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

Late City Vol.160 Issue 90
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

LUCKNOW, WEDNESDAY APRIL 3, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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BAIL FOR SANJAY SINGH Bane or Boon for AAP?

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a relief to AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, the Supreme Court on Tuesday granted bail to him in the money laundering case related to the Delhi liquor policy case after the Enforcement Directorate conceded that it has no objections.

The AAP leader is not supposed to make any public statement regarding the case, the court added, while dismissing as infructuous the second petition filed by Singh challenging his arrest and remand.

The top court decision has brought a big relief to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in midst of Lok Sabha poll campaigning as two of its top leaders — national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia — are in jail in connection with the case.

The bench comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Dipankar Datta and PB Varale passed the order to grant him bail, who has been in jail for six months, observing that no money has been recovered from his possession and there is no trace of it, while orally commenting that Singh would be entitled to indulge in



In this file photo, AAP MP Sanjay Singh being taken to the Rouse Avenue Court by the Enforcement Directorate officials in connection with the Delhi excise policy case, in New Delhi. Singh was on Tuesday granted bail in the case by the SC PTI

political activities during the period of bail.

"We clarify that the concession given in the court today would not be treated as a precedent. We also clarify that we have not made any comments on the merits of the case. The impugned judgment is set aside and the appeal is allowed and disposed of in the above terms," the court said in its

order. The bench ordered that the AAP leader can continue with his political activities but cannot make any statements with regard to the case.

It said Singh will remain out on bail during the course of the entire trial and that the terms and conditions for the bail will be fixed by the special court. During the post-lunch session, Additional Solicitor General

SV Raju, appearing for the ED, said he has taken instructions from the probe agency and it has no objections if Singh is out on bail. "I am making the statement without going into the merits of the case and keeping all the rights and contentions open," he said. Taking note of the statement, the bench ordered, "In the morning session ASG SV Raju was asked to obtain instructions. He states they have no objections if Sanjay is released on bail in proceedings arising out of the FIR...In view

of the statement made, we allow the present appeal and direct that Sanjay be released on bail during pendency of trial on terms and conditions set by the trial court."

The bench said the concession of bail granted to Singh will not be treated as "precedent". Consequently this bail order may not be of much help to other jailed AAP leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal. The bench clarified that the bail was granted to Singh on the concession granted by the ED and not on merits.

As AAP MP Sanjay was given bail by the Supreme Court in the liquor "scam" case on Tuesday, the atmosphere was jubilant at Singh's residence as supporters with "dhol and nagada" gathered outside his house to celebrate the bail. They raised slogans like "Jail ke taale toot gaye, Sanjay bhaiya choot gaye" and "Sanjay tum sangharsh karo, hum tumhare sath hain". Reacting on the bail, Singh's wife Anita Singh said the happiness is incomplete with three of her "brothers", Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain, still behind bars. Describing Singh's bail as the "victory of truth", his wife said the AAP will celebrate when all its leaders are cleared in the case.

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Sleep timing of Ram Lalla keeps Ayodhya awake

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Controversy has erupted over the district administration's proposal to keep Ram Lalla awake for 24 hours during the upcoming Ram Navami festival, drawing objections from saints and members of the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

Anticipating a significant surge in devotees during Ram Navami, the district administration has suggested keeping the temple doors open round-the-clock, discarding the traditional 'shayan' (sleeping) timing, to accommodate the expected influx of worshippers.

District Magistrate Nitish Kumar had announced that the Ram Temple management will graciously open its doors round the clock from April 16 to April 18, with the pinnacle of celebrations slated for April 17. However, the proposal has been met with skepticism from saints, who question the prudence of such a decision. Senior Priest Satendra Das remarked, "Never ever any temple remained open for 24 hours, that too for three days. This is against Hindu tradition. Bhagwan also needs rest." While the Trust asserts that it is consulting with the saints



to gather their opinions on the matter, concerns remain regarding the departure from established worship traditions.

The Ram Navami fair, slated to begin on April 9, anticipates a massive turnout of over 50 lakh devotees in Ayodhya from across the country. With such a crowd expected, there is consideration to extend the temple's opening hours to 24 hours a day during the festival period to ensure uninterrupted darshan of

Ram Lalla. Presently, the temple operates for 14 hours daily, attracting a footfall of approximately one and a half to two lakh devotees to Ram Lalla's shrine.

Acknowledging the necessity for extended hours during the festival, the district administration has urged the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust to contemplate opening the temple 24 hours on Ashtami, Navami, and Dashami tithis.

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Ministry seeks report on Vistara flight cancellations, delays

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Vistara decided to temporarily curtail its daily flight schedule, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) has sought a detailed report from the Tata group airline amid non-availability of pilots causing flight cancellations and major delays.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has also asked Vistara to submit a daily report on the flights that are being cancelled and delayed. Vistara has been facing backlash from passengers on social media due to significant operational challenges. Over the past week, flights have either been cancelled or delayed.

Vistara has cancelled around 60 flights on Tuesday after the airline cancelled approximately 50 flights and 160 delayed on Monday. The number could even go up to 70.

In the ongoing summer schedule, Vistara will be operating 55.22 per cent more weekly flights at 2,324. Many passengers have taken to social media to complain about flight delays and cancellations.

Reflecting the impact of flight cancellations and delays, Vistara's On Time Performance (OTP) touched 51.4 per cent on April 1 and it was the lowest among the scheduled airlines, as per the latest data from the civil aviation ministry. The airline's passenger load factor stood at 85.4 per cent on April 1, the data showed.

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Modi attacks Rahul over fire remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RUDRAPUR (UTTARAKHAND) / NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday launched a blistering attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his remark suggesting that there will be a "conflagration" in the country if he gets a third term and asked the people to wipe out the Congress from everywhere. Addressing his first election rally in Uttarakhand, Modi said he is being threatened and abused by the corrupt but there will be even bigger action against corruption after his re-election.

"The Congress and INDIA Alliance have made their intentions clear. Congress's royal

family shehzada (prince) has threatened there will be fire if Modi gets another term in office. Staying out of power has made them so desperate that they are now talking about setting the country afire. Would you let them do it? Is this the kind of language used in a democracy? Wouldn't you punish them?" Modi said. At an INDIA Bloc rally in Delhi's Ramlila Maidan on Sunday, Rahul Gandhi had said if the BJP wins the election through "match-fixing" and changes the Constitution, then the country would be on "fire" and would not survive.

"The Congress, with its Emergency-mindset, no longer has faith in democracy. Therefore, it is busy instigating



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a public rally ahead of upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Udham Singh Nagar district in Uttarakhand, on Tuesday PTI

India sees red as China runs riot renaming Arunachal towns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Tuesday rejected attempts by China to rename places in Arunachal Pradesh and asserted that assigning "invented names" will not alter the reality that the State "is, has been, and will always be" an integral and inalienable part of India.

Responding to questions at a Press conference, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday had said, "If today I change the name of your house, will it become mine? Arunachal Pradesh was, is and will always be a State of India. Changing names does not have an effect."



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar

The MEA statement on Tuesday was issued in response to media queries in the wake of China releasing a fourth list of 30 new names of various places in Arunachal Pradesh amid Beijing's stepped-up assertions in recent

weeks to re-emphasise its claim over the Indian State.

"China has persisted with its senseless attempts to rename places in the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh. We firmly reject such attempts. Assigning invented names will not alter the reality that Arunachal Pradesh is, has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India," MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal was quoted as saying in the statement. The 30 places renamed by Beijing include 12 mountains, four rivers, one lake, one mountain pass, 11 residential areas and a piece of land, state-run Global Times reported. A high-resolution map of the areas has also been shared by China.

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Three former foreign secretaries ask parties not to rake up Katchatheevu

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

The DMK's game plan to bring in Katchatheevu, a 285 acre uninhabited islet 20 km off Rameswaram coast, an issue in the upcoming Lok Sabha poll has backfired as three former Foreign Secretaries of the country has issued a stern warning to the major political parties which are behind the move.

It all started with the DMK's manifesto for the 2024 election blaming the BJP Government at the Centre for failing to retrieve the islet that was seceded to Sri Lanka in 1975 by the then Prime



Minister Indira Gandhi as part of the move to settle the international maritime boundary line between the two countries.

It has also been revealed that a technology innovation by Union Government's INCOIS laboratory to keep the fishermen away from

international maritime border line did not take off because of the lack of interest in it by a political party in Tamil Nadu.

Shiv Shankar Menon, who was the Foreign Secretary and later national security adviser under the UPA Government led by Manmohan Singh has alerted the parties not to rake up the Katchatheevu issue. "It is like scoring a self-goal and will be counter productive," Menon told media persons who asked him about the possibility of retrieving the islet, a bone of contention between fishermen of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

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Crackdown on vehicles with tinted glass intensifies

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Considering the involvement of tinted glass-equipped vehicles in criminal activities and the increasing prevalence of such vehicles, the Delhi Police has initiated a crackdown on these vehicles across the national Capital. The Najafgarh area of south west Delhi leads the list as of now with as many as 851 violations, followed by 617 in Nangloi, 417 in Punjabi Bagh, 365 in Tilak Nagar and 350 in Dwarka among others. The IGI airport area in Delhi, known for its bustling activity among tourists and

foreigners, has also experienced a 100 per cent surge in violations within just one year. Last year, the Delhi Traffic Police recorded 123 violations, whereas from January 1 to March 15 this year, the number has escalated to 265 violations.

The police said such vehicles have a history of being used for committing crime against women by criminals. According to the law, the front windscreen should have a visual light transmission (VLT) of at least 70 per cent, which means it shouldn't block more than 30 per cent of the light. The side windows should maintain a VLT of at least 50



Representational Image

per cent, ensuring adequate visibility.

The opacity of heavily tinted windows obstructs clear visibility, posing a threat both for the other commuters and pedestrians and the driver of the four wheelers. The Delhi Traffic Police launched campaigns this year to target such vehicles with as many as 7,567 violators booked in 2023 compared to 1,083 in 2022 and 3,029 in 2023. Taking vigilance of a concerning trend of non-compliance, measures including heightened surveillance, regular checkpoints, and stringent penalties for offenders were put in

place in India's Capital.

These violations were frequently happening mainly in West and South west Delhi including areas of Najafgarh, Nangloi, Punjabi Bagh, Tilak Nagar, Dwarka, Karol Bagh, IGI Airport, Kapashera, Rajouri Garden, and Badarpur.

Comparatively, the violations in these areas have also increased manifold over the years. While 50 violations were seen in Punjabi Bagh in 2022, the number went up to 417 in 2024.

Similarly, in a period of a year the number of tinted glass violations in Tilak Nagar area went to 365 from

just 129 in 2023.

By addressing this issue, the Delhi Traffic Police aims to mitigate potential hazards associated with impaired visibility, thereby reducing the incidence of accidents and promoting responsible driving practices. It also aims to crackdown on criminals who target women. Vehicle owners have been told to adhere strictly to regulations of tinted glass, stating that the "compliance with these regulations not only fosters safer road conditions but also contributes to the overall well-being of the community."

2 women crushed to death by car

Minor accused nabbed

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two women were crushed to death by a speeding car, allegedly being driven by a minor, in Papermill Colony under Mahanagar police station on Tuesday morning. Additionally, two motorcycles parked at the roadside were damaged by the car. The accused is the son of a prominent liquor businessman in the city and is a Class X student at a prestigious school. The incident occurred near Metro City and the impact of the collision was so severe that the women were dragged for nearly 200 metres, leading to their instant demise. The victims, Sabnam (45) and Sahida Bano (65), were neighbours who resided near the Mahanagar Christian cemetery, close to Metro City apartment on Papermill Road. DCP (Central) Ravina Tyagi stated in a video statement that the incident occurred around 5 am when the minor driving the car ran over the women, who were walking along the side of the road, resulting in their tragic death. The minor was apprehended by the police, and the car was seized. Furthermore, the minor also damaged two motorcycles parked on the road, as confirmed by the DCP in the



NOTICE

I have changed my name from TABASSUM PARVEEN to SEEMA PARVEEN W/O JUNAID ALAM FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSE R/O 80/23 COOLIE BAZAR KANPUR UP

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Altaf Ahmad to ALTAF AHMAD WARSII S/O MOHAMMAD IQBAL 89/209 Flat no 501 Bewis compound BANSMANDI kanpur

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohammad Badrudduja To Mohd. Badrudduja, Mohd Badrudduja S/o Abdul Rasheed R/O 88/408A, Chamanganj Kanpur

NOTICE

I, Virendra Kumar Dixit S/o Shiv Balak Dixit R/o H.M. Dayal Colony Civil Lines, Unnao have lost my Possession & Allotment Letter of H.No. 406/4 Chandra Shekhar Azad Nagar, Unnao Original Sale deed Book No 1 Vol, 2162 page 141to 174 Sl.No. 2884 Dt. 01.06.2001 at S/R Office Unnao, Vide Affidavit.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Anubha Wahal to SAANICA WAHAL D/o Anurag Wahal R/o Flat No.710 Shiv Ratan Estate 6/25 Parvati Bagla Road Tilak Nagar Kanpur for all future purpose.

NOTICE

My daughter HANSIKA GUPTA was previously known as Hanshika Gupta is now Hansika Gupta D/O Ravi Gupta 4/276 Shrishti Rachana Apartment Rani Ghat, Tilak Nagar Flat No. 101 Kanpur Nagar Uttar Pradesh 208002

NOTICE

Be it known to all that my son Yogesh Kumar Dubey and his wife Komal Shukla daughter of late Gopal ji Shukla have bad conduct, both of them are quarrelsome. They are out of my control and beat me and my wife. Hence I disown my son Yogesh Dubey and his wife Komal Shukla from all my movable and immovable property. I and my family will have nothing to do with any of their transactions or any other work. They will be the solely responsible for any act they do in future. Doodhnath Dubey son of late Niranjan Dubey R/O-480/428A, Mohtsinganj, P. S.-Kotwali, Prayagraj

Man found dead in his car

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 46-year-old man was found dead in his car, parked at the entrance of his residential colony in the PGI police station area on Tuesday morning. Identified as Sushant Pal, a resident of Sanskriti Apartment in Eldeco Colony, he had been abandoned by his wife and children back in 2022. Sushant had left his house around 1:30 pm on Monday in his car and had not returned home since then. Given his habit of frequently staying away from home for extended periods, his family awaited his return. On Tuesday morning, the colony's security guard noticed Sushant's car parked at the gate and approached it, only to find Sushant unresponsive in the driver's seat. The

video statement. Eyewitnesses said that the car, being driven recklessly, struck the women from behind, causing them to be thrown into the air before landing on the ground, resulting in fatal injuries. Subsequently, the minor driver rammed the car into the motorcycles and attempted to flee the scene but was nabbed by locals and handed over to the police. Following the incident, a large number of residents gathered at the scene and demanded strict action against the irresponsible driver, whose actions led to the untimely death of the two women. The police assured the agitated crowd of taking stringent measures against the errant driver. It was revealed that the women had gone out after having 'sehri' meal and the tragedy struck shortly thereafter. Family

members learned of the incident when the news spread throughout the colony. CCTV footage obtained by the police showed the women walking along the extreme side of the road before the car suddenly appeared and struck them.

guard promptly contacted Sushant's father, Ramesh Vijay Pal, who rushed to the scene. Sushant was then transported to a hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead. Ramesh Vijay Pal informed the police that his son Sushant had a history of drug addiction and was prone to aggression. "Due to his aggressive behavior and drug addiction, his wife and children had left him. He was unemployed and often engaged in disputes with family members over trivial matters," Ramesh Vijay Pal stated. Police mentioned that Sushant had likely picked up the drug habit from his friends and had been unemployed for several years. The police sent his body for autopsy, and an investigation is ongoing. Although the family did not initially suspect foul

play in Sushant's death, the police took precautionary measures and sent the body for examination to rule out any foul play. "It appears he may have succumbed to a cardiac arrest or an illness he was suffering from," police sources stated. In a separate incident, thieves stole Rs 65,000 in cash and jewelry worth several lakhs from a house in the PGI police station area during the night between Monday and Tuesday. The homeowner, Ashok Kumar of Haivatmau Mavayya in Jagannathpuri Colony, stated that he and his family had been away at their native house in Patna for Holi, and upon returning on March 29, they discovered the burglary. Police have registered a case and initiated an investigation into the matter.

TRUCK DRIVER HELD HOSTAGE, ROBBED

A truck driver travelling from Barabaki was abducted by a group of miscreants in Lucknow and robbed of Rs 30,000 while being held hostage on Monday. However, the man managed to escape after seizing an opportunity and subsequently filed a formal complaint with the Gosaiganj police. An FIR under the relevant section has been registered at the Gosaiganj police station. In his complaint, the victim, Anuj Kumar, informed the police that he drives a container for transportation. While en route from Mohanlalganj to Gosaiganj on Sunday, he was intercepted by three unidentified men in a car on the Purvanchal Expressway. "The men first collided with my container, then forcibly took me into their car, where they assaulted me and demanded money. Subsequently, they coerced me into calling my family and pleading with them to come to Lucknow with money. They also confiscated Rs 30,000 cash, which I had for transportation purposes. In the interim, I contacted the police at 112, which startled the miscreants. They then ejected me from the car near Ekana Stadium," recounted the victim. He further stated that the miscreants had fled the scene before the police arrived.

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SP ex-MLA booked, brother held in land grabbing case

Balrampur (PTI): Former Samajwadi Party (SP) MLA Arif Anwar Hashmi has been booked while his brother was arrested for allegedly grabbing government land here, police said on Tuesday. District Magistrate Arvind Singh said that a 730-sq metre land located next to the Sadullanagar police station was grabbed by Hashmi, the former MLA from Utraula seat, and his brother Maroof on June 27, 2013 using forged documents. A complaint was received regarding the matter and the allegation was found to be true in the probe. Superintendent of Police Keshav Kumar said the district administration took action against Hashmi, Maroof and others. While Maroof has been arrested, the ex-MLA is at large, officials said. A case has been registered against the accused people under sections 420 (cheating), 468 (forgery for purpose of cheating) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code and under the Gangster Act, SP Kumar said. The land is under the possession of the district administration now.

Businessman dies, wife injured in attack by worker, aides

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A businessman died and his wife was injured in Agra after they were beaten up allegedly by a worker and his aides, who also robbed their house, police said on Tuesday. A case has been registered and efforts are underway to nab the accused, they said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (City) Suraj Kumar Rai said the incident took place on Monday evening at the house of trader Dileep Gupta in Vijay Nagar Colony under the limits of Hariparwat police station in Agra. The servant, along with a few accomplices, entered the businessman's house on Monday evening and allegedly thrashed the couple, leaving them injured, Rai said. They also allegedly robbed the house before fleeing the scene, he added. After the incident, the couple were taken to a hospital in Agra where Gupta was pronounced 'brought dead', while his wife was admitted for treatment, the police said. The main accused has been working at Gupta's shop for the past four years, the police said. Based on a complaint by the deceased's son, a case has been registered against the worker and his associates, the DCP said. Teams have been formed to nab the accused while further investigation is on, he added. Meanwhile, a pregnant woman and her husband died while their 2-year-old daughter was severely injured when a speeding truck hit their motorcycle in Uttar Pradesh's Shamli district on Tuesday, police said. The accident took place under the Jhijnjhana police station area. Imran (30), his wife Zindi (28), who was eight months pregnant, and their daughter were going to a hospital for her ultrasound when the truck hit their motorcycle on Unn road, said Station House Officer (SHO) Dharmendra Kumar. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem examination. The victims' daughter has been hospitalised, he said. Kumar said a case has been registered against the truck driver, who managed to flee from the spot.

other places in the morning, and the bus was on its way back in the evening. Meanwhile, two people died in a fire that broke out after a collision between two trucks in the Deva area in Barabanki, police said on Tuesday. At around 11 pm on Monday, a sugarcane-laden truck hit another truck carrying utensils near Jabrila village, Deva SHO Anil Pandey said. A fire broke out due to the collision and the driver of the truck, laden with utensils, and his helper died on the spot, he said.

5 KILLED IN COLLISION BETWEEN DUMPER TRUCK AND AUTORICKSHAW Meanwhile, a speeding dumper truck rammed an overloaded autorickshaw in Chitrakoot district on Tuesday, leaving five people dead and three others injured. According to police, the accident occurred on Tuesday morning and five people aboard the three-wheeler died on the spot while three others were grievously injured. Visuals showed the mangled remains of the autorickshaw which was completely crushed due to the impact of the collision. Other clips showed the mutilated bodies of the victims being removed from the site. Reports said that the victims were on their way to Chitrakoot when the accident occurred at the National Highway-35 (NH-35) near a



BSF personnel conducting a flag march in front of Vidhan Bhawan in Lucknow on Tuesday

Pioneer

4 children among 5 killed as bus overturns

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Five people, including four children, were killed while 25 other kids were injured when a bus carrying them overturned in Salarpur village under Deva police station on Tuesday evening. The bus carrying government school children was returning after a visit to Lucknow zoo. Taking to X, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath wrote, "The death of children in a road accident in Barabanki district is extremely sad. My condolences to the bereaved family. Instructions have been given to the officials concerned for proper treatment to the injured children. May Lord Shri Ram provide peace to the departed souls and speedy recovery to the injured children."

Police said the accident occurred when the bus overturned near Salarpur village in a bid to avoid hitting a bike. However, the bus ended up hitting the bike, which got dragged to about 50 metres. The five children on board the bus, and the biker died, while around a dozen kids were injured. There were 42 children on the bus at the time of the accident. An official said the children belonging to the composite school Harakka of Suratganj block, were taken on an educational tour by the Education department to Lucknow zoo and

dhaba in Amanpur area. The injured were rushed to a nearby hospital where their condition was stated to be critical, a senior police officer said. "The mishap occurred near Jhansi-Mirzapur National Highway. A speeding dumper collided with an auto-rickshaw, leaving five people dead. The condition of another three injured is said to be critical," Additional SP Chakrapani Tripathi said. The officer said the injured had been referred to a hospital in Prayagraj. The deceased have been identified as Anirudh (30), Atar Singh (50) & Akhilesh Singh (22) from Kannauj district, and Dharmendra Soni (30) & Nidhi Soni (19) from Hamirpur district, the police said. A case was registered and the bodies were sent for autopsy. Meanwhile, in Hamirpur, three children drowned in a village pond. Reports said 12-year-old Vicky, son of Bhagwandin Shrivats of Kunheta village of Thana Biwar; 11-year-old Dipanshu, son of Munna Verma; and 11-year-old-Mohit, son of Nanhu Verma, had gone to Tilgawan Devi pond to take bath with some other children of the village on Tuesday morning. Mohit's body was floating in the pond. Clothes of two children were found on the bank of the pond. Later, the bodies of Dipanshu and Vicky were also fished out of the pond.

ed that according to regulations, one cannot sell the remaining liquor or beer quota of a particular month in the following month. Shop owners had to seek permission from the department to sell old or remaining stock in the subsequent month. "Many shop owners obtained approval to sell the old stock of beer and IMFL this time. However, the existing stock is limited and will only last for a few days. The delay in delivery of IMFL and beer due to convoluted rules could lead to a crisis affecting our business and causing revenue loss for the government," he added.

District Excise Officer, Lucknow, Rakesh Singh, assured that there was no shortage of liquor and sufficient stock of all types of liquor (desi, beer, and IMFL) was available at shops in Lucknow. He mentioned that the consumption/sale of desi liquor is approximately 60-70,000 liters per day in the city, and the department had issued a stock of around 1 lakh liters on Monday alone. When questioned specifically about beer and IMFL, Singh stated that there was ample stock available, and there were no issues with the delivery to shops.

Liquor sellers rue unavailability of IMFL

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Liquor sellers in the state expressed concern over the lack of availability of branded beer and Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) as the new fiscal year began on April 1. Members of the Liquor Sellers Welfare Association (LSWA) of Uttar Pradesh cited delays in paperwork required at the start of the new financial year, leading to delays in clearing liquor quotas from warehouses to model shops. "Due to this delay, consignments of IMFL bottles and beer did not reach the shops in the new fiscal year. To

restart business operations, approvals for brand, roll-over, and other clerical tasks are necessary. Unfortunately, these processes were delayed this year. As a result, many model shops found their liquor cabinets empty at the beginning of the financial year. Some shops only had a limited quantity of old stock of branded beer and IMFL bottles. We had to rush to the excise department offices at the last minute to obtain permission to sell the old stock to keep our businesses running," lamented the liquor sellers. Devesh Jaiswal, media incharge of LSWA, elaborat-

ed that according to regulations, one cannot sell the remaining liquor or beer quota of a particular month in the following month. Shop owners had to seek permission from the department to sell old or remaining stock in the subsequent month. "Many shop owners obtained approval to sell the old stock of beer and IMFL this time. However, the existing stock is limited and will only last for a few days. The delay in delivery of IMFL and beer due to convoluted rules could lead to a crisis affecting our business and causing revenue loss for the government," he added.

Team of auditors visits varsity

Lucknow (PNS): A team of 34 auditors representing 23 countries visited Lucknow University on April 1 as part of the 159th International Training Programme on 'Implementation Auditing', organised by the International Centre for Information Systems and Auditing (ICISA). During their visit, the delegation aimed to gain insights into various facets of academic excellence at Lucknow University and explore its historical and cultural sites. Prof Manuka Khanna, dean of recruitment & assessment cell and head of the department of political science, delivered the welcome address. DSW Prof Sangeeta Sahu delivered a presentation highlighting the university's achievements and operational processes, including financial, administrative, and audit protocols. The delegation visited the Archaeological Museum, where Prof Piyush Bhargava provided insights into the artifacts. They then proceeded to visit both museums located in the department of anthropology, where HoD Prof Keya Pandey offered detailed information.

Service pistol looted from head constable

Lucknow (PNS): Three scooter-borne men looted the service pistol from Head Constable Vinod Singh, who is employed in the police department and is currently posted in the UP Special Task Force (STF) in the Ghazipur police station area on Monday night after assaulting him. At the time of the incident, the road was bustling with vehicles, and police teams were on patrol. Despite this, the miscreants managed to flee successfully after seizing the pistol. Immediately after the incident, senior officers mobilised the STF team to crack the case. A team apprehended three miscreants, including a minor, in a round-the-clock manhunt. The arrested accused were identified as Akash Mishra and Shashank Mishra. "All three miscreants hail from Madaion village in the city. The police recovered the looted service pistol and the scooter used by the miscreants during the crime," stated DCP, North, Abhijeet R Shanker. He added that a case was registered, and further investigation

was underway. According to the victim, Vinod, a resident of Chhatha Mill, Sairpur, he was returning home from the office in Vibhutikhand on Monday evening when he was accosted by the miscreants after crossing the Sector 25 intersection in the area. As Vinod's bike collided with the scooter after it suddenly applied brakes, the miscreants began verbally abusing him. Upon protesting, the assailants turned violent. Akash and Shashank snatched the service pistol from Vinod's waist and fled the scene, threatening him with dire consequences. DCP North, Abhijeet R Shankar, stated that the STF team obtained footage of the suspects during the investigation. With the help of the vehicle number, both were apprehended from their residence in Madaion village. Akash and Shashank's father operates a street food stall selling pani puri. The miscreants confessed to their crime, claiming ignorance of Vinod's occupation as a policeman.



UP Congress chief Ajay Rai and others at a roza iftar hosted at the party office in Lucknow on Tuesday

Pioneer

NOTICE
Priyanshi Verma (Borrower) have agreed to create mortgage in respect of the Plot situated at Part of Azari No. 343Ka Min Netua Shuklaganj, Pargana Sikandarpur Sarosi Mohalla Ambikapuram Gangaghat Shuklaganj, Unnao admeasuring 50 sq. Yds With Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Ltd, and the Sale deed dated 24/06/1998 executed by Smt. Sheela Devi in favour of Smt. Savitri Devi which is registered in Book No. 1 Vol. No. 1522 on pages 189 to 194 at serial no. 3121 at the office of Sub Registrar Unnao is lost. If any person having any claim against the said Property can contact to me, within 07 days. Bharat Bhatnagar, Advocate Office :- Room No. 14 Second Floor Mudgal Adhivakta Bhawan Civil Court Kanpur Nagar Mob. 09839034426

The U.P. Real Estate Appellate Tribunal, Lucknow
4th floor, Indira Bhawan, Ashok Marg, Lucknow-226001
Letter no.87 /Appeal no 303-2022/UPREAT/2023 Lucknow Dated 15/03/2024

Notice for Publication
Appeal no 303/2022
Amandeep Garg.....Appellant
VS
Supertech Township Project Limited.....Respondent
To, Respondent no 3 M/S Wealth Clinic Pvt.Ltd Address 301, Noble Tower-II, Eldeco Utopia, Sector 93-A, Nodia 201301 Uttar Pradesh.
Subject- Regarding Appeal u/s 44 of the RERA Act, 2016
You are hereby informed that said appeal, was taken up for hearing on 06.03.2024. You are therefore directed to be present before the Tribunal either in person or through legal representative as provided U/s 56 of the Act to oppose reply the Appeal otherwise the said appeal will be heard ex-parte in your absence. Now the case is fixed for hearing on 09.04.2024.
Registrar UPREAT, Lucknow

Youth setting up start-ups instead of migrating: Yogi

PNS ■ PILIBHIT/
BUDAUN/BAREILLY

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said the youth of the country and the state are setting up their own start-ups and are no longer resorting to exodus. Adityanath said this at the intellectuals' meeting at Pilibhit while seeking votes for the BJP's Lok Sabha candidate Jitin Prasada, a statement said. The UP chief minister also addressed election rallies in Budaun and Bareilly. The BJP this time has fielded UP PWD Minister Prasada instead of giving ticket to the sitting Lok Sabha MP, Varun Gandhi. "The daughters are not feeling unsafe. Rather by becoming fighter pilots, they are roaring like lionesses in the defence of India. "At the same time, (every) resident of India is proudly gaining respect in the world under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Adityanath said. "Today our borders are completely secure. Terrorism in Kashmir, extremism in the northeastern states and Naxalism have completely ended," he said. There is a better security environment in the country. Criminals and mafia have been defeated in the state while the daughters and the businessmen are feeling safe.

The state has become riot-free, Adityanath said. "There is a complete control on curfew in the state. Kanwar Yatra is going on with much fanfare," the chief minister said, and added that India is working by better coordination between both its heritage and development. He also listed various welfare works accomplished in Pilibhit. By accepting all the proposals of medical college, road and bridge in Pilibhit, the government has worked to connect it with the new stream of development, he said. Not only this, the government is also working to promote Pilibhit as an excellent destination for eco-tourism. Electric fencing has been done around the farmers' land lying in the middle of the forest in the constituency to prevent human-wildlife conflict, he said. "This time this election is going to be between 'family first' versus 'nation first' and 'mafia raj' versus 'law and order'. Be it the SP or the Congress, the president of their party can be a person from only one family, whereas Prime Minister Narendra Modi is going to dedicate his entire life to the country after coming from an ordinary poor family. For him, 140 crore Indians are his family," he said.



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at an intellectuals' meeting on Tuesday

The UP chief minister also told the gathering that they have witnessed the Samajwadi Party (SP) tenure, when the

youngsters used to wave guns instead of doing any work. "We have done the work of giving tablets to the youth. If

people from the SP, the Congress and the BSP come to power in the state, they will bring mafia rule with them,

whereas the BJP believes in the rule of law. "This election is being held on corruption versus zero toler-

ance. A government with strong willpower is needed to decide that the place of corrupt people and mafia should be the jails. This work can only be done under the leadership of the BJP," he said. According to the election schedule, eight parliamentary constituencies in UP will vote in the first phase of Lok Sabha polls on April 19. These are Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Nagina (SC), Moradabad, Rampur and Pilibhit. Meanwhile in Budaun, Adityanath accused the SP-Congress alliance of tarnishing the state's reputation and instigating chaos. These people previously spread anarchy, supported curfews and imposed a ban on the 'Kanwar Yatra', he said. "In their tenure, the criminals used to explode bombs at different places. We said there would be no bombing in Uttar Pradesh but there will be 'Har har, bum bum'. "We need to unite for a new India under PM Modi's leadership. He had carried out those tasks which seemed impossible, including the ban on (instant) triple talaq, the removal of Article 370 and the construction of the Ram temple, where Lord Ram is now seated," Adityanath said. On this occasion, he appealed to vote in favour of the BJP's Lok Sabha candidates —

Durvijay Singh Shakya from Budaun and Dharmendra Kashyap from Aonla. Urging to give a third term to the Modi government, Adityanath said India has become the fifth-largest economy under the leadership of Modi. India will emerge as a major global power and position itself as the world's third-largest economy in the first three years of the third term of the Modi government, he said. He added that this will lay the foundation for a developed India. A developed UP is necessary for a developed India and a developed Budaun is crucial for a developed UP. In Bareilly, Adityanath said there is only one voice in the entire country — 'Ek baar phir Modi sarkar'. "Behind this is Modi ji's continuous hardwork of 10 years. He worked to take the country's image to new heights on the global stage, hence, the Indians are saying this in one voice to express their gratitude towards him," he said. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India is touching new heights of development. The 2024 elections are an opportunity for the people to express their gratitude to Modi ji. Budaun along with Bareilly will vote in the third phase on May 7. Counting of votes will be held on June 4.

Lob Sabha polls: Direct contest on cards between SP, BJP in Meerut

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

It is likely to be a direct contest between the Samajwadi Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party in the Meerut Lok Sabha constituency. The Samajwadi Party on Monday changed its candidate and replaced Bhanu Pratap Singh with Sardhana MLA Atul Pradhan. Pradhan is known as a "giant killer" as he had defeated Sangeet Som of the BJP in the 2022 UP assembly polls. Arun Govil, who played the role of Bhagwan Ram in Ramayana, is the BJP candidate in Meerut. SP president Akhilesh Yadav had to change the candidate following the vehement opposition mounted by the party cadres against Bhanu Pratap Singh. Pradhan's entry, SP insiders say, will ensure that the Meerut contest is not one-sided, as it seemed likely with "outsider" Bhanu Singh in the race. While Pradhan unsuccessfully contested the Sardhana assembly seat several times between 2012, in the 2022 assembly polls, he had defeated firebrand BJP leader Sangeet Som by a margin of over 18,000 votes. Expressing his gratitude to SP president Akhilesh Yadav for giving the ticket to him from the Meerut Lok Sabha seat, Pradhan said, "We will continue our fight for the poor, youth and farmers. I was born and brought up in Meerut, a place which has been my 'karma bhoomi' since my student days." A member of the Gurjar community, Pradhan (41) has been associated with the SP since he graduated from Chaudhary Charan Singh University. He was previously the president of SP's Chhatra Sabha (student wing). Pradhan's wife Seema was elected Sardhana zila parishad chief in 2015 and last year, she unsuccessfully contested the Meerut mayoral polls with the

Arun Govil files nomination

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Renowned actor Arun Govil, celebrated for his portrayal of the revered Lord Ram in the iconic TV series 'Ramayan', has ventured into the realm of politics by formally stepping into the electoral arena as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate for the Meerut Lok Sabha constituency. In a symbolic gesture marking his transition from the silver screen to the political stage, Govil filed nomination papers on Tuesday, flanked by Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya. Thousands of people who thronged the collectorate shouted the slogan 'Jai Sri Ram' as Govil, dressed in saffron, alighted from the open jeep. Expressing gratitude to the BJP leadership for the nomination, Govil acknowledged the overwhelming outpour of support from the public. "Today, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the BJP leadership for bestowing their trust upon me and for nominating me as the candidate from Meerut," said Govil. Maurya exuded confidence in Govil's candidacy, saying the BJP's is on firm footing in Uttar Pradesh. "Arun Govil has filed his nomination papers today.



Arun Govil (right) with Deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya

There is tremendous confidence among the workers and people that the BJP will achieve the target of winning all 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh and 400 seats in the entire country," Maurya said. Govil's entry into politics was announced on March 24 when the BJP handpicked him to contest from the Meerut Lok Sabha constituency, capitalising on his widespread popularity and the deep-seated reverence garnered from his portrayal of Lord Ram. Responding to queries regarding the BJP's potential opposition in the forthcoming elections, Maurya

downplayed any looming threat, stating, "According to us, there is no one in competition. There is no opposition anywhere. There is a tussle among SP, BSP, and Congress. Our preparations are from 2024 to 2047 (when UP assembly elections are to be held)." With Govil's induction into the political fray, the BJP seeks to harness his towering celebrity status and mass appeal to clinch victory in the upcoming elections, reiterating its unwavering commitment to consolidate power both in Uttar Pradesh and across the nation.

which he claims are not fool-proof. The SP's decision to field Bhanu Singh initially from the seat had stumped party leaders. A Supreme Court lawyer and a resident of Sahibabad, near Delhi, Singh had contested the 2017 assembly polls from Sikandarabad seat as a candidate of the Rashtriya Janhit Sangharsh Party, an outfit he floated, and polled just over 1,000 votes. Singh is a Supreme Court lawyer and has been vocal against the use of electronic voting machines (EVMs),

fall in the OBC category, are around 11% and 5% respectively. Scheduled Castes (SCs) form a significant chunk with around 19% of voters. What goes against Atul Pradhan is that Sardhana is not an assembly segment of the Meerut Lok Sabha seat and is a part of the Muzaffarnagar Lok Sabha constituency. The BJP is banking on not just Govil's appeal as the actor who played Ram in the widely popular TV serial Ramayana, but also that he is a local. He was born in Meerut.

Ujjwal Raman joins Cong, fielded from Prayagraj

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Failing to find even 17 candidates to contest Lok Sabha elections here in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress on Tuesday welcomed Samajwadi Party leader Ujjwal Raman Singh into the party fold and announced him as a candidate for the Prayagraj Lok Sabha seat. The Congress is in alliance with Samajwadi Party to contest the Lok Sabha election here in UP. Earlier, the party also gave tickets to turncoats, who joined it within the last few weeks. The first Congress list for Uttar Pradesh included the names of Imran Masood from Saharanpur and Sadal Prasad from Bangsaon. Imran Masood defected from Samajwadi Party (SP) to Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and then the Congress. Sadal Prasad joined the Congress after quitting the BSP. Danish Ali, who has been fielded from Amroha, quit the BSP two months back and joined the Congress a fortnight ago. From Mathura, the Congress has given the ticket to boxer Vijendra Singh. Interestingly, the party has maintained silence over the candidates from Amethi and Rar Bareilly. Ujjwal Raman Singh, son of former MP and veteran SP leader Revati Raman Singh, joined the Congress in presence of UP's national general secre-



tary Avinash Pandey, and state president Ajay Rai at party's state headquarters in Lucknow on Tuesday. Welcoming Singh in the party, Avinash Pandey said that the way leaders of political parties are showing their faith in Congress, being impressed by the Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra of mass leader Rahul Gandhi, they are confident that INDIA bloc will have a big victory in the Lok Sabha elections. Ajay Rai said that leaders of all the parties of INDIA are united to save the country and democracy. "The way politics of hatred and disintegration is going on in the country today, people of this country, which is bearing the brunt of inflation and unemployment, have understood the anti-people

policies of the BJP. Now, people of the country have made up their mind for a change. We are working together on a war footing and there will be an INDIA government in the country this year," he said. Uttar Pradesh Congress Legislature Party leader Aradhana Mishra 'Mona' expressed concern over the increasing atrocities against women in Uttar Pradesh and said that the Bharatiya Janata Party has failed to provide security to women. She claimed that Uttar Pradesh ranks first in terms of crime against women. Addressing mediapersons, Ujjwal Raman Singh said that the Constitution is in danger, and people with similar ideology have to unite together and fight to save democracy.

PM to address electorate through digital medium today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to engage with the electorate on Wednesday through a digital NaMo rally, utilising the NaMo app across all booths of the 10 Lok Sabha seats slated for the third phase of elections in Uttar Pradesh. During this event, he will also engage in discussions with select booth presidents. Senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader Sanjay Rai said that voting is scheduled for May 7 across Sambhal, Budaun, Bareilly, Aonla, Etah, Hathras, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Firozabad, and Mainpuri in the third phase. Prime Minister Narendra will virtually connect with workers at 1 pm on April 3 via the NaMo app, reaching out to a total of 22,648 booths spread across these Lok Sabha constituencies. Sanjay Rai said that through NaMo rally, Modi would address booth committee members and district coordinators, emphasising the participation of officials from the state, region, and district levels. Additionally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will personally engage with select booth presidents to gather insights into the party's activities.

Jayant to address rally in Budhana today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Rashtriya Lok Dal's national president Chaudhary Jayant Singh is scheduled to address a public meeting in support of the NDA candidate in the Budhana assembly segment of Muzaffarnagar Lok Sabha constituency on April 3. National spokesperson of Rashtriya Lok Dal Anil Dubey shared the details of Chaudhary Jayant Singh's upcoming public meetings. He said Jayant would meet with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in Baghpat on April 5 and address a public meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Saharanpur on April 6. Dubey also informed mediapersons that Jayant would address public meetings in Kairana on April 9, in Purkaji (Muzaffarnagar) and Baghpat on April 10, in Sikandarabad (Gautam Buddha Nagar) on April 11, and in Hastinapur (Bijnor) on April 12. Dubey claimed that there has been a significant surge in public attendance at the public meetings addressed by Jayant. He stated that the crowd gathering at Jayant's public meetings indicates that the NDA alliance is poised to win all 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh. Meanwhile, national secretary of the Rashtriya Lok Dal Anupam Mishra on Tuesday responded to the incidents of forced religious conversion by Christian missionaries in Kanpur, Kaushambi, and Jaunpur. He stated that despite the implementation of the 'Prohibition of Unlawful Religious

Conversion Act' in Uttar Pradesh, Christian missionaries continue to engage in planned and secretive conversion activities. Mishra emphasised that such incidents violate the religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution and pose a significant threat to the country's internal security. He highlighted that the Constitution's Preamble and the Right to Religious Freedom, as outlined in Articles 25-28 of the Fundamental Rights, ensure equality in religion and worship, granting individuals the freedom to practise any religion of their choice. However, Mishra clarified that while individuals have the right to adopt a religion or method of worship, converting people through coercion or inducement is deemed a criminal act, as evidenced by legal precedent. He noted that conversion incidents are predominantly reported in remote, underprivileged areas where residents are often uneducated and economically vulnerable. Mishra pointed out that individuals in such circumstances are susceptible to manipulation and coercion, leading them to convert to Christianity under false pretenses. He urged the government to take stringent action against those involved in such activities and emphasised the need for punitive measures against institutions and individuals perpetrating such conversions, as they adversely affect the social and cultural fabric of society.

Oppn leaders arrested to divert attention from electoral bonds: AKY

Kannauj: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday said the BJP-led Centre arrested opposition leaders to divert people's attention after it was exposed that the party "extorted" money through electoral bonds by misusing the ED and CBI. For the first time in the history of the country, "extortion" is being done by showing fear. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) "extorted" money from many companies in the name of electoral bonds, Yadav said. When their "extortion" technique was exposed, the BJP government arrested the opposition leaders to divert people's attention, the SP chief, who was here to address party workers, added. "The BJP government has discovered new ways of corruption and loot," he said. The ruling BJP has collected donations by showing fear and putting pressure on Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and other government agencies, Yadav said. Addressing mediapersons later, the SP supremo said the BJP-led Central government is worried because of the unity of the INDI Alliance and is therefore defaming opposition leaders by filing fake cases. "We all have faith in the judiciary. The court will support the truth. Gradually all the leaders will come out. The BJP government has implicated Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Jharkhand's Hemant Soren, SP's Mohammad Azam Khan and his family, and MLA Irfan Solanki in false cases," he said. "To suppress the voice of the opposition, these leaders have been sent to jail out of hatred. This time in the Lok Sabha elections, people will vote against the injustice and false cases foisted by the BJP," he added. Yadav, without taking names, said people are doubting that poison has been given to a prisoner in jail, apparently referring to mafia-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari's death. **PTI**

Labour force in favour of BJP-led govt

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The dynamic workforce of Uttar Pradesh not only significantly contributes to the state's infrastructure development through its dedication and skills but also holds sway in shaping governmental policies. Acknowledging this pivotal role of the workforce, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the double-engine government has implemented various schemes aimed at benefiting workers across all sectors. As a result, the state's labour force has emerged as a strong supporter of the BJP-led government. Reflecting on the strides made for workers during CM Yogi's seven-year tenure, there's confidence that

the promise of '80 out of 80' made by the CM will be fortified by the steadfast support of the workforce. Amidst closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh, who were employed in other states, returned home. During this period, Chief Minister Yogi pledged to provide employment to these workers within the state and delivered on his promise. A comprehensive skill mapping initiative encompassing around 38 lakh workers was undertaken. As per data from the Sewayojan Portal, employment opportunities were extended to 1,047,522 workers. Furthermore, 950,042 individuals found employment in the private sector through Rozgar Melas. The Mission Rozgar

initiative benefitted 116,285,61 workers/candidates. Furthermore, over 58,622,55,304 man-days were generated, ensuring sustainable livelihoods. Moreover, 33,070 construction sites were registered by December 2023. At the same time, since the formation of the BOC Board, until the month of December 2023, a total of 3,66,953 construction sites were registered. Additionally, the number of workers registered in Uttar Pradesh on the e-Shram portal of the Government of India, facilitated by the Uttar Pradesh Unorganised Workers Social Security Board, has surged to 8,33,25,459 as of January 23, 2024, making Uttar Pradesh the frontrunner in this regard nationwide.

The government's initiative to establish Atal Residential Schools for the children of construction workers, providing residential education for over three years, has commenced its second session. This endeavour has eased the burden of education expenses for the workers' children and lightened their overall financial obligations. Moreover, 1,45,912 candidates benefitted from the BOCW Board, with expenditures amounting to Rs 714.65 crore. Furthermore, workers receive the added benefit of free rations. These comprehensive measures are instrumental in fostering a closer bond between the working class and the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and the BJP government.

Opposition wants to save the corrupt: Pandey

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Union Minister for Heavy Industries Dr Mahendra Nath Pandey strongly criticised the opposition parties for supporting corruption and praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying that the PM's aim is to remove corruption while the opposition wants to 'save the corrupt'. Talking to the reporters at the party's Gulab Bagh Office here on Tuesday, he was harsh on the opposition leaders terming them as 'painted jackals'.

"A day ago we all watched the 'daily soap' 'brotherhood of corruption' in Ramliila Maidan. We saw with what arrogance the 'corrupt' are justifying their 'corruption'. The PM says



'remove corruption', but the opposition leaders of INDIA say save the corrupt," he said, adding that no matter how many attacks the opposition leaders make on the PM, our leader will continue his fight against corruption.

Dr Pandey said for the PM, 140 crore people of the country are his family. So, the PM is making efforts to save

this family from the corrupt and one who has looted the country will have to give it back. "This is Modi's guarantee", he said and added, "The INDIA is a 'barat of ghotale-baaj' (procession of scammers) where everyone wants to loot the country but the same should not be discussed. They indulge in scams and also want no action to be taken. This

alliance is not a 'janbandhan', but it is a 'thugbandhan'. The Aam Aadmi Party says that a rally is being held in support of Kejriwal's arrest. Congress says that this is not a rally in support of any individual but of the entire alliance. The Congress-Aam Aadmi Party are doing Ilu-Ilui in Delhi but 'Hum Aapke Hain Kaun' is happening in Punjab. Mamta has refused to fight together in West Bengal. In Bihar, RJD declared its candidates first. In Maharashtra, Uddhav Thackeray has also declared his candidates. Their MPs and MLAs are leaving Congress and AAP. No one is paying any attention to Congress in UP," Dr Pandey said. The union minister said that from the sky

to the underworld and from independence till today, the Congress is accused of scams only. "Their top leadership is out on bail in a scam worth ₹5,000 crore. The allegations range from jeep scam to helicopter scam," he said. Launching a scathing attack on Samajwadi Party Dr Pandey said everyone knows how the party had committed corruption. "The whole country knows about the corruption but the people of UP have also been suffering due to their nepotism. The party which once called Congress the most corrupt party in the country, today remains its ally. The SP chief remains silent on party leaders who make objectionable statements on Sanatan Dharma and Ramcharitmanas," he said.

Reward on Atiq's sister, Ashraf's wife announced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Prayagraj Commissionerate Police has announced a reward of Rs 25,000 each on Atiq Ahmed's sister Ayesha Noori and Ashraf's wife Zainab Fatima, who were absconding after the Umesh Pal murder case. A reward of Rs 50,000 has already been declared on Atiq's wife Shaista Parveen. Now the search for all three women has been intensified. Information has been sent to all the districts of the state. Along with Zainab Fatima, Ayesha Noori is also an accused in the

Umesh Pal murder case. Several raids have been conducted in Meerut in search of Ayesha Noori, wife of Dr Ekhlaiq Ahmed of Bhavani Nagar under Nauchandi police station area of Meerut. Dr Ekhlaiq is already in jail.

After the Umesh Pal murder case, Guddu Muslim had reached the Ayesha Noori's house in Meerut and ran away after getting money and help from there. When the police seized CCTV cameras and DVR during the raid at Ayesha's house, Guddu Muslim was seen in the footage. Ayesha is believed to be involved in the

murder conspiracy. A case was registered against Zainab for allegedly occupying and selling property worth Rs 100 crore of Waqf Board along with her brothers. A case has been registered against seven people, including Zainab Fatima, in the case. A case was registered on November 18 at Puramufi police station against Zainab Fatima, Ashraf's brother-in-law Saddam, Zaid, Sylvi, Naeem, Tariq and others. The matter pertains to the land of Puramufi's Akbarpur village. The PDA is preparing to demolish the illegal construction on the land soon.

Oath for prevention of mosquito-borne communicable diseases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A special communicable diseases control campaign, which was started on Monday, will continue till April 30. Under it with the cooperation of 10 departments, including health, emphasis will be laid on identifying patients with symptoms of dengue, malaria, meningitis etc as well as tuberculosis (TB), leprosy, kala-azar and filariasis. On the first day of the drive, the officials took oath in the office of the chief medical officer (CMO) for prevention of mosquito-borne communicable diseases in the district.

Under the leadership of CMO Dr Sandeep Chaudhary, Nodal Officer and ACMO Dr SS Kanojia, District Malaria Officer (DMO) SC Pandey, DHEIO Harivansh Yadav, Assistant Malaria Officer KK Rai, biologist Dr Amit Kumar Singh and other officials, health



workers and DMC of UNICEF took the oath. They pledged that in the fight against communicable diseases, they will make every possible effort to ensure that their families and communities remain free from these diseases and if any person in their villages or surrounding areas is suffering from fever, then his/her family will be encouraged to go to the government hospital for immediate treatment.

The nodal officer appealed to the people not to allow water stagnation or dirt to

accumulate anywhere in and around their houses, because mosquito larvae will grow in such waterlogged places and due to this, various infectious and communicable diseases caused by vectors (mosquitoes, flies etc). He said that public awareness work is being done to prevent dengue, malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases in the district so that one can keep oneself as well as one's family safe. Through health workers and ASHA workers, information is being given about the changing

weather, prevention of communicable diseases and cleanliness through door-to-door public awareness, he added.

DMO SC Pandey said most of the vector-borne diseases are spread through mosquito bites. "To avoid these diseases, it is very important to protect ourselves from mosquitoes. For this, keep the houses and surrounding areas clean and do not allow waterlogging. Keep the bushes and drains clean and neat, destroy the larvae by pouring burnt mobil oil or kerosene into the stagnant water nearby and instal anti-mosquito nets on the doors and windows of the house. Be sure to use mosquito net while sleeping. Wear clothes that cover the entire body. Clean coolers, fridges etc weekly. Do not put unused utensils, pipes, tyres, coconut shells etc on the roof. Keep pots and vases also clean," he advised. The DMO said in

view of the campaign, 70 hot spots have been created in urban areas and 101 in rural areas where special emphasis will be given. He said 78 malaria patients were found in the district in the year 2022, and 27 in 2023 whereas in 2022, 562 dengue patients were found and in 2023, 451 patients. As many as 45 chikungunya patients were found in the year 2022 and 124 in 2023. So far this year, two dengue and six chikungunya patients have been found but not a single malaria patient was found. He advised the patients that in case of fever, the patient should take complete rest and consume more and more liquids like fresh fruit juice, pulse water, coconut water, ORS solution, milk-buttermilk, fresh fruits, immune system strengthening foods etc and avoid using fried, heavy food, painkillers etc.

Gujarat Guv visits Kashi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat, along with his family, arrived here. He visited Sarnath, where Gautam Buddha delivered his 'First Sermon', and then Governor of Gujarat visited the archaeological ruins site. Then he went to Kuti Vihar Buddhist Temple where the Buddhist monks welcomed him. The Gujarat governor also visited Sarnath Museum and saw various historical structures, artifacts and other items, including the national emblem of India, the 'Lion Capital of Ashoka' in the main hall.

Later, Acharya Devvrat reached Swarved Mahamandir Dham at Umraha on Varanasi-Ghazipur national highway. He inspected the sprawling temple premises and took information about Swarved Mahamandir from manager Surendra Yadav. He also saw the artifacts made in this unique meditation centre.

DEO: No negligence will be tolerated in election work

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In order to ensure free and fair conduct of Lok Sabha General Elections 2024 in the district, District Magistrate/District Election Officer (DM/DEO) S Rajalingam gave necessary guidelines while holding a meeting with the officers concerned/ AROs and officers in-charge appointed for the elections in the Commissionerate Auditorium here on Monday. He said that no negligence of any kind will be tolerated in election work.

He said that to increase the voting percentage in the district, Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) activities should be conducted on a large scale.

"The model booths to be built should be identified and necessary preparations should be made there within time," he said, adding that the teams of Flying Squads and Static

Surveillance Teams (FSTs, SSTs) should work actively for checking.

On the occasion the DEO said that the compliance with the Model Code of Conduct should be ensured at all times. He directed that the officers should go out in the field in view of the elections and visit their respective areas and polling stations along with their police counter parts. He also laid special emphasis on quality and timely resolution of complaints received through Control Room, cVigil etc. He said the officers in charge should hold meetings with their subordinates and inform them about the election related instructions and also should be given necessary training etc.

During the meeting, Additional District Magistrate ADM (City), ADM (Administration), ADM (Finance/Revenue), AROs, officers in charge were present.

PCE among 10 BLW personnel retire

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A total of 10 officers/employees, including Principal Chief Engineer (PCE) Vinod Bampal of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW), who retired in the month of March, were given farewell at a function held at Hall of Fame here on Tuesday. Principal Chief Personnel Officer (PCPO) Janardan Singh gave a respectful and emotional farewell to all the retired employees by presenting them medals and folders and suggested them to invest their accumulated money in government institutions only. He wished the retired employees to stay healthy, remain connected



to social welfare work and spend most of their time with family. With the help of the Accounts and Personnel departments, lump sum payment was made to the retired employees.

On the occasion the Manager of State Bank of India (SBI) located at BLW premises,

in his address, informed the retired employees in detail to invest their accumulated money properly and provided gifts to all the retired employees on the bank's behalf. Along with this, BLW Staff Council also presented gifts to all the retired employees. Senior Personnel Officer

(Headquarters) Raj Kumar Gupta conducted the function. He also proposed the vote of thanks. Joint Secretary of Staff Council Shrikant Yadav, and members Amit Kumar, Santosh Kumar Yadav and Manish Kumar Singh were also present.

In another programme held at the same venue in Administrative Building, PCE Vinod Bampal was given an emotional farewell on the occasion of his retirement. General Manager (GM) Basudev Panda, while presiding over the programme, said Bampal is a unique person who is not only of calm nature but is also very adept in his work and also has a special interest in sports. He

is a good player of golf. He said that the BLW family will always cherish the work done by him as Bampal was an example for the other officers and employees.

Principal Chief Electrical Engineer (PCEE) SK Srivastava, Principal Chief Materials Manager (PCMM) Rajneesh Gupta, Principal Chief Security Commissioner (PCSC) Ranveer Singh Chauhan and Senior Deputy General Manager Vijay along with other department heads and officers were also present and they remembered the time spent together during the tenure of Vinod Bampal apart from wishing the latter a bright and healthy life.

Aarti performed at Sheetla Mata Temple

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The activists of Namami Gange performed the aarti at Siddha Peeth Sheetla Mata Temple located at Dashashwamedh Ghat on the auspicious occasion of Sheetla Ashtami (Basiyaura) here on Tuesday. By offering food and offerings, they prayed to the goddess seeking her blessings for the complete destruction of diseases and long and healthy life of children. They appealed to the devotees and visitors at the temple and ghat to keep the Ganga river clean. The Namami Gange team members



also collected the polythenes and other wastes scattered here and there on the banks of Ganga and threw the same in the dustbins.

Regional convener (Kashi) Rajesh Shukla said that Sheetla is known as the goddess who

cures diseases. "Kalash, soop, broom and neem leaves in hands of goddess are indicators of cleanliness," he said. City coordinators Sarika Gupta and Bina Gupta, Pankaj Aghari, Suman Mishra etc were involved in the event.

Navratri Mela: 30 trains to stop at Maihar station

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Chaitra Navratri Mela is going to be organised in Maihar from April 9. To ensure that passengers do not face any problem or inconvenience during Navratri, Railways has decided to stop 30 trains at Maihar station. Important trains will stop at Maihar railway station for two to five minutes so that passengers can easily reach Maihar during Navratri. This stoppage of mail and express trains will be effective from April 9 to 23.

Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) of North Central Railway (NCR) Himanshu Shekhar Upadhyay

said train number 11055 Lokmanya Tilak (Terminal)-Gorakhpur will now stop at Maihar station till April 22. The train 1059 Lokmanya Tilak (Terminal) Chhapra will stop at Maihar station three days a week from April 9 to 20. The train No. 12669 Chennai Chapra will stop at Maihar station two days a week from April 8 to 22. The train 19051 Valsad-Muzaffarpur weekly from April 13 to 20, the 11045 Kolhapur-Dhanbad from April 12 to 19 and the 15268 Lokmanya Tilak- Raxaul Express will stop at Maihar station from April 8 to 22.

ARRESTED: The police team led by SO Udaipur,

said train number 11055 Lokmanya Tilak (Terminal)-Gorakhpur will now stop at Maihar station till April 22. The train 1059 Lokmanya Tilak (Terminal) Chhapra will stop at Maihar station three days a week from April 9 to 20. The train No. 12669 Chennai Chapra will stop at Maihar station two days a week from April 8 to 22. The train 19051 Valsad-Muzaffarpur weekly from April 13 to 20, the 11045 Kolhapur-Dhanbad from April 12 to 19 and the 15268 Lokmanya Tilak- Raxaul Express will stop at Maihar station from April 8 to 22.

ARRESTED: The police team led by SO Udaipur,

KDA V-C conducts inspection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Vice-Chairman of Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) Madan Singh Garbhal on Monday along with secretary and other senior officers carried out spot inspection of the proposed Bingawa Housing Scheme.

He directed to carry out an integrated planning for the entire area. He directed the senior officers to hear the grievances of people related to this scheme and resolve them on a regular basis. He was accompanied by Secretary Shatrohan Vaishya, Executive Engineer Dharendra Bajpai, OSD Brijendra Upadhya and others.

Official Language Implementation Committee meeting held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A meeting of the Official Language Implementation Committee was held on Tuesday at the Subedarganj headquarters of North Central Railway (NCR) here on Tuesday. During this, General Manager Ravindra Goyal released the quarterly magazine 'Rail Sangam'.

Goyal said it is our constitutional, national and moral responsibility to execute government work in the official language. For its 100 per cent use in the offices located in Hindi speaking areas, it is expected from all of us to work with full commitment in all items of official language implementation. With the advent of new facilities and



technologies, working in Hindi has become increasingly easier and the official language in railways has been greatly promoted in both Hindi and non-Hindi speaking areas.

Goyal directed all the heads of departments and officers that all employees of their departments and offices should

be completely proficient in working in Hindi on computers and the provisions of the Official Language Act and Rules, especially Section 3 (3), should be followed in all the offices. The progress achieved in the use of Hindi or Hindi-English bilingual form in correspondence, notes, dictation

etc should be maintained and efforts should be made to achieve the desired goal.

On NCR receiving the Railway Minister Official Language Trophy this year for the excellent use and dissemination of the official language Hindi, the GM congratulated the officers and employees and said this achievement is the result of the collective and combined contribution of railway employees. Last year, NCR had received the first prize of Railway Minister Official Language Shield.

All the officers informed the GM about the progress in the official language in their respective offices. The meeting was conducted by senior official language officer Chandrabhushan Pandey.

Cash, valuables stolen from house

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Cash and valuables worth lakhs of rupees were stolen from a house in Saraiya village under Gangaghat Kotwali police area of Unnao on Monday night. Miscreants broke into the house and committed the theft when all the family members were fast asleep. The incident came to light when they woke up on Tuesday morning and informed the police. Victim Ravi Yadav said when he along with family members was sleeping on Monday night, miscreants broke into his house through the rooftop and committed the theft. On Tuesday morning, he found the room open and household goods ransacked. He said miscreants had taken away ₹50,000 cash from a box while from another box, which was recovered from a nearby ground, jewellery worth around ₹2.50 lakh

were stolen. He lodged a complaint with the Gangaghat Kotwali police.

Meanwhile, Ashok Bajpai of Sunder Bagia, Ganga Nagar, informed the police that unidentified miscreants stole ₹13,000 cash from his room by unlocking the main gate on Monday night. He lodged complaint with the Gangaghat Kotwali police. Besides, Govind Gupta of Gandhi Nagar runs his sweetmeat shop in Jagnikheda from where miscreants stole ₹10,000 cash, one cylinder, utensils and other goods all worth thousands of rupees on Monday night. He also informed the police.

CAR CATCHES FIRE: Panic prevailed when a moving car suddenly caught fire near Hata Bazar chauraha of Safipur in Unnao on Tuesday. On seeing the fire, car riders somehow saved themselves by jumping from the moving vehicle. The residents poured water and

extinguished the fire but by then the entire car was gutted. According to reports, Sanu of Dada Nagar along with family members was going to attend Iftar party. On the way, his car suddenly caught fire which could be controlled with

the help of residents. Inspector Shyam Narain Singh said he had come about the incident and no casualty was reported.

Meanwhile a youth, neck deep in debt, committed suicide by consuming poisonous substance in Gadankheda village of Hasanganj Kotwali police area of Unnao late on Monday night. He was also a liquor addict, kin informed.

Huts, shops gutted in fire



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Over 60 huts, waste material shops and godowns were gutted in a devastating fire that broke out in Rakhi Mandi, Afimkothi under Raipurwa police station area on Tuesday morning. Flames about 50 feet high surrounded by thick smoke were seen by people up to three kilometres away from the spot. Over a dozen fire tenders along with chief fire officer and the force from South and Central Zone police stations rushed to the spot. The fire which broke out at 8.30 am was brought under control after around three

hours. Thereafter, the work of removing the debris started in the presence of the fire brigade and police.

MISHAP: A woman bus conductor was killed while many other passengers were injured when their vehicle, after colliding with a pickup, fell into a pit near Aliganj of Etah in Farrukhabad on Tuesday morning. The victim identified as Rekha died on the spot. The injured were sent to the hospital. On getting information police and roadways officers rushed to the spot and took stock of the situation. The deceased was a resident of Bholepur, Fatehgarh.

95 Bn of CRPF celebrates 36th foundation day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The 95 Battalion of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) celebrated 36th annual foundation day at its Pahadia premises here on Monday evening. The foundation day is also known as raising day and the same of CRPF is on July 27 but this battalion came into existence on April 1. For any battalion, its annual festival has its own special significance. For the 95 Battalion CRPF family, this day has the same importance as a person's birthday.

Battalion Commandant Anil Kumar Briksh first paid tribute to the martyrs and then took the special guard salute. He congratulated all the personnel and remembered the work of the battalion. Various



games were organised at the CRPF battalion headquarters. A cultural evening was also organised in which the chief guest was Deputy Inspector General of Police, Group Centre Chandauli, Rakesh Kumar. The personnel of the battalion made the atmosphere musical by presenting various types of folk songs and folk dances. On the occa-

sion, president of Srijan Samajik Vikas Nyas Anil Kumar Singh, chief archak (priest) of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Shrikant Mishra, president of Nai Subha Sanstha Dr Ajay Tiwari, Shruti Jain of Bahu Beti Sanstha, teachers and children of Sant Atulanand Convent School and officers and personnel of the battalion were present.

EC appoints special observers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday appointed special observers for administrative, security and expenditure monitoring purposes in several States to ensure a level playing field during the upcoming elections. The special observers — former civil servants with brilliant track record — have been tasked with overseeing the electoral process with strict vigilance, particularly against the backdrop of challenges posed by the influence of money, muscle and misinformation, the poll panel said. Special observers (general and police) have been deployed in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Bihar where the population is more than seven crore and also in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha where the simultaneous elections to the Assemblies are to be held, the poll authority said. Special expenditure observers have



also been deployed in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha, it said. Besides general, expenditure and police observers, the EC had been deploying special observers in poll-going states. Special observers will station themselves at the state headquarters and if needed, tour the areas where sensitivity is high

and necessary coordination is required, the poll panel said. They can seek requisite inputs from time to time from the observers deployed in the parliamentary constituencies, assembly seats or districts, wherever necessary, without interfering in their work. They are also mandated to seek inputs and coordinate with regional heads and nodal offi-

cers of various agencies involved in monitoring activities. The special observers will have a special focus on border areas and work towards plugging the inflow of inducements and also work on seeking inputs on the redressal of grievances of the public. Also on their agenda is quick response to counter false narrative and monitoring of the last 72 hours before the poll, to ensure free and fair elections. While retired IAS Manjit Singh has been deployed as a general special observer in Bihar, former IPS Vivek Dubey has been posted as a police special observer in the state. In Maharashtra, Dharmendra S Gangwar, a retired IAS, has been made general special observer while N K Mishra, a former IPS, is the police special observer. In Uttar Pradesh, retired IAS officer Ajay V Nayak is the general special observer and Manmohan Singh, a former IPS officer, is the police special observer. Similarly, in Andhra

Pradesh, the general special observer is retired IAS officer Ram Mohan Mishra and the police special observer is former IPS Deepak Mishra who was once with the Delhi Police. Former IAS officer Yogendra Tripathi and retired IPS Rajnikant Mishra have been appointed as a general special observer and police special observer, respectively for Odisha. In West Bengal, the general special observer is former IAS Alok Sinha and the police special observer is retired IPS Anil Kumar Sharma. The special expenditure observers for the five states are Rajesh Tuteja in Uttar Pradesh, Himalini Kashyap in Odisha, B Murali Kumar in Karnataka, Neena Nigam in Andhra Pradesh and B R Balakrishnan in Tamil Nadu. All are former Indian Revenue Service officers. Lok Sabha elections are being held in seven phases between April 19 and June 1. The counting of votes will be held on June 4.

EC issues transfer order of two IGs, eight DMs, 12 SPs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday issued transfer orders for two inspectors general of police, eight district magistrates and 12 superintendents of police in five States as part of its “regular review” for the Lok Sabha elections. The decision was taken by the commission during a meeting chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar along with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, the poll panel said. The elections were announced by the commission on March 16 and will be held in seven phases between April 18 and June 1. Counting of votes is scheduled for June 4. The Election Commission (EC) said that all the transferred officials have been asked to hand over their



charge to their immediate junior officers. Those shunted out will not be assigned any election duty till the completion of the Lok Sabha polls, it said. The respective state governments have been directed to send a panel of names of Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service officers to the commission and those short-listed will be appointed in the place of those transferred. Among those transferred are the inspectors general of police Guntur Range, Andhra

Pradesh, and Central Range, Odisha. The other officers are the district magistrate (DM) of Udalgiri in Assam; the DM and the superintendent of police (SP) of Bhojpur district, and the DM and the SP of Nawada district in Bihar. The SP of Deoghar in Jharkhand, the DMs of Cuttack and Jagatsinghpur, the SPs of Angul, Behrampur, Khurda, Rourkela and the DCP (Cuttack) in Odisha have also been transferred. In Andhra Pradesh, the DMs of Krishna, Ananthapuram and Tirupati districts and the SPs of Prakasam, Palnadu, Chittoor, Ananthapuram and Nellore districts have been shunted out. Separately, the EC has asked the Jharkhand chief secretary to fill up vacant posts of SP (Rural) Ranchi, deputy inspector general of police (Palamu) and IGP (Dumka) by sending a panel of names of officials to it.

ICG Samudra Paheredar makes port call at Vietnam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) Pollution control vessel Samudra Paheredar, with an integral helicopter, made a port call at Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam on Tuesday as part of its ongoing overseas deployment to Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, Coast Guard officials said here. Giving details, they said during the three-day visit, the crew will engage in professional interactions focusing on marine pollution response, maritime search and rescue, and maritime law enforcement. The activities will also include cross-deck training, subject

matter expert exchanges, sports events and passage exercise with the Vietnam Coast Guard (VCG). The visit not only aims to strengthen ties between the ICG and VCG, but also showcases India's indigenous ship-building capabilities. In addition, 25 National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets aboard the vessel will participate in a Walkathon and Beach Clean-up activities. Since 2015, the ICG and VCG have an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which institutionalised the cooperative engagements between the two maritime agencies. This overseas deployment is a testimony to ICG's commitment to bolster bilateral rela-

tionships and enhance international cooperation with friendly countries. The visit of the ICG specialised vessel to these countries is in pursuance with India ASEAN Initiative for marine pollution announced during ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus in Cambodia in 2022. The deployment of Samudra Paheredar to the ASEAN region reflects India's shared concern and resolve towards marine pollution, promoting safety and security through maritime cooperation. Prior to Ho Chi Minh, the vessel had visited Manila, Philippines to demonstrate a seamless continuation of diplomatic maritime engagements in the ASEAN region.

Must focus on changing nature of warfare: Rajnath to forces

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday here urged the armed forces to be prepared to meet the challenge of fast changing nature of warfare and stressed upon the present complex world situation which effects everyone globally. Making this assertion while addressing the Army Commanders' Conference, he said “Unconventional and asymmetric warfare, including hybrid war will be part of the future conventional wars. Cyber, information, communication, trade and finance have all become an inseparable part of future conflicts. This necessitates that Armed Forces will have to keep all these facets in consideration while planning and formu-



lating strategies.” Referring to the situation on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) facing China, Rajnath expressed full confidence that while troops are standing firm, the ongoing talks for peaceful resolution will continue and disengagement and de-escalation, is the way forward. The defence minister complimented the efforts of Border Roads

Organisation (BRO), which has led to the quantum improvement of road communication in the borders both Western and Northern, while working under difficult conditions. Referring to the situation along the Western borders, he complimented the Indian Army's response to cross border terrorism, however the proxy war by the adversary continues. Western borders face Pakistan while Northern borders face China. Rajnath stressed upon the technological advancement taking place in every sphere of our life and applauded the Armed Forces for aptly incorporating them. He appreciated the Army's efforts to develop niche technologies in collaboration with civil industries, including premier

educational institutions and thereby progressing towards the aim of ‘Modernisation through Indigenisation’ or ‘Atamnirbharta’. He emphasised that a regular interface of Armed Forces with the emerging technologies is a must. The Army Commanders' Conference, an apex level biannual event, was conducted in virtual mode on March 28 and thereafter in physical mode on April one and two. During the event, Indian Army's apex leadership comprehensively deliberated upon all aspects of existing security scenarios, situation along the borders, in the hinterland and challenges for the present security apparatus. In addition, the conference also focused on issues pertaining to organisational restructuring, logistics,

administration, human resource management, modernisation through indigenisation, induction of Niche technologies and assessment of impact of the various existing global situations. Rajnath said issues related to “Defence diplomacy, indigenisation, information warfare, defence infrastructure and force modernisation should always be deliberated upon in such a forum. Doctrinal changes whenever required should be made to make the Armed Forces future ready. The recommendation and suggestions made by the senior leadership in such like forum as Commanders Conference should be deliberated upon and be taken to a logical conclusion with mid-course review and modification if required.”

Kharge attacks BJP over state of railways

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday attacked the BJP Government on the state of the Railways, alleging that it has “ravaged” the Railways by destroying its finance, safety, efficiency and affordability. Kharge claimed that his party will revitalise the national carrier as a growth engine for India. In a social media post, Kharge said, “The Railways (is) ravaged under the Modi Government! Trains, getting ‘trained’ only for Self Promotion.” “Behind the 3D Selfie Points of Modi ji and the event-driven green flags for Vande Bharat, lies the story of absolute apathy, complete neglect and deliberate emaciation of the Railways by the BJP,” he said. Kharge claimed the Railways is still the lifeline for crores of Indians, but the Modi govern-



ment “has destroyed its finances, safety, efficiency and affordability.” “No wonder, the number of mail and express trains that were punctual declined from 79 percent in 2012-13 to 69.23 percent in 2018-19 ! (CAG 2023). The Congress party will revitalise the Railways as a growth engine for India,” the Congress chief said.

Posing seven questions, he asked why has the BJP government not filled more than three lakh vacancies in the Railways. “Is the BJP against SC, ST, OBC, EWS people who may avail reservation in India's largest public sector employer,” he asked. “Why has the average price per passenger per kilometre dou-

bled from 0.32 paise per passenger-km in 2013-14 (UPA) to 0.66 paise per passenger-km in 2023? Is it not true that more than 100,000 train-related deaths were reported between 2017 and 2021? (NCRB). This does not include the deadly Balasore accident (2023) which took the precious lives of almost 300 people,” Kharge said. “Is it not true that the Kavach Railway Safety anti-collision technology only covers 2.13% of the network? Why did the Modi Government withdraw the concessions for senior citizens, women and children, in an apathetic manner during the COVID pandemic? Due to this revocation, the Modi Government looted Rs 2242 crores in a single year,” the Congress president asked. According to the CAG, he claimed that only 0.7 percent funds out of Rs 58,459 crore were spent on track renewal and asked why it was so.

This is the reason, Kharge claimed, why the much-hyped Vande Bharat high speed trains have an average speed of just 83 kmph instead of 180 kmph claimed by the Modi government. “Is it not true that the move to merge the Railway Budget was a way to cut its funds through the back door? Is it not true that Modi Government has unveiled a grand plan of Privatisation of the Indian Railways and incremental privatisation has already begun,” he also asked. According to the National Railway Plan (2021) of the Modi government, the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha claimed “all freight trains will be privatised by 2031, along with 30 percent of the 750 railway stations.” “All profit-making AC coaches will also be privatised. Only loss-making second class passenger trains will be left with the railways,” he said.

EC ropes in Ayushmann to urge youngsters to vote

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Actor Ayushmann Khurrana has been roped in by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to urge the youngsters to vote in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The 39-year-old actor features in the ECI's campaign video that encourages the youth to exercise their franchise in the upcoming elections. Khurrana, known for critically-acclaimed films such as “Andhadhun”, “Dream Girl”, “Bareilly Ki Barfi” and “Dum Lagha Ke Haisha”, said it is imperative that the youth participate in deciding the future of the country. “Everyone must vote and be conscious citizens by participating in the process of nation-building. The power to choose



the leaders who will represent the country, represent our needs in the Parliament rests with us.” “Every vote counts and every vote is important. Voting is a symbol of empowerment in a democratic nation like ours,” Khurrana said in a statement. Santosh Ajmera, director of Voter Education at ECI, New Delhi, praised the actor for supporting the ECI's campaign,

aimed at addressing urban and youth apathy in the electoral participation. “The film, while a commentary on individual behaviour whereby voting day is often considered as a holiday with hundreds of excuses offered for not to vote, gives out a beautiful message and a single reason for why one should vote. “Ayushmann Khurrana's act is highly convincing and impactful and resonates well with his followers, mostly the younger generation. ECI has tried to utilise Ayushmann's potential and reach to inspire and mobilize youngsters towards voting, as an important democratic exercise & duty towards the future,” he said. The Lok Sabha polls are scheduled to be held in seven phases from April 19. The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.

Congress complains to EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday complained to the Election Commission against BJP's advertisement campaign, alleging it was maligning the Opposition party through the use of cropped and distorted videos, and urged the poll body to take immediate action against the authors and issue instructions for recall. The Congress also filed a complaint against what it called the BJP's “malicious attempts” to link the Congress campaign to billionaire financier George Soros. AICC General Secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh said, “The party lodged a complaint against the BJP's repeated and malicious use of cropped and distorted videos to malign the INC. The ECI was requested to take immediate action against the authors of this low-level campaign, as well as issue instructions for its recall.”

A delegation of party leaders comprising Salman Khurshid, Pawan Khera and Gurdeep Sappal on Tuesday met the Election Commission and handed over a memorandum of their complaints to them. “The Congress Party lodged a complaint against the BJP's malicious attempts to link the Congress campaign to George Soros,” Ramesh said. “This complaint covers other examples of false propaganda that target the INC as well. Not only are these materials patently false, they are also mala fide and knowingly defamatory. The ECI was requested to take immediate action against the authors of this low-level campaign, as well as issue instructions for its recall,” he said in a post on X. The opposition party has also complained against the alleged violation of the model code of conduct for elections in Andhra Pradesh, where assembly and Lok Sabha polls are held together. It claimed posters and advertisements of

state schemes were still bearing the photos of the state chief minister. The Congress submitted its position that no welfare beneficiaries should be denied their benefits during the course of the election in the state of Andhra Pradesh, a position which the Election Commission appreciated, he said. “In violation of the Model Code of Conduct, state scheme advertisements in Andhra Pradesh still bore the photograph of the Chief Minister until recently. The Congress had demanded an immediate stop to this practice, and the Election Commission acted on it, ordering the withdrawal of all posters. It requested the Congress Party to notify it of any remaining posters in the state,” Ramesh said. He said the Congress Party sought a clarification on the expenditure allocation and division between the candidate and the party for expenses on campaign materials.

Only five per cent lithium ion batteries get recycled

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Only a mere 5 per cent of lithium-ion batteries are currently undergoing recycling and reuse, while a staggering 95 per cent are disposed in landfills and incineration, posing grave environmental and safety concerns in the country. As India stands as the 3rd largest generator of e-waste globally, urgent and substantial efforts are imperative to combat this mounting crisis. The dominance of the informal sector in the Lithium ion batteries e-waste scenario has just exacerbated adverse environmental and economic implications. Flagging the issue, Rajesh Kumar Pathak, Secretary of the Technology Development Board (TDB) under the Union Science and Technology Ministry said, “India is 3rd in the world in terms of e-waste generation and significant efforts are required to curb the issue. TDB supporting this initiative would help to engage informal recyclers to connect with



formal recyclers thereby contributing towards a circular economy.” He was sharing his concerns at an event held to ink a pact with Remine India Private Limited, for setting up a commercial plant for recycling of Li Battery and E-Waste using indigenous technology at Eldeco, SIIDCUL Industrial Area in Sitarganj in district Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand with TDB pledging substantial financial assistance.

Amidst escalating imports of e-waste, propelled by the proliferation of lithium-ion batteries in portable electronics, electric vehicles, and renewable energy systems, the imperative for recycling initiatives looms large. The potential for value creation through metal retrieval from spent batteries underscores the urgency for sustainable solutions. With India's lithium-ion battery recycling market poised to surge to USD 14.89 billion

by 2030, the need for robust, environmentally friendly recycling methods is paramount. In this pursuit, the concerted efforts of stakeholders to address the burgeoning battery waste crisis and mitigate its adverse impacts on both the environment and economy cannot be overstated. India is one of the world's largest importers of lithium-ion batteries, importing them from China, Japan, and South Korea. In 2022, it imported 617 million units of lithium-ion batteries for USD 1.8 billion. Through the agreement, TDB has pledged a financial assistance of Rs 7.5 crores out of the total project cost of Rs 15 crores, marking a significant stride towards sustainable development and environmental stewardship. The funded project entails the establishment of a commercial plant for the recycling of Li-ion batteries and e-waste, leveraging indigenous technology developed by the Centre for Materials for Electronics Technology

(CMET), Hyderabad. Recognized as a matter of national significance, the efficient recycling of Li-ion batteries serves as a vital source of secondary raw materials for cell manufacturing within the country. The escalating imports of e-waste stemming from the disposal of spent Lithium-ion Batteries (LIBs) are driven by their growing utilization in portable electronics, electric vehicles, and global renewable energy storage systems. Efficient and environmentally friendly recycling methods are imperative to address the escalating issue of battery waste, mitigate migrant supply side risks related to critical elements, and reduce carbon footprints. With informal recyclers often employing rudimentary and environmentally damaging methods to extract valuable materials from e-waste, the result is heightened pollution, soil and water contamination, and health hazards for workers and surrounding communities, pointed out environmentalists.

Tumultuous times

Imran Khan gets relief in Toshakhana corruption case; no reprieve for Pakistani politics



In what can be termed as a minor victory for cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan, he has got some relief from the court in the ongoing corruption case against him. In a dramatic turn of events, the former Pakistani Prime Minister, Imran Khan, and his wife, Bushra Bibi, have had their 14-year jail sentence suspended by the court. Imran Khan received a reprieve as the High Court of Islamabad suspended the sentence imposed on him and his wife, Bushra Bibi, in the Toshakhana corruption case. Initially sentenced on January 31 by an accountability court, the couple challenged the verdict in the Islamabad High Court. The Islamabad High Court has granted temporary relief to the couple by suspending their sentences and providing them bail. The decision, made by the Islamabad High Court, has stirred considerable controversy and reignited discussions about the state of governance and accountability in Pakistan. The case revolved around allegations that Imran Khan and his wife had received luxury gifts from foreign dignitaries during his tenure as Pakistan's Prime Minister and did not deposit them in the state treasury. The decision to suspend the jail term has sparked intense debate across Pakistan. Supporters of Imran Khan view it as a victory for justice, citing a lack of substantial evidence and alleging political vendetta by the ruling party. On the other hand, critics argue that the move undermines the credibility of Pakistan's anti-corruption efforts and raises questions about the role of the judiciary. This development comes at a crucial juncture for Pakistan, with the country grappling with a myriad of economic, social, and political challenges. The new regime that came to power is still gasping for legitimacy. The popular perception is that the election was a farce and Imran remains popular though behind bars. He was ousted from office two years back when he fell out of favour with the Pakistan army, which holds significant influence as the kingmaker in the country. Imran campaigned for his party in the general elections but was put behind bars just before the elections and remained there throughout the election while Pakistan Muslim League (N) won the elections and Shehbaz Sharif was elected as the prime minister of the country. The popular perception is that it is the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf of Imran Khan has a large support base and Imran remains a popular leader. With the court verdict now going in his favour Imran may take on the ruling party more aggressively. While Imran Khan's supporters see it as a vindication of his leadership and a blow to his political adversaries, PML(N) is likely to intensify its efforts to dig deeper into Imran's follies. Moreover, the role of the military in Pakistani politics continues to be a subject of speculation and concern. Amidst these challenges, Pakistan faces an uncertain future. A lot needs to be done to ensure good governance and accountability in the country. As Pakistan navigates through these turbulent times, the need for strong and principled leadership has never been more pressing.

PICTALK



A herd of wild Asiatic elephants seen on the outskirts of Guwahati

PTI

Role of parents in a child's formative years

The first five years of a child's life are termed 'golden period,' a pivotal phase where parents play a monumental role in shaping its future

The first five years of a child's life are a unique opportunity for parents to nurture and guide their child's development so that they can realise their full potential and become the best version of themselves. This period is often referred to as the "golden period," a critical and transformative phase that lays the foundation for all their future development, learning, and well-being. Let's understand why. Unraveling Synaptic Pruning Every baby is born with about 100 billion brain cells which are largely not connected with each other. As the baby comes into the world and experiences the world through sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feel, these brain cells start firing and connecting with each other at an astounding rate to form "synapses". But, starting around the age of 2, the brain wants to be efficient and it starts pruning off brain connections (synapses) that it thinks are not strong or important enough by a process called synaptic pruning. It's almost as if the child starts losing their talents even before they have a chance to



fully develop them. **Pivotal Role Of Parents in Early Childhood** For parents, it's crucial to understand the significance of synaptic pruning in the early years of a child's brain development, and it highlights the importance of providing rich, engaging learning experiences for their baby right from birth. By offering diverse and holistic learning experiences - that includes physical play, creative stimulation - parents can help ensure that the most beneficial synapses are strengthened in their child's brain, setting the foundation for a lifetime of talents and skill development. **Sooner, the Better** During the first five years the brain is exceptionally malleable, and experiences leave a lasting impact on cognitive, emotional, and social development. Maximising positive experiences and interactions during this critical phase

sets the foundation for a child's future success in various aspects of life. The younger the baby, the faster they learn, and wider the window for them to explore their fullest potential. **Practical Tips for Parents:** **1.Quality Interactions:** Your young baby or toddler is capable of amazing feats, much beyond your imaginations! Treat them not as a helpless being, but as a fearless and curious learner! **2.Deliberate Stimulations:** Create deliberate opportunities to provide your baby or child with the right stimulations to grow and develop their physical, intellectual, social, cognitive, creative, logical, and problem solving skills through play. **3.Consistent Activity:** Get into an easy-to-follow routine, where you are not stressing out daily about researching and reading on what to do with your child, but can follow a done-for-you program that tells you what activities to do with your child on a daily basis for their all-round development. **4.Meaningful Playtime:** Try and give many opportunities to your child to play with kids

of their own age to help develop compassion, confidence, social skills and even a higher IQ. It is as important for them to interact with other kids as it is for them to interact with adults, and we can't neglect one over the other! **5.No Screen time:** Yes, it's easy to feed your child while watching a video on mobile! But, screen time may lead to long term impact on your child's brain development, and may also lead to speech delays, so avoid screen time as much as you can! Bill Gates has said that the first five years of a child essentially shape how the next 80 years turn out to be. Parents thus have a huge responsibility towards their children to understand the significance of synaptic pruning and recognise this golden window of opportunity. Through love, engagement, and thoughtful nurturing, parents can contribute to the flourishing of strong neural connections, laying the groundwork for a bright and promising future. *(The writer is Co-founder, Raising Superstars; views are personal)*



RAGHAV HIMATSingKA

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Political seesaw in Nepal

As Nepal navigates through these uncertain times, the future of its leadership and the direction of its governance hang in a delicate balance

Many Nepalese see second time Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane as a future Prime Minister. With Bell as its election symbol it became the fourth largest party on debut in politics. Bereft of ideological orientation and any macro vision, it has focused on development and eradication of corruption. Ironically, Lamichhane is himself being investigated for fraud a second time—the first time he had to step down due to dual passport and citizenship issues. Nepali Congress had blocked Parliamentary proceedings setting a deadline of 31 March for an impartial parliamentary probe and demanding his resignation for alleged fraud in a cooperative fund. He was questioned by an inhouse panel of lawmakers where he denied the charge. Both Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda and former PM KP Oli have ruled out the probe and his resignation. Lamichhane captured the people's imagination as a Galaxy 4K TV anchor who championed the crusade over corruption in his signature show, Seedha Kura Janata Ko Sang (Straight Talk with People). He is youthful, charismatic and a popular leader who is going places. A Janata Samajwadi Party politburo member, whose party is in the five-party coalition Government told me yesterday in Pokhara, : "Lamichhane ko dui ta haath ma laddu chha (Lamichhane has sweets in both hands), implying he's the new kingmaker sought by the opposition NC to break the coalition and return to power. The NC is believed to have offered him the premiership before Prachanda and Oli had secured him. Will Lamichhane take a break till investigations - if ordered - are completed? Or will the case lead to another political crisis? But the assault on corruption is absolute. The former Maoist leader and Prachanda confidante KB Mahara was rearrested and released on bail in the 61 kg gold scam in which his son Rahul is already in jail. Many distinguished leaders are in and out of jail. There is a



money and name trail with Chinese deeply embedded. The Bhutan refugee scam had powerful politicians including former NC defence minister, Balkrishna Khand, recently released on bail and Maoist Top Bahadur Raymaji still in custody. Many others including a "prominent lady" are linked to it. Min Bahadur Gurung, the owner of the biggest departmental store chain, Bhat Bhateni, was in jail recently. And last month, Nepal's only billionaire and NC lawmaker, Binod Chaudhary, was investigated over Bansari land scam while his brother Arun was briefly jailed. The names of two former PMs have been linked to Lalita Niwas land scam. Another former PM's name is whispered about a tea estate in Jhapa. Both Prachanda and Lamichhane are attacking corruption with utmost vigour China was last month delighted with the Left alliance returning to power which Communist leader Oli insist-ed was not Beijing's handiwork but "ours" - "we brought about the change". Despite the perceived pro-China Government, its leaders are moving very slowly on BRI and the utilisation of Rs 60 bn pledged by President Xi Jinping during his maiden visit in 2019. Last week Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Narayan Kaji Shreshtha was on a nine-day visit to Beijing (UMI's Bishnu Poudyel was also in China)



THE FORMER MAOIST LEADER AND PRACHANDA CONFIDANT KB MAHARA WAS REARRESTED AND RELEASED ON BAIL IN THE 61 KG GOLD SCAM IN WHICH HIS SON RAHUL IS ALREADY IN JAIL

and met his counter part Wang Yi. They reaffirmed to "very soon sign the BRI implementation plan" which is according to Chinese procedure, is needed for executing projects. When NC's former Foreign Minister Prakash Mahat signed the BRI Framework Agreement in 2017, Nepal had worked on 35 projects which were toned down to nine. The hesitation on part of both China and Nepal and the consequential delay is due to defining the funding modality. Kathmandu wants aid and grants or , concessional, not commercial, loans from China. Nepal has joined only China's Global Development Initiative, not Global Security or Global Civilisation Initiatives. After an agonising four years, Kathmandu subscribed to US's Millennium Challenge Corporation - Nepal Compact in 2022. BRI is intended to balance MCC. Nepali strategists have modified Prithvi Narayan Shah's dictum — Nepal is a yam between two stones (India and China) to three stones (India, China and US). Till about 2010, US Embassy in Delhi would say: "It will take the lead on Nepal from India." Over time, that has changed. I've been living in Lame Ahal, a predominantly Gurung village below the Kathmandu-Pokhara Highway which China, its original builder, is four-laning for the last two years throwing up dust, slush and anger.

Chinese engineers from Wayuan Highway and Bridge Construction Company with Nepalese labour are working at snail's pace. Pokhara-ites were telling me it hadn't rained for two years. Many village taps had dried up. Then suddenly last week Pokhara valley was deluged in rain, causing havoc for road and air traffic from Pokhara. It is an unseasonable phenomenon and climate-change related. India is still the favourite whipping boy. When I visited Bhat Bhateni and observed in audible voice: everything is Chinese" the lady at the counter responded: "India does not give us anything". On my daily trek across Seti river, I sometimes hear the word 'thug' about India. All of this is compulsive and imagined anti-India sentiment which will not go away anytime soon. Prachanda is already talking about switching coalitions again. This tactic keeps coalition partners with him. NC is trying to wean away JSP and Unified Socialists led by Upendra Yadav and Madhav Nepal who was once called Madhav India to revive Democratic alliance keeping the current coalition on a short fuse and Nepal unstable. *(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WATER SCARCITY

Madam — Acute water shortage is a fact of life in most Indian cities. The water crisis in Bengaluru adds to the plethora of apocalyptic tales of water scarcity. In Bengaluru, the cost of tanker services surged, impacting upscale and residential areas alike. The issue of water scarcity and the lack of access to clean water in many parts of the world. water is frequently regarded as a commodity rather than an essential human right. The absence of water could be perilous in alternative scenarios like urban fires due to which firefighters are struggling to encounter increased challenges in reaching a blaze in our densely populated country. Declaring water as a human right can be seen as problematic because it doesn't address the underlying issue of access and distribution. While it's crucial for those who lack it, simply declaring it a right without addressing systematic issues could be seen as a superficial solution. In 2023, the sale of bottled water in India was worth about 403 billion rupees. The growth slowed down mainly because fewer people in rural areas were buying bottled water. It takes about five times more water to make a plastic bottle than the amount of water it can hold inside.

Palak Rohra | Ujjain

GET RID OF WASTE

Madam — The common practice for household refuse disposal in rural areas is to dump solid waste openly in backyard gardens or open spaces. Such indiscriminate disposal is an environmental hazard and can threaten human health and safety. Solid waste that is improperly disposed of can result in several problems. It can create a breeding ground for pathogenic microorganisms and vectors of disease and cause a public nuisance due to its unsightliness and bad smell. It can cause contamination of surrounding soil, groundwater and surface water, and it can also create fire hazards, and physical hazards and have poisoning effects (from pesticides and insecticides).

Empowering women in science



Apropos news article "Need more women representation in science" published on April 02, this is my response. The underrepresentation of women in STEM fields is a multifaceted challenge, stemming from societal biases and a lack of support within professional circles. Recognising this disparity, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in India has launched the 'Women in Science and Engineering-KIRAN (WISE-KIRAN)' scheme, a commendable effort to empower women across diverse backgrounds in scientific pursuits. WISE-KIRAN's com-

prehensive approach addresses various hurdles faced by women in STEM, from societal stereotypes to limited resources and mentorship opportunities. By offering scholarships, mentorship programmes, and capacity-building workshops, this initiative aims to foster a supportive environment for women in scientific careers. Moreover, schemes like WIDUSHI and CURIE further bolster women's participation by supporting retired and non-permanent women researchers and enhancing research infrastructure in women's institutions. Additionally, initiatives like Vigyan Jyoti play a crucial role in sparking young girls' interest in STEM disciplines, paving the way for a more inclusive and diverse scientific community. These efforts signify a step forward in breaking down barriers and fostering a culture of inclusivity, ultimately driving innovation and progress in STEM fields.

Vishal Kumar | Delhi

However, these problems can be avoided by using appropriate management techniques. For all waste management issues, your role should be to engage community members and families in awareness of the solid waste problems in their area and try to change their behaviour. In doing so, it should be possible to have a clean, attractive and sustainable environment. Proper management of e-waste will help your community prevent communicable diseases and sustainably safeguard the environment.

Shanthi Ramanathan | Mumbai

STRUGGLE OF INDIAN CRICKETERS

Madam — Apropos news article "New pace sensation Mayank who found inspiration in jet planes" published on April 01, this is my response. There is no dearth of Mayank Yadav's like stories in Indian cricket. Many past and young cricketers who have made it to the IPL or Indian team have seen their share of struggles in their lives and come from humble beginnings. MS Dhoni, Bumrah, T. Natarajan, Mukesh Kumar, Praveen Kumar—the list is endless.

Since we have a fascination for fast bowling hence any bowler who bowls at faster than 150 kmph delivery gets into the limelight. Mayank, who did not have proper cricketing shoes 7 years ago and could not even get proper meals and his father's small commodity business collapsed during Covid. But the Sonnet club in Delhi took great care of him and nurtured him. There is no doubt that by clocking 156 kmph delivery he has become the talk of the town but he should not forget that before him there was Umran Malik who bowled at 157 kmph delivery and even played for India too, but then his inconsistency did him in. So Mayank Yadav would do well to sharpen his other aspects of the game and try to be consistent if he wants to play for India. Because only bowling fast will not fetch him the desired results. He has to develop in swing, outswing, slower, cutter all kinds of variations.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

TIME TO ROOT OUT CORRUPTION

Create an environment that ensures fairness, justice and integrity in governance



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

In recent months there has been one topic that has consistently grabbed headlines in Indian media and that is 'Corruption'. Huge scams, central agencies probes, public protests and anti-corruption agitations have kept the topic alive in all sections of media, Government quarters and in public and private discussions. There has been enormous pressure on the Government by civil rights activists to make a strong anti-corruption Law and implement it aggressively across the country. However, in this whole struggle, we tend to forget the fact that the issue of corruption cannot be dealt with by activism and political awareness alone. Because laws and regulations cannot deter humans from indulging in follies of character and moral values. It is like pruning or cutting the stems and branches that will sprout again and proliferate in more directions. Such laws can surely deter people in high public offices from indulging in blatant acts of bribery, fraud and corruption but it cannot root out the evil itself.

So what is it that makes man corrupt? Is it power, status, wealth or lack of these that makes him so? The genesis of corruption is not to be found in any external circumstance, it actually lies in the psyche or the character of the human soul. It begins with a desire that tempts one to have more, acquire more and grab more money, assets, power and fame in order to gain happiness.



Once it starts, it creates a chain of vicious circles that keeps feeding itself with more desire and indulgence. This blind chase is then supported by the temporary feeling of being high and powerful which is followed by emptiness, insecurity and despair that further drives a person to commit such acts of corruption. All this begins from the fundamental ignorance about the true identity of self. Because we believe our self-worth depends on money, role, status, fame or authority we strive to create more identities based on that. With time these fabricated means of self-worth crumble and fall apart and in that fear, we put in all effort to strengthen and protect these false support systems because we feel we are nobody if all these identities are taken away.

From a spiritual perspective, it is said that vices like greed, ego, lust, anger and attachment are all born out of body consciousness i.e. the false identification of the self with one's physical image, role and assets. It is this ignorance and vices that begin to corrupt the soul and everything that comes from a corrupt soul will be tainted i.e. its thoughts, feelings, actions and habits. In that sense, one can say that today almost all human souls have become corrupt to some degree. Hence we must understand that corruption is a soul-deep malady and it can be remedied only by spiritual awareness and empowerment. We must awaken to our true selves and live by our original values of peace, purity, love and joy.

When we look inward and become aware of our true identity and innate qualities, we begin to express and experience them in our lives naturally. A person who empowers himself this way experiences contentment in life. Such a person will never fall into the trap of sensory attractions and desires as it's only when we are disconnected from our innate self we feel empty inside and get attracted to external things to feel happy or worthy. In the soul consciousness stage, we are naturally aware of our virtues and we also understand the law of cause and effect — the law of karma. Remember! A soul that is aware of its spiritual identity will never indulge in corrupt actions as it knows that they will lead to suffering and degradation. This realisation and experience will free us from corruption.

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

Kangana Ranaut: From stardom to political aspirations

Kangana's evolution from a silver screen sensation to a grassroots politician unfolds against a backdrop of controversy and high expectations

In line with the 19th-century Victorian realist philosophy of 'Chance and destiny' championed by Thomas Hardy, Kangana Ranaut's journey from an obscure village in Himachal Pradesh to the glamorous world of Bollywood and now to the realm of politics seems like an unimaginable dream turned into reality. Her indomitable spirit and unwavering determination have propelled her from testing her luck in the film industry in Mumbai to considering a political career in her hilly home state.

Kangana's ascent from the nondescript village of Bhambala in Mandi district is a testament to her sheer willpower and commitment. Despite facing resistance from her family, who initially



K S TOMAR

opposed her choice to pursue a career in Bollywood, Kangana forged ahead, overcoming financial struggles and the harsh realities of life in Mumbai. Her journey was fraught with challenges, with her even lacking a proper place to live at times. However, her training under renowned theatre director Arvind Gaur proved to be a turning point, honing her skills and shaping her into the formidable talent she is today.

Transitioning from the glitz and glamour of Bollywood to the rough and tumble world of politics is no small feat. Kangana's decision to enter active politics, particularly by contesting the Mandi Lok Sabha seat, signifies a significant shift in her career trajectory. Despite her lack of experience in politics, her unwavering support for Hindutva ideology and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, coupled with her association with the RSS, has garnered her the BJP ticket, setting the stage for a potentially dramatic political showdown.

However, Kangana's foray into politics is not without its challenges. Unlike the scripted narratives of films, political reality demands a different set of skills and commitments. Voters in Mandi will expect her to prioritise their needs and concerns, necessitating her to establish a permanent presence in the constituency. Her inexperience in political manoeuvring will require her to work doubly hard to earn the trust and support of the electorate, notwithstanding



the backing of the BJP machinery and the charisma of Prime Minister Modi. The bypoll for the Mandi Lok Sabha seat held on October 30, 2021, saw the Congress candidate securing victory, largely due to the sympathy factor following the demise of Virbhadra Singh. However, with the political landscape shifting and the Congress party grappling with internal strife, Kangana's entry into the fray could potentially tilt the scales in her favour.

Kangana's nomination for the Mandi seat on her 37th birthday was seen as a fitting tribute to her unwavering commitment to her ideological beliefs and her determination to serve her birthplace. However, her propensity for controversy, evident in her social media posts and public statements, has garnered both acclaim and criticism. From her remarks on the farmer's agitation to her views on India's independence, Kangana has courted controversy, often finding herself embroiled in heated debates and facing backlash from various quarters.

As she embarks on this new chapter in her life, Kangana will need to shed her filmy persona and connect with the grassroots workers and voters on a more personal level. Building rapport with the electorate and demonstrating a genuine understanding of their needs will be crucial for her success as a politician.

In conclusion, Kangana Ranaut's journey from Bollywood to politics is a testament to her resilience and determination. While her transition may be fraught with challenges, her unwavering commitment to her beliefs and her desire to serve her people could pave the way for a successful political career. As she navigates this new terrain, Kangana will need to draw upon her strengths and adapt to the demands of the political arena, all while staying true to her roots and convictions.

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

Political chameleons: A threat to democracy



SUKHDEV SINGH

The new political entrants like AAP, promising a departure from traditional politics, have faltered, mirroring the same patterns of opportunism and non-performance



The presence of political parties in democracies makes the peoples' representation in governance social but organised and helps the democracies work. Since the representation is through individuals, the politics of party switching by one or more leaders and/or followers is a common phenomenon causing the defeat and victory of the respective individual leaders and political parties. If party switching is guided by political ideologies, development policies and other policy programmes or by the change in leadership affecting the core ideology of the party or the constitutional spirit of the governance, it can be a healthy corrective exercise.

But if influenced by the strategic local individual factors concerning the prospects of the political growth of an individual involving the chances of winning elections, gaining ministerial and other positions and gaining influence, then it is a matter of serious concern for a democracy, people and a nation.

Another matter of a similar concern is the growing trust deficit of the people in the political class and cynicism about human integrity and political class due to the gap between what the political leaders say and do.

Indian democracy is under threat from both these political phenomena more than ever in its history: the major political parties in power promise during the elections without delivering on the ground after winning the elections. If this were not enough, the party-switching game driven by individual strategic interests is more frequent and unhesitant than ever in its history. What is more worrisome is that the political parties are themselves active players in the game of poaching turncoats who willingly show them white today, yellow tomorrow and saffron the next day. Neither the individual leaders nor the political parties have any qualms about the mismatch in the ideologies and policies; the only



ANOTHER MATTER OF CONCERN IS THE GROWING TRUST DEFICIT AMONG THE PEOPLE IN THE POLITICAL CLASS AND CYNICISM ABOUT HUMAN INTEGRITY, STEMMING FROM THE DISPARITY BETWEEN WHAT POLITICAL LEADERS SAY AND WHAT THEY ACTUALLY DO

motivation is winning elections to remain in power; Neither the individual leaders nor the political parties have any worry that the party switching would impact governance, confidence of people, representation and policy-making. It underscores the fluidity of political allegiances, party politics and validity of manifestoes.

The recent happenings during the last a few years in Punjab are a case in study. Disillusioned about the working of the traditional political groupings, people in Punjab elected the first time leaders of a new political party AAP challenging the traditional party system, but finding AAP too in the footsteps of the traditional political parties has led them to a new level of disillusionment.

Rather than planning a serious engagement to fulfil the poll promises and work for people, a continued engagement in blame game and with winning elections following the modus operandi of the conventional political parties has created despondency rather than enthusiasm. Instead of fielding their own members, however raw they may be, or searching from the academia and NGOs their probable candidates in elections at different levels, they have been relying on induction of the traditional leaders from other traditional parties to contest in their name without bothering to check their ideology, previous political training and working behaviour.

Anurag Sheetal of Jalandhar left BJP to contest assembly elections in 2022 on AAP ticket but has now left AAP to join BJP again. His rival as a congress candidate in the 2022 assembly elections,

Sushil Kumar Rinku was inducted in AAP in the presence of Arvind Kejriwal to contest parliamentary by-election from Jalandhar in 2023 in spite of staunch opposition by the AAP MLA Anurag Sheetal. To the desperation of AAP, Susheel Rinku has now resigned from AAP to join BJP, charging AAP senior leadership with non-performance.

With strong support from the AAP, Sushil Kumar Rinku had won the parliamentary by-election. Interestingly in August, 2023, he was suspended from the parliament session for his unruly behaviour while opposing the BJP Government on Delhi services bill. As a follow up, he wore chains symbolising 'democracy in slavery' and stood in front of the Parliament building protesting against the leaders of opposition parties. Criticising the central Government i.e. the BJP, he had appealed to the people to defeat the central Government (BJP) in 2024 elections to keep the spirit of constitution and ideology of Bhim Rao Ambedkar alive. Now, ironically, he himself has joined the BJP to bring it back to power again and the BJP has welcomed him in its fold without any qualms about his 'unruly behaviour' worthy of suspension from parliament.

Wouldn't his appeal to the people to elect the BJP into power that he earlier wanted the people to defeat confuse the people and generate disbelief and cynicism? Wouldn't the praise of Sushil Rinku as a worthy and sober leader by the BJP high command persuading to vote for Sushil Rinku, whom they had suspended as an unruly leader add to the

confusion and trust deficit? Wouldn't the people experience absurdity to see Anurag Sheetal campaigning for Rinku whose entry in AAP he had opposed? Several senior congress leaders have already defected from the congress to the BJP impersonating a 'take-over' instead of switch over. Sunil Jakhar, once the state president of the congress, is now the state BJP president causing unhappiness to both the congress high command and the old guard of the state BJP. Shouldn't people receive his policy statements with an amount of mistrust?

A three term MP on congress ticket has quit congress to join the BJP. As a young boy and sophomore in politics, he was rewarded for his grandfather's political assassination as a congressman and the then chief minister of Punjab. Suddenly after joining the BJP, he has realised that the PM and HM have a great affection for Punjab whom he has criticised more than once for their ideology, politics and governance. To the people, his statement definitely does not stand as an authentic communication.

The political discourse by nature is characterised by a gap between projected and practised values; if the gap is widened enough to be poles apart on different occasions, it sounds unauthentic and absurd. Yet the political parties in Punjab are busy setting the stage for a theatre of absurd for the people to witness the circus of parliamentary elections 2024.

(The author is a retired professor from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and member of governing council, INTACH & Cultural Heritage, New Delhi; views are personal)

Labharthis emerge as powerful voting block in UP

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW

Labharthis, the millions of beneficiaries of the welfare schemes during the last over five years has emerged the powerful voting block in Uttar Pradesh. This block has altered the electoral mathematics of political parties pursuing caste based identity politics for last over three decades. The scheme are dwelling unit, toilet, LPG connection, tapped water supply connection, electricity supply, health insurance

(Ayushman Bharat) and annual payment of Rs 6,000 to farmers under PM Kisan Samman Yojna- all free. Besides free distribution of food grains- wheat and rice from April 1, 2020, which has now been extended till 2029. Samajwadi party is particularly feeling the heat of the silent change at the grassroots level as the welfare schemes have turned the caste to class. Samajwadi party in last 10 years has faced defeat from the BJP in 2014, 2019 Lok Sabha elections and 2027 and 2022 UP

assembly elections. SP tried many permutations and combinations of alliance first with the Congress in 2017 UP assembly election and later with Bahujan Samaj Party, Rashtriya Lok Dal in 2019 Lok Sabha elections and with small caste based political parties in 2022 UP assembly election. Samajwadi party after a gap of seven years has again joined hands with the Congress for Lok Sabha elections. In 2017 UP assembly elections, SP had forged alliance with the Congress, which had ended in



a disaster for both the parties. The 2022 alliance with small political parties did help the SP to raise its vote share and take the number of seats to 111 in a house of 403, the alliance collapsed soon after the elections. SP has already floated new slogan PDA (Pichda, dalit, alpsankhyak) to assert its claim as the party representing the interests of the disadvantaged sections of society. ``Samajwadi party is yet to rise above the traditional approach towards electoral politics. The caste based identity politics is

not delivering the political dividends for the party as it did a decade ago. Caste remains integral part of the electoral politics. Prime minister Narendra Modi has not ignored the caste dynamics. With successful implementation of the welfare schemes PM has created four classes out of caste--Women, youth, marginal farmer and poor. This has resulted in caste getting amalgamated with class and it has created new aggregate", said political analyst Dr A K Verma. ``The BJP by ensuring effective

delivery of the benefits of the welfare schemes has benefited the people cutting across the caste and creed. The beneficiaries are no longer keen to retain their caste identity as they used to do two decade ago. It's getting increasingly difficult for the non BJP parties to prevent the caste from turning to class", said Verma adding ``all non BJP parties are refusing to recognise the change in the ground reality. Even if they know it, they are clueless how to wriggle out of the situation created by the BJP at the ground zero".

Clash of titans at Anantanag Rajouri as Azad enters

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Anantanag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat is set to witness a 'Clash of Titans' between one of the tallest Gujjar leaders and National Conference candidates Mian Altaf Ahmad and veteran Congress leader and Chairman of the Democratic Progressive Azad Party Ghulam Nabi Azad in the third phase of polling on May 7. Announcing the candidature of Ghulam Nabi Azad, DPAP Treasurer Taj Mohiuddin in Srinagar told reporters that the core committee of the party has decided to field Ghulam Nabi Azad from the Anantanag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat. On its part, PDP is yet to take a final call on fielding their party candidates on three Lok

Sabha seats of Kashmir valley. For the time being Bharatiya Janta Party is also keeping its cards close to its chest as regards announcing the name of the party candidate from the Anantanag Rajouri Lok Sabha seat. As per the political grapevine, the BJP may go ahead and lend tactical support to the DPAP candidate to prevent the division of votes. The decision was taken a day after the National Conference Vice President Omar Abdullah sprung a surprise by fielding five-time MLA from Kangan, Mian Altaf Ahmed. Against the backdrop of this current political development, former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, Tuesday made concerted efforts to convey that all is well between the PDP and the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference.

Responding to media queries about whether the PDP will field its candidate against the JKNC nominee, Omar questioned the intentions of the media persons claiming they were trying to create a wedge between his party and the PDP to run their news bulletins. "Why are you making the PDP fight us? Has the PDP said anywhere that they will contest elections? It is you people who are fuelling this. I heard the speech of Mehbooba Mufti in Delhi, she said Farooq sahib and we are together and we will not break the INDIA alliance. Why are you trying to make us fight?" he asked. In Jammu, when National Conference President Dr Farooq Abdullah was asked about the People's Democratic Party being "disappointed"

over the National Conference announcing its candidate from the Anantanag-Rajouri seat, Abdullah responded angrily and said, "Who told you that they are disappointed? Have you heard her (Mehbooba Mufti) in Delhi? Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah (National Conference vice-president) and Mehbooba are standing united." When told that the People's Democratic Party might put up a candidate against the National Conference's Mian Altaf, Dr Abdullah said it is a free country and anyone can contest elections. "Farooq (Abdullah) has no fear of it, the INDIA bloc has no fear. We are strong and nobody can break this alliance," he said. Dr Abdullah also lashed out at the BJP claiming they wanted

to replicate Russia- and China-like rule in the country. Dr Abdullah said the INDIA bloc has come forward to safeguard the Constitution, even at the cost of "our lives". Asked to comment on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's criticism of the Congress over its decision to hand over the strategic Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka in the 1970s, Dr Abdullah pointed to China's alleged incursions into Ladakh and its claims over land in Arunachal Pradesh. "How much land is with China, why are they (Central Government) not talking about it? China has grabbed thousands of kilometres of our land and we raised the issue in the Parliament but they did not answer. Let them reply on this first," the Srinagar MP said.

MCC violations rule being applied differently: Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday raised a "basic question" as to "why would there be different rules for the Prime Minister and others," even as she went on a public relation exercise visiting a church at Chalsa in North Bengal. "I am sensitive to the model code of conduct before the elections and desist from making even administrative commitments ... but I wonder why there would be different set of rules for the Prime Minister and others" in that regard," Banerjee said without naming Narendra Modi but

referring to the his speech at an Reserve Bank of India programme. Modi at an event in Mumbai on Monday delivered a speech at the 90th anniversary of the RBI and unveiled a commemorative coin. "How the Prime Minister can make certain statements ... how there can be two different laws", Banerjee asked. The TMC leadership earlier raised objections regarding the Prime Minister's statements where he promised a series of works after he would swear in for the third time post elections. Referring to the massive devastation left by Sunday's tornado in three districts of Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar

and Cooch Behar Banerjee said, "the Prime Minister has asked the BJP men to visit the victims ... what he did not say was that the BJP workers should go and pay money to them ... this is also one kind of violation of model code." The TMC had earlier petitioned the Election Commission of India against a recent conversation between the Prime Minister and BJP's Krishnagar candidate Amrita Roy whom he advised to tell the people during campaigns that the BJP Government was thinking of returning Rs 3,000 crore seized by the Enforcement Directorate from the people who had defrauded the citizens.

Denied ticket by BJP, sitting Jalgaon MP reaches out to Sena(UBT) for nomination

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a jolt to the ruling BJP, its sitting MP from Jalgaon Unmesh Patil — who has been denied a party ticket to re-contest the Lok Sabha polls — on Tuesday reached out to the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena, in an apparent effort to seek its nomination to contest the polls from the same constituency in north Maharashtra. Patil met Shiv Sena spokesperson Sanjay Raut in Mumbai. Though Patil claimed that his meeting with Raut was personal in nature, informed sources in the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) said that at the meeting Patil conveyed his readiness to con-

test the Lok Sabha polls from Jalgaon on a Sena (UBT) ticket. Sources said that Patil would soon be meeting Sena president Uddhav Thackeray to make a bid to formalise the arrangement. When asked about the development, Raut said: "...you will get the news of Unmesh Patil very soon". Under the seat-sharing arrangement reached among the three constituents of the MVA constituents, the Shiv Sena (UBT) will field its candidate from Jalgaon Lok constituency which is going to poll in the fourth phase on May 7. Worried over the possibility of his party's sitting MP Unmesh Patil contesting the LS polls on

the Sena (UBT) ticket, State BJP President Chandrashekhar Bawankule has reached out to Patil. It remains to be seen if the BJP will be able to placate him and restrain him from moving over to the Sena (UBT) to contest the May 7 polls. Jalgaon has been a BJP stronghold for more than two and a half decades. The BJP has been winning this Lok Sabha seat since 1999 Gunwantrao Sarode represented Jalgaon from 1991 to 1996... Y G Mahajan won this seat in the 1999 and 2004 polls. A T Patil bagged this seat in 2009 and 2014 polls. In 2019, Unmesh Patil won the Jalgaon seat by defeating Gulabrao Deokar of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) with a huge margin of

4 lakh votes. While Patil polled 7.13 lakh votes, Deokar of the NCP came a distant second by securing 3.02 lakh votes. In 2014, Unmesh Patil had been elected as an MLA from the Chalisgaon constituency in Maharashtra. He was also the chairman of the Maharashtra State Cooperative Sugar Factories Federation Limited from 2015 to 2019. Smita Wagh, who has replaced Unmesh Patil as the BJP candidate from Jalgaon, was the president of the BJP's women's wing before she became an MLC. In the last Lok Sabha polls, too, she was one of the aspirants to contest the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. However, the BJP had given the ticket to Unmesh Patil.

Tamang joining Congress in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

With the newly formed Hamro Party of Darjeeling deciding to shun BJP for allegedly failing to keep its promise and back the Congress, the tri-colour party, seems to have got winds in its sail high up there in the mountains. This also after former Bharatiya Gorkha Parisangh chief Munish Tamang joining the Congress in Delhi. A few days after Ajay Edward the founder of the Hamro Party that faired exceptionally well in the last year's civic elections said that he would side with the Congress if it nominated a right candidate, Bidhan Bhavan (State Congress

head quarters) named former BGP chief Tamang as its candidate for Darjeeling parliamentary seat. Out of the seven Assembly seats in Darjeeling constituency three are on the hills which have a majority of Gorkha population that plays a determining role in the parliamentary elections. The hill people had been backing BJP for the last three elections ... but they have not been able to keep their words ... their policies have not done good to the people of Darjeeling," Ajoy Edward a businessman-turned-politician said adding "if the Congress chooses a right candidate then there is a good chance of its winning in Darjeeling.

Leadership qualities in netas do not come with their ancestral ties

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

There is an adage in south India which when translated into English would read like this ; "The moment you see a kid, you can make out the plight of the village from where he hails". This means that the kid can never hide the intensity of the poverty and sufferings he undergoes in the village, This is true in the case of many of our politicians who are out in the street seeking votes from the electorate. The truth that they are misfit as leaders is written clearly on their body language. We can also make out true leaders from their attitude and behavior towards the society. However hard they try to project an artificial behavior, their failure as a potential leader would be as clear

as daylight. The offsprings of leaders of dynasty politics is a clear proof of the adage mentioned above. The chief minister of Tamil Nadu MK Stalin, who is the president of the DMK, is a case study. Stalin is incapable of addressing a gathering of even 100 persons without the help of a written speech. He has a battery of beauticians in attendance wherever he goes to address public meetings. One can never see Stalin sans make-up and neatly starched and ironed dhoti and shirt. Stalin, who prefers to be addressed as Thalapatthi (Tamil for Commander) has no leadership qualities and he became the DMK chief only because he happened to be the son of M Karunanidhi, the former party president and chief minister.

Ministry seeks report on...

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The airline has also been asked to ensure that "facilities are provided to passengers by airlines due to denied boarding, cancellation of flights and delays in flights". Officials are also monitoring the situation to ensure compliance, DGCA said. This is to minimise the inconvenience to passengers, it said.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation also commented, saying it is monitoring the situation of Vistara flight cancellations.

"However, flight operations are managed by airlines themselves. Airlines have to comply with DGCA norms to ensure passenger facilitation in case of cancellation or delay of flights," the Ministry said in a post on X.

However, flight operations are managed by Airlines themselves. Airlines have to comply with DGCA norms to ensure passenger facilitation in case of cancellation or delay of flights.

The airline operates a little over 300 flights daily and has a fleet of 70 planes comprising A320-family aircraft and Boeing 787s. Vistara said it was forced to cut a number of flights as it was dealing with a shortage of pilots and crew as a company spokesperson said in a statement, "We have had a significant number of flight cancellations and delays in the past few days due to various reasons including crew unavailability."

The spokesperson also said efforts are being made to stabilise the situation and that operations at regular capacity will resume soon. Teams are working towards minimising the discomfort to the customers, the spokesperson added.

A day after the carrier

announced reducing operations due to non-availability of crew and other operational reasons, sources on Tuesday said some commanders as well as first officers of its A320 fleet are also reporting sick to protest pay revisions due to signing of new contracts.

The airline has around 800 pilots and the senior first officers who resigned had completed their conversion training that allowed them to operate wide-body Boeing 787 planes. However, they did not get the duty for flying the 787 aircraft, the sources said.

Many passengers have taken to social media to complain about flight delays and cancellations. Some even tagged Ratan Tata in their posts. A frustrated passenger pleaded for help on social media after Vistara cancelled the flight from Ranchi to Delhi. He claimed that his grandfather was on his deathbed. He wrote, "Vistara, my flight UK754 from Ranchi to Delhi was cancelled (April 2), and I have to go to Delhi urgently as my grandfather is on his deathbed. Please help arrange another flight on any airline on the same day. Your staff has refused to do so."

In recent weeks, discontent has been simmering among pilots at Vistara, which is in the process of getting merged with Air India, following the new contracts wherein there are concerns that fixed pay component is getting reduced and there is more flying-linked incentive in the salary structure.

The new contracts that will bring parity between pilots of Vistara and Air India have been introduced as part of the ongoing merger process. Vistara is a joint venture between the Tata Group and Singapore Airlines.

BAIL...

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"Until all three of my brothers, Kejriwal, Sisodia and Satyendar Jain, come out of custody, this happiness is incomplete. This is the victory of truth. I had full faith in the judicial process," Anita said while talking to reporters. "This is not the right time to celebrate. When all my brothers are out, we will celebrate together," she added. Meanwhile, the BJP mocked the AAP for "celebrating" a regular bail to its leader Sanjay in the Delhi excise policy case as a clean chit to him and asked if by this "logic" it has accepted that jailed Kejriwal is the kingpin of the "scam".

Addressing a Press conference, BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said with the Supreme Court granting bail to Singh in the case, the AAP now has no right to claim that the action of central probe agencies against its leaders is "vendetta politics". The AAP is "celebrating" Singh's bail and projecting as if the apex court has given him a clean chit in the case, he said.

In a joint Press conference, AAP leaders claimed that the court order "exposed" that the entire liquor scam case was based on statements "extorted" from witnesses and approvers. Singh was brought to a hospital on Tuesday morning and he is likely to be discharged on Wednesday, an official source said. Singh was arrested by the ED in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped excise policy on October 4. "This is a big day for democracy in the country and a moment of happiness and hope," Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said in the Press conference. Atishi, also a Cabinet Minister in the Delhi Government, said for two years AAP leaders have been targeted in fake cases and arrested.

India sees red as...

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Union Minister Kiren Rijiju also criticised China, emphasising that such actions do not alter the ground reality. "China has been making all baseless claims but that's not going to change the ground reality and the 'historical facts'. Arunachal Pradesh is an inalienable part of India, and the people of Arunachal Pradesh are supremely patriotic Indians by all standards and definitions," Rijiju tweeted. On March 28, India said Beijing may "repeat its baseless claims" as many times as it wants but that is not going to change New Delhi's position that Arunachal Pradesh "was, is and will always remain" an integral and inalienable part of the country. China's Ministry of Civil Affairs made an announcement on March 30, which said it had "standardised" the names of 30 places in "southern Tibet". The first such "standardised" list of six places was released in 2017, followed by a second list of 15 places in 2021, and a third list of 11 places in 2023.

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Modi also raised the Katchatheevu island issue, holding the Opposition party responsible for giving the island to Sri Lanka during its rule. "Talking about patriotism does not suit a party like the Congress," he said. In the 2024 general election, there are two distinct camps "of those in favour of honesty and transparency on the one side and the corrupt and dynasts (parivarwadis) on the other", Modi said. "We are saying eliminate

In the past too, MEA had rejected the renaming. "We have seen such reports. This is not the first time China has made such an attempt. We reject this outright. Arunachal Pradesh is, has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India. Attempts to assign invented names will not alter this reality," the MEA's spokesperson said in April 2023. Responding to questions on March 23, after delivering a lecture at the Institute of South Asian Studies, the National University of Singapore, Jaishankar termed China's repeated claims as "ludicrous", and said Arunachal Pradesh was a "natural part of India". "This is not a new issue. I mean, China has laid claim, it has expanded its claim. The claims are ludicrous to begin with and remain ludicrous today," he had said. "So, I think we've been very clear, very consistent on this. And I think you know that is something which will be part of the boundary discussions which are taking place."

Sleep timing of Ram...

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However, dissent arises from some saints, arguing that the proposal contradicts religious scriptures by depriving Ram Lalla of sleep. Champat Rai, the Trust's general secretary, echoed the concerns raised by the saints, emphasising that Ram Lalla is revered in the form of a five-year-old boy, and it may not be suitable to keep them awake constantly. "Should we keep Ram Lalla awake for 24 hours? Will it be prudent?" he questioned. He asserts that a final decision will only be reached after thorough deliberation and discussion among all stakeholders. Ram Navami, a Hindu festival celebrated to honour the birth of Lord Vishnu's incarnation, Lord Rama, marks the culmination of the nine-day Chaitra-Navratri celebrations, observed in the Hindu month of Chaitra, which falls on the cusp of spring and summer. This marks the first Ram

Navami following the sacred consecration of Shri Ram Lalla. With such a significant event, Ayodhya is bracing for potentially massive crowds. As numerous individuals seek spiritual rejuvenation through participation, stringent security measures have been implemented to mitigate potential risks. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has asked both the Chief Secretary and DGP to personally oversee the preparations for the event. To cater to the massive influx of devotees, arrangements are being meticulously planned for darshan over three consecutive days, with special emphasis on Ashtami, Navami, and Dashami, Chief Secretary Durga Shankar Mishra said in a statement. Since the consecration of the Ram Temple on January 22, devotees have flocked to the Ram Lalla temple, with nearly two crore people having darshan in the past two months.

Three...

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Nirupama Rao, former Foreign Secretary who too was the High Commissioner to Sri Lanka reminded the political parties that international agreements, however, unjust they might be, have sanctity and they cannot be repudiated by successor Governments. "If India abrogates the agreement unilaterally, its image will suffer; the best possible solution is to get the Island of Kachchatheevu and the adjoining seas on lease in perpetuity," said Rao in her social media post, G C Shekhar, chronicler of Tamil Nadu politics, pointed out that at no point of time Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said his Government would retrieve Katchatheevu from Sri Lanka. "Former attorney general Mukul Rohatgi had told the Supreme Court that India has to wage a war with Sri Lanka to retrieve Katchatheevu. The matter ends there," said Shekhar who expressed his doubts over the DMK's move to rake up the issue at this point of time.

me. But they can't deter me. Action against each one of the corrupt will continue," Modi said. He said more development work has been done in Uttarakhand over the last 10 years than in 60-65 years before that. "In the third, your son will do one more big work. To ensure you get 24-hour electricity, zero electricity bill and also earn money from electricity, Modi has started Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana," Modi said. He said the Government is

providing assistance to people to set up solar power panels on their roofs under the scheme. Middle-class households consuming about 300 units of power on an average will not only get it free but can also earn by selling surplus solar power to the Government, Modi said and asked the people to start applying for the scheme. In Uttarakhand, Modi said, 85000 pucca houses have been given to people, water connections have been given to 12 lakh households, 5.5

lakh toilets have been built and free LPG connections have been given to more than five lakh women under the Ujjwala Yojana. He said 35 lakh people who did not have bank accounts have their accounts now, Rs 2200 crore have been credited directly into the accounts of small farmers. "One could wonder how so much work is being done by the Modi Government. Development happens when the intentions are right. Right intentions lead to good results," he said.

Kitchen charity halts Gaza ops

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH

An apparent Israeli airstrike killed six international aid workers with the World Central Kitchen and their Palestinian driver, the charity said Tuesday, in a potentially major setback to efforts to deliver aid by sea to Gaza, where Israel's offensive against Hamas has pushed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to the brink of starvation. The food charity, founded by celebrity chef Jose Andres, said it was immediately suspending operations in the region. The source of fire late Monday could not be independently confirmed. The Israeli military expressed "sincere sorrow" over the deaths while stopping short of accepting responsibility. Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the top military spokesman, said that officials are reviewing the incident at the highest levels. He says an independent investigation will be launched that "will help us reduce the risk of such an event from occurring again."

Footage showed the bodies, several wearing protective gear with the charity's logo, at a hospital in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah. Those killed include three British nationals, an Australian, a Polish national and an American-Canadian dual citizen, according to hospital records. The charity said the team was travelling in a three-car convoy that included two armoured vehicles. "Despite coordinating movements with the (Israeli army), the convoy was hit as it was

'Aid workers in Gaza were killed by an unintended strike'

Deir Al-Balah (Gaza Strip) (AP): Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has acknowledged that Israeli forces carried out the strike that killed seven aid workers in Gaza. In a statement on Tuesday, he said: "Unfortunately over the last day there was a tragic incident of an unintended strike of our forces on innocent people in the Gaza Strip." He says officials are "checking this thoroughly" and "will do everything for this not to happen again". The strike late Monday killed seven aid workers for the World Central Kitchen, leading the charity to suspend its operations in Gaza.

leaving the Deir al-Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tons of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route." Erin Gore, the CEO of the charity, said "this is not only an attack against WCK, this is an attack on humanitarian organizations showing up in the most dire of situations where food is being used as a weapon of war. This is unforgivable." Three aid ships from the Mediterranean

island nation of Cyprus arrived earlier Monday carrying some 400 tons of food and supplies organized by the charity and the United Arab Emirates, the group's second shipment after a pilot run last month. The Israeli military was involved in coordinating both deliveries. The US, which has provided key military and diplomatic support for Israel's offensive, has touted the sea route as a new way to deliver desperately needed aid to northern Gaza and plans to build its own floating dock, with construction expected to take several weeks. The UN has said much of the population is on the brink of starvation, largely cut off from the rest of the territory by Israeli forces. Israel has barred UNRWA, the main U.N. agency in Gaza, from making deliveries to the north, and other aid groups say sending truck convoys north has been too dangerous because of the military's failure to ensure safe passage. The UNRWA said in its latest report that 173 of its workers have been killed in Gaza. The figure does not include workers for other aid organizations. The bodies of the aid workers have been taken to a hospital in the southern city of Rafah on the Egyptian border, according to an Associated Press reporter at the hospital. The foreigners' bodies will be evacuated out of Gaza and the Palestinian driver's body will be handed to his family in Rafah for burial.

12-year-old opens fire at school in Finland, killing 1, wounding 2

AP ■ HELSINKI

A 12-year-old student opened fire at a secondary school in southern Finland on Tuesday morning, killing one and seriously wounded two other students, police said. The suspect was later apprehended. Heavily armed police cordoned off the Viertola school — a large educational institution including lower and upper secondary schools with a total of about 800 students — in the city of Vantaa, just outside the capital, Helsinki, after receiving a call about a shooting incident at 09:08 am. Police said both the suspect and the victims were 12 years old. One of the students had died instantly after being shot, Chief of Police Ilkka Koskimäki from the Eastern Uusimaa Police Department told a news conference. The other two were seriously wounded, he said. The weapon used in the shooting was a registered handgun that was licensed to the suspect's relative, Koskimäki said. The suspect was detained in the



Helsinki area later Tuesday with a handgun in his possession, police said. He admitted to the shooting in an initial police hearing but there is no immediate word of the motive, police said, adding that the case is being investigated as a murder and two attempted murders. Finnish President Alexander Stubb and Prime Minister Petteri Orpo offered con-

lences to the families of the victims in postings on X with both saying they were shocked over the shooting. "What makes it particularly shocking is the age of the victim and the suspect," Orpo said during a news conference later Tuesday. "I can assure you that this (shooting) will be carefully reviewed and conclusions will be drawn that this will not happen again," he said.

The minimum age of criminal liability in Finland is 15 years, which means the suspect cannot be formally arrested. A suspect younger than 15 can only be heard by the police after which they will be handed over to Finland's child welfare authorities. In the past decades, Finland has witnessed two major deadly school shootings. In November 2007, a 18-year-old student armed with a semi-automatic pistol opened fire at the premises of the Jokela high school in Tuusula, southern Finland, killing nine people. He was found dead with self-inflicted wounds. Less than a year later, in September 2008, a 22-year-old student shot and killed 10 people with a semi-automatic pistol at a vocational college in Kauhajoki, southwestern Finland, before fatally shooting himself. In the Nordic nation of 5.6 million, there are more than 1.5 million licensed firearms and about 430,000 license holders, according to the Finnish Interior Ministry.

Egypt's pres sworn in for third 6-year-term

AP ■ CAIRO

President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi of Egypt was sworn in for a third six-year term on Tuesday after being re-elected in a December vote in which he faced no serious challengers. El-Sissi took the oath of office before parliament, which convened in the new administrative capital in the desert outside Cairo. El-Sissi won 89.6 per cent of the vote in the December election, with turnout of 66.8 per cent more than 67 million registered voters. He ran against three virtually unknown opponents. The vote was overshadowed by the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza on Egypt's eastern border, which has threatened to expand into wider regional turmoil. El-Sissi was first elected as president in mid-2014, then reelected in 2018. A year later, constitutional amendments, passed in a general referendum,



added two years to el-Sissi's second term, and allowed him to run for a third, six-year term. His victory in this latest election was widely seen as inevitable. His three opponents were marginal political figures who were rarely seen during the election campaign.

Senegal swears in ex-opp figure, recently freed from prison, as new president

AP ■ DAKAR (SENEGAL)

Senegal inaugurated Bassirou Diomaye Faye as its new president on Tuesday, completing the previously little-known opposition figure's dramatic ascent from prison to the palace in recent weeks. Faye was released from prison less than two weeks before the March 24 election, along with popular opposition figure and mentor Ousmane Sonko, following a political amnesty announced by outgoing President Macky Sall. It is the former tax inspector's first time in elected office. "It's the culmination of a long struggle for democracy and the rule of law," said Aissata Sagna, a 39-year-old factory worker who worked on Faye's campaign. "This is a day of celebration for us, even if we have lost young people killed during



the demonstrations." The election tested Senegal's reputation as a stable democracy in West Africa, a region that has experienced coups and attempted coups. It followed months of unrest ignited by the arrests last year of Sonko and Faye and concerns that the president would seek a third term in office despite constitutional term limits. Rights groups said dozens were killed in the

protests and about 1,000 were jailed. Faye, 44, campaigned on promises to clean up corruption and better manage the country's natural resources. His victory was seen as reflecting the will of young people frustrated with widespread unemployment and former colonial ruler France, seen by critics to be using its relationship with Senegal to enrich itself. Such frustrations are common across many countries in Africa, home to the world's youngest population, where a number of leaders have clung to power for decades. In his first speech as president-elect, Faye promised to fight corruption and reform the economy. A practising Muslim from a small town, Faye has two wives, both of whom were present on Tuesday. Ahead of the election, he released a declaration of his

assets to show transparency and called on other candidates to do the same. It listed a home in Dakar and land outside the capital and in his hometown. His bank accounts totalled roughly USD 6,600. "I think the first challenge is the formation of his (Faye's) government," said Alioune Tine, founder of the Senegalese think tank Afrikajom Centre. "This will be the first concrete message he sends to the Senegalese people. The size, diversity and profiles will be analyzed with a fine-tooth comb, to see if they meet the demand for a break with the past." The new president was little known until Sonko, a popular opposition figure who came third in the previous election in 2019, named him to run in his place after being barred from the election for a prior conviction.

Israel clears way to expel Al Jazeera Netanyahu's incitement claim is a lie

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday vowed to shut down Al Jazeera's operations in Israel, calling it a "terror channel" that spreads incitement, after parliament passed a law clearing the way for the closure. Netanyahu's pledge escalated Israel's long-running feud against Al Jazeera. It also threatened to heighten tensions with Qatar, which owns the channel, at a time when the Doha government is playing a key role in mediation efforts to halt the war in Gaza. The broadcaster condemned Netanyahu's incitement claim as a "dangerous ludicrous lie." Al Jazeera said late Monday that it holds Netanyahu responsible for the safety of its staff and offices, that it would continue what it described as its bold and professional coverage, and that it "reserves the right to pursue every legal step." Israel has long had a rocky relationship with Al Jazeera, accusing it of bias against Israel. Relations took a major downturn nearly two years ago when Al Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh was killed during an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank. The Palestinian-American journalist was well-known across the Arab world for her critical coverage of Israel, and the channel accused Israel of intentionally killing her. Israel denied the charge, saying she was likely killed by Israeli fire in what appeared to be an accidental shooting. Those relations further deteriorated following the outbreak of Israel's war against Hamas on October 7, when the militant group carried out a cross-border attack in southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage. In December, an Israeli strike killed an Al Jazeera cameraman as he reported on the war in southern Gaza. The channel's bureau chief in Gaza, Wael Dahdouch, was

injured in the same attack. The network also blamed Israel for killing Dahdouch's son in a strike in January. Hamza Dahdouch was working for Al Jazeera when the strike hit a car he was traveling, it reported. The army later said that Hamza Dahdouch was a member of Islamic Jihad, a militant group that joined the October 7 attack with Hamas. Wael Dahdouch's wife, daughter and another son were killed along with his grandson in another Israeli strike last October. The channel broadcast images of Dahdouch entering the hospital and giving way to grief as he peered over the body of his dead son. Israel has not said who the target of that strike was. Al Jazeera is one of the few international media outlets to remain in Gaza throughout the war, broadcasting bloody scenes of airstrikes and overcrowded hospitals and accusing Israel of massacres. Israel accuses Al Jazeera of collaborating with Hamas. "Al Jazeera harmed Israel's security, actively participated in the October 7 massacre, and incited against Israeli soldiers. It is time to remove the bullhorn of Hamas from our country," Netanyahu said on X, formerly Twitter. He said he planned on acting immediately under the authorities of the newly passed law. "The terror channel Al Jazeera will no longer broadcast from Israel," he said. Al Jazeera has been closed or blocked by other Mideast governments, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Egypt has banned Al Jazeera since 2013. It launched the crackdown after the 2013 military overthrow of an elected but divisive government dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood group. Egypt considers the Brotherhood a terrorist group and accused both Qatar and Al Jazeera of supporting it.

Sunak expands free childcare as 'improving' sign before election

London (PTI): British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Tuesday marked the expansion of free government-funded childcare to cover two-year-olds as a sign of things "improving" for the economy ahead of a general election expected later this year. During a round of local radio interviews in north-east England, the 43-year-old British Indian leader was again asked when he plans to call an election and reiterated his previous indication of a timeline in the second half of the year. While he came under some criticism for laughing off the question during one such exchange, Sunak insisted that the government was heading to a place where the electorate would be able to see a "brighter future" ahead. "Last year we promised the biggest-ever expansion in childcare provision this country has ever seen, and today we are delivering on our plan with 15 hours of free childcare for parents with two-year-olds," said Sunak. "We want to give working families the peace of mind that they will be supported and our full expansion will save parents 6,900 pounds a year — helping to build a brighter future for families and help to grow our economy," he said. Asked about a general election, he told BBC Radio Newcastle: "I've said repeatedly and clearly that my working assumption would be that we have a general election in the second half of the year. There's been no change to that." "I think people hopefully will increasingly feel that things are improving and that we're heading to a place where, as I said, I want to give people peace of mind that there's a brighter future for them and their families, they can have a renewed sense of pride in our country. That's the direction of travel and so we're now heading in the right way," he told BBC Radio Tees.

Iran vows retaliation for Israeli strike on Syrian consulate

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran and one of its key proxies vowed Tuesday to respond to a strike widely attributed to Israel that demolished Iran's consulate in the Syrian capital of Damascus and killed eight people, including two Iranian generals. Iran's state TV reported Tuesday that the country's Supreme National Security Council, a key decision-making body, met late Monday and decided on a "required" response to the strike. The report said the meeting was chaired by President Ebrahim Raisi, but provided no further details. "We will make them regretful about the crime and similar acts," said Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has final say on all matters of state in Iran. Israel has repeatedly targeted military officials from Iran, which supports militant

groups fighting Israel in Gaza, and along its border with Lebanon. Monday's strike in Damascus signaled an escalation because it struck an Iranian diplomatic mission. It was not clear if Iran would respond itself, risking a dangerous confrontation with Israel and its ally the United States, or if it would continue to rely on proxies, including Lebanon's Hezbollah militia and Yemen's Houthi rebels. The airstrike in Syria killed Gen Mohammad Reza Zahedi, who led the elite Quds Force in Lebanon and Syria until 2016, according to Iran's Revolutionary Guard. It also killed Zahedi's deputy, Gen Mohammad Hadi Hajriahimi, and five other officers. Hezbollah said Tuesday that Zahedi played a crucial role in helping "develop and advance the work" of the group in Lebanon. A Hezbollah member was also killed in Monday's strike, bringing the overall death toll

to eight. Hezbollah announced the death of Hussein Youssef on Tuesday, but did not provide further details. "This crime will certainly not pass without the enemy receiving punishment and revenge," Hezbollah said in a statement. Since the outbreak of the war in Gaza nearly six months ago, those proxies have stepped up attacks, leading to near daily cross-border exchanges between Hezbollah and Israel, and frequent Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping. Hamas, which rules Gaza and attacked Israel on October 7, is also backed by Iran. Israel, which rarely acknowledges strikes against Iranian targets, said it had no comment on the latest attack in Syria, although a military spokesman blamed Iran for a drone attack early Monday against a naval base in southern Israel. Israel has grown increasingly impatient with

the daily exchanges of fire with Hezbollah, which have escalated in recent days, and warned of the possibility of a full-fledged war. Houthi rebels have also been launching long-range missiles toward Israel, including on Monday. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said the country is in a war on multiple fronts "both offensively and defensively." "We see evidence of this every day, including over the last few days," said Gallant, speaking to the Israeli parliament's Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee. "We operate everywhere, every day, in order to prevent our enemies from gaining strength and in order to make it clear to anyone who acts against us — all over the Middle East — that the price for action against Israel will be a heavy one." Gulf monarchies Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar condemned the strike on the Iranian consulate amid fears

of a widening regional conflict. The 22-state Arab League alleged that Israel aims to "expand the war and push the region to chaos." Iran's official news agency IRNA said Tuesday that Iran relayed an important message to the United States late Monday and that it called for a meeting of the U.N. Security Council. The message to Washington was delivered through a Swiss envoy in Tehran; Switzerland looks after US interests in Iran. IRNA said Iran holds the United States, Israel's closest ally, responsible for the strike. Meanwhile amid ongoing tensions in the Red Sea, the U.S. Central Command said early Tuesday that its forces had destroyed a Houthi unmanned surface vessel the previous day. CENTCOM said the vessel posed "a threat to US and coalition forces and merchant vessels in the region."

Congo appoints its first female PM

AP ■ KINSHASA (CONGO)

Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi on Monday appointed the country's first female prime minister, fulfilling a campaign promise and taking an important step toward the formation of a new government after his reelection late last year. Former planning minister Judith Suminwa Tuluka will step into the role at a time of worsening violence in the country's mineral-rich east, which borders Rwanda. The long-running conflict has displaced more than 7 million people according to the United Nations, making it one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Tuluka promised to work toward peace and development in her first speech on state television following her appointment. Still, it could be months before a new government is formed as the process requires intensive negotia-



tions with the many political parties. "My thoughts go out to the east and to all corners of the country, which today are facing conflicts with enemies

who are sometimes hidden," she said, referring to the conflict that involves many armed groups, including some believed to be backed by Rwanda's military. "I'm thinking of all these people, and my heart goes out to them." Far from the nation's capital, Kinshasa, eastern Congo has long been overrun by more than 120 armed groups seeking a share of the region's gold and other resources as they carry out mass killings. Both regional and UN peacekeepers have been asked to leave Congo after the government accused them of failing to resolve the conflict. Violence has only continued to worsen as the withdrawal of personnel begins and Congolese authorities move into their positions. Bintou Keita, the top UN envoy to Congo, told the UN Security Council last week that the prominent rebel group known as M23 had made significant territorial

gains in the east, which was contributing to the spike in violence and surging numbers of displaced people. Re-elected to a second five-year term in December, Tshisekedi has blamed neighbouring Rwanda for providing military support to the rebels. Rwanda denies the claim but UN experts have said there is substantial evidence of their forces in Congo. The United States last month urged Congo and Rwanda to walk back from the brink of war. The US State Department also said Rwanda should withdraw troops and surface-to-air missile systems from eastern Congo and criticized M23, calling it a "Rwanda-backed" armed group. The Rwandan Foreign Ministry said last month that the country's troops are defending Rwandan territory as Congo carries out a "dramatic military build-up" near the border.

Channel opened for vessels clearing wreckage at bridge collapse site

AP ■ BALTIMORE (US)

The US Coast Guard has opened a temporary, alternate channel for vessels involved in clearing debris from the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, part of a phased approach to opening the main shipping channel leading to the vital port, officials said Monday. Crews are undertaking the complicated work of removing steel and concrete at the site of the bridge's deadly collapse after a container ship lost power and crashed into a supporting column. On Sunday, dive teams surveyed parts of the bridge and checked the ship, and workers in lifts used torches to cut above-water parts of the twisted steel superstructure. Officials said the temporary channel is open primarily to vessels that are helping with the cleanup effort. Some barges and tugs that have been stuck in the Port of Baltimore since the

collapse are also scheduled to pass through the channel. Authorities believe six workers plunged to their deaths in the collapse, including two whose bodies were recovered last week. Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said at a Monday afternoon news conference that his top priority is recovering the four remaining bodies, followed by reopening shipping channels to the port. He said he understands the urgency but that the risks are significant. He said crews have described the mangled steel girders of the fallen bridge as "chaotic wreckage." "What we're finding is it is more complicated than we hoped for initially," said US Coast Guard Rear Admiral Shannon Gilreath. Moore said crews used a large crane to lift a 200-ton (180-metric ton) span of the bridge, a task that took 10 hours. He said the piece was considered a "relatively small lift" in the grand scheme

of the recovery effort, which he called enormous. Moore said crews would lift another 350-ton (317-metric ton) piece from the bridge later Monday as weather allows. Officials earlier said the temporary channel would have a controlling depth of 11 feet (over 3 meters), a horizontal clearance of 264 feet (80 meters) and a vertical clearance of 96 feet (29 meters). "This marks an important first step along the road to reopening the port of Baltimore," Capt. David O'Connell, the federal on-scene coordinator of the response, said in a statement Monday. "By opening this alternate route, we will support the flow of marine traffic into Baltimore." Two additional larger channels are planned as more debris is removed from the waterway. Officials declined to provide a projected timeline for those channels being opened.

India manufacturing sector growth hits 16 years high in March

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a 16-year high in March on the back of the strongest increase in output and new orders since October 2020, amid reports of buoyant demand conditions, a monthly survey said on Tuesday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) surged to a 16-year high of 59.1 in March, from 56.9 in February, reflecting stronger growth of new orders, output and input stocks as well as renewed job creation. In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction. "India's March manufacturing



PMI rose to its highest level since 2008. Manufacturing companies expanded hiring in response to strong production and new orders. On the back of strong demand and a slight tightening in capacity, input

cost inflation picked up in March," Ines Lam, Economist at HSBC, said. Manufacturing output rose for the 33rd month running in March, and to the greatest extent since October 2020.

Growth quickened across the consumer, intermediate and investment goods sectors. Inflows of new work strengthened from both domestic and export markets. New export orders increased at

the fastest pace since May 2022, the survey said. Quantities of purchase increased at the quickest rate since mid-2023, and one that was among the strongest in nearly 13 years, as companies sought to build up stocks in advance of expected improvements in sales. On the job front, after leaving payroll numbers broadly unchanged in the previous two months, manufacturers in India took on additional workers in March. The pace of job creation was mild, but the best since September 2023, the survey said. On the price front, despite remaining modest by historical standards, cost pressures were at their highest in five months. Companies reported having paid more for cotton, iron,

machinery tools, plastics and steel. However, customer retention remained a priority for goods producers who raised their charges to the least extent in over a year. On the outlook for the Indian manufacturing sector, companies remained confident on an average, with 28 per cent forecasting output growth in the year ahead and 1 per cent expecting a contraction. The overall level of sentiment remained elevated, but slipped to a four-month low as inflation concerns weighed on confidence. The HSBC India Manufacturing PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to purchasing managers in a panel of around 400 manufacturers.



India, EEU bloc start negotiation for FTA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior officials of India and the five-nation Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) bloc held detailed discussions last month to formally start negotiations for a free trade agreement to boost economic ties, an official said. The five members of the EEU are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia. The official said two feasibility studies have already been conducted on the proposed agreement. In such agreements, two or more trading partners either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. These agreements provide greater market access to Indian goods and services. "Senior officers of both sides have met on March 28 here and have

discussed formally starting talks for the FTA," the official said. An industry expert said domestic exporters from sectors like engineering goods, electronics and agriculture can get an edge from the agreement. Russia is the top trading partner of India in the bloc, with bilateral trade worth USD 49.4 billion in FY23. India's exports to Russia stood at USD 1.14 billion in 2022-23, while imports were USD 46.2 billion due to an increase in crude oil imports. The bilateral trade with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan was USD 134.26 million, USD 111.81 million, USD 641.62 million, and USD 56.56 million, respectively, in 2022-23. A similar agreement was signed by India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). The members of this bloc are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

India commanding higher valuations on investors trust: Buch

PTI ■ MUMBAI

SEBI chairperson Madhabi S Puri Buch on Tuesday said the Indian capital markets are commanding higher valuations because of foreign investors' optimism and trust in the country. She said at 22.2, the ratio of price to earning multiple in the Indian market is higher than the average of many indices around the world. "Yes, some people say that we are an expensive market but still why is the investment coming? Because this is a reflection of the optimism and the trust and faith that the world has in India today that we are commanding the kind of multiples in our markets," she said at a CII event on corporate governance here. A few weeks ago, Buch had flagged concerns on high valuations in segments of small and midcap stocks, stating that it could be becoming into a bubble. Buch said she meets foreign investors regularly as part of her mandate and has seen an increased interest in India among them because of the velocity which the country's economy has got after years of high speed growth. They are encouraged by data suggesting the strength of



the economy as visible in the growth in GST collections month on month, advance tax payouts, power and energy consumption, she said. The interest has led to the overall market capitalisation in equities reaching over Rs 378 lakh crore at the end of FY24 from Rs 74 lakh crore a decade ago, Buch said, adding that the market capitalisation is at the level of the overall GDP now. She said Indian entities raised a total of Rs 10.5 lakh crore from markets by way of equity and bond issuances in FY24, which includes over Rs 8 lakh crore through the bond route. Speaking about the bond issuances, she said it has reached over 62 per cent of the overall bank lending done in a year now.

Bajaj Auto shares climb nearly three per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Bajaj Auto Ltd on Tuesday climbed nearly 3 per cent after the company reported a 25 per cent year-on-year growth in its total vehicle wholesales in March. The stock advanced 2.61 per cent to settle at Rs 9,276.65 on the BSE. During the day, it jumped 3.48 per cent to reach the 52-week high of Rs 9,356. At the NSE, it climbed 2.53 per cent to Rs 9,271.05.

Bajaj Auto Ltd on Tuesday reported 25 per cent year-on-year growth in its total vehicle wholesales, including exports at 3,65,904 units in March. The Pune-based automaker had sold 2,91,567 two-wheelers and commercial vehicles in March 2023, according to a company statement. Total domestic sales (including commercial vehicles) rose 18 per cent to 2,20,393 units in the last



month compared to 1,86,522 units sold in the same month last year. Total exports during the month under review rose 39 per cent at 1,45,511 units from 1,05,045 vehicles shipped out to overseas markets in March last year, according to the statement. For the fiscal year ended March 31, 2024, the company reported wholesales of 4,350,933 units, an 11 per cent rise over 3,927,857 units in 2022-23.

Stock markets end three days winning run

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets snapped the three-day winning run on Tuesday with benchmark Sensex falling by 110 points due to profit-taking in select IT, private bank and auto shares amid weak trends from the US markets and foreign fund outflows. The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 110.64 points or 0.15 per cent to settle at 73,903.91 with 16 of its components ending lower and 14 settling higher. During the day, the index dropped by 270.78 points or 0.36 per cent to a low of 73,743.77 points. The broader NSE Nifty closed lower by 8.70 points or 0.04 per cent at 22,453.30 despite recovery at the lag-end..



Both Sensex and Nifty scaled lifetime high levels in intraday trade on Monday before settling around 0.5% higher. "The domestic market took a breather today after achieving a fresh record high yesterday.

Factors such as a rising dollar, increasing US bond yields, and a notable uptick in crude oil prices collectively dampened investor sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial

Services said. Better-than-expected US data raised worries about a potential delay in interest rate cuts by the US Fed, Nair added. "Nifty snapped its three-day rally despite a sharp recovery in the last half an hour. Global stocks were mixed on Tuesday after Wall Street fell as surprisingly strong US manufacturing data created doubts over how soon the US Federal Reserve might cut interest rates," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. From the Sensex basket, Kotak Mahindra Bank fell the most by 1.84 per cent. ICICI Bank dropped 1.63 per cent, HCL Technologies by 1.82 per cent, and Infosys by 0.84 per cent. Tata Consultancy

Services, Wipro, Tech Mahindra and Larsen & Toubro were the major laggards. Mahindra & Mahindra, Nestle, Tata Motors and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.28 per cent and the midcap index climbed 1.14 per cent. Analysts said mid and small-cap stocks continued their recovery rally, although concerns about high valuations lingered. Moreover, investors are eagerly anticipating guidance from the upcoming RBI monetary policy announcement for insight into near-term market direction.



Gold falls ₹50; silver climbs ₹430

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After hitting an all-time high of ₹60,000 per 10 grams on Tuesday, gold prices on Tuesday fell Rs 50 to Rs 68,370 per 10 grams in the local market, following weak trends in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous session, the precious metal closed at Rs 68,420 per 10 grams. However, silver prices climbed Rs 430 to Rs 79,000 per kg. In the previous session, it had settled at Rs 78,570 per kg. In the overseas markets, spot gold at COMEX was trading at USD 2,255 per ounce, down by USD 2 from the previous close. "After reaching an all-time high in the previous session, gold prices slightly retreated on Tuesday, as traders began to doubt the US Federal Reserve's decision to lower interest rates following solid US manufacturing data. "Meanwhile, the US dollar index rallied to a five-month high, which also weighed down on the precious metal prices," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities. However, silver prices were higher at USD 25.55 per ounce. Its previous close was USD 25.13 per ounce.

Audit profession at crossroads in fight for talent: ACCA

PNS ■ DELHI

Accountancy bodies ACCA & CAANZ have released a survey report which highlights major challenges audit profession is facing in attracting and retaining talent. A survey conducted by ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA ANZ), supported by a series of global roundtables, revealed persistent challenges in the auditing profession in its battle to attract and retain talent. Antonis Diolas, head of Audit and Assurance, ACCA and author of the report "Attract, Engage, Retain: Insights and Recommendations for Audit Talent Success," said, "A compelling insight from our study highlights the absence of a commonly understood and unified purpose within the audit profession. This not only inhibits prospective candidates from entering the profession in the first place, but also hinders current professionals from recognising how their work generates value." Amir Ghandar, Reporting and Assurance leader, CA ANZ said, "The research clearly shows the need for empathy and respect in the workplace recognising employees' multifaceted lives." He also said that the people also need to be able to see themselves in their leaders, to visualise the opportunities and career possibilities in a way that feels real.

Hiring down four per cent in March year on year: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Hiring by Indian companies saw a 4 per cent decline in March as compared to the same month last year, a report released on Tuesday stated. However, sequentially, there was a slight uptick of 3 per cent, reflecting an optimistic business sentiment, the report by foundit Insights Tracker (fit) said. The report is based on an analysis of fit data from March 2023 to March 2024. The report revealed that white-collar gig jobs, or freelance work, saw an 184 per cent increase compared to the previous year. This suggests professionals' growing preference for flexible, project-based work arrangements, it noted. Additionally, it stated that gig workers, representing a vital workforce segment, have expanded 21 per cent over the same period, highlighting companies' increasing reliance on freelancers and independent contractors to meet business needs. The IT sector is at the forefront of this gig boom, as per the report. The share of IT software in the gig economy has nearly doubled, jumping to 46 per cent in March 2024, from 22 per cent in March 2023, it added.

growing preference for flexible, project-based work arrangements, it noted. Additionally, it stated that gig workers, representing a vital workforce segment, have expanded 21 per cent over the same period, highlighting companies' increasing reliance on freelancers and independent contractors to meet business needs. The IT sector is at the forefront of this gig boom, as per the report. The share of IT software in the gig economy has nearly doubled, jumping to 46 per cent in March 2024, from 22 per cent in March 2023, it added.

MakeMyTrip, STB ink pact to promote Singapore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Online travel service provider, MakeMyTrip Ltd on Tuesday said it has entered into a partnership with Singapore Tourism Board for promoting Singapore as a key destination to Indian travellers. The two partners have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a year-long strategic partnership to boost travel to Singapore, MakeMyTrip said in a statement. Under the MoU, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and MakeMyTrip will embark on joint activations and campaigns to boost inbound travel to Singapore in 2024, it added. "Through this partnership, we want to



deepen Indian consumers' brand affinity for Singapore and reinforce the city's appeal and enhanced offerings for various segments of Indian visitors," STB Chief Executive Melissa Ow said.

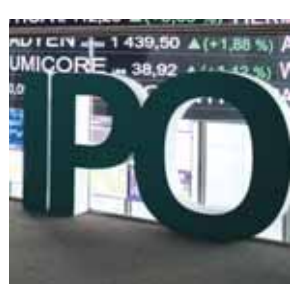
STB will also tap into MakeMyTrip's market understanding and insights to curate unique travel holiday packages targeting consumers in India, the statement said.

MakeMyTrip Co-Founder and Group CEO, Rajesh Magow said Singapore was one of the top three searched international destinations on the company's platform last year, advancing from fifth place in 2022. "The widespread interest for this destination from across India underscores its appeal. With ongoing initiatives that refresh its offerings, seamless travel access, and amenities tailored to Indian preferences, Singapore holds significant potential to capture the continued interest of more Indian travellers," he added. India is one of the top five markets for STB and over 10 lakh Indians visited Singapore in 2023, the statement said.

Main board IPOs collect ₹62,000 crore in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Buoyant secondary markets, strong participation of retail investors, and robust flows from institutional investors helped 76 companies in raising nearly Rs 62,000 crore through mainboard IPOs in 2023-24, marking a 19 per cent surge from the previous fiscal year. With FY2025 on the horizon, expectations are high for yet another stellar year for IPOs (Initial Public Offerings). This optimism is fuelled by a confluence of factors, including the surge in domestic capital, enhanced governance practices, the vibrant spirit of Indian



entrepreneurship, and favourable government policies bolstered by FDI support, Pantomath Financial Services Group, said in its report. "With a diverse array of offerings and a fervent appetite for growth capital,

the IPO landscape in FY2025 promises to be dynamic and vibrant, offering exciting opportunities for investors and companies alike. We anticipate that equity-raise through IPOs in FY25 could exceed Rs 1 lakh crore. This figure could potentially increase even further if there are no global shocks affecting the Indian market," Mahavir Lunawat, Managing Director, at Pantomath Capital Advisors, said. According to the report, a total of 76 companies garnered close to Rs 62,000 crore through main-board IPOs in 2023-24, which was way higher than Rs 52,115

crore mopped up by 37 companies in the preceding fiscal. Interestingly, companies from multiple sectors tapped the IPO market in FY24. However, the traditionally dominant financial sector, demonstrated restrained activity, raising Rs 9,655 crore, which accounted for less than a fifth of the total capital raised in FY24, in comparison to 51 per cent in 2022-23. Further, new-age technology companies were also few, with just three IPOs of Yatra, Mamaearth, and Zaggie hitting the market in the last fiscal.

Rupee falls four paise to close at 83.43 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee on Tuesday consolidated in a narrow range and settled 4 paise lower at 83.43 against the US dollar. Forex market was closed on Friday and Monday on account of 'Good Friday' and the annual account closing of banks, respectively. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on strong US dollar and weak tone in domestic markets. Rising crude oil prices may also weigh on the domestic currency," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst,

settled at 83.43, a fall of 4 paise over its previous close. On Thursday last week, the rupee depreciated 6 paise to settle at 83.39 against the US dollar. Forex market was closed on Friday and Monday on account of 'Good Friday' and the annual account closing of banks, respectively. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on strong US dollar and weak tone in domestic markets. Rising crude oil prices may also weigh on the domestic currency," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst,

Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Traders may take cues from Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) and speeches by various US Federal Reserve officials. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in the range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 83.60, Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent lower at 104.96. Brent crude futures advanced 1.78 per cent to USD 88.98 per barrel.



INDIAN MEN HOCKEY TEAM HEADS TO AUSTRALIA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian men's hockey team has left for Australia to compete in a five-match Test series beginning April 6, a crucial assignment ahead of the Paris Olympics in July-August. The Harmanpreet Singh-led side left on Monday night. The team has been in good form and recently won three out of its four matches during the FIH Pro League in Bhubaneswar. After the opening game on April 6, the series features matches on

April 7, 10, 12 and 13. It is essential for the Indian team to enhance their performance, build and check-through the improvement areas for the coming Paris Olympics, Hockey India stated in a press release. "As we embark on this crucial tour to Australia, we are filled with determination and excitement. The series presents an excellent opportunity for us to assess our strengths and areas for improvement ahead of the Paris Olympics," Harmanpreet said before the side's departure.

"We are fully committed to giving our best on the field and making every moment count." Vice-captain Hardik Singh stated that this tour holds immense significance for the team. "We have been working hard as a team to refine our skills and strategies, and we are confident in our abilities. We are focused on putting up a strong performance and making our country proud," he said.

THE INDIAN TEAM:
GOALKEEPERS: Krishan Bahadur Pathak, PR Sreejesh,

Suraj Karkera
DEFENDERS: Harmanpreet Singh (C), Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay, Sumit, Amir Ali
MIDFIELDERS: Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh (VC), Vivek Sagar Prasad, Shamsher Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Rajkumar Pal, Vishnukant Singh.
FORWARDS: Akashdeep Singh, Mandeep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Abhishek, Dilpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Gurjant Singh, Mohammed Raheel Mauseen, Bobby Singh Dhami, Arajjeet Singh Hundal.

Praggnanandhaa enters as India best bet

PTI ■ TORONTO

Teen sensation R Praggnanandhaa will enter as the favourite among the three Indian participants in the Candidates chess tournament that will get underway here from Wednesday to decide the challenger for the next world championship match. After nearly 35 years as many as three Indians — Praggnanandhaa, D Gukesh and Vidit Gujrathi — have qualified for the most prestigious event of the year that has just eight participants. According to an expert, India is the new Russia of the chess world, as in the past such dominance was only shown by Russian players. Praggnanandhaa, 18, starts as the rating favourite among Indians and also as the favourite of the chess buffs even though the top bracket of the world feels that all the three Indian youngsters still need time to settle among the world elite. Fearless and psychologically sound, Praggnanandhaa will likely have the assistance of eight-time Russian champion Peter Svidler for the event. One cannot help but recall that during one of the world championships Indian grandmaster P Harikrishna had assisted Svidler in his quest to be the world champion. While Svidler could be a game-changer, it will largely depend on Praggnandhaa's form and how he adapts in this tough event, where the eight players will play each other twice. At just 17 years, Gukesh is



hailed as one of the finest talents around. The Indian is also the youngest participant in the fray and second youngest ever after Robert James Fischer — aka Bobby Fischer — to qualify for the elite event. Fischer was 16-year-old when he qualified in 1959. That Fischer's record lasted a whopping 65 years, goes to prove what it takes to be one of the candidates and if Gukesh wins it, he will be the youngest ever to compete for the World Championship title. Vidit Gujrathi will have his task cut out and much will depend on his form. In his last outing, probably training his sights for the candidates, the Nasik-based player did not do well at the Prague masters and slipped considerably on the rating list also. Praggnanandhaa was the first to qualify for the tournament

by virtue of his silver medal performance in the last World Cup at Baku, Azerbaijan. The Indian star went down to Magnus Carlsen in the final but since then has picked up a lot and has come around as a fierce. Gujrathi made it thanks to a remarkable performance in the Grand Swiss tournament at Isle of Man, UK, last year. The Indian had displayed top form in the final stages of the tournament. For Gukesh it was touch and go but the teenager displayed steely nerves to win a spot through the rating process by winning a GM tournament in Chennai last December. The field however is diverse with a great mix of youth and experience. American Fabiano Caruana starts as the top seed ahead of his compatriot Hikaru

Nakamura. The 20-year-old Alireza Firouzja of France is ranked third while twice challenger Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia is the fourth seed. Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh and Gujrathi follow these four in terms of FIDE ratings while Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan is the last seed in the event. The first round will commence on Thursday, at midnight IST. There will be four rest days in all. The winner not only gets to play the world championship match but will also become richer by 48000 Euros (roughly Rs. 45 lakh).

ROAD TO THE CANDIDATES:
Ian Nepomniachtchi (2758) — qualified as the previous World Championship match runner-up.
R Praggnanandhaa (2747) — qualified as the 2023 World Cup runner-up.
Fabiano Caruana (USA, 2804) — qualified as the third-place finisher at the 2023 World Cup.
Nijat Abasov (AZE, 2632) — qualified as the fourth-place finisher at the 2023 World Cup after the winner, Magnus Carlsen, dedined his right to participate.
Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 2789) — qualified as the 2023 Grand Swiss runner-up.
Vidit Gujrathi (2747) — qualified as the 2023 Grand Swiss winner.
Alireza Firouzja (FRA, 2760) — qualified as the best by rating on January 1, 2024.
D Gukesh (2747) — qualified as the 2023 FIDE Circuit winner.

PTI ■ ROHTAK

Month-long exposure camps with international pugilists will greatly benefit the development of boxing in India, especially at the age-group level, feels national junior girls' boxing coach Geeta Chanu. Chanu noted that the reason countries like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are among the top boxing nations is the close cooperation between the respective boards of these Central Asian nations. "Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have good endurance they are also high on strength but where they really score over others is there confidence," Chanu told PTI. "Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan conduct combined training and competitions across various age groups, at least three such combined train-

Indian junior girls coach advocates for extended training camps with international boxers

ing or competitions in a year. Hence from a very young age they get a lot of international exposure. "Our players face international boxers only in multi-national tournaments," she added. The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) conducted a 15-day REC Combined Multinational Training Camp for junior boys and girls at the Sports Authority of India's National Boxing Academy here. At the camp that ended on Tuesday, Indian boxers got to rub shoulders with pugilists from boxing powerhouses Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan besides Sri Lanka.



Chanu welcomed BFI's move to host a multinational camp for the age-group level Indian teams

but insisted that the duration of such camps should be longer. "We need even longer camps. A

30-day camp would yield more results. In 15 days not everything can be covered so we want that a longer camp should be there," she said. Junior World Championship gold and silver medallists Payal and Amisha Kerketta echoed the same sentiment. "This camp was very useful as our shortcomings were identified and a lot of work on rectifying them was done. It would have been great had it been a longer camp," Payal said. "At the continental as well as World Championships we face a lot of Uzbek and Kazakh boxers so it was good to observe them close up and spar with

them at this camp," Amisha added. "We wish more such camps are conducted for longer durations like 45 days or a month so that we can learn much more." The camp, which is a part of SAI's new Khelo India Rising Talent Identification (KRITI) initiative, saw participation of over 150 boxers including 75 from India, 37 from Kazakhstan, 18 from Uzbekistan and 35 from Sri Lanka. "The vision behind this is to identify athletes at a grassroots level and to build the bench strength of the he country," said Deputy Director SAI Sachin. K.



Atletico Madrid beat Villarreal

AP ■ MADRID

Atletico Madrid scored early and late to beat Villareal 2-1 in an entertaining Spanish league game and snap a two-game losing streak. Villarreal won its last four matches and was nine games unbeaten, but a last-gasp goal from substitute Saul Niguez gave Atletico all three points and took it into fourth place in La Liga, two points above Athletic Bilbao. Niguez got the winner with three minutes remaining when he coolly side-footed a low shot past the goalkeeper from 17 yards out. It was the first league goal of the season for the central midfielder, who went on to replace Pablo Barrios just three minutes earlier.

Axel Witsel put the capital club 1-0 up when he headed home a corner from Rodrigo Riquelme after eight minutes. Villarreal's Norwegian striker Alexander Sorloth equalized four minutes into the second half with his 14th goal of the season. The late defeat was a crushing blow for Villarreal, which started poorly but came into the match in the second half. It remained in 10th place, ahead of Getafe on goal difference and a point behind Osasuna in ninth. Of the late goal, Villarreal defender Raul Albiol said, "Atletico have a punch and that can happen. They are one of the teams who most score goals in the final minutes of a game."

We need to start believing we are as good as anyone: Jena

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic-bound javelin thrower Kishore Jena says facilities and funding have never been as good as they are right now for India's athletes, who need to improve their mindset and start considering themselves as good as anyone else in the world. Jena undertook a 35-day training stint in Gold Coast in Australia from February 5 to March 10, funded by Target Olympics Podium Scheme (TOPS). Speaking to PTI, Jena said he hardly found anything different save for the warmer weather Down Under, which was more conducive for his training. "We have everything here, I trained at NIS Patiala where the facilities are world class and as good as in Australia. I have been looked after very well by Sports Ministry, SAI (Sports Authority of India), getting funding from TOPS," Jena, youngest of the seven children of a paddy farmer in Kothasahi village near Puri in Odisha, said in the interview facilitated by SAI. "What is lacking is in ourselves (athletes), our mindset, the mindset that we are as good as any other in the

world though we are improving on this front as well." His goal is to deliver his personal best at the upcoming Paris Olympics but the Asian Games silver-medallist feels he can enter the exclusive Indian club of Diamond League top-three finishers. Jena, who improved his personal best from 78.05m to 87.54m last year, is beginning his season at the Doha leg of the prestigious Diamond League on May 10. He will also take part in Golden Spike at Ostrava, Czech Republic, on May 28 — a World Athletics Continental Tour gold level event — and the Paris leg of the Diamond League on July 7. "This year, everything is about doing my personal best in Paris Olympics. That is the most important thing. But everybody wants to finish on podium (top three) in prestigious competitions like Diamond League and I also hope to do that," Jena said. "If I do my best on the day, it (top three finish in DL) can happen," said the 28-year-old who made the Paris Olympics cut by breaching the 85.50m qualifying standard at the Asian Games last year. Till now, reigning Olympic and world champion Neeraj Chopra, long



jumper M Sreeshankar and former discus throw star Vikas Gowda are the only three Indians who have finished inside top three in a Diamond League meet. Jena threw his personal best of 87.44m to win the silver medal in the Hangzhou Asian Games last year, while Chopra took the gold with a throw of 88.88m. His meteoric rise last year — from finishing fifth in the Budapest World Championships to winning silver medal in Asian Games -- was

achieved while training in India and he said the country has world class infrastructure and support system to shine at the global stage. "It's cold in Patiala in winter and difficult to manage training because of fog also. So, we requested SAI for training stint in Australia. We went to Australia solely because of the cold winter in Patiala, nothing else. "It was a productive stint of strength training and improvement on technique (in Australia). We worked on the bending of the blocking leg. It

will gradually improve and I am hoping for 85 per cent improvement on that. "We are yet to do full throwing sessions (in Patiala), will do gradually as the Diamond League (Doha leg on May 10) approaches. I am hoping to improve my personal best and achieve peak form during Paris Olympics." Chopra had said after last year's Asian Games that Jena has a smooth run-up but his blocking leg bends a bit and he will do even better if he corrects that. Jena said that he has started much better than last year and will be training at NIS Patiala before leaving for Doha. Asked if he will return to India after competitions abroad, Jena said, "I may be taking part in back-to-back events (beginning in Doha on May 10) and may need to be abroad most of the time till the Paris Olympics, but we are yet to finalise. "But from the Paris Diamond League (July 7) onwards, I would prefer to have my base there till the end of the Olympics." The men's javelin throw event at the Paris Olympics will start with the qualifying round on August 6 and final will be held on August 8.

Inter extends Serie A lead with win over Empoli

AP ■ ROME

Inter Milan became the second team in Serie A history to score in the season's first 30 games when it beat Empoli 2-0 and edged closer to the title. Only Juventus in the 2013-14 campaign scored in its first 30 games. In the big five European leagues this season, no other team has matched Inter's feat. Inter extended its lead to 14 points on second-placed AC Milan. There are eight rounds left. Empoli lost its last three games by 1-0 and it was a goal behind after just five minutes when Federico Dimarco turned in

an Alessandro Bastoni cross. Inter was on top throughout but it couldn't double its lead until the 82nd minute. Alexis Sanchez, who replaced Bastoni, had the easiest of finishes after good work on the right by Denzel Dumfries. Empoli remained third to last and in serious relegation trouble. **BOLOGNA CLOSER TO CHAMPIONS LEAGUE:** Bologna beat lowly Salernitana 3-0 to take another step towards Champions League football. The eighth win in nine games for Thiago Motta's side pushed it to within two points of third-placed Juventus. A fourth place finish would ensure

Bologna of Champions League football for the first time. Riccardo Orsolini opened the scoring after 14 minutes with a tremendous left-foot shot from outside the box and Alexis Saelemaekers made it 2-0 a minute from halftime. Left back Charalampos Lykogiannis completed the scoring in stoppage time after working a neat one-two with Saelemaekers. The result marked an unhappy debut for Salernitana coach Stefano Colantuono, the club's fourth coach this season. Salernitana looks doomed to spend next season in the second tier. It is 11 points from safety. Salernitana plays Sassuolo



next Friday in a relegation six-point game made all the more urgent after Sassuolo surrendered a lead at home to Udinese. Grégoire Defrel opened the scoring for the home four minutes before halftime following a defense-splitting pass from Matheus Henrique. However, Florian Thauvin equalized from close range three minutes later. The result will satisfy neither side as the search for points becomes more desperate. Sassuolo remained second from bottom on the table, and although Udinese was five places above it, only four points separate them in a congested battle to avoid the

drop. **CAGLIARI DRAWS WITH VERONA:** Two other teams in the fight, Cagliari and Verona, started the day tied on points and they ended the day still tied after drawing 1-1. Verona led after half an hour through Federico Bonazzoli. Goalkeeper Simone Scuffet got a hand to Bonazzoli's flick with the outside of his boot but could not stop the ball going in. Ghanaian midfielder Ibrahim Sulemana scored with 16 minutes remaining to give Cagliari a share of the spoils. Verona was in 15th place, above Cagliari on goal difference. **ROMA STALEMATE AT**

LECCE: Fifth-placed Roma was held to 0-0 at Lecce. Good goalkeeping and profligate finishing ensured a stalemate. Roma failed to score in the league for the first time since Daniele De Rossi took over as coach in mid-January but the point still means he has taken 23 points in his first 10 matches in charge, a feat bettered previously by only two other Roma coaches in the last 30 years. The point was a welcome one for Lecce and coach Luca Gotti. Gotti took over on March 13 and is unbeaten in his first two games. Lecce remained in 13th place but not out of relegation danger.



De Kock's grit, Mayank's pace stuns RCB

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Quinton de Kock's astute fifty and pace sensation Mayank Yadav's youthful brilliance fashioned Lucknow Super Giants' 28-run romp over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in their IPL match here on Tuesday. Lucknow constructed their 181 for five around Quinton De Kock's 81 (56b) and Nicholas Pooran's unbeaten 40 (21b). RCB threatened to miraculously scale 182 briefly through Mahipal Lomror, who produced a forceful 33 off 13 balls. However, Mayank's scorching three-wicket haul (3/14) was not to be denied as the hosts were bundled out for 153. But in reality, RCB's chase never really took off – partly by their own follies and partly by the excellence of Lucknow bowlers.



Lucknow opened the bowling with two spinners – Manimaran Siddharth and Krunal Pandya – and it did surprise Faf du Plessis (19 off 13) and Virat Kohli (22 off 16). But the introduction of pacer Naveen-ul-Haq saw Kohli upping the ante, smoking him for six over the bowler's head. The left-arm spinner Siddharth soon fetched the massive wicket of in-form Kohli as the latter's attempt to go inside out resulted in a simple catch to Devdutt Padikkal at backward point. RCB went on a slide from that point losing skipper du Plessis, to a mindless run-out, Glenn Maxwell and Cameron Green and found themselves at 58 for four in the eighth over. This was the period when Mayank cranked up the pace in his three-over spell (3-0-13-2). Maxwell tried to pull a 151

kmph laser beam from Mayank, but the high pace meant that the Aussie could not time his pull, resulting in a simple catch to Pooran at short mid-wicket. Green was beaten by Mayank's raw pace as the delivery straightened a bit after pitching on the good length to rattle his off-stump. The right-arm quick later added Rajat Patidar (27) to his kitty to reduce RCB to 103 for six, and the home side was sinking fast then. Earlier, De Kock manifested his exceptional hitting skills with a fifty but Lucknow could not progress beyond a par score. The left-hander selected the bowlers and positions around the ground to play his shots with precision but the RCB bowlers did not allow other batsmen, except Pooran, a free run. The Super Giants went off the block quickly, reaching

32 for no loss in three overs and then making it 54 in the Power Play. Most of the runs came from the blade of De Kock, who took a particular liking for pacer Mohammed Siraj. The South African slammed him for three sixes – two in succession – spread across two overs – two powerful pulls and a handsome loft over mid-wicket. KL Rahul, who captained the side after coming in as an impact sub against Punjab Kings in the previous game, started slowly making six runs off his first 10 balls. But a six off left-arm pacer Yash Dagal gave his innings momentum and later he swept spinner Maxwell for a six. However, Rahul perished soon as an attempt to pull Maxwell's good length delivery ended up in the palms of Mayank Dagar inside the circle.

The second substantial alliance in LSG innings followed Devdutt Padikkal's exit as De Kock and Marcus Stoinis (24, 15b) added 56 runs off 30 balls for the third wicket. De Kock, who brought his fifty in 36 balls, kept his end going during this alliance as Stoinis hammered a six each off Maxwell and Green as LSG rolled on. But the blooming partnership ended when Stoinis' half-hearted swat was pouched by Dagar at point. De Kock departed soon, lofting Reece Topley to Dagar at long-on. The LSG were 143 for four in 16.3 overs at that stage and needed a few more runs to reach safer shores. Pooran, who biffed left-arm seamer Topley for three sixes in a row in the 19th over and two more maximums in the final over off Mohammed Siraj, gave them those during his final assault.

Delhi Capitals ready for KKR challenge

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Delhi Capitals would be keen to prove that their comfortable win against Chennai Super Kings was not a flash in the pan while Kolkata Knight Riders would be eyeing a hat-trick of victories when the two sides face off in the IPL here on Wednesday. The Capitals would be buoyed by the 20-run victory here on Sunday, their first of the season, against defending champions CSK who were outsmarted by Rishabh Pant and Co. In all departments of the game. And come Wednesday, the Capitals will have to put another such performance against KKR, whose batters pummelled Royal Challengers Bengaluru bowlers to notch their second win of the season on March 29.

Khaleel Ahmed's performance against CSK was commendable, yet his long-standing fielding troubles remain a concern. He struggles particularly with aerial catches, dropping more than he successfully takes. He dropped a catch of MS Dhoni against CSK. Mukesh Kumar lacks pace while veteran Ishant Sharma is more than capable of asking pertinent questions. KKR, on the other hand, have looked good this season, registering two wins from as many games. Opener Phil Salt, all-rounder Andre Russell and Venkatesh Iyer have been in good nick in the first two games and would look to pose a challenge for the Delhi pacers. Skipper Shreyas Iyer also got some runs under his belt in the win against Royal Challengers



For DC, the onus will be on Prithvi Shaw and veteran Australian David Warner to provide a solid start. Meanwhile, Pant continues his inspirational journey. After two scratchy innings, the skipper gave a glimpse of his devastating best as he scored his maiden fifty (51 off 32 balls) of the season and seems to be slowly finding his groove. The likes of South African Tristan Stubbs and Australian Mitchell Marsh, both capable of launching an assault on the opposition, need to be better towards the end as DC lack domestic power hitters. While Stubbs showcased his prowess with the bat against Rajasthan Royals, a consistent show from him will do a world of good for DC. On the other hand, Marsh is yet to produce a glimpse of his brute power with the willow which could prove to be DC's lethal weapon. South African Anrich Nortje is yet to find his rhythm as he returned to action after a long injury layoff. The Capitals' Indian pace unit will thus have to punch above its weight against a formidable KKR side.

Bengaluru. Rookie pacer Harshit Rana has impressed so far, picking five wickets in two outings, but Mitchell Starc, their record buy, and Varun Chakravathy have gone for runs aplenty. **THE TEAMS (FROM):** **Delhi Capitals:** Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Prithvi Shaw, Yash Dhull, Abishek Porel, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Mitchell Marsh, Pravin Dubey, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Kuldeep Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Khaleel Ahmed, Ishant Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Tristan Stubbs, Ricky Bhui, Kumar Kushagra, Rasikh Dar, Jhye Richardson, Sumit Kumar, Swastik Chikara and Shai Hope. **Kolkata Knight Riders:** Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravathy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain, Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

Rohit would not have lost MI captaincy if he had been named India T20 WC skipper earlier: Sidhu



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu believes that Rohit Sharma would not have been replaced by Hardik Pandya as Mumbai Indians captain had the BCCI named him skipper for the T20 World Cup last year itself. Rohit was declared captain of India's yet-to-be-named T20 World Cup squad in February this year by BCCI secretary Jay Shah at an event in Ahmedabad, a good two months after he was replaced by Pandya as MI skipper. "If the BCCI had named Rohit as captain for the T20 World Cup in October, the franchise wouldn't have chosen Hardik as captain. It's a matter of the franchise's respect. So, the actual issue here is timing," Sidhu said in 'Star Sports Press Room'. Pandya has been facing hostility from fans in the ongoing IPL, booed in all three matches so far, including the one at MI's home turf of Wankhede, besides ending up

on the losing side. Sidhu said the fans' reaction is quite understandable as Rohit is a much-loved cricketer. "Nobody can digest the fact that India's hero, India's captain, is not the captain of our franchise. 'What wrong has he done?' is what fans of the franchise would be thinking. But what does he have to do? "There is nothing that succeeds like success. If he had won these two matches, there wouldn't have been any noise," he pointed out. Talking about other teams in the IPL, Sidhu felt Royal Challengers Bengaluru have become predictable, especially in their spin bowling. "The biggest thing needed in the winning of a team is that they are not dependent on just one individual to achieve victory. We do talk about Virat Kohli and Faf du Plessis, but you got to saddle the right horse. "The chain is as strong as the weakest link, and their weakness lies in the spin

department. Their spinners are just not there, so therefore they will have to replenish that area. Like, RCB had (Wanindu) Hasaranga, who was pretty good and even before him, there was Yuzvendra Chahal," he observed. "But they let them go and that has created a void in their bowling line-up. RCB haven't been able to fill that void, which makes them predictable. Now look at (MS) Dhoni – when he comes, no one knows his plan," he said. Sidhu reiterated that IPL performances will shape the T20 World Cup squads of all the teams. "The entire world revolves around the IPL. Playing in the IPL just before the World Cup is like participating in a mini World Cup. Stellar performance here can make you an overnight sensation. Therefore, anyone who excels in the IPL becomes a strong contender," he said. The T20 World Cup will begin on June 1 in the USA and the West Indies.



KKR-RR, GT-DC matches rescheduled: BCCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Kolkata Knight Riders' home IPL game against Rajasthan Royals was on Tuesday advanced by a day to April 16, while Gujarat Titans-Delhi Capitals fixture in Ahmedabad was also rescheduled by the BCCI which did not give any reason for the move. The PTI had on Monday reported that the KKR-RR tie was set to be rescheduled due to Ram Navami, but the Board did not specify any reason for the rescheduling of matches on these two dates. "The fixture between Kolkata Knight Riders & Rajasthan Royals, which was earlier scheduled to take place on April 17, 2024 at Eden Gardens, Kolkata will now be played a day prior on April 16, 2024. "The Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad was earlier scheduled to host the match between Gujarat Titans & Delhi Capitals on April 16, 2024. The fixture will now be played on April 17, 2024," the BCCI said in a statement. It was learnt that Kolkata Police expressed its inability to provide adequate security cover for what will be KKR's third home game of the 17th IPL season, just three days after they host the Lucknow Super Giants. "Since the match is coinciding with Ram Navami and a portion of security is already deployed for elections. Therefore it won't

be possible for us to provide adequate security for the match on April 17," Kolkata Police had stated in a letter to Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) president Snehasish Ganguly. Bengal is also set to vote on April 19 in the first phase of the seven-phase general elections. The voting in Kolkata will take place on June 1. "Yes, the CAB has informed us that local police has asked for rescheduling of the date and the matter is being looked into. We haven't yet decided on the new date," a senior BCCI official told PTI on Monday. On part of CAB, a senior officer-bearer had informed: "We have suggested two dates, April 16 or 18. In any case, it is KKR's home match and will be played at the Eden Gardens." The CAB had suggested that the match be advanced either by a day (16 April) or pushed back by 24 hours to 18 April. KKR is currently in Visakhapatnam for a game against Delhi Capitals on Wednesday. They had begun the season with a thrilling four-run victory over Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Eden Gardens, followed by a seven-wicket thumping of Royal Challengers Bengaluru at M Chinnaswamy Stadium. The Shubman Gill-led Gujarat Titans are placed fourth in the standings with four points, following two wins and a loss from four outings.

We never give up, we will keep fighting, asserts Hardik



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya on Tuesday asserted that the former champions will not give up and will continue to fight in the ongoing IPL despite slumping to a hat-trick of defeats. "If there's one thing you should know about this team, we never give up. We'll keep fighting, we'll keep going," Hardik posted on X. Hardik has been facing the ire of fans since replacing Rohit Sharma as MI captain. The all-rounder was booed in the team's opening two matches and the crowd hostility was at its peak in MI's first home game of the season on Monday. To add to the woes, under his captaincy MI's campaign at the 2024 IPL got off to a disastrous start as they sit at the bottom of the table following three losses on the trot. However, MI are known to be perennial slow starters. In 2015, they lost the first four games before going on to win the title. Hardik's poor captaincy calls have also been questioned -- whether it was not giving Bumrah the new ball or sending Tim David ahead of himself against Gujarat Titans. The change in captaincy has not sat well with the legions of MI supporters. On Monday, chants of 'Rohit Rohit' filled the Wankhede with the Indian captain himself asking the crowd not to jeer Hardik. Mumbai Indians will next face Delhi Capitals at home on Sunday.

Kohli seems to have evolved again: Hussey

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Virat Kohli seems to have "evolved again" avowed former Australia cricketer David Hussey, who warned against writing off the champion player after a debate ensued on the Indian batter's strike rate. Despite leading the run chart for Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the ongoing edition of IPL, Kohli faced some criticism for not batting aggressively enough against KKR in their last game. Kohli is the joint-highest run getter so far with RR's Riyan Parag, scoring 181 runs in three matches with two fifties at a strike rate of 141.4. With the T20 World Cup impending, Kohli's place in the team has also been a topic of discussion even though he played one of the most memorable innings for India

in their clash against arch-rivals Pakistan in Melbourne. "Virat Kohli is the leading run scorer, isn't he in the IPL currently?" Hussey replied when asked about what he made of the debate around Kohli's strike rate. "He's a pretty good player. I don't think he's going to have too many issues. If you see the strike rate in this IPL, he seems to have taken his game to a new level, he's evolved again," Hussey told the media here on the sidelines of the announcement of the launch of Melbourne Cricket Academy, a partnership between Cricket Victoria and KheloMore. "You never write off champions, like you never write off Steve Smith, (like) you never write off Ricky Ponting, Sachin Tendulkar, Rohit Sharma..."



"You never write them off and I'm certain that Virat Kohli is going to come out in the next World Cup and be the dominant force that he has been for the better part of a decade. Never write off your champions," Hussey reiterated. Hussey, who played in the IPL for Chennai Super Kings, the then Kings XI Punjab and said Kolkata Knight Riders, said

the competition has evolved with teams moving on from a conservative approach to an ultra-aggressive one. "It's hit-hit, bang-bang from ball one now, whereas back in 2008, (it) was (about) take your time, get yourself in, try and have wickets in hand at the first 10-over mark and then try and get 180 or 190 (and) that was out of this

world," he said. "Now teams are getting 270 runs and other teams are almost chasing them down. If you face a couple of dot balls early and your strike rate is under 100, you're sort of ostracised, you don't fit to the T20 mould, so the planning that's evolved from 2008 till now is phenomenal - every ball, every over is really important," he said. Hussey, who was present at the Cricket Club of India along with Cricket Victoria CEO Nick Cummins and KheloMore CEO and selector Jatin Paranjape, said 10 years from now IPL would be entirely different. "The game has evolved out of sight and like Nick (Cummins) said, I can't wait to see what the IPL and what T20 cricket looks like in a decade's time, because teams might get 300 runs and chase it down,

which should be not good for fast bowlers or spinners but it's great for the game of cricket," he said. Hussey felt Australia will have a selection headache going into the World Cup, adding that players who are likely to feature in the T20 World Cup are getting an excellent opportunity to prepare for it in the IPL. "There's competition for places, isn't there, in the Australian team? There's Travis Head who also opens up batting as well, who's playing particularly well," Hussey said. "Anybody can beat anybody on their day, the pitch is a different, foreign conditions, but the players are very, very fortunate to have the IPL to play in and prepare very well in order to go to the World Cup and execute their skills," Hussey said.