrounding it. The official informed that a South African delegation reached India on Tuesday to review preparations at Gandhisagar for the introduction of cheetahs and the progress of the project in the Kuno National Park. "Officials from South Africa visited the Gandhisagar

Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh, and were apprised of preparations to receive cheetahs under the ambitious Project Cheetah. Valuable insights were shared while visiting the bomas, control room, and upcoming veterinary facilities," read the post. It further shared that on Wednesday, the South African delegation met Indian officials in New Delhi, and discussions focused on strengthening collaboration between the two countries in species

conservation, especially Project Cheetah which was kicked off in November 2022. According to a document released by the Union Environment Ministry earlier this year, the long-term goal is to establish a metapopulation of cheetahs in the Kuno-Gandhisagar landscape (area around 9,000 square km) of 60-70 individuals after restorative measures, prey availability, and scientific management are ensured. The current action plan, following the broad framework of the earlier action plan for the introduction of cheetahs in India, has been modified and formulated based on the experiences learned from Kuno suited for the site-specific requirements of Gandhisagar in consonance with the overarching guidelines of IUCN on reintroductions and conservation translocations (2013), the document read. Project Cheetah aims to reintroduce the only large carnivore species that went extinct in independent India. The first batch of eight cheetahs was introduced in India in September 2022, and the second batch of 12 cheetahs was flown in from South Africa last February. The much-vaunted cheetah conservation project initially drew criticism over the animals' deaths. However, with the birth of 12 cubs this year so far, officials claim that the project is on the right track. Namibian cheetah Aasha gave birth to three cubs in January. Jwala, another female cheetah from Namibia, also gave birth to three cubs in the same month. She had delivered four cubs last year but only one of them survived. With South African cheetah Gamini giving birth to six cubs in March, the total number of cheetahs, including cubs, in Kuno is now 26. Since last March, seven adult cheetahs, including Shaurya, have died due to various reasons. The seven adult cheetahs -- three females and four males -- that died include Sasha, Uday, Daksha, Tejas, Suraj, Dhatri, and Shaurya. The first six fatalities occurred in a six-month period between March and August 2023.

Forensic labs need to be augmented for expeditious tests: NHRC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The number of technologically advanced forensic laboratories in India needs to be "augmented for expeditious examination", the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) said on Wednesday. Chairperson, NHRC, Justice (retd) Arun Kumar Mishra, during a core group meeting here also said that investigation and forensics examination should be part of the process and "not independent" of each other. "The observation followed after a core group meeting of the NHRC on criminal justice system reforms," the rights panel said in a statement. The focus was on finding ways to address delay in forensic reports, areas of improvement in the prosecution sys-



tem, and simplification of language used in organs of criminal justice system. During the discussions, it was emphasised that public prosecutors play a very important role at the trial stage and therefore, it is necessary to

create a "cadre-based service" of public prosecutors to ensure transparency and merit in their appointment, the statement said. A training academy should also be set up for them with a research and analysis wing.

They also need to be supported with proper office infrastructure, it said, adding that the witness examination should be the "prerogative of the public prosecutor and not of the judges". The meeting, in hybrid mode, was chaired by the NHRC chairperson in the presence of core group members, experts, academicians, representatives of civil society organisations and senior officers of the Commission. Justice Mishra said forensic examination in the criminal justice system plays a critical role. Delay in forensic examination results in delayed justice, he was quoted as saying in the statement. The number of technologically advanced forensic laboratories needs to be augmented for expeditious examination, he said. The digital forensics also needs to be

strengthened in the wake of "new challenges" of cyber-crime to reach the culprit fast, the NHRC chief added. He emphasised on increased systematic coordination among public prosecutors, forensic teams and the police. For this, their training in the legal provisions, the concept of trial and the importance of forensics is necessary for reforms in the criminal justice system for speedy trial ensuring that any innocent person doesn't suffer, the NHRC chief said. Justice Mishra also said that public prosecutors need to be given exposure to forensics and the concept of trial. He said language is a barrier for the common man in understanding legalese in judgments as most of these are delivered in English, which is difficult to understand for many people.

IHRC adopts new logo to communicate unique identity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Historical Record Commission (IHRC) has adopted a new logo and motto to visually communicate the "unique identity" and ethos it represents, officials on Thursday said. The new logo has been selected by the government through an online competition hosted on MyGov portal from May 12 to June 12 last year, they said. The entry for logo and motto submitted by Shaurya Pratap Singh (Delhi) was selected for logo as well as motto of the IHRC, the Ministry of Culture said in a statement. "In order to visually communicate the unique identity of IHRC and the ethos that it



represents, an online competition was launched in 2023 on MyGov portal to invite the designs for logo and motto, and in response a total 436 entries were received," the statement said. "The pages in the shape of lotus petals represent IHRC as the resilient nodal institution for maintaining historical records. The Sarnath pillar in the middle represents

India's glorious past. Brown as the colour theme reinforces the organisation's mission of preserving, studying and honouring India's historical records," the statement said. Set up in 1919, the Historical Record Commission (IHRC), an apex advisory body on archival matters and headed by the Union Minister of Culture, acts as an all-India forum of creators, custodians and users of records to advise the government of India on the management of records and their use for historical research. The National Archives of India in New Delhi is the Secretariat of Indian Historical Records Commission (later re-designated Indian Historical Records Commission).



Stage set for BJP, Congress poll battle in Jammu Reasi Lok Sabha seat

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

After witnessing a close contest on the Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha seat the stage is now set for another interesting poll battle between the Bharatiya Janta Party and the Congress party on the Jammu-Reasi Lok Sabha seat in the second phase of polling on Friday.



border residents across Jammu and Samba districts, and sense of insecurity regarding land, and resources are the other key factors around which the Congress party ran its campaign to woo the electorate.

districts were removed and attached to the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat during the marathon exercise.

percentage of 68.2 percent. In 2019, Jammu Lok Sabha seat had recorded a turnout of over 72 percent.

Rajiv scrapped inheritance tax to save Indira's wealth from going to Government, says Modi

PTI ■ MORENA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said then-PM Rajiv Gandhi abolished the inheritance tax after his mother Indira Gandhi's death in 1984 to save her wealth from going to the government, and alleged the Congress now wants to bring back the levy.

Congress has committed. I want to put forth an interesting fact. When sister Indira Gandhi passed away, there was a law by virtue of which half of the wealth used to go to the government.



that after its four generations have reaped the benefit of the wealth passed on to them, he said. But the BJP will not allow such designs to succeed, the PM assured the crowd.

Congress cut off her hands and divided the country, Modi alleged. The Congress wants to snatch reservation of SCs/STs/OBCs for the sake of its Muslim vote-bank and was bent on grabbing power with religious appeasement, the PM said.

Stage set for phase II of LS polls in Assam, 61 in fray

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam is all set to witness a triangular and a direct contest for the second of the three-phased polls in five constituencies to decide the fate of 61 candidates in the fray on Friday.

security forces deployed across the five constituencies. The BJP and the Congress are contesting in all five seats, the AIUFD in two and the Trinamool Congress in one.



In Karimganj, a triangular contest is on the cards among sitting BJP MP Kripanath Malla, Hafez Rashid Choudhury of Congress and

Assam minister Parimal Suklabaidya of BJP, Surya Kanta Sarkar of Congress and Radheyshyam Biswas of Trinamool Congress.

the fray in Nagaon, and the contest is set to be triangular between sitting Congress MP Prodyut Bordoloi, BJP's Suresh Bora and AIUFD's Aminul Islam.

Bodo Peoples' Front candidate Durga Das Boro is also expected to put up a good fight.

Anurag Goel said all arrangements have been completed for conducting the polls in a free, fair and peaceful manner.

PUBLIC NOTICE: This is to inform to public at large that my client Sh. Brij Mohan Suri S/o. Washeshwar Nath Suri...

PUBLIC NOTICE: To be known to all that I, Meera Batra, W/o Arun Batra, Plot No. 81, Pooori Marg, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-110057.

NOTICE: I have lost my original Sale Deed for First Floor, E 456, Greater Kailash-2, New Delhi-110048, duly registered in my name before Sub Registrar V, South East, New Delhi as Registration No. 2808 dated 24.02.2005.

CORRIGENDUM: ICICI Bank Regd. Office: ICICI Bank Limited, ICICI Bank Tower, Near Chakli Circle, Old Padra Road, Vadodra, Gujarat. Pin- 390 007

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MORE SUMMER SPECIAL TRAINS-2024: In addition to already announced Summer Special Trains, Railways will run following additional Summer Special Trains as per following details:-

Table with train details for 01015/01016 Dadar-Gorakhpur-Dadar Special Express (Bi-Weekly). Columns include Train No., ARR, DEP, STATIONS, and Train No. 01016.

Table with train details for 01427/01428 Lokmanya Tilak(T.)-Gorakhpur-Lokmanya Tilak(T.) Special Express. Columns include Train No., ARR, DEP, STATIONS, and Train No. 01428.

Table with train details for 01411/01412 Pune-Gorakhpur-Pune Spl. Exp. Columns include Train No., ARR, DEP, STATIONS, and Train No. 01412.

Table with train details for 02250/02249 Delhi Jn.-Patna Jn.-Delhi Jn. Special Express. Columns include Train No., ARR, DEP, STATIONS, and Train No. 02249.

Table with train details for 09478 Patna-Sabarmati Special Express. Columns include Train No., ARR, DEP, STATIONS, and 01 Trip.

Table with train details for 08481/08482 Puri-Anand Vihar(T.)-Puri Special Express (Weekly). Columns include Train No., ARR, DEP, STATIONS, and Train No. 08482.

Table with train details for 04672 Jammu Tawi-New Delhi Special Exp. Columns include Train No., ARR, DEP, STATIONS, and 01 Trip.

Table with train details for 04221 Varanasi-Delhi Jn. Special Express. Columns include Train No., ARR, DEP, STATIONS, and 01 Trip.

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PUBLIC NOTICE: The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA).

ICICI Bank PUBLIC NOTICE - TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET. Includes details of borrower Suman Singh, amount of Rs. 38,49,968.45/-, and auction date on May 22, 2024.

PUBLIC NOTICE: We Vijay Kumar S/o Khemchand and Nanjula Gajwani W/o Vijay Kumar R/O B-1, 1101, Mapso Casabella Sector-82, Gurugram HR, disown our son Manish Gajwani & Daughter in law Divisha Chawla R/O B-1, 1101, Mapso Casabella Sector-82, Gurugram HR, due to their bad habits and bad behaviour with us.

PUBLIC NOTICE: The General public is hereby informed that Mr. Bhabhu Kumar is my client and his wife Mrs. Shakuntala Kumari was the absolute owner of Flat no. F-1, Plot no. C-158, D.F. Dished Extn.-2, Bhaura, Ghaziabad was registered in the office of sub-registrar-III, Mrs. Shakuntala Kumari passed away on 03.01.2021.

CHANGE OF NAME: I, Pooja Sarpal W/O Amit Arora R/O D2/A Jain Nagar Extension Delhi 110081 have changed my Name from Pooja Sarpal to Pooja Arora for all purpose.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Patrimonial dispute

It may be time to debate a tax on inheritance in India, but it will not be a walk in the park

The informal proposal in the Congress quarters of an inheritance tax has garnered attention and curiosity across India. While the party has distanced itself from these remarks, originally made by Indian Overseas Congress chairperson Sam Pitroda, the Statement has given another stick to the BJP to beat the Congress with. As to the viability of implementing a tax system akin to America's, delving into the issue requires a comprehensive examination of various factors, including economic, social and political. The US has long embraced the concept of taxing inheritance, albeit with its own complexities and controversies. The rationale behind such a tax is multilayered. One, it aims to address wealth inequality by ensuring that accumulated wealth is not perpetually passed down generations without contributing to public good. Two, it serves as a source of revenue for the Government, aiding in funding public services and initiatives. However, the implementation of an inheritance tax in India would face unique challenges. One of the primary concerns is the prevalence of informal economies and undocumented wealth, which could potentially evade taxation. Additionally, India's cultural and social fabric places a significant emphasis on familial ties and inheritance practices, making the introduction of such a tax a sensitive issue. Moreover, the Indian taxation system already comprises various levies, including income tax, capital gains tax and wealth tax (though repealed in 2015), which may complicate the addition of an inheritance tax. There are also concerns about the practicality of administering such a tax, given the diverse nature



of assets and prevailing inheritance structures. However, proponents argue that implementing an inheritance tax could serve as a tool for promoting economic mobility and reducing wealth concentration among a select few. By imposing a tax on large inheritances, the Government could potentially redistribute wealth more equitably and generate revenue to fund social welfare programmes. To effectively assess the feasibility of an inheritance tax in India, policymakers would need to engage in extensive consultations with stakeholders, including economists, tax experts, legal professionals and the public. Additionally, careful consideration has to be given to designing a tax framework that minimises loopholes and ensures compliance while addressing concerns related to family businesses, agricultural land and other sensitive assets. Any decision to introduce an inheritance tax should be accompanied by measures to enhance tax transparency, improve enforcement mechanisms and bolster efforts to combat tax evasion and avoidance. In conclusion, while the idea of taxing inheritance in India draws parallels with the US model, its implementation would necessitate a nuanced approach tailored to the nation's unique socio-economic context.

PICTALK



Tibetan monks during special prayers for the long life of the 11th Panchen Lama on his birthday, in Shimla

The marginalisation of disabled in politics



VAMIKA GUPTA

Despite 2.68 crore persons with disabilities, the *divyang* community struggles to find representation in mainstream politics

In the vast landscape of Indian democracy, where diversity should thrive, the voices and needs of individuals with disabilities often echo in silence. Despite India accounting for 2.68 crore persons with disabilities, making up 2.28 per cent of the population as per Census 2011, the disabled community has been unable to find its place in mainstream politics. With the Lok Sabha General Elections 2024 looming large and around the corner, a stark reality emerges: out of the 543 seats, not even one is occupied by a person with a disability. This absence speaks volumes, reflecting a systemic failure to acknowledge the rights and contributions of over 2.68 crore disabled individuals.



As the countdown to the elections intensifies, this leads us to critical questions. Why do the demands of persons with disabilities find little or no place in the manifestos of the political parties? Why do the exit polls overlook this significant demographic, pushing them to the sidelines of the demographic discourse? Can we truly celebrate the biggest festival of democracy with one of the significant sections of the population lagging behind? A vicious cycle of exclusion persists when it comes to the political representation of persons with disabilities. Political parties often overlook people with disabilities, considering them a marginalised group who do not vote and are "incompetent" and "incapable" of creating any electoral impact. Professor Anita Ghai poignantly observes this disparity as "to be disabled is to be disabled by society."

Too often, persons with disabilities are portrayed solely as objects of inspiration, highlighting their perceived "achievements" in crawling, reaching a polling booth and overcoming all the adversities. While these stories may momentarily touch hearts, they ultimately reinforce stereotypes, further excluding the disabled community from active participation in the electoral process. Moreover, the physical barriers encountered at the polling stations compound the challenges faced by disabled voters, stripping away their dignity and agency. Lack of accessibility of polling stations and booths, absence of information, as well as inadequate capacity building of staff to support persons with disabilities, often make it difficult for disabled people to exercise their political rights. For instance, during the Karnataka Assembly Elections held in 2023, when Anitha (38) arrived at the polling center, having traveled 20 km on her three-wheeled mobility bike, she was unable to make her way to the polling booth. There were no wheelchairs stocked at the facility. She says "The ramp was too narrow and could only accommodate a two-wheeler. It could not fit my three-wheeled assisted bike. The only person to ask for help was the security guard, who shrugged it off and told me to 'manage' like the other voters with disabilities, who were forced to crawl up the ramp, to the booth to cast their vote." Anitha's experience serves as a reminder of the systemic neglect that plagues our electoral infrastructure.

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AS WE MARK 75 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE, THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CIVIL AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS OF THE STATE MUST BE RESPECTED AND HONOURED

The challenges multiply for those with lesser known and lesser visible disabilities, such as those with blood disorders and intellectual and developmental disability. For example, the absence of sign language interpreters during political campaigns renders crucial information inaccessible, further alienating persons with speech and hearing impairments. In a democratic process that is built on inclusivity and fairness, these barriers erode the dignity of its disabled citizens, which it promised to uphold. Further, the lack of concrete and official data exacerbates the situation. Without accurate statistics on the number of disabled voters who cast their votes and their representation in positions of power, policy formulation becomes a shot in the dark. The reliance on outdated figures, such as considering only 7 kinds of disabilities as against 21 as per the amended Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD) 2016, further compounds the problem. This dearth of information results in a lack of targeted policies and inadequate budget allocations for persons with disabilities. Yet, amidst these challenges lies an opportunity for trans-

formation. The need is for persons with disabilities to be considered a part of the mainstream discourse around development. It is time to shift from a tokenistic approach to disability towards a more rights-based approach. Significantly, we need to move away from the traditional approach of treating disabled persons as mere beneficiaries and recipients of pensions and assistive devices. As we mark 75 years of independence, the fundamental rights of persons with disability to participate in the civil and political systems of the State must be respected and honoured. This necessitates that persons with disabilities hold a seat at the table, with them being key stakeholders in designing and developing all policies and programs developed for them. Integration of the needs of the disabled community across all facets of governance is the need of the hour. I believe that it is only then that we can truly realise the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' and propel India towards its aspiration of a \$ 5 trillion economy.

(The writer is Program Officer-Advocacy, NCPEDP; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DISRESPECT BY HIGH COMMAND

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Churn in Congress over Delhi candidates", published on April 25, this is my response. The recent resignation of Raj Kumar Chauhan, a stalwart in Delhi politics and a prominent Dalit leader, from the Congress party highlights a deepening discontent within its ranks. Chauhan's departure, fuelled by allegations of disrespect from the party high command, sheds light on internal rifts over ticket distribution and outsider nominations. The incident underscores a broader issue of party unity and inclusivity, especially ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. The rejection of 'outsider' candidates and the clash between grassroots leaders and central leadership reflect a disconnect that could harm the party's electoral prospects. Chauhan's decades-long dedication to the Congress, coupled with his grievances, poses a significant challenge to the party's leadership. His departure, along with the protests against nominations like Udit Raj's, signals a need for introspection and reconciliation within the Delhi Congress. Ultimately, the party must address these grievances transparently to uphold its integrity and regain the trust of its members and constituents alike.

Aysha Singh | Jaipur

CORRUPTION, A PERVERSIVE REALITY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Determining the limits of corruption, the Indian way", published on April 25, this is my response. Corruption, an omnipresent spectre, haunts every facet of Indian society, transcending the boundaries of public and private sectors. While Governmental and political malfeasance often grab the headlines, corruption manifests in myriad forms, from petty bribery to workplace coercion. The notion that only monetary exchanges define corruption overlooks systemic injustices and abuses of power. The oath-bound duty of public officials to serve the populace is marred by arrogance

India's democracy dilemma



Apropos the news article, "The democratic status of India under scanner", published on April 25, this is my response. The V-Dem Institute's report labeling India as an "electoral autocracy" raises eyebrows, suggesting a skewed perspective on its democratic landscape. While global indices like the EIU Democracy Index provide a framework,

their methodology and accuracy have been questioned. Civil liberties, a cornerstone of democracy, show a worrying decline in India, impacting its global rankings and sovereignty. The World Happiness Report highlights India's struggle, exacerbated by the pandemic, influencing its happiness index. Moreover, the RSF's Press Freedom Index depicts a concerning picture, placing India unfavorably alongside Pakistan and Afghanistan. The methodology critique underscores the importance of robust research methodologies. As India faces scrutiny, it's imperative to introspect and perhaps develop indigenous indices aligned with its realities. Decolonising the democracy index could offer a more accurate reflection of India's democratic journey amidst global assessments.

Anand Rajan | Chennai

and apathy, fostering a culture where exploitation thrives unchecked. Despite legislative efforts, corruption persists unabated, prompting introspection on the efficacy of legal remedies. Is corruption an indelible part of our collective psyche, entrenched beyond legislative constraints? The normalisation of corrupt practices challenges societal morality, blurring the lines between acceptance and condemnation. As scandals unveil the deep-seated roots of corruption, it beckons a reevaluation of societal norms and ethical compasses. The lament of a disillusioned officer underscores a sobering reality: corruption knows no bounds, yet its normalisation is a limit we dare not accept.

Nikhil Desai | Pune

NAVIGATING WORKPLACE DYNAMICS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Nurture workplace safety and inclusivity", published on April 25, this is my response. The modern workplace is a dynamic ecosystem, mirroring Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where foundational

elements must be addressed before reaching higher goals. With a diverse workforce spanning multiple generations, including X-Gens to Generation Alpha, it's imperative to adapt policies and practices accordingly. Pay parity, safe workplaces and respectful environments are crucial pillars, alongside diversity and inclusion initiatives. Flexibility, accessibility and appreciation further enhance employee well-being and engagement. Training and development programs ensure continuous growth and inclusivity. By prioritising accessibility and accommodation, organisations demonstrate their commitment to equality. In this evolving landscape, fostering a culture of support and appreciation is key to nurturing talent and achieving collective success. As we navigate these workplace dynamics, it's essential to embrace change and prioritise the well-being of all employees.

Pooja Menon | Kochi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Why do Indians excel abroad and fail back home?

Emphasis on fostering creativity, innovation and risk-taking is pivotal for the nation to become a global hub for knowledge creation



RADHIKA SHRIVASTAVA

Indians have undeniably left a lasting impression across various global arenas, spanning technology, entrepreneurship, academia and healthcare. However, a perplexing paradox persists - why do Indians excel overseas while encountering unique obstacles within their homeland? This compelling question warrants immediate attention and a thorough exploration of the multifaceted challenges at hand. **Deciphering the Enigma: Indian Excellence Abroad and Domestic Hurdles**

The disparity between Indian achievements on the international stage and the hurdles faced domestically primarily stems from deficiencies in the public education system. The insightful narrative of "Why Indians Succeed Everywhere Except in India," as presented by EW, adeptly dissects this paradox, attributing it to the lamentable State of public education - an observation that holds true. **The Interplay of Education, Governance and Economic**



Development

The nexus between the quality of education and the overall health of political, socio-economic and law and order systems is profound. A robust education system forms the cornerstone for an informed citizenry, competent leadership and a flourishing economy. Recognising education as a catalyst for effective governance and economic prosperity, it is imperative to prioritise education within national development strategies. **Challenges in Primary and Secondary Education** The current State of primary and secondary education reflects the trajectory of our nation's future. ASER surveys reveal a stark reality - a significant portion of our youth lacks even basic

skills expected at their grade levels. This systemic failure jeopardises the very foundation of our future, necessitating a discerning response to address underlying issues. **Higher Education: Quality and Employability Crisis** Graduation should ideally open doors to a world of opportunities. However, India grapples with the challenge of higher education - the mismatch between degrees and employability. It is crucial to question whether higher education institutions adequately prepare graduates for the dynamic job market, reflecting the systemic challenges faced by graduates and the subsequent brain drain.

The Brain Drain Predicament: Retaining India's Brightest Minds

While India boasts exporting talent worldwide, there's a sobering reality - a loss of intellectual capital that could otherwise fuel national growth. Understanding the migration patterns of Indian graduates to foreign shores challenges the convention-

al narrative of brain drain. Yet, it's vital to acknowledge the diaspora's positive contributions as a bridge between India and the global economy. **A Call to Action for Change** Viewing the emigration of skilled individuals as a loss for India underscores the urgency for comprehensive strategies to reverse brain drain, attract exceptional talent back home and invest in research and development.

A paradigm shift in higher education is imperative, emphasising creativity, innovation and risk-taking to foster a globally competitive India.

Restoring the spirit of private enterprise and nurturing a dynamic academic and industrial environment is crucial for sustained growth. As we navigate the complexities of reform, the vision outlined in this analysis serves as a beacon toward a more prosperous, innovative and globally competitive India. (The author is a Managing Director, FIIB; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

THE ESSENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

It is awareness of the environment, thoughts, feelings and sensations



RAVI VALLURI

We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves. What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow, the Enlightened One, Buddha was to say.

In our lexicon today subjects and topics like physics, metaphysics, an elevated State, consciousness, life coaches and mind, apart from iconic names of Stephen Hawking, Jim Holt, and Carl Sagan among others are all banded quite recklessly without deep study. This is perhaps done under pressure to keep up with Jones or to display our awareness about certain issues of topical interests without proper research.

Recently my jaw dropped when confronted with some basic facts and facets of our universe. Through my elementary study of physics and geography, I was aware that we live on Planet Earth, which is an integral part of a Solar System; though I was in the dark and not fully aware that each star in the galaxy has its own solar systems like ours. I was certainly an ignoramus on these riveting concepts. Apparently, several of these stars and their respective solar systems do not exist anymore and have disappeared forever in the sands of time or are perhaps gravitating towards a black hole. It dawned on me as to how ignorant I was despite my readings on the subject.

So how does this lead us to the quintessential term of consciousness? Simply put consciousness is a State when humans are aware of and responsive to their environment. This is inclusive of both prevailing internal and external conditions. An individual blessed with an efficacious and robust thought process becomes aware and responsive to various occurrences which are taking place both within and without.



Consciousness is an individual's State of awareness of their environment, thoughts, feelings, or sensations; and in order to experience consciousness, one must be both awake and aware. Arjuna, the ace archer slumped and his fabled Gandiva fell to the ground as his mind was gripped with doubts and fear as the spectre of battling his cousins, his Gurus and above all the patriarch Bhishma coloured the mind and Sisyphian thought process engulfed his persona.

This was when Lord Krishna unleashed his Vishwarup Darshan and rendered the song celestial Bhagavad Gita which revealed his true self and raised the consciousness in Arjuna who took up the cudgels once again. King Janaka the father of Sita was a Jnani Purush. He was a highly knowledgeable and enlightened person and was referred to as a Raj Rishi. One day in his court he fell asleep and dreamt that Mithila his kingdom was stricken by severe and dreaded drought conditions.

The suzerain visualised an eagle swooping down and plucking a piece of bread/chappati from the hands of an impoverished peasant. This shocked the king and he woke up from a State of slumber to receive sage Ashtavakra who was to reveal the gospel of truth, which is popularly referred to as Ashtavakra Gita. Janaka then realised his true self and the consciousness was ignited. Buddha for years continued with his spiritual practices and was perennially haunted by Mara (evil/ fiendish forces) while cogitating, until on one full moon night pristine truth dawned on him and he went into deep silence.

Consciousness in Buddhism refers to life force, mind and discernment. Consciousness is the State when the human mind is verily awakened and assumes the form of a pure and pristine child brimming with enthusiasm, joy and curiosity. This is an experiential State of mind and consciousness.

(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)

Neglect spurs industry exodus in Punjab



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

The Punjab Government has not only lacked an industrial policy for a long time, but there has been a continuous deterioration in the infrastructure required for industries

After independence till the year 2011-12, Punjab was considered to be one of the rich and prosperous States of India. In the year 2000-01, the per capita income of Punjab was not only the highest in the country, but it was also 9 per cent more than the second richest State, namely, Haryana. But in the year 2012-13, the per capita income of Punjab slipped to the second position and today Punjab has reached the 10th position in terms of per capita income among the States with a population of more than 1 crore and the 19th position among all the States, and has now become the second slowest growing States in the country.

In the year 2011-12, when Punjab's per capita income was the highest in the country, the share of agriculture was 24 per cent, that of industries 28.4 per cent and that of services 47.6 per cent. But by the year 2022-23, the share of agriculture had increased to 28.94 per cent, while the share of industries and services was reduced to 25.51 per cent and 45.91 per cent respectively. It can be assumed that the industry and service sector have shrunk in Punjab. While talking about its neighbouring State Haryana, the share of industries in GDP in Haryana has increased from 25.90 per cent to 28 per cent between the years 2011-12 and 2021-22. The share of industries in Gujarat has increased from 36 per cent to 43 per cent during the same period, and in Tamil Nadu from 27.9 per cent to 33 per cent.

It can be understood that during this period, deindustrialisation has taken place in Punjab. Although Punjab is famous in the world for its population migrating to different parts of the world, since the beginning, after independence, a large number of Punjabi people migrated to the USA, Canada, Europe and many other countries. Punjab benefited a lot from these migrant Punjabis. The money sent to Punjab by the migrant Punjabis from abroad was greatly beneficial for the development of agriculture and industries. A wave of industrial development was seen in Punjab for a long time.

But for quite some time now it has been observed that not only has the industrial development of Punjab come to a halt, but a large number of industries have now started migrating out of Punjab. Industries of Punjab have now started shifting to its neighbouring States like Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan etc. as well as to distant States like Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat etc. Punjab was especially known for its engineering industry, but many engineering companies have now shifted to the user States of their products. On the other hand, Jalandhar was considered a big centre for sports products, and many sports industries there, have now shifted to Meerut, Uttar Pradesh. It is being observed that textile and garment industries have shifted to Madhya Pradesh, the bicycle industry to Chennai and China, knitwear industry to Africa, Southeast Asia and Madhya Pradesh.

Anti-industry policies of Punjab Government
The agriculture sector in Punjab has been considered very important from an economic point of view. It is worth noting that although only 28.94 per cent of the total GDP in Punjab comes from agriculture, more than 65 per cent of its population depends directly on agriculture. A sad part of Indian democracy is its populist policies. In Punjab, these populist policies have



PUNJABIS ARE GOOD ENTREPRENEURS, WHICH MAKES PUNJAB EXCEL IN INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT. BUT TODAY, PUNJAB IS LAGGING BEHIND IN COMPETITION WITH THOSE STATES WHERE LOGISTICS COSTS ARE LOW AND WHERE THERE HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN INFRASTRUCTURE

worked to adversely affect the economic development of Punjab. Punjab, that is, the region of five rivers, has been very rich in terms of water. However in Punjab, due to the ease of groundwater extraction, a large number of tube wells were installed. To please farmers, the Punjab Government started the scheme of giving free electricity for agriculture. In such a situation, excessive exploitation of water started. Due to this, many districts of Punjab have now become dark zones, that is, where the availability of groundwater has depleted excessively.

However, the Punjab Government's policy of giving free electricity to agriculture has not only affected the availability of groundwater but has also affected the industries there. The Punjab Government has put most of the burden of free electricity for agriculture on industries and businesses. Due to this electricity has become very expensive for industries, causing a huge disadvantage to the Punjab industry vis a vis their counterparts elsewhere. This has seriously affected the viability of industries. They have no option left but to move out of Punjab to other States and even to foreign countries. Environmental laws in Punjab are such that it is almost impossible to comply with them. In such a situation, industries have no choice but to shut down their units or move to other States. Not only this, industries and businesses in Punjab also have to pay high water cess, due to which industries have to face losses.

Conditions becoming difficult
One of the reasons for rapid indus-

trial and economic development in States like Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh etc. is infrastructure development and other facilities, which leads to a reduction in their logistics cost. It is well known that Punjabis are good entrepreneurs, which made Punjab excel in industrial and commercial development. But today Punjab is lagging behind in competition with those States where logistics cost is low and where there has been significant progress in infrastructure. It is worth noting that the condition of infrastructure in Punjab has become much worse in recent years.

Not only this, the implementation of the GST system has also affected the industries of Punjab. Earlier, indirect taxes were levied at a low rate by the Punjab Government, but after the implementation of the GST system, the possibility of State-specific fiscal incentives is very limited, due to which the competitive power of the industries of Punjab has now become much lower than other States.

Obstacles for new and old industries

If someone wants to set up a new industry in Punjab, then not only environmental but also other types of clearances are highly difficult. Not only this, allotment of land for industries is also very difficult and is also plagued by corruption. The financial sector in Punjab has also been seriously affected, because most of the agricultural loans of Punjab have turned bad and due to this, NPAs in Punjab are also very high.

Not only this, the continuously dete-

riorating law and order situation in Punjab is wreaking havoc on the industries.

Half-hearted efforts

The distance from the sea and the high logistics cost of exports are also one of the reasons why Punjab's industries have to send goods through a long route. Earlier, goods could be sent through Pakistan, but now since that route is closed, goods can be sent overseas only through Mumbai port. To deal with this situation, an air cargo facility was started in Amritsar, but there was a lack of complementary efforts. Due to the lack of backward linkages of air cargo with industries, only 20 per cent of the air cargo facility is being used presently. While other State Governments are offering various incentives to attract industries, the Punjab Government has not only lacked an industrial policy for a long time but there has been a continuous deterioration in the infrastructure required for industries. There is also a lack of research and development activities.

Due to the lack of industrial development, Punjab is continuously lagging behind economically, but the biggest concern is that the Punjab administration has no thought or policy initiatives on this subject. In such a situation, if this trend is not stopped, Punjab can lag far behind in economic development, which will be neither good for Punjab nor for the country.

(The writer is a professor at PGDAV College, University of Delhi, views are personal)

Bihar's educational reforms cock a snook at private players

Bihar Government's bold education initiatives combat global capital's influence on marginalised, writes Keyoor Pathak

The failure of the Bihar Government on countless fronts in the last few decades cannot be dismissed, and an exclusive example of the failure can be perceived in the law made without any proper preparation and study against liquor. Apart from this, there are many issues where the Government has demonstrated its substantial weakness such as rural migration, agriculture et cetera. However, there are some steps taken by the Government that must be appreciated without any political prejudices, this is the initiative on the subject of education in the State. Today, when the market is bent on taking over education completely in almost the entire India, the effort of the State to patronise education on such a

large scale can be considered a very bold step. In a way, this is a counter by the State to global capital. When the educational institutions are coming out of the hands of the Government and going into the hands of the corporates, the work done by the Bihar Government on the education system is in a way like the return of the welfare State. Such efforts must be made on health services too. However, in recent years, its big beginning can be seen in Delhi where it was claimed that Government school education has been taken to a prestigious level, and this claim should not be denied. But through education reforms in Bihar, the State is again visible in its public-concerning role, albeit partially, only in a few

subjects. Bihar is one of the poorest States in the country, and social and economic inequality is also at its peak. Then in such a situation, the model of economic development of putting education in the open market will push marginalised people even further to the margins.

It has always been a crying question of how much space will be left for the rights of education of the marginalised sections while in most of the private schools are functioning like money making industries. And it should be understood that private schools do not flourish because of their quality, rather the failure of the Government schools gives them an opportunity to spread their footing. Unfortunately, Government schools have



been continuously neglected by the State for decades. And all this did not happen spontaneously, rather there was a well-planned conspiracy of the Global Capital behind it that firstly let the Government schools be destroyed and then the private schools would automatically get legitimacy. In a way, the society has given up all its expectations from Government schools, they have accepted that children

have no future in Government schools. Consequently, social psychology developed which did not take the availability of quality education as a serious question. If it had been taken, there would have been pressure on the Governments and they would have worked on the facilities and quality education in the Government schools, but this rarely happened. The Bihar Government again made Government schools a part of the election manifestos of political parties. We saw some of the work that the Government has done to improve the education system. For example, there was a severe shortage of teachers in schools for a long time, to fulfil teachers were recruited on a large scale. The appointment of more than one lakh teachers is

enough to show the seriousness of the Government's vision on education. Undoubtedly a large part of the budget would have been spent on this. If we talk about infrastructure, the schools of Bihar had turned into ruins. It was difficult to say which building would collapse and when. Children were often forced to sit in the open field or in the veranda. But to fix all these things the Government allocated a huge amount. Allotment of the books, dresses and bags and water bottles for children along with other materials not only attracts them towards schools but also reduces the financial burden for the parents, especially for those who are barely able to earn their living by doing farm labour. For urban elites

these things might be futile but for the rural people this is not affordable by their own income.

We all had seen children carrying books in their hands or in dusted polythene or in torn cloth (jholas), but now they had beautiful bags in their hands and instead of torn half-naked clothes on their bodies, uniforms were shining on them. It was well known fact how little attention they paid to the children.

The Government has strictly forced the teachers to be responsible for their duties towards children, which was not an easy task, years of Government negligence had made them indolent. Some other small and big efforts can be seen there to control the deep-rooted corruption in the

education system. A pertinent aspect which perhaps sought for more attention that is 'Mid-Day Meal'. This should be allowed to continue in a smoother manner and at the local level merely, any interference by any external agency is likely to lead to many other complications. Amidst all these achievements, the biggest problem visible is, how to continue this reform in the future, because there still seems to be a lack of proper mechanism for this; and in the absence of a mechanism all efforts and achievement may be proven futile.

(The author is Post-Doctorate from CSD, Hyderabad and Assistant Professor in Department of Sociology, University of Allahabad; views are personal)

Colleges nationwide turn to police to quell pro-Palestine protests

AP ■ AUSTIN

With graduations looming, student protesters doubled down early Thursday on their discontent of the Israel-Hamas war on campuses across the country as universities, including ones in California and Texas, have become quick to call in the police to end the demonstrations and make arrests. While grappling with growing protests from coast to coast, schools have the added pressure of May commencement ceremonies. At Columbia University in New York, students defiantly erected an encampment where many are set to graduate in front of families in just a few weeks.

Columbia continued to negotiate with students after several failed attempts — and over 100 arrests — to clear the encampment, but several universities ousted demonstrators Wednesday, swiftly turning to law enforcement when protests bubbled up on their campuses. Police peacefully arrested student protesters at the University of Southern California, hours

after officers at the University of Texas at Austin aggressively detained dozens in the latest clashes between law enforcement and those protesting the Israel-Hamas war on campuses nationwide.

Tensions were already high at USC after the university cancelled a planned commencement speech by the school's valedictorian, who publicly supports Palestine, citing safety concerns. After scuffles with police early Wednesday, a few dozen demonstrators standing in a circle with locked arms were detained one by one without incident later in the evening. Officers encircled the dwindling group sitting in defiance of an earlier warning to disperse or be arrested. Beyond the police line, hundreds of onlookers watched as helicopters buzzed overhead. The school closed the campus. Hours earlier in Texas, hundreds of local and state police — including some on horseback and holding batons — bulldozed into protesters, at one point sending some tumbling into the street. Officers

pushed their way into the crowd and made 34 arrests at the behest of the university and Texas Governor Gregg Abbott, according to the state Department of Public Safety. A photographer covering the demonstration for Fox 7 Austin was in the push-and-pull when an officer yanked him backward to the ground, video shows. The station confirmed that the photographer was arrested. A longtime Texas journalist was knocked down in the mayhem and could be seen bleeding before police helped him to emergency medical staff.

Dane Urquhart, a third-year Texas student, called the police presence and arrests an "overreaction," adding that the protest "would have stayed peaceful" if the officers had not turned out in force.

"Because of all the arrests, I think a lot more (demonstrations) are going to happen," Urquhart said. Police left after hours of efforts to control the crowd, and about 300 demonstrators moved back in to sit on the grass and chant

under the school's iconic clock tower.

In a statement Wednesday night, the university's president, Jay Hartzell, said: "Our rules matter, and they will be enforced. Our University will not be occupied."

North of USC, students at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, were barricaded inside a building for a third day, and the school shut down campus through the weekend and made classes virtual. Harvard University in Massachusetts had sought to stay ahead of protests this week by limiting access to Harvard Yard and requiring permission for tents and tables. That didn't stop protesters from setting up a camp with 14 tents Wednesday following a rally against the university's suspension of the Harvard Undergraduate Palestine Solidarity Committee. Students protesting the Israel-Hamas war are demanding schools cut financial ties to Israel and divest from companies enabling its monthslong conflict.

'282 mn faced acute hunger in 2023, with the worst famine in Gaza'

United Nations (AP): Nearly 282 million people in 59 countries suffered from acute hunger in 2023, with war-torn Gaza as the territory with the largest number of people facing famine, according to the Global Report on Food Crises released on Wednesday.

The UN report said 24 million more people faced an acute lack of food than in 2022, due to the sharp deterioration in food security, especially in the Gaza Strip and Sudan. The number of nations with food crises that are monitored has also been expanded.

Máximo Torero, chief economist for the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, said 705,000 people in five countries are at Phase 5, the highest level, on a scale of hunger determined by international experts — the highest number since the global report

began in 2016 and quadruple the number that year. Over 80 per cent of those facing imminent famine — 577,000 people — were in Gaza, he said. South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Somalia and Mali each host many thousands also facing catastrophic hunger.

According to the report's future outlook, around 1.1 million people in Gaza, where the Israel-Hamas war is now in its seventh month, and 79,000 in South Sudan are projected to be in Phase 5 and facing famine by July. It said conflict will also continue to drive food insecurity in Haiti, where gangs control large portions of the capital. Additionally, while the El Niño phenomenon peaked in early 2024, "its full impact on food security — including flooding and poor rain in parts of east Africa and drought in southern Africa, especially

Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe — are like to manifest throughout the year."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the report "a roll call of human failings," and that "in a world of plenty, children are starving to death." "The conflicts erupting over the past 12 months compound a dire global situation," he wrote in the report's foreword. Guterres highlighted the conflict in the Gaza Strip, as the enclave holds the highest number of people facing catastrophic hunger. There is also the year-old conflict in Sudan, which has created the world's largest internal displacement crisis "with atrocious impacts on hunger and nutrition," he added. According to the report, over 36 million people in 39 countries and territories are facing an acute hunger emergency, a step below the famine

level in Phase 4, with more than a third in Sudan and Afghanistan. It's an increase of a million people from 2022, the report said. Arif Husain, the UN World Food Program's chief economist, said every year since 2016 the numbers of people acutely food insecure have gone up, and they are now more than double the numbers before the COVID-19 pandemic. While the report looks at 59 countries, he said the target is to get data from 73 countries where there are people who are acutely food insecure. Secretary-General Guterres called for an urgent response to the report's findings that addresses the underlying causes of acute hunger and malnutrition while transforming the systems that supply food. Funding is also not keeping pace with the needs, he stressed.

Ship attacked off Yemen coast amid accelerating Houthi rebel campaign

AP ■ JERUSALEM

A ship traveling in the Gulf of Aden came under attack Thursday, officials said, the latest assault likely carried out by Yemen's Houthi rebels over Israel's ongoing war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The attack comes after the U.S. military said early Thursday an allied warship shot down a Houthi missile targeting a vessel the day before near the same area. The Houthis claimed that Wednesday assault, which comes after a period of relatively few rebel attacks on shipping in the region over Israel's ongoing war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In Thursday's attack, a ship was targeted just over 15 miles (25 kilometers) southwest of Aden, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. There was no other immediate information about the attack, which also was reported by the private security firm Ambray. The Houthis did not immedi-

ately claim the attack, though it typically takes them hours to acknowledge an assault. The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sank another since November, according to the U.S. Maritime Administration. Houthi attacks have dropped in recent weeks as the rebels have been targeted by a U.S.-led airstrike campaign in Yemen and shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat. American officials have speculated that the rebels may be running out of weapons as a result of the U.S.-led campaign against them and firing off drones and missiles steadily in the last months. However, Wednesday's attack was the first one by rebels in some time. An explosion struck some 130 kilometers (80 miles) southeast of Djibouti in the Gulf of Aden, the UKMTO said. Early Thursday, the U.S. military's Central Command said the explosion came from a coal-

ition warship shooting down the missile likely targeting the MV Yorktown, a U.S.-flagged, owned and operated vessel with 18 U.S. and four Greek crew members.

"There were no injuries or damage reported by U.S., coalition or commercial ships," Central Command said. Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesman, claimed the attack but insisted without evidence that the missile hit the Yorktown. Saree also claimed the Houthis targeted another ship in the Indian Ocean, without providing proof. The Houthis have made repeated claims that turned out to not be true during their yearlong war in Yemen. The Houthis have said they will continue their attacks until Israel ends its war in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage.

Blinken discusses trade practices in Shanghai meetings

AP ■ SHANGHAI

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken raised what the US describes as unfair Chinese trade practices during his first full day of meetings in China on Thursday with local government officials in the financial hub of Shanghai.

Blinken met with the city's top official, Communist Party Secretary Chen Jining, and "raised concerns about (Chinese) trade policies and non-market economic practices," the State Department said in a statement.

It said he stressed that the United States seeks healthy economic competition with China and "a level playing field for US workers and firms operating in China."

"The two sides reaffirmed the importance of ties between the people of the United States and (China), including the expansion of exchanges between students, scholars, and business," it said.

China's multibillion-dollar trade surplus with the US along with accusations of intellectual property theft and other prac-



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, center, U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns, right, and Scott Walker, second left, Consul General at the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai, visit a waterfront area called The Bund on Thursday. AP/PTI

tics seen as discriminating against US businesses in China have long been a source of friction in relations.

China, for its part, has

objected strongly to US accusations of human rights abuses and Washington's support for Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing considers its own terri-

tory and warns could be annexed by force.

Asked about Blinken's comments, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin

said China has "always conducted economic and trade cooperation in accordance with market principles, firmly supported the multilateral trading system, and fully complied with the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO)."

"We hope the US will also earnestly respect the principle of fair competition, abide by the WTO rules, and work with China to create favorable conditions for the sound and stable development of China-US economic and trade relations," Wang told reporters at a daily briefing. Blinken also spoke with students and business leaders before flying to Beijing for what are expected to be contentious talks with national officials, including Foreign Minister Wang Yi and possibly President Xi Jinping. Blinken arrived in Shanghai on Wednesday shortly before US President Joe Biden signed a USD 95 billion foreign aid package that has several elements likely to anger Beijing, including USD 8 billion to counter China's growing aggressiveness toward Taiwan and in the South China Sea.

Frigate has destroyed drone launched from Yemen's Houthi-held areas: EU officer

Nicosia (AP): A top European Union military officer said that a frigate that's part of an EU military mission in the Red Sea to protect merchant shipping destroyed a drone launched from an area in Yemen controlled by Houthi rebels on Thursday morning. Austrian Gen. Robert Brieger, who is chair of the EU's military committee, said that it would be crucial for the bloc to "conserve resources" over the long haul because the threat posed by Houthi attacks "will not disappear" due to its connection to the Israel-Hamas war.

"The task given to the military is simply to protect merchant ships and to show the public that the European Union is not willing to accept a terrorist organization will interrupt the freedom of movement at sea," Brieger said. Brieger said that he's asking EU members to provide the necessary resources to the EU mission dubbed Aspidos — Greek for "shields."

He said that it's the first time that the EU has launched a naval operation in a hostile environment that's twice the size of the 27-nation bloc, calling it a "litmus test" that the bloc will pass successfully.

The commander of an EU naval mission in the Red Sea, Greek Rear Adm. Vasilios Gryparis, wants to significantly increase its size to better defend against possible attacks by Houthi rebels based in Yemen. Nineteen of the 27 EU nations are involved in the mission, but only four frigates are patrolling an area twice the size of the bloc. The EU mission was established in February to defend civilian vessels and doesn't take part in any military strikes. The southern part of the Red Sea is deemed a high-risk zone. Iran-backed Houthi rebels, which control much of Yemen's north and west, launched a campaign of drone and missile attacks on shipping in the Red Sea in November.

Trump to attend hush money trial in NY While SC hears his immunity case in DC

AP ■ NEW YORK

Reluctant Donald Trump will be back in a New York City courtroom Thursday as his hush money trial resumes at the same time that the U.S. Supreme Court hears arguments in Washington over whether he should be immune from prosecution for actions he took during his time as president.

Jurors will hear more witness testimony from a veteran tabloid publisher, and Trump faces a looming decision over whether he violated a gag order imposed by the judge. But he had asked to skip out on his criminal trial for the day so he could sit in on the high court's special session, where the justices will weigh whether he can be prosecuted over his efforts to reverse his 2020 election loss to President Joe Biden.

That request was denied by New York state Supreme Court

Judge Juan Merchan, who is overseeing the trial on the hush money scheme that was meant to prevent harmful stories about Trump from surfacing in the final days of the 2016 campaign.

"Arguing before the Supreme Court is a big deal, and I can certainly appreciate why your client would want to be there, but a trial in New York Supreme Court... is also a big deal," Merchan told Trump's lawyer Todd Blanche last week when he nixed the idea.

Though 200 miles apart — and entirely separate cases — the proceedings Thursday were jumbled together in one big legal and political puzzle that has implications not just for the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, but for the American presidency writ large.

In both instances, Trump is trying to get himself out of legal jeopardy as he makes another bid for the White

House. But the outcome of the Supreme Court case will have lasting implications for future presidents, because the justices will be answering the never-before-asked question of "whether and if so to what extent does a former president enjoy presidential immunity from criminal prosecution for conduct alleged to involve official acts during his tenure in office."

The high court's decision may not impact the New York City case, which hinges mostly on Trump's conduct as a presidential candidate in 2016 — not as a president. He faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in connection with hush money payments meant to stifle embarrassing stories from surfacing. It is the first of four criminal cases against Trump to go before a jury.

The New York trial resumes after a scheduled day off with more testimony from the Manhattan District Attorney's

first witness, David Pecker, former publisher of the National Enquirer and a longtime friend of Trump's who pledged to be his "eyes and ears" during his 2016 presidential campaign.

In testimony earlier this week, Pecker explained how he and the tabloid parlayed rumor-mongering into splashy stories that smeared Trump's opponents and, just as crucially, leveraged his connections to suppress seamy stories about Trump, including a porn actor's claim of an extramarital sexual encounter years earlier.

Pecker traced the origins of their relationship to a 1980s meeting at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, and said the friendship bloomed alongside the success of the real estate developer's TV show "The Apprentice" and the program's subsequent celebrity version. Pecker recounted how he promised

then-candidate Trump that he would help suppress harmful stories and even arranged to purchase the silence of a doorman.

"I made the decision to purchase the story because of the potential embarrassment it had to the campaign and to Mr. Trump," Pecker said of the doorman's story that his publication later determined wasn't true. Judge Merchan may also decide whether or not to hold Trump in contempt and fine him for violating a gag order that barred the GOP leader from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and others connected to the case. Some of Trump's recent online posts in question included one describing prosecution witnesses Michael Cohen, his former attorney, and Stormy Daniels, the porn actress, as "sleaze bags" and another repeating a false claim that liberal activists had tried to infiltrate the jury.

Ariel Henry resigns as Haiti PM

Port-au-Prince (Haiti) (AP): Ariel Henry resigned Thursday as prime minister of Haiti,



leaving the way clear for a new government to be formed in the Caribbean country, which has been wrecked by gang violence. Henry presented his resignation in a letter signed in Los Angeles, dated April 24, and released on Thursday by his office on the same day a council tasked with choosing a new prime minister and Cabinet for Haiti was due to be sworn in.

The council would be installed more than a month after Caribbean leaders announced its creation following an emergency meeting to tackle Haiti's spiralling crisis.

More than 100 inmates break free from Nigerian prison

AP ■ ABUJA

More than 100 inmates have escaped from a prison in Nigeria near the capital city of Abuja after overnight heavy rains destroyed parts of the facility, a prison official said Thursday, as security agencies searched for the fleeing prisoners.

The downpour, which lasted for several hours on Wednesday night, destroyed the perimeter fence of the medium-security prison in the neighbouring town of Suleja, in Niger state, giving way to the escape of a total of 118 inmates from the facility, "according to Adamu Duza, a prisons spokesman. The prison service and other agencies have managed to recapture 10 of the escaped



inmates while the search is on to find the rest, Duza said. There are fears that they could find their way into the vast forests that connect Suleja town and neighbouring states, some of which are known hideouts for criminal gangs.

In addition to being overcrowded with 70% of the inmates still awaiting trial, most prisons in Nigeria are old, having been built during the colonial era before the West

African nation's independence from Britain in 1960. The structures are rarely renovated, which has made it easier for inmates to escape during past jailbreaks. Thousands of inmates have escaped from prisons during such jailbreaks, including Abuja where nearly 900 inmates broke free in 2022. The authorities are making efforts to rebuild the structures and modernise the ageing facilities, Duza said.

Taiwan's president-elect appoints new ministers

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan's president-elect has appointed new foreign and defence ministers to join his incoming administration as the island faces continuing military threats and diplomatic isolation from China.

Lai Ching-te, who assumes the presidency on May 20, announced Thursday that current Presidential Secretary General Lin Chia-lung will take over as foreign minister. He said Wellington Koo will head the Defence Ministry at a time when Taiwan is upgrading its defences against China with new ships, submarines, warplanes, missile systems and other land-based defences.

Along with stepping up its threat to annex Taiwan by force, China has whittled down the number of Taiwan's formal diplomatic allies to



In this photo released by the Taiwan Presidential Office, U.S. Democratic Congressman Dan Kildee, left, meets with Taiwan President-elect and Vice President Lai Ching-te in Taipei, Taiwan on Tuesday. AP/PTI

just 12, while excluding it from the United Nations and most other international organisations.

Koo, a lawyer, has headed the National Security Council under current President Tsai Ing-wen, who is leaving office as mandated after two four-year terms. He will be replaced in the high-profile role by current Foreign Minister Joseph Wu.

Taiwan has a long-embedded tradition of civilians serving as defence minister, in contrast to China's practice of appointing top generals who have taken an increasingly belligerent attitude toward Taiwan, the US and in asserting China's territorial claims in the South China and East China seas. Lin previously served as mayor of Taiwan's largest city, Taichung, and was put in charge of Taiwan's economic outreach to Southeast Asia,

Australia and New Zealand. Both Lin and Koo are members of the Democratic Progressive Party, with which China has cut contacts over its refusal to acknowledge Beijing's claim of sovereignty over the island.

Lai handily won the presidential election in January, although the main opposition Nationalist Party that backs eventual unification with China took a one-vote majority in the legislature. Taiwan has a mixture of presidential and parliamentary systems with much power also invested in local city and county governments. The formula emerged after Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists relocated their government to the former Japanese colony of Taiwan in 1949 as Mao Zedong's Communists seized power on the mainland after a decades-long civil war.

US secretly sent long-range missiles to war-torn Ukraine

Biden says China, Iran, N Korea helping Russia

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US has secretly delivered long-range ballistic missiles to Ukraine to be used against Russian forces, the Pentagon has confirmed, while President Joe Biden alleged that China, Iran and North Korea were supplying weapons and technology to Moscow to boost its military. President Biden secretly approved the transfer of the long-range ATACMS missiles in February for use inside Ukrainian territory. The ATACMS missiles were then quietly included in the USD 300 million aid package announced on March 12 and ultimately delivered to Ukraine earlier this month, according to Pentagon spokesman Lt Col Garron Garn said on Wednesday.

"It was not announced that we are providing Ukraine with this new capability at the time to maintain operational security for Ukraine at their request," Garn said, deferring questions about their use to Ukraine's military.

The US previously supplied Ukraine with a mid-range version of the Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) but had been reluctant to send anything more powerful, partly over concerns about compromising US military readiness.

The ballistic missiles have a range of up to 300 kilometres, nearly doubling the striking distance of Ukraine's missiles. President Biden directed his team to take this step following Russia's procurement and use of North Korean ballistic missiles against Ukraine, according to US media outlets.

Ukrainian officials have been urging the US for the long-range missiles to target deeper behind Russian lines. American officials have previously resisted, citing supply issues and concerns about further provoking Russia if they are deployed. Speaking from the White House on Wednesday after signing into law a USD 61 billion aid package providing crucial military assistance to Ukraine, Biden said it was a "good day for America, a good day for Ukraine and a good day

Ukraine bid to replenish forces

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine worked on Thursday to get much-needed new supplies of weapons and ammunition from a huge US aid package to its eastern front line, where Russia was pressing forward with its efforts to take ground from outnumbered and out-gunned troops.

Ukraine is also seeking to reverse the drain of potential soldiers from the country, announcing that men of conscription age will no longer be able to renew their passports from outside the country. The Cabinet of Ministers said Wednesday that men between 18 and 60 who are deemed fit for military service will only be able to renew their passports inside Ukraine.

Millions of Ukrainians have fled the country since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, mostly to neighbouring European countries. The European Union's statistics agency, Eurostat, says 4.3 million Ukrainians are living in EU countries, 860,000 of them men 18 years of age or older. The defence minister of Poland, home to one of the

largest Ukrainian diasporas, said the country was ready to help "in ensuring that those who are subject to compulsory military service go to Ukraine," though he did not specify how.

Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz said "Ukrainian citizens have obligations towards the state." But Ukrainian opposition lawmaker Ivanna Klympush-Tsyntadsze, who heads the Parliamentary Committee for Ukraine's European

Integration, said denying military-age men access to consular services could lead to "well-founded" legal challenges at the European Court of Human Rights.

"I think that these actions will only push an enormous number of Ukrainians to look for different ways to obtain citizenship from other countries," she said.

Russia's population of almost 150 million dwarfs Ukraine's 38 million, and Moscow can draw on a much bigger army. Earlier this month, Ukraine lowered the conscription age from 27 to 25 in an effort to bolster the size of the military. The US is sending \$61 billion in new US military aid, a life-

line for Kyiv's armed forces in their more than two-year war with Russia. President Joe Biden signed into law the aid package on Wednesday. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said "the key now is speed" in getting the supplies into place. Ukrainian forces have run desperately short of artillery ammunition and air defence missiles during six months in which the US aid was held up by wrangling in Congress. That has allowed the Kremlin's forces to inch forward in parts of eastern Ukraine in what has largely become a war of attrition.

Ukraine's general staff said Thursday that the situation at the front remained "difficult". Six people were injured in the Cherkasy region of central Ukraine on Thursday after a "high speed target" struck a critical infrastructure object, Regional Governor Ihor Taburets said on social media. He said a rescue operation was underway. Ukraine's Air Force warned of a "high speed aerial object" flying towards Cherkasy region around 6:30 am local time. It did not identify the type of object or say whether it was intercepted.

Drops of toilet cleaner mixed in Bushra's food: Spokesperson

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi was reportedly given at least two to three drops of 'toilet cleaner' mixed in an Iftar meal, her spokesperson said on Thursday.

The cleaner was allegedly mixed with her food on Shah-e-Barat on February 24. "We found out that two or three drops of toilet cleaner were added to Bushra Bibi's Iftar meal," the spokesperson of Bushra Bibi, Mashal Yousafzai, was quoted as saying by the Geo news. She claimed that after consuming the meal, her health deteriorated and it was getting worse every day.

Khan, 71, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, has many times claimed that Bushra Bibi, 49, was given food mixed with toilet cleaner. The spokesperson said before her arrest, she did not have any problems, including blood pressure and diabetes.

"Since her arrest, Bushra Bibi's health has deteriorated, some-

thing must have happened," she said expressing her apprehension. Bushra Bibi, convicted in two different cases, is being held at the Bani Gala home since the couple was sentenced in the 'un-Islamic nikah' case in February. The Bani Gala residence has been converted into a sub-jail for the former prime minister's wife.

Yousafzai, also the advisor to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister, questioned why Bushra's medical tests were not conducted when the court had been directing the authorities for three weeks. She also wondered that was preventing the authorities from conducting the medical tests.

"The court has directed (authorities) to conduct her endoscopy and blood test. Endoscopy revealed ulceration and inflammation in the stomach," said Yousafzai. She said despite the orders of the court, they did not let the former first lady get her blood tested. She said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) also asked that the blood test

should be done by Al-Shifa Hospital and be cross-checked at the Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital. She said, "The blood test could reveal whether the element of poison was present in her blood or not."

Yousafzai said a couple of days ago, Bushra had pain in her chest and left arm. The jail doctor did an ECG and it was not normal, she claimed.

The jail doctor said that she would go and inform the jail administration so that the doctors from the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) could come and conduct her check-up, she said.

"The jail doctor went to inform the administration at 12 pm and came out at 5 pm. While the PIMS doctor came at 11 pm in the night, due to us raising our voice," she said, adding that after 11 pm, Bushra had had another ECG.

She said there was a difference between the imprisonment of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto and Punjab Chief

Minister Maryam Nawaz as Bushra was a housewife and not a politician. "Bushra Bibi is targeted because she is the wife of the PTI founder," she said.

Last week, a comprehensive medical evaluation of Bushra Bibi was performed under the observation of Khan's family physician. The doctors at a private hospital declared Bushra Bibi, the former first lady, to be in good health.

The former first lady stayed at a private hospital in Islamabad for six hours for diagnostic tests, including endoscopy, but refused to undergo a blood test and did not provide a blood sample, sources told Geo News. The hospital sources stated that Bushra Bibi also underwent, ultrasound, echo, and ECG tests, while during the check-up, Khan's physician, Dr Asim Yousuf, was also present.

The doctors, according to the sources, cleared all the medical reports of the former first lady. The hospital sources said that Khan's wife only had a minor gastric issue.

Court bars Imran, wife from speaking on state institutions

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A court in Pakistan on Thursday barred jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi from issuing provocative statements against state institutions, including the army, and officials. During the hearing of a petition seeking a fair trial, Judge Basir Javed Rana of the Accountability Court in Islamabad also said the media should limit its reporting to court proceedings and not report statements of the accused.

According to the order, Khan, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party made provocative political statements against senior officials of state institutions, including the army, the judiciary and the army chief, newspaper The Express Tribune reported.

The order said that such statements disrupt judicial decorum and also obstruct judicial functions such as the dispensation of justice and further stated that

during the jail trial of the PTI founder, the media will limit its reporting to court proceedings and not report statements of the accused.

In its order, the court also instructed the prosecution, the accused and their defence counsels not to make political or inflammatory statements which may disrupt the decorum of the court, the newspaper said.

Media was also ordered to refrain from publishing political and inflammatory narratives targeting state institutions and officials and was asked to adhere to PEMRA guidelines prohibiting discussing ongoing cases.

The former prime minister asserted that premeditated rigging marred the by-polls in Punjab, accusing the Punjab Police of indulging in rigging. "Democracy hinges on the supremacy of law and the conduct of free and fair elections, yet what we witnessed was jungle law. The interference of the police in the Punjab by-elections is deeply concerning," Khan said during a media interaction at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail.

Khan highlighted that the recent by-polls were also conducted in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, where the PTI-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) is ruling, affirming that no instances of rigging transpired in the province.

"There exists no semblance of democracy in the nation presently. The rigging was a pre-emptive move, driven by fear of the events that unfolded on February 8. The postponement of the [general] elections from October to February was a deliberate tactic to suppress the PTI. Even our petition in the Supreme Court remained unheard, as it awaited the demise of the PTI," he elaborated.

Khan lamented that myriad tactics were deployed ahead of the general elections to besmirch the reputation of the PTI, resulting in the conversion of a majority vote into a minority. "There is no truth in claims of pressuring Imran Khan to come to the negotiating table," Asif said in an interview published in Independent Urdu on Wednesday and reported by the Dawn newspaper on Thursday. Speaking to reporters outside the Parliament House on Tuesday, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan replied in the negative when asked if he had said there was "pressure being exerted for a deal" with Imran Khan: "No, I have not given any such statements." However, Gohar later said: "Another thing we (PTI) are saying is that the way Khan sahib is being kept in jail, the way [Bushra] Bibi has been [jailed], these are all [forms of] pressure that Khan sahib somehow agrees to a deal.

Min rejects claims Imran was forced for a 'deal'

Minister Maryam Nawaz Asif has rejected the claims made by Imran Khan's close aide Barrister Gohar Khan that the jailed former premier was being pressured to accept a "deal", according to a media report on Thursday. "There is no truth in claims of pressuring Imran Khan to come to the negotiating table," Asif said in an interview published in Independent Urdu on Wednesday and reported by the Dawn newspaper on Thursday. Speaking to reporters outside the Parliament House on Tuesday, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan replied in the negative when asked if he had said there was "pressure being exerted for a deal" with Imran Khan: "No, I have not given any such statements." However, Gohar later said: "Another thing we (PTI) are saying is that the way Khan sahib is being kept in jail, the way [Bushra] Bibi has been [jailed], these are all [forms of] pressure that Khan sahib somehow agrees to a deal.

French president outlines his vision for Europe

AP ■ PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron warned Thursday that Europe could die if it fails to build its own robust defense as Russia's war in Ukraine rages on, or if it fails to undertake massive trade and economic reforms to compete with China and the US.

Macron urged Europeans to become more ambitious in a fast-changing world to face the challenges of war, fierce trade competition, energy scarcity, climate change and increasing authoritarianism. In a nearly two-hour speech at the Paris's Sorbonne University, Macron said the Continent is divided and "too slow and lacks ambition" at a time when the 27-member European Union needs to become a superpower, defend its own

borders and speak with one voice if it wants to survive and thrive. "Our Europe today is mortal," Macron said. "It can die and that depends solely on our choices," he added. He called on people to make those choices now because, "it's today that Europe is between war and peace."

Russia's aggression in Ukraine, now in its third year, is an existential threat and Europe is not armed enough to defend itself when "confronted by a power like Russia that has no inhibitions, no limits," Macron said. Our ability to ensure our security is at stake," Macron said. "Russia mustn't be allowed to win." France has been a firm supporter of Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression, and Macron has often clashed with other Western leaders as he has insisted that Europe must stand

by the country at any cost. Last month, the French president alarmed European leaders by saying that sending Western troops into Ukraine to shore up its defenses shouldn't be ruled out. Referring to trade practices of China and the US, Macron said "the two world powers have decided not to respect the rules of global trade" by shoring up protections and subsidies while Europe's industry remains open and is stuck in overregulation. "Let's do the same, we are in competition," Macron said. Thursday's speech comes ahead of pivotal European Parliament elections. Macron, an avid advocate of a united and assertive Europe, also rallied support for his centrist Renaissance party ahead of the June 9 vote as far-right parties lead the moderate coalitions in the polls.

Rajapaksa rejects allegations on Easter attack probe

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Thursday categorically rejected the allegations levelled against him by the head of the country's Catholic church Cardinal Malcom Ranjith on the investigations into the deadly Easter Sunday terror attacks in 2019. As many as 270 people, including 11 Indians, were killed on April 21, 2019, when nine suicide bombers belonging to the local Islamist extremist group National Thawheeb Jamaat (NTJ) linked to ISIS carried out a series of blasts that tore through three Catholic churches and as many luxury hotels in Sri Lanka. In the statement, Rajapaksa, 74, said the Easter Sunday attacks were perpetrated by a group of Islamic extremists.

The highest investigative arm of the then government - the CID - had for several months before the attacks, been investigating

the activities of the very same individuals and groups that carried out the suicide bombings but "failed to apprehend the terrorists before they struck", news portal dailymirror.lk reported.

The public should take good note of the fact that Cardinal Ranjith "either glosses over the responsibility of, or expressly absolves the two parties mentioned above while continuing to relentlessly attack and criticize me over the Easter Sunday suicide bombings", he said. Rajapaksa is a former politician and military officer, who served as the President of Sri Lanka from November 2019 until his resignation in July 2022 due to months of public anger against the government as the country faced unprecedented economic turmoil.

The former president noted that at a recent media conference, Cardinal Ranjith alleged that the day after the report of the Presidential Commission of



Inquiry on the Easter Sunday attacks was handed over to the former president, he had spoken to him over the phone and said that he had difficulties in implementing the recommendations in that report as it would entail the arrest of individuals and even the banning of organisations that were supportive of him. In response, Rajapaksa said, "I categorically state that I did

NOT speak to the Cardinal over the phone after the Presidential Commission report was submitted to me and tell him that the recommendations of the Presidential Commission could not be implemented because that would entail the arrest of people and even the banning of organisations allied with me."

"It is a well-known fact that the Muslim community in general did not vote for me or support my candidacy at the Presidential election, so I cannot possibly have had any allies in any organisation that would need to be banned over complicity in the Easter Sunday attacks," he said.

On Cardinal Ranjith's allegations that he had delayed giving him a copy of the first volume of the Presidential Commission report and that he had not given him the remaining volumes, Rajapaksa denied the charges.

"The report of the Presidential Commission was handed over

to me on February 1, 2021. Having studied it myself and referred it to the Attorney General, it was handed over to the Speaker of Parliament on February 23, 2021, and by March 1, 2021 copies had been given to the Venerable Mahanayaka Theras, the Cardinal and the Catholic Bishops. There was no delay in handing over the report to the Cardinal," he said.

Rajapaksa also rebutted the allegations that he had transferred the CID officers investigating the Easter Sunday attacks and even imprisoned one such senior officer to sabotage the investigation.

Noting that the Cardinal has accused him of not having brought the perpetrators of the Easter Sunday bombings to justice, Rajapaksa said criminals have to be brought to justice not by politicians but by the police, the Attorney General's Department and the Courts system working together.

3rd man detained in Russia's major bribery case

AP ■ MOSCOW

A third man has been detained in a bribery case involving a Russian deputy defense minister, Moscow's court service said on Thursday. It said businessman Alexander Fomin is suspected of paying bribes to Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov, who was detained on Wednesday, as well as Ivanov's associate, Sergei Borodin. All of the men are to remain in custody until at least June 23.

Ivanov, an ally of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, was jailed pending an investigation and trial on charges of bribery, court officials said in a statement. He was in charge of military construction projects and was previously accused of living a lavish lifestyle in anti-corruption investigations conducted by the team of late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Moscow's court service said Fomin and Borodin contributed to Ivanov receiving a "particu-

larly large bribe" — an offense punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Ivanov, 48, was sanctioned by both the United States and European Union in 2022 after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

According to a court statement, investigators told the judge that Ivanov conspired with third parties to receive a bribe in the form of unspecified property services "during contracting and subcontracting work for the needs of the Ministry of Defense."

Ivanov's lawyer, Murad Musayev, told the state news agency Tass on Wednesday that his client is accused of "taking a bribe in the form of free construction and repair work on supposedly his personal properties" and in turn providing "assistance to companies that were contractors for the Defense Ministry."

Another lawyer, Denis Baluyev, was quoted by state news agency RIA Novosti as saying

Wednesday that Ivanov maintains his innocence.

According to the Defense Ministry's website, Ivanov was appointed in 2016 by a presidential decree. He oversaw property management, housing and medical support for the military, as well as construction projects.

RIA Novosti quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying that Shoigu and President Vladimir Putin were informed of Ivanov's arrest, which comes as Moscow's war in Ukraine grinds through its third year.

Independent Russian news outlets reported Wednesday that the bribery charges were intended to hide more serious charges of treason and avoid scandal, citing two unidentified sources close to the Federal Security Service, or FSB.

Peskov dismissed the suggestion and described the reports as speculation. "There are a lot of rumors. We need to rely on official information," he told journalists.

Musayev, Ivanov's lawyer, also denied any other charges, telling RIA Novosti Ivanov faced only bribery allegations.

Before his arrest, Ivanov was seen attending a meeting with Shoigu and other top military brass. The move against Ivanov came nearly a month after Putin called on the FSB to "keep up a systemic anti-corruption effort" and pay special attention to state defense procurement.

Russian media reported that Ivanov oversaw some of the construction in Mariupol, a Ukrainian port city that was devastated by bombardment and occupied by Russian forces early in the war.

Zvezda, the official TV channel of the Russian military, reported in summer 2022 that the ministry was building an entire residential block in Mariupol and showed Ivanov inspecting construction sites and newly erected buildings.

That same year, the team of opposition leader Navalny alleged Ivanov and his family

had been enjoying luxurious trips abroad, lavish parties and owned elite real estate. The activists also alleged that Ivanov's wife, Svetlana, divorced him in 2022 to avoid sanctions and continued living a lavish lifestyle.

The prosecution of high-level officials for corruption remains relatively rare in Russia.

In April 2023, former Deputy Culture Minister Olga Yariylova was arrested and charged with embezzling more than 200 million rubles (USD 2.2 million). Yariylova, who held her post from 2018 to 2022, is on trial and facing a possible seven-year jail term.

Former Economics Minister Alexei Ulyukayev received an eight-year prison sentence in 2017 for accepting a USD 2 million bribe from one of Putin's top associates. The high-profile trial was widely seen as part of fighting between Kremlin clans. Ulyukayev, now 68, was granted early release from prison in May 2022.

China launches 3-member crew to its space station

AP ■ JIUQUAN

China launched a three-member crew to its orbiting space station on Thursday as part of its ambitious programme that aims to put astronauts on the moon by 2030.

The Shenzhou-18 spacecraft lifted off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre on the edge of the Gobi Desert in northwestern China atop a Long March 2-F rocket at 8:59 pm (12:59 GMT).

The spacecraft's three-member crew will relieve the Shenzhou-17 team, which has been staffing China's Tiangong space station since last October. The China Manned Space Agency, or CMSA, held a send-off ceremony — complete with flag-waving children and patriotic music — for the Shenzhou-18 crew earlier on Thursday, as the three astronauts prepared to

enter the spacecraft. The trio is made of Commander Ye Guangfu, 43, a veteran astronaut who took part in the Shenzhou-13 mission in 2021, and fighter pilots Li Cong, 34, and Li Guangsu, 36, who are spaceflight rookies.

They are expected to reach the space station about six-and-a-half hours after liftoff.

China built its own space station after being excluded from the International Space Station, largely because of US concerns over the Chinese military's involvement in the program. This year, the Chinese station is slated for two cargo spacecraft missions and two manned spaceflight missions.

The Shenzhou-18 crew will spend about six months on the space station. They will conduct scientific tests, install space debris protection equipment on the station, carry out payload

experiments, and popularise science education, among other things, according to Lin Xiqiang, deputy director of the CMSA. Lin also said China was working toward eventually offering access to its space station to foreign astronauts and space tourists. "We will accelerate the research and promotion of the participation of foreign astronauts and space tourists on flights on China's space station," he said in a press conference Wednesday. The country is planning a mission to bring back samples from Mars around 2030 and three lunar probe missions over the next four years. It also wants to put astronauts on the moon by 2030. China conducted its first crewed space mission in 2003, becoming the third country after the former Soviet Union and the US to put a person into space using its own resources.

Markets extend gains

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rising for the fifth straight session, equity benchmark Sensex rallied nearly 500 points to reclaim the 74,000 mark while the Nifty closed above the 22,550 level on Thursday, driven by heavy buying in banking, financial and metal stocks. Recovering after a sell-off in early trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 486.50 points or 0.66 per cent to settle at 74,339.44. During the day, it surged 718.31 points or 0.97 per cent to 74,571.25. The NSE Nifty advanced 167.95 points or 0.75 per cent to 22,570.35. From the Sensex basket, Axis Bank jumped 6 per cent after the company reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 7,599 crore during the March 2024 quarter. State Bank of India, NTPC, Nestle, Sun Pharma, JSW Steel, ITC, Mahindra & Mahindra and HCL Technologies were among



the other major gainers. Kotak Mahindra Bank tanked 10.85 per cent after the RBI barred the company from onboarding customers online and issuing credit cards.

Cracking down on repeated non-compliance with IT norms, the RBI on Wednesday barred Kotak Mahindra Bank from onboarding new customers through its online and

mobile banking channels and issuing fresh credit cards with immediate effect after the regulator found "serious deficiencies" in the lender's IT risk management. Hindustan Unilever, Titan, Bajaj Finance, Maruti and Asian Paints were the other laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled lower while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the positive territory. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Wednesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.06 per cent to USD 88.07 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,511.74 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark rose 114.49 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 73,852.94 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty advanced 34.40 points or 0.15 per cent to 22,402.40.

Resilient economy, price stability to support India promising growth story: FinMin report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Resilient growth, price stability and steady external sector outlook continue to support India's promising economic performance amid uncertain global conditions, a Finance Ministry report said on Thursday. Overall, India continues to be the fastest-growing major economy, with positive assessments of the growth outlook for the current financial year for India by international organisations and the RBI, the Monthly Economic Review for March said. The IMF, in its April 2024 World Economic Outlook (WEO), has revised upwards its estimate of India's real GDP growth for FY24 to 7.8 per cent from 6.7 per cent in its January 2024 update and 6.3 per cent in its October 2023 WEO. The report said the global economic growth landscape is seeing a gradual resurgence, marked by fading fears of recession and rebounding growth in major economies. Geopolitical tensions remain a concern, but notwithstanding recent developments, risk perceptions have softened, offering a potential upside for growth, it said.



Talking about global economic growth recovery, the report said it is underway in major economies, although disparities persist. "While the leading indicators signal increased economic activity and geopolitical tensions have eased slightly, recent conflicts continue to pose risks. Despite the global challenges, India stands out with its strong economic performance, highlighting broad-based

growth across sectors and asserting its pivotal role in supporting the global growth trajectory," it said. Global slowdown led to a moderation in India's merchandise exports and imports, it said adding that the slowing of trade has resulted in the merchandise trade deficit narrowing in FY2023-24, as exports have shown a smaller contraction than imports. However, the non-petroleum and non-gems & jewellery merchandise exports have shown resilience with a sustained uptick in the last few months, growing at 3 per cent in FY24. Services exports expanded at the fastest pace in FY24, supported by rising software exports and business services exports. Owing to these developments, it said, India's current account deficit improved in the first nine months of 2023-24 compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. India's capital inflows saw a significant turnaround in 2023-24, and its foreign exchange reserves reached an all-time high in March 2024, sufficient to cover 11 months of projected imports and more than 100 per cent of total external debt.

AI offers remarkable opportunity for India: Qualcomm India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India, with its growth engines roaring, is the "place to be", Qualcomm India President Savi Soin has said, adding that the country has a "remarkable opportunity" with hybrid Artificial Intelligence (AI). The San Diego, California-headquartered chip designer is working with OEMs as well as operators in India to help bring entry-level 5G smartphone that would push new frontiers in affordability. "India is the place to be... Look at every sector, there is growth in every sector in India and that is just to serve the Indian consumers... You can imagine what is happening in phones with what OEMs are doing here... Not just build for India market but also for exports," Soin said in an interview to PTI. The India growth story is compelling, and the country with its strength and scale has



a "remarkable opportunity" with hybrid AI. Hybrid AI is device and cloud working together, splitting AI computation as needed, to offer enhanced experiences and optimum use of resources. "I wouldn't want to be in any place else but India in terms of

growth story at this time. India has an amazing opportunity... "India has remarkable opportunity with hybrid AI to be able to do on-device AI and show the world possible use cases on these devices, PCs, phones, cars, or two-wheelers," he said.

Qualcomm sees India as a "crucial" hub for talent, but also an opportunity "to do more". Qualcomm opened its first India office in 1996 in New Delhi, and its engineering development centres in Bengaluru and Hyderabad came up in 2004. The company's engineering presence in the country has now expanded to include Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Noida, with offices in Gurgaon, and Mumbai. The development centres operate as a part of Qualcomm's global research and development engine. In fact, India is the largest base outside of San Diego for Qualcomm's research and development. The development and R&D teams work very closely with Qualcomm's headquarters to customise solutions and applications for India across mobile, Internet of Things (IoT), auto, and connectivity. The Bangalore Development

Centre is host to a 5G Innovation lab, which has supported several Indian customers and startups on 5G solutions and product development journeys. "...We are working with all the two-wheeler OEMs in India and been able to provide them digital transformation... The experience they are looking for, in terms of connected platforms on two-wheelers and doing the similar thing for digital cockpit in four-wheelers... "We are also looking at what we can do in terms of consumer devices, be PC or phones. We are super excited about what India has to offer," Soin said. Describing Reliance Jio as a strategic partner for Qualcomm, Soin said, "We have been working with them on fixed wireless and on their initial 4G devices as well. "Lot of initiatives we have undergoing with Jio, they are very strategic partners for us.

We are proving tech know how and expertise... While we bring these technologies there is a lot of innovations that Jio is bringing to us as well. This is a two-way partnership," he elaborated. The company is lining up a new chipset that would enable the launch of 5G smartphone, in the price point of sub-USD 100. Qualcomm is working with all operators in India to help bring an entry-level 5G smartphone and believes that such technology should be available to the masses. Soin said the company is working not just with one but multiple partners to ensure its success, and reach. "We are enabling all OEMs, that we work with, to bring these devices into India. We will be working with all the operators in India and channels partners to bring these devices at affordable prices that India has not seen before. That is what we are most excited about," he said.

India services exports grow 11.4 per cent in 2023: UNCTAD report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's services exports jumped 11.4 per cent to USD 345 billion in 2023 despite global economic uncertainties, while China's shipments from the sector contracted by 10.1 per cent to USD 381 billion, according to a UNCTAD report. Sectors that contribute to India's services export growth include travel, transport, medical and hospitality. With an 8.9 per cent annual rise in current dollar value terms, the world services exports surpassed USD 7.9 trillion in 2023, a quarterly bulletin of UNCTAD said. The leading exporters among developing economies include India, China, Singapore, Türkiye, Thailand, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia, it added. India's services imports, however, dipped marginally by 0.4 per cent to USD 248 billion last year.

"The main driver of the YoY (year-on-year) rise of services exports in Q4 2023 was the ample growth of international travel receipts. In the post-COVID-19 recovery, travel receipts increased by 70 per cent in Asia (YoY)," the report said. Commenting on India's services exports, an industry expert said that the export of IT and IT-enabled services and travel is going strong. Business services like engineering, architecture, legal and accounting services and research and management consulting services stand to benefit from leveraging the opportunities presented by the government initiatives. India's service exports have historically been concentrated in North America and Europe, but there is also significant potential for growth in emerging markets, such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Ministry working on infrastructure needs to achieve \$1 trillion goods exports target by 2030: Official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce ministry has initiated an exercise to identify required infrastructure needs, potential sectors, and clusters which would help the country achieve the USD 1 trillion merchandise exports target by 2030, a senior government official said on Thursday. Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce Anant Swarup said that the Asian Development Bank has been requested to conduct a study in this regard. If the country is targeting USD 1 trillion of exports by 2030, there is a likelihood of about USD 1.5 trillion of imports, so "do we have enough capacity" to cater to USD 2.5 trillion of EXIM (export and import) trade, he said. So that is the target on which the department is working, he said. "The ADB is doing a study for us because what is more important is from where the USD 1 trillion of exports is going to come from; which are those sectors and clusters



Imports too dipped to USD 677.24 billion in the last fiscal. He also said that the government is also focusing on ways to push India's integration into the global supply chains (GVCs) as at present about 70 per cent of the global trade is happening through these chains. For this, there is a need to increase manufacturing. He added that generally exports and imports move in tandem. China's exports stood at about USD 3.5 trillion and imports are at USD 3.2 trillion. Speaking at the event, Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) Santosh Kumar Sarangi said that further infrastructure push is required at ports and airports to increase India's exports. Sarangi said that to handle USD 2.5 trillion of exports and imports, India needs to create a lot of infrastructure. As per rough calculations, "we need to create an infrastructure which will support an additional 2,000 million tonnes of goods movement in the ports.

from where this USD 1 trillion of exports is going to come from. That is very critical for us. "Because unless we know about the clusters, and ports or airports from where this USD 1 trillion of exports and USD 1.5 trillion of imports is going to happen, we would not be able to do a baseline study to identify the gaps which exist and then enhance our infrastructure capabilities," Swarup said. He was speaking at a CII conference on resilient export logistics for trade and connectivity. India's merchandise exports dipped by 3.11 per cent to USD 437 billion in 2023-24.

HUDCO celebrates its 54th Foundation Day

ABHI SINGHAL ■ NEW DELHI

Housing and Urban Development Corporation Limited (HUDCO), a Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), celebrated its 54th Foundation Day on Thursday. The Navratna CPSE has been adding more efforts for the creation of sustainable and resilient infrastructure in line with Government of India Vision of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. The Public Financial Institution celebrated their Foundation Day at India Habitat Centre and the celebrations were graced by the board of Directors of HUDCO including Sanjay Kulshrestha, Chairman & Managing Director, M Nagaraj, Director of Corporate Planning, Kuldip Narayan, Director and more senior members. HUDCO with its mandate of providing long term financial assistance to Housing and Urban Infrastructure sectors has operated through its Pan-India network of 21 Regional Offices, 11 Development Offices and a Corporate Office



and Research and Training Institute (HSMI) in Delhi. The CPSE also released many Hindi and English publications namely Shelter - HSMI's biannual publication on policy issues, Darpan - an inhouse magazine, Johar and more. For many years HUDCO has supported the State Government in the development of Affordable Housing Schemes for Economically Weaker Section (EWS) and Low Income Group (LIG) segments and social infrastructure projects all over the country. HUDCO is also one of the Central Nodal Agency for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban).

ITC plans to open more hotels overseas: CMD Puri

PTI ■ COLOMBO

India's diversified entity ITC plans to open more hotels overseas with neighbouring countries and the Middle East as primary target markets after opening of its first international property here, company Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Puri said on Thursday. The company's arm ITC Hotels, which had opened 22 new properties in the last 24 months, plans to add another 70 hotels in the next five years in India as part of expansion plans in the hospitality sector. Besides the hotels business, the company will look for opportunities to expand the presence of FMCG and other verticals in new overseas markets as well. "We are open to exploring opportunities that come about. I think we have strong credentials in hospitality which we can take outside India now. Very clearly at the moment the focus is on proximal markets, be it for hospitality, be it for FMCG..." Puri said here at a press conference after the opening

of the 352-room luxury property, ITC Ratnadipa here. He said as the company explores and understands a place for a particular business, it may look at it as a market for other verticals as well. Citing the example of Nepal, Puri said, "We started with other businesses and are now looking at hospitality (there). Here (in Sri Lanka) we have started with hospitality...As we explore and understand the place, we will look at possibilities in some of our other sectors as well." On overseas expansion of the hospitality business, while the company's focus is more on 'proximal markets', he said, "We are open to it if there are some interesting opportunities beyond it. We will certainly be interested in pursuing that." When asked if ITC is looking at the Middle East as a market for the hospitality business, he said it is a vibrant economy right now with terrific growth plans and "if opportunity comes our way then we will certainly explore that".

SRM IST hosts Conference on Occupational Therapy



KATTANKULATHUR: In his presidential address at the inauguration of the National Conference on Autism, 2024, on Wednesday, Dr P Sathyanarayanan, Pro Chancellor (Academics), SRM Institute of Science and Technology, said SRM College of Occupational Therapy, since its inception in 1996, had provided treatment to more than 5,000 people through the occupational therapy programme. He said that people with autism had to travel to different places to have access to services and avail treatment from doctors and therapists. With a view to providing all such services under a single roof, they had established the occupational therapy centre at SRM IST in Kattankulathur. PNS

Tech Mahindra Q4 net profit tanks 41 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IT services company Tech Mahindra on Thursday reported about 41 per cent year-on-year fall in its consolidated net profit to Rs 661 crore for the quarter ended March 2024. The net profit in the year-ago period was Rs 1,117.7 crore. For Q4FY24, the Tech Mahindra's revenue dropped by 6.2 per cent to Rs 12,871 crore. During the full fiscal FY24, the consolidated net profit tanked 51.2 per cent year-on-year to Rs 2,358 crore. The revenue during FY24 at Rs 51,996 crore, translated to a decline of 2.4 per cent over the previous fiscal. Tech Mahindra CEO Mohit Joshi said, "As we step into FY25, we look forward to improvement in clients spending, which fuels

our optimism for a better revenue performance ahead." He said that FY24 posed its fair share of challenges for the IT services sector. "...Yet, amidst the global economic uncertainties, we continue to observe a notable push towards digital adoption," Joshi said. The company's total headcount stood at 1,45,455 in Q4FY24, down 795 on a sequential basis. The board recommended final dividend of Rs 28 per equity share (face value of Rs 5 each) for the financial year ended March 31, 2024. The Final Dividend, if approved, will be paid on or before, August 9, 2024. This dividend is in addition to interim dividend of Rs 12 per equity share paid by the company in November, 2023.

Consumers sentiments in India's housing market remain positive despite a rise in prices, according to realty portal Magicbricks. On Thursday, Magicbricks released a report 'Housing Sentiment Index' based on the survey of over 4,500 customers across 11 cities. "Despite inflationary pressures, the Housing Sentiment Index (HSI) across India remains robust with strong buyer confidence," it said in a statement. The survey revealed a positive market outlook for the Indian residential real estate sector with an overall HSI of 149. Magicbricks said the HSI is

Indian housing market outlook bullish: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



derived from an online survey capturing the responses of 4,500 high intent homebuyers across the top 11 cities of India, spanning various income brackets and budget preferences. The HSI score ranges from 0 to 200, with 100 representing

neutral. Indicating an expectation of market stability in the short to medium term. A score of 200 reflects a bullish sentiment while a score of 0 indicated a bearish sentiment. "Currently, the pan-India HSI stands at 149, signalling the optimistic outlook of

prospective homebuyers," the report said. Ahmedabad emerged as the frontrunner with the highest HSI of 163, closely followed by Kolkata (160), Gurugram (157), and Hyderabad (156), propelled by enhanced infrastructure and upcoming new real estate projects. "The current scenario of India's real estate sector reflects the most promising conditions witnessed in the past decade, instilling confidence among homebuyers and investors nationwide. Its also noteworthy that the demand is consistently surpassing available supply, showing encouraging signs of swift absorption when new

inventory enters the market," Sudhir Pai, CEO of Magicbricks, said. The report also identified that mid-age professionals (24-35 age group) demonstrated the highest HSI (154). Furthermore, consumers with an annual income of Rs 10-20 lakh displayed strongest aspirations for home buying, with HSI of 156. According to the statement, Magicbricks has monthly website traffic exceeding 2 crore and an active base of over 15 lakh property listings. It has become a full stack service provider for all real estate needs, with services, including home loans, interiors, movers and packers, and expert advice.

PRESERVING A RICH LEGACY FOR A GLORIOUS FUTURE

World Dance Day is not just a celebration but a promise for the future, a future where Indian classical dance continues to inspire, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



Renowned Bharatanatyam dancer, vocalist, and Padma Shri awardee, Geeta Chandran, is a bridge between tradition and contemporary sensibilities. Leading the esteemed Natya Vriksha organisation, her dedication to Indian classical dance extends far beyond captivating performances. Led by the visionary Chandran, her organisation took centre stage in Delhi for World Dance Day, offering a stunning display last week on April 20th and 21st at the India International Centre, co-hosted by the Ministry of Culture. Chandran's talent for blending tradition with contemporary flair was on full display, captivating attendees from all walks of life. The heart of the celebration beat with the youthful energy of the Young Dancers' Festival, promising a bright future for Indian classical dance. The opening was a soulful Bharatanatyam performance by Vaishnavi Srinivasan and Nivedha Harish, disciples of Guru Smt Roja Kannan. Their dance, choreographed by Guru Adyar K Lakshmanan, set a magical tone for the evening. Divya Goswami, a disciple of the late Guru Shri Munnalal Shukla, followed with her mesmerising Kathak performance. Beyond technical skill, the event offered a glimpse into Indian culture through the expressive movements of young artists. Each gesture was filled with passion, captivating the audience,

showcasing Chandran's instinct to identify exceptional talent. On this platform, Natya Vriksha not only celebrated established artists but also empowered emerging dancers, providing them a space to shine. The Bharatanatyam performances were a visual feast, with elaborate costumes, jewellery, and makeup enhancing the storytelling. The audience responded with thunderous applause, appreciating the dedication and skill of the dancers. Chandran's vision for Natya Vriksha extends far beyond the stage. Her organisation serves as a nurturing ground for budding artists. They create a sense of community and collaboration within the Indian classical dance scene, encouraging a sense of shared passion and heritage. Chandran's unwavering commitment to preserving this rich cultural heritage is evident not only in her captivating performances but also in her dedication to empower the next generation of dancers. World Dance Day, under her watchful eye, was more than just a celebration; it was a promise for a vibrant future. A future where Indian classical dance continues to enthral audiences for

generations to come, with young artists carrying the torch forward, with their unique interpretations to keep this ancient art form alive. It's a promise of preserving tradition while embracing innovation, ensuring that the rich tapestry of Indian classical dance continues to inspire and mesmerize. Natya Vriksha's efforts continue to flourish and captivate audiences around the world. Geeta Chandran's Natya Vriksha supports new artists, creating a community within the Indian classical dance scene. Her dedication to preserving this cultural heritage is seen in her performances and her focus on empowering the next generation. World Dance Day is not just a celebration but a promise for the future. It's a future where Indian classical dance continues to inspire, with young artists adding their own styles and keeping the art form alive. It's about preserving tradition while embracing new ideas, ensuring that Indian classical dance remains captivating and inspiring. Photo: Pankaj Kumar



Voices of women compels us to participate in a world where incredible women artists are striving for a more inclusive and vibrant art world, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**

PAINTED WHISPERS OF STORIES UNTOLD

Imagine a space where each wall whispers a story, a world that is painted not on spatial maps but on timeless canvases. This is the essence of the 'Voices of Women,' an art exhibition recently presented by Art Garde in a vibrant celebration of contemporary art by women artists. It was a testament to the flourishing creativity of these artists, each with a unique voice yearning to be heard. It was indeed a captivating display curated by Teesta Bhandare, where we were invited into the vibrant world of young and contemporary women artists.



Showing a diverse range of artwork, this exhibition, held earlier this month, showcased the talent and creativity of emerging and mid-career artists from across India. It was a testament to the increasing presence and influence of women on the art scene. While equal representation between men and women artists is still a work in progress, platforms like 'Voices of Women' play a crucial role in addressing this disparity and providing a space for women to underscore their creativity. Each stroke, each hue, whispered a story untold, drawing the one's attention to a world where art is not just seen but felt, where every canvas is a portal to a soulful journey. Clearly, the exhibition was a testament to the evolving role of women in the art world, a world where their voices resonate with increasing clarity and power. The show also shed light on the growing trend of women collectors, who are now collecting more art than men, further emphasising the importance of platforms like this in promoting women artists. Each piece of art in the exhibition narrates a unique and compelling story, the diverse perspectives of women artists brought together in perfect symphony. Neha Luthra's paintings, such as 'Dol ka bar and Sambhar Lakes,' painted in oil, depict her emotional connection to the places she has been to and experienced. Her artwork is the essence of these locations, conveying their beauty and ecological significance. Astha Patel's works, including 'Trepies Dancing Around Falling Bauhineas,' 'Celocias' and a Wild Avian,' and 'Butterscotch Light and Wild Fields,' are inspired by her environment and daily experiences. Her paintings often feature Bohemian flowers and birds, illuminated by moonlight, creating a sense of magic and tranquility. One of the paintings represents a place near Vadodara, in Gujarat, which highlights the ever-changing landscape and the constant presence of jungle babblers. These paintings evoke a sense of wonder and appreciation for the beauty nature has in store. Tanushree Sarkar's works explore themes of emotional intimacy and human connection. Her painting, 'Skin is Red - Half Women Half Dream,' done in oil, portrays bold and intimate moments, inviting us viewers to reflect on the complexity of human relationships. Another one, 'A Whirlwind Ahead,' depicts two figures intertwining with each other and nature, symbolizing harmony and the building of a shared future. Sarkar's art challenges conventional notions of beauty and encourages viewers to embrace their own unique bodies and identities. 'The Power of Braille' by Vijaya Chauhan, inspired by her experiences with visually

impaired friends, is an artist's courageous exploration of the Braille text. This thought-provoking work challenges societal norms, highlighting alternative notions of sight and communication. By using Braille as a point of departure, Chauhan demonstrates the beauty and power of alternative forms of expression, reminding us that sight is not the only way to experience and understand the world. 'Voices of Women' had more to it than mere aesthetics. It contained a powerful challenge to stereotypes perpetuated of yore, when a female artist was confined to the realm of the decorative. Here, even as Tanushree Sarkar explores themes of body consciousness and sexuality Vijaya Chauhan's works redefine our very perspective on what sight symbolises. The exhibition did not simply present diverse representations of women artists, it also broke the stereotypes and shackles on the art women create. It was a platform for young collectors to discover and acquire art that resonates with the common onlooker, making art accessible and meaningful to a wider audience. Malavika Rajnarayan, Ekta Singha, Maitreyi Desai, and Sareena Khemka, among others also scripted their unique perspectives on their canvas, enriching the exhibition with some exceptional artwork. The exhibition brought forth and celebrated the creativity and resilience of women artists, challenging traditional notions of art and beauty. In a conversation with a Curator Teesta Bhandare highlighted the importance of diversity in representation, stating that the exhibition aims to show the wide range of styles and themes women artists can explore. She also emphasized the challenge of educating people about the value of art as a cultural investment, urging visitors to see art as an integral part of their cultural identity.

Creative submission to the senses

BY **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Every artist has an impressive narrative to tell, recently brought forth in an exhibition, 'Evoke, Ignite, Awaken, Stir,' by the Art Exchange Project which featured not only professional artists but also individuals from diverse backgrounds who pursue art as a passion. In a world growing distant from art, it is difficult to track the journey of each artist and the challenges faced. Appreciation from people and sparse turnouts at art shows pose an ongoing challenge for artists. However, art encapsulates the ability to shine through this opacity. Curated by Aarti Patel, the exhibition featured 16 artists from Delhi, Haryana, and Rajasthan, each art piece a pouring out of the artist's inner core. The show provided a platform to the uninitiated to step on the canvas and chart their individual journeys of seeking meaning in every piece of art. The exercise was truly exhilarating for every artist showcased. Sixteen artists, each with their own unique story, some well-known, others only starting out, all sharing the common love and passion for creativity. Artist Ritu Chopra's work left a lasting memory on the onlooker, an artist whose works resonate with her felt physical experiences. Chopra relentlessly pursued new forms highlighting the freshness of a raw artist. Her love for trees, for example, is evident in her series where the tree symbolises the real sage, the silent spectators to life, emitting knowledge and enlightenment. Chopra's paintings have ensured that her spirit



lives on, much after life, a poignant reminder that artists never die, their work an immortal and vibrant legacy for generations to come. Kavita Lomror's cityscapes, using reflective glass, are abuzz with the energy of city life, a sharp contrast to Chopra's serene landscapes. While Lomror captures the rush, complexity, and rhythm of urban life, Indraneel Ghose's photographs serve as a magic window to his winter wonderland, an escape from the searing heat of Delhi, a world of frosty mornings and misty landscapes. Madhav Bhardwaj, views art as a medium to express the depth of human emotions, his personal release inviting the outsider to connect with one's inner self. Bhardwaj's hope is that his paintings evoke serenity and ease, and inspire others to remain undefeated, as a beacon of hope. His

series, 'A Stroll with Blooms,' is all about an all-encompassing positivity. Reena Chopra's work is a testimony to the free-flowing forms in life that speak of a journey and a destination that no one knows about. Life is a river that we float on and the sooner

we realise we have no control and surrender to the flow, the better the journey will be. Sushil Thakur's 'The Matrix' series was truly stunning. Artist Harsh Jalendra's oil paintings, like 'Falling' and 'Bitter Sweet,' were incredibly realistic, almost in motion. A fusion of intertwined styles, his work was a walk through dreams and reality, through a colourful spectrum of emotions. 'The Change of Perspective' truly altered the way art is perceived. Artists Khushboo Kalyanwala and Sarka Chandra explored the cyclical movement of celestial bodies. Sujata Khanna, Tushar Nath, and Winnie Singh, contributed uniquely to the exhibition, creating a magical experience for all. The overall display of creativity was mesmerizing for people who invest their time in art. Aarti Uppal Singla, the artist and Curator who made it all happen, spoke of a community reborn. Here, art was not just for a privileged few; it was for everyone. Her dream to ignite the creative spark even in silent onlookers contains the power to bring people together. Evoke was not just another art show. It was a journey where tired eyes rediscovered the joy of colour, where doubts melted away in the face of imagination, when strangers became soulmates, all on an artistic discovery creating an invisible bond. Exhibitions like these are a vibrant testimony to the human spirit and its unending search for beauty, a celebration of the transformative power of art that can evoke, ignite, awaken, and stir long after the final curtain are down. Photo: Pankaj Kumar

A Journey through Darkness

Delving into a turbulent period of Indian history, *Razakar* brings a complex narrative to life. In a conversation with **SAKSHI PRIYA**, the film's cast sheds light on their experiences portraying characters from a dark chapter in Indian history

Raj Arjun, what was the biggest challenge in portraying your character in *Razakar*?

Every character gives me a challenge, and every character elevates me. That's what is exciting in this journey. I am in this field because I am always bored by monotonous routines, and I need challenges in my life. If you don't get challenges, you get bored, so I need challenges in my characters. That's why the excitement was there from the moment I was offered the role of Kasim Rizvi. He has a lot of complexity; he is a brutal man, Hitler-like, and a tough character. I thought I could justify it because of my thought process, and that's how I started. *Razakar* deals with a dark period in Indian history. Did portraying a character from that time impact you in any way? It does impact you for each and every character, whatever you

play. If it is intense and requires you to be deeply in the role, it does leave an impression on you. It is not impossible to get out of that, but it gives you pain and trauma. It is hard to get involved in another character afterward, as it is hard to come out. Then, we fight with the emptiness of our own space because for a long process, we involve ourselves in a particular character, and then there is nothing after that. Neither are we actors nor that character at that particular time. So, you feel totally empty. This takes you on a different emotional ride, which can sometimes bring you down



because a particular character is very intense. He is so brutal, he is thinking of his own Islamic state, and everything, and then, cut, the process is over. Now, that mindset you are left with for the last five months, and now there is nothing. You are not allowed to go beyond that. You start thinking about how you will move to the next character. That always gives you pain, but at the same time, there is happiness also. The mixed emotions are what we have to deal with. That's why we are actors, and that's why we are artists. There is often debate surrounding historical

portrayals in movies. How do you feel about the responsibility of actors in portraying such events accurately? For every role I am offered, if I have been called, I feel that without them giving me the responsibility, I take it upon myself because I feel if they have called me, they know I am a good actor, and I have to serve the purpose. I have to justify the role with my honesty and my craft, by not showing that I am overacting. They have to see the character, not Raj Arjun the actor. That is my forte. People call me that because I start looking like the character. So,

I do feel the responsibility so much that I get involved with my production house, my people, director, makeup artist, as a family member. I will go beyond everything because for me, my film, my character, and my story are my God. How did working alongside your fellow cast members enhance your understanding of the film's themes? They are so lovable, and they are great. If you see love outside and around you, you will find love. If you throw hatred through your eyes, you will find hatred. In the work zone, I don't find anybody who is jealous of me or not giving me good vibes because I am so engrossed in my work that I don't have time to look up and see what others are thinking. If I start thinking about others, it would be a criminal waste of my time, and I don't believe in that kind of thinking. Sometimes, when you

talk to actors, when you do the scene, you get the energy. Over here, as I said, if you are good, everybody is good. In any case, they all work here, so we will all be good people, good energy around. That's why commercially, where this project will reach, I am not worried about that. That should be my concern because I am a part of this film, and I should think that my producer should benefit. But it is not in my hands. But what can I do? I can just support this film. That's why all this good energy works together, and here is a good product out of that good energy. Photo: Pankaj Kumar





KKR bowling woes under spotlight vs shaky Punjab Kings

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Mitchell Starc will be desperate to justify his USD 3 million price tag as Kolkata Knight Riders bowling unit try to find ways to be less profligate when it is pitted against a perennially under-achieving Punjab Kings in an IPL match here on Saturday.

KKR is currently second in the 10-team table with 10 points, four behind table toppers Rajasthan Royals (14 points) and the team's success is largely due to the batting efforts from the top-order.

In Punjab Kings, they meet a side that has been inconsistent and despite two good finds in Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma, they haven't exactly done well during key moments and like every other year, they are all but out of play-off contention.

Sunil Narine (286 @176.54 SR) and Phil Salt (249 @169.38 SR) have been phenomenal at the top. Andre Russell (155 @184.52), skipper Shreyas Iyer (190 @126.66) have all been

among the runs. Even Rinku Singh, who has just faced 67 balls in 7 games has a strike-rate of close to 160.

Save captain Iyer, all the specialist batters have scored at a strike-rate northwards of 150 and that has been instrumental in the Shah Rukh Khan co-owned team posting four 200-plus totals in their seven games so far.

Only Venkatesh Iyer's poor form has stuck out like a sore thumb and Nitish Rana's finger fracture has not only robbed KKR of a master player of spinners but also a very handy off-break bowler.

However the same can't be said about the bowling unit where Narine with his immaculate line and length is the only person, who has been able to maintain an economy rate of just above 7.10 which is brilliant in times when 'Impact Player' is in vogue.

The Trinidadian has also started leaking runs and the way Rajat Patidar took him on, hitting him for two sixes in one over, will definitely inspire the likes of Ashutosh and



Shashank — the two in-form batters of PBKS. But it is Starc, whose underwhelming performance (6 wickets at ER 11.48) is the worst among the specialist bowler. At an all-time high price tag of Rs 24.75 crore (USD 3 million), Starc must be feeling the heat but to be fair to him, some of the tracks, including the one at the Eden

Gardens have been perfect belters where length balls are soaring into the stands. Compared to Starc, uncapped India pacers Harshit Rana (ER 9.25, 9 wickets) and Vaibhav Arora (9.57, 7 wickets) have been more impressive but they have also got hit at times. Against a side like Kings with some power-hitters at the back-end, a better

performance will be warranted from the bowling unit. Starc has looked unidimensional, relying more on pace and has been reluctant to bowl the slower ones as the batters have negotiated him easily especially in the death overs. For KKR to go all the way, Starc will have to get his mojo back and play a lead role in the bowling department, for the

likes of Narine and Varun Chakravarthy to dominate in the middle overs.

This is one area PBKS would like to exploit as they would look to return to winning ways. While KKR top-order has done the bulk of their scoring, it's the opposite in case of Punjab Kings who have struggled to get it going from the outset.

The likes of Prabhshimran Singh, Liam Livingstone, Rilee Rossouw and Jonny Bairstow have failed to get into the act. It's their uncapped duo of Ashutosh and Shashank who have salvaged the team from precarious situations with their astonishing powerhitting. They would hope that their regular skipper Shikhar Dhawan who is nursing a shoulder injury makes a comeback, after sitting out of their last three matches.

Dhawan was seen knocking in two phases and also playing a football match during their training after reaching here on Wednesday as his inclusion would definitely be a boost to their sagging morale.



All rounder role is in danger: Axar Patel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Axar Patel, who is a very capable batter besides being a quality left-arm spinner, feels the "all-rounder's role is in danger" because of the 'Impact Player' rule, making him the latest cricketer to give a thumbs down to the IPL innovation that has polarised opinions.

Promoted to No.3, Axar made a counter-attacking 43-ball 66 and along with skipper Rishabh Pant, lifted Delhi Capitals from 44/3 to 224/4 in their Indian Premier League match against Gujarat Titans here on Wednesday.

Later, he picked up one wicket as DC successfully defended their total to win by four runs. Sharing his thoughts on the Impact Player rule, Axar said, "As an all-rounder, I feel that an all-rounder's role is in danger with the Impact Player rule. Every team is looking to play either a pure batter or a pure bowler as the Impact Player, and the all-rounders are not being used."

"With the Impact Player, every team goes into the match thinking they have six batters or bowlers, depending on if they are batting or bowling. This also creates a lot of confusion sometimes," Axar told 'JioCinema'.

The rule has also been criticised by the likes of Indian captain Rohit Sharma and several former players as well.

Introduced in 2023, the 'Impact Player' rule allows teams to substitute players during innings, sparking debate and scrutiny in the current season.

Axar, who sees himself as an all-rounder, had earlier said that because of the rule, the value of an all-rounder has gone down.

Thanks to Axar and Pant's brisk 113-run association, DC put up a total that helped them register their season's fourth win.

"I didn't know beforehand that I would bat at No. 3. When our batting came, they told me that they were thinking I should go at No. 3 because three spinners were playing. First, they asked Rishabh and then we discussed, and I said that I'll go."

"Rishabh also wanted to go, but then I told him that they'll use spinners later as well, and he should go at No. 4 because he can handle the middle-overs," Axar said.

On his bowling, Axar said, "I am not doing anything new. I am just adding variations to the pace. I wasn't confident about bowling my slow ball earlier, but I have found that confidence regardless of the batter being right or left-handed."

"The pace variations are making a big difference now. With the high-scoring games we're seeing, it's important to have the right attitude."

Rishabh Pant looks hungry, he is in very good form: DC batting coach Amre

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The swashbuckling Rishabh Pant has showed with his scintillating knock against Gujarat Titans that he is ready to roar in the upcoming T20 World Cup, feels Delhi Capitals' batting coach Pravin Amre.

A month after returning to competitive cricket after recovering from the multiple injuries sustained during a horrific car accident in December 2022, Pant virtually sealed his spot as India's first choice wicketkeeper for the T20 World Cup with an unbeaten 88 off 43 balls in DC's four-run win over GT in an IPL match here on Wednesday.

Skipper Pant and Axar Patel (66 off 43) forged a brisk 113-run stand off 68 balls to power DC to 224/4 after they were reeling at 44/3 in their must-win game.

"He (pant) started with a two-week camp in Vizag, he came there, he prepared himself very well. I remember when he came for the Vizag camp, he came straight to the ground from the airport.

"He was hungry and made sure



everyday he is going to utilise. It is all about his hard work, which is paying him," Amre said at the post-match press conference.

"And obviously a couple of good knocks gave him the confidence and today we saw a special knock. Finishing was important, and we saw how Rishabh single-handedly got 31 runs against an experienced bowler (Mohit Sharma), and that really says that he is in good form."

Amre also praised Axar, who made the opportunity count after being promoted to the No.3 spot.



It is Rahul vs Sanju and Avesh vs Bishnoi and Axar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

KL Rahul is believed to be slightly ahead of Sanju Samson in the race for second wicketkeeper's slot even as Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya's indifferent batting form remains a worry for the national selection panel which is expected to announce the 15-member squad for the T20 World Cup in Americas by the end of this month.

The other bone of contention in drafting the final squad could be the choice of an extra bowler.

It remains to be seen whether an extra pace bowler in Avesh Khan will be accommodated or whether the choice would be between Lucknow Super Giants leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi and Delhi Capitals all-rounder Axar Patel considering the low and slow tracks in the West Indies.

It is understood that skipper Rohit Sharma is likely to have a meeting with chairman of

selectors Ajit Agarkar to discuss the outline of the team. With the ICC setting a May 1 deadline for the announcement of 15-member squads, the BCCI is expected to reveal the names anytime between the end of this week or the beginning of next week. Pandya has so far bowled 17 overs out of a possible 32 in eight games for ML.

As a designated finisher, he has hit only seven sixes in these games, which is below par by every measure. The free-flowing bat-swing is completely missing in the 150 odd runs that he has scored in the tournament so far at a strike-rate of 142.

However, Pandya can be called a "TINA" option (There Is No Alternative) for the selectors as Shivam Dube, who is also expected to board the New York bound flight, isn't bowling either.

Also in terms of skill and pace, Dube the bowler isn't anywhere close to Pandya but

his current batting form (22 sixes in eight games) can't be ignored either.

RAHUL VS SANJU: It can be safely concluded that Rishabh Pant, who is now third among the top run-getters in the competition with 342 at a strike rate of 161, has sealed his place as the team's No. 1 keeper-batter and also as a designated finisher.

The fight is pretty intense for the second keeper's slot and despite KL Rahul (302 at 141 SR) not batting in the middle-order, his range of strokes might just help him pip Samson (314 at SR 152).

Samson might again have to be content with being a stand-by inclusion like last year's 50 over World Cup.

BISHNOI VS AVESH VS AXAR: The five bowlers, who have all but sealed their places are Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh, Mohammed Siraj, Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav.

However save Bumrah and

Kuldeep, the other Indian bowlers haven't been in great form during IPL and hence the choice of an extra bowler becomes very important.

It will be a three-way fight between Rajasthan Royals' pacer Avesh, Delhi Capitals left-arm spin bowling all-rounder Axar and Lucknow Super Giants leg-spinner Bishnoi.

Avesh, who has improved a lot as far as his death bowling is concerned, has eight wickets from as many matches with an economy rate of 9.41 while Bishnoi has only taken five wickets but on flat tracks, his economy of 8.47 can be considered impressive.

Axar, who has seven scalps from nine games but is bowling at an rate of just above 7, would be a brilliant choice too taking the conditions into consideration.

Add to it, his batting prowess, scoring runs at a strike of 132, and also the fact that he is a very good all-round felder.

OTHER SPORTS

Archery World Cup: Recurve men team in final

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

The Indian trio of Tarundeep Rai, Dhiraj Bommadevara and Pravin Jadhav set up a gold medal clash with Olympic champions Korea after storming into the men's team recurve final of the Archery World Cup Stage 1 here on Thursday.

It came a day after India were assured of at least two medals in the compound competition after both the men's and women's teams made the

finals.

The Indian recurve team, which qualified behind reigning world and Olympic champions South Korea, sailed past Italy 5-1 (55-54, 55-55, 56-55) in the last-four stage.

India will be up against the South Korea's Tokyo Olympics gold medal-winning trio of Kim Woojin, Lee Woo Seok and Kim Je Deok in the final slated for Sunday.

The top-seeded Korean trio defeated their Chinese Taipei rivals Tan Chih-Chun, Lin



Zih-Siang and Tai Yu-Hsuan in straight sets 6-0 (57-50, 58-56, 58-54).

In the compound event, former world youth champion

Priyansh and reigning Asian Games gold-medallist Jyothi Surekha Vennam advanced to their respective individual semi-finals to also remain in

the hunt for a medal.

Having got a first round bye in the season-opening tournament, the second-seeded men's recurve team overcame a first set deficit to beat 15th seeded Indonesia 5-3 (55-56, 54-54, 55-51, 55-53) in their tricky opening clash.

They were back to their best against seventh-seeded Spain as they began by dropping just one point (59 out of 60) before cruising to a 5-1 (59-54, 56-55, 55-55) win to make the semifinals.

Liverpool Premier League title hopes hit by 2-0 loss to Everton

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Jurgen Klopp's hopes of a dream send-off were left in tatters after a 2-0 loss to Everton dealt a major blow to Liverpool's Premier League title bid on Wednesday.

Goals from Jarrad Branthwaite and Dominic Calvert-Lewin at Goodison Park meant Klopp tasted a bitter defeat in his last Merseyside derby before standing down at the end of the season.

"I can only apologize for today to the people. We should have done better and we didn't and that's why we lost," Klopp said.

The loss keeps Liverpool three points behind league leader Arsenal in second place and one ahead of defending champion Manchester City, which is in third and has two games in hand on both of its rivals.

Klopp had spoken last week of needing perfection to win his second title at the club. But this was the latest setback for his team, which has lost two of its last three games in the league.

While the result hurt Liverpool's title chances, it delivered a boost to Everton's survival bid, with the win



moving Sean Dyche's team eight points above the relegation zone. That fact seemed to be of less concern to the home fans, who were too busy reveling in the damage caused to Liverpool's season.

"You lost the league at Goodison Park," they chanted as the final whistle approached and the majority of the 39,000 crowd remained inside the stadium to drink in the atmosphere as the players celebrated on the field.

"I'm very disappointed. We let it happen exactly the game that Everton wanted," Klopp said.

Klopp had dominated this fixture since taking over at Anfield in 2015, winning nine of the past 16 derbies before Wednesday's match.

Statistics showed Everton won 75% of all duels in the opening half hour, a league record for any top flight team this season.

After just six minutes, Liverpool was grateful for VAR as it escaped an early penalty when Alisson brought down Calvert-Lewin in the box and referee Andrew Madley pointed to the spot. The decision was overturned because of an offside in the build up.

That pressure was made to count when Everton took the lead in the 27th. Liverpool's defenders repeatedly failed to clear the danger from a free kick and Branthwaite's shot squirmed through the hands of Alisson and off the post before crossing the line.

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Indian chess prodigy D Gukesh on Thursday thanked the legendary Viswanathan Anand for playing a huge role in shaping his career, saying "I wouldn't have been close to what I am now if it wasn't for him."

The 17-year-old Grandmaster scripted history on Monday by winning the Candidates Chess Tournament in Toronto to become the youngest ever challenger to the world title, beating a record created by the legendary Garry Kasparov 40 years ago.

The triumph paved the way for Gukesh's clash against reigning world champion Ding Liren of

I will not have been close to what I am now if it was not for Vishy: Gukesh

China later this year.

"Vishy sir has been a huge inspiration for me and I have heavily benefitted from his academy. I am truly grateful to him and wouldn't have been close to what I am now if it wasn't for him," Gukesh said at a press conference a few hours after his arrival here to a rousing reception from fans and schoolmates.

Gukesh has trained at the Westbridge-Anand Chess Academy which came into existence in 2020. Incidentally,



before Gukesh, Anand was the only Indian to have won the Candidates, the last time being 2014.

Speaking about his much-anticipated clash against Liren, Gukesh said, "The biggest challenge against Ding would be how I prepare myself and being in the right state of mind since it will be a big match."

"There are a lot of expectations and a lot at stake. I have full belief in myself and will be going in with the same strategy.

Hopefully, it will work out well." The history-making teen was swamped by fans as he returned to an enthusiastic reception early this morning.

Hundreds of students from the Velmammal Vidyalaya, the school where Gukesh studies, lined up at the airport at least one hour before his flight landed to greet him. "I am happy to see what the victory meant to the country. I was delighted to see young kids full of energy and rooting for me the moment I landed in Chennai. It's truly special and means a lot to me," he said.

His mother Padma, who is a microbiologist, was at the airport to receive him. His father Rajinikanth had travelled with Gukesh to Toronto.