



CITY 3 PEOPLE WANT A CHANGE: PRIYANKA

OPINION 6 SHOWDOWN IN KARNATAKA

WORLD 10 RUSSIAN MISSILES SLAM INTO UKRAINE KILLING 14

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PK, MI DESPERATE TO RESURRECT IPL CAMPAIGN 12 SPORTS

Surya Tilak for Ram Lalla after five centuries



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ AYODHYA

In an unprecedented event, at precisely 11:58 am today, the divine sunlight delicately graced the forehead of Ram Lalla, marking the commencement of the revered Surya Abhishek ritual. Lasting for four celestial minutes, this enchanting spectacle unfolded amidst joyous celebrations in the sacred city of Ayodhya. "This is an extraordinary moment for all devotees of Lord Ram," exclaimed Pandit Satyendra Das, a prominent priest at the temple. "The Surya abhishek symbolises the divine blessings showered upon the birthplace of Lord Ram after centuries of longing," he said. The Surya Tilak, an effulgent mark adorning Ram Lalla's forehead, serves as a poignant emblem of Lord Ram's birth and the realisation of a profound spiritual aspiration. According to a senior scientist from the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), Roorkee, the planned size of the tilak is 58 mm. The precise duration of the tilak on the forehead center was

approximately three to three-and-a-half minutes, with two minutes of full illumination, he noted. Utilising cutting-edge scientific expertise, a 5.8 centimetre beam of light was directed onto the deity's forehead. To achieve this remarkable phenomenon, a specialised instrument was meticulously crafted. A team of ten esteemed Indian scientists stationed at the Ram Mandir meticulously ensured the success of this auspicious event on Ram Navami. For approximately 3 to 3.5 minutes, starting just before 12 noon, sunlight was precisely focused onto the statue's forehead using a combination of mirrors and lenses. "This tradition of adorning the Ram Lalla idol's forehead with the 'surya tilak' in Ayodhya on Ram Navami will now become an annual ritual," stated Abhay Karandikar, secretary of the Department of Science and Technology. "However, due to the ongoing construction of the temple, adjustments will be required in the design of the optical mechanism responsible for creating the 'surya tilak.'" Continued on Page 8

Curtains down on campaign for first phase of LS polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

LOK SABHA ELECTION PHASE 1 SEATS

STATE/UT	CONSTITUENCY
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	Andaman and Nicobar Islands
Arunachal Pradesh	Arunachal Pradesh East, Arunachal Pradesh West
Assam	Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Kaziranga, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur
Bihar	Aurangabad, Gaya, Jamui, Nawada
Chhattisgarh	Bastar
Jammu and Kashmir	Udhampur
Madhya Pradesh	Chhindwara, Balaghat, Jabalpur, Mandla, Sidhi, Shahdol
Maharashtra	Nagpur, Chandrapur, Bhandara-Gondiya, Gadchiroli-Chimur, Ramtek
Manipur	Inner Manipur, Outer Manipur
Meghalaya	Shillong, Tura
Mizoram	Mizoram
Nagaland	Nagaland
Puducherry	Puducherry
Rajasthan	Ganganagar, Bikaner, Churu, Jhunjhunu, Sikar, Jaipur Rural, Jaipur, Alwar, Bharatpur, Karauli-Dholpur, Dausa, Nagaur
Sikkim	Sikkim
Tamil Nadu	Tiruvallur, Chennai North, Chennai South, Chennai Central, Sriperumbudur, Kancheepuram, Arakkonam, Vellore, Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Tiruvannamalai, Arani, Villupuram, Kallakurichi, Salem, Namakkal, Erode, Tiruppur, Nilgiris, Coimbatore, Pollachi, Dindigul, Karur, Tiruchirappalli, Perambalur, Cuddalore, Chidambaram, Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, Thanjavur, Sivaganga, Madurai, Theni, Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram, Thoothukudi, Tenkasi, Tirunelveli, Kanniyakumari
Tripura	Tripura West
Uttarakhand	Tehri Garhwal, Garhwal, Almora, Nainital-Udhamsingh Nagar, Haridwar
Uttar Pradesh	Pilibhit, Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Nagina, Moradabad, Rampur
West Bengal	Coochbehar, Alipurduars, Jalpaiguri

The campaigning for the first phase of polls covering 102 parliamentary seats of 21 States and Union Territories (UTs), where voting will be held on April 19 ended at 5 pm on Wednesday. Electioneering picked up pace on the final day of campaigning with the parties making last-minute effort to woo voters. Heatwave conditions and untimely rains with thunder and lightning had hit campaigning. Leading the charge, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took whirlwind tours of various constituencies in the past few days, addressing rallies and holding roadshows, and asserting that he went to people with hope in 2014, trust in 2019 and guarantee in 2024. Many times he said there is "Modi's guarantee across the country and I am giving the guarantee of fulfilling all these guarantees". Modi held two election rallies in Assam's Nalbari and Tripura's Agartala on Wednesday and launched a scathing attack on the Congress during campaigning in the northeastern States saying the party had adopted the 'loof' east policy while the BJP turned it into the 'Act East' policy. Continued on Page 8

Deluge hits Dubai



Vehicles sit abandoned in floodwater covering a major road in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on Wednesday. Heavy thunderstorms lashed the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, dumping over a year and a half's worth of rain on the desert city-State of Dubai in the span of hours as it flooded out portions of major highways and its international airport

AP/PTI ■ DUBAI

Heavy thunderstorms lashed the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, dumping over a year and a half's worth of rain on the desert city-State of Dubai in the span of hours as it flooded out portions of major highways and its international airport. Meanwhile, the death toll in separate heavy flooding in neighbouring Oman rose to 18 with others still missing as the sultanate prepared for the storm. The rains began late Monday, soaking the sands and roadways of Dubai with some 20 millimetres (0.79 inches) of rain, according to meteorological data collected at Dubai International Airport. The storms intensified around 9 am local Tuesday and continued throughout the day, dumping more rain and hail onto the overwhelmed city.

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TMC MANIFESTO Mamata on collision course with Modi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In an apparent view to grab land and pull back the steadily alienating minority voters, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday promised through the Trinamool Congress manifesto that if her party comes to power as a constituent of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) in the Centre then it would ban the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), banish National Register of Citizens (NRC) and put a bar on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). Releasing the TMC's election manifesto, senior leader and former Bengal Finance Minister Amit Mitra quoting from Didi's shapath (promises) said, "If the TMC is voted to power as a part of the INDIA alliance then it will repeal the CAA, abolish the NRC and see to it that UCC does not take place in the entire country."



TMC leaders Amit Mitra, Derek O'Brien and Chandrima Bhattacharya release the party's election manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections in Kolkata on Wednesday

The Chief Minister too said similar things at an election rally in Assam. Alleging that the BJP had "turned the entire country into a detention camp," she said, "If the INDIA Bloc wins, there will be no NRC, CAA and UCC. We will repeal all discriminatory laws." She said she had never seen "such a dangerous election in her life".

There would be "no democracy left and there would be no elections" if Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns to power for the third term, she warned. Back in Kolkata the ten promises christened Didi Sapath by the party, the TMC also held out dangling a whole

range of carrots that ranged from 5 kilogram ration in home delivery mode to ten free LPG cylinders a year for all BPL families. "This is all about Dirid Sapat... we will provide 5 kg ration at the doorstep and give 10 gas cylinders free per year," Mitra who was flanked by senior leaders

Derek O'Brien and Chandrima Bhattacharya said, adding his party would also get replaced the Ayushman Bharat at the all-India level to a ₹10 lakh medical insurance scheme. Besides, the students would get a credit card up to Rs 10 lakh for higher studies and the OBCs, SCs and STs would be provided separate higher education scholarships. The elderly too were not left out with a monthly old-age pension of ₹1,000 for those who cross 60 years. The party also promised a Minimum Support Price for the farmers which would be 50 per cent higher than the average cost of production of the costs. Besides "Didi's Sapath also includes an enhanced wage of ₹400 per day for the job card holders who are enlisted in the 100-days' work scheme," said Mitra, adding the new Government in the Centre aided by the TMC would also decrease diesel and petrol prices by formulating a price stabilisation mechanism.

On the radar of Bihar's electorate, litmus test for Nitish Kumar

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ PATNA

The Lok Sabha 2024 elections, like all polls, are considered to be as significant as those in the past. However, Bihar's seven-phase elections for its 40 Parliamentary seats this time will not only decide between the NDA and the INDIA Bloc but also seal the fate for the future politics of the longest-serving Chief Minister Nitish Kumar now in his seventies, regardless of his alliances. While it is a direct contest between the BJP-led NDA and the RJD-led INDIA Bloc, Nitish is on the 'radar' of the people of Bihar, making him the litmus test for his major coalition partner, the BJP, which has long struggled to 'install' their own candidate as head of the State Government. As per the estimates of several politicians and parties, amidst the poll

fervour, it is comprehensible that the BJP and the RJD will have a close finish against each other. The June 4 poll result may highlight any political misstep by the BJP in realigning with JD(U), as its tallest leader's popularity is waning. They also said that Nitish would be able save his skin a bit just in the name of the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Am certain not only Nitish but his party JD(U) too, due to severe internal factionalism pre- and post-Lalan Singh era, is affected. The cadre is facing difficulties in explaining the voters of Bihar due to the lone instance of repeated flip-flops by a sitting Chief Minister in the history of Indian politics. Biharis don't like to be tagged as 'paltu', a more derogatory term than the old 'aayaa Ram, gayaa Ram'. But I have got feedback that people of the State



Usually a hub of political activity during elections, this is the scene outside the Janata Dal (U) head office in Patna on Wednesday

across the world are facing difficulty in explaining his frequently changing sides. "Nitish Kumar rode over Lalu Raj and people

overwhelmingly voted for him going beyond caste and religion, but things are different now. "He seems to have run out of

ideas for a good last two terms. His last alliance with Tejaswi Yadav's RJD kindled some hope on the employment front. But such

people-oriented development seems to have taken a back seat while caste and religion-ridden politics is back if you look at the pattern of ticket distribution." Pushpendra Kumar, former Professor and chairperson of prestigious Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Patna Centre and now working full time as a researcher of Bihar's society and polity, told The Pioneer in a tete-a-tete revolving around the general elections in Bihar. Even residents of the village of Bihar CM expressed disenchantment towards the son of their soil due to his several political oscillations. "We were so proud that Nitish was so instrumental in bringing back Bihar to life after years of misrule by Lalu Raj but now we are fed up with Nitish's own decisions. I

can only remember the Bollywood song Is Mod Se Jaate Hai Kuch Sust Kadam Raste Kuch Tej Kadam Rahein..." said Pradeep Mahto, a villager of Kalyan Bigha near Harnaut in Nalanda district. According to the Bihar Economic Survey (2023-24) the State has over 88 per cent rural population and 50 per cent of its workforce is engaged in agriculture. The phase 1 polls on April 19 will see elections in Aurangabad, Gaya, Nawada, and Jamui while second phase on April 26 will take place in Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia, Bhagalpur, and Banka. With 40 Lok Sabha seats, Bihar is considered to be a hotbed for Indian politics as it is the fourth-highest State overall.

While the JD(U) is contesting from 16 seats, the BJP from 17 seats and its partner LJP of Ram Vilas Paswan fighting on five seats and former Bihar CM Jitan Ram Majhi's HAM and RLP each running for one seat. The Mahagathbandhan also part of INDIA Bloc with the Congress as its partner in Bihar, the largest coalition member the RJD has staked for 26 seats while CPI(ML) on three seats, CPI and CPM one each, and the Congress nine seats. The BJP, JDU, and LJP together formed the NDA, which won 39 of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The third phase May 7 will see polls in Jhanjharpur, Supaul, Araria, Madhepura, and Khagaria, and the fourth will be held in Darbhanga, Ujjainpur, Samastipur, Begusarai, and Munger on May 13. Continued on Page 8

Ideals of Lord Ram as pertinent today as in Treta Yuga: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Wednesday, said that the timeless ideals of Maryada Purushottam Lord Shri Ram remain as pertinent today as they were in the Treta Yuga.

and national obligations." Chief Minister Yogi pointed out that during Vasantik Navratri, rituals honouring various forms of Adishakti Maa Bhagwati take place starting from the Pratipada of Shukla Paksha until Navami, when young girls embodying Navdurga are worshipped.

followers of Sanatan Dharma across the globe celebrate the birthday of Lord Shri Ram with great fervour. This year, the festivities of Shri Ram Navami are particularly vibrant and deeply rooted in faith, especially in Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Shri Ram.

form of Maa Durga, as per rituals in the Gorakhnath temple. Subsequently, he performed 'havan' on the ninth date of Vasantik Navratri.

'roli' (red powder), 'chandani' (sandalwood), and rice grains on the foreheads of the nine girls. He then sought their blessings by offering them 'chunari' and 'dakshina'.



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath performing kanya puja in Gorakhpur on Wednesday

PTI

Ram Navami celebrated with enthusiasm

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Ram Navami was celebrated with extra fervour and gaiety at the various temples of the city on Wednesday that drew huge crowds on the occasion.



Indira Nagar area by the Sri Ram Janmotsav Samiti. The grand procession included live tableaux of boys and girls dressed as various gods and goddesses and witnessed thousands of Ram devotees participating in it.

mittee president Shashikant Sharma and general secretary Sanjeev Garg said the procession was grander this year and witnessed the participation of a larger number of devotees.

people, devotees, boys, girls, traders and other people participated in the procession. Elephants and horses were also a part of the procession.

For all those traffic constables who stand for several hours in the heat, monitoring the traffic on the road, here is some good news.

Traffic cops in city to get AC helmets

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

For all those traffic constables who stand for several hours in the heat, monitoring the traffic on the road, here is some good news.

He said that in view of the rising temperatures, they had given instructions to the traffic policemen to increase the intake of water.

all the departments come together and the departments concerned are given the recommendation to complete the task.

CLASSIFIEDS. आवश्यकता है. आवाश्यकता है (प्राचार्य एवं सहो आचार्यो को) उच्च प्रताप सिंह महाविद्यालय

CLASSIFIEDS. NOTICE. I Vivek Srivastava S/o Shri Ram Nihal Lal Srivastava R/o P & T Colony, Aliganj Lucknow.

Protest against demolition of Janabe Fatima's tomb

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Maulana Fakhre Millat Dr Yasoob Abbas led a massive protest at the Martyrs Memorial in Lucknow, condemning the demolition of the raizas (tombs) of Janabe Fatima and other imams by the Saudi government in the Jannatul Baqi cemetery of Madina.

Muslims in Saudi Arabia. All India Shia Personal Board chairman, Hujjatul Islam Maulana Saim Mehndi, echoed these sentiments in a letter to the prime minister, highlighting the need to consider the demands of the minority community.

Unemployed man ends life. DUPED: A man was duped of over Rs 5.5 lakh by cyber fraudsters in Chinhat.

Survey company duped, police register complaint

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Owner of a firm assigned the task of survey of properties of municipal corporations in Lucknow, Ghaziabad and Allahabad in 2018, was duped of over Rs 1.24 crore after he completed the survey work.

done while going to fields along with the revenue inspectors of the municipal corporations," he alleged.

Man hangs self after attempt to kill wife. Poonam and their children. Nitin had a difference with his father over marrying Poonam and so he was staying separately from his parents.

CLASSIFIEDS. NOTICE. In the co-mark sheet of the affidavit of high school year 2007 roll number 2636182, Km. MANISHA SINGH YADAV has been written. Which is wrong.

CLASSIFIEDS. NOTICE. I have changed my name from Noor Mohammad Ansari to Noor Mohammad S/O KARIM BAKS for future purpose.

CLASSIFIEDS. आवश्यकता है. आवाश्यकता है (प्राचार्य एवं सहो आचार्यो को) उच्च प्रताप सिंह महाविद्यालय

CLASSIFIEDS. NOTICE. I have changed my name from SHAHE ALAM ANSARI to SHAHE ALAM S/O NOOR MOHAMMAD for future purpose.

CLASSIFIEDS. NOTICE. I have changed my name from I, Saraswathi Devi, w/o Chandra Kishor Mishra JC-439621 H Sub. (RT) R/O D-26 Hare Krishna Homes, Flat No.301, shyam Nagar, Kanpur, have changed my name to Saraswati Devi and my date of birth is 13.04.1981.

Unemployed man ends life

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A former contractual employee of the Uttar Pradesh Secretariat was found hanging at his house in Chinhat on Tuesday night.

YOUTH KILLS SELF: In a bizarre incident reported from Bareilly district, a 25-year-old Hindu youth committed suicide by consuming poison after his father converted to Islam.

Man hangs self after attempt to kill wife. Poonam and their children. Nitin had a difference with his father over marrying Poonam and so he was staying separately from his parents.

Man hangs self after attempt to kill wife

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a fit of rage, a man attempted to kill his wife by hanging her at the office of a property dealer in Sarojininar and then ended his life fearing action by the police, on Tuesday night.

Another employee, Atul, came to the office and found the shutters down. When Atul went inside, he found Nitin hanging from the ceiling of the office and Poonam lying on the floor of the office.

The local police took both to the community health centre where doctors pronounced Nitin dead. Poonam is undergoing treatment at KGMU.

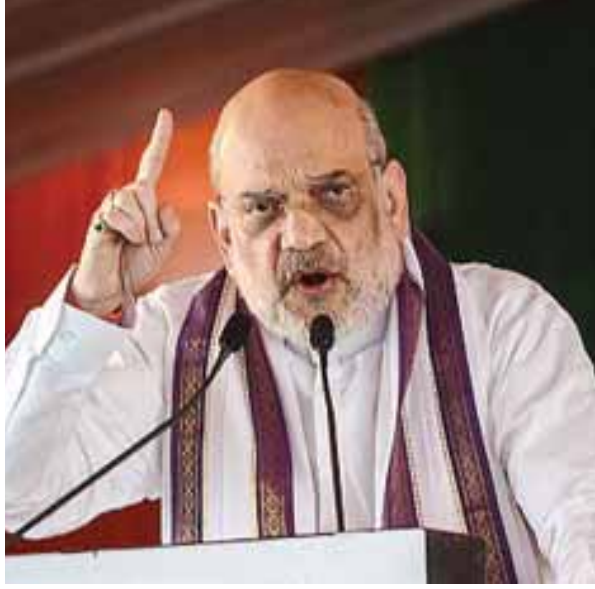
Government determined to free country of Maoists: Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has reaffirmed the government's commitment to making Chhattisgarh and the entire country, "completely free of Maoists." He also labeled them "the biggest enemy of development, peace, and (the) bright future of youth". Shah's comments come a day after Chhattisgarh security forces killed 29 Maoists, including a senior rebel leader — Shankar Rao, on whom there was a bounty of Rs 25 lakh — in a gunfight in Kanker district. The Home Minister also congratulated the joint District Reserve Guard and Border Security Force team, which suffered three non-

fatal injuries. He said the Modi government is determined to free the country from the scourge. Shah said due to the offensive policy of the government and the efforts of security forces, Maoism has been confined to a small area now and soon Chhattisgarh and the entire country will be completely Maoist-free. "Today, a large number of Naxalites have been killed in the operation of security forces in Chhattisgarh. I congratulate all the security personnel who made this operation successful with their bravery and wish for the speedy recovery of the brave policemen who have been injured," Shah wrote on 'X' in Hindi.

Apart from the 29 rebels also recovered a huge quantity of weapons, including Ak-47 and INSAS rifles, as well as .303



also recovered a huge quantity of weapons, including Ak-47 and INSAS rifles, as well as .303

carbines and pistols. The Narendra Modi government will eliminate Naxals from the country in a very short period of time, Union Home Minister Amit Shah asserted on Wednesday, according to PTI from Ahmedabad. The central government has been conducting incessant operations against terrorism and Naxals, he said in a statement, a day after security forces gunned down 29 Maoists in Chhattisgarh. "I can say with conviction that operations against Naxals will continue in the times to come, and under the leadership of Modi, we will uproot Naxalism from our nation in a very short period of time," Shah said. The home minister said since the formation of a BJP government in Chhattisgarh

three months ago, more than 80 Naxals have been eliminated, more than 125 arrested and more than 150 have surrendered. Shah said a large number of camps of security forces have been set up in Maoist-affected areas since 2014. Since 2019, as many as 250 such camps have been set up, ending the security vacuum, he said. Since the start of 2024, as many as 79 Naxalites have been killed in separate gunbattles with security forces in the Bastar region, a Maoist stronghold. The violence in Kanker comes days before the Lok Sabha election begins; the Bastar seat will vote in the first phase on Friday, while Kanker will vote in the second round on April 26.



Modi greets people on Ram Navami

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted people on the occasion of Ram Navami on Wednesday and said Ayodhya is in incomparable bliss as this is the first time the festival is being celebrated there after the consecration of the Ram temple. He also watched online the ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya following his Lok Sabha poll rally in Nalbari in Assam. In a post on X, the Prime Minister said, "After my Nalbari rally, I watched the Surya Tilak on Ram Lalla. Like crores of Indians, this is a very emotional moment for me. The grand Ram Navami in Ayodhya is historic. May this Surya Tilak bring energy to our lives and may it inspire our nation to scale new heights of glory." Greeting people, the prime minister said "The first Ram Navami after the Pran Pratishtha in Ayodhya is a generational milestone, weaving together centuries of devotion with a new era of hope and progress. This is a day crores of Indians waited for," Modi said in a series of posts on X. This is the fruit of the hardwork and sacrifices made by the people of the

country over many years, he said. Ram Navami celebrates the birth of Lord Ram and the temple was recently consecrated at the place where he was born in Ayodhya. Modi said, "May the blessings of Prabhu Shri Ram always remain upon us and guide our paths towards righteousness and peace, illuminating our lives with wisdom and courage." He said he feels overwhelmed and grateful on this occasion as he along with a large number of people in the country witnessed the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya. Modi said the memories of that moment continue to pulsate within him with the same energy. Lord Ram is deeply embedded in the hearts of Indians. Ram Navami is also a time to remember and respect those saints and devotees who dedicated their lives to the construction of the temple in Ayodhya, Modi said. "I am confident that Maryada Purushottam Bhagwan Ram's life and ideals will become a strong basis for constructing 'Viksit Bharat'. His blessings will provide new energy to the resolve of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', the prime minister said.

Modi pays tribute to former PM Chandrashekar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday paid tribute to former Prime Minister Chandrashekar on his birth anniversary, lauding him as an exemplary leader who rose from the grassroots and made rich contributions to national progress. In a post on X, Modi said, "He is remembered for his emphasis on serving the poor and downtrodden. He was also at the forefront of resisting the Emergency and safeguarding our democratic ideals." Born in the Ballia district of Uttar Pradesh in 1927, Chandra Shekhar was a stalwart socialist leader who briefly headed a minority government. His son Neeraj Shekhar is a BJP MP and is contesting from the Ballia.

Congress questions EC order to delete bonds post from X

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday questioned the Election Commission's move to get a post on electoral bonds scheme deleted from social media platform X and said the issue raised in the post makes the government "extremely uncomfortable". The opposition party's remarks came after the social media platform X said the Election Commission (EC) ordered it to take down select posts of YSR Congress, AAP, N Chandrababu Naidu and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary for violation of the model code of conduct. The orders were issued on April 2 and April 3 and a follow-up email was sent by the poll panel on April 10 in which it cited a violation of the "voluntary code of ethics"

if 'X' fails to remove the four posts reported to it. Congress spokesperson and party's social media department head Supriya Shrinete said the Election Commission had asked platform X, formerly known as Twitter, to delete some posts, one of which was about electoral bonds. She said it is incumbent upon the poll watchdog to ensure that free and fair elections happen and that whenever someone breaches the model code of conduct, they are hauled up, including those making hate speeches, religious references and crass and vulgar statements. "So that is why it is very surprising that the EC chose to get a tweet deleted which raised the issue of electoral bonds. Why would they do that? "One does not understand but obviously electoral bonds is



an issue which makes the government extremely uncomfortable," Shrinete told reporters at the AICC headquarters here. She claimed Prime Minister Narendra Modi tried his best to give an explanation on the electoral bonds issue and "not just sounded defensive but stopped making sense". "Those donating to the BJP were the ones winning the big contracts. People being raided by ED and Income Tax

department were donating so this was an extortion racket that was happening and the country now knows about it," she claimed. Citing Rahul Gandhi's remarks at a press conference earlier in the day, Shrinete alleged that the prime minister is a "champion of corruption" as he was "breeding graft through the electoral bonds scheme". "I do want to raise that there is a pattern as far as social media platforms are concerned. This government is very uncomfortable with social media platforms, digital platforms and YouTube channels because it has been able to convert large sections of mainstream media into cheerleaders of the government that do not ask it about jobs, price rise, justice for the girl in Hathras or our athletes," Shrinete said. There is a pattern of how

social media platforms and independent media are being "systematically attacked", she alleged. Shrinete cited how multiple social media accounts of farmer leaders, associations and independent journalists were all "restricted" during the farmers' movement. "I would like to say that social media platforms are being curbed at a time when IT rules of 2021 are under contention across courts in India," she said. The government of the day must do some soul-searching about "suppressing these voices", Shrinete added. On Tuesday, social media platform 'X' said the Election Commission has issued takedown orders requiring the microblogging site to act on posts containing political speech shared from elected politicians, political parties and candidates for office.

Indian fishing boat involved in diesel smuggling seized

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has apprehended an Indian fishing boat allegedly involved in smuggling of diesel and carrying unauthorised amount of currency totaling about Rs 11,46,000. The boat was brought to Mumbai on Wednesday for further investigation. Giving details here, officials said Coast Guard Regional Headquarters (West) launched an operation based on tip off from customs and apprehended an Indian fishing boat 83 nautical miles northwest off

Mumbai on Monday. The operation involved a sustained search during challenging night conditions amidst considerable fishing and merchant traffic covering an area of 200 square miles including offshore development areas off Maharashtra coast. In a seamlessly coordinated operation which involved search by 02 ICG Fast Patrol Vessel (FPVs) and one Interceptor Boat, the suspected boat was finally located and boarded on Monday night. The vessel was brought to Mumbai anchorage in the early hours of Wednesday.

Pande inaugurates cybersecurity lab in Uzbekistan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Wednesday inaugurated a state-of-the-art IT laboratory facility that also boasts a cutting-edge cybersecurity lab at the Uzbek Academy of Armed Forces during his ongoing visit to Uzbekistan, sources said. The development signifies a milestone in defence cooperation between the two nations, following a commitment made during the Defence Ministers' meeting in September 2018, Indian Army sources said. Pande is visiting Uzbekistan from April 15-18 to explore

new avenues of bilateral military collaboration. He is scheduled to hold wide-ranging talks with the top military brass of the Central Asian nation besides visiting a number of defence establishments, the defence ministry had earlier said in a statement. In a significant step toward strengthening bilateral ties between India and Uzbekistan, the Army chief inaugurated a high-tech IT laboratory at the Uzbek Academy of Armed Forces, sources said. The laboratory is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, including nine rooms that house two lecture halls, a cutting-edge cybersecurity lab, a hardware programming lab, an object-

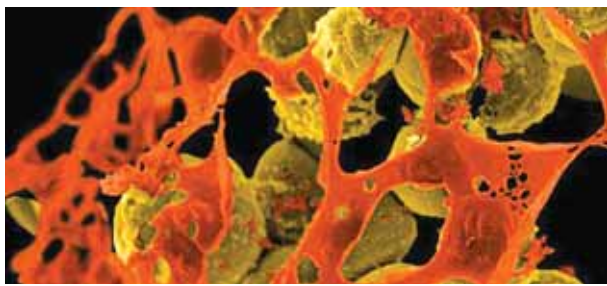


oriented programming lab, a web programming lab, a server room, a multimedia room, and a virtual reality room, they said. Additional facilities include video conferencing terminals, interactive panels,

networking devices, and an assortment of computing equipment comprising a large number of high-end PCs, workstations and laptops, alongside essential peripherals such as printers, cameras, scanners, and storage devices. The request to establish an IT lab was initially made during the Defence Ministers' meeting in September 2018, and the project gained momentum with the approval in 2019, funded through the Ministry of External Affairs' Aid to Eurasia initiative, the army sources added. It has been learnt that the bids exceeded the envisaged budget of Rs 6.5 crore. As a result, Rs 8.5 crore was allotted for the project. An Indian company won the contract and made the lab fully operational well in time, they said. This collaborative initiative is not just a "leap in technological advancement"

for Uzbekistan's defence academy but also a bridge "reinforcing the expanding partnership" between the two nations, promising a future of cooperation in defence and technology, a source said. The establishment of the IT lab is expected to enrich the training resources available to the Uzbek armed forces and foster a deeper understanding and cooperation between India and Uzbekistan in the years to come, they said. The defence ministry on Monday described the Army chief's visit to Uzbekistan as a "significant step" in bolstering defence cooperation between the two countries.

Amid scare of antimicrobial resistance experts call for surveillance of pathogens



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In view of the escalating threat of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in India, microbiologists have called for Unified Data Systems and Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) for surveillance of the pathogens. "AMR is a global threat that requires people who have historically not worked together to cooperate and work towards a common goal..." said Prof. Anurag Agrawal, Dean, Biosciences at Trivedi School of Biosciences, Ashoka University at a workshop titled, "Environmental Surveillance of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR): Strategies and Implications." The workshop which was held recently also saw involvement of key organizations such as the Indian Council of Medical

Research (ICMR), World Health Organisation (WHO), National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), and partners of Alliance for Pathogen Surveillance and Innovation (APSI), among others. They underscored the seriousness of the issue and the need for collaborative efforts to address it effectively. "The APSI consortium is a unique initiative involving public and private academia, public and private hospitals, R&D labs, and government departments trying to address the AMR problem in four different regions of the country," said Prof. LS Shashidhara, Director of the NCBS about the consortium. It is working with a vision that the data generated and the outcome of its efforts will provide additional evidence to frame public health policies and strategies at the national and state levels, he

Testing, evaluation hub for sonar systems SPACE launched

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A state-of-the-art Submersible Platform for Acoustic Characterisation and Evaluation (SPACE) was inaugurated by Secretary, Department of Defence (R&D) and Chairman Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) Dr Samir V Kamat at Underwater Acoustic Research Facility, Kulamavu in Idukki, Kerala on Wednesday, defence ministry said here. The SPACE, set up by the Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory of DRDO, has been designed as a premier testing and evaluation hub for sonar systems destined for Indian Navy onboard various platforms including ships, submarines and helicopters. The SPACE marks a milestone in naval technology advancement. It will consist of two distinct assemblages - a platform which floats on the water surface, and a submersible platform which can be lowered to any depth up to 100 m using winch systems.



Upon completion of operations, the submersible platform can be winched up and docked with the floating platform. The SPACE will mainly be utilised for evaluation of complete sonar system, allowing for quick deployment and easy recovery of scientific packages such as sensors and transducers. It will be suitable for survey, sampling, and data collection of air, surface, mid-water, and reservoir floor parameters using modern scientific instrumentation.

Parties climate concerns in manifestos hollow amid no concrete steps: Experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst the looming specter of climate change, political parties such as BJP and Congress are acknowledging the severity of the crisis and integrating it into their manifestoes as a commitment to addressing it through policy action and international cooperation. However, experts are not impressed. They caution that while these commitments are a step in the right direction, they may fall short of meaningful action if not accompanied by concrete and substantive measures. The BJP, which released its 69-page election manifesto recently, has dedicated three pages to environment and climate issues under the section Modi Ki Guarantee for Sustainable Bharat, coming a long way from just a paragraph on environment in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections. The word climate change did not even figure in the 1999 and 2004 manifestos of the BJP, currently the world's largest political party. The Congress has allotted two pages for environment, climate, disaster management, and water and sanitation-related issues in its 2024 election manifesto. A review of its previous Lok



Sabha election manifestos shows a strong emphasis on climate change and environmental sustainability issues. A 2022 study by the Centre for Policy Research noted that the Congress has consistently emphasized climate change and environmental sustainability over the last three elections and has discussed specific steps for environmental protection, like green budgeting and the creation of an independent authority to work on it. According to the study, while the BJP dedicates about 11 per cent of its manifesto to environmental issues, left-leaning parties generally highlight water conservation, dedicating around 12 per cent of their content to environmental protection and sustainability. Key commitments in the BJP's latest manifesto include achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, transitioning to non-

fossil fuel energy sources, improving river health, achieving national air quality standards in 60 cities, expanding tree cover, and boosting disaster resilience. The Congress has proposed setting up a fund for a green transition and achieving the net-zero goal. However, critics highlight that some promises made in these manifestos might be symbolic rather than substantive. "There have been several cases where the government's approach to issues like forest and wildlife conservation, where policies and actions may not align with the stated commitments to address climate change. For instance, while there may be pledges to protect forests and wildlife habitats in manifestos, actual policies or actions may prioritize economic interests over environmental conservation," said a climate change expert.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

SC votes for EVMs

The apex court has summarily rejected the idea of reverting to ballot papers for registering votes

General elections would be held through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) as the Supreme Court has voiced its disapproval of criticism directed towards them; it has summarily dismissed the idea of reverting to ballot papers. This statement comes amid debates regarding the reliability of EVMs. Many Opposition leaders have publicly expressed scepticism regarding the accuracy of EVM results, citing concerns of tampering and the potential undermining of the democratic process. The Supreme Court's stance underscores the need for a pragmatic approach towards electoral reforms, balancing concerns of transparency and efficiency in democratic practices. The use of EVMs in elections has been a subject of contention since its introduction in India in the 1990s by the Congress Government. While proponents argue for its efficiency, accuracy and ability to streamline the voting process, critics raise concerns over potential vulnerabilities to tampering, hacking and manipulation. These concerns have fuelled



calls for a return to traditional paper ballots, perceived by some as a more secure and transparent method of voting. However, the Supreme Court's recent remarks shed light on the practical challenges associated with such a regression. The transition from paper ballots to EVMs was a significant leap forward in the electoral process. Reverting to paper ballots would not only be a step back in terms of technology but also pose logistical challenges in managing large-scale elections in a country as populous as India. The Supreme Court is right in its stand as replacing EVMs with paper ballots will be a humongous exercise. However, there is a middle ground called VVPAT

— the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). A tangible link between electronic voting and the traditional paper ballot system, it provides voters with the opportunity to verify their vote by displaying a paper slip containing the chosen candidate's name and symbol. A little tweaking of the system to collect paper slips with the candidate's name the voter voted for and counted along with the electronic votes would go a long way in making the system transparent. Critics of EVMs have often pointed to instances of alleged tampering and discrepancies in election results. While these concerns merit attention, it is essential to distinguish between genuine issues and unsubstantiated claims driven by political agendas. The integrity of the electoral process is paramount, and any allegations of malpractice should be thoroughly investigated and addressed. Perception plays a crucial role in shaping the legitimacy of election outcomes, and measures to strengthen transparency and accountability are essential. Rather than advocating for a wholesale rejection of technological advancements, the focus should be on enhancing the security, transparency and accountability of the electoral process. Making VVPAT counting and matching mandatory would indeed go a long way in clearing the doubts about the EVMs.

PICTALK



National Cadet Corps perform a drill during their 10-day summer season camp at Nagrota, in Jammu

Showdown in Karnataka

As Karnataka braces for the Lok Sabha elections, the political arena is set for a fierce clash between the Congress and the BJP-JD(S) alliance



KALYANI SHANKAR

The Lok Sabha elections are coming up in Karnataka and will be held in 28 constituencies on April 26 and May 7. The Congress party and the BJP-JD(S) alliance will compete to win voters' support. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has visited the State multiple times to campaign for BJP candidates. BJP has the support of former chief minister Yediyurappa, who is widespread among the Lingayat community and is a significant vote bank in the State. These elections are crucial for Karnataka's future and mark a pivotal moment in its history.

Karnataka has been a stronghold of Congress for many years. It supported Prime Minister Indira Gandhi even after the Emergency, is a testament to its political significance. This historical significance is evident from the victories of Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi, who both won seats in Karnataka for the Congress party.

These elections are not just a contest but a high-stakes battle between Congress, BJP and the Bharatiya Janata Party-Janata Dal (Secular) alliance. They symbolise the BJP's re-entry into Karnataka's political landscape. The election could shift policy priorities and governance style, potentially impacting various sectors of the State's economy and society. The results will have significant consequences for people's lives, making their participation and understanding of the process crucial.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seeks to emerge victorious in the upcoming Karnataka elections to solidify its regional dominance in the South, enhance its standing in national politics and extend its sphere of influence in southern India. In contrast, the Indian National Congress is committed to protecting its Government in the State. At the same time, the Janata Dal (Secular) [JD(S)] endeavours to survive in a highly competitive political climate. In essence, JD(S) is striving to attain political longevity.

The BJP's campaign in Karnataka centres around PM Modi's achievements and Congress's fail-



ures. It targets two influential communities, the Lingayats and Vokkaligas, who are crucial to its electoral strategy. The Lingayats, being a dominant community in the State, have traditionally supported the BJP.

In contrast, the Vokkaligas, another influential community, has been a JD (S) stronghold. Winning over these communities is crucial for the BJP's electoral success. The BJP faces some local conflicts. For the first time since 2014, the party has had an open rebellion. The reason for this is the BJP-JDS alliance, which has yet to be well received. The Congress, too, has its rebel candidates. Congress is targeting SCs, STs and Muslims in Karnataka.

The Congress Government implemented five essential poll guarantees promised last year, which included free bus rides for women, increased funding for education and job creation. These promises were designed to address specific concerns of the region's voters and reflect the party's commitment to social welfare and economic development.

Three pre-poll surveys by Edina, News 18 and India Today Group predict con-



THE CONGRESS GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTED FIVE ESSENTIAL POLL GUARANTEES PROMISED LAST YEAR, WHICH INCLUDED FREE BUS RIDES FOR WOMEN, INCREASED FUNDING FOR EDUCATION AND JOB CREATION

flicting results for Karnataka's upcoming elections. Edina predicts Congress will win 17 seats and the BJP-JDS alliance will bag 11. News 18 forecasts NDA will win 25 seats, Congress only 3. India Today Group predicts NDA will win 24 seats with a 53 per cent vote share. The INDIA alliance, a regional party alliance, is expected to secure only four seats with a 42 per cent vote share. These surveys provide a snapshot of the current political landscape.

They can help readers gauge the potential outcomes of the election. There is a significant shift from the 2019 polls when Congress and JD(S) were allies. The BJP aims to secure the Vokkaliga vote in Old Mysore and tilt the election in their favour. The Vokkaligas, a dominant community in the Old Mysore region, have traditionally supported the JD (S). The BJP's strategy to win over this community involves a combination of caste-based outreach, promises of development and highlighting the failures of the JD (S) Government. If successful, this strategy could significantly impact the election outcome and the State's political landscape.

The BJP has fielded a top cardiologist, a member of the Mysuru royal family and an ex-chief Minister among its candidates. It has also fielded some new faces. The Congress has many ministers' relatives and these candidates can impact the result.

Since the BJP formed its first Government in 2008, the 'toppling game has been ongoing. Money and positions often play a significant role in luring legislators to shift loyalties, adding another layer of complexity to the State's political landscape. Both parties are willing to spend money.

The upcoming election in the State poses a decision for voters. They must choose between supporting the Congress party they previously elected in the Assembly polls or the BJP, which had held power earlier. While some may prefer the Congress, the BJP still has a loyal following. Suppose the voters choose to reject the BJP. In that case, it'll signify that the political party's access to the South has been closed, at least temporarily and the return of Congress is on the right track.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MEDICAL SUPPLIES SCANDAL

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Delhi Government's Vigilance Department Exposes Kejriwal", published on April 16, this is my response. Recent revelations concerning irregularities in medical procurement by the AAP-led Delhi Government raise serious concerns. The findings of the Vigilance Department indicate a pattern of favouritism towards specific individuals and companies during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in significant losses for the Government. The involvement of high-ranking officials, including the Health Minister's OSD RN Das, in managing tenders to benefit particular entities is troubling.

The exploitation of the pandemic crisis to swindle funds from the public exchequer is deplorable. The notice's assertion that procurement procedures were blatantly ignored, coupled with allegations of cartelisation among suppliers, paints a grim picture of corruption within the health department. The revelation that certain companies, allegedly linked to influential individuals, secured lucrative contracts further deepens suspicions of foul play. While the AAP-led Delhi Government dismisses the allegations as baseless, the call for accountability is paramount. Swift and transparent investigations are necessary to restore public trust and ensure such egregious malpractices are rooted out effectively.

Vishwajeet Aparna | Jaipur

NATO'S EVOLVING CHALLENGES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Challenges galore for NATO@75", published on April 16, this is my response. NATO, an alliance born in the aftermath of World War II, faces a multitude of challenges as it marks its 75th anniversary. Criticism from within Europe, coupled with the rise of right-wing nationalism, underscores the need for NATO to adapt. Its traditional focus on military might must now contend with non-traditional threats like cyber warfare and terrorism. Moreover, NATO's credibility is under

The power of young citizens



Apropos the news article, "A call to vote responsibly beyond party lines", published on April 16, this is my response. India's youthful population yields immense power through their vote, a power intrinsically tied to responsibility. As we step into adulthood, we're not just celebrating a milestone but embracing a civic duty to shape the nation's

future. The call is clear: transcend party lines and scrutinise progress objectively. Our nation's trajectory demands introspection—are we advancing equitably? Are policies benefiting all strata of society?

The electoral process is our mechanism for accountability, a tool to measure leadership against promises made. Infrastructure, industry, healthcare, education—these sectors reflect our collective welfare. As citizens, we must assess policies impartially, ensuring transparency and inclusivity. Our vote signifies unity, transcending divisive lines for the greater good. Informed decision-making isn't just a privilege but a necessity. Our diverse nation thrives when every voice is heard and every concern addressed. Let's harness the power of our vote to pave the path towards a stronger, more inclusive India.

Keerti Punia | Chandigarh

scrutiny due to perceptions of American hegemony and its military interventions worldwide. The proposed aid package to Ukraine highlights NATO's role in geopolitical tensions, particularly concerning Russia. However, India's rejection of a US offer to join NATO signals a broader reluctance among nations to align too closely with Western military alliances. As NATO faces an uncertain future, navigating the complexities of global power dynamics will require strategic reforms and a renewed commitment to its founding principles of security and cooperation.

Aryan Kant | Sonipat

MENTAL IMPACT OF NUTRITION

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Mangoes are nature's antidepressants", published on April 15, this is my response. Poor nutrition doesn't just affect our bodies—it deeply impacts our mental well-being too. In an insightful exploration by Rajdeep Joshi, the link between nutrition and mental health is emphasised, with a focus on the often overlooked benefits of mango consumption. Nutrition is the

cornerstone of good health and its deficiency is intertwined with mental health issues like depression and anxiety. While various factors contribute to depression, nutritional imbalances are often sidelined. Key vitamins and minerals play pivotal roles in managing psychological well-being, influencing optimal brain function and stress levels.

Mangoes emerge as natural mood enhancers, packed with serotonin-boosting tryptophan and vital minerals like potassium and magnesium. Incorporating mangoes into our diet not only promotes physical health but also aids in relieving nervous tension and improving mood. The recipe provided, a nutritious mango salad, offers a delicious way to harness the mental wellness benefits of mangoes, blending their goodness with other wholesome ingredients. It's a flavorful reminder that what we eat profoundly impacts not just our bodies, but our minds too.

Jitu Majumdar | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The new age of quantum technology

The scientific community celebrated April 14 as World Quantum Day to raise awareness of quantum science's impact across diverse fields

The world of science is on the cusp of a transformative era driven by the burgeoning field of quantum technology. Quantum science is founded on several key principles that underpin the behaviour of particles and systems at the quantum scale.



communication between them. These counterintuitive phenomena, once relegated to the realm of theory, are now being harnessed to create groundbreaking technologies with the potential to revolutionise numerous fields. India has a long and rich history in quantum science. Pioneering work by Satyendra Nath Bose on quantum statistics laid the groundwork for many modern quantum technologies, including Bose-Einstein condensation, quantum superconductivity and quantum information theory. Over the past few decades, advancements in quantum science have surged, laying the groundwork for a new era characterised by unparalleled computational power, secure communication and transformative applications across various sectors. One of the most captivating applications of quantum mechanics is the

development of quantum computers. These machines leverage the power of superposition to perform calculations exponentially faster than traditional computers. By manipulating qubits (quantum bits) that can be 0, 1, or both simultaneously, quantum computers can explore a vast array of possibilities concurrently. This unparalleled processing power holds immense promise for drug discovery, where simulating complex molecules can accelerate the development of life-saving medications. Another revolutionary application of quantum technology is in secure communication. Quantum key distribution (QKD) utilises the principles of quantum mechanics to establish secure cryptographic keys between parties. By encoding information into the quantum States of particles and leveraging entanglement properties, QKD ensures that any attempt to intercept or eavesdrop on the communication would disturb the quantum State, thereby alerting the parties involved. Quantum cryptography safeguards sensitive information

in critical areas like financial transactions, national security communications and protecting intellectual property. By exploiting the extreme sensitivity of quantum systems to minute changes, scientists are developing sensors capable of detecting the subtlest variations in magnetic fields, gravity and temperature. This has profound implications for medical imaging, where ultra-high-resolution MRIs can provide detailed analyses of tissues and organs, aiding in early disease detection and personalised medicine. In navigation, quantum sensors can lead to more precise GPS and navigation systems, which are crucial for autonomous vehicles and various scientific endeavours. The Government of India, under the Department of Science and Technology, has initiated the National Quantum Mission (NQM), which aims to harness the transformative potential of quantum technology to address national challenges and foster innovation.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN



FIRST COLUMN

SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO CLIMATE CHANGE

To return to a life of harmony with nature, we need to realise our spiritual identity



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

A few centuries ago no one worried about climate change, because there was no reason to do so. But as humans extracted more from nature and dumped an increasing amount of waste, including highly toxic substances, on it, the ecological balance began to get disrupted. This process has accelerated over the centuries and brought us to the present situation where, according to some experts, the entire human race faces extinction shortly.

Climate change and global warming are sometimes thought of as things that will happen in the future. But scientists are finding increasing evidence that the planet is changing now - and that people must take a large share of the blame for this phenomenon. They further explain that excessive carbon emissions through industrial and vehicular pollution, use of CFCs and plundering of forests and natural resources have depleted the ozone layer. This has trapped more and more solar radiation inside the earth's atmosphere. As a result, the earth is heating up which has begun to trigger a chain of natural upheavals like floods, earthquakes, tsunamis and landslides in recent times.

To prevent such an eventuality, humans need to work on themselves. Man does not need to master nature. The human soul is the master of all that is material. It is when the soul begins to identify itself with the body that it comes under the influence of matter and vices. In the Golden and Silver Ages, when all human souls had self-awareness and divine qualities, nature was their obedient servant. The elements of nature made life pleasant in that era, which is remembered in religious texts as paradise or heaven.



Because the divine beings of that world were free of vices, they never exploited or despoiled nature. Instead of having to be environment-friendly, they had a truly friendly environment. They were friends not only to their fellow beings but also to all matter. This State of affairs continued till the beginning of the Copper Age when the souls forgot who they were and began to come under the influence of the body and the vices. They then began to exploit natural resources, gradually harming the environment. In return, nature too ceased to obey souls who had lost mastery over themselves. As the influence of the vices grew, so did the plunder of nature and what was once a harmonious relationship turned more into one between an exploiter and the exploited.

The Prime Minister of India in his speech at the UN said "We can achieve the same level of development, prosperity and well-being without necessarily going down the path of reckless consumption. It doesn't mean that economies will suffer; it will mean that our economies will take on a different character. For us in India, respect for nature is an integral part of spiritualism. We treat nature's bounties as sacred. Yoga is an invaluable gift of our ancient tradition. Yoga embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature; and a holistic approach to health and well-being. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and nature. By changing our lifestyle and creating consciousness, it can help us deal with climate change."

Now, if we wish to go back from the brink and return to a life of harmony with nature, we need to realise our spiritual identity and values. Such awareness will make us naturally eco-friendly and send out a positive energy that will bring the elements of nature into harmony with us again. If a critical mass of humans begin to live with this spiritual awareness, nature will by itself become our friend and humanity will look at a golden instead of a doubtful future.

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

The roots of Wahhabi extremism



HASAN KHURSHID

The world reels under the grip of Wahhabi terrorism, orchestrated by Saudi rulers with Zionist affiliations, masquerading behind a façade of Islam



Today entire world is gripped in the clutches of Wahhabi terrorism spearheaded by Zionist Saudi rulers, wearing the cloak of pseudo-Islam, who are hiding their faith in Judaism. All terrorist organisations, such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Lashkar e Taiyaba, Lashkar e Jhangvi, etc; follow the ideology of Wahhabism, a newly created cult of Saudi rulers, the pseudo-Muslims.

The activities of this cult can be best explained through the words of renowned British historian Charles Allen, who in his book, God's Terrorists - The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad, writes, "Wahhabi is a guiding ideology behind modern Islamist terrorism. In the 18th century, a violently intolerant re-interpretation of Islam took root in the Arabian desert. Its followers became known after their founder (Sheikh Muhammad Najdi ibn Abd-al Wahhab), as Wahhabi. The creed was then exported to India and its north-west frontier Afghanistan."

Sheikh Najdi was born in 1702, in the desert of Najd, a rocky plateau of the Arabian Peninsula. About Najd, Charles Allen writes, "Indeed for many Arabs, Najd had only negative associations. There was a popular saying that 'Nothing good ever came out of Najd' and it was related in the Hadith that the Prophet had three times been called upon to ask God to bless Najd and had three times refused, answering on the third occasion, 'Earthquakes and dissension are there and there shall arise the horn of Satan.' In the years following the ministry of Al-Wahhab, there were many who argued that this prophecy had been confirmed." In 1744, Najdi ibn Wahhab, sidelining the preaching of true Islam by Prophet Mohammed, created a new version of



WAHHABISM IS NOTHING BUT PSEUDO-ISLAM. HOWEVER, WHEN OPPOSITION MOUNTED AGAINST HIS IDEOLOGY, NAJDI WAS SHREWD ENOUGH TO FIND A PATRON IN MUHAMMED-IBN SAUD, A BEDOUIN TRIBAL CHIEF WHO MADE USE OF HIS NEW VITRIOLIC VERSION OF ISLAM FOR POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION

Islam called Wahhabism. His ideology is enshrined in Kitab-al Tawhid (book of unity), which prescribes the forceful conversion of Muslims and non-Muslims to his Salafi or Wahhabi ideology, wherein he manifestly says, "Follow my ideology, else get ready to be killed." His ideology was strongly opposed by Muslim masses, including his father and uncle.

So, Wahhabism is nothing but pseudo-Islam. However, when the opposition mounted against his ideology, Najdi was shrewd enough to find a patron in Muhammed-ibn-Saud, a Bedouin tribal chief, who made use of his new vitriolic version of Islam for political consolidation. Ibn Saud belonged to the Jewish tribe of Anza Ben Wael.

Islam is not the original religion of Saudi Arab rulers. Sheikh Najdi, also belonging to Jewish ancestry, not only made an alliance with Ibn Saud but also got his daughter married to Ibn Saud's son Abd-al-Aziz ibn Saud. Thereafter, the faith was of Sheikh Najdi and the sword was of Ibn Saud. A dynastic government was established as a result of this partnership, which is continuing in the name of Saudi Arabia.

In 1766, Muhammed ibn Saud was killed and his son Abd-al-Aziz took over as Emir (temporal leader). He introduced firearms in the holy war or jihad, replacing conventional weaponry. He accelerated his attacks in a spectacular bid to extend his territory and as Allen says, "He issued every holy warrior a 'firman' or written order addressed to gate-keeper of heaven, requir-

ing him to be admitted forth-with should he die on battle." Since then it has been the common schismatic, fraudulent practice of terror operators to misguide and exploit the youth for recruitment with the promise of paradise.

The history of Wahhabism has been written with the blood of innocent people. On June 2, 1792, Sheikh Muhammad Najdi-ibn-Abd-al-Wahhab died, leaving his 24 wives and 18 children and his son-in-law Abd-al-Aziz speeded up his violent actions and conversions. In 1802, he attacked Karbala in Iraq, desecrating the holy shrine of Hazrat Imam Husain. Lieutenant Francis Warden wrote, "They pillaged the whole of it and plundered the tomb of Hazrat Imam Husain, slaying in the course of the day, with circumstances of peculiar cruelty, killing about 5,000 of the inhabitants. A huge amount of booty was seized."

In 1803, Abd-al-Aziz ibn Saud obtained a visit permit from the Sharief of Mecca on the pretext of performing Hajj; whereupon his Wahhabi fighters laid waste in Islam's holiest shrine (Kaaba), like the accursed Yazid had desecrated it in 682 AD. According to T.E Ravenshaw, author of A Memorandum on the Sect of Wahhabis, "They robbed the splendid tombs of the Mahomedan saints, who were interred there; and their fanatical zeal did not even spare the Prophet's Mosque (in Medina) which they robbed of the immense treasures and costly furniture to which each Mahomedan Prince of Europe,

Asia and Africa had contributed his share."

In 1804, a Wahhabi gang again crossed the great desert in the Hijaz and destroyed tombs of the Prophet's family members at Jannat-ul-Baqi, the ancient century of Medina and even despoiled the grave of Prophet Mohammed. In 1925, Wahhabis demolished the holy shrines of Hazrat Fatima Zehra, daughter of Prophet Mohammed and his grandsons, as well as the birth-place of Prophet Mohammed.

In India, the 500-year-old Babri Masjid in Ayodhya was demolished on December 6, 1992, by a radical Hindu mob led by Sangh Parivar leaders. Intellectuals across the globe, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or region, condemned the demolition. Muslims across the world protested. Several lives were lost. In its landmark judgement of 2019, the Supreme Court held that the demolition was illegal and directed the authorities to allot an alternative plot for a mosque as compensation.

On the other hand, the more heinous crime of multiple demolitions of holy shrines, relics and heritage sites together with massacres took place in Saudi Arabia at the behest of Saudi Arab's Wahhabi/Salafi rulers of Zionist ancestry, on 8th Shawwal 1344 Hijri (1925 A.D), but surprisingly no Muslim of any sect reacts or protests against the pseudo-Muslim Saudi rulers. Is it because those perpetrators are Muslim for name sake?

(The writer is a legal journalist and author. The views expressed are personal)

Temperature soars as our ignorance threatens Earth's future

The relentless rise in global temperatures paints a stark portrait of humanity's disregard for the environment, echoing a dire warning for the planet's future

The temperature in the world is increasing day by day, due to the ignorance and carelessness of the people. The problem of rising temperatures is seen all over the world. The world's Climate changes day by day. The rising temperature is a bell of danger for the living world. If we are not aware, then we will not be able to deal with the problems of the future. All living beings need water, air and heat to survive. The changes in the quality and quantity of water and air will give birth to uncountable problems. When the atmosphere or the climate changes the changes are also seen in the living world, as we see now. The desert's biome is differ-



KALI DAS

ent from Iceland's biome. In Australia we can see its national animal kangaroo, In Iceland we can see polar bears and penguins. Fruits, vegetables, flowers and forests also differ due to climate change. When the temperature of the earth is increasing, it poses a big threat to everyone. We don't know whether we will get the same fruits and vegetables tomorrow that we get now. Today the animals, birds or insects that we see all around us will they extinct or survive we don't know. We don't have any information about living beings, how many species of them have already extinct every year is not known doubt they enrich our lives. We

don't account for how much our lives have been affected since they disappeared. If our outer is affected then our inner is also affected. It is worth considering. We are destroying our environment because of our greed. Inhumanity is seen in humans today. There are two reasons behind the increase in global temperature, one is man-made and the other one is natural. Man-made causes are deforestation, cutting of trees, use of vehicles and excessive use of fossil fuels. Natural causes where earthquakes, Storms, forest fires, gas accidents coal burning etc. The main cause of global warming is the greenhouse effect. A greenhouse is a glass house for keeping trees,



which does not allow the heat to go away from the glass house. It is used to save the trees. The greenhouse effect is seen in the increase of carbon dioxide and methane gas. When the temperature increases by one degree, it greatly affects our environment. The ice accumulated

in the South Pole and the North Pole of the Earth is starting to melt. The glaciers in the Himalayas of India are also starting to melt and the water from these glaciers is causing floods in the rivers coming out of the glaciers. Nowadays days Shiv ling in Amarnath is melting within in few days. In the future, as

the heat increases, the rivers will cause flood and they will join the sea with the flood water. Many intellectuals of the world are concerned about the increase in global temperature. The solution to these problems is only by planting trees. The only way we can save our planet is by plantation and forest protection. Trees give us oxygen and reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. So planting trees is only one solution to the problem. The tree planting program should be carried out regularly. When the Seawater rises it enters nearby cities and villages. In the fourth chapter of the twelfth skanda of the Bhagavatam, there is a description of the flood or the pralaya where the

matter of Prithibi becomes hot and causes a flood or pralaya. It is also said that the rays of the sun will destroy the living world. How to save the living world should be the main subject of our course of studies in educational institutions. As long as the world is standing at the door of destruction we should not count the numbers of profit and loss but the message of collective development and collective happiness and peace should be spread. The intellectual people of India always sent messages of peace and goodwill to the world. Today let India be the guide of the world to protect the planet.

(The writer is a columnist, poet and social worker; views are personal)



Congress adopted loot east policy, BJP turned it into Act East policy: Modi

PTI ■ AGARTALA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday slammed the Congress, saying the party had adopted the 'loot' east policy while the BJP had turned it into the 'Act East' policy.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated by Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha, BJP candidate and former Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb and others during a public meeting ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in Agartala on Wednesday

'After a long wait of 500 years, Ram Lalla is finally in a grand temple in Ayodhya instead of a tent,' he added. The Prime Minister said his government is focusing on enhancing connectivity in the Northeast.

JMM leader apologises for making derogatory statement against PM



PTI ■ RANCHI

Senior Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader Nazrul Islam on Wednesday apologised for making a derogatory statement against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said that his remark was not intended to hurt anyone.

'buried 400-foot below' in the election, instead of winning 400 seats. 'During a political speech, I was speaking against the prime minister's claim of winning 400 seats. I intended to say that they (BJP-led NDA) would not get 400 seats and they will be out of power,' Islam said in a video statement.



Modi and CM Vijayan one and the same: Congress

PTI ■ KANNUR (KERALA)

The political ripples created by the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi are yet to die down in Kerala, with the Congress on Wednesday alleging that the BJP leader and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan were trying to convince people that they were not similar.

Rajnath seeks Congress stand on CPI(M) manifesto

PTI ■ KASARAGOD (KERALA)

Senior BJP leader Rajnath Singh on Wednesday questioned the intention behind the CPI(M)'s poll manifesto promise to dismantle nuclear weapons in the country and demanded to know the stand of the Congress on this issue.

nations in the world and dismantling its nuclear weapons will weaken the country whose neighbours Pakistan and China are nuclear powers. The CPI(M) in its manifesto has said there will be 'complete elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, including chemical and biological weapons.'



country. That is what has happened to Congress and the CPI(M),' he alleged. Singh claimed that the Congress was opposed to the building the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and 'today look at its condition in the country.'

He said that if the BJP is voted to power again, then all of Modi's guarantees — of India becoming a top world economy, welfare of farmers, making huge strides in the space sector and the development of the nation — would be fulfilled.

within church grounds, educational institutions were turning into centres of Communist workers, people were living in fear and those in power in the state were sleeping peacefully. He said that the BJP does politics not to form government, but for nation-building.

Rampur heads for elections in absence of Azam Khan

PTI ■ RAMPUR (UP)

A subdued atmosphere prevailed throughout the election campaign in Rampur, which has over close to five decades become used to electrifying speeches by Azam Khan, a Samajwadi Party leader who has been removed from the fray because of his imprisonment.



that a representative of Khan Saheb would be given the ticket from Rampur. I could not understand what happened after that,' the person said. Khan's absence has sent his supporters, somewhat, in a mood of apathy. Many have distanced themselves from Nadvi's election campaign.

fielded under a pact with the opposition's Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), is confident of his victory. Nadvi, a resident of Swar in the district, says he has got a chance to make it his political workplace after a long time.

People of State will not believe Modi poll promises: Kerala CM Vijayan

PTI ■ PALAKKAD (KERALA)

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday said that the people of the state won't believe the heap of promises showered upon them by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the recent election rallies.



As the people had been fed up with the UPA rule, they believed the promises of BJP and voted it to power, the CM further charged.

The Left veteran also charged that the saffron party's attempt was to turn India into a religious nation. Criticising the Congress party over the CAA, he alleged that it was maintaining silence about the controversial law in its election manifesto.

Minorities not with us a myth spread by Congress: BJP leader

PTI ■ PANAJI

BJP's Goa desk in-charge Ashish Sood has claimed the opposition Congress is spreading a myth that members of the minority community are not supporting the saffron party.



started with a policy of appeasement to none and justice to all,' he said.

the government because they belong to the minority community,' he said. The BJP government has implemented all the schemes without any discrimination, Sood asserted.

Congress are 'nothing but desperation to save itself from the evident defeat in the Lok Sabha election,' he said. The aim of the BJP is not only to win the election but to create a 'Viksit Bharat' (developed nation), he said.

