

OPINION 6
ROLE OF AI IN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

WORLD 8
US EFFORT TO BRING AID TO GAZA BY SEA

MONEY 10
MARKETS SNAP FIVE DAYS RALLY; SENSEX TUMBLES

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 34 Issue 116
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY APRIL 27, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

DELHI CAPITALS TAKE ON MI 12 SPORTS



Supreme Court rejects 100 per cent VVPAT verification plea

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A tight slap to Congress led Opposition: Modi

In a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court on Friday rejected all petitions seeking 100 per cent cross-verification of votes cast using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT).

Weighing in on the intensely debated issue that has long divided political parties, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta delivered two concurring verdicts in the matter, also rejected a demand to go back to ballot papers in elections. The order came on a day during the second phase of polling for 88 parliamentary seats in 13 States. The Supreme Court's long anticipated verdict quickly found echo in the political landscape with Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying at a rally in Araria in Bihar that it is a "tight slap" on the Congress-led Opposition which now must "apologise" for committing the "sin of creating distrust" against



Supreme Court on EVM-VVPAT Verification Case Photo: PTI

electronic voting machines. Hours after the Supreme Court verdict, Modi said the decision shattered dreams of the INDIA Bloc that "sought to mislead the nation". "Every politician in the INDIA coalition sinned by trying to create doubts in the hearts of the nation's citizens," Modi said at an election rally in Araria Lok Sabha constituency in Bihar. "When the Congress, the RJD and other INDIA Bloc parties were in power, the poor,

backwards and Dalits used to be deprived of their votes through booth capture. With the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines, they are no longer able to play their old game. Hence, they committed the sin of creating distrust against EVMs," he said. Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal described the decision as "fabulous". He said the Supreme Court's ruling has exposed Opposition parties, including the Congress, which had left no opportunity to "defame" the Election Commission. **Continued on Page 2**

Opposition vows to continue VVPAT campaign

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

While most Opposition parties did not express their view after the Supreme Court's verdict on VVPAT, the Congress and a couple of parties like Samajwadi Party (SP) said it will continue with its campaign on greater use of VVPATs to increase the public trust in the electoral process. **Continued on Page 2**

Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said the Opposition is not a party, directly or indirectly, to the petition on VVPATs. "We have taken note of the verdict of the two-judge bench and our political campaign on the greater use of VVPATs to increase public trust in the electoral process will continue," Ramesh said in a statement. **Continued on Page 2**

Estimated Poll Turnout (Phase -II) at 07:00 PM

STATES	VOTING PER CENT
Assam	70.78
Bihar	54.91
Chhattisgarh	73.05
Jammu and Kashmir	71.63
Karnataka	67.12
Kerala	65.28
Madhya Pradesh	56.60
Maharashtra	54.34
Manipur	77.18
Rajasthan	63.82
Tripura	78.63
Uttar Pradesh	54.82
West Bengal	71.84



Nearly 61 per cent voter turnout in Phase II of LS polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to young and women voters to turn out in great numbers and Opposition leaders, including Priyanka Gandhi's message for voters to vote and 'save the Constitution,' notwithstanding, saw nearly 61 per cent voting till 7 pm on Friday in the second phase of the Lok Sabha. The 2019 polls of the second phase recorded 66 per cent voting. At 7 pm, 61 per cent voter turnout was recorded across 13 States and Union Territories. Manipur, Chhattisgarh, Bengal, Assam and Tripura recorded over 70 per cent voter turnout while Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra recorded

the lowest turnout at 52.6 per cent, 53 per cent and 53.5 per cent respectively. In 2019, NDA secured victory in 56 seats of the 89 seats while the UPA won 24 seats. In the ongoing second phase of Lok Sabha elections, Assam saw voting percentage of 70.97 per cent, Bihar 54.91 per cent, Chhattisgarh 73.19 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir 71.92 per cent, Karnataka 67.77 per cent, Kerala 65.45 per cent, Madhya Pradesh 57.55 per cent, Maharashtra 54.58 per cent, Manipur 77.18 per cent, Rajasthan 64.01 per cent, Tripura 78.82 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 54.83 per cent and West Bengal 71.84 per cent.

After Friday's phase, polling will be over in the States of Kerala, Rajasthan and Tripura. Barring a few confrontations and complaints of fake voting in Barmer-Jaisalmer, polling was peaceful in the second phase. The third phase of elections for 94 seats across 12 States and Union Territories will be held on May 7. Modi expressed his delight saying the phase two of the Lok Sabha polls has been "too good" for the BJP-led NDA, describing the support to the ruling alliance as unparalleled. "Phase Two has been too good! Gratitude to the people across India who have voted today. The

unparalleled support for NDA is going to disappoint the Opposition even more. Voters want NDA's good governance. Youth and women voters are powering the strong NDA support," Modi said on social media. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took potshots at the PM over his attack on the grand old party, saying he is scared and may even shed tears on the stage. Interestingly, Modi and Opposition leaders, including Rahul raised the pitch of the campaign by focusing on hot-button issues such as religious discrimination, inheritance taxes and affirmative action's during the second phase to polarize their vote bank.

Notably, Kanker, Rajnandgaon and Mahasamund in Chhattisgarh having naxalite presence, recorded voter turnout of 63.92 per cent. Similarly, the newly settled Bru voters of Tripura exercised their franchise for the 2024 general elections to the Lok Sabha. Voters in some villages of Uttar Pradesh's Mathura, Rajasthan's Banswara and Maharashtra's Parbhani boycotted polls over various issues but were persuaded by authorities to cast their franchise. Voters in some villages of Uttar Pradesh's Mathura, Rajasthan's Banswara and Maharashtra's Parbhani were boycotting the polls over various issues but were later persuaded by authorities to cast their franchise. **Continued on Page 2**

THE PIONEER REPORTS FROM GROUND ZERO

KERALA

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The ebullient fight between the BJP-led NDA, the Congress-led UDF and the CPI(M)-led LDF for the 20 Lok Sabha seats from Kerala that went to the polls on Friday is continuing even after the polling concluded by 6pm on Friday. As hundreds of voters had queued up in front of polling stations at 6 pm, polling officials issued tickets to all so that no one needed to return home without casting their votes. By 7 pm on Friday, the State had registered 70 per cent polling according to the Election Commission of India. The final figure is likely to cross the 77.8 per cent figure which was recorded in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll from the State. Law enforcement agencies heaved a sigh of relief as the polling process was by and large peaceful and no major untoward incidents were reported from anywhere in the State. But there were allegations by the BJP and the opposition Congress party that thousands of voters cast their votes with the help of fake identity cards. "There were many instances of expatriate workers from other States managing to cast



their votes with the help of officials whose loyalty lied with the CPI(M)," said Adoor Prakash, Congress candidate from Attingal in southern Kerala. Seven persons reportedly died either after casting the votes or while waiting for their turn to vote. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who cast his vote with wife Kamala and scam tainted daughter Veena Mohammed Riyaz claimed that there was a CPI(M) wave across Kerala and the LDF would win in all the 20 constituencies. He said that the good works done by the LDF to help the poor would be reflected when results are declared on 4 June. **Continued on Page 2**

NORTH EAST

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Sensitive States of the North East, including Manipur and Tripura, besides Assam witnessed peaceful polling on Friday in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections. Manipur, where polling was held under high presence of security personnel, the turnout was a high 77 per cent and one incident of EVM damage was reported. The State had witnessed violence in some areas during the first phase of polls on April 19. On Friday, voting was held in the remaining parts of the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency at 857 polling stations, spanning 13 Assembly segments in eight districts, officials said. Over 4.84 lakh people are eligible to vote in this phase. Fifteen assembly segments of the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency went to the polls in the first phase on April 19 along with the whole of the Inner Manipur seat. Four candidates are in the fray in Outer Manipur — NPF's K Timothy Zimik, Congress's Alfred Kannam Arthur, and Independents S



Kho John and Alyson Abonmai. The BJP has not fielded any candidate and is backing its ally, the NPF. Security measures were significantly enhanced across all 13 assembly segments where polling was underway, with 87 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and 4,000 state police personnel deployed to ensure free and fair elections. During the first phase of elections, parts of the Outer Manipur seat, covering 15 assembly segments, and 32 assembly segments of the Inner Manipur, went to polls on April 19. In the 2019 elections, the NPF emerged victorious, defeating the BJP by a margin of 73,782 votes. **Continued on Page 2**

UTTAR PRADESH

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW

In the second phase of Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh, 55-60 per cent voter turnout is expected to be recorded. Uttar Pradesh's Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said here on Friday that by 5 pm 52.74 per cent voter turnout was recorded in eight Lok Sabha constituencies where polling was held on Friday. Prominent among the 91 candidates whose fate was decided in the second phase polling are actors-turned-politician Hema Malini, who is seeking a third term from Mathura, and Arun Govil, who played the role of Lord Ram in the Ramayana TV serial. He has been fielded by the BJP from his native place Meerut. The other prominent candidates are Danish Ali of Congress from Amroha, and BJP's Atul Garg from Ghaziabad and Mahesh Sharma from Gautam Buddha Nagar. The constituencies where polling was held on Friday included Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Aligarh, Mathura and Bulandshahr. **Continued on Page 2**



The CEO said polling was peaceful in all eight Lok Sabha constituencies and no untoward incident was reported from anywhere. He said around 150 complaints were received at the state control room and all were promptly disposed of. The CEO said complaints related to faulty electronic voting machines (EVMs), power supply breakdown, slow polling and identification documents produced by voters. He said 48 ballot units, 213 control units and 469 VVPAT machines were replaced. In one polling booth, a polling agent was asked by the police to leave the booth. Following a complaint by the political party, the agent was allowed to stay at the particular polling booth. **Continued on Page 2**

KARNATAKA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

The first phase of Lok Sabha polls in Karnataka on Friday comprising 14 constituencies witnessed an impressive 65 per cent voter turnout where the Congress and BJP locked horns on the electoral battleground in less than a year. According to poll officials, 65 per cent voter turnout was recorded. The turnout was however 49.37 per cent in Bengaluru South, and 50.04 per cent in Bengaluru North, amid indications of continued voter apathy in the city. Long queues were seen at polling booths, as people, especially senior citizens and morning walkers came out to vote during the early hours since the voting began at 7 am. Several prominent personalities like Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, IT industry veteran N R Narayana Murthy, his wife and nominated member of Rajya Sabha Sudha Murthy, cricketing legends Rahul Dravid, Anil Kumble, and Javagal Srinath cast their

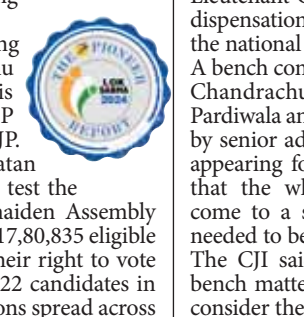


ballot. Former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, Siddaramaiah, Shivakumar, Kumaraswamy, and film personalities like Upendra, Shivarajkumar and Sudeep, also exercised their franchise. Several new couples cast their votes either before or after their marriage. Many booths saw centenarians and differently-abled people actively taking part in the democratic process. Out of 14 segments that went to polls, the highest turnout of 74.87 per cent was recorded in Mandya, followed by Udupi-Chikmagalur and Hassan at an identical 72.13 per cent, and the least 48.61 per cent in Bangalore Central. **Continued on Page 2**

JAMMU

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

More than 70 per cent voter turnout was recorded in the Jammu-Reasi Lok Sabha constituency in the second phase of polling amid tight security arrangements on Friday. Over 67.22 per cent polling was recorded till 5.00 pm and a large number of voters were still standing in the polling booths to cast their votes. Election Commission authorities said while sharing the Assembly-wise polling percentage. Former Minister and working president of Congress in Jammu and Kashmir Raman Bhalla is challenging two-time sitting MP Jugal Kishore Sharma of BJP. Ankur Sharma of Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal is also in the fray to test the political waters ahead of the maiden Assembly polls in the Union Territory. Of 17,80,835 eligible voters, 11,97,127 had exercised their right to vote till 5.00 p.m. sealing the fate of 22 candidates in the fray across 2416 polling stations spread across 4 districts of Jammu, Samba, Reasi, and Rajouri (83- Kalakote-Sunderbani). **Continued on Page 2**



SC to consider listing Delhi Government's plea on services row with Centre

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday told the Delhi Government that it would consider listing its plea challenging the Central Government's law establishing pre-eminence of the Lieutenant Governor over the elected dispensation in controlling services in the national Capital. A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra was urged by senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the AAP Government, that the whole administration has come to a standstill and the matter needed to be heard. The CJ said presently a nine-judge bench matter is going on and he will consider the submission. Presently, the nine-judge bench headed by the CJ is hearing petitions



raising a vexed legal question 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. Earlier on February 9, the Delhi Government had mentioned the plea for urgent listing before the five-judge Constitution bench. On September 27 last year, the top court had ordered that a common compilation of submissions be filed by both the parties in the petition by the Delhi Government. **Continued on Page 2**

Two terrorists killed in Baramulla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Amid high-voltage electioneering going on in the Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency of North Kashmir, a joint team of security forces on Friday eliminated two terrorists in the Nowpora area of Sopore. A civilian and two security personnel were also injured in the exchange of firing which continued intermittently during the night. The condition of all three personnel is stable. According to the Inspector General of Police, Kashmir range VK Birdi, "a joint operation was launched by the security forces on receipt of information about the presence of terrorists in the Nowpora area of Sopore in



Security personnel stand guard during an encounter with terrorists in Nowpora area of Sopore on Friday PTI

The intermittent firing continued during the night. The two terrorists were neutralised after fresh contact was established. The entire area was sanitised after the recovery of arms ammunition and other incriminating material. IG Kashmir VK Birdi said the identity of the slain terrorists is yet to be ascertained. Based on documents recovered from the encounter site one of the terrorists has been identified as Saifullah, he added. Voting is scheduled to take place during the fifth phase of polling on May 20. Peoples' Conference Chairman Sajad Lone and former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah are locked in a straight fight on the Lok Sabha seat. **Continued on Page 2**



Nearly 53.51 per cent polling on eight seats in Maharashtra

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

Amid reports about one electronic voting machine (EVM) in a polling booth in Nanded district being damaged by an aggrieved voter and malfunctioning EVMs at a few places, nearly 53.51 per cent of the total 1.5 crore voters exercised their franchise till 5 pm, in eight of the Lok Sabha constituencies that went to polls in Vidarbha and Marathwada regions. Available indications suggested the final voting percentage may either touch cross 60 per cent, which is significant considering that voters turned at the polling booth braving the hot weather conditions that prevailed in all the poll-bound constituencies. In the second phase of Lok Sabha elections, Buldhana, Akola, Amravati, Wardha, Yavatmal-Washim — all in Vidarbha region, Hingoli, Nanded, and Parbhani — in Marathwada region went to polls on Friday. Of the average of 53.51 per



cent polling reported till 5 pm, Wardha accounted for a maximum of 56.66 per cent voting, followed by Amravati - 54.50 per cent, Yavatmal-Washim - 54.04 per cent, Parbhani - 53.79 per cent, Akola - 52.49 per cent, Nanded - 52.47 per cent, Buldhana - 52.24 per cent and Hingoli - 52.03 per cent. In an untoward incident, an aggrieved voter - identified as one Bhaiyasaheb Edke (26) - broke an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) by hitting with a hammer at a polling booth at Rampuri in Nanded district in Nanded constituency of Marathwada region.

Immediately after the incident, Edke was arrested by the local police. The polling was suspended for some time in that booth. However, after the damaged EVM was replaced with a new one, the voting resumed in the affected booth. Edke, who gave vent to his anger by breaking the EVM, said that he was looking forward to people electing a pro-farmer and pro-labourer government in the country. The police are investigating the credentials, the motive behind his act of breaking the EVM and if he belonged to any political party. There were

reports from Buldhana constituency that owing to malfunctioning of EVMs at a few booths, the voting had to be suspended for a while. However, the voting passed off peacefully in all the affected polling booths. In Parbhani, the people in Balsa village had announced a boycott of the poll. However, the district collector reached out to the villagers personally and prevailed on them to cast their votes. After the district collector's intervention, the voting took place in the village without a hitch. Of the eight constituencies that went to polls, three constituencies — Buldhana, Yavatmal-Washim and Hingoli — are witnessing a direct fight between the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, which is taking on the Shiv Sena (UBT). This is the first major elections where the two Shiv Sena outfits are clashing against each other after the Shiv Sena split that saw senior party leader Eknath Shinde rebel against Uddhav Thackeray, walk out of the party along with 40-odd

MLAs team up with the Opposition BJP to form a government in Maharashtra in June 2022. 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 Baburao Kolatkar against Nagesh Patil Ashtikar of the Sena (UBT). In Amravati and Nanded, a close contest is being witnessed between the ruling BJP and Congress. Both the constituencies are important because: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addressed a massive gathering at Amravati and his speech found traction with the voters, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi tore into Rahul at Nanded in his election speech.

Brisk polling in Bengal sans violence in Phase II

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
KOLKATA

Brisk and near-peaceful polling was witnessed in three seats of Darjeeling, Balurghat and Raiganj which went to polls on Friday in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections. Barring perhaps of some stray complaints of rigging and heckling of BJP State BJP president Sukanta Majumdar the polling went off nearly peacefully, sources said. A bunch of TMC workers blocked the path of Majumdar at Tapan Assembly segment where he went following complaints of rigging, sources said. The EC had sought reports from the Returning Officer regarding the incident sources said. At Darjeeling to TMC protesters raised slogans against BJP MP and candidate Raju Bishta when he went to cast his vote, source said. Till 2 in the noon the percentage of voting at Darjeeling was 49 whereas Balurghat saw 44 per cent polling.

UTTAR PRADESH

From Page 1

In Amroha, a woman, Ameena Khatoun aged 70 years, collapsed inside the polling booth after casting her ballot. She died of cardiac arrest. At Lalgarhi village in Khair Assembly segment of Aligarh Lok Sabha constituency, the villagers boycotted the polling in protest against the lack of development in their village. The district officials tried to pacify the angry villagers and persuaded them to vote. Later, out of 850 voters nearly 200 cast their votes. Under the seat-sharing arrangement between the Samajwadi Party and Congress in Uttar Pradesh, the grand old party is contesting in 17 constituencies while the SP has fielded its candidates in the remaining 63 seats. In the 2019 general elections in Uttar Pradesh, barring Amroha, the Bharatiya Janata Party had won rest of the seven Lok Sabha constituencies that went to poll on Friday. Uttar Pradesh has already completed the first phase of voting on April 19. The

remaining constituencies will vote in subsequent phases on May 7, May 13, May 20, May 25 and June 1. A three-cornered fight was witnessed in the eight Lok Sabha constituencies that went to polls in the second phase of election on Friday. According to the Election Commission of India, till 5 pm, Amroha recorded maximum turnout at 61.89 per cent, followed by Meerut (55.49 per cent), Aligarh (54.36 per cent), Bulandshahr (54.34 per cent), Baghpat (52.74 per cent), Gautam Buddha Nagar (51.66 per cent), Ghaziabad (48.21 per cent) and Mathura (46.96 per cent). "In the second phase, a strange trend was observed throughout the day. The number of voters from all communities and classes voting in support of the INDIA bloc kept on increasing at every booth, while on the other hand, the number of Bharatiya Janata Party voters kept on decreasing," Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said in a post.

BMC connects Mumbai coastal road with Bandra Worli sea link

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

In a significant milestone in the bridge-construction history of the country, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Friday connected the Mumbai Coastal Road (MCR) with the existing Bandra Worli Sea Link (BWSL) using 'tidal wave conditions' in the Arabian Sea. The breakthrough, which was achieved between 2 am and 3.25 am, involved the installation of a gigantic 136 metre-long Bow Arch String Girder, made of steel, weighing around 2000 tonnes, linking the two

important routes in south Mumbai, through India's biggest arch bridge. The installation of girder, which is 18-21 meter wide, was witnessed by Mumbai Municipal Commissioner Bhusan Gagrani, Additional Municipal Commissioner Dr. Amit Saini and other officials. The girder commenced its voyage on a 25,000 tonne-barge from Mazagon Docks on Wednesday at 12.30 pm and reached the Worli bay at 4 am the next day, awaiting the further process. Keeping a close watch on the prevailing tidal conditions there, the work of setting up the

girder was taken up at 2 am on Friday, it was gradually brought to the midpoint of the MCR and the BWSL on the barge, and expertly stabilised amid the sea waves and the winds to ensure optimal conditions for the final set-up. For the purpose, the BMC's engineering teams had set up four 'mating units', two each on the MCR and the BWSL measuring 2 metre and 1.8 metres cones, and they were precisely mated at 3.25 am, completing the connectivity. The achievement was greeted by a huge round of applause, cheers and shouts of 'hip hip hurray'.

NSG rushes in after CBI digs up arms, explosives at Sandeshkhali

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bitter political slugfest sensed after the Union Home Ministry on Friday deployed National Security Guard commandos to defuse explosives recovered by the Central Bureau of Investigation at Sandeshkhali leading the Trinamool Congress to term it all an "election-time high drama in order to influence voters" while the BJP promptly demanding Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's resignation. Earlier on the day the CBI dug up about 10-15 guns of foreign make and a large quantity of ammo including explosives hidden under the floor of the house of a local TMC worker Abu Taleb Molla, 55 known for his proximity to arrested TMC strongman Sheikh Shahjahan. As the Home Ministry was informed about the cache a posse of NSG commandos were deployed for recovering the explosives and defuse them. A robot was used for the purpose. Sandeshkhali a riverine semi-urban block in North 24

Parganas has been on the national news since January 4 when the supporters of Shahjahan roughed up the officials of Enforcement Directorate and in subsequent weeks local women rose up in rebellion against alleged mass land-grab sexual harassment by Shahjahan's men. The two incidents were not totally unrelated. A riverine island at the mouth of Sunderbans bordering Bangladesh the investigating agencies were taking the issue of recovery of foreign made arms seriously. The officials were tight-lipped about the class of explosives. "Information were received about a stockpile of arms and explosives at certain locations at Sarberia village in Sandeshkhali area of Najat Police Station area... subsequence raid raised yielded the stockpile of arms and explosives," police officials who too backed the agencies in their operation said adding "while the arms were found hidden under the floor inside a room the explosives were kept inside a box in an adjacent semi-pucca room.

KARNATAKA

From Page 1

Bangalore Rural that is witnessing a tough contest between Congress' D K Suresh, MP and brother of Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, and Dr C N Manjunath, a noted cardiologist and son-in-law of former PM H D Deve Gowda, on a BJP ticket, recorded 61.78 per cent till 5 pm. A total of 247 candidates -- 226 men and 21 women -- are in the fray for the first phase covering most of the southern and coastal districts, where more than 2.88 crore voters were eligible to exercise their

franchise in 30,602 polling stations. Friday's elections witnessed 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. In the first phase, the Congress contested in all 14 seats, while BJP fielded nominees in 11 and its alliance partner JD(S), which joined the National Democratic Alliance in (NDA) in September last year, in three -- Hassan, Mandya and Kolar.

SC to consider listing Delhi...

From Page 1

Prior to this, the CJI-led bench had permitted the Delhi Government to amend its petition challenging the Central Government's ordinance establishing pre-eminence of the lieutenant governor over the elected dispensation in controlling services. Amending the petition became necessary after the ordinance was replaced by a law.

Gautam Buddha Nagar sees 52.46 per cent voter turnout

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI /NOIDA

The voting percentage in Gautam Buddha Nagar seat stood at 52.46 per cent till 9 pm. According to Election Commission, polling was passed peacefully on Friday. They said voting started peacefully in Noida and other parts of the constituency in the morning as people were seen standing outside the polling booths.

The Noida administration claimed to make all necessary arrangements to facilitate the voters at polling stations and to avoid any untoward incident. A total of 15 candidates are in the fray for the Gautam Buddha Nagar seat, with over 26.75 lakh people eligible to decide their fate. Till 9 am, nearly 12 per cent voting was recorded in all five assembly constituencies (Dadri, Noida, Jewar, Sikandrabad and

Khurja). Till 11 am, total turnout was nearly 24 per cent. The voting percentage was nearly 35 per cent till 1 pm and till 3 pm, it was nearly 44 per cent. The latest data of EC reflected 51.60 per cent voting till 5 pm. Since Gautam Buddha Nagar comprises five assembly constituencies with a mix population, urban as well as rural, of voters, the political parties tried to convince them in the favour through issues related to their areas.

Earlier on the day the CBI dug up about 10-15 guns of foreign make and a large quantity of ammo including explosives hidden under the floor of the house of a local TMC worker Abu Taleb Molla, 55 known for his proximity to arrested TMC strongman Sheikh Shahjahan. As the Home Ministry was informed about the cache a posse of NSG commandos were deployed for recovering the explosives and defuse them. A robot was used for the purpose. Sandeshkhali a riverine semi-urban block in North 24

NORTH EAST

From Page 1

The Tripura East Lok Sabha constituency recorded a voter turnout of 79.50 per cent as polling remained peaceful, an official said. Voters came out in large numbers to exercise their democratic right since morning. Nearly 14 lakh voters in the constituency, including 6.94 lakh women and 13 persons of third gender, will decide the fate of nine candidates in the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls. An estimated 70.06 per cent of 77,26,668 voters exercised their franchise till five pm in

the five parliamentary constituencies of Assam. The turnout was expected to increase as those in queue before 5 pm would be allowed to vote, they said. Polling began at 7 am and no untoward incident was reported so far. A total of 61 candidates are in the fray in the second phase. Darrang-Udalguri Lok Sabha seat recorded the highest turnout of 72.9 per cent, followed by Nagaon (71.84), Karimganj (71.12), Diphu (69.62) and Silchar (53.06). Assam Transport Minister

Parimal Suklabaidya is pitted against Surya Kanta Sarkar of Congress in Silchar, while BJP's Amarsing Tisso is contesting against Congress's Joyram Engeng in Diphu. Nagaon's sitting Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi is contesting against BJP's Suresh Bora, while Karimganj's BJP MP Kripanath Malla is pitted against Congress's Hafiz Ahmed Rashid Choudhury. In Darrang-Udalguri, the main contest is between BJP MP Dilip Saikia and former Congress MP Madhab Rajbongshi.

Supreme Court rejects 100 per...

From Page 1

Notably, the bench also gave candidates the option to get a proportion of the EVMs checked and verified by a team of engineers from EVM manufacturers post the announcement of results" on a written request, expenses for which will be notified by the Election Commission of India (ECI). Additionally, the SC directed that there will be an option for candidates to get the microcontroller program of EVMs to be checked by a team of engineers after the declaration of results. The Supreme Court also issued two directions issued - containers carrying the symbol loading unit should be sealed in the presence of polling agents and candidates and be kept secured for 45 days and the control unit, ballot unit and VVPAT shall be verified by engineers of the manufacturing companies post the result of the counting on a written request to be made within seven days of the declaration of results. Rejecting pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using electronic voting machines (EVMs) via VVPAT machines, the Supreme Court observed that blindly distrusting any aspect of the system can lead to unwarranted skepticism. Pronouncing his verdict, Justice Khanna directed the EC to seal and store units used to load symbols for 45 days after the symbols have been loaded to electronic voting machines in strong rooms. "The burnt memory/microcontroller in 5 per cent of the EVMs, that is, the control unit, ballot unit and the VVPAT, per assembly constituency/assembly segment of a parliamentary constituency shall be checked

and verified by the team of engineers from the manufacturers of the EVMs, post the announcement of the results, for any tampering or modification, on a written request made by candidates who are at SI.No.2 or SI.No.3, behind the highest polled candidate. Such candidates or their representatives shall identify the EVMs by the polling station or serial number. All the candidates and their representatives shall have an option to remain present at the time of verification. Such a request should be made within a period of 7 days from the date of declaration of the result," the court said in the judgement. The top court also allowed engineers of the EVM manufacturer to verify the microcontroller of the machines after declaration of the results on the request of candidates who stood second and third. Requests for the verification of the microcontroller can be made within seven days of declaration of the results after payment of fees, the court said. "If EVM is found tampered during verification, fees paid by the candidates will be refunded," it said. An EVM comprises three units -- ballot unit, control unit and the VVPAT. All three are embedded with microcontrollers which have a burnt memory from the manufacturer. Currently, the Election Commission conducts random matching of VVPAT slips with EVMs at five polling booths per assembly constituency. "The credibility of the ECI and integrity of the electoral process earned over years cannot be chaffed and over-riden by baroque contemplations and speculations," the court said.

From Page 1

Out of the total votes polled till 5.00 pm 50.69 per cent were male and 49.30 per cent were female voters. Out of 18, eight Assembly segments recorded over 70 per cent voter turnout while four others recorded over 65 per cent till 5.00 pm. All three Assembly segments of the Reasi district recorded over 70 per cent polling. Several centenarians stepped out to vote while motivating others to participate in the festival of democracy. In a polling station in Reasi district, 102-year-old Haji Karamdin exercised his right to franchise and said, "I am very happy to vote at this polling station at this age." More than 15,000 polling staff were deployed to ensure free and fair polling. Of the 2,416 polling stations 158 booths were set up along the International Border and the Line of Control (LoC). The first-time voters accompanied by women

JAMMU

voters exercised their right to vote without facing any inconvenience. The Election Commission had made special arrangements to facilitate senior citizens and specially-abled voters. Compared to voters in the urban centres the rural population showed more enthusiasm in the periphery of the Jammu district. The border belt of Samba and RS Pura also recorded a healthy voter turnout. The newly carved Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Assembly segment in the Reasi district recorded over 75 per cent polling followed by Akhnoor where 74 per cent of voters exercised their right to franchise. The Lok Sabha poll is the first major electoral battle in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of the erstwhile state into Union Territories -- Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh -- on August 5, 2019. For the first time after the 1967 polls, the

Rajouri and Poonch districts were not part of the Jammu Lok Sabha seat as the frontier districts were removed and attached to the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat during the marathon exercise. "Similarly, the whole of Reasi district has been removed from Udhampur constituency and allocated to Jammu. Union Minister Jitendra Singh stepped out to vote in the Trikutanagar area of Jammu. Sitting BJP MP Jugal Kishore Sharma accompanied his family members at a polling booth set up at the Kishenpur government high school in Nagrota. Congress candidate Raman Bhalla, who visited several polling booths, also expressed happiness over the smooth polling in the constituency. Jammu and Kashmir BJP chief Ravinder Raina thanked people for coming out in large numbers to vote.

From Page 1

Former Defence Minister and oldest surviving Congress leader A K Antony (84) cast his vote, most probably the last time in his life, at Thiruvananthapuram accompanied by wife Elizabeth and long-time friend M M Hassan. "This is our last chance to save secularism, socialism, pluralism and democracy in India. This time Narendra Modi would be voted out and a new government led by the Congress would come to power in the Center," said Antony even as he cursed the BJP and its leaders. Antony's son Anil is contesting as a BJP candidate from Pathanamthitta. Both the CPI(M) and the Congress claimed that they would sweep all the 20 seats at stake from the State. The BJP camp too is confident of improving their vote share. In 2019, the Hindutva party had polled 13 per cent votes and the NDA front led by it had polled 15.64 per cent. The NDA front had drawn a blank

in the score board having failed in winning at least one seat. The Congress-led UDF had polled 47.48 per cent and the front won 19 seats leaving a lone seat to the CPIM). The BJP is yet to open its account in the State till date. The fates of Sasi Tharoor, union ministers Rajiv Chandrasekhar and V Muraliedharan, senior parliamentarian N K Premachandran, former union minister Kodikkunnil Suresh, film actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi, the Romeo of Kerala's Love Jihad Abdussamad Samadani, were among the candidates whose fates were sealed on Friday. Samadani's name had figured prominently in author Kamala Das' conversion to Islam. Efforts to elicit information about which way the wind was blowing remained unclear as most of those who cast their votes were reluctant to disclose information about whom they voted for. "We are caught between the deep sea and the devil.

Opposition...

Asked about the Prime Minister's attack on the Opposition, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera said similar doubts against the EVMs were made by BJP stalwart LK Advani and advised the ruling party to start with him. "So, in 2009, was Advani misleading the nation? When he released the book of GVL Narasimha against EVMs, when Advani was championing the cause of leading a protest against EVMs, was he misleading the nation? The Prime Minister should do a basic homework, instead of focusing on Nehru, he should start focusing on Advani. He will stop talking irresponsibly," Khera said. Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav, when asked about the decision on the sidelines of a poll rally in UP's Kasganj, urged the people to make the INDIA Bloc victorious and do away with the EVMs.

Nearly 61 per cent voter turnout...

From Page 1

The Election Commission (EC) said polling remained largely peaceful. The tentative figure at 7 pm of voter turnout of 60.96 per cent is likely to go upwards when reports from all polling stations are obtained, the EC said, adding voters reaching polling stations till the end of polling hour are allowed to cast their vote. According to EC, voters from 46 villages in Bastar and Kanker PCs in Chhattisgarh cast their vote in a polling booth set up in their own village for the first time in a Lok Sabha

Election. The Lok Sabha polls are the first major electoral battle in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of the erstwhile state into Union Territories -- Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh -- on August 5, 2019. The Election Commission registered nearly 300 complaints in West Bengal, mostly related to EVM malfunctioning. Rahul, Shashi Tharoor, Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar and actor-turned-politician Arun Govil, actress Hema Malini, Lok Sabha speaker Om Birla, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's brother DK Suresh (Cong), and former Karnataka chief minister HD Kumaraswamy (JDS) are among the key candidates. In restive Manipur, where polling is being held under high presence of security personnel, the turnout was a high 77.18 per cent. In Kerala, the turnout was 63.97 per cent. One person each reportedly died at Palakkad, Alappuzha and Malappuram after casting their vote and a polling agent died after collapsing at a booth in Kozhikode. While Karnataka recorded

63.90 per cent voter turnout till 5 pm, Rajasthan recorded 60.61 per cent voter turnout was recorded in the 13 constituencies. Six Lok Sabha constituencies in Madhya Pradesh recorded a voter turnout of 58.35 per cent in the second phase. West Bengal recorded voter turnout of 72 per cent till 5 pm which included Balurghat recorded the highest polling percentage at 72.30, followed by Raiganj at 71.87 and Darjeeling at 71.41. Bihar recorded voter turnout of 58.58 per cent, almost 4.34 per cent lower than that of the 2019 general elections.

FIR filed against one for power theft in Amritsar

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

One person was caught tampering with smart meter and another escaped when an official of Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) in Amritsar was inspecting the power subdivision. SE sub urban circle Amritsar was doing routine inspection of West subdivision for preparation of giving uninterrupted supply in the upcoming summer season when he suddenly saw two private persons near the metre pillar box and they were tam-

pering with smart metre. The SE stopped there and questioned them. One of them escaped and the other was caught by the SE and his team and they handed over this person to the SHO anti power theft VERKA. He didn't divulge any details and FIR has been lodged by the SHO and he will seek police remand," said the PSPCL. Thorough investigation is required to bust the whole gang of this person and to know the modus operandi by which they are tampering with smart metres, it said.

Uproar in MCD House over postponement of Mayoral polls

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP and BJP on Friday traded allegations over the postponement of mayoral polls, accusing each other of being anti-Dalit, following an uproar in the MCD House meeting that was adjourned amid heavy sloganeering. Polls to elect the mayor and deputy mayor were postponed late Thursday night due to the non-appointment of the presiding officer for the elections. The third term of the mayoral polls is reserved for a Dalit candidate.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) House session witnessed an uproar over the postponement of the mayoral elections that were slated to be held on Friday, with both AAP and BJP councillors raising slogans against each other before the proceedings of the House began. BJP councillors surrounded the mayor's seat and raised slogans demanding the presence of Mayor Shelly Oberoi who was running late for the meeting.

AAP councillors initially raised slogans against the BJP near the Ambedkar statue at the corporation headquarters.

Later, they reached the House and continued raising slogans against the opposition party calling them "Dalit Virodhi BJP". The AAP has called the BJP "anti-Dalit", saying it was trying to ensure that a candidate from the reserved category does not become the mayor of Delhi. The councillors of the two parties raised slogans against each other for about an hour.

After Mayor Oberoi reached the House, she accused Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena of "murdering the Constitution" and using the judicial custody of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as an "excuse" to stall the mayoral polls. The mayor then adjourned the meeting of the MCD House.

"The anti-Dalit Bharatiya Janata Party is once again murdering the Constitution. It is very sad that the way dictatorial government is running in the entire country, Delhi and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. The people of Delhi have also come to know how they want to govern every time through dictatorship," she said.

"Today the mayoral elections

were supposed to take place. The Election Commission had also given its permission on April 24. But yesterday, the file for appointing the presiding officer was sent to the Lt Governor bypassing the elected government. LG sahab's response to the file that he does not have the power to appoint the presiding officer in the absence of inputs from Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is shallow politics," Oberoi said. She said the BJP has hatched a conspiracy to postpone the elections. "If this is not the murder of democracy, then what is it? Lok Sabha elections (in Delhi) will be held soon. They don't want AAP's candidate to become the mayor before it. "AAP had the mandate as well as the numbers. Our candidates would have won the (mayoral) elections," the mayor said.

Meanwhile, BJP councillors, after the adjournment of the session, were seen dancing to the BJP's campaign song "Phir se Modiji ki sarkaar dekhn chahu su" and danced on the premises of the house.

The video was shared by several AAP leaders, including the mayor and Delhi ministers



Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj. They alleged that the BJP was celebrating since AAP's Dalit candidate could not be elected as mayor. "Look at the happiness of BJP councillors that a Dalit did not become the mayor," Atishi captioned her video post on X.

Leader of Opposition in MCD and former Mayor Raja Iqbal Singh called AAP an "anti-Dalit and anti-women party". "The Aam Aadmi Party itself did not want to hold elections for the posts of Mayor and Deputy Mayor so that the ongoing differences in their party do not become public. If the AAP wanted to conduct elections for the posts of Mayor and Deputy Mayor, then they

should have completed the entire formalities in a constitutional manner before the announcement of general elections," he said. He further alleged that the AAP does not want to follow any constitutional process and does not want to do any work as per the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act 1957. He also claimed that similarly the AAP mayor did not allow elections to be held for the posts of Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee.

"There is no restriction on the election process of the Standing Committee, yet the Mayor of Aam Aadmi Party has not appointed any presiding officer to complete the elec-

tion process and because of the Aam Aadmi Party, the elections of the Standing Committee have not been held yet. Due to which the people of Delhi are suffering the consequences, development work has come to a halt in Delhi because of the Aam Aadmi Party, there are heaps of garbage at various places," Singh alleged.

AAP councillors initially raised slogans against the BJP near the Ambedkar statue at the corporation headquarters. Later, they reached the House and continued raising slogans against the opposition party calling them "Dalit Virodhi BJP".

The AAP has called the BJP "anti-Dalit", saying it was trying to ensure that a candidate from the reserved category does not become the mayor of Delhi. The councillors of the two parties raised slogans against each other for about an hour.

Senior AAP Leader and MCD incharge Durgesh Pathak questioned the BJP and LG's intention. He asked, "The BJP's LG should have taken the recommendation from the CM, who has stopped him from taking

the recommendation? The CM could have appointed a minister and he would have given the recommendation to the LG. But LG's intentions were already bad. The LG did not send the file of the mayoral election to the minister."

"The BJP's LG sent the file to the Chief Secretary through the Secretary of the Urban Development Department and the Chief Secretary sent the file directly to the LG. The LG did not even try to get the minister's recommendation on the file. It is clear from this that the BJP and LG had already made a complete plan not to conduct the mayoral election.

Because the BJP and LG do not believe in the Constitution of India, they do not believe in the Constitution made by Baba Saheb," the AAP MCD incharge said, adding that the BJP is anti-dalit and anti-woman. Stating that the PM wants to change the constitution and wants to remove people's rights. "They want to remove the rights of the Dalits, backward communities and the minorities by changing the Constitution. Today, without

Sunita to hold road shows in support of AAP candidates



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP convenor and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal will hold roadshows from Saturday to support the Aam Aadmi Party candidates

in the national capital. The campaign is to kick off with a grand roadshow in the East Delhi Lok Sabha constituency where AAP candidate Kuldeep Yadav is contesting from, followed by another in West Delhi from where AAP's Mahabab Mishra is contesting.

Sunita Kejriwal's campaign will extend beyond Delhi to Punjab, Gujarat, and Haryana. In Gujarat, the former IRS is listed as a star campaigner. Senior AAP Leader and Delhi Minister Atishi asserted that BJP's attempt to arrest the AAP chief has backfired and people will vote for AAP and the INDIA alliance nationwide. "Immediately after the announcement of Lok Sabha elections, immediately after the imposition of the model code of conduct, the BJP-ruled central government and its political weapon ED arrested the popular Chief Minister of Delhi. He was arrested before the announcement of elections because BJP is afraid of Arvind Kejriwal. The BJP did not want Arvind Kejriwal to enter the electoral fray. That is why he was arrested," she alleged, adding that the gamble by BJP to arrest Kejriwal will not work. "I want to tell BJP that their gamble has backfired com-

pletely. Whether it is Delhi-Punjab or the rest of the country, the common people are protesting against the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, protesting against the dictatorship of PM Narendra Modi, protesting against this attack on democracy. The people are unanimously saying that they will answer the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal with their votes," she affirmed.

Atishi said that in protest against the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, his wife Sunita Kejriwal will campaign to seek votes for AAP candidates from the people of Delhi, Punjab, Gujarat and Haryana.

She further stated that Kejriwal's wife, who came into the limelight following the arrest of CM in the alleged excise policy linked money laundering scam, will start campaigning from East Delhi on Friday. "She will hold a roadshow in East Delhi tomorrow and will seek blessings from the people of East Delhi for Arvind Kejriwal. On Sunday, Sunita Kejriwal will hold a roadshow in the West Delhi Lok Sabha constituency and will seek blessings from the people for Arvind Kejriwal," she said.

"I want to tell the BJP that the people of Delhi, Punjab and the entire country are standing with Arvind Kejriwal, are against the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal and will definitely give him their blessings and will definitely vote for the AAP," Atishi concluded.

AAP Government least concerned with governance: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP on Friday slammed the Kejriwal government alleging it is "least concerned with governance" as more than 3,000 files related to important work were pending with different ministers as well as the chief minister for many years.

"The Kejriwal government is not meant for administration and governance but publicity and corruption, which is evident by 3,060 files lying pending, gathering dust at its different departments. Also, there are 420 files related to impor-

tant work that are pending at the level of the chief minister," Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva alleged in a press conference.

Showing copies of purported official documents, Sachdeva claimed the files stuck up at the chief minister's level were related to 'Garib Sanjivini Ayushman Yojna', enhancing powers of Delhi Lokayukta, Delhi Water Policy file pending for seven years, development of unauthorised colonies, construction of STPs for Yamuna cleaning, among others. "The pending files show that this government is least concerned



about work and more interested in publicity and corruption. Still, they claim to be serving Delhi," charged the Delhi BJP president. The Delhi BJP President said that in 2022, we repeatedly saw the government create controversies over sending teachers to Finland for training, but even after approval from the Lieutenant Governor, the Education Department has kept the file pending for two and a half years.

Sachdeva said that similarly, the Delhi government has kept files related to the welfare and education reforms of Delhi

University teachers, as well as electricity reforms, sports, trade, and heritage protection, pending.

Secretary of Delhi BJP Harish Khurana alleged that the AAP government as well leaders of the ruling party were used to alleging that they were not being allowed to work by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Delhi's Lieutenant Governor. But they sat over important files for many years, he alleged.

He claimed that the file related to land acquisition for setting up a sports university in Delhi was lying pending since February 2016.

AAP guarantees have become like Chinese goods, claims BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Friday said he charged that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has broken his promise of not allowing any member of family to join politics by launching wife into the arena. Levelling this allegation, Bidhuri also said now their guarantees have become like Chinese goods. Kejriwal had said that no member of my family will enter politics but after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested him, he has launched his wife into politics.

Bidhuri also said Kejriwal had promised he will not compromise with any party, will not form the government with anyone's support, will not take a government bungalow, will not take security and official vehicles and no other member of the family will enter politics.

He claimed Kejriwal's wife has been taking messages from her husband in ED custody and jail and conveying them to the workers. Now she is regularly going to campaign for Aam Aadmi Party in the



Lok Sabha elections and will also hold a road show in East Delhi on Saturday. After this she will campaign in the rest of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and other states of the country. This announcement has been made by Aam Aadmi Party minister Atishi, Bidhuri said. He said everyone in the country has the right to enter politics and no one should have any objection in it. BJP especially welcomes the empowerment of women and their entry into politics. That is why a bill for one-third reservation for women has also been passed. Here the question is not about

a woman entering politics but about the end of familyism and Kejriwal's guarantees. Aam Aadmi Party had passed the resolution opposing nepotism. It was even said if a member of someone's family becomes a corporation councillor, then no other member of that family will be allowed into politics and will not be given any post. Kejriwal's wife does not hold any post but she is becoming a clear example of nepotism and dynasty politics. Kejriwal is ensuring that if he has to resign from the post of Chief Minister, his wife will become the Chief Minister, Bidhuri claimed.

Capital hit by freak weather

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The national capital on Friday evening witnessed sudden rain with thunderstorms and gusty winds which led to traffic chaos on several stretches. An electric pole fell on a car parked at Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, ITO. No casualty reported here.

India Meteorological Department (IMD)'s Director General Dr Mruntnjay Mohapatra told the pioneer, the sudden weather change witnessed by the people in North west and Central India including Delhi is a result of the western disturbance. Central India will witness rain on Saturday as well. Strong gusty winds of speed between 70 to 80 kmph were also witnessed.

The IMD has predicted cloudy sky in the national capital on Friday for the next one week. The maximum temperature recorded as per the IMD was 40.5 degrees celsius, which is 1 degree celsius above from the normal temperature. The minimum temperature stands at 21.6 degrees celsius, which is 2 degrees celsius lower than the normal.



The IMD predicted the weather of the national capital on Friday as "generally cloudy sky with light rain or thunderstorm accompanied with hail".

For Saturday, the meteorological department predicted "generally cloudy sky with light rain or drizzle". The city witnessed light to moderate rainfall on Tuesday as well as the result of a cyclonic disturbance.

Further the department has issued a weather warning which states "Thunderstorms and Lightning accompanied

with gusty winds (speed 30-50 kmph) over Northwest India. Hail at isolated places over Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and East Rajasthan. Heat wave at isolated places over east Uttar Pradesh. Dust Storm at isolated places over west Rajasthan."

In the coming days, the IMD has also predicted strong surface winds during day time in Delhi on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The maximum humidity in the city stands at 66 percent and the minimum recorded is 16 per cent.

Two boys arrested for disrobing, robbing Uganda national

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two boys allegedly injured a 27 year old Uganda national and disrobed her in South Delhi's Chhattarpur Pahari area on Thursday. According to the police, a PCR call was received regarding a lady who was injured on road.

DCP South Ankit Chauhan said, "On Thursday at around 12 midnight, a PCR call regarding a lady who was injured on road was received at Police Station Mehrauli. On reaching the spot an Uganda National lady aged 27 years was found injured at the spot and she was taken to hospital by PCR." The police have arrested both of them. The accused have been identified as 24 year old Manoj, alias Kinnu, and 26 year



old Rinku Kashyap. Manoj worked as a labourer at a Malba loading vehicle of Rinku. The victim stated, "At around 10:45 PM, when I was going from phool Mandi at 100 Feet Road, Chhattarpur Pahari & walking on the footpath, suddenly two boys who had a dog were walking behind her. She was scared of dogs so she tried to get away from the dog. However, the boys grabbed her from behind and dragged her to the other side of the wall."

She revealed that an altercation took place and they robbed her purse containing Rs. 800 in cash and one silver ring. They also tore her clothes and hit her head with a stone before fleeing from the spot, the police said. She resides in New Delhi's Chhattarpur. On her statement, a case under section 394 (Voluntarily causing hurt in committing robbery), 354B (Assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to disrobe) and 34 (Acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) of IPC was registered at Mehrauli Police Station. "They both are addicted to drugs and robbed the lady victim. They were found slightly intoxicated when apprehended," the DCP added.

Spiderman couple arrested for performing stunts on bike

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two youths dressed as iconic comic book superheroes, Spiderman and Spider-Woman, were arrested on Friday for performing stunts on a motorcycle in South West Delhi's Dwarka. The 'Spiderman couple', as police described them, were riding on a bike with no number plate or mirrors. However, while one expects the culprits to be ashamed of flouting the law, the young Spiderman calls the arrest as a bucket list thing. The 'Spiderman' Aditya, aged 20 years old, and his friend 'Spider-Woman' Anjali, aged 19 years old, recorded an Instagram reel of themselves riding on the bike while striking a titanic pose, titled "Spiderman Najafgarh Part



5". In the video, "Spider-Woman" walks up to the superhero after exiting the Najafgarh metro station and shakes hands. Subsequently, she climbs on his bike following which they go riding on the streets of Delhi. As they zoom through,

the "Spiderman couple" are seen talking to each other as they strike the iconic titanic pose for the camera. After the reel went viral, the Delhi traffic police took cognisance and arrested the two. The police issued a challan under Motor Vehicle Act.

According to police, a video made rounds on social media showing a person wearing a Spiderman costume and performing stunts on a motorcycle without a number plate and a helmet on the Urban Extension Road-II (UER II) in Delhi. In the video, the man was later joined by a woman, who was also wearing the Spiderman costume. They were seen riding the motorcycle with the woman sitting pillion.

"Two persons were riding a bike and wearing Spiderman costumes. An inquiry into the matter was conducted and the riders have been booked under different sections of the Motor Vehicle (MV) Act for offences without a helmet, without a mirror, without a licence, dan-

gerous driving and not displaying a number plate etc," a senior police officer said. Previously, the young man who calls himself as "Najafgarh Spiderman" has taken to the streets of Delhi while donning his superhero attire many times. He is a resident of Najafgarh and runs an Instagram account called Indian Spidey Official, where he posts videos of his stunts. The girl also runs a page called Spideygn Official. The boy's bio reads "Your Friendly Neighbourhood Indian Spidey" and the account has over 9,000 followers, with the viral video getting about 80,000 likes. A quick scroll through his Instagram page shows the "Indian Spidey" playing badminton, riding a tractor and dancing on trending songs.



SC terms apprehensions of petitioners on EVM misplaced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court cannot allow the entire process of the ongoing general elections to be called into question and upended on mere apprehension and speculation of the petitioners regarding the efficacy of EVMs, apex court judge Justice Dipankar Datta said on Friday. Justice Datta was part of the apex court bench which rejected pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using electronic voting machines (EVMs) with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT).

EVMs in elections violates the principle of free and fair elections nor have they been able to establish a fundamental right to 100 per cent VVPAT slips tallying with the votes cast. Terming the petitioners' apprehensions as "misplaced", he said reverting to the paper ballot system, rejecting inevitable march of technological advancement, and burdening the EC with the onerous task of 100 per cent VVPAT slips tallying would be a folly when the challenges faced in conducting the polls are of such gargantuan scale. The top court delivered its verdict on a batch of petitions, including the one filed by the NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms, which

also sought a direction to return to the paper ballot system in elections. Justice Datta noted the petitioning association has also attempted to highlight a public trust deficit with respect to the current voting system by relying on a survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies - Lokniti, which concluded that a majority of the Indian population did not trust the EVMs. "It is a private report and I find little reason to trust such a report. Over the years, more and more voters have participated in the election process. Had the voters any doubt regarding the efficacy of the EVMs, I wonder whether the voting percentage would have



seen such increase," he said. "EVMs have stood the test of time and the increased voting percentage is sufficient reason for us to hold that the voters have reposed faith in the current system and that the report to the contrary, which has been relied on, merits outright rejection," Justice Datta said. He noted the petitioners' had

submitted that the right to be informed under Article 19(1)(a) vis-a-vis the electoral process have two facets -- first, a voter has a right to know that the vote is recorded as cast and secondly, that the vote as cast is counted. He said a citizen's right to 'freedom of speech and expression' under Article 19(1) of the Constitution is not absolute and the State by virtue of Article 19(2) can place reasonable restrictions on these rights. "There can be no doubt that the electorate has a right to be informed if the votes, as cast, are accurately recorded. The dispute, in the present writ proceedings, centres around the modality of delivering the information," he said.

Justice Datta noted the petitioners have characterised the present procedure, wherein the voter after pressing the 'blue button' and casting the vote can see his VVPAT slip for seven seconds through an illuminated glass window, as inadequate for the voter to verify if the vote as cast is recorded. "Recording of the vote cast signifying the choice of the voter and its projection on the VVPAT slip, albeit for 7 (seven) seconds, is fulfilment of the voter's right of being informed that his/her vote has been duly recorded," he noted. He said as long as there is no allegation of statutory breach, there can be no substitution of the court's view for the view of the EC that the light in VVPAT

would be on for seven seconds and not more. Justice Datta also addressed the second facet of the argument based on the right guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) - the voter's right to know that his or her vote, as recorded, has been counted. "To deal with this contention, a question comes to my mind - did this right not exist when the 'paper ballot system', which the petitioning association wishes to be reverted to, was in vogue?" he said. Justice Datta observed there is in place a stringent system of checks and balances to prevent any possibility of a miscount of votes and for the voter to know that his or her vote has been counted.

SC seeks EC response on plea seeking re election if NOTA gets majority

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In a significant development amid the ongoing general elections, the Supreme Court on Friday asked for a response from the poll panel on a PIL seeking framing of rules to nullify an election and order fresh one if NOTA (none of the above) option gets majority over other candidates. The top court issued notice to the Election Commission on the PIL filed by author, activist and motivational speaker Shiv Khera.



The NOTA option is provided to the voters in the elections in pursuance of the 2013 apex court verdict. A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the submissions of senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for Khera, and issued the notice. Initially, the bench was reluctant to consider the PIL, saying it was for the "executive to decide".

"We will issue a notice. This is about the electoral process also. Let us see what the Election Commission has to say..." the CJ said. The senior advocate said that present plea was important keeping in mind the development at Surat in Gujarat where a BJP nominee was declared

winner before polling as some nomination papers were rejected and few withdrew from the race. The top court, in its 2013 judgement, had held that "a provision of negative voting would be in the interest of promoting democracy as it would send clear signals to political parties and their candidates as to what the electorate thinks about them" and directed the Election Commission to provide the option of NOTA in all EVMs. "It is most respectfully prayed that this Court may be pleased to issue a writ... Directing the Election Commission to frame rules to the effect that if NOTA gets a majority, the election held in the particular constituency shall be declared null and void and a fresh election shall be conducted to the con-

Petitions challenging EVM reliability junked on forty occasions by courts: EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

On a day the Supreme Court rejected pleas seeking a return to the ballot paper system, Election Commission officials pointed out that constitutional courts on at least 40 occasions have rejected petitions challenging the reliability of the electronic voting machines. The functionaries also referred to the recent remarks of Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar that EVMs are "100 per cent safe" and political parties know in the "heart of their hearts" that the machines are fair.

The top court on Friday rejected pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) and said "blindly distrusting" any aspect of the system can breed unwarranted scepticism. Maintaining that "democracy is all about striving to build harmony and trust between all institutions", a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta delivered two concurring verdicts and dismissed all the pleas in the matter, including those seeking to go back to ballot papers in elections. "Almost 40 times constitutional courts -- the Supreme

Court and the high courts -- have rejected pleas challenging EVMs," CEC Kumar had said addressing a press conference here on March 16 while announcing the schedule for the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Citing a publication of the EC, he said it shows on how many occasions ruling parties have been voted out in elections where EVMs were used. "Political parties have come into existence due to EVMs. There are many smaller parties, which in the age of ballot paper, might not have come into existence," he had said. He said the EVMs are fair and political parties recognise it in the "heart of their hearts". He also described them as "100 per cent safe, 100 per cent sure".

The apex court bench also issued two directives. Pronouncing his verdict, Justice Khanna directed the Election Commission to seal and store units used to load symbols for 45 days after the symbols have been loaded into electronic voting machines in strong rooms. The apex court also allowed engineers of the EVM manufacturers to verify the micro-controller of the machines after the declaration of the results on the request of candidates who stood second and third.

Ministry asks CBSE to work out logistics for holding Board exams twice a year from 2025-26 session

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Education has asked the CBSE to work out logistics for conducting board exams twice a year from the 2025-26 academic session while the plan for introducing a semester system has been ruled out. Sources said the MoE and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will hold consultations with school principals next month for conducting board exams twice a year. The CBSE is currently in the process of working out the modalities of how will the academic calendar be structured to accommodate another set of board exams without impacting the undergraduate admission schedule. "The ministry has asked the CBSE to work on the logistics of how will board exams be conducted twice a year. The board is working out the modalities and a consultation will be organised next month with school principals," a source said. "The idea being explored is to conduct two editions of the board exams at the end of the year from the 2025-26 academic session but the modalities still need to be worked out. However, there is no plan to implement the semester system," the source added. The ministry's initial plan was to introduce biannual board

exams from the 2024-25 academic session, however, it has been pushed back by a year. The new national curriculum framework (NCF), prepared by the Union government-appointed national steering committee which was led by former ISRO chairman K Kasturirangan in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, proposed a semester system for students of classes 11 and 12. The framework, which was released by the ministry in August last year, also proposed that the students be given the option to write their board exams twice a year. "The CBSE right now is brainstorming on the schedule so students can get maximum benefit and the goal of making board exams stress-free can be achieved. However, logistics is a challenge which needs to be addressed, conducting exams is tiresome so the plan has to be flawless," the source said. However, this is not the first attempt at reforming board exams. The Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) was introduced for Class 10 in 2009 but was revoked in 2017 and the board reverted to the old model of year-end exams. The board exams for classes 10 and 12 were also split into two terms during the Covid pandemic as a one-time measure, but the old format of year-end exams resumed this year.

Zero tolerance of terrorism must for prosperity of SCO nations: Aramane

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane on Friday emphasised the need to adopt a zero-tolerance approach towards terrorism in all its forms for prosperity and development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member states. Making this assertion at the SCO Defence Ministers' meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, he reiterated India's steadfast commitment towards maintaining peace, stability and security in the SCO region, defence ministry said here.

Aramane mentioned about India's long-standing proposal of Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the United Nations. He also highlighted the concept of 'Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)', proposed by India for the Indo-Pacific. During the meeting, a protocol was signed by the Defence Ministers of all SCO Member States. A Joint Communiqué was issued after the meeting, in which the SCO Defence Ministers agreed, amongst other initiatives, to developing the idea of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' which is rooted in the ancient Indian philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

Congress seeking to snatch rights of SCs, STs, OBCs to benefit Muslims, says Nadda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

BJP president J P Nadda on Friday accused the Congress of seeking to snatch the rights of SCs, STs and OBCs to benefit Muslims, alleging that it is the hidden agenda of the opposition party. Continuing with the BJP's attempts to project the Congress as a party championing interests of Muslims at the cost of traditionally deprived Hindu groups, Nadda said the Opposition party has long been making the grounds for the minority community to be declared as SCs and give them reservation.



He issued a video statement as the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls got underway. Nadda cited the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's 2006 statement of minorities, especially Muslims, having the first rights on the country's resources and added that he made similar comments in April 2009.

Muslims in educational institutions and jobs through a sub-quota in the Other Backward Classes category. The BJP president claimed that the Congress' stand against majoritarianism in its 2024 poll manifesto underscores its "hate" for the SCs, STs and the OBCs as they make up for a majority in the society. "False claims were made through the Sachar committee report and it was said that Muslims are worse off than Dalits. It means that the Congress had been making the ground for Muslims to be declared as SCs so that they can give the reservation due to Dalits," Nadda said.

Dalits among Muslims too so that the minority community gets the SC quota benefits. The BJP on its X handle also shared a clip of Manmohan Singh's remarks at a press conference in April 2009 in which he reiterated that minorities, especially poor Muslims, should get priority when it comes to the nation's resources. "The BJP claimed, 'He categorically stated that he stood by his earlier assertion that Muslims should have first right when it comes to resources.' It demolishes the Congress' canards and clarifications on his previous statement, the party said.

will finish majoritarianism (in the country). The OBCs (Other Backward Classes), SCs (Scheduled Castes) and STs (Scheduled Tribes) are the majority in the country," the Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister said. The Congress has committed the "sin of doing social injustice" with the country's Dalits, backwards and adivasis by "depriving" them of their rights for 70 years, he alleged and asserted that the grand-old party will be punished in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections for this.

Maurya said the Congress has "conspired to snatch the rights of OBCs, SCs and STs, and give these to Muslims". The Congress and the INDIA bloc are "robbing" SCs, STs, OBCs of their rights, he said. This will not be tolerated at any cost, the BJP leader said. "(Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi has said that a caste census will be conducted. You are talking about doing an X-ray while the country's OBCs, SCs and STs are doing an MRI of your conspiracy," he said. Maurya alleged that the Congress' history is filled with "petty and disgusting" politics of appeasement. "The Congress' 'hidden agenda' of the Lok Sabha polls is to grab power 'anyhow' and handover the rights of OBCs, SCs and STs to Muslims so that its vote-bank becomes strong 'forever', he alleged on day when voting is underway in 88 constituencies spread across 13 states and Union Territories, including Uttar Pradesh, in the second phase of the elections.

Senior BJP leader Keshav Prasad Maurya alleged the Congress has "conspired" to snatch the rights of OBCs, SCs and STs, who are in "majority" in the country, and give these to Muslims. "They (the Congress) have clearly said in their manifesto that if given a chance, they

Children from hills in India more likely to have stunted growth: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Children living in India's hills and mountains, especially at higher altitudes, are more likely to experience stunted growth, according to a recent research analyzing data from over 165,000 children under five years old in the country.

The study found that stunting was more common among third-born children and those with smaller sizes at birth. The prevalence of stunting was 36 per cent, with higher rates among older children. Living at altitudes above 2000 meters increased the risk by 40 per cent, as per research published in the open access journal BMJ Nutrition Prevention & Health. GPS data were used to categorise altitude level while the World Health Organization (WHO) standard was used to define stunting. Most, i.e. 98 per cent (164,874) of the children lived less than 1000 m above sea level while 1.4 per cent (2346) lived between 1000 and 1999 m above sea level; and 0.2 per cent (335) lived at or above 2000m. Seven out of 10 lived in rural areas.

The overall prevalence of stunting among these children was 36 per cent, with a higher prevalence among children aged 18-59 months (41 per cent) than among those under 18 months of age (27 per cent). Stunting was more common among children of third or higher birth order (44 per cent) than it was among first-borns (30 per cent). And stunting rates were even higher among those children who had been small or very small (45 per cent) at birth. Mother's education emerged as an influential factor: stunting



prevalence fell as maternal educational attainment rose. The proportion of children whose mothers had had no schooling was more than double that of children whose mothers had had a higher education. Other protective factors included elements of antenatal care, such as clinic visits, tetanus vaccination, and iron and folic acid supplements; proximity to health facilities; and not belonging to a particular caste or indigenous tribe. This is an observational study that captured a snapshot of the population at a specific point in time, making it difficult to confirm altitude as a cause of stunting, acknowledged the researchers.

But there are plausible explanations for their findings, they suggested. For example, chronic exposure to high altitude can reduce appetite, restrict oxygen delivery to tissues, and limit nutrient absorption. Food insecurity also tends to be greater at higher elevations where crop yields are lower and the climate is harsher. Similarly, healthcare provision, including implementing nutritional programmes, and healthcare access are also more challenging, they suggest. "In summary, concerted efforts are needed across health and nutrition sectors to address stunting, tailored to focus on higher-risk children in vulnerable areas," said the researchers.

More Indian youths are enrolling to learn Korean language, Taekwondo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Extending beyond the world of K-Drama and K-Beauty, Indian youth interest towards Korean culture is expanding to also include learning the Korean language and Taekwondo, a great tradition of Korean martial arts. In the domain of martial arts, the demand for learning Taekwondo has experienced a remarkable surge. Drawing a comparison with the previous year, the statistics paint a compelling picture: in 2023, a total of 1,530 students were enrolled in Taekwondo classes across 31 schools. This figure has more than doubled in the current year, with an impressive 3,536 students now enrolled across 47 local schools in Delhi alone.

This surge in interest has been facilitated through strategic partnerships between the KCCI and local associations such as the Delhi Taekwondo Association, underscoring the collaborative efforts to meet the growing demand for Taekwondo instruction, said an official from the KCCI. Likewise, the appeal of learning the Korean language has experienced a meteoric rise. The numbers speak volumes: from 1,535 students enrolled in Korean language classes across 20 schools last year, the figure has surged to 2,572 students across 32 schools this year. This exponential increase underscores the growing fascination with Korean culture and the eagerness of Indian youth to delve deeper into its linguistic nuances. Hwang Il Yong, Director of KCCI said, "Korean is one of the fastest-growing foreign languages in India, and the



demand to study the language has constantly been on the rise. Both Taekwondo and Korean language classes in Indian schools will further expand opportunities for students to experience Korean culture and will become a starting point for achieving their dreams. In line with this trend, the KCCI has taken measures to support and nurture this growing interest. For instance, the Centre has spearheaded initiatives to distribute 2,000 newly designed Korean language textbooks, meticulously crafted in collaboration with the National Institute of Korean Language. These textbooks, adorned with illustrations featuring quintessential Indian elements such as 'Naan', 'Samosa', and 'Mojarri', serve as a testament to the harmonious fusion of cultures and the inclusive nature of language learning. In fact, learning language demand surprised everyone when the 93rd Korean Language Proficiency Test was organised. KCCI simultaneously organised the test in threefold pg 2 regions in India - Delhi, Chennai and Imphal, Manipur and the centre had to announce that the Korean Language Proficiency Test will be conducted one more time this year in October.



Congress wants to lay foundation of India's division on religious lines: Yogi

Lashing out at the Congress on Friday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the manifesto of the grand old party was harmful to India, the world's largest democracy.



X-ray of properties to seize and redistribute them, the Congress aims to lay the foundation of the country's division on religious grounds.

to do this, it will be opposed at all costs," he added. "Naxalism is on the decline in India. If there is any attempt to revive it, we will never accept it.

Omar, Mufti appeal EC not to defer polls on Anantnag seat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Two former Chief Ministers of Jammu and Kashmir Friday appealed to the Election Commission of India against deferring polls on the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat.

rescheduling of elections in the constituency due to adverse weather conditions. "I appeal to the EC that such a step should not be taken. The demand for postponement is not from all parties.

Commission should issue a directive to the local administration to keep the road open," he said.



War of words between Modi, Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

War of words ensued between the top BJP and TMC leadership after Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday attacked the Mamata Banerjee Government for selling Government jobs, indulging in appeasement politics so as to subvert the national interests.

cannot give jobs but can take it... it is the BJP which is conspiring against the TMC and the people of Bengal," she said.

the issue inheritance tax the Prime Minister said how the tri-colour party was planning to introduce 55 percent tax on property after a person's death.

Smooth sailing for BJP's Vishnu Sharma in MP

GIRISH SHARMA ■ BHOPAL

In absence of strong opposition in Khajuraho Parliamentary constituency, there is smooth sailing for Vishnu Dutt Sharma, the State president of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Yadav, as a joint candidate for INDI Alliance. However, at the last minute, during the scrutiny of the nomination papers, the District Returning officer found her nomination papers as invalid.



Both the parties did extend their supports to Prajapati, but factually in the field, both the parties were not witnessed making genuine efforts toward Prajapati's victory.

Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, National BJP leader JP Nadda and other prominent leaders addressed election meetings in Khajuraho.

planned conspiracy" was behind the rejecting of party candidate Meera Yadav's nomination.

Shah attacks Congress over Ram Temple

PTI ■ RAJGARH (MP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday slammed senior Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Digvijaya Singh for declining the invitation to attend the consecration of Ram Lalla's idol in Ayodhya, saying their move was guided purely by vote-bank politics.



therefore, they should never be pardoned," he noted. Shah lashed out at the Congress for continuing with the Article 370, that granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, for a long time because of which, he said, terrorism flourished in the erstwhile state and people were unable to even hoist the national tricolour.

manifesto a promise that if a party-led government came to power at the Centre, it will "introduce personal law in the country," the BJP's star campaigner claimed.

PUBLIC NOTICE: General public is hereby informed that Tisha T. Thampal is intending to sell Third Floor with roof/terrace rights towards back side built on Property No. 303, area measuring 53.5 Sq. Yds. in 44/150 Sq. Mts. out of Kharsa No. 21/2 (Kasturba) No. 21 & 6/16 No. 21, situated in the revenue estate of Village Hastal, Delhi State Delhi, area known as Colony-1 Block, Utam Nagar, New Delhi-110029, to Deepak Kutehria to be financed & mortgaged by my client i.e. M/s. IIF Home Finance Ltd. On the deed dt. 07/07/2023 vide doc. No. 13260, pertaining to the aforesaid property have been lost and the claim for the aforesaid documents shall be treated as null and void in respect of the subsequent documents.

PUBLIC NOTICE: It is to inform to the Public at large that Mr. Rajeev Upplal and sapna upplal is the other of 2nd floor Roof rights Property Bearing Plot No 31, Area-125.41 Sq.Mt. IE-150 sqyds, out of Kharsa No-15/1/81, situated at village Dabri, Block-E, Raghunagar, Pankha Road New Delhi from Mr. Harsh Anujal owner of a free Hold Property by Pol through DDA (Conveyance deed - PM UDAY), duly registered as Documents No-3425, In Adit. Book No-1 volume no-12059 on Page 62 to 66, dated 25/03/2023, SRO-18, New Delhi and same to be financed and Mortgaged by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. If any Person have any having any type of claim/right/ title interest over the said Property, may inform in writing at address mentioned below about this objection within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said Property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.

PUBLIC NOTICE: It is to inform to the Public at large that Miss Preeti Kumari and Manju Devi, is the New owner of the entire Property Area 165.6, sq mt Property No. RZ F-559-c12, Gali No-28, land Area 66 sqyds, Kharsa No.660, 662, village Nasipur, colony known as sadh Nagar, Palam colony New Delhi, from, Rohas Singh, we have Purchase from Rohas Singh, he is the other from GPA, ATS and will Reg. Receipt. Now Sale deed executed by Rohas Singh in favour of Preeti Kumari and Manju Devi. - Registration No. 2024/16/14664 in Book no-1, volume No-13206, Page No 17 to 34 dated 18/04/2024. If any Person having any type of claim/right/ title interest over the said Property may inform in writing within 7 days from today said Property is free from all type of Encumbrance lien etc.

PUBLIC NOTICE: General Public is hereby informed that I.M.S. Kiran Arora W/O Late Sh. Ramesh Arora R/O B-5, 3rd Floor, Lajpat Nagar-III, New Delhi-110024 has filed an application in L&DO for substitution/Mutation of the property at Plot No.88/1, Baird Road, New Delhi now known as 127, Bangla Sahib Marg, New Delhi in the name of Ms. Kiran Arora W/O Late Sh. Ramesh Arora on the basis of Relinquishment Deed, Affidavits. If there are any objections/claims from the general public on this application, the same shall be communicated to L&DO with supporting documents through registered post or by visiting L&DO at Nirman Bhavan, New Delhi-110001 or through an email at ldo@nic.in within 30 days of publication of this notice.

INDIAN RAILWAYS GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (BHARAT SARKAR) MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAIL MANTRALAYA) (RAILWAY BOARD) CORRIGENDUM-VI Subject : E-Tender No. TM-2303 for procurement of Rail Borne Maintenance Vehicle "RBMV" for Indian Railways to be opened on 30.05.2024 The date of opening of above mentioned tender due on 02.05.2024 has been postponed to 30.05.2024. All other terms and conditions of the subject tender remain unchanged.

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE Invitation of Tender through GEM's N.I.T. No. : 02/24-25 dated 26.04.2024 GEM Bid No. GEM/2024/B/4890713 1 Name of work with its location : Custom bid for services- Hiring of 03 Ambulance 1 Tempo Traveller AC round the clock on monthly kilometers basis for three years under Medical Director N Rly Central Hospital New Delhi.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE ICICI Bank Branch Office- ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005 Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE: It is to inform to the Public at large that Mr. Rajeev Upplal and sapna upplal is the other of 2nd floor Roof rights Property Bearing Plot No 31, Area-125.41 Sq.Mt. IE-150 sqyds, out of Kharsa No-15/1/81, situated at village Dabri, Block-E, Raghunagar, Pankha Road New Delhi from Mr. Harsh Anujal owner of a free Hold Property by Pol through DDA (Conveyance deed - PM UDAY), duly registered as Documents No-3425, In Adit. Book No-1 volume no-12059 on Page 62 to 66, dated 25/03/2023, SRO-18, New Delhi and same to be financed and Mortgaged by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. If any Person have any having any type of claim/right/ title interest over the said Property, may inform in writing at address mentioned below about this objection within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said Property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.

PUBLIC NOTICE: It is to inform to the Public at large that Mr. Rajeev Upplal and sapna upplal is the other of 2nd floor Roof rights Property Bearing Plot No 31, Area-125.41 Sq.Mt. IE-150 sqyds, out of Kharsa No-15/1/81, situated at village Dabri, Block-E, Raghunagar, Pankha Road New Delhi from Mr. Harsh Anujal owner of a free Hold Property by Pol through DDA (Conveyance deed - PM UDAY), duly registered as Documents No-3425, In Adit. Book No-1 volume no-12059 on Page 62 to 66, dated 25/03/2023, SRO-18, New Delhi and same to be financed and Mortgaged by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. If any Person have any having any type of claim/right/ title interest over the said Property, may inform in writing at address mentioned below about this objection within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said Property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.

PUBLIC NOTICE: It is to inform to the Public at large that Mr. Rajeev Upplal and sapna upplal is the other of 2nd floor Roof rights Property Bearing Plot No 31, Area-125.41 Sq.Mt. IE-150 sqyds, out of Kharsa No-15/1/81, situated at village Dabri, Block-E, Raghunagar, Pankha Road New Delhi from Mr. Harsh Anujal owner of a free Hold Property by Pol through DDA (Conveyance deed - PM UDAY), duly registered as Documents No-3425, In Adit. Book No-1 volume no-12059 on Page 62 to 66, dated 25/03/2023, SRO-18, New Delhi and same to be financed and Mortgaged by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. If any Person have any having any type of claim/right/ title interest over the said Property, may inform in writing at address mentioned below about this objection within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said Property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.

INDIAN RAILWAYS GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (BHARAT SARKAR) MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAIL MANTRALAYA) (RAILWAY BOARD) CORRIGENDUM-VI Subject : E-Tender No. TM-2303 for procurement of Rail Borne Maintenance Vehicle "RBMV" for Indian Railways to be opened on 30.05.2024 The date of opening of above mentioned tender due on 02.05.2024 has been postponed to 30.05.2024. All other terms and conditions of the subject tender remain unchanged.

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE Invitation of Tender through GEM's N.I.T. No. : 02/24-25 dated 26.04.2024 GEM Bid No. GEM/2024/B/4890713 1 Name of work with its location : Custom bid for services- Hiring of 03 Ambulance 1 Tempo Traveller AC round the clock on monthly kilometers basis for three years under Medical Director N Rly Central Hospital New Delhi.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE ICICI Bank Branch Office- ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005 Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE: BE IT MAY KNOW TO ALL THAT, my clients Sh. Dhirender Jain S/O Sh. Bal Kishan Jain and his wife Mrs. Neetu Gupta both R/O 52-A MIG Flat, Phase-1 Gurgaon Enclave, Mother Dairy, Katwaria Sarai, Hauz Khas, Delhi-110016 have severed all their relations with their brother-in-law (Sala) Sh. Raman Kumar Gupta, (Brother of Ms. Neetu Gupta) S/O Lt. Sh. Ashok Kumar Gupta R/O House No. 41, sector 15-A, Faridabad, Haryana due to his impatient, short temperedness and inappropriate conduct. Both of my brother-in-law (Sala) Sh. Raman Kumar Gupta in every manner whatsoever, Anybody dealing with or having relationship with Sh. Raman Kumar Gupta will do so at his/ her/ their own risks and consequences. My clients shall not be responsible for any act, deed or dealing done by Sh. Raman Kumar Gupta.

PUBLIC NOTICE: Informed to the public at large that Title holder of Flat No.19, GEL, CGHS Ltd, OEL Apartments, Plot no.8-14, Vasundhara Enclave, Delhi-86, Mr. Kamleshwar Sahai and Mrs. Manju Sahai are absolute owners. Original Agreement to sell dated 13.08.1996 executed by K.Sitarama Raju in favour of Mr. Kamleshwar Sahai and Mrs. Manju Sahai and Original Allotment and Possession letter issued by C.E. CGHS Ltd in favour of K.Sitarama Raju have been lost/misplaced and are untraceable. The FIR/ Lost report to this effect has already been lodged dated 26.04.2024 with LR no. 1676798/2024. Any Person (s)/company (ies) /authority (ies)/society (ies)/organization (s)/ financial institution(s)/ bank(s) claiming any right/ interest having any objection or found in possession of the original document may contact to the above name within 15 days from this notice, post expiration any claim(s) or objection(s) if raised after this time be treated as null & void.

INDIAN RAILWAYS GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (BHARAT SARKAR) MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAIL MANTRALAYA) (RAILWAY BOARD) CORRIGENDUM-VI Subject : E-Tender No. TM-2303 for procurement of Rail Borne Maintenance Vehicle "RBMV" for Indian Railways to be opened on 30.05.2024 The date of opening of above mentioned tender due on 02.05.2024 has been postponed to 30.05.2024. All other terms and conditions of the subject tender remain unchanged.

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE Invitation of Tender through GEM's N.I.T. No. : 02/24-25 dated 26.04.2024 GEM Bid No. GEM/2024/B/4890713 1 Name of work with its location : Custom bid for services- Hiring of 03 Ambulance 1 Tempo Traveller AC round the clock on monthly kilometers basis for three years under Medical Director N Rly Central Hospital New Delhi.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE ICICI Bank Branch Office- ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005 Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

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 columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP., TRIPs. Includes train 041109/01110 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj T. Special Train.

Days of Run: 01109 Ex Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj T. from 28.04.2024 (Sunday) & 02.05.2024 (Thursday) and 01110 Ex Gorakhpur Jn. from 30.04.2024 (Tuesday) & 04.05.2024 (Saturday)

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP., TRIPs. Includes train 09557/09558 Bhavnagar T.-Delhi Cantt- Bhavnagar T. Special Train (Weekly).

Days of Run: 09557 Ex Bhavnagar T. from 03.05.2024 to 28.06.2024 (Friday) and 09558 Ex Delhi Cantt. from 04.05.2024 to 29.06.2024 (Saturday)

Table with columns: STATIONS, TRAIN NO. 09044, ARRIVAL, DEPARTURE. Includes train 09044 Barauni Jn.-Bandra Terminus Special Train.

Days of Run: 09044 Ex Barauni Jn. on 29.04.2024 (Monday). Accommodation: Sleeper.

Table with columns: TRAIN NO. 03423, STATIONS, TRAIN NO. 03424, ARR., DEP. Includes train 03423/03424 Bhagalpur Jn.-Haridwar - Bhagalpur Jn. Special Train (Weekly).

Days of Run: 03423 Ex Bhagalpur Jn. from 29.04.2024 to 24.06.2024 (Monday) and 03424 Ex Haridwar from 30.04.2024 to 25.06.2024 (Tuesday).

Table with columns: TRAIN NO. 06225, STATIONS, TRAIN NO. 06226, ARR., DEP. Includes train 06225/06226 Hubballi Jn.-Yog Nagri Rishikesh- Hubballi Jn. Summer Special Train (Weekly).

Days of Run: 06225 Ex Hubballi Jn. from 29.04.2024 to 27.05.2024 (Monday) and 06226 Ex Yog Nagri Rishikesh from 02.05.2024 to 30.05.2024 (Thursday).

Advertisement for RailMadad Helpline No. 139 and Northern Railway services, including contact information and website links.



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

All is well

India shows the mirror to the US, rejects its report on rights violations in Manipur as 'deeply biased'

Soon after the US pointed the finger at India for alleged incidents of human rights violations, particularly in Manipur, India has vehemently criticised the State Department report. The Indian Government has denounced the report as "deeply biased" and asserted that it reflects a "significant misunderstanding of the ground realities". Seeking to show the mirror to the US instead, it questioned the US administration's response to the recent killing of Indian students on its soil. The MEA emphasised the "deeply biased" nature of the report, saying the report misrepresents the situation in Manipur and demonstrates a "lack of comprehension" regarding India's efforts to address human rights issues within its borders. The report, which is not limited only to Manipur, talks about other issues too that have apparently undermined Indian democracy in the recent past. One of the key points raised in the State Department's report pertains to the raids conducted by the Indian Income Tax authorities on the offices

of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), alleging that the raids extended to journalists not involved in the organisation's financial affairs. Furthermore, the US report claims that the Indian Government used emergency powers to ban the screening of a BBC-produced documentary. The report highlights the concerns of local human rights organisations, minority political parties and affected communities regarding the Government's alleged "delayed response" to violence and its failure to provide adequate humanitarian assistance in Manipur.



It also cites instances of disinformation tactics being employed against civil society organisations, religious minorities such as Sikhs and Muslims, and political opposition groups. The Indian reaction to the US report is laudable as it defends and protects the boundaries of Indian sovereignty and sends across the message that no country has any business to meddle in India's domestic affairs. The Government must also ensure that foreign powers do not get a chance to sermonise India on human rights. It is an established maxim that human rights issues transcend political boundaries. Besides, the Government should be mindful of criticism by the Indian civil society, which has been airing similar sentiments. They should not be summarily rejected and branded as anti-national and harassed, a routine thing in autocratic systems. Indeed, India's reaction to the State Department's report underscores its commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty and ensuring that international assessments accurately reflect the country's efforts to uphold human rights. India has consistently maintained that it is committed to addressing any legitimate concerns regarding human rights violations through its robust legal framework and democratic processes. In light of these developments, it is imperative for the international stakeholders to engage with India in a constructive dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding.

PICTALK



A man bathes an elephant at the Veermata Jijabai Bhosale Botanical Udyan and Zoo, in Mumbai

PTI

Robotics: Predictable and optimal surgical success

Today, India is leading globally with advancements in robotic surgery and making a difference in critical surgical procedures

Robotic surgery, also known as robot-assisted surgery, has revolutionised the field of surgical procedures by offering increased precision, flexibility and control compared to conventional techniques. Typically associated with minimally invasive surgery, robotic surgery utilises a system consisting of a camera arm and mechanical arms with surgical instruments attached, all controlled by the surgeon seated at a computer console. This setup provides high-definition, magnified, 3D views of the surgical site, enhancing the surgeon's ability to perform delicate and complex procedures. Minimally invasive surgery is now the standard of care across various surgical specialties. Introduced four decades ago, Laparoscopy changed our approach and outcome in surgical patients. Robotic surgery introduced two decades ago, was the next step in the evolution of minimally invasive surgery. Now, the time has come when a surgeon avoids leaving anything on chance. Advanced, stable and predictable robotic surgery can ensure success



in each case. The primary motivation for opting for robotic surgery is the enhanced precision, flexibility and control it offers to surgeons during operations. The precision and minimally invasive nature of robotic procedures contribute to a lower risk of infection and other complications. In India, the Da Vinci system is commonly used for robotic surgery across various specialties, including urology, gynaecology, cardiothoracic and general surgery. In urology, robotic surgery has emerged as a significant advancement, offering several advantages over open or laparoscopic procedures. These advantages include reduced blood loss, decreased patient discomfort, minimised use of painkillers, shorter hospital stays and faster healing times. Urological surgeries com-

monly performed using robotic technology include robotic prostatectomy, robotic cystectomy, robotic partial nephrectomy, robotic pyeloplasty and other procedures such as nephroureterectomy, adrenalectomy, uterine reimplantation and kidney transplantation. Even in the case of frequently performed non-cancerous gastrointestinal surgery like cholecystectomy gall bladder removal or hernia, innumerable challenges can be countered including some very serious injuries, which may result in longer hospital stays or life-threatening situations. Robotic surgery filters out the struggle happening at the surgeon's end while ensuring smooth outcomes with ultimate safety for the patients. Our understanding of robotic surgery benefits originated from cancer patients in urology and onco-surgery. Today non-cancerous surgeries deserve and demand equal precision and safety. Prevention of complications and quick recovery are the new points. Due to the sheer number, improvement of outcome in benign surgeries would translate into a large

number of healthier and happier patients. While technology remains premium, the health insurance companies do understand and approve of such advanced technology. For instance, Narayana Health offers robotic-assisted procedures for various gastrointestinal conditions. The robotic surgery program has an experienced team specialising in using the da Vinci surgical system for minimally invasive general surgeries. With the surgeon controlling robotic arms from a console while watching the operative field through a video camera, patients experience shorter recovery times, with most returning to normal activities within two to three weeks instead of the six to eight weeks typically associated with standard open surgery. Indeed, constant innovation and development in the field of robotic surgery will result in lowering the cost with wider applications.

(The writer is a consultant-general, Robotic and Renal Transplant Surgery at Narayana Hospital - RN Tagore Hospital, Mukundapur, Kolkata; views are personal)



FORQAN BABU SHAIKH

number of healthier and happier patients. While technology remains premium, the health insurance companies do understand and approve of such advanced technology. For instance, Narayana Health offers robotic-assisted procedures for various gastrointestinal conditions. The robotic surgery program has an experienced team specialising in using the da Vinci surgical system for minimally invasive general surgeries. With the surgeon controlling robotic arms from a console while watching the operative field through a video camera, patients experience shorter recovery times, with most returning to normal activities within two to three weeks instead of the six to eight weeks typically associated with standard open surgery. Indeed, constant innovation and development in the field of robotic surgery will result in lowering the cost with wider applications.

(The writer is a consultant-general, Robotic and Renal Transplant Surgery at Narayana Hospital - RN Tagore Hospital, Mukundapur, Kolkata; views are personal)

Artificial Intelligence, a game-changer in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, has revolutionised traditional campaign strategies. The era of candidates personally visiting voters' homes and engaging in conversations over tea, even after a five-year hiatus, has given way to a more technologically advanced approach. Social media played a pivotal role in the 2014 election. However, the advent of AI and the potential use of deepfake videos in India's 2024 elections could be game-changers. These videos, capable of blurring the lines between truth and falsehood, have the potential to significantly impact the trust and integrity of the electoral process.

Political parties and candidates have understood the power of AI in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. They use AI to analyse voter data, enabling them to develop effective campaign strategies. Additionally, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants have been deployed to engage with voters on social media, providing real-time responses to their queries and concerns.

The use of AI technology can help with election processes in several ways:

AI can predict election outcomes. AI chatbots and virtual assistants can communicate with virtual media.

AI can prevent election fraud and regulate political advertising campaign finance violations.

Political parties can now customise their calls to individual voters, potentially harming their opponents' reputations. In India, more than 50% of the population uses the internet, which may increase to 900 million by 2025. The upcoming election in India is expected to generate a market worth Rs 500 crore.

Political parties are using AI to reach voters via social media. Congress and BJP used AI in last year's State elections, the first time false videos and parodies were used in political campaigning. Parties like BJP, Congress, AAP, DMK and AIADMK use AI technology to engage with their supporters. For example, the BJP used AI to translate PM Modi's speech-



es into eight regional languages. However, some campaigners misuse AI-generated videos, including deepfakes, to spread misinformation. These videos are targeted at the 18-25 age group and are being shared on platforms like WhatsApp.

Parties in India use various tools to influence voters. They share fake images and videos on social media platforms. For example, the Congress party shared a phoney photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At the same time, the BJP posted a false video of Rahul Gandhi on Instagram. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK and AIADMK parties used recordings of their deceased leaders for voter support in this election. The Communist parties have also employed AI technology in their campaigns. One video shows Asaduddin Owaisi, the leader of the AIMIM party, singing Hindu devotional songs. Regional leaders like Akhilesh Yadav, Naveen Patnaik and Mamata Banerjee also applied similar tools to influence voters.

The use of AI for malicious purposes is a significant concern. With advanced AI, it has become possible to impersonate anyone, including voters or candidates, which can lead to identity theft and manipulation of the electoral process. This underscores the



POLITICAL PARTIES ARE USING AI TO REACH VOTERS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA. THE CONGRESS AND THE BJP USED AI IN LAST YEAR'S STATE ELECTIONS

need for clear regulations to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process, making the audience more aware of the potential risks and the importance of addressing them, fostering a sense of vigilance.

The use of AI in political campaigns raises valid concerns about privacy and the potential for unfair competition and misinformation. Therefore, it's imperative that clear regulations are implemented to ensure a transparent electoral process.

Governments must take the lead in regulating AI use to promote fairness. The IT Minister has already issued warnings to social media companies, instilling confidence in the audience about the security and integrity of the electoral process.

The Election Commission must issue clear guidelines to regulate AI-generated information for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. These guidelines should address ethical AI use in campaigns and voter data analysis. Strict rules are necessary to maintain the integrity of the electoral process, protect voters' rights and ensure fairness and transparency. Without these regulations, there could be doubts about the legitimacy of the election results.

While there are valid concerns about AI, it's crucial to recog-



KALYANI SHANKAR

nise its potential for positive change. Certain AI-generated technologies have the power to revolutionise how we conduct free and fair elections. As these technologies gain wider acceptance, they could pave the way for e-elections, a future where elections are conducted online, ensuring a more transparent and accountable electoral process. This potential for positive change should inspire optimism and hope, reassuring the audience about the future of elections.

During the Bihar elections, the Election Commission used an AI-powered system to ensure transparency and prevent manipulation. The system detected and flagged misinformation and hate speech cases, expediting the counting process and curbing hate speech during the election. This demonstrates how AI can be used effectively and instils confidence in the electorate.

Presidents, prime ministers, or legislators could win or lose based mainly on the success or failure of their AI campaign. Gullible voters can be fooled easily. Technological advancements can bring about significant changes and AI is no exception.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REVIVAL OF EDUCATION IN BIHAR

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Bihar's educational reforms cock a snook at private players", published on April 26, this is my response. The narrative underscores Bihar's struggle with governance failures, notably in areas like liquor laws and rural migration. However, amidst this backdrop of challenges, the Government's focus on education emerges as a beacon of hope. In a landscape where education is increasingly commodified, Bihar's commitment to public education stands out as a bold counterforce to market forces.

By prioritising education, the Government aims to address deep-rooted social and economic inequalities. The recruitment of teachers and infrastructural improvements demonstrate tangible progress. Yet, sustaining these reforms remains a concern, particularly regarding the absence of a robust mechanism. Additionally, while efforts to combat corruption and enhance accountability are commendable, ensuring the continuity of initiatives like the Mid-Day Meal program is crucial. Ultimately, Bihar's journey towards educational reform signifies a vital step towards empowering marginalised communities and challenging the dominance of private institutions driven by profit motives.

Rajiv Mishra | Lucknow

PERSPECTIVES ON CONSCIOUSNESS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "The Essence of Consciousness", published on April 26, this is my response. The journey of understanding consciousness is a profound one, intricately woven with the fabric of human existence. In the hustle of modern life, terms like consciousness often float around without genuine comprehension. Yet, beneath this veneer lies a profound truth: consciousness is the essence of our being, the awareness that shapes our reality. In a world bombarded with information, it's easy to overlook the depth of our existence. From the wisdom of Buddha to the revelations of quantum physics, consciousness permeates every aspect of our lives. Like Arjuna on the bat-

Ensure representation of the disabled



Apropos the news article, "The marginalisation of disabled in politics", published on April 26, this is my response. The stark absence of political representation for persons with disabilities in India's democratic landscape is a glaring issue. Despite a substantial population, their needs are sidelined, reflecting a systemic failure. Political parties overlook their demands, perpetuating exclusion and reinforcing stereotypes.

Physical barriers at polling stations compound their challenges, stripping away dignity and agency. Anitha's experience exemplifies this neglect. Moreover, those with lesser-known disabilities face additional hurdles, such as a lack of sign language interpreters during campaigns. The dearth of accurate data further complicates policy formulation and budget allocations. However, amidst these challenges lies an opportunity for transformation. A shift towards a rights-based approach is imperative, with persons with disabilities actively involved in policy development. Integration across governance facets is essential for true inclusivity. Respecting their fundamental rights and ensuring their participation in civil and political systems is crucial as India celebrates 75 years of independence. Only then can the nation progress towards its economic aspirations while truly embracing diversity in a democracy.

Aarav Patel | Mumbai

tlefield or King Janaka in his kingdom, we grapple with doubts and fears until a moment of awakening shifts our perception.

True consciousness is not merely being awake but being truly alive, attuned to both internal thoughts and external surroundings. It's the clarity that arises when we shed the layers of ignorance and embrace the purity of our being. In this journey towards enlightenment, let us not merely skim the surface but dive deep into the ocean of consciousness, where every wave carries the promise of a profound revelation.

Vikram Singh | Delhi

THE INDIAN PARADOX

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Why do Indians excel abroad and fail back home?", published on April 26, this is my response. India's global footprint shines brightly across diverse fields, yet a puzzling paradox persists: why do Indians thrive abroad while facing challenges at home? This conundrum demands urgent attention and a deep dive into the complexities

at play. The link between India's international success and domestic hurdles lies largely in the shortcomings of the public education system. Insightful analyses pinpoint the dire State of education as the root cause, a truth echoed by credible sources. Education stands as the linchpin connecting governance, socio-economic stability and prosperity. The nation's future hinges on the quality of primary and secondary education, a reality starkly revealed by surveys.

Moreover, the disconnect between higher education and employability exacerbates the brain drain dilemma. To reverse this trend, India must foster an environment that retains talent and promotes innovation. Embracing change is paramount. Reimagining education to nurture creativity and entrepreneurship can steer India towards global competitiveness. It's time to forge a path towards a brighter, more inclusive future.

Nandini Rao | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

WORK WITH ALLIES FOR SEMICONDUCTORS

It is time to let go of the regulatory bottlenecks to make a mark

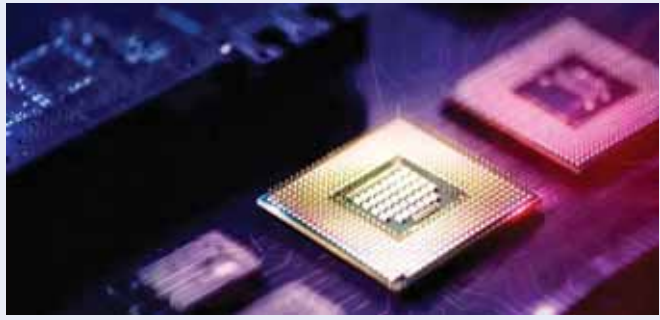


KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

One of the most common reasons cited by foreign investors, against investing in India is too complex regulatory processes and multiplicity of overlapping compliances. The latest to join the bandwagon is Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. The minister was responding to questions from a journalist on the reason for Taiwanese companies not warming up to India's constant welcome mat for attracting investments in the new age technology, building block and semiconductors space.

To be sure Taiwan is home to the largest chip manufacturing facilities in the world, a key component of the digital economy, ranging from mobile phones to satellites. Wu during his interaction with the journalist quoted "India is cumbersome in its administrative structure and it would require for Indian Government to look at that too, to streamline all kinds of laws and regulations to help semiconductor investors coming to the country". He has further in the same interview talked about the lack of skilled engineers to work in the chip-making factories, even though India doesn't fall short of chip-designing talent.

What Mr Wu highlighted, isn't something new, as it is a similar caution from many other potential investors interested in India. This author spoke with several high-ranking officials in several new and emerging technology manufacturing companies, who complained about complex time-consuming administrative processes in India and echoed that, when compared to competing economies such as Singapore, Vietnam etc. A new department called Invest India (a public-private joint venture) was created, early on in the current Government's regime, to assist potential investors through the difficult, regulatory regime. Even for semiconductors, where, India is the preferred potential partner, a dedicated business division has been created in the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, in the form of India Semiconductor Mission (ISM).



The recent trade policy agenda 2024 released by the Biden administration highlighted "Since announcing the negotiating mandate in August 2022, the two sides have pursued an ambitious schedule of meetings to make progress as quickly as possible. In June 2023, AIT and TECRO signed the first agreement under the Initiative. This agreement includes high-standard commitments and economically meaningful outcomes in a number of trade areas, including customs administration and trade facilitation, good regulatory practices, services domestic regulation, anticorruption and small and medium-sized enterprises", underscoring the importance of the partnership between the two countries.

The US supports India's ambitions to develop into a significant player in semiconductor design and manufacturing space, as an alternative to China. India US trade relationship, which has been in limbo has been energised in the last two years after a formal Trade policy forum came into existence, which has had regular meetings on several bilateral issues. In the 2024 trade policy agenda document, US mentions, "We committed to pursue enhanced engagement leading to mutually beneficial outcomes in several areas, with a view to deepening the trade relationship for the benefit of working people. We identified certain areas, including critical minerals, customs and trade facilitation, supply chains and trade in high technology products, in which our Governments intend to develop an ambitious and forward-looking roadmap for enhanced cooperation in order to achieve economically meaningful outcomes."

Given the convergence of interests and the willingness of like-minded partners and allies to invest and support India in the race of semiconductors, the next Government could do well to include removing regulatory bottlenecks in its 100-day agenda. It would be a good start towards a Stated Vikist Bharat target.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Sri Lanka's Easter attack revisited

As the island nation grapples with the aftermath of the attack, the intricate web of extremism and intelligence failures continues to haunt it even five years later



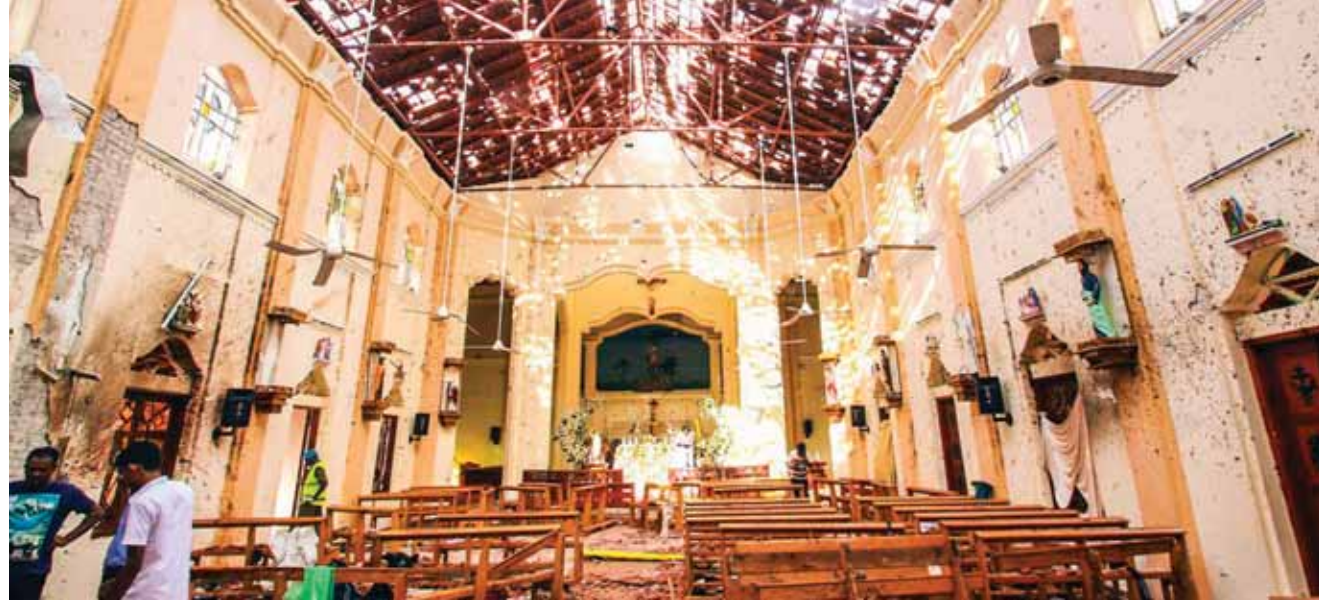
NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

When conspiracy theories gain traction and permeate the public consciousness, they inevitably taint the discourse surrounding the event in question. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in politically charged contexts. Five years ago, amidst the Easter attack on tourist hotels, two Catholic churches and a Zion church in Western and Eastern provinces, a plethora of conspiracy theories surfaced. Initially, speculation swirled suggesting the involvement of a powerful Western nation, followed by theories positing the attack as a ploy to consolidate political power. More recently, local politicians and various social groups have propagated the notion that India orchestrated the attack. Yet, none of these claims have been substantiated with credible evidence. Meanwhile, the culpability of the investigating officers' negligence, which played a role in the tragedy, has been overshadowed by these baseless allegations. Instead of being held accountable, those partially responsible have reshaped the narrative to deflect blame onto others.

However, in the aftermath of the attack, public media reports surfaced alleging that prominent politicians and Government officials were aware of the impending threat. Some even openly discussed this matter. Additionally, a leaked classified document from the police indicated forewarning of an imminent attack. What followed was not just the proliferation of various interpretations but also the dissemination of misconceptions. For instance, blame was swiftly pinned on the State Intelligence Service, the country's premier intelligence agency, extending to judicial indictments. However, a more rational examination, grounded in verifiable data, reveals a different societal reality. It uncovers a systemic failure across institutions tasked with national security and a disregard for prior warnings. Furthermore, it exposes concerted efforts to downplay this negligence for political gain. In a nation scarred by nearly four decades of internal conflict and widespread devastation, such institutional negligence sadly becomes almost unsurprising. It's crucial to highlight overlooked facts concerning the attack in question.

Leading up to the incident in question, there was a noticeable proliferation of extremist factions advocating violence across Sri Lanka. This surge wasn't limited to Muslim extremist groups but encompassed various ideological factions, each pursuing distinct political agendas. The emergence of the Islamic State in West Asia particularly bolstered the prospects of extremists across different nations, with Sri Lanka serving as a pivotal transit hub.

Investigations have revealed a significant influx of extremists from regions like Kerala, as well as countries such as the Maldives, into Sri Lanka. It's evident that intelligence agencies within the region, including those of Sri Lanka and Western nations, amassed substantial intelligence on these activities and collaborated in information sharing. Testimony from the wife of Zahran Hashim, a ringleader of the carnage, attests to the financial backing he received from a Singaporean national to establish his initial mosque. She further detailed Zahran's extensive involvement in extremist endeavours, including recruiting adherents and garnering financial and logistical support throughout the country. This revelation sheds light on the proliferation of extremism in Sri Lanka, culminating



in the Easter attack and subsequent incidents like the suicidal blast at the Sainthamaruthu house, where Zahran's family last resided. Zahran and his cohorts have exhibited affiliations with extremist ideologies and have been inspired by the Islamic State. Moreover, Sri Lankan nationals who joined the organisation's ranks in Syria have been observed exerting influence on local activities. Between 2014 and 2018, a staggering 41,490 individuals from 91 nations travelled to Syria to support the Islamic State, including 32 Sri Lankans.

Exploiting this influx, organisations espousing extremist ideologies, under various guises, began proliferating throughout Sri Lanka. Additionally, individuals of Sri Lankan origin who attempted to travel to Syria via Turkey but were unsuccessful have returned home and aligned themselves with figures like Zahran. Simultaneously, the ideological backing of Mohamed Naufar, known as the "second emir" and a close relative—specifically, the husband of Zahran's maternal aunt—played a pivotal role. Naufar, identified by the FBI as the mastermind behind the attack, exerted significant influence on the events.

Since March 2017, there have been eleven significant incidents leading up to the Easter attack, yet none have undergone thorough investigation. This failure on the part of investigative agencies, which were supposed to act on precious intelligence passed on to them, has been perceived as a deliberate effort to conceal the underlying truth of the entire episode from society, thereby impeding the crucial lessons to be gleaned from this tragedy. The series of events began with a clash at Kattankudy Aliyar junction on March 10, 2017. Following this conflict, police attempted to arrest Zahran, but their efforts proved unsuccessful. Subsequently, on May 17, 2017, a member of National Thowheeth Jamaath was shot. This was followed by a bomb thrown at the National Front for Good Governance (NFGG) Mohammad Farzan's house on February 06, 2018 and another bomb thrown at

the NFGG Kattankudy office on February 12, 2018.

Further escalations occurred with the shooting of Palani Bawa in Kattankudy on June 08, 2018 and the detonation of a bomb by Zahran's brother Rilwan in Arayampathy on August 26, 2018, resulting in injuries and fatalities at Wavnathiv police post on November 30, 2018. The incidents continued with the vandalism of religious statues in Mawanella on December 23, 2018 and further vandalism on January 16, 2019, related to providing information about the destruction of statues and concealment of explosive materials in Vanathavilluwa of Puttalam District. The situation intensified with the discovery of material and the shooting of informant Raziq Mohammad Taslim on March 08, 2019, resulting in permanent disability. Finally, a motorcycle explosion in Thalankudah on April 16, 2019, just five days before the Easter attack, marked the culmination of these incidents. Numerous intelligence reports concerning these events have been received by the commissions tasked with investigating them, shedding light on the negligence of the officers responsible for the criminal investigation.

One of the most significant incidents out of these eleven took place in August 2018, involving Rilwan, who mishandled explosives, resulting in an accident. After the explosions in the Arayampathy area, Rilwan was taken to Colombo National Hospital and admitted under the name Zaheed on 26 August 2018. Investigations have confirmed that Zahran, conducting a training camp in the Hambantota area at the time, visited his brother in Colombo. The following day, 27 August 2018, Rilwan was admitted to the National Eye Hospital. Subsequently, he visited the clinics of the National Hospital on 27.09.2018, 04.10.2018, 11.18.26 and 15.03.2019. This incident occurred eight months prior to the attack, yet neither the training camps nor the incident itself were reported to any police or intelligence agencies.

Remarkably, the individual managed to conceal his identity from the National Hospital and Eye Hospital for several days. The doctor suspected of aiding in this matter has later fled the country.

Later, there was another incident identified as a dry run, which the State Intelligence Service formally reported to the Inspector General of Police as well as the head of CID, stating that the incident on 2019.04.18 was an explosive test. However, due to the lack of proper investigation into the incident until the Easter Sunday attack, a key opportunity to apprehend the perpetrators was missed.

Upon examination of the intelligence reports submitted to the investigative commissions regarding the attack, it becomes evident that not only did the local intelligence agency provide information, but also the Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB), India's internal security and counter-intelligence agency under the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, accurately foresaw the impending attacks. This information was disseminated not only to the then Inspector General of Police and the Secretary of the Ministry of Defense but also to the officers responsible for crime and investigation.

Their acknowledgement of receiving this crucial information is documented. Despite being forewarned, no preventive measures were taken to thwart the attack. This apparent failure to act raises serious questions about accountability and highlights a disturbing trend of negligence. That was a collective failure.

The balance sheet of five years since this tragedy is that there has been a concerted effort to obscure the truth by proliferating conspiracy theories, thereby masking this dereliction of duty. This deliberate attempt to deflect attention from institutional failures through the propagation of unfounded narratives not only undermines public trust but also obstructs the implementation of preventive mechanisms to ensure non-recurrence.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist. Views are personal)



SINCE MARCH 2017, THERE HAVE BEEN 11 SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS LEADING UP TO THE EASTER ATTACK, YET NONE HAS UNDERGONE THOROUGH INVESTIGATION

The U-turns and contradictions in Antony's political journey

From advocating communal harmony to his stance on Hindu-Muslim relations, Antony's journey reflects his love for courting controversies

The year was 1993. The Kerala Press Academy (since renamed as Kerala Media Academy) under the ownership of the Kerala Government was having the Mathai Manjooran Memorial Day. Mathai Manjooran was a socialist party leader and was a member of the EMS Namboodiripad-led coalition Government during the 1967-69. He was also a trade union leader who never hesitated to speak his mind. It is unfortunate that he passed away in 1970 at the age of 58.

A K Antony, the quintessential Congress leader was the speaker who delivered the Manjooran Memorial speech and as a journalist, I was there to cover the event. The country was yet to come out of the impact of the demolition of the



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

disputed structure at Ayodhya and the entire secularist forces were up in arms against the Hindus for the "barbaric" act. Not a single day passed in Kerala without communal harmony meetings and all speakers were vying with one another in blaming the Sanatanis for the heinous act and praising Islam as the religion of peace. But Antony chose a different approach in his 45 minutes. He warned the minority com-

munities (read Christians and Muslims) from attacking the Hindus and reminded the two communities that they should be grateful to the Sanatanis for their magnanimity in offering the minorities more than what the Hindus themselves enjoyed. "The minorities have been given more rights and privileges to run their own educational institutions and hospitals while the Hindus were denied the same. We should always bear in mind the truth that the minorities in India enjoy unique rights and privileges that the Hindus do not have and we should be grateful to them for their broad-mindedness," said Antony, which made the next day's headlines. Antony became the chief minister of Kerala for the third

time in 2001 but he quit in 2004 for reasons best known to him, the then Congress president Sonia Gandhi and the then Muslim League boss Mohammed Shihab Ali Thangal. Eight Hindu fishermen were butchered by members of a Muslim extremist organisation at Maradu in Kozhikode district in May 2003 and there was a demand for a CBI probe into the massacre. A prominent Muslim League leader, who later on became a Union Minister in the Manmohan Singh Government played a significant role in offering shelter in a mosque to the assassins. When the issue of the CBI probe came for consideration in the liaison committee meeting of the UDF, the Muslim League leaders warned Antony



who was the then Chief Minister against an investigation by the Central agency. The UDF had won 99 out of the 140 seats at stake and was in a comfortable position. The Muslim League ultimatum against the CBI probe angered Antony and he announced in a public meeting the next day

that political parties, especially the caste and community-based outfits, should not make the Government dance to their tunes with organised bargaining power. That turned out to be the nemesis for Antony as the Gods in Malappuram asked Sonia Gandhi to remove him from the post of chief minister. Despite Antony tendering an apology, the chieftains of the Muslim League, controlling Kerala politics from the Kudappanakkal castle in Panakkad, were not humoured and they insisted on the former's ouster. That was how Antony resigned as the Chief Minister and shifted camp to Delhi. The Sulthans of Malappuram had the last laugh.

Antony knows very well that his shirt and dhoti should be

more secular than that of the CPI(M) and other outfits to stay in the reckoning. That is why the person who wanted the minority communities to be grateful to the Hindus wants the Sanatan Dharma to be demolished. There is nothing surprising in Antony's stance as he was always against the Hindus even as the president of Kerala Students Union, the feeder organisation of the Congress. The group in the Congress party in Kerala has its roots in Antony's grievances over the status enjoyed by Hindu leaders like K Karunakaran and their clout in the High Command. The group in Congress has nothing to do with ideology and Antony's hatred towards Hindus is reflected in his cursing his son Anil Antony join-

ing the BJP. What Antony should have done is to give freedom to 38-year-old Anil to select the party of his choice and wish him all success. Instead of that what Antony has done is to demand the Nehru-Gandhi clan to field candidates for the Lok Saba election from Amethi and Rae Bareilly. He also declared that the Congress party cannot exist without the Nehru-Gandhi family. Isn't this another way of telling that India is India and India is India? Remember, this is the same Antony who ridiculed Indira Gandhi cast his lot with the CPI(M) in 1980 and formed a Government with the Marxists during 1980-1982.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

University responses vary: Dialogue or police for pro-Palestinian protests

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The students at Columbia University who inspired pro-Palestinian demonstrations across the country dug in at their encampment for the 10th day on Friday as administrators and police at campuses from California to Massachusetts wrestled with how to address protests that have seen scuffles with police and hundreds of arrests.

Officials at Columbia and some other schools have been negotiating with student protesters who have rebuffed police and doubled down. Other schools have quickly turned to law enforcement to douse demonstrations before they can take hold.

As the death toll mounts in the war in Gaza and the humanitarian crisis worsens, protesters at universities across the country are demanding schools cut financial ties to Israel and divest from companies they say are enabling the conflict. Some Jewish students say the protests have veered into antisemitism and made them afraid to set foot on campus, partly prompting the calls for police

intervention. After a tent encampment popped up Thursday at Indiana University Bloomington, police with shields and batons shoved into protesters and arrested 33. Hours later at the University of Connecticut, police tore down tents and arrested one person. And at Ohio State University, police clashed with protesters just hours after they gathered Thursday evening. Those who refused to leave after warnings were arrested and charged with criminal trespass, said university spokesperson Benjamin Johnson, citing rules barring overnight events.

The clock is ticking as May commencement ceremonies near, putting added pressure on schools to clear demonstrations. At Columbia, protesters defiantly erected a tent encampment where many are set to graduate in front of families in just a few weeks.

Columbia officials said that negotiations were showing progress as they neared the school's deadline of early Friday to reach an agreement on dismantling the encampment.



An Israeli police officer searches an activist before she is taken away by police car after she was blocking a road along with a delegation of American and Israeli rabbis from Rabbis for Ceasefire marching towards the Erez crossing to the Gaza Strip with food aid for Gaza civilians and to call for a ceasefire, in southern Israel, on Friday. AP/PTI

US effort to bring aid to Gaza by sea moving forward but concerns remain

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The construction of a new port in Gaza and an accompanying US military-built pier offshore are underway, but the complex plan to bring more desperately-needed food to Palestinian civilians is still mired in fears over security and how the humanitarian aid will be delivered.

The Israeli-developed port, for example, has already been attacked by mortar fire, sending high-ranking UN officials scrambling for shelter this week, and there is still no solid decision on when the aid deliveries will actually begin.

While satellite photos show major port construction along the shore near Gaza City, aid groups are making it clear that they have broad concerns about their safety and reservations about how Israeli forces will handle security.

Sonali Korde, an official with the US Agency for International Development, said key agreements for security and handling the aid deliveries are still being negotiated. Those include how Israeli forces will operate in Gaza to ensure that aid workers are not harmed.

"We need to see steps implemented. And the humanitarian community and IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) continue to talk and engage and iterate and improve the system so that everyone feels safe and secure in this very difficult operating environment," Korde said.

A senior US military official said on Thursday the US is on track to begin delivering aid using the new port and pier by early May. The official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet made public, said deliveries through the sea route initially will total about 90 trucks a day and could quickly increase to about 150 trucks daily.

The senior official acknowledged, however, that the final installation of the US-built causeway onto the beach at the port will be governed by the security situation, which is assessed daily.

The Israeli Defense Forces has a brigade — thousands of soldiers — as well as ships and aircraft dedicated to protecting the deliveries, the official said.

Asked about the recent mortar attack, the military official said the US assesses that it had nothing to do with the humanitarian mission, adding that security around the port will be "far more robust" when the deliveries start.

Scottish leader cancels major speech as confidence vote in his govt looms

AP ■ LONDON

Scotland's leader cancelled a speech on Friday as he fights for his political life in the wake of his decision to pull the plug on a three-year power-sharing agreement, a move that has exposed the government to peril.

First Minister Humza Yousaf of the Scottish National Party was due to deliver a major speech on Scotland's independence from the UK, but that has been cancelled following the furor surrounding his decision to tear up the power-sharing deal with the much smaller Greens on Thursday.

Without the support of the Greens, the SNP is two seats shy of a majority of lawmakers in the Scottish Parliament, meaning it can only get legislation and its budget through with the support of other parties.

Although Scotland is part of the UK, its government has widespread powers, including

over health and education, as well as some limited powers over the raising of revenues. On Friday, Scottish Labour, which is connected to the UK's main opposition Labour Party, said it wants to lodge a vote of no confidence in the Scottish government next week.

If all opposition legislators, which now include the Greens, vote against the government, it could set off a chain of events that leads to early elections in Scotland, which are not due until 2026. Ministers in the government would be required to resign immediately and the legislature in Edinburgh would then have 28 days to see if it can create a new government with majority support. If that isn't possible, then early elections would be triggered.

"It's a matter now of when, not if, Humza Yousaf will step down as first minister," said Scottish Labour's leader Anas Sarwar. "It would be untenable for the SNP to assume it can impose another unelected first

minister on Scotland." Yousaf, who replaced long-time leader Nicola Sturgeon in March 2023, may need the vote of a former SNP lawmaker, Ash Regan, to survive. She has indicated that she would seek to extract a price from Yousaf in order to back him and the government in the no-confidence votes. Of Parliament's 129 seats, the SNP holds 63. Regan's backing would result in the government having 64 votes at least. In the event of a tie, the chamber's presiding officer — Scotland's equivalent to the speaker — would be expected to vote in favour of the status quo.

It could well be that tight. The Greens, furious at their ejection from government, have already said they will vote against Yousaf himself, along with the other main opposition parties, including the Conservatives and Labour.

It's not clear yet whether they will vote against the government as a whole or whether they will abstain.

Tate's trial on charges of rape, human trafficking might start

Bucharest (AP): A court in Romania's capital on Friday ruled that a trial can start in the case of influencer Andrew Tate, who is charged with human trafficking, rape and forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women.

The Bucharest Tribunal ruled that prosecutors' case file against Tate met the legal criteria but did not set a date for the trial to begin.

Tate's spokesperson, Mateea Petrescu, said the ruling will be appealed.

Tate, 37, was arrested in December 2022 near Bucharest along with his brother Tristan Tate and two Romanian women.

Romanian prosecutors formally indicted all four in June last year. They have denied the allegations.

'United Team Pak could defeat negative forces'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Army chief General Syed Asim Munir said on Friday that a "united team Pakistan" could defeat "negative forces", as he asserted that negative propaganda and social media trolls could not distract the nation from marching towards its development and prosperity.

Addressing the Green Pakistan Initiative conference, Gen. Munir said that the country's armed forces, with the nation's support, would defeat all the inimical forces bent on impeding Pakistan's development and prosperity, Geo News reported.

He asserted that negative propaganda and social media trolls could not distract the nation from marching towards its development and prosperity.

"Let us all reject negative forces together and focus on Pakistan's journey of development and stability," he was quoted as saying.



"We are all a united team Pakistan - InshaAllah (God willing), with the cooperation and support of the people, all efforts of those who distract and obstruct Pakistan's development journey will fail," he said.

Stressing the need for over-pursuing economic challenges, Gen. Munir said that complete independence without economic stability is not possible. "In today's era, complete independence is not possible with-

London resident arrested by NIA in Indian mission attack case

London (PTI): A man who was arrested for unlawful activities by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) as part of its investigations into the attack on the High Commission of India here in March 2023 had previously been detained at the Attari border while entering India from Pakistan last year. Indrapal Singh Gaba, a resident of Hounslow in west London, was arrested in India on Thursday for committing offences under Section 13(1) of the Prevention of Insult to National Honour Act and Section 34 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), official sources here said.

There were two major violent protests in front of India House in London on March 19 and 22, 2023. On March 19, a large group of protesters were found to have attacked Indian officials, damaged the High Commission building and insulted the Indian National Flag.

On March 22, they chanted anti-India slogans, insulted the Indian National Flag again and indulged in unlawful and threatening behaviour, according to the reports logged by the NIA following the incidents.

As part of the investigation, several suspects were examined, and seizures were made after conducting searches at 31 locations in Punjab and Rajasthan. An investigation team of the NIA had also visited London, sources said.

LOC [Look Out Circular] was opened against several suspects, including Indrapal Singh Gaba. Singh was detained at the Attari border on 09.12.2023 when he entered India from Pakistan. As part of the investigation, his mobile phone was seized and data was extracted and analysed.

Investigation revealed that protests on 19.03.2023 and 22.03.2023 were part of the larger conspiracy to attack Indian missions and its officials, they said. The violent protests in March last year were repeatedly raised in the British Parliament and there has since been a very visible Metropolitan Police security presence outside the High Commission of India in London.

Trump's lawyers to grill ex-tabloid publisher

AP ■ NEW YORK

After prosecutors' lead witness painted a tawdry portrait of "catch-and-kill" tabloid schemes, defence lawyers in Donald Trump's hush money trial are poised on Friday to dig into an account of the former publisher of the National Enquirer and his efforts to protect Trump from negative stories during the 2016 election.

David Pecker will return to the witness stand for the fourth day as defence attorneys try to poke holes in his testimony after he described helping bury embarrassing stories that Trump feared could hurt his campaign.

It will cap a consequential week in the criminal cases the former president is facing as he vies to reclaim the White House in November. At the same time jurors listened to testimony in Manhattan, the Supreme Court on Thursday signalled it was likely to reject Trump's sweeping claims that he is immune from prosecution in his 2020 election inter-



ference case in Washington. But the conservative-majority high court seemed inclined to limit when former presidents could be prosecuted — a ruling that could benefit Trump by delaying that trial, potentially until after the November election. In New York — the first of Trump's four criminal cases to go to trial — the presumptive Republican presi-

dent nominee faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in connection with hush money payments meant to stifle negative stories from surfacing in the final days of the 2016 campaign. Trump denies any wrongdoing. Before entering the courtroom on Friday, he told reporters he believes Thursday's proceedings went

"very well" for the defense, adding that "the case should be over".

Prosecutors allege that Trump sought to illegally influence the 2016 race through a tabloid industry practice that involves catching a potentially damaging story by buying the rights to it and then killing it through agreements that prevent the paid person from telling the story to anyone else.

Over several days on the witness stand, Pecker has described how he and the tabloid parlayed rumour-mongering into splashy stories that smeared Trump's opponents and, just as crucially, leveraged his connections to suppress seamy stories about Trump.

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

Claims of double standards in Sydney stabbing incidents

Newcastle (Australia) (AP): Muslim groups in Australia on Friday criticized the disparity in the police response to two stabbing attacks in Sydney this month, saying it had created a perception of a double standard and further alienated the country's minority Muslim community.

The Australian National Imams Council said an attack at a Bondi Junction shopping center was "quickly deemed a mental health issue" while the stabbing of a Christian bishop at a Sydney church two days later was "classified as a terrorist act almost immediately."

"The differing treatments of two recent violent incidents are stark," the council's spokesperson, Ramia Abdo Sultan, said in a statement with the Alliance of Australian Muslims and the Australian Muslim Advocacy Network.

"Such disparities in response create a perception of a double standard in law enforcement and judicial processes," she said.

A 16-year-old boy is accused of repeatedly stabbing Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel and a priest at the Christ the Good Shepherd Church on April 15, two days after the Bondi Junction attack, in which six people were killed and a dozen others seriously wounded by a lone assailant with a history of mental illness.

The boy was charged last week with committing a terrorist act, a crime that carries a maximum penalty of life in prison. Five teenage boys aged from 14 to 17 have also been charged with terrorism offenses in connection with the church stabbings.

UK cancer patient joins trial for world's first skin cancer vaccine

PTI ■ LONDON

An international clinical trial testing a novel cancer immunotherapy, which may prevent skin cancer from recurring, has recruited its first patient in Britain this week.

The mRNA-based technology, the vaccine tech used for some COVID vaccinations, is aimed at people who have already had high-risk melanomas — the most serious form of cancer — removed.

For the trial, University College London Hospitals (UCLH) doctors are giving it alongside another drug, pembrolizumab or Keytruda, that also helps the immune system kill cancer cells.

One of the first patients to sign up for the trial is British musician Steve Young, 52, from Hertfordshire, east England,

who was diagnosed with stage II melanoma, which was removed. "I feel lucky to be part of this clinical trial. Of course, I did not feel so lucky when I was diagnosed with skin cancer, in fact, it came as quite a shock, but now that I've had treatment, I'm keen to ensure it does not recur. This is my best chance at stopping the cancer in its tracks," Young said.

The personalised treatment works by instructing the body to make up to 34 proteins, each targeting "neoantigens" identified by gene sequencing and thought to be driving the cancer in that particular patient. The neoantigens are proteins found only on the cancer cells, and the individualised neoantigen therapy is designed to prime the immune system to attack the tumour cells in each patient, while Keytruda

blocks an immunological "brake" that protects the cancer. "The idea behind this immunotherapy is that, by prompting the body to make these proteins, it can prepare the immune system to quickly identify and attack any cancer cells bearing them, with the aim of preventing recurrence of melanoma," said University College London medical oncologist Heather Shaw, the national coordinating investigator of the new trial.

The new Phase 3 clinical trial, being led by UCLH, is evaluating the combination of mRNA-4157 (V940) and Keytruda (pembrolizumab) versus a current standard of care (pembrolizumab) as a risk-reducing treatment option for patients with resected high-risk, stage IIB to IV melanoma.

US probes Tesla autopilot recall on attention

AP ■ DETROIT

The US government's auto safety agency is investigating whether last year's recall of Tesla's Autopilot driving system did enough to make sure drivers pay attention to the road. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says in documents posted on its website on Friday that it has concerns about the December recall of more than 2 million vehicles, nearly all the vehicles that Tesla had sold at the time.

The agency pushed the company to do the recall after a two-year investigation into Autopilot's driver monitoring system, which measures torque on the steering wheel from a driver's hands.

The fix involves an online software update to increase warnings to drivers. But the agency said in documents



that it has found evidence of crashes after the fix, and that Tesla added updates that weren't part of the recall. "This investigation will consider why these updates were not part of the recall or otherwise determined to remedy a defect that poses an unreasonable safety risk," the agency wrote.

A message was left early Friday seeking comment from Tesla.

NHTSA said that Tesla reported 20 crashes that apparently happened after the recall remedy was sent out. The agency has required Tesla and other automakers to report crashes involving partially and fully automated driving systems.

NHTSA said it will evaluate the recall, including the "prominence and scope" of Autopilot's controls to address misuse, confusion and use in environments that the system

is not designed to handle. It also said that Tesla has stated that owners can decide whether they want to opt in to parts of the recall remedy, and that it allows drivers to reverse parts of it. Safety advocates have long expressed concern that Autopilot, which can keep a vehicle in its lane and a distance from objects in front of it, was not designed to operate on roads other than limited access highways.

The Associated Press reported shortly after the recall that experts said it relied on technology that may not work. Tesla, the leading manufacturer of EVs, reluctantly agreed to the recall last year after NHTSA found that the driver monitoring system was defective and required a fix.

The system sends alerts to drivers if it fails to detect torque from hands on the steering wheel, a system that experts

describe as ineffective. Government documents filed by Tesla say the online software change will increase warnings and alerts to drivers to keep their hands on the steering wheel. It also may limit the areas where the most commonly used versions of Autopilot can be used, though that isn't entirely clear in Tesla's documents.

NHTSA began its investigation in 2021, after receiving 11 reports that Teslas that were using the partially automated system crashed into parked emergency vehicles. Since 2016, the agency has sent investigators to at least 35 crashes in which Teslas that were suspected of operating on a partially automated driving system hit parked emergency vehicles, motorcyclists or tractor trailers that crossed in the vehicles' paths, causing a total of 17 deaths.

Blinken meets Xi as US, China spar over bilateral and global issues

AP ■ BEIJING

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Friday with Chinese President Xi Jinping and senior Chinese officials, stressing the importance of “responsibly managing” the differences between the United States and China as the two sides butted heads over a number of contentious bilateral, regional and global issues.

Talks between the two sides have increased in recent months, even as differences have grown.

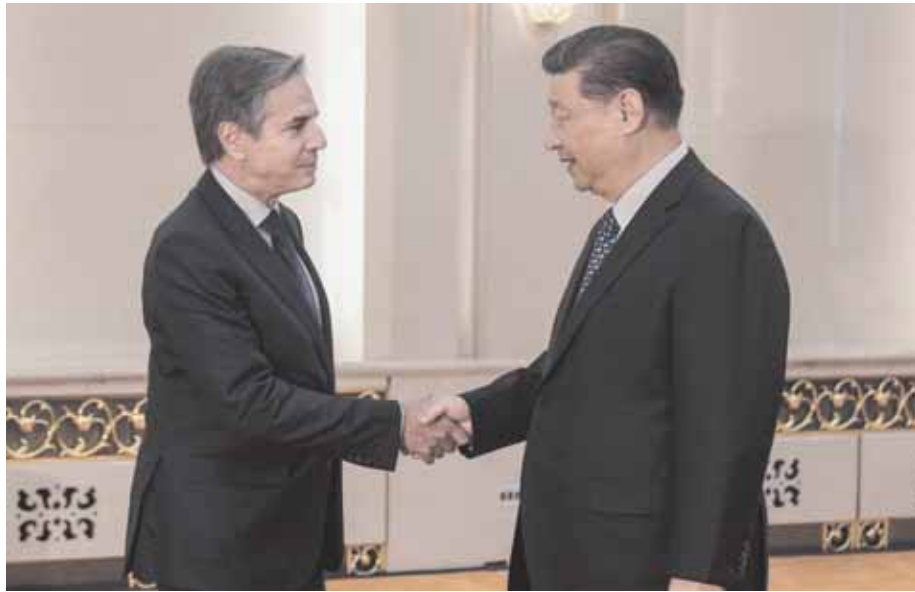
Blinken said he raised concerns with Xi about China’s support for Russia and its invasion of Ukraine, as well as other issues including Taiwan and the South China Sea, human rights and the production and export of synthetic opioid precursors. Blinken sounded a positive note on recent progress made in bilateral cooperation, including in military communications, counternarcotics and artificial intelligence.

“We are committed to maintaining and strengthening lines of communication to advance that agenda, and again deal responsibly with our differences so we avoid any miscommunications, any misperceptions, any miscalculations,” he said.

But he said he made clear to Xi ongoing concerns about Beijing’s supply of materials, including machine tools and micro electronics, to Moscow that President Vladimir Putin is using to boost Russia’s defences and its war on Ukraine. “Russia would struggle to sustain its assault on Ukraine without China’s support,” Blinken told reporters after his meeting with Xi.

“Fueling Russia’s defense industrial base not only threatens Ukrainian security, it threatens European security,” he added. “As we’ve told China for some time, ensuring transatlantic security is a core US interest. In our discussions today, I made clear that China does not address this problem.”

Blinken also said he urged China to use its influence “to discourage Iran and its proxies from expanding the conflict in the Middle East” and convince North Korea “to end its dangerous behaviour and engage in



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People, on Friday AP/PTI

dialogue.” Blinken also discussed with Xi China’s maritime maneuvers in the disputed South China Sea, and reiterated “ironclad” American support for the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia. Xi stressed that China and the US must seek common ground “rather than engage in vicious competition.”

“China is happy to see a confident, open, prosperous and thriving United States,” the Chinese leader said. “We hope the US can also look at China’s development in a positive light. This is a fundamental issue that must be addressed.”

Earlier, Blinken held lengthy talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Public Security Minister Wang Xiaohong. He and Wang underscored the importance of keeping lines of communication open as they lamented persistent and deepening divisions that threaten global security. Those divisions were highlighted earlier this week when US President Joe Biden signed a massive foreign aid bill that contains several elements that the Chinese see as problematic. “Overall, the China-US relationship is beginning to stabilise,” Wang told Blinken at the start of about 5 1/2 hours of talks. “But at the same time, the negative factors in the relationship are still increasing and building and the relationship is

facing all kinds of disruptions.” “Should China and the United States keep to the right direction of moving forward with stability or return to a downward spiral?” he asked. “This is a major question before our two countries and tests our sincerity and ability.” Wang also outlined, without being specific, well-known Chinese complaints about US policies and positions on the South China Sea, Taiwan, human rights and China’s right to conduct relations with countries it deems fit.

“China’s legitimate development rights have been unreasonably suppressed and our core interests are facing challenges,” he said. “China’s concerns are consistent. We have always called for respect of each other’s core interests and urge the United States not to interfere in China’s internal affairs, not to hold China’s development back, and not to step on China’s red lines on China’s sovereignty, security, and development interests.”

Blinken responded by saying that the Biden administration places a premium on US-China dialogue even on issues of dispute. He noted there had been some progress in the past year but suggested that talks would continue to be difficult.

The State Department said later that Blinken and Wang had “in-depth, substantive, and

constructive discussions about areas of difference as well as areas of cooperation” and made clear that Blinken had stood his ground on US concerns.

Blinken “emphasised that the US will continue to stand up for our interests and values and those of our allies and partners, including on human rights and economic issues,” State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement. Blinken arrived in China on Wednesday, visiting Shanghai shortly before Biden signed the 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. It also seeks to force TikTok’s China-based parent company to sell the social media platform. China and the United States are the major players in the Indo-Pacific. Washington has become increasingly alarmed by Beijing’s growing aggressiveness in recent years toward Taiwan and its smaller Southeast Asian neighbours with which it has significant territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea.

China has railed against US assistance to Taiwan and immediately condemned the aid as a dangerous provocation. It also strongly opposes efforts to force TikTok’s sale.

Chinese marine research ship back in Maldives’ waters

PTI ■ MALE

A 4,500-tonne high-tech Chinese research ship is back in the Maldivian waters, two months after it spent a week docked at different ports in this archipelago nation.

Xiang Yang Hong 03 was docked at the Thilafushi industrial island’s harbour on Thursday morning, news portal Adhathu.com reported on Friday. However, “the government has not disclosed the reason for its return. But the government previously confirmed permission for the ship to dock before its first visit,” it said, days after President Mohamed Muizzu, a pro-China leader-led People’s National Congress won the general election, securing 66 out of the 93-member People’s Majlis. Muizzu rode to power last year on an ‘India Out’ promise and with a super majority win in parliamentary polls on April 21, he has further consolidated his position.

“The ship has now come back after skirting the Exclusive

Economic Zone (EEZ). Therefore, Xiang Yang Hong 03 has been active inside or near Maldives territory since January,” it said. The ship had earlier docked on February 23 at the same Thilafushi port, about 7.5 km to the west of Male. The hi-tech ship reached Maldivian waters on February 22 after spending about a month near the boundary of the Maldives’ EEZ. About six days later, the ship went back to the EEZ boundary.

In February, the Maldivian Foreign Ministry had said the Xiang Yang Hong 3 was here to “make a port call, for the rotation of its personnel and replenishment” after a diplomatic request was made by the government of China to the government of Maldives.

“The vessel would not be conducting any research while in the Maldivian waters,” the Foreign Ministry said on January 23. The Maldives’ proximity to India, barely 70 nautical miles from the island of Minicoy in Lakshadweep and 300 nautical miles from the

mainland’s western coast, and its location at the hub of commercial sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) gives it significant strategic importance. Meanwhile, local media reports in February provided details about the type of vessel Xiang Yang Hong 03: The 100-metre-long vessel was added to the fleet of China’s State Oceanic Administration (SOA) in 2016. This is the only 4,500-tonne vessel currently in China. Since 2019, China has also been using the vessel to conduct ‘distant water’ and ‘deep sea’ surveys at China’s Pilot Ocean Laboratory.

The vessel can also be used for studies on salinity, microbial genetic studies, underwater mineral exploration, and underwater life and environmental studies, it said. It has data buoys that can measure ocean currents, waves, and important environmental information. These buoys will provide real-time satellite information to the Chinese government, the report then said.

Head of Vietnam parl resigns amid corruption probe

Hanoi (AP): Vietnamese state media outlet VN Express reports that the head of Vietnam’s Parliament, Vuong Dinh Hue, has resigned. He is the latest member of senior government to leave office amid an ongoing anti-corruption campaign. Hue’s resignation takes place four days after his assistant Pham Thai Ha was arrested on charges of abusing his position and power for personal gain, according to state media.

Vietnam’s Communist Party accepted what called Hue’s voluntary resignation, according to VN Express, while noting that investigators found that Hue had “violated Party regulations, and his violations have affected the reputation of the Party, the State and himself.” Hue, 67, had been the chairman of Vietnam’s national assembly for over three years. The chairman of the national assembly is the fourth most important politician in Vietnam, along with the President, the Prime Minister and the head of the Communist Party.

South Korean police raid office of incoming doctors’ group head

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korean police said on Friday they searched the office of the hard-line incoming leader of an association of doctors and confiscated his mobile phone as he faces accusations that he incited the protracted walkouts by thousands of medical interns and residents. The development could further dim prospects for an early end to the strikes.

The office of Lim Hyun-taek, who is to be inaugurated as head of the Korean Medical Association next week, called the raid politically motivated and questioned whether the government is sincere about its offer for dialogue to end the strikes.

Police said they sent officers to Lim’s office in Seoul and residence in the southern city of Asan on Friday to confiscate his mobile phone and other unspecified materials. Lim is

one of five former or incumbent Korean Medical Association officials who have been under police investigation for allegedly inciting and abetting the strikes. In mid-April, two of them had their medical licenses suspended by health authorities. Lim’s office said in a statement that the police raid was “a clear retaliation and political suppression” of Lim. It said the government should have not orchestrated the raid if it truly wants talks.

More than 10,000 interns and residents at major university hospitals walked off the job in February in protest at the government’s plan to increase the country’s medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 starting next year, from the current cap of 3,058. Their walkouts have caused numerous cancellations and delays of surgeries and other medical treatment at their hospitals.

In the face of growing pub-

lic calls to find a compromise to end the strikes, the government said last week it could adjust its plan by allowing universities to determine whether to lower planned admissions by up to 50 per cent next year.

This means the number of newly recruited medical students next year could be as low as 1,000. But Lim said doctors want the government to completely scrap the enrollment hike plan, saying they won’t allow any increase in the number of students. He also urged the government to fire top officials involved in the formulation of the admissions plan.

Officials say the plan is aimed at adding more doctors because South Korea has one of the world’s fastest aging populations and its doctor-to-population ratio is one of the lowest in the developed world.

Doctors say schools aren’t ready to handle an abrupt increase in students and that it

would ultimately undermine the country’s medical services. They say the government plan would also result in doctors in greater competition performing unnecessary treatments. But critics say those aren’t the real reasons behind their protests and that they simply worry the supply of more doctors would lead to lower income for them in the future. South Korea’s current medical student enrollment cap has been unchanged since 2006, with doctors thwarting previous government attempts with vehement protests. Deepening worries about the medical impasse, senior doctors at the striking junior doctors worked have threatened to resign in support of the strikes. Their associations recently decided to let senior doctors take a day off every week, citing the overwork caused by the departures of their junior partners.

Ukraine pulls Abrams tanks from front lines

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Ukraine has sidelined US-provided Abrams M1A1 battle tanks for now in its fight against Russia, in part because Russian drone warfare has made it too difficult for them to operate without detection or coming under attack, two US military officials told The Associated Press.

The US agreed to send 31 Abrams to Ukraine in January 2023 after an aggressive month-long campaign by Kyiv arguing that the tanks, which cost about USD 10 million apiece, were vital to its ability to breach Russian lines.

But the battlefield has changed substantially since then, notably by the ubiquitous use of Russian surveillance drones and hunter-killer drones. Those weapons have made it more difficult for Ukraine to protect the tanks when they are quickly detected and hunted by Russian drones or rounds.

Five of the 31 tanks have already been lost to Russian attacks. The proliferation of drones on the Ukrainian battle-

field means “there is not open ground that you can just drive across without fear of detection”, a senior defence official told reporters on Thursday. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide an update on US weapons support for Ukraine before Friday’s Ukraine Defence Contact Group meeting.

For now, the tanks have been moved from the front lines, and the US will work with the Ukrainians to reset tactics, said Joint Chiefs of Staff Vice Chairman Admiral Christopher Grady and a third defence official who confirmed the move on the condition of anonymity.

“When you think about the way the fight has evolved, massed armour in an environment where unmanned aerial systems are ubiquitous can be at risk,” Grady told the AP in an interview this week, adding that tanks are still important. “Now, there is a way to do it,” he said. “We will work with our Ukrainian partners, and other partners on the ground, to help them think through how

they might use that, in that kind of changed environment now, where everything is seen immediately.”

News of the sidelined tanks comes as the US marks the two-year anniversary of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, a coalition of about 50 countries that meets monthly to assess Ukraine’s battlefield needs and identify where to find needed ammunition, weapons or maintenance to keep Ukraine’s troops equipped. Recent aid packages, including the USD 1 billion military assistance package signed by US President Joe Biden on Wednesday, also reflect a wider reset for Ukrainian forces in the evolving fight. The US is expected to announce on Friday that it also will provide about USD 6 billion in long-term military aid to Ukraine, officials said, adding that it will include much sought after munitions for Patriot air defence systems. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet made public. The USD 1 billion package

emphasised counter-drone capabilities, including 50-calibre rounds specifically modified to counter drone systems, additional air defences and ammunition, and a host of alternative, and cheaper, vehicles, including Humvees, Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles. The US also confirmed for the first time that it is providing long-range ballistic missiles known as ATACMs, which allow Ukraine to strike deep into Russian-occupied areas without having to advance and be further exposed to either drone detection or fortified Russian defences.

While drones are a significant threat, the Ukrainians also have not adopted tactics that could have made the tanks more effective, one of the US defence officials said. After announcing it would provide Ukraine the Abrams tanks in January 2023, the US began training Ukrainians at the Grafenwoehr Army base in Germany that spring on how to maintain and operate them.

They also taught the Ukrainians how to use them in combined arms warfare — where the tanks operate as part of a system of advancing armoured forces, coordinating movements with overhead offensive fires, infantry troops and air assets. As the spring progressed and Ukraine’s highly-anticipated counteroffensive stalled, shifting from tank training in Germany to getting Abrams on the battlefield was seen as an imperative to breach fortified Russian lines. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced on his Telegram channel in September that the Abrams had arrived in Ukraine. Since then, however, Ukraine has only employed them in a limited fashion and has not made combined arms warfare part of its operations, the defence official said. During its recent withdrawal from Avdiivka, a city in eastern Ukraine that was the focus of intense fighting for months, several tanks were lost to Russian attacks, the official said.

Ukraine’s farm minister is latest corruption suspect

AP ■ KYIV

A Ukrainian court on Friday ordered the detention of the country’s farm minister in the latest high-profile corruption investigation, while Kyiv security officials assessed how they can recover lost battlefield momentum in the war against Russia.

Ukraine’s High Anti-Corruption Court ruled that Agriculture Minister Oleksandr Solskiy should be held in custody for 60 days, but he was released after paying bail of 75 million Hryvnias (USD 1.77 million), a statement said. Ukraine’s National Anti-Corruption Bureau suspects Solskiy headed an organized crime group that between 2017 and 2021 unlawfully obtained land worth 291 million Hryvnias (USD 6.85 million) and attempted to obtain other land worth 190 million Hryvnias (USD 4.47 million). Ukraine is trying to root out

corruption that has long dogged the country. A dragnet over the past two years has seen Ukraine’s defense minister, top prosecutor, intelligence chief and other senior officials lose their jobs. That has caused embarrassment and unease as Ukraine receives tens of billions of dollars in foreign aid to help fight Russia’s army, and the European Union and NATO have demanded widespread anti-graft measures before Kyiv can realize its ambition of joining the blocs.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was due to hold online talks Friday with the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, which has been the key international organization coordinating the delivery of weapons and other aid to Ukraine. Zelenskyy said late Thursday that the meeting would discuss how to turn around Ukraine’s fortunes on the battlefield. The Kremlin’s forces have gained an edge

over Kyiv’s army in recent months as Ukraine grappled with a shortage of ammunition and troops.

Russia, despite sustaining high losses, has been taking control of small settlements as part of its effort to drive deeper into eastern Ukraine after capturing the city of Avdiivka in February, the defense ministry said Friday. It’s been slow going for the Kremlin’s troops in eastern Ukraine and is likely to stay that way, according to the Institute for the Study of War. However, the key hilltop town of Chasiv Yar is vulnerable to the Russian onslaught, which is using glide bombs — powerful Soviet-era weapons that were originally unguided but have been retrofitted with a navigational targeting system — that obliterate targets. “Russian forces do pose a credible threat of seizing Chasiv Yar, although they may not be able to do so rapidly,” the Washington-based think tank said late Thursday.

Indian-origin man shot in US as police attempt to arrest him

New York (PTI): A 42-year-old Indian-origin man was shot and killed by police in San Antonio after he struck two officers with his vehicle as they were trying to apprehend him in connection with an aggravated assault case. Sachin Sahoo was pronounced deceased at the scene after police officer Tyler Turner shot at him on April 21.

Sahoo originally hailed from Uttar Pradesh. Sources said he could have been a naturalised US citizen. According to a preliminary investigation, just before 6:30 pm on April 21, officers were dispatched to a home in Cheviot Heights in San Antonio for a report about Aggravated Assault with a Deadly Weapon, the San Antonio Police Department

said in a statement to PTI. Upon arrival, officers found a 51-year-old female who had been intentionally struck by a vehicle. The suspect, Sahoo, had fled the location. The victim was transported to a local hospital in critical condition. San Antonio Police Detectives issued a felony arrest warrant for Sahoo in that incident. Several hours later, neighbours called the police to inform them that Sahoo had returned to the original location. Officers arrived and attempted to contact him when he struck two officers with his vehicle. One officer fired his weapon, striking Sahoo, who was “pronounced deceased on scene.”

One officer was transported to a local hospital for treatment of his injuries and the other offi-

cer was treated for his injuries on scene. Nobody else was injured during the incident. This investigation remains ongoing, police said. Police Chief Bill McManus said that Sahoo had run over the woman, who was his roommate, with his vehicle. The woman was undergoing several surgeries and was in critical condition. The police had issued an arrest warrant for Sahoo and a couple of officers had gone to his known location on April 21 to see if they could find him and arrest him. “They did find him and he jumped in his car. He pulled out of his driveway” where the police officers blocked him with their vehicles but he was able to squeeze through them.

Two men charged in UK with spying for China granted bail

London (AP): A former researcher working in the UK Parliament and another man charged with spying for China were granted bail Friday after an initial court appearance in London. Christopher Cash, 29, and Christopher Berry, 32, were charged with violating the Official Secrets Act by providing information or documents that could be “useful to an enemy” — China — and “prejudicial to the safety or interests” of the UK between late 2021 and February 2023.

Cash, a parliamentary researcher who worked with senior lawmakers from the governing Conservatives, was ordered not to enter Parliament

or contact members of the House of Commons. Cash’s colleagues included Alicia Kearns, who now heads the powerful Foreign Affairs Committee, and her predecessor in that role, Tom Tugendhat, who is now security minister. Berry is reportedly an academic based in Oxfordshire. The two didn’t enter pleas during a short hearing in Westminster Magistrates’ Court. The defendants were also ordered not to travel outside the UK or contact each other. They were ordered to appear May 10 at the Central Criminal Court known as the Old Bailey for a preliminary hearing.

Philippine police kill Abu Sayyaf militant implicated in beheadings

Manila (AP): Philippine forces killed an Abu Sayyaf militant, who had been implicated in past beheadings, including of 10 Filipino marines and two kidnapped Vietnamese, in a clash in the south, police officials said on Friday.

Philippine police, backed by military intelligence agents, killed Nawapi Abdulsaid in a brief gunbattle Wednesday night in the remote coastal town of Hadji Mohammad Ajul on Basilan island after weeks of surveillance, security officials said. Abu Sayyaf is a small but violent armed Muslim group, which has been blacklisted by the United States and the Philippines as a terrorist organisation for ransom kidnappings, beheadings, bombings and other bloody

attacks. It has been considerably weakened by battle setbacks, surrenders and fighting, but remains a security threat particularly in the southern Philippines, home to minority Muslims in the predominantly Roman Catholic nation.

Abdulsaid, who used the nom de guerre Khatan, was one of several Abu Sayyaf militants who aligned themselves with the Islamic State group. A confidential police report said that Abdulsaid had been implicated in at least 15 beheadings in Basilan, including of 10 Philippine marines in Al-Barka town in 2007 and two of six kidnapped Vietnamese sailors near Sumisip town in 2016. The Vietnamese were seized from a passing cargo ship. He

was also involved in attacks against government forces in 2022 and a bombing in November that killed two pro-government militiamen and wounded two others in Basilan, the report said. Abdulsaid was placed under surveillance in February, but police forces couldn’t immediately move to make an arrest because of the “hostile nature” of the area where he was eventually gunned down, according to the report.

On Monday, Philippine troops killed the leader of another Muslim rebel group and 11 of his men blamed for past bombings and extortion in a separate clash in a marshy hinterland in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town in southern Maguindanao del Sur province, the military said.

Deloitte projects India's FY25 GDP growth at 6.6 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Deloitte India on Friday said it estimates India's GDP growth at 6.6 per cent in the current fiscal helped by consumption expenditure, exports rebound and capital flows. In its India's economic outlook report, Deloitte said the rapid growth of the middle-income class has led to rising purchasing power and even created demand for premium luxury products and services. With the expectation that the number of middle-to-high-income segments will be one in two households by 2030/31, up from one in four currently, we believe this trend will likely become further amplified, driving overall private consumer expenditure growth, it said.

Deloitte has revised India's economic growth prediction for last fiscal to a range of 7.6 to 7.8 per cent. In January, the firm had projected growth for 2023-24 fiscal in the range of 6.9-7.2 per cent. The country's GDP growth is estimated to reach around 6.6 per cent in FY 2024-25 and 6.75 per cent in the year after, as markets learn to factor in geopolitical uncertainties in their investment and consumption decisions, Deloitte said in its quarterly update to its economic outlook.



"The global economy is expected to witness a synchronous rebound in 2025 as major election uncertainties get sorted out and the central banks of the West may announce a couple of rate cuts later in 2024. India will likely see improved capital flows and a rebound in exports" said Deloitte India Economist Rumki Majumdar. Strong growth numbers over the past two years have helped the economy to catch up with the pre-COVID trends. Investment, backed

by strong government spending on infrastructure, has helped India maintain a steady recovery momentum, she added. That said, there are concerns about inflation and geopolitical uncertainties feeding into higher food and fuel prices. At the same time, the prediction of above normal monsoon will likely provide some respite by positively impacting agriculture output and easing pressure on food prices.

Inflation is expected to remain above the Reserve Bank of India's target level of 4 per cent over the forecast period due to strong economic activity, Majumdar said. Deloitte's FY25 GDP growth estimate is similar to the projections made by the World Bank. It is, however, lower than the projections by the RBI and other agencies. The RBI has projected the Indian economy growth at 7 per cent in the current fiscal. While the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Fitch Ratings have estimated growth at 7 per cent, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), S&P Global Ratings and Morgan Stanley projected a 6.8 per cent growth rate for FY25. Deloitte said even as growth in consumer spending post-pandemic has been fluctuating, there is a visible shift in consumption patterns, with demand for luxury and high-end products and services growing faster than demand for basic goods. "India is seeing a prominent shift in consumer behaviour toward aspirational spending, which is inevitable in any nation that experiences growing economic prosperity. India's spending share in the luxury and premium goods and services category (such as spending on transport, communication,

recreation, etc.) has traditionally been lower than nations such as the United States, China, Japan, and Germany. So, there is, therefore, potential for this ratio to increase further as consumer income grows," Majumdar said. The report further said that to sustainably boost household spending amidst wealth concentration, declining savings, and rising debt levels, several corrective measures can be implemented. Increasing employment opportunities in rural and semi-urban areas could elevate savings, particularly as employment transitions from agriculture, which represents 44 per cent of employment but only about 18 per cent of GDP, to sectors like manufacturing, services, and construction. Government investments in infrastructure and initiatives such as Future Skills Prime 2021 for skill enhancement and Ayushman Bharat for health improvements are expected to enhance employability and productivity. Despite the necessity for credit growth to stimulate economic activity, the RBI will have to monitor rising household debt and encourage banks to leverage data analytics for smarter lending decisions, Deloitte said.

RBI action on Kotak Mahindra Bank may restrain credit growth: S&P



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

S&P Global Ratings on Friday said RBI's regulatory action on Kotak Mahindra Bank could restrain the lender's credit growth and profitability. The RBI on Wednesday barred Kotak Mahindra Bank from issuing fresh credit cards and onboarding new customers online. Credit cards are a higher-yielding target growth segment for Kotak Mahindra Bank. This portfolio grew at 52 per cent year-on-year as of December 31, 2023, compared with total loan growth of 19 per cent, the US-based rating agency said. "Action by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) this week could push the bank to rely more on physical branch network expansion to supplement growth thus entailing higher operating costs," S&P said, adding that it could be a setback for credit growth and profitability. This action will not, however, materially affect our ratings on Kotak Mahindra Bank (BBB-/Stable/A-3). This is because credit cards make up a small 4 per cent of total loans as of the end of December 2023. The bank will still be able to cross-sell its other products to existing customers. "We anticipate Kotak Mahindra Bank could potentially take a year to fully address the RBI's key concerns for the bank which encompasses systems stability, patch management, and disaster recovery," S&P said. RBI's actions on Kotak Mahindra Bank follow similar actions in recent years on

other financial institutions in India. S&P said in a similar case in 2020, when HDFC Bank was temporarily barred from sourcing new credit card customers, it took the bank more than a year to meet the RBI's requirements and have restrictions lifted. In the past 18 months, Kotak Mahindra Bank has made significant progress on technological enhancements, including the hiring of senior level executives in the chief technology officer and chief experience officer positions, S&P said. Nevertheless, it will take time for the bank to implement changes and conduct a comprehensive external audit to address the RBI's concerns. RBI's actions on Kotak Mahindra Bank follow several outages of the bank's core banking systems as well as online and digital banking channels, and deficiencies identified through the RBI's IT examinations in 2022 and 2023. This shows the regulator's commitment to strengthening the financial sector and its diminishing tolerance for operational deficiencies. Systems stability and robust disaster recovery planning have become increasingly important with the rapid scale up in digital transactions in India. "Regulators across many jurisdictions are adopting a similar playbook. The Monetary Authority of Singapore recently imposed a six-month ban on DBS Bank Ltd from making new acquisitions and closing branches or ATMs following several service disruption.

Motilal Oswal reports multi fold jump in profit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd on Friday reported an over four-fold jump in profit after tax to Rs 724.6 crore for the March 2024 quarter, driven by strong growth in the capital market as well as wealth & asset management businesses. In comparison, the company had a profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 167 crore in the year-ago period, Motilal Oswal Financial Services said in a regulatory filing. The company's total income rose to Rs 2,158.15 crore in the January-March quarter of the financial year (FY) 2023-24 from Rs 1,033.54 crore in the same quarter preceding fiscal. Reacting to the positive development, shares of the company rose as much as 8.66

per cent to a 52-week high of Rs 2,677 apiece on the BSE. The stock finally settled at Rs 2,600.65, up 5.67 per cent from the previous close. The company's asset and wealth management businesses reported strong growth with a PAT at Rs 210 crore in Q4FY24, a jump of 79 per cent year-on-year basis. Also, the capital market business grew 66 per cent to Rs 251 crore in the three months ended March 2024. Further, the company's board approved bonus shares in a ratio of 3:1, which means 3 bonus shares for 1 fully paid-up equity share. The record date for the bonus issue of shares is yet to be determined. For the full financial year 2023-24, the company posted a PAT of Rs 2,445.62 crore and a total income of Rs 7,130.52 crore.

Rupee falls 7 paise to settle at 83.35 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee declined 7 paise to close at 83.35 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday as a strengthening American currency overseas and a selloff in domestic equities weighed on the local unit. Besides, rising crude prices in the international market and risk-averse sentiment dragged the local unit down, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened strong at 83.30 and moved in the range of 83.30-83.36 during the session. The local currency finally settled at 83.35 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 7 paise from its previous close. In the previous session, the rupee closed at 83.28 against the US dollar.



"Indian Rupee declined slightly on weak domestic markets and a surge in crude oil prices. We expect the rupee to trade slightly weak on renewed geopolitical tensions in the Middle East

and weakness in domestic equities. "Rising crude oil prices and FII outflows may further put pressure on the rupee. However, any intervention by the RBI may support the

rupee at lower levels. We expect USDINR to trade in the range of 83.10-83.60," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.38 per cent to USD 89.35 per barrel. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, increased 0.05 per cent to 105.49. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex slumped 609.28 points, or 0.82 per cent, to settle at 73,730.16, and Nifty declined 150.40 points, or 0.67 per cent, to close at 22,419.95. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,823.33 crore, according to exchange data.

Markets snap five days rally; Sensex tumbles over 600 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty wilted under selling pressure on Friday after a five-day rally as investors pared exposure to banking, financial and consumer durable stocks amid mixed trends in global markets. Rising global crude prices, a depreciating rupee and persistent foreign fund outflows further weighed on sentiment, traders said. Profit-taking also came into

play as the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 609.28 points or 0.82 per cent to settle at 73,730.16. During the day, it lost 722.79 points or 0.97 per cent to 73,616.65. The NSE Nifty declined 150.40 points or 0.67 per cent to 22,419.95. Bajaj Finance was the biggest drag on the Sensex chart, skidding nearly 8 per cent after the company's March quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. Bajaj Finserv also declined over 3 per cent. IndusInd Bank, Nestle, Kotak Mahindra Bank and



Mahindra & Mahindra were among the laggards. Meanwhile, Tech Mahindra jumped over 7 per cent after the IT services company's CEO outlined an ambitious three-year roadmap to accelerate revenue growth and lift margins. Wipro, ITC, UltraTech Cement, Titan and Axis Bank were among the gainers. "The fall was on expected lines as both the benchmark indices had rallied for five straight sessions, and profit-taking has been due for some time.

"Correction is also attributed to global factors after the Japanese Yen fell to a new 34-year low and disappointing US data pushed its benchmark yields to over 4.7 per cent, thus worsening hopes of an interest rate cut in the medium term," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory. European markets were trading in the green. Wall Street ended lower on

Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.31 per cent to USD 89.29 a barrel. The rupee declined 7 paise to close at 83.35 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,823.33 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark climbed 486.50 points or 0.66 per cent to settle at 74,339.44 on Thursday. The NSE Nifty advanced 167.95 points or 0.75 per cent to 22,570.35.

Five star petal ceiling fan launched

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Surya Roshni's Consumer Durable Division takes pride in announcing the launch of another 5 Star Petal Ceiling Fan. With a commitment to delivering superior cooling solutions for homes and offices nationwide, Surya upholds its legacy of quality, excellence, and environmental responsibility. The 5 Star Petal Fan sets a new benchmark in energy efficiency, performance, and design, catering to the modern consumer's preference for eco-friendly and visually appealing products. This fan while employing the traditional Induction motor technology is able to achieve 5 star labelling, which offers not only higher energy savings by consuming only 34W but also the benefits of longer product life and ease of maintenance. The aerodynamic design, complemented by wider blades for enhanced air thrust, ensures a comfortable and breezy environment, elevating the user experience.

Seminar on American Pecans organised



With a view to educate and create awareness about the technical aspects of American Pecans, New Mexican Department of Agriculture (NMDA) conducted an engaging seminar on the benefits of American Pecans today in New Delhi. This move is a concerted effort from NMDA to popularise American Pecans in the light of the growing health-consciousness amongst Indians. Eminent speakers who were present at the Seminar included Dr Richard Heerema from New Mexico State University and Serena Schaffner, Managing Director-Global Marketing and Regulatory Affairs & American Pecan Council

Promotion Board (APPB). The session was well attended by leading chefs, and well-known nutritionist Ritika Samaddar who gave useful health tips on Pecans and its health benefits. Founded in 2016, the American Pecan Council is a group of passionate growers and shellers whose life work is dedicated to growing, harvesting and processing America's only major tree nut — American Pecans. It is solely dedicated to showcase the diverse and versatile benefits, uses and remarkable history of America's native tree nut. The purpose of APPB is to strengthen the position of American Pecans in the market place, maintain and expand markets for pecans and develop new uses for pecans.

At least USD 12 trillion needed for tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030: COP28

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

At least USD 12 trillion is required to create new infrastructure over the next six years for tripling global renewable energy capacity by 2030, COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber said on Friday. Addressing the annual Petersburg Climate Dialogue, Al Jaber said the energy transition will not happen without significant investment and a level-up in climate finance. He said the four key priorities to level up climate finance are infrastructure, technology, people and the Global South. "On infrastructure, we need to invest at least USD 6 trillion over the next six years to meet our 2030 target of 11TW of renewable energy capacity. And we need to spend a similar amount to upgrade outdated or non-existent grids," the COP28 president said. World leaders reached a historic agreement at COP28 in Dubai last year to triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030. According to the



International Energy Agency, tripling global renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency is crucial to limiting the average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a political target set in 2015 to prevent worsening of climate impacts. At the United Nations climate conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) or a new climate finance goal will be the key issue. NCQG is the new amount developed countries must mobilise every year from 2025 onwards to

support climate action in developing countries. Rich countries are expected to raise more than the USD 100 billion they promised to provide every year from 2020 but repeatedly failed. Al Jaber said artificial intelligence can be a game changer by multiplying efficiencies and helping solve intermittency and storage. "Every country must invest in its people, developing a new set of skills for a new green economy. And we must invest in the Global South. Right now, over 120 developing

countries attract less than 15 per cent of global clean tech investment. Public, private, and development finance must work in tandem in creative catalytic models that turn billions into trillions," he said. Al Jaber said the COP troika, a collaboration between the COP hosts of 2023, 2024, and 2025, is pushing for more ambitious nationally determined contributions (NDCs or national climate plans) ahead of the UN climate conference in Brazil. "We are encouraging all governments to set out economy-wide emission reduction plans, with explicit renewable energy targets. And we are advocating for smart policies that push industries to step up... And incentivise the private sector to invest," he said. "My message to governments is simple, think bigger... Act bolder. Send a clear message early with your next NDC that puts green infrastructure at the centre of your development plans. Be transparent about the costs and trade-offs involved.

Olectra Greentech bags order for 8,232 electric vehicles during FY 23-24

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading electric vehicles manufacturer Olectra Greentech Limited (OGL), announced its Q4 and full year consolidated financial results ending March 31, 2024. The Board of Directors, in its meeting held today, officially approved these remarkable achievements. Company has received total orders of 8,232 electric vehicles during FY 23-24 including 3,000 buses repeated order from BEST - Mumbai in Q4 FY 23-24. In Q4 FY23-24, the company has surpassed an order book milestone of 10,000 electric buses in the country. The company has delivered 1,746 electric vehicles till date including deliveries of 131 electric vehicles in Q4 FY23-24. Strong demand continues with the total number of bus orders on hand at 10,969 units. The revenue for FY23-24 was ₹1154.14 crore, up by 5.8 per cent, it said in a statement.



FEAST ON HOT SUMMER MENUS

Embark on a culinary journey through Delhi NCR's finest dining experiences, discovering the hottest summer menus in the vibrant city's gastronomic scene.

SEASONAL AND LOCAL AT OLLY, OLIVE'S ALL-DAY CAFE & BAR, GURGAON

Like a second home Olly is a peaceful escape from the city's hustle and bustle. With a cafe menu featuring classics, fresh coffee, unique beverages, and homemade cold-pressed juices, on offer is a delightful everyday experience. The summer menu is influenced by seasonal and local produce, aimed at ensuring a light and refreshing dining experience during the warmer months. Abundant with fresh salads, bowl food, and light grills, the menu promises to be both satisfying and light.



stems from a desire to cater to the most discerning palates, offering a diverse selection that caters to all tastes. Olly's offerings encompass world cuisine crafted from the finest quality ingredients. Their charming terrace provides a cool retreat, complete with live music on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday evenings.

Must Try: Baked Crispy Sweet Potato Skins, Prawn, Mango & Avocado Salad, The Forbidden Rice Salad, Asian Style Buddha Bowl & Almond Crusted Baked Sole Fish

A TANTALIZING JOURNEY AT THE CHINA KITCHEN, THE HYATT REGENCY NEW DELHI

The China Kitchen offers a unique Chinese dining experience that sets it apart. Diners get to enjoy their meals right in the kitchen, giving a fresh and authentic touch to their dining experience. With a strong emphasis on using fresh, quality ingredients and expert culinary methods, The China Kitchen serves up an immersive culinary journey through Chinese cuisine. Their famous Peking duck and specially curated menu by Chef Zhang are highlights not to

be missed. Experience a tantalizing voyage through Chinese culinary delights with the new summer lunch menu. Infusing traditional flavours with a touch of innovation, each dish reflects the rich tapestry of Chinese cuisine. Meticulously chosen ingredients and expert cooking methods elevate classics like the Beijing-style chilled cucumber salad and the fragrant Sichuan fried rice. Delve into specialties such as the Southern-style lotus root fritter and the luxurious Gong bao diced chicken, celebrating diversity and authenticity. Embark on a culinary escapade that captures the essence of summer in every flavourful bite.

Must Try: Southern Style Lotus Root Fritter, Sizzling Sliced Lamb, Gong Bao Diced Chicken Clay Pot, Braised Tofu is a Hearty vegetarian option with tofu, vegetables, and aromatic sauces. And the Wok-Fried String Beans, stir-fried with chili and garlic chip, make for a savoury and spicy side dish.

SUMMER IN MY HEART AT VIET-NOM, CYBER HUB, WOLDMARK & DLF SAKET

As the sun casts its golden rays to signal a new season, Viet:nom unveils a tantalizing array of seasonal delights, marrying traditional Vietnamese flavours



with a modern flair. With a steadfast commitment to authenticity and culinary mastery, it presents a menu that invites guests on a sensory journey through the symphony of tastes and textures embodied in their signature Banh Mi sandwiches. Combining tender proteins, crisp vegetables, and house-made spreads, these sandwiches redefine street food with sophistication. Complimenting this epicurean adventure are the meticulously crafted cocktails and mocktails, skillfully prepared with premium spirits, fresh herbs, and homemade cordials. From refreshing fruit-infused mocktails to innovative cocktail creations inspired by Vietnamese flavours, each sip offers a refined experience of taste and creativity. The menu is a celebration of the season's abundance and Vietnamese culinary art.

Must Try: From crisp salads brimming with seasonal produce to delicate summer rolls bursting with succulent fillings and fragrant herbs, each dish is a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation.

SALADS AND SAVOURY AT L'OPERA, MULTIPLE OUTLETS

At this revered French Boulangerie, Pâtisserie, and Salon de Thé, the seasonal selection

features an array of refreshing salads tailored for the summer, light and delectable meals catering to diverse palates, and a fresh assortment of summer coolers perfect for savouring on hot summer days and evenings. The new menu is artfully complemented by Lopera's renowned seasonal mango collection, presented in captivating new presentations. Adding to the culinary experience, the savoury offerings introduce enticing additions such as Alfredo Pasta in Fettuccine - a creamy fettuccine pasta bathed in a luscious Alfredo sauce and adorned with Parmesan cheese and Panzanella Salad - a lively and tangy ensemble of seasonal vegetables, fresh basil, Parmesan cheese, and crispy bread croutons, among other delightful surprises.

Must Try: Alfredo Pasta in Fettuccine, Herbed Risotto with Pesto Prawns is a harmony of flavours and textures, Panzanella Salad, a vibrant tangy salad with seasonal vegetables, fresh basil, Parmesan cheese and crunchy bread croutons.

VIBRANT ESSENCE OF SADDI DILLI AT CAFE DELHI HEIGHTS, MULTIPLE OUTLETS

Reflecting the Capital's generous spirit through its generous servings of exquisitely prepared dishes. Constantly evolving with a new outlet each month and revamped aesthetics across many locations, Café Delhi Heights has unveiled an enticing New Menu designed to tantalize the taste buds of discerning food enthusiasts.

Founder Mr. Vikrant Batra proudly champions the diverse and imaginative culinary offerings at CDH that aim to delight all five senses. Chef Ashish Singh has consistently impressed food aficionados since the brand's inception, and the latest menu is poised to continue this tradition of culinary



excellence. Featuring delectable specialties such as the healthy Italian Chicken Salad and the Miso Avocado & Tofu Bowl, the menu also showcases a range of gourmet options including savoury wraps, flavourful Mexican dishes, and tantalizing meal bowls crafted for the pleasure of the palate.

Must Try: Health-conscious patrons can savour the Protein Bowl or Poke Bowl, while dessert lovers can indulge in the luscious Red Velvet Lava and Fruit Truffle creations, adding a sweet conclusion to the culinary journey at Café Delhi Heights.

AKANKSHA DEAN is an independent food & travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at Osteria Francescana, in Modena, Italy, rated as the world's best restaurant in the World's 50 Best Restaurants, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the Best of The Best Category.



INTERNATIONAL STREET FOOD FESTIVAL THE WORLD ON THE PLATE



Known for its versatility, dynamism and one of the best food ethos, the most loved café of Delhi - Café Delhi Heights is introducing the most dynamic food festival- International Street Food Festival. Scheduled from April 20th to May 10th, Café Delhi Heights is inviting patrons on an epicurean journey through the International Street Food Festival. Vikrant Batra, founder of Café Delhi Heights says, The idea of a food festival is to celebrate the diversity of food. Food festivals are those special occasions where we celebrate specially curated menus that are otherwise not part of our routine menu. We at CDH take our festivals seriously, and each menu is a serious attempt to do something new and exciting for our customers. We are bringing the International Street Food Festival for the first time, and this brings street delicacies from different countries on the gourmet front. Whether you're a seasoned epicurean or a curious adventurer, Café Delhi Heights' International Street Food Festival promises an unforgettable dining experience that will transport you to distant lands and leave you yearning for more. Come, indulge your senses and savor the flavors of the world at Multiple outlets of Pan India Brand, Café Delhi Heights. Drawing inspiration from

bustling food markets and vibrant street stalls around the world, Café Delhi Heights presents a carefully curated menu that showcases the rich tapestry of global cuisine. Each dish is a masterpiece, crafted with precision and passion by the café's talented chefs, ensuring an authentic and immersive dining experience for all. From the bustling streets of Bangkok to the sun-kissed shores of Greece, guests can embark on a culinary voyage like no other, sampling iconic street foods from Thailand, Greece, Japan, Latin America, Canada, Lebanon, Russia, and Spain-all within the cozy confines of Café Delhi Heights Dehradun. Savor the bold flavors of Thailand with the signature Pad Thai, an irresistible blend of stir-fried rice noodles, succulent shrimp or chicken, and crunchy peanuts. Transport yourself to the Mediterranean with Gyros,

tender grilled meat nestled in warm pita bread and topped with fresh vegetables and creamy tzatziki sauce. Japan's culinary artistry shines through in the comforting embrace of Ramen, a soul-warming noodle soup adorned with slices of grilled chicken breast, soft-boiled eggs, and fragrant green onions. Meanwhile, Latin America beckons with the savory indulgence of Empanadas, golden pastry parcels brimming with flavorful filling. Canada's beloved Poutine offers a hearty treat with its crispy fries, gooey cheese curds, and savory gravy. At the same time, the Middle Eastern delight of Shawarma promises a symphony of flavors with its tender grilled meat and creamy tahini sauce. From the heart of Russia come Pelmeni, delicate dumplings filled with savory delights, while Spain's Churros provide the perfect sweet finale-a crispy delight coated in cinnamon sugar and served with a decadent chocolate dipping sauce. "As we celebrate culinary diversity with our International Street Food Festival, we invite our guests to embark on a journey of flavors and discoveries," says Brand chef Aashish Singh of Café Delhi Heights.

Born and brought up in Mumbai, Chef Varun Totlani moved to Hyderabad to study at the Culinary Academy of India and later graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in New York. Upon returning to Mumbai, he joined the opening team at Masque and steadily rose through the ranks, becoming Sous Chef in 2021 and Head Chef in 2022. Chef Varun is passionate about showcasing the diversity of India's produce and culinary prowess, contributing to the country's ever-evolving contemporary foodscapes. For reservations please contact +91 8586972078.



At Café Delhi Heights Multiple outlets Meal for two- ₹1500 plus taxes For reservations please contact- 8800691812 Instagram page- @cafedelhiheights



About Chef VARUN TOTLANI

Born and brought up in Mumbai, Chef Varun Totlani moved to Hyderabad to study at the Culinary Academy of India and later graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in New York. Upon returning to Mumbai, he joined the opening team at Masque and steadily rose through the ranks, becoming Sous Chef in 2021 and Head Chef in 2022. Chef Varun is passionate about showcasing the diversity of India's produce and culinary prowess, contributing to the country's ever-evolving contemporary foodscapes. For reservations please contact +91 8586972078.



The Story Club at WESTIN Gurgaon hosts a Pop Up by Masque Restaurant's Chef VARUN TOTLANI

Savour a 10-Course Tasting Menu: Traditional Flavours Meet Innovation

Embark on a culinary adventure at an exclusive 2-day pop-up at The Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi, featuring Chef Varun Totlani from Masque restaurant, India's Best Restaurant for the third consecutive year at Asia's 50 Best 2024. Guests can enjoy a 10-course Tasting Menu that showcases innovative twists on traditional Indian flavours, all thoughtfully paired with fine beverages. The menu promises a keen exploration of India's diversity, embodying Chef Varun's culinary style that harmonises technique and intuition. It blends the ever-evolving landscape of contemporary Indian cuisine, offering a range of tantalising dishes. Dive into a world of flavours with options like Purple Corn, Charred Baby Corn, and Corn Mousse. Veggie lovers can savour Puran Poli with Amti and Green Peas, while non-vegetarians can indulge in Mud Crab. Don't miss the must-tries: Jicama with Coconut Malai Momo and Passionfruit Thukpa. Barbecue enthusiasts can enjoy BBQ Sweet Potato or Pork paired with tangy Tamarind and crispy Rice. Tantalise your taste buds further with Jackfruit Pepperfry or Duck Pepperfry served with Malabar Paratha and Mustard, complemented by refreshing Green Mango, Aam Papad, and Apples. For the main course, vegetarians can relish Butternut Squash, and non-vegetarians can try Clams with Karandi Loncha and Goda Masala. Don't miss the enticing Mushroom Bhutwa or Lamb Bhutwa with Potato and

Hemp Seed. Rice lovers can savour the flavorful Ladi Poa paired with Black Garlic Pulao. Conclude your meal perfectly with Gongura with Mulberry and White Chocolate or the rich Cacao. The event is priced at INR 8250 plus taxes per person for food & beverages. It will be hosted at Story Club & Lounge, The Westin Gurgaon New Delhi, Number 1 MG Road, Sector 29, Gurugram, Haryana 122002, on April 26th & 27th, 2024, from 7:30 pm to 11:30 pm.

For more information, please contact: PRERNA DAGA Associate Director of Marketing Prerna.Daga@westin.com +91-99990 45851

SUNAKSHI SONI Sunakshi@quirkindia.com +91-9899928231





Upbeat Delhi Capitals take on struggling MI as playoff race intensifies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bolstered by Rishabh Pant's brilliant batting form and inspiring leadership, the resurrected Delhi Capitals will aim to continue their upward march in the IPL points table when they take on an inconsistent Mumbai Indians here on Saturday.

The Capitals have endured a rollercoaster season so far, showing flashes of brilliance while also succumbing to embarrassing defeats. But three wins in the last four matches have helped them climb to the sixth spot and a win against MI will strengthen their claim to a play off spot.

On the other hand, after a familiar poor start, MI bounced back with three wins

in their next four matches but a comprehensive nine-wicket thrashing by Rajasthan Royals put an end to their resurgence. They are tottering on the eighth place on the points table and can ill-afford to lose.

DC's biggest positive has undoubtedly been skipper Rishabh Pant's form, which appears to be improving with each game.

He has looked sharp behind the stumps and seems to be batting with freedom. He was at his belligerent best during a match-winning unbeaten knock against Gujarat Titans on Wednesday.

It would be fair to say that the southpaw is in prime position to make India's squad for the T20 World Cup despite stiff opposition from the likes of Sanju Samson, Dinesh Karthik

and Ishan Kishan. In Jack Fraser-McGurk, DC have found an able top-order batter who can exploit the powerplay but more is expected of opener Prithvi Shaw, given that his only responsibility is to bat as he is used as an Impact Substitute. David Warner missed out of the previous game, making way for Shai Hope, who couldn't capitalise on the opportunity, and the veteran Australian might be brought back in the playing XI.

Tristan Stubbs has time and again proved he can be brutal with the bat while Axar Patel also showcased his batting prowess when he was elevated up the order in the four-run win against GT.

While the spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar have bowled



economically, DC's fast bowling unit needs to step up. Pace spearhead Anrich Nortje is having a forgettable season and has leaked runs at 13.36 which has been a major problem for Delhi.

The likes of Khaleel Ahmed, Mukesh Kumar and Ishant Sharma have been plagued by injuries leading to inconsistent runs.

They were taken to the cleaners by MI batters, who piled on 234/5 earlier in the season. And DC would be wary of a similar performance. MI's resurgence this season began with a win against DC and the five-time champions would hope for an encore in the crucial clash.

For Mumbai, Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav and Tilak Varma have got runs but all of

them have found form in patches. It's time for the likes of Tim David, Ishan Kishan and skipper Hardik Pandya to contribute a big way and take some pressure off the top trio.

While the batting department has occasionally looked good, the bowling remains a massive cause of concern. Jasprit Bumrah has expectedly been MI's standout bowler. He has led the attack with 13 wickets at an economy rate of 6.37.

However, new addition Gerald Coetzee has been inconsistent in his maiden IPL. Though he has an economy of 10.10, the South African pacer has accounted for 12 wickets in eight games.

But barring the two seamers, Mumbai's bowling has disappointed.

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori feels that after mastering the art of setting totals, it's time his team brushes up on its chasing abilities as the business end of the Indian Premier League approaches.

SRH are currently third in the leaderboard with five wins from eight games. Of the five victories, four have come batting first.

"We have been successful setting totals and now we have to look at how well we are in chasing," Vettori said after the 35-run loss against Royal Challengers Bengaluru here on Thursday night.

RCB posted a challenging 206 for 7 after opting to bat and then restricted SRH to 171 for 8.

For a team that has breached the 250-run mark thrice this season, the target was easily

Now time to polish chasing abilities: SRH coach Vettori | RR look to maintain winning run

gettable but a rare failure of the top and middle-order cost the hosts dearly.

"Obviously, disappointing one where we have come from in the last four games; we played some really good cricket and even though we lost, you could see if we had some wickets at the back end, we could have still chased it down," Vettori said at the post-match press conference.

"Those early wickets broke everything. We were confident for the scores we were being able to put up. We thought that 206 was a good score, we probably let a few runs in the field. But there was confidence in the group because of past performances. We also knew it was being set up by the openers and how good they have played, and



today they had an off day and that's cricket," he said.

The former New Zealand cricketer said there are no easy games in IPL.

"Unfortunately, we didn't get the support through the middle stages. It's a tough loss but we understand every team

in the IPL can beat every team. There are no easy games at all," Vettori said. The coach was of the view that the role of an anchor has no significance in high-scoring matches.

"I think the wicket was still pretty good. The guys who

came off said that it is a surface where you can score on. Anchor role when you are chasing 207 it is hard to come, you obviously need to be aggressive. For some to sit along and play anchor role is a little bit tricky."

RCB all-rounder Swapnil Singh, meanwhile, was relieved after his side snapped its six-match losing streak.

"Experience was good but we won the game that was more important. When you win a game, the tempo in the team changes. It feels good. Last two games we missed by small difference but still long way to go," he said.

Swapnil said they felt the target was enough on this wicket despite SRH boasting of a super-aggressive batting order.

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

High-flying Rajasthan Royals will look to continue their winning momentum and consolidate their position at the top when they take on a resurgent Lucknow Super Giants, who would be gunning for revenge at home in an IPL match here on Saturday.

Former champions RR have looked in ominous form this season with seven wins from eight games, and they could be a tough nut to crack for LSG.

LSG, meanwhile, too have played some good cricket and are placed fourth with five wins from eight games.

But going into Saturday's match, RR would certainly be the favourites as they have registered a hat-trick of victories after a rare blip against Gujarat Titans.

Assam batter Rryan Parag has been the flavour of the season for RR in the batting department. The youngster reinvented himself and has been the team's highest scorer with 318 runs from eight games.

The return to form of Yashasvi Jaiswal, who was struggling a bit this season, has further strengthened RR's batting. While chasing a 180-run target in the last game against Mumbai Indians, Jaiswal smashed an unbeaten 104 off 60 balls to power his side to a comfortable nine-wicket win.

Jaiswal's return to form is something RR's opponents should really be worried about given the devastation the youngster and Jos Buttler



can wreak at the top of the order.

RR's batting typically revolves around skipper Sanju Samson, who has scored 314 runs so far, and with West Indian Shimron Hetmyer capable of hitting top gear, the 2008 IPL champions have a potent lineup.

The likes of Rovman Powell and Dhruv Jurel, though, need to contribute more.

RR also boast of a potent bowling attack comprising the experienced Trent Boult, Avesh Khan and Sandeep Sharma, whose 5 for 18 against Mumbai Indians has really fired up the side.

The team's spin department is also in the safe hands of the experienced duo of Yuzvendra Chahal and R. Ashwin, although the latter has struggled this season.

Chahal, however, is RR's best bowler with 13 wickets from eight games.

LSG, on the other hand, would be seeking revenge after having lost the first tie to RR by 20 runs this season.

Besides revenge, LSG would look to register a hat-trick of victories and scale up in the leaderboard. KL Rahul's side is also on a high after two successive wins, but the India player knows the shortcomings in the top order. When Rahul and his opening partner Quinton de Kock are on fire, LSG's batting looks ominous. The problem arises when the opening duo has an off day.

That area was, however, covered by Marcus Stoinis in their last game against Chennai Super Kings, where the Australian scored an unbeaten century.

Despite losing Rahul and de Kock early in the chase of 210/4, Stoinis played one of the best knocks in this IPL, remaining unbeaten on 124 off 63 balls to hand LSG a six-wicket win.

Stoinis' return to form augurs well for LSG middle-order, where the likes of Devdutt Padikkal, Nicholas Pooran and Deepak Hooda need to take up more responsibility.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India star Yuvraj Singh has identified the swashbuckling Suryakumar Yadav and pace ace Jasprit Bumrah as key to the team's prospects in the upcoming T20 World Cup owing to their ability to "change the complexion of a game" in a jiffy.

Yuvraj, who was pivotal to India's title triumph in the inaugural edition of the tournament back in 2007, said Suryakumar will need to have a good outing for the team to win the cup for the second time while also suggesting that Bumrah needs to be at his best.

"Suryakumar Yadav (is India's key player)," Yuvraj was

Yuvraj identifies Surya, Bumrah as key to India's prospects in T20 World Cup



quoted as saying by ICC.

He added, "Because the way he plays, he can change the complexion of a game in 15 balls. And he is definitely a surety... for India to win this T20 World Cup, Surya is going to be the key."

"I think Jasprit Bumrah is also the key with the bowling and I would like to see a leg-spinner in the squad as well, like Yuzvendra Chahal as he has been bowling really well. "But being a batter, I would say Suryakumar Yadav (is the key player)."

While dissecting the options of who should be India's first-choice wicket-keeper, Yuvraj expressed satisfaction with veteran Dinesh Karthik's form in the IPL but said if he is not part of the playing XI, there is no point picking the 38-year-old in the squad as the younger Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson have been playing extremely well.

"DK (Karthik) has been batting well, but the thing with DK is that the last time (2022) they picked him and the T20 WC was on he didn't get to play," Yuvraj noted.

"If DK is not in your XI I don't think there is any point in picking him. There is Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson and both guys are in great form and obviously they are younger.

OTHER SPORTS

Man City beats Brighton 4-0 to stay on course for another Premier League title. Phil Foden scores 2

AP ■ BRIGHTON (ENGLAND)

Manchester City chalked up another big win in its pursuit of an unprecedented fourth straight Premier League title, with Phil Foden continuing his career-best scoring season with two goals in a 4-0 thrashing of Brighton on Thursday.

Foden's first-half double came between goals by Kevin De Bruyne and Julian Alvarez as City extended its unbeaten run in the league to 18 games and trimmed the gap to leader Arsenal to one point. Liverpool is two points further back in third after its title chances were damaged by a 2-0 loss at Everton on Wednesday.

City has five games remaining - one more than Arsenal and Liverpool - and, on current form, is showing no sign of slipping up in the final stretch that still contains trips to Nottingham Forest, Fulham and Tottenham as well as home matches against Wolverhampton and West Ham.

Win all five of those games and City is the champion again. No team has ever won four successive top-flight titles in the history of English soccer.

"I trust my team," De Bruyne said. "All respect to Arsenal and Liverpool, they are amazing... But we need to do our job."



"We just need to keep going, not get ahead of ourselves, be humble and work hard."

Since a 0-0 draw with Arsenal at home on March 31, City has won four straight league games and scored 17 goals in the process.

Pep Guardiola's team kept up that hot streak without the injured Erling Haaland - the league's joint-top scorer with 20 goals - and that allowed Foden to potentially join the race for the Golden Boot.

It's 16 goals for the campaign and 24 in 48 games in all club competitions this season for Foden, who delivered another clinical display in front of England coach Gareth Southgate at Amex Stadium - seven weeks out from the start of the European Championship.

World Cup: Deepika ousts Korean rival to make semis; archers confirm four medals

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

Continuing her spirited progress post motherhood, former world number one Deepika Kumari eliminated Korean Jeon Hunyoung to storm into the semifinal, while compound archers continued to shine to assure India a fourth medal in the World Cup Stage 1 here on Friday.

Deepika, the three-time Olympian, who has slipped to world No. 142 and qualified as 30th seed in the rankings round, overcame a 1-3 deficit to defeat Jeon 6-4 (27-28, 27-27, 29-28, 29-27, 28-28) in the women's recurve individual quarterfinal.

Having started off with an eight, Deepika lost the first set 27-28, but the 29-year-old continued to improve and levelled the second at 27-28, before taking the third (29-28) by dropping just one point.

From three-all, there was no stopping Deepika who went on to drill in four 10s including two X (closer to centre) from six arrows to make the semis.

Deepika, who embraced motherhood in December 2022 and returned to win the Asia Cup gold in Baghdad in



February this year, may have to overcome two more Korean rivals in her bid to win a first World Cup individual gold medal since the Paris Stage 3 in June 2021. Korean teenager Nam Suhyeon, who qualified as the seventh seed, stands in Deepika's way in the semifinal.

The other half will feature top seed and 20-year-old world No. 2 Korean Lim Sihyeon taking on Li Jianan of China.

JYOTHI, VERMA CONFIRM FOURTH MEDAL: The day began with Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Abhishek Verma advancing into the compound mixed team final.

The world No. 2 Indians dropped just five points to prevail over their Mexican

opponents Andrea Becerra and Lot Maximo Mendez Ortiz 155-151.

They will face lower-ranked Estonia in the gold-medal clash on Saturday. Jyothi is also a member of the women's compound team, which had entered the final on Wednesday.

With Jyothi also securing a semi-final spot in the individual section on Thursday, the World No. 3 and Asian Games gold medalist is in the hunt for a hat-trick of top podium finishes. Overall, Indian archers have qualified in four finals, all in the team events, and are in the hunt for two medals in compound individual events - where Jyothi and Priyansh have made the semifinals.

The four events where Indian teams have made the gold-medal round are compound men's, women's, mixed categories and men's recurve.

Having got an opening round bye, the second-seeded Indian pair of Jyothi and Verma started off by producing a flawless 160 out of 160 to knock out the lower-ranked Australian pair of Geogina Graham and Brandon Hawes by eight points.

Next up, 10th ranked Luxembourg's Mariya Shkolna and Gilles Seywert were also no match for the Indian pair, which dropped just five points from 16 arrows to storm into the semifinals with a 155-151 win.

In the semi-final, the Indians started on a back-foot after Andrea and Mendez Ortiz capped three 10s and one nine to take the opening end 39-38. But the Mexicans slipped in the next set of arrows as Jyothi and Verma snatched the lead by dropping one point.

The Indians then extended their lead by three points in the penultimate round after another slip-up by the Mexicans.

Jyothi and Verma sealed the issue with a perfect 40 in the fourth end.



Senthilkumar, Akanksha enter quarters of PSA events

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Top-seeded Indian Velavan Senthilkumar eased past Frenchman Matteo Carrouget in straight games to move into the quarterfinals of the Batch Open squash, a USD 12,000 PSA Challenger Tour event in Paris.

National champion Senthilkumar, ranked 58th in the world, beat Carrouget 11-4 11-6 11-7 in 29 minutes in the second round on Thursday night after receiving a bye in the opening round.

He will meet fifth seed Jakub Solnický of the Czech Republic in the quarterfinals.

Elsewhere, National Games women's champion Akanksha Salunkhe advanced to the quarterfinals of the Expression St James Open, a USD 20,000 PSA Challenger Tour event in Springfield, US.

Fourth seed Salunkhe, ranked 70th in the world, beat Winifer Bonilla of Guatemala 11-8 11-2 11-9 in 25 minutes in the second round following a bye in the first.

She will play fifth seed Alina Bushma of Ukraine next.