



CITY 3 THOSE COMMITTED TO NATION BACK BJP: YOGI

OPINION 6 THE ENDURING TIES BETWEEN INDIA AND IRAN

WORLD 10 US, UK IMPOSE NEW CURBS ON IRAN

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LUCKNOW FACE HOME TEST AGAINST CSK 12 SPORTS

Country gears up for 1st phase of LS polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid ongoing heatwave conditions in some parts of Southern and Eastern States, the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are set to kick off with polling in 102 constituencies (General-73; ST-11; SC-18) across 21 States and Union Territories (UTs). This phase marks the largest of the seven phases of the elections, with 16.63 crore eligible voters. On Thursday, lakhs of polling personnel made their way to their stations in preparation for Friday morning. The Election Commission (EC) announced on Thursday that it is prepared for the polls to open at 7 am on Friday, with polling parties travelling by ship and boat to

reach Lakshadweep's Kiltan Island, officials trekking to remote booths in Arunachal Pradesh' Siang district, and personnel venturing into areas hit by violent insurgencies and crossing rivers to reach millions of voters. Simultaneously, Assembly elections will also be held in Arunachal Pradesh (60 seats) and Sikkim (32 seats). Meanwhile the BJP's ambition to emerge as a force challenging Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu and determination to retain its strongholds across the country will be put to a stern test on Friday when the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections commence. If a lot is at stake for the ruling party in the 102 constituencies

going to the polls as Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeks a stronger majority, the challenge is even bigger for the Opposition INDIA Bloc, whose several constituents are in a battle of survival and hope for a rebound after facing reverses in the 2014 and 2019 elections. The Prime Minister has visited many temples in the run-up to the elections, especially in the days ahead of the Ram temple consecration ceremony in January. According to the EC, of the total 16.63 crore voters in phase one,



there are 8.4 crore male, 8.23 crore female and 11,371 transgender voters. Over 35 lakh first-time electors are also eligible to cast their votes. As many as 1,625 candidates (1,491 male and 134 female) are in the fray. As many as 18 lakh polling personnel will work at 1.87 lakh polling stations. In order to ensure the smooth movement of security forces, the EC said 41 helicopters, 84 special trains and nearly lakh other vehicles had been deployed. According to the EC, there are 181 polling stations in 21 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu critical

and six of the 42 Lok Sabha constituencies in West Bengal as 'financially sensitive'. In Bihar, 5,000 polling booths have been marked as "sensitive", given these districts' long history of naxal violence. Scores of polling officers have been flown to remote areas in the rugged Himalayas and the Central Indian constituency of Gadchiroli-Chimur, beset by Maoist violence, to which 850 polling staff are being sent, the EC said. It said a total of 4,627 Flying Squads, 5,208 Statistics Surveillance Teams, 2,028 Video Surveillance Teams and 1,255

Video Viewing Teams are keeping surveillance round the clock to strictly and swiftly deal with any form of inducement of voters. "A total of 1,374 inter-State and 162 international Border check posts are keeping strict vigil on any illicit flow of liquor, drugs, cash and freebies. Strict surveillance has been kept at sea and air routes," the EC said. Of the 102 Lok Sabha seats, the BJP had won 39 in 2019, with the ruling alliance NDA bagging 12, five and three of them in Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and West Bengal, respectively. The BJP's existing allies hold seven of them. Continued on Page 8

BJP faces a tough fight in Tamil Nadu

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry are set to witness one of the toughest electoral battles of recent times as both the State and the UT go to the polls to elect 40 representatives (39 from TN and a lone member from the UT) on Friday. What Tamil Nadu witnessed once the Election Commission of India announced the poll schedule was a gruelling campaign despite the scorching heat of the summer. There are three fronts vying with one another for the top honours. The main contender (at least on paper) is the DMK and its allies that include



The Indian National Congress, CPI(M), CPI, and caste and community outfits like DMK,

VCK, Muslim League and some fringe elements. The DMK has fielded 22 candidates while the Congress has been allocated nine seats. The AIADMK, which disintegrated into many factions, is leading a front that include MDMK, the Islamic outfit SDPI and Puthiya Tamizhagam. The AIADMK, which consists of Edappadi Palaniswamy and his henchmen, is contesting from 32 constituencies while the MDMK founded by late Vijayakanth is contesting from five seats. Continued on Page 8

Western UP in the spotlight

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

With the nation on the brink of the first phase of general elections slated for April 19, all eyes are focused on Western Uttar Pradesh (UP) region, where the Jatava community, known for their support of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and the Muslim electorate wield considerable influence. "The performance of BSP candidates across the eight contested seats and the voting inclinations of minority communities are poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the electoral outcome for both Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) and

Samajwadi Party, BSP candidates in the initial phase," remarks political analyst Rajesh N Bajpai. In the upcoming polls, the spotlight will be on Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Nagina (SC), Moradabad, Rampur, and Pilibhit. Reflecting on past electoral trends, the 2014 Lok Sabha elections witnessed a clean sweep by the BJP across all eight seats earmarked for the first phase, significantly bolstering its tally to 71 seats, later rising to 73 in alliance with the Apan Dal. However, the 2019 elections witnessed a notable shift, with the BJP facing setbacks against the grand alliance of SP-RLD and BSP. Continued on Page 8

BJP fights to retain Vidarbha

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The ruling BJP is battling hard to retain its stronghold over Vidarbha where it had swept the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in alliance the then Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena, while the Congress has little to lose but everything to gain, as half of the ten constituencies in the region go to elections in the first phase on Friday. With no apparent wave in the air and not much of enthusiasm witnessed among voters, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is trying to cash in on Ram Mandir temple issue and use its organisational strength to reach out to voters in the five poll-bound constituencies — Nagpur, Ramtek (SC), Chandrapur, Bhandara-Gondiya and Gadchiroli-Chimur (ST) — in the region. Continued on Page 8

Confusions galore in Bihar ahead of voting



From left to right: Chirag Paswan, Vivek Thakur, Jitan Ram Majhi and Shrawan Kushwaha

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ GAYA/JAMUI

A lot of confusion prevails in the minds of voters of the four Lok Sabha seats going to polls in the first phase on Friday as in these constituencies the cast for caste has been the pattern for decades and development is a non-issue as was put once by Bihar's political stalwart former Chief Minister Lalu Prasad "there is no connection between politics and development". Interestingly Chirag Paswan who leads the LJP now is sitting MP from Jamui and has changed his constituency this time to "safer" LJP's years of dominance to Hajipur near

Patna. Jamui has been now assigned to a family member of the Paswans, Arun Bharti who is heads on with INDIA Bloc's RJD leader Archana Ravidas. Chirag has twice represented Jamui in the Lok Sabha. It's from Jamui where Prime Minister Narendra Modi kicked-off his election campaign in Bihar on April 4 followed by a public meeting in Nawada on April 7 and then at Gaya early this week. This general elections as per the arrangements either the seats have been changed or first timers like Vivek Thakur, son of Bihar BJP's stalwart former Union Minister CP

Thakur, Arun son-in-law of late Ram Vilas Paswan are on the battlefield with their bowlers from particular sections. Vivek is a sitting Rajya Sabha member from the BJP and is trying his luck in the upper caste Bhumihar dominated constituency of Nawada near Gaya. In the seven-phase Lok Sabha election in Bihar, which sends 40 MPs to Parliament, the four constituencies of Aurangabad, Gaya, Jamui and Nawada will vote in the first phase on April 19. Another turnout tagged, former Bihar Chief Minister Jitan Ram Majhi, is contesting from Gaya as part of the

NDA's seating arrangements. The outgoing Lok Sabha has all four seats from NDA viz Aurangabad (BJP), Gaya (JDU), LJP from both Jamui and Nawada. In the 2024 LS while the BJP had their candidates in Rajput dominated Aurangabad and Bhumihar dominated Nawada constituencies, while two reserved seats Gaya went to its ally HAM and Jamui to another alliance partner, the Chirag Paswan-led LJP. Three-time MP from Aurangabad Sushil Kumar Singh stands against RJD's Abhay Kushwaha. Kushwaha was a JD(U) MLA from the Tekari Assembly constituency in 2015 but recently joined the RJD and was given the party's ticket from the Aurangabad Lok Sabha constituency. The seat is Rajput-dominated though it has a sizeable OBC and EBC voters hence the RJD has fielded an OBC candidate. The poll is to be interesting as four of six Assembly constituencies of Aurangabad — Kutumba, Rafiganj, Aurangabad, and Gurua — are held by Mahagathbandhan MLAs, while the remaining two — Imamganj and Tekari — are held by HAM, an ally of NDA. Continued on Page 8

Uneasy lull in poll-bound Cooch Behar



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The police administration on Thursday went on high alert as an uneasy lull descended in parts of Cooch Behar district of North Bengal which will go to first phase of elections along with neighbouring Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar on Friday. Union Home Minister for State Nisith Pramanik of the BJP is pitted against his main contender Jagadish Chandra Basunia of Trinamool Congress in the constituency. Besides intermittent face offs between the TMC and the BJP all these weeks Cooch Behar, an SC seat, has also been in the news because it is one of those few constituencies where the Left and the Congress have failed

to put a joint candidate unlike in other parts of the State. Notwithstanding, all eyes are likely to be on this northern most district of Bengal bordering Assam against the backdrop of four deaths on the opening day of the 2021 Assembly elections when one BJP supporter was allegedly shot dead by the TMC goons and three alleged supporters of the TMC died at booth at Sitalkuchi when the central forces reportedly opened fire to resist booth capture. In view of the four deaths in 2021 the Election Commission has decided not to deploy any CISF personnel in that area. The same force had been on duty three years ago. There has been repeated flare-ups between the TMC

and the BJP in Cooch Behar constituency in the past one month with on one occasion the saffron workers and their TMC counterparts fighting a pitched battle in presence of Pramanik on one side and local MLA and State Minister Udayan Guha on the other. Known for its sensitive character Cooch Behar during the last Assembly elections saw a scuffle between the TMC and the saffron workers in which Guha received a fractured hand. As late as on Wednesday the TMC men led by the son of Guha staged a dharna at Dinhatra Police Station, demanding arrest of BJP men who had allegedly assaulted his supporters. In the other two constituencies neighbouring Cooch Behar the BJP has renominated Jayanta Roy from Jalpaiguri SC seat and Madarihat MLA Manoj Tigga from Alipurduar ST seat. Tigga replaces the outgoing saffron MP John Barla which has led to a small discontent among some workers and may result in some votes getting alienated from the BJP. Continued on Page 8



Tight security in Manipur today for polls

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Tight security arrangements have been put in place for the first of the two-phased Lok Sabha elections in Manipur, which had been rocked by ethnic violence over the last one year, officials said on Thursday. The Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat, which comprises 32 of the 60 Assembly segments in the State, and 15 Assembly segments of the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seat will go to polls in the first phase on Friday. Voting will be held in the remaining 13 segments of Outer Manipur in the second phase on April 26. A total of six candidates, including State Education Minister Thounaojam Basanta Kumar Singh of the BJP and Angomcha Bimol Akoijam of the Congress, are contesting the Inner Manipur seat. Republican Party of India (RPI) has nominated Thounaojam Maheshwar, while there are three other Independent candidates. Voting will commence at 7 am and is likely to continue till 4 pm. A total of 9.91 lakh voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in Inner Manipur, with the highest concentration of 3.81 lakh in Imphal West district, District Election Officer Th Kirankumar said. Continued on Page 8

ED attaches Shilpa Shetty's assets worth ₹98 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday said it has attached a bungalow and a flat, apart from equity shares, worth about ₹98 crore of actor Shilpa Shetty and her husband Raj Kundra in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the alleged crypto assets Ponzi scheme. The federal agency has issued a provisional order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to attach the properties of the couple. The case pertains to alleged duping of investors through the use of crypto currency like Bitcoins. The attached properties include a residential flat in Mumbai's Juhu, presently in the name of Shetty, a



bungalow in Pune and equity shares in the name of Kundra, the federal agency said in a statement. These assets are worth ₹97.79 crore, it said. A lawyer for the couple said no prima facie case has been made out against his clients and that they would cooperate with the authorities. The money-laundering case

stems from FIRs lodged by the Maharashtra Police and the Delhi Police against a company named Variable Tech Private Limited, late Amit Bhardwaj, Ajay Bhardwaj, Vivek Bhardwaj, Simpy Bhardwaj, Mahender Bhardwaj and a number of multi-level marketing agents who are alleged to have collected huge amounts of

funds in the form of Bitcoins (worth ₹6,600 crore in 2017) from the public with the "false promise" of 10 per cent monthly return in the form of Bitcoins. It was alleged by the ED that the Bitcoins were supposed to be utilised for mining and investors were supposed to get huge returns in crypto assets, but the promoters "cheated" them and have been concealing the "ill-gotten" Bitcoins in obscure online wallets. Kundra, the agency alleged, received 285 Bitcoins from the "mastermind" and promoter of Gain Bitcoin Ponzi "scam", Amit Bhardwaj, for "setting up a Bitcoin mining farm in Ukraine". These Bitcoins were sourced out of the "proceeds of crime" collected by Amit Bhardwaj from gullible investors, it said. "Since the deal did not

materialise, Kundra is still in possession and enjoyment of 285 Bitcoins which are presently valued at more than ₹150 crore," the ED claimed. The lawyer for Shetty and Kundra said they shall follow the due process of law and take necessary steps, as prescribed under the PMLA, to protect the liberty and property of his clients. "We have complete faith in the judiciary. I believe when we make our fair representation before the Enforcement Directorate, even the investigation agencies may grant justice to us." "We have faith in the fair investigation," advocate Prashant Patil said in a statement. The ED arrested Simpy Bhardwaj, Nitin Gaur and Nikhil Mahajan in the case last year. Continued on Page 8

Kejriwal on a sweet binge to increase blood sugar levels

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's diabetic status has become a bone of contention between him and the Enforcement Directorate (ED). The agency informed the court here on Thursday that Kejriwal, arrested in an excise scam case, is eating food high in sugar like mangoes and sweets every day to create grounds for medical bail. But his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has expressed concern over his fluctuating blood sugar levels and weight loss. "Kejriwal is eating high sugar content food despite having type 2 diabetes. He is consuming 'aloo poori',

mango, sweets, daily. This is being done to make grounds for medical bail," the ED told the court. The ED made the claim before special judge for Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and ED cases, Kaveri Baweja, who directed the authorities to file a report in the matter, including Kejriwal's diet chart. "Today, he (Kejriwal) is in court custody. He is in custody because of our case. The cause of concern is he was allowed prescribed home cooked food because he claimed he has high diabetes. But he is having mangoes, sweets and sugar with tea. Continued on Page 8

Close shave for 3 as fire erupts in apartment

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Three people had a narrow escape after a fire broke out in a high-rise apartment in Thakurganj's Sarfarazganj area on Thursday evening, resulting in the destruction of household items worth several lakh. According to the fire department, the blaze originated in flat number 302 on the third floor of the building, belonging to a resident named Heena. A woman and two girls on other floors were trapped due to heavy smoke engulfing the building. The individuals trapped were identified as Shivani, Harshita, and Zeba Hasan. "The intensity of the fire caused thick smoke to fill the entire building, making it difficult for residents to breathe. Fortunately, they were safely evacuated, averting a potentially catastrophic fire incident due to the prompt action of the firefighters," said Lucknow's Chief Fire Officer Mangesh Kumar, who supervised the rescue operation.

"Firefighters initially opened all doors and escorted people to the terrace, the safest place in the building. Once the fire was extinguished, the rescuers facilitated their descent," added Kumar. The fire department attributed the blaze to an alleged electrical spark in the air conditioner at flat 302, which quickly escalated. Upon receiving the alert at Chowk Fire Station, firefighting vehicles and equipment were dispatched to the scene from Chowk, BKT, and Hazratganj fire stations, as per a press release from Chowk fire station. "Teams of firefighters equipped with breathing apparatuses ascended to the third floor and commenced firefighting operations. Two firefighters entered the affected room via the adjacent balcony and employed water from both sides to douse the flames. The fire was brought under control within approximately one hour," elaborated the chief fire officer. In another incident, a man was apprehended over a month

after being implicated in a case involving rape and assault in Dubagga. The accused, identified as 22-year-old Shashi Kant Dixit from Hardoi district, was residing in Begariya, Dubagga. There were allegations that Dixit coerced the victim into silence after sexually assaulting her, reneging on promises of marriage. Threats of violence were also made against the victim if she reported the incident to authorities. Dixit, who was employed at a local shopping mall, utilised his position to lure potential victims, including the victim in this case, under the guise of job opportunities. He was subsequently apprehended near Joggers' Park in the area. Additionally, Saadatganj police arrested another individual, Zeeshan Sheikh, from Mumbai, in connection with a case involving rape, assault, and threats against a victim who was promised marriage. Sheikh was apprehended by a joint team comprising Saadatganj police and Maharashtra police.

BJP committed to grassroots workers: Srivastava

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

Op Srivastava, the BJP candidate for by-elections to the Lucknow East assembly constituency, emphasised the party's commitment to recognising the contributions of grassroots workers. Expressing gratitude to PM Narendra Modi, BJP national president JP Nadda, Defence Minister & Lucknow MP Rajnath Singh, and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for

the opportunity to contest, Srivastava said, "They have given me the chance to work for the people of Lucknow East and showed confidence in an ordinary person like me, and I will try to fulfill the expectations of the party and the general public." Asserting that his selection by the BJP was not unexpected, Srivastava underscored the party's ethos of empowering grassroots workers, contrasting it with other political paradigms where leadership often supersedes grassroots activism. He

highlighted the BJP's mantra 'Booth Jeeta toh Chunav Jeeta' (Win the booth, win the election) as emblematic of the party's emphasis on grassroots efforts and perpetual election readiness. Confident in his prospects, Srivastava attributed the BJP's stronghold in Lucknow East to the transformative leadership of PM Modi and CM Yogi, citing achievements in infrastructure, public welfare, and law enforcement. He emphasised the party's com-

mitment to action-oriented governance. Regarding his agenda for Lucknow East, Srivastava pledged to continue the developmental initiatives initiated by his predecessor, focusing on completing ongoing projects and addressing local issues such as water scarcity and economic revitalisation. Responding to inquiries about his background, Srivastava highlighted his extensive community involvement in Lucknow over the past four decades, including his tenure

with the RSS and academic credentials from Allahabad University. He affirmed his dedication to full-time party engagement, saying, "I have been connected with people through a lot of social work and in an active manner. I joined the RSS in 1971 and I have done my graduation from Allahabad University. I am carrying out no profession and my three children are financially independent. I am devoting my whole time to the party."

Farmer burnt alive as fire breaks out in field

Lucknow (PNS): A farmer was burnt alive in a massive fire which broke out in his field and destroyed crops worth several lakh rupees in Deoria. Gauri Shankar Shukla (62) of Gaura village died of burns after a fire broke out in a field in Rampur Karkhana police station area of the district. Police said that Gauri Shankar Shukla had gone to his field to get the wheat crop harvested. During this, he died of burns after getting caught in the fire. Shukla belonged to a normal family. Farming was his main source of income. On Thursday at 12:00 noon, he had gone to get his wheat crop harvested when a fierce fire in the Baliyaha village spread to his field. Gauri Shankar was caught in the fire and died a painful death on the spot.



Children braving extreme heat on their way back homes from school, in Lucknow on Thursday

CM inaugurates Hanumat Pran Pratistha, Rudra Mahayagya

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

Corakshpeethadishwar and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath formally inaugurated Shri Hanumat Pran Pratistha and Rudra Mahayagya in Gorakhnath temple on Thursday morning. The consecration of the new idol of Lord Hanuman will take place on April 21 on the temple premises while the Rudra Mahayagya will conclude on April 22. Various types of worship and rituals will be performed from Thursday till Purnahuti (completion ceremony). Earlier, amid music and chanting of mantras, a large number of women, led by the main priest of Gorakhnath temple, Yogi Kamalnath, filled water from the Bhim Sarovar into the yagya kalash. After circumambulating the Bhim Sarovar, the procession reached the yagya shala where the yagya kalash was installed at various locations. Taking command from here, the chief minister entered the pavilion of the yagya shala after offering prayers at the main door.

Man found dead near canal

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 48-year-old man, Mohammed Irfan, who had a block printing shop on fabrics, was found dead at the bank of a canal in Bhaliya village of Kakori on Thursday. Irfan, a resident of Dona village in Kakori, had been missing since Wednesday evening. Authorities suspect he may have taken his own life by ingesting a poisonous substance, as evidenced by the recovery of an empty pesticide bottle and foam-like discharge from the victim's mouth—a common indicator of poisoning, according to a police spokesperson. Residents of Bhaliya village spotted Irfan's body near the canal bank and promptly informed the village head, who alerted the local police. Upon arrival, law enforcement initiated an investigation, with a team of senior officials dispatched to the scene. The victim's nephew, Mohammed Adil, later confirmed the identity of the deceased. The body was sent for further examination following an initial inquiry. According to the victim's fam-

ily, Irfan had left home the previous evening to procure supplies for his block printing business from Chowk. His failure to return raised concerns, and his family remains puzzled by the circumstances surrounding his demise, suspecting foul play and questioning whether the scene was tampered with to suggest suicide. In a separate incident, a woman named Phool Kumar, along with her father, fell victim to theft while traveling to Rae Bareilly in a car (Eco) from Gosainganj. Phool Kumar, a resident of Indra Nagar, reported that cash and ornaments were stolen from her bag during the journey. She recounted that two women and two men, seemingly acquainted with the driver, were already present in the car when they boarded. The driver abruptly halted the vehicle in Sadarpur village, claiming a family emergency, before fleeing the scene without accepting payment. Subsequently, Kumar discovered the theft, alleging the involvement of the passengers

in the car. The incident was reported to the police on April 5, although reasons for the delay in registering the case remain unspecified.

WOMAN RAPED ON MARRIAGE PRETEXT

A 22-year-old woman was allegedly raped by a man on the pretext of marriage in Ballia district, police here said on Thursday. According to the FIR, the victim had alleged that the accused, Rajneesh Yadav recently refused to marry her and had raped her multiple times since 2021, Station House Officer Dharam Veer Singh said. When the woman's father went to inquire about Rajneesh's refusal to marry, his parents and another relative abused and threatened to kill him, SHO said. Based on the complaint of the woman's mother, an FIR was lodged against Rajneesh under section 376 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code and three of his family members under sections 504 (Intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace) and 506 (criminal intimidation), he said. Further investigation is underway, he added.

DC for strengthening traffic system

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A meeting was chaired by Divisional Commissioner Roshan Jacob on Thursday to enhance the efficiency and strength of the traffic system. Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Salman Taj, Additional Municipal Commissioner Pankaj Srivastava, representatives from PWD, Lucknow Development Authority, and other officials concerned were present in the meeting. Dr Roshan Jacob emphasised the need for a smooth-running traffic system and strict adherence to traffic regulations to minimise road accidents. She stressed the importance of wearing helmets for two-wheeler riders to reduce accidents. Instructions were given to identify and relocate haphazardly parked carts at intersections to designated vending zones. Municipal Commissioner was tasked with inspecting opera-

tional vending and parking zones and ensuring the removal of illegal encroachments regularly. Additionally, she emphasised that city transport buses must stop only at designated places to avoid disruptions, with penalties for violations. The PWD was directed to prioritise signage and patch repair work. Progress updates were provided regarding blacktop extension and widening projects at various intersections. Concerning the Model Code of Conduct and election preparations, a separate meeting was held via video conferencing, with all relevant district officials present. Jacob emphasised the importance of increasing voter turnout and conducting awareness programs across the division. She stressed on mutual coordination among districts for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections to ensure a fair, transparent, and peaceful process. Precautions were advised for inspecting sensitive polling

stations in advance, along with timely and quality training for polling personnel. Additionally, she emphasised the provision of essential facilities at polling centers and regular inspection of all booths in respective areas. Jacob urged immediate rectification of any deficiencies found during inspections and activation of mobile surveillance teams, flying squads, and municipal corporation teams for effective monitoring.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mehdi Hasan to MEHNDI HASAN S/o late Nanney R/O 15/51 Civil Lines, Kanpur for all future purpose.

NOTICE

I, Ajay Kumar Dwivedi, son of J. N. Dwivedi, residing at 86/398 Dev Nagar, Kanpur Nagar, have changed my daughter's name from Bhoomi (Bhumi) Dwivedi to Aarohi Dwivedi, as per the affidavit dated April 18, 2024, notarized by Adv A.K. Tiwari.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mukhtar Alam to MUKHTAR RAZA S/o Aftab Alam R/O 493, Faithfulganj Cantt. Kanpur for all future purpose.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Abdul Aynoor to Abdul Aynoor Ansari for all future purpose. Abdul Aynoor Ansari S/O Abdul Wasim R/O 5A/530 Awas Vikas Hanspuram Naubasta, Kanpur

NOTICE

I Rabintra Nath Singh Nana of Aamyia Singh and Guardian of Aamyia Singh has changed her name from Aamyia Mahananda to Aamyia Singh. Today onwards she will be known as Aamyia Singh instead of Aamyia Mahananda.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohammad Sharjeel Ayaz to Sharjeel Ayaz for all future purpose. Sharjeel Ayaz S/o Mohd Shahayaz R/O 88/407 Humayun Bagh, Chamanganj Kanpur

NOTICE

In my high school marksheet year 2010 Roll No. 1682161 my father's name is mentioned as JAGESHWAR PRASAD. Both JAGESHWAR PRASAD and JAGESHWAR represent my father only. Rammilan s/o Jageshwar village Khera Shilajit, Tehsil Sarila, District Hamirpur, U.P.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohammad Shareef to Mohd Sharif for all future purpose. Mohd Sharif S/o Mohd Rafiq R/O 101/4 Hata Chote Miya ka, Coloneganj Kanpur

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Vinay Kashyap to Vinay Kashyap David for future purpose. Vinay Kashyap David S/o Late Shiv Nath Kashyap R/O 34/12, Bangali Mohal, Kanpur

NOTICE

This is to inform that the name Farooqui Asma has been written by mistake in my high school certificate whereas the correct name in the Aadhaar card and other documents is Asma Farooqui. Both Asma Farooqui and Farooqui Asma are the same person. Asma Farooqui, w/o Abdul Tauheed, R/O Sona Vihar Colony, Alam Nagar, Lucknow.

Four of a family die in road accident

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Four members of a family, including two children, were killed and five others were injured when their car met with an accident on the highway in Etah on Thursday. Senior Superintendent of Police Rajesh Kumar Singh said all passengers belonged to a family and they were traveling from Noida to Etah. The car met with an accident in the early hours of Thursday after the driver lost control of the vehicle, he said. Nitya (1), Aradhya (6), Kuldeep (21) and Gulshan (23) died on the spot while five others were injured and have been admitted to hospital, the SSP added.

Gulshan was to get married later this month, police said. The bodies were sent for post-mortem. In a separate road accident, two truck drivers were charred to death after their vehicles caught fire following a collision in Aligarh, police said on Thursday. The incident took place in the afternoon when one truck transporting chemicals rammed into another stationary truck near Nagola village under Jawaan police station in Aligarh district, igniting a fire, police said. A third truck, which was carrying buffaloes and was parked on the roadside, also caught fire after it was hit by the two trucks. Three buffaloes died in the incident. Fire tenders

rushed to the spot and they doused the fire. After the fire was contained, the police recovered the remains of two truck drivers, Assistant Superintendent of Police (Rural) P Bansal said. The bodies, which are yet to be identified, were sent for autopsy.

TWO HELD WITH HEROINE WORTH ₹2 CRORE

In Maharajganj, two men were arrested and heroine worth around Rs 2 crore was recovered from their possession, a senior official said on Thursday. The arrest was made by a joint team of district police and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) on Wednesday night in the Parsamalik area of the India-

Nepal border here. The accused, identified as Satyam Madeshiya and Ashish Paswan Sonauli, were arrested during a routine checking and 200 grams of the contraband was seized, Additional Superintendent of Police Atish Kumar Singh said. They were on their way to Nepal to hand over the consignment valued at around Rs 2 crore in the global market, he added. Singh said the accused have been booked under relevant provisions of the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. Investigations are underway to find out about their contacts and the source of the seized narcotic substance, ASP Singh said.

Cops misbehave with youth, video goes viral

Lucknow (PNS): A viral video depicting two policemen from Dial 112 allegedly engaging in crude behaviour with a youth, who was later taken to a police outpost and subjected to severe beating, prompted senior police officials to initiate damage control measures during the ongoing poll season on Thursday. The victim, identified as Rahul from Balaganj locality, recounted that he was obligated to repay a debt to a woman residing in the same house on April 25. However, on Thursday, differences arose between them, resulting in the woman demanding repayment. An argument ensued, prompting the woman to contact the police control room, following which two constables arrived at the scene on a motorcycle. It was alleged that the constables began verbally abusing the youth upon arrival, despite his assurance of repaying the money. "They verbally attacked me without provocation, even though I assured them of repayment. I recorded their misconduct on my mobile phone, which they confiscated and deleted. However, some bystanders present at the scene clandestinely captured the incident and later circulated it widely," the victim stated. Subsequently, he was instructed to report to the police outpost, where he endured repeated slapping and kicking by the policemen. When questioned, a spokesperson stated that they had obtained a video corroborating these allegations and were in the process of verifying it with the Thakurganj police station.

LDA to develop warehouses, cold chain facilities

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Lucknow Development Authority is set to embark on a significant initiative, developing a sprawling complex along Kisan Path dedicated to housing warehouses and cold chain facilities for preserving perishable food items. The project, valued at Rs 600 crore, aims to address the issue of significant wastage, with over 40 per cent of perishable goods reportedly going unused or declared unfit for consumption in the past. According to Vice-Chairman of LDA Indramani Tripathi, the complex will include a 'kisan serai' to accommodate farmers overnight in the event of late-hour delays, thus mitigating wastage. Spanning across 10 acres of land along Kisan Path, with a storage capacity of 5 lakh metric tons, the facility will be easily accessible to farmers and transporters via a well-connected outer ring road linking to Kisan Path. Recognising the need for proper preservation infrastructure, experts highlight the significance of cold chain facilities for storing items such as processed juices, ice-cream, pickles, and other perishable goods

The project aims to address the issue of significant wastage, with over 40% of perishable goods reportedly going unused or declared unfit for consumption in past

derived from fruits, vegetables, and dairy products. Authorised agencies will oversee distribution to retailers, ensuring quality and freshness. Notably, the introduction of such a large-scale cold chain facility marks a pioneering endeavour in the state, reflecting a growing awareness of the importance of food preservation techniques. An inspection of the proposed site by the VC, along with representatives and experts from the Ministry of Agriculture, garnered positive feedback, with plans underway for a meticulously planned infrastructure equipped with state-of-the-art technology. The implementation of a robust cold chain system promises to extend the shelf life.

CH. CHARAN SINGH UNIVERSITY, MEERUT
(NAAC ACCREDITED with A++ Grade)

Admission Announcement: 2024-25

Applications are invited for admission to M.Ed. and LLM (through Entrance Test) and B.Ped. and M.Ped. (through Physical Fitness Test) in Ch. Charan Singh University campus and affiliated colleges. Application form and admission rules will be available on the University website www.ccsuniversity.ac.in w.e.f. April 20, 2024 to May 10, 2024.

Registrar

HDFC BANK Legal Cell: HDFC Bank Ltd, 2nd Floor, Experio Building, Vibhuti Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh-226010

POSSESSION NOTICE APPENDIX IV [RULE 8(1)]

Whereas, the undersigned being the authorized officer of the HDFC Bank Ltd, under the Secularization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 read with rule 5 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, issued demand notice dated 19.01.2024 calling upon the borrower(s) 1. M/s Kisan Tractors Through its Partner's (Borrower) 2. Mr. Sheo Shankar Agarwal W/o Mr. Shiv Shankar S/o Chandmal Agarwal (Guarantor & Mortgagor) 3. Mr. Shubhash Chandra Agarwal S/o Shiv Shankar Agarwal (Guarantor) 4. Mrs. Meena Agarwal W/o Mr. Vishwa Nath Agarwal (Guarantor & Mortgagor) to pay the amount mentioned in the notice Rs.75,50,823.00/- (Rupees Seventy-Five Lakh Fifty Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty-Two Only/-) within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under section 13 (4) of the said Act on the read with rule 8 & 9 of the said Rules, on this 15 APRIL 2024. The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (6) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to charge of HDFC Bank Ltd. for an amount of notice Rs.75,50,823.00/- (Rupees Seventy-Five Lakh Fifty Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty-Two Only/-) and interest thereon together with expenses and charges etc. less amount paid, if any.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

Shop No. 10/A, Situated At Mohalla Shankarganj, Tehsil Biswa District Sitapur, Near Biswa Sugar Mill, Measuring Area 360.00 Sq. Ft. (Property Owned By Mrs. Meena Agarwal) Bounded As Under - East: Lucknow Road, West: Nala And House Of Kishor Awasthi, North: House Of Seller, South: Purchaser. Plot No. 10/A, Situated At Mohalla Shankarganj, Tehsil Biswa District Sitapur, Near Biswa Sugar Mill, Measuring Area 645.00 Sq. Ft. (property Owned By Mr. Shiv Shankar Agarwal). Bounded As Under - East: Biswa Sidhulal Road, West: Nali Nagar Palika, North: House Of Seller, South: Plot Of Late Sri. Ambika Prasad

DATE: - 15/04/24, PLACE: - SITAPUR AUTHORISED OFFICER, HDFC BANK LTD.

पावरग्रिड POWERGRID

1. The applicant above-named has made an application before the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission, New Delhi for Determination of Transmission Tariff from DOCO to 31-03-2024 for Petition-1; Asses-I: ESTABLISHMENT OF STATE-OF-THE-ART UNIFIED CENTRALIZED NETWORK MANAGEMENT SYSTEM U-NMS FOR NORTHERN REGION (NR) ISTS AND STATE UTILITY COMMUNICATION NETWORK and Petition-2; Asses-I: Substation: 400KV Bikaner-II PS (Under TBCB) Extension: 02 Nos. 400KV Line Bays at Bikaner-II PS Bikaner (PG) 400KV D/C (Quad) line formed after removal of LILO of one circuit of Bhadla-Bikaner (RVPN) 400KV D/C (Quad), Transmission line: 400KV Bikaner-II PS - Bikaner (PG) (Quad) line; [Removal of LILO of one circuit of Bhadla-Bikaner (RVPN) 400KV D/C (Quad) line at Bikaner (PG) and extension of above LILO section from Bikaner (PG) up to Bikaner-II PS to form Bikaner-II PS - Bikaner (PG) 400KV D/C (Quad) line.] under Transmission system strengthening scheme for evacuation of power from solar energy zones in Rajasthan (8.1GW) under Phase-II-Part F1.

2. The beneficiaries for Combined Assets of the above-mentioned Transmission system are: (1) Ajmer Vidyut Vitran Nigam Ltd. (2) Jaipur Vidyut Vitran Nigam Ltd. (3) Jodhpur Vidyut Vitran Nigam Ltd. (4) Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (5) Haryana Power Purchase Centre (6) Power Development Deptt. Govt. of Jammu & Kashmir. (7) Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd. (8) BSES Yamuna Power Ltd. (9) BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd. (10) Tata Power Delhi Distribution Ltd. (11) Chandigarh Administration. (12) Uttaranchal Power Corporation Ltd. (13) North Central Railway (14) New Delhi Municipal Council. (15) Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board (16) Central Transmission Utility of India Limited (17) Bikaner-II (Bhiwadi) Transco Limited

S.No	Subject	Petition-1	Petition-2
1	Approved capital cost of the project (Rs. In Cr)	114.55	99.76
2	Scheduled date of commercial operation	08.08.2023	June 2022
3	Date of commercial operation	15.11.2023	11.07.2023
4	Capital cost on DOCO (Rs. In Cr)	71.28	91.02

4. Details of tariff: 2019-24 (Rs.in Lakhs)

Petition	Asset	2023-24
Petition-1	Asset-1	882.40
Petition-2	Asset-1	1287.16

5. The copy of the application made for determination of tariff is posted on the website of the applicant at www.powergrid.in

6. The suggestions and objections, if any, on the proposals for determination of tariff contained in the application be filed by any person, including the beneficiary before the Secretary, Central Electricity Regulatory Commission, 3rd and 4th Floor, Chandekal Bhawan, 36, Janpath, New Delhi -110001 (or other address where the office of the Commission is situated), with a copy to the applicant at the address of its corporate office within 30 days of publication of this notice.

Sd/-
Senior General Manager

Place: Gurugram
Date: 18.04.2024

POWER GRID CORPORATION OF INDIA LIMITED
(A Government of India Enterprise)
Reg. Office: B-9, Qutab Institutional Area, Katwaria Sarai, New Delhi - 110 016,
Corporate Office: 'Saudamini', Plot No. 2, Sector 29, Gurugram-122 001 CIN: L40101DL1989G0038121
A Maharatna PSU

Stage set for voting in first phase

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Tight security arrangements have been made for the first phase of voting in the eight Lok Sabha constituencies spread across nine districts of Uttar Pradesh on Friday. The voters of the eight Lok Sabha constituencies in western UP falling in the Jat land and sugarcane belt are set to exercise their constitutional right as polling for the first phase of the seven-phase parliamentary election begins on Friday. The constituencies going to polls on Friday are Saharanpur, Bijnor, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Nagina (reserved for Scheduled Castes), Moradabad, Rampur and Pilibhit. The poll campaign for the first phase ended on Wednesday evening. Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said here on Thursday that all arrangements were in place for peaceful, free and fair conduct of the election in the eight Lok Sabha constituencies going to polls on Friday. He said there were 80 candidates, including eight

women, in the fray for these eight Lok Sabha seats. DGP Prashant Kumar disclosed that to ensure peaceful, free and fair polling in these eight constituencies, one lakh jawans, 6,018 inspectors and sub-inspectors, 35,750 head constables and constables, 24,992 home guards, 60 companies of PAC and 220 companies of CAPF have been deployed for security duty. The CAPF includes BSF, CRPF, ITBP, CISE, SSB and RPF. He added that 6,764 village chowkidars and 155 PRD jawans have also been deployed on security duty. Gazetted officers and other police forces will be continuously active on general and law and order duty districts going to polls. In the first phase, voting is to be held at 1,48,49 polling stations of 7,689 polling centres in the Lok Sabha constituencies of nine districts — Saharanpur, Shamli, Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly and Pilibhit. A total of 248 barriers have been set up in these nine dis-

tricts. Out of these, 11 barriers have been set up in the international border area of Pilibhit and 88 barriers have been set up on the interstate borders of Saharanpur, Shamli, Moradabad, Bijnor, Rampur, Muzaffarnagar and Pilibhit and continuous intensive checking is being done. Kumar informed that flying squad teams, static surveillance teams and quick response teams were keeping vigil in all the nine districts. A total of 1,824 flying squad teams, 1,470 static surveillance teams and 459 QRTs have been formed in all the districts of the state. For keeping close watch on the polling process on Friday, the poll panel has deployed eight general observers, five police observers and 10 expenditure observers. Besides these, 1,272 sector magistrates, 150 zonal magistrates, 103 static magistrates and 1,861 micro observers have also been deployed. Rinwa said 18,662 electronic voting machine (EVM) control units, 18,734 ballot control units and 19,603 VVPAT

would be used for polling. He said arrangements for live web-casting had been made in 50 per cent of polling stations while videography would be done in 1,510 polling booths. He said the polling would commence from 7 am and voters who reach the polling station by 6 pm would be allowed to cast their vote. Poll officials said that the presence of the workers of all political parties had been restricted in these constituencies with the conclusion of electioneering. According to the Election Commission of India, 1.43 crore people are eligible to cast their votes in the first phase polls. Of them, 76.23 lakh are men, 67.14 lakh women and 824 are transgenders. According to data compiled by political parties, Muslim voters account for 35 per cent to 50 per cent of the electorate in these constituencies. Twelve candidates are in the fray from Moradabad, 14 from Kairana, 11 each from Muzaffarnagar and Bijnor, 10 each from Saharanpur and Pilibhit and six each from

Nagina and Rampur. The Bharatiya Janata Party has joined hands with the Rashtriya Lok Dal while the Samajwadi Party has allied with the Congress for the election. The Bahujan Samaj Party has decided to go solo. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP swept all eight seats slated for the first phase of voting, contributing to its impressive tally of 71 seats, which rose to 73 in alliance with the Apna Dal (Sonelal). However, the 2019 elections saw a shift in the political landscape, with the BJP facing setbacks against the grand alliance of SP, RLD and BSP. Out of the eight seats it won in 2014, the BJP could secure only three in 2019, marking a significant decline from its previous dominance. This loss of momentum resulted in the BJP winning 62 seats overall, a decrease of nine from the 2014 elections, as SP and BSP made significant gains in Purvanchal. The SP-BSP alliance secured victory in five out of the eight seats contested in the first phase of the 2019 elections.



Polling officials collect EVMs and other election material at a distribution centre ahead of the first phase of voting for Lok Sabha elections, in Moradabad on Thursday

SP, BSP and Congress follow 'danga policy', says Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Thursday, accused the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Congress of following a 'danga (riot) policy', and said that the policy of the National Democratic Alliance government was that of development, which was in sharp contrast to the opposition's policy. Speaking at a public meeting in Secunderabad, Bulandshahr, the chief minister emphasised, "The BJP stands for faith, security and prosperity. Under the governance of SP, BSP and Congress, the state frequently saw curfews lasting for months. However, now there are no curfews in the state. These parties were known for stirring unrest through riots. They adopted a 'riot policy', while we prioritise 'development policy'." Chief Minister Yogi urged the public to vote for Dr Mahesh Sharma, Member of Parliament and the BJP candidate from Gautam Buddha Nagar. Many leaders of the SP also joined the BJP on the occasion.



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath waves to the BJP supporters at a public meeting in Bulandshahr on Thursday

highlighting the transformation in India, Yogi Adityanath said, "We are now in a 'New India'. Those who remember the 2014 elections can attest to the conditions of the country back then. They should inform the new generation and first-time voters about the prevailing discontent and mistrust during that period." He further remarked, "Terrorism, Naxalism and separatism were on the rise across the nation. Corruption was rampant in all sectors. The youth were disheartened and the farmers were driven to suicide." The chief minister highlighted the significant changes India has undergone in the past decade, pointing out that various challenging issues such as tackling Naxalism and terrorism have been successfully addressed and resolved. He attributed these problems to the Congress' governance, stating that the entire country, including Jammu, was once plagued by terrorism. "Daily explosions claimed innocent lives, leaving families shattered. Yet, the Congress remained a passive spectator, shying away from uttering a word against terrorism," he

remarked. He contrasted the situation with today's when the present government has revoked Article 370. Chief Minister Yogi pointed to the development of Asia's largest airport in Jewar as a testament to progress. He mentioned that Secunderabad and Jewar will reap substantial benefits from this project. He also emphasised the strengthening of the national and state economies. "Plans are underway for a rapid rail system and the expansion of the metro network. Additionally, with the Dadri junction being a part of the dedicated freight corridor, the country's largest logistics centre is set to be established there. This development is expected to generate hundreds of thousands of jobs," he said. Outlining the government's development initiatives, the chief minister said, "In Uttar Pradesh, if someone falls ill and he does not have an Ayushman card, MPs, MLAs, and the affected individual can write a letter, and the funds will be directly deposited into their accounts. The government ensures that families are not financially burdened by med-

ical expenses." The chief minister said that by solving the problems of builder-buyers in Noida, Greater Noida and Yamuna Authority, the cases pending for years were being closed and the buyers were being given the rights. The chief minister emphasised that previously some individuals prioritised family interests over national welfare. He said this election was a choice between the 'swarth ka parivar' (vested interests) and 'Modi ka parivar' (Modi family) representing India's 140 crore people. He criticised the SP, the BSP and the Congress for their narrow focus on family interests. He also noted the improved environment for secure investment. "After 500 years, Ram Lalla celebrated his 'janmotsav' at his birthplace. Many witnessed the unique tilak ceremony of Suryavanshi Ram, where the rays of Lord Surya adorned him," he remarked. Chief Minister Yogi attributed India's prosperity to Narendra Modi's leadership and urged voters to re-elect him as prime minister and Dr Mahesh Sharma as MP for a third

'Those committed to nation back BJP'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Thursday, said that while India and Pakistan attained freedom from the British rule together, today Pakistan was suffering from hunger while in India, 80 crore people were being given free ration. Chief Minister Yogi was addressing a public meeting in Kithore, Meerut, seeking votes for Bharatiya Janata Party candidate from the Meerut-Hapur Lok Sabha constituency, Arun Govil. He remarked, "Pakistan, with a population of 22 crore, inherited fertile land during partition, yet its people are currently suffering from hunger. Conversely, in India, over the past decade, a greater number of individuals have risen above the poverty line than Pakistan's entire population." The chief minister said in his speech that when Arun Govil was playing the role of Lord Ram in the Ramayana serial, he did not even know that one day Lord Ram would celebrate his birthday in his birthplace. He added that Arun Govil's candidacy in Meerut coincides with Lord Ram's return to his birthplace. Chief Minister Yogi further

mentioned the rare event of the Surya Tilak on the occasion of Ram Navami on Wednesday when the sun kissed the forehead of Lord Ram's idol at his grand temple in Ayodhya, pointing out that the spectacle mesmerised people across the world. He posed a query to the audience, asking whether individuals from Congress, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party could undertake the tasks ranging from the laying of the foundation stone for Lord Ram's temple to the installation of his idol and the grand celebration of Ram Navami. Highlighting the turnout of 15 lakh people in Ayodhya on Ram Navami, he emphasised the unity displayed as they all gathered in Meerut, accompanied by Arun Govil. The chief minister said that in 1857, Dhan Singh Kotwal had declared independence by rejecting his job and standing among the immortal martyrs of the country. "He fought not for himself and his family, but for the freedom of the country and the bright future of the coming generations. It is our fortune that we are witnessing the realisation of that dream," Chief Minister Yogi stated. Highlighting the development

works in Meerut, the chief minister noted the presence of a 12-lane highway connecting Meerut to Delhi, rapid rail connectivity and the establishment of a sports university, alongside infrastructure enhancements. He underscored that prior to 2014, these developments were a dream. Furthermore, he disclosed plans for the future, including the provision of metro rail facilities in Meerut. Additionally, he outlined the accomplishments of several welfare schemes aimed at assisting the underprivileged. The chief minister attributed the efforts to enhance the country's dignity and security to the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He asked the gathering if the Congress could have ever repealed Article 370 in Kashmir, eradicated terrorism, and put an end to the practice of triple talaq. He asserted that the BJP and Prime Minister Modi have made significant strides in promoting women's empowerment. "Presently, the state is free from curfew, and kanwar yatras are being conducted with fervour. The safety of daughters and businessmen has been ensured. The BJP gov-

ernment, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, has elevated respect for faith and bolstered employment opportunities for the youth," he added. "Our local athlete, Parul Chaudhary, achieved a remarkable victory by defeating a Chinese player in China. As a token of appreciation, we offered her a position as deputy superintendent of police. Additionally, the establishment of a sports university is underway, and our sports equipment is garnering global recognition. Electing Arun Govil as your MP will further boost your businesses through free advertising of sports equipment," Yogi emphasised. He noted that those who prioritise family allegiance may advocate for parties like SP, BSP and Congress, but those committed to the nation are steadfastly supporting the BJP candidate. Prior to this, Chief Minister Yogi paid homage to Baba Aghadnath, hailing Meerut and the historic site of the first freedom struggle in 1857. He urged everyone to represent Prime Minister Modi and Arun Govil as they visit every village, appealing to people to vote for the lotus symbol.

Mayawati appeals to vote for 'pro-Bahujan' govt

Lucknow (PNS): On the eve of polling for the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections, Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Thursday appealed to people to exercise their right to vote and elect a "pro-Bahujan" government. In a post on X, the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh said the right to vote was a "democratic power to obtain the master key to power" which would enable the poor, weak and neglected people to uplift themselves. "A strong appeal to you to elect a pro-Bahujan government for the poor, the working class and the deprived by fearlessly using your valuable constitutional right to vote in the first round

of polling for the seven-phase elections for the 18th Lok Sabha," Mayawati said in a post in Hindi. She also asked voters to ensure that their votes are not "misused" in the name of temple-mosque or bought using money power. "It is necessary to prevent the misuse of government machinery and violation of the model code of conduct by the ruling party," she added. Polling will be held in Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Nagina, Moradabad, Rampur and Pilibhit Lok Sabha constituencies of western Uttar Pradesh on Friday. The counting of votes for all seven phases of the elections will be taken up on June 4.

Akhilesh says BJP will be wiped out from Ghaziabad to Ghazipur

Kannauj (PTI): Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday said the BJP will be wiped out from Ghaziabad to Ghazipur in Uttar Pradesh this time in Lok Sabha polls. He said the INDIA bloc candidates will win in the first phase of elections to be held on Friday and appealed to the people to vote in favour of the alliance candidates. Yadav, who reached the Samajwadi Party (SP) district office, held a closed-door meeting of zonal in-charges and sector in-charges and explained to them the strategy regarding the elections. He later reached village Bhud Purva, where a



young man named Brajesh Pal had committed suicide after burning his degrees. In the suicide letter found on his person, Pal termed unemployment as the reason for taking the extreme step. Yadav expressed condolences to his family members. He attacked the BJP and said the

Abhay Dubey challenges Irani to list 5 works done in Amethi

Lucknow (PTI): Congress leader Abhay Dubey on Thursday challenged BJP MP from Amethi, Smriti Irani to give five examples of work done by her in the constituency and said even a small Congress worker can defeat her in the polls. "It seems that Smritiji is in a state of panic. Had she worked there, she would not have been afraid. The Congress had written a saga of development in Amethi," Dubey, the Congress's national spokesperson, told PTI Videos. He then challenged her to give five examples of work done by her in Amethi. Dubey, who was here, said, "We got factories of the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), ordinance factory, Rail Neer, and hospitals constructed." The plastic waste management plant which is being talked about consists of two rooms and it does not even have an electric connection, he

further alleged. "The people of Amethi do not even want to keep you Smritiji in their smriti (memory). Even a small worker, if contests from there will defeat you," he said responding to Irani's dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi that he has "changed his colours" and will go there after April 26. While the BJP has announced Irani as the party candidate from Amethi, the Congress is yet to name its nominee. Amethi will vote in the fifth phase on May 20. Gandhi had defeated Irani in Amethi in 2014 but lost to her in the 2019 general elections. To a question regarding an attack on three people in Bengaluru for allegedly raising 'jai Shree Ram' slogans, he said Lord Ram will give sad-buddhi (good sense) to the BJP. "Ramji had given up power and went into the jungles for 14 years to uphold the 'vachan' (promise) but taking his

(Ram's) name, the BJP breaks its promises every day and enjoys power," he said. Dubey said that at the time of voting, people will fix accountability on the basis of the work done and not on the statements issued. On the issue of electoral bonds, he said, "The RBI in May 2017, and the Election Commission (EC) in September 2017, wrote telling (Prime Minister Narendra) Modiji not to bring electoral bonds scheme as it will lead to more shell companies and black money but they did not listen to anyone as they had to do 'chanda do dhandhalo'." They have been "exposed" by the Supreme Court's decision and the BJP is "nervous" over this, Dubey said. He also said alleged the EC is not giving time to the Congress for a meeting and its transparency is at stake. "It is a constitutional body, they have to think of upkeeping its transparency," he added.

Vikas Agrahari denies joining BJP, says will remain in Cong

Amethi (PTI): In a surprise turn of events, Congress state co-coordinator Vikas Agrahari, who was reported to have joined the BJP in the presence of Union Women Smriti Irani on Thursday morning, said that he had merely called on the Amethi MP and remains firmly in the grand old party. Earlier in the day, the BJP released a press note about Agrahari joining the saffron party and also shared a picture of the Congress leader with Irani and BJP district president Ram Prasad Mishra with a saffron scarf around his neck. The press note said that Mishra made Agrahari join the BJP. BJP spokesperson Chandramauli Singh had also claimed in the press note that common people of Amethi are with Irani. Singh said the relationship that Irani has built with Amethi in the last 10 years is becoming stronger with each passing day and this is the reason why people are now leaving the Congress and joining the BJP. Later in the day, Agrahari held a press conference at the Congress office and denied joining the BJP. Agrahari said that he had gone to meet the Amethi MP as part of common courtesy where he was made to wear a saffron scarf. This does not mean that I am in the BJP or joined it, said Agrahari, adding these people should desist from saying that those coming to meet them have come to join the party. "We were in the Congress with all our soul, we are in the Congress even today and will remain in the Congress in future also," he stressed. The press note issued by the BJP had also stated that the Congress leader said Amethi is developing rapidly in every field under Irani's leadership.

BJP candidate DS Bhole files nomination from Akbarpur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

BJP candidate Devendra Singh Bhole filed his nomination from Akbarpur (Kanpur Dehat) parliamentary seat for the third term here at the Collectorate office on Thursday.

On reaching the Collectorate office, he had an argument with the cops over entry of prescribed number of people with him in the nomination room. Apart from four persons allowed with him, Bhole insisted on the entry of



BJP candidate from Akbarpur (Kanpur dehat) constituency Devendra Singh Bhole filing nomination papers on Thursday

his lawyer also. After the argument, Bhole took six persons to the nomination room with him. State cabinet minister

Rakesh Sachan was asked to leave the nomination room after complaint to the returning authorities. During the nomination, total five persons, including the former mayor Jagatvir Singh Dron, former MLA RP Kushwaha and two lawyers accompanied him.

During the nomination process, Bhole had an argument with ACP Kotwali Archana Singh. Earlier, Bhole visited the Anandeshwar Parmat temple and took the blessings of Lord Shiva.

DEO: Discharge election-related responsibilities on priority

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate/ District Election Officer (DM/DEO) S Rajalingam has directed the officers to ensure the discharge of election-related responsibilities assigned to them on priority. In view of the preparation for Lok Sabha General Elections-2024, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of Rajalingam with nodal officers and assistant returning officers in the Collectorate auditorium on Thursday.

While directing the officers concerned during the meeting, the DEO said that in order to conduct the Lok Sabha elections of the district in a fair, safe and transparent manner, it is necessary to complete all the election related preparations on time as per the guidelines of the Election Commission of India (ECI). "All officers should ensure that they complete the preparations on time while discharging their assigned responsibilities well," he said, adding that there should be no laxity or negligence at any level in an important task like elec-



DM/DEO S Rajalingam holding a meeting of officers to review poll preparations in Varanasi on Thursday.

tions, otherwise, action will be taken against those concerned. During the meeting, along with a concrete action plan for the preparations of EVMs to be used in elections, instructions were given to appoint adequate staff for the said work apart from adequate teams of videographers for election work along with actively ensuring complete videography of public meetings etc, publicity programmes, seizures etc by SST, FST teams in view of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and in cases of MCC violation. He also instructed the officers

concerned to ensure necessary action. "SST, FST teams should remain continuously active and conduct extensive checking campaigns," he said, directing the officers for the preparation of materials to be used in the elections as well as their packaging on time. In the meeting, discussions were held on the action plan for the first randomisation of polling personnel, necessary basic facilities at all polling centres/booths, arrangements for special category voters like disabled, elderly etc, polling party departure and all necessary arrangements

at the places where EVMs are to be deposited, counting of votes etc.

The DEO also gave necessary guidelines after detailed discussion. On the occasion, Chief Development Officer (CDO)/Officer in-charge Personnel Himanshu Nagpal, ADM (V/R) Vandita Srivastava, ADM (City) Alok Verma, ADM (Administration/ Deputy District Election Officer) Bipin Kumar, Nodal Officer including ADM (Protocol), assistant nodal officers, assistant returning officers and other officers concerned were also present.

Meanwhile, the DM/DEO has directed the Uday Pratap Inter College, under Section 160 of the Representation of the Peoples Act 1951, to provide its premises for providing training to polling personnel, micro observers and zonal/sector magistrates for conducting the Lok Sabha General Elections 2024 in a safe and peaceful manner. The room and premises/hall of Uday Pratap Public School and RSMT have been acquired from April 26 to June 3 for this purpose.

Demand to end online slip system

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In order to end the online slip system in government hospitals, the Samajwadi Party (SP) workers handed over a memorandum to Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary on Wednesday and demanded that slips be issued in a normal manner. Former city SP president Vishnu Sharma reached the CMO office in Durgakund and apprised the CMO of the problems being faced by the patients in getting online slips at Shri Shiv Prasad Gupta (SSPG) Divisional Hospital, Kabirchaura and other government hospitals.

He said the general public, especially women and elderly people, face difficulties in downloading the slips from mobile phones and sometimes they have to wait for hours. He said in the earlier normal computerised system it was easy for every patient to get the medical slip by standing in line, but with the online method, it has become difficult for the patients to get medical slips for treatment.

Senior SP leader Pooja Yadav said in the online slip system the patients, especially women who do not know how to download the prescriptions from the app, are forced to seek the help of others and wander here and there to get the slips. She said due to this system, the patients are being deprived of medical treatment and demanded the abolition of online slip system and restoration of earlier computerised slip system. The CMO assured the SP workers that a decision in this direction will be taken as soon as possible by forwarding the memorandum to the government level. Senior SP leader Baldu Rana, Amit Srivastava, Sandeep Sharma, Pradeep Modanwal, Kishan Yadav, Abhishek Vishwakarma, Chandra Shekhar Singh etc were among those who were also present in the SP delegation.

Man hacked to death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A middle-aged man was hacked to death in JK Colony under Jajmau police station area late on Wednesday night. He was identified as Aslam (55), a 'rajai-gadda' (quilts and mattresses) vendor on the roadside for the past around 20 years. His kin alleged the involvement of his two employees in the killing. Local police with forensic team rushed to spot and carried out probe. The body had been sent for the autopsy. A native of Manhar, Distt Hazipur (Bihar), Aslam (55) lived with family members in JK Colony for the past 35 years. His family comprises wife Shaqueela, four sons and a daughter. He was engaged in the sale of quilts and mattresses from a temporary shop set up on the footpath at JK Chauraha. Kin said two labourers Aslam and Jagdamba were also employed in the shop. During the day family members also used to remain in the shop while at night Aslam used to sleep there with his two labourers. On Wednesday night, all the family members had returned



Police carrying out a probe in Jajmau.

home at 10 pm. On Thursday morning, when his nephew Javed passed from there with a rickshaw, he found the profusely-bleeding body of Aslam lying on the cot. Both the labourers were found absconding from the shop. DCP (East) Shrawan Kumar along with Chakeri and Jajmau police force rushed to spot and carried out investigation. He said on Wednesday night when Aslam was consuming liquor with his two employees they had an argument over some issue. Raids are on to nail the absconding labourers, he said.

Meanwhile a youth was electrocuted while his father and younger brother sustained serious burns when they came

in contact with the electric cable passing through their roof in Orai in Jalaun district on Thursday morning. On seeing their father stuck to the wire, when both the sons rushed in his rescue, they also came into contact with the electric current and all the three sustained serious burns. The kin took them to the CHC where the elder son was declared dead by the doctors. On Thursday morning when after bath Kamlesh Ahirwar had gone dry clothes on the rooftop, he came in contact with the electric line passing from there. On hearing his screams, when his sons, Vineet (25) and Rohit rushed in his rescue, they were also caught. At the CHC, Vineet was declared dead by the doctors.

FIRE: Standing wheat crop on 200 bighas of land belonging to about 50 farmers along the four villages was gutted in a fire which broke out there in the Ghatampur police station area on Thursday afternoon. Five fire tenders rushed to spot and carried out rescue operation. Farmers also attempted to control the fire along with the firefighters.

Motorcyclist killed in mishap

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A motorcyclist was killed and three others were injured when two bikes collided head on on Kanpur-Aligarh highway near Kajjanj Hasauli village under Bilhaur police station area late Wednesday night. The police sent the body for autopsy and injured, to hospital. Narendra Yadav (48) son of farmer Girish Chand Yadav of Bamhni, Araul, Bilhaur, was employed in a brick kiln. The accident occurred late on Wednesday night near Kajjanj Hasauli village on Kanpur-Aligarh highway when he was returning home after finishing duty. In the incident, Narendra Yadav and a youth Mayank Kumar of Ramkheda Chaurai, Vidhnu, riding on other bike were seriously injured. Two other persons riding on other bike also sustained minor

injury. Police sent all the injured to Bilhaur CHC where Narendra Yadav was declared dead by the doctors. After the first aid, Mayank was referred to the LLR (Hallet) hospital, Kanpur, while other two youths, with minor injury, were sent to home after the first aid. After kin of the deceased reached the spot and completing formalities of 'panchnama', police sent the body for autopsy.

Meanwhile a woman, going for a bath into Ganga with her son-in-law on bike, was fatally knocked down by a truck near Bhudda Chauraha on Bilhaur Road under Bangermau Kotwali police area of Unnao on Thursday morning. Her son-in-law also sustained serious injury in the incident. After falling from the bike, she was run over by the truck which led to her

killing on the spot. The police sent the body for autopsy after investigation. Phool Kumari alias Sushila (55), wife of Phool Chand of Daulatpur village in Fatehpur Chaurasi police area had organised a *katha* at her house. She was going to Nanamau ghat with son-in-law Anil on bike for a bath in the Ganga. The truck hit her from behind near Bhudda chauraha and after she fell on the street it ran over her killing her on the spot. Due to the body lying in the middle of the street, a massive jam prevailed on the road for about half-an-hour.

Circle Officer (CO) Arvind Singh and Kotwali Incharge Raj Kumar rushed to the spot and assured kin of the deceased of extending all possible assistance. After completing the legal formalities, police got the traffic movement there restored.

Final assessment of Kayakalp Yojana done at Cholapur CHC



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The final assessment of the Kayakalp Yojana for the year 2023-24 was done at the Community Health Centre (CHC) Cholapur, known as 'Mini District Hospital' of the district, on Wednesday. The team for external assessment was determined by the Quality Assurance Section, State Programme Management Unit (SPMU)/National Health Mission (NHM), Lucknow comprising Dr Arpit Srivastava, Dr Mohammad Mustaq and Dr Shreya Singh. For the external assessment of Kayakalp, the team inspected all types of facilities and cleanliness etc in the CHC and gave appropriate guidelines. This was the seventh Kayakalp External Assessment (Final Assessment) of CHC

Cholapur which has received Kayakalp Yojana Award six times and every time CHC Cholapur has got first position in the district. The result for the year 2023-24 will be declared soon. This year many more new facilities have been expanded in this CHC which mainly include ultrasound and ECG facilities. Now the reports of all the pathology tests of CHC Cholapur are being sent to the patients through SMS on their mobile phones. The benefit of this facility is that the patients do not have to visit the hospital again and again for the reports. Along with this, due to the installation of Health ATM in CHC Cholapur, more than 100 types of tests are being done in a few minutes with just a few drops of blood sample. Along with the herbal garden,

the fountain garden was recently constructed in this CHC by Superintendent Dr RB Yadav which is not available in any community health centre. All the patients coming to the hospital are benefiting from this. Dr Yadav said that the CHC Cholapur has 24 hours facilities for delivery, admission of patients and treatment, emergency, blood bank, pathology, tele-medicine, pharmacy, X-ray, operation and OPD by senior doctors.

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said our aim is to provide high class health facilities to all the patients coming to all government hospitals and primary and community health centres (PHCs/CHCs) without any discrimination and for that we are always committed, he added. At the time of Kayakalp assessment, pharmacist Jitendra Yadav, Dr Santosh Singh, Dr Akanksha, Dr Amit Jain, Dr Pradeep Jaiswal, ARO Rajesh Srivastava, lab technician (LT) Ramesh Prasad, pharmacist Bhanu Prakash, staff nurse Amita Kumari, KN Srivastava, Shatrughan Mishra, Abhishek, Pradeep, Mishra, Sanjay, etc were also present.

Four injured

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Four car-borne persons were seriously injured when their uncontrolled vehicle suddenly overturned and fell into a pit on the Bundelkhand Expressway in Hamirpur on Thursday morning. The incident took place when they were going to Delhi from Jabalpur. They are safe as the car's airbags opened.

Nareesh Kumar (36) of Gurgaon said he along with



friends, Sumit Kumar (28), Abdul Munaf (32) and Manjit Singh (32) of Delhi was going to Delhi via Bundelkhand Expressway on Thursday morning. His car overturned on the expressway near Nadna village under Kotwali police station area and fell into a pit. As a result all the four people were seriously injured. On receiving information the 108 ambulance staff got them admitted to the CHC from where Dr Akhilesh Kumar Singh referred Nareesh Kumar and Sumit to Medical College, Orai.

Govt notifies new product 'Nano Urea Plus'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The government has notified a new product 'Nano Urea Plus' fertiliser to be manufactured by cooperative IFFCO in the country for the next three years. Nano Urea Plus is a new version of Nano Urea to meet the nitrogen requirements of the crop at critical growth stages. According to the gazette notification, the government has approved Nano Urea Plus in liquid form with 16 per cent nitrogen. It said the product will be manufactured by cooperative major IFFCO for a period of three years.

IFFCO's Nano Urea Plus is an advanced formulation of

Nano Urea with redefined nutrition to meet the nitrogen requirements of the crop at critical growth stages. It is used in place of traditional urea and other nitrogenous fertilisers to promote soil health, farmer profitability and a sustainable environment. It also increases the availability and efficiency of micronutrients. It is a chlorophyll charger, increasing yields and helping in climate-smart farming.

IFFCO Managing Director Dr Uday Shanker Awasthi said that Nano Urea Plus has been notified for three years by the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India. Under

which the production of IFFCO Nano Urea Plus has been approved. There will be no increase in the price of Nano Urea Plus and it will be available in 500 ml bottles at the rate of Rs 225. Nano Urea Plus will help in plant growth without harming the environment. Its objective is to benefit the farmers of the country and promote self-reliant India and self-reliant agriculture.

Senior Executive Director (Unit Head) Sanjay Kudesia of IFFCO Phulpur Unit, said the production of Nano Urea Plus will be started in the Phulpur unit soon as soon as instructions are received from the IFFCO headquarters.

DST Gyan Kendra inaugurated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

With the aim of improving the employment and livelihood of poor and small farmers, DST Gyan Kendra (Knowledge Centre) was inaugurated by the Registrar of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) Prof AK Singh and gram pradhan Dr Rajesh Patel at Saiji village under Arajiline block on Wednesday. The centre will be conducted by the Department of Agricultural Extension and Communication, Institute of Agricultural Sciences (IAS-BHU) under the project funded by DST, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.

Chief investigator of this project Prof Kalyan Ghadei informed the present group about the need for computer and internet training at this centre for getting employment. "Along with education, this centre will help one in getting proper and timely benefits of rural and agricultural related projects," he said.

Dr Rajesh Patel welcomed everyone and discussed in detail about the benefits the villagers will get from this project. In the end, Dr Virendra Kamalvanshi, co-project investigator thanked everyone and the inaugural programme ended with the national anthem. The programme was conducted by Dr SK Goyal with cooperation from Surendra Verma and Mohd Javed.

Woman, lover held for murder

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A woman was arrested along with her lover for killing her husband in Rampur Gohari village under Phaphamau police station in Gangapur area here. Reports said Photo Devi murdered Rajkumar alias Mithun (35) after hatching a conspiracy with her lover Ranjit. Thereafter she raised an alarm that someone had killed her husband at night.

DCP Abhishek Bharti reached Gangapur with force. The woman along with her lover confessed to the murder and were arrested. Reports said parents of Mithun of Rampur Gohari village of Phaphamau, have died. Elder brothers Om Prakash and Ram Singh live separately with family. Mithun had built a house outside the village. He was married to Photo Devi of Khargapur, Nawabganj, five years ago. They did not have children. Mithun used to work in a factory in Delhi. He returned to the village on April 13. On April 14 he brought his wife living in Khargapur, Nawabganj, to his home. Mithun's body was found in his room on Wednesday. The Phaphamau police sent the body for post-mortem. The police got call details of Photo Devi's mobile. She had called her relative Ranjit at 9 pm. The police picked up Ranjit and when interrogated, he started giving a different statement. Before marrying Mithun, she had an affair with her sister-in-law's cousin Ranjit of Mundera

under Dhoomanganj police station here. Due to some reasons, the marriage of Ranjit and Photo Devi could not take place. When Mithun went to Delhi for a job, Ranjit again came close to Photo Devi. When Mithun returned on April 13, he said he will now do something by staying here. When husband asked questions about Ranjit, Photo Devi got scared. She talked to Ranjit and hatched a conspiracy. The DCP said as per the plan, the woman called Ranjit at 9 pm. Ranjeet and Mithun had a fight in the room.

CRIMINAL HELD: The Prayagraj Commissionerate Police arrested a criminal who used to extort money from high profile women by blackmailing them. When police officers got information about him, teams were deployed. The police caught him on Wednesday night. The youth who was caught had arrived with six bombs to threaten a family. The police have recovered the bomb from the accused and has sent him to jail. The name of the arrested accused is Syed Asaf, a resident of Garhi Kala Leader Road under Shahganj police station area here. Shahganj police outpost in-charge, Upendra Rai said that one such high profile case was registered in Kareli police station. It was revealed that he was blackmailing the woman and threatening the family members. After this, the police conducted a confidential investigation and arrested him. However, a search is on for his accomplice.

Rituals completed under Chaitra Navratri Maha Mahotsav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Navratri rituals under Chaitra Navratri Maha Mahotsav were completed on Thursday in the courtyard of Sri Vidyamath here in the presence of Shankaracharya of Jyotish Peeth Swami Avimuktেশ्वरानंदा Saraswati. During the festival, many cultural programmes were dedicated at the feet of Goddess Bhagwati every day. After completing the Gaushat Chandi Prayog (experiment), the 'kalash' was immersed in the sacred water of Ganga on the banks of the Kedar Ghat.

The administrator of Sri Vidyamath, Paramatmanand Prabhachari Paramatmanand performed all the rituals under



the guidance of Acharya Veereshwar Datar Shastri. After Purnahuti, 108 couples (husband and wife) were worshipped. The couple was worshipped in the form of Bhagwati Kameshwari and Lord Kameshwar and received blessings from them. Sadhvi Purnamba Devi and Sadhvi Shardamba Devi completed the couple's puja. On the occa-

sion, Sadhvi Jyotirmayanand, S a d h v i Pradhanpurusheshwaranand, Sadhvi Sarvabhatmanand, Shri Prakash Pandey, Jyotishankar Tripathi, Shaileendra Yogi, Ramesh Upadhyay, Girish Tiwari, Avinash Antheria, Savitri Pandey etc were present. Speaking on the occasion, the Shankaracharya, while mentioning the name of Bhagwati in Lalita Sahastranam, she is first worshipped as Shrimata, the same Shrimata is 'Gaumata'. "Today, the biggest problem in the country is protection of cow. If we do not make efforts to stop cow slaughter, it will be a suicidal step for our nation," he said, adding that we all will have to come together with all

our might to declare cow as the 'Mother of the Nation'.

Earlier on the auspicious occasion of Ram Navami, Shri Ram Navami Yatra was taken out by Varanasi city unit of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), which started from Gaushtala at Golghar and ended at Chittaranjan Park via Maidagin, Nichi Bagh, Chowk, Gyanvapi, Bansphatak and Godowlia. The main attractions of the yatra were various tableaux related to Lord Ram apart from the presence of drums, pipe bands, drum bands, Damru Dal etc. The people participating in the yatra carried 'Shri Ram' flags in their hands, wore turbans and danced and sang on the tune of Ram bhajans.

INDIA Bloc leaders resorting to politics of abuse, intimidation: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday charged that leaders of the Congress and other INDIA bloc constituents are resorting to politics of "abuse and intimidation," and urged the Election Commission to take suo motu cognisance of their recent remarks and act against them. Shehzad Poonawalla, the party's national spokesperson, said during a press conference at the BJP headquarters that Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader Nazrul Islam recently "openly" threatened to "bury" Prime Minister Narendra Modi "400 feet below".

"Nazrul Islam, a leader of the JMM and the 'INDI Alliance', has insulted the country's 'jana shakti (people's power)' by threatening to kill and bury the prime minister, who has been elected by the people of the country," Poonawalla said. The JMM leader's remark shows the "mindset" of the opposition's INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) bloc, he charged. "The Election Commission should take suo motu cognisance of Nazrul Islam's remarks and take action against him immediately," the BJP leader said. "This politics of abuse, insult and intimidation is not a coin-



cidence but a well thought out plan (of the opposition). Two days ago, a Congress candidate had talked about killing Modi by saying that he would come (win the election) and Modi would die," Poonawalla charged. Islam on Wednesday apologised for making a derogatory statement against Modi and said his remark was not intended to hurt anyone. "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 would be out of power," the JMM leader said in a video statement. The BJP's Jharkhand unit on

Tuesday demanded a high-level probe and the arrest of Islam for his remarks against Modi. Taking on the Congress, Poonawalla alleged that Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar recently threatened residents of a housing society that they would not get water supply if they did not vote for his brother D K Suresh. Earlier, Karnataka Minister D Sudhakar had "threatened" that a special grant of Rs 25 crore would not be provided if the people did not vote for the Congress candidate, Poonawalla alleged. "Will people be threatened like this? DK Shivakumar gave an

open threat. It's a clear violation of the model code of conduct, Representation of the People Act," the BJP leader said and added, "The Election Commission should take suo motu cognisance of it and take the strictest action against DK Shivakumar and the other Karnataka minister." The BJP's Karnataka unit on Monday filed a complaint with the Election Commission against Sudhakar for alleged violation of the model code of conduct for his comment during a speech at the Nayakanahatti village of Chitradurga district, promising a special grant of Rs 25 crore from the chief minister.

Mamata responsible for violence on Ram Navami in Bengal: Malviya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee should be held to account for failing to protect Bengali Hindus, the BJP said on Thursday, holding her responsible for the violence during Ram Navami celebrations in Murshidabad district. The BJP's reaction comes after Banerjee, who heads the Trinamool Congress, claimed that the violence was "pre-planned" and accused the BJP of orchestrating it ahead of polling for the Lok Sabha elections. The seven-phase polls starts on Friday and West Bengal will vote in all the phases -- April 19, April 26, May 7, May 13, May 20, May 25 and June 1. Counting of votes will be taken up on June 4. "Bengal is falling apart and Mamata Banerjee is responsi-

ble for it. Her vituperative and communal speeches are the reason Ram Bhakts have been attacked across Bengal," BJP co-in-charge for West Bengal Amit Malviya said in a post on X. She must be held to account for failing to protect Bengali Hindus, he added. According to the West Bengal Police, a woman was injured in a blast that took place when a procession was taken out in Murshidabad's Shaktipur area on Wednesday. Malviya claimed that "after

widespread rioting in Murshidabad, now devotees of Shri Ram targeted in Egra, Medinipur." "BJP karyakartas (workers) will gherao the Egra police station to protest the brutal attack on the Ramanavami Shobha Yatra," he said. Chief Minister Banerjee on Thursday alleged that the BJP instigated violence during Ram Navami celebrations in the state. "Everything was pre-planned. The DIG (deputy inspector general of police) of Murshidabad was removed a day ahead of Ram Navami so that you (the BJP) can carry out violence," she said at an election rally in Raiganj Lok Sabha constituency. The chief minister also claimed that goons associated with the BJP roughed up police personnel in the district.

Congress standing by Naxals for votes: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday alleged the Congress is advocating for Naxals for votes as it has sensed its defeat in the Lok Sabha elections. Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, party national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla alleged that Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete on Wednesday described Naxals killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh as "martyrs" and raised questions over the action against the extremists. Security personnel gunned down 29 Naxals in Kanker, Chhattisgarh on Tuesday, in the biggest encounter ever in the state which has been facing the Naxal menace for the

past three decades. "We have seen a very important operation in Chhattisgarh in which 29 Naxals were eliminated by security personnel. It was indeed a big achievement for the security forces," Poonawalla said. "Instead of welcoming the action by the security forces, the Congress has done what is expected of them. However, it is unthinkable that it claimed that the Naxals were essentially martyrs. It put a question mark on the bravery of our security forces," he charged. "Supriya Shrinete described the Naxals as martyrs and expressed sympathy for them. The Congress leader said that a thorough probe should be conducted into this (operation)," Poonawalla said of Shrinete's comments. The BJP leader said that Shrinete exposed the real face of the opposition INDIA bloc. "Congress leaders are advocating for Naxals as they are losing in the elections. They are not hesitant to stand by terrorists while opposing (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi," Poonawalla said. The number of fatalities in Tuesday's operation was the highest suffered by Naxals in a single encounter in the history of Chhattisgarh's fight against Left Wing Extremism (LWE).

Space established domain of warfare, says CDS Chauhan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining the growing importance of space, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan said here on Thursday he believes that space is already an established domain of warfare and it will "cast its influence" on air, maritime and land domains. Making this assertion in a recorded video address that was played at the inaugural session of the three-day Indian Defence Space Symposium. General Chauhan also said that "space diplomacy" will soon become a reality. Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) Chairman Samir V Kamat and other senior officers of the armed forces attended the event held at the Manekshaw Centre here. In his address, General Chauhan underlined the role of space evolving in future warfare. "I will touch upon where we are and where we need to go," he said. "Space is called the final frontier. Space is infinite in its expanse and is also expanding. Like all other frontiers, it is difficult to define its edges very clearly. Mankind has a long way to go to unravel the mystery of space. India wants to be part of that journey," the CDS said. He also spoke about the four "cosmonauts under training" as part of India's "Gaganyaan" programme. "Space is also referred to as an emerging domain of warfare. I believe that it is already an established domain of warfare. My belief is premised on the fast-paced development occurring in this particular

domain," he said. General Chauhan said the history of warfare has "taught us that in any war, the initial contest generally occurs in a new domain." The new domain also influences the battles in older domains, he added. "Initially, the naval power was able to influence battles on land. Later, air power influenced war at land and seas. It is my belief that now, space will cast its influence on air, maritime and land domains," General Chauhan said in his video address. Terming space a "global commons," he said there can be "no concept of sovereignty in space." The CDS also said "space diplomacy will soon become a reality." One does not have to be a neighbour to extend cooperation in space to friendly nations. Distances and geopolitical separations might be of "advantage in defence space cooperation," he added. Navy Chief Kumar said despite countless challenges and denial of technology, Indian space scientists have shown the world that India has the "will, wisdom and wherewithal" to be an "ace in space." Admiral Kumar also said it is not rocket science to realise that in "Amrit Kaal", India is "leading the charge at escape velocity" in the space sector. Domain experts and senior officials from the armed forces are taking part in the symposium.

All women crew from tri-services ends sailing expedition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A tri-services all-women crew has completed a nearly four-week rigorous sailing expedition under challenging circumstances in the Arabian Sea as a precursor to an arduous blue-water voyage around the world. The crew comprising 12 women officers from the Indian Army, Navy, and the Indian Air Force carried the voyage to prepare for the global circumnavigation competition scheduled to take place in September, officials said on Thursday. The crew embarked on the journey under the banner of the Army Adventure Wing and the Army Aqua Nodal

Centre of the College of Military Engineering, they said. The voyage, which is a precursor to a much more challenging global circumnavigation competition, spanned over 27 days and tested their endurance and skills in some of the most demanding maritime conditions, an Army official said. "The successful completion of this expedition by the all-women crew highlights the capabilities and potential of women officers in leading and executing complex and challenging missions," he said. The training expedition is formally culminating on Friday with a voyage from Mumbai to Lakshadweep and back. The women sailors have



collectively logged more than 6000 nautical miles of training afloat. The crew is preparing themselves for 'Around the World Sailing Competition' that is set to mark a significant milestone in India's military history, the official said. During their expedition, the women sailors navigated through varying wind condi-

tions, sweltering heat, and choppy waters, showcasing not only their physical prowess but also their mental fortitude and teamwork, said another official. The journey was broken down into four legs, each presenting unique challenges and learning opportunities for the crew, strengthening their capabilities for the upcoming global circumnavigation challenge, he said. "This expedition is not just about marking geographical milestones but also breaking cultural and gender barriers. The initiative celebrates 'Nari Shakti' (women power) and emphasises the importance of inclusivity and diversity," the official said. "As the team prepares for

their global journey in the coming months, their story is already inspiring many across the nation and the world, showing that with resilience and determination, barriers can be broken, and new paths can be forged," he said. The official further adds: "This historic journey not only exemplifies the spirit of adventure but also underscores the significance of fostering inclusivity and diversity within maritime and military endeavours." The flagging-in ceremony, to be held on Friday evening at Marve in Mumbai, will celebrate the achievements of the courageous women sailors, who have collectively logged more than 6,000 nautical miles of training, he said.

DRDO successfully conducts flight test of desi cruise missile

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a fillip to self-reliance in niche missile technology, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Thursday conducted a successful flight-test of Indigenous Technology Cruise Missile (ITCM) from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur off the coast of Odisha. Giving details, defence ministry officials said here during the test, all subsystems performed as per expectation. The missile performance was monitored by several Range Sensors like Radar, Electro Optical Tracking System (EOTS) and Telemetry deployed by ITR at different locations to ensure complete coverage of the flight path. The flight of the missile was also monitored from the Su-30-Mk-I aircraft of the Indian Air Force. The missile followed the desired path using way point navigation and demonstrated very low altitude sea-skimming flight. This successful flight test has also established the reliable performance of the indigenous propulsion system developed by Gas Turbine Research

Establishment (GTRE), Bengaluru. The missile is also equipped with advanced avionics and software to ensure better and reliable performance. The missile is developed by Bengaluru-based DRDO laboratory Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE) along with contribution from other laboratories and Indian industries. The test was witnessed by many senior scientists from various DRDO laboratories along with the representatives from the production partner. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO for the successful flight-test and stated that successful development of indigenous long range subsonic cruise missile powered by indigenous propulsion is a major milestone for Indian defence research and development.

At least 80 Naxals killed, 125 arrested, 150 surrendered since January in Chhattisgarh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

At least 80 Naxals have been killed and more than 125 arrested while 150 have surrendered in this year so far in Chhattisgarh, where 29 ultras were gunned down two days ago in a fierce encounter with security forces, officials said on Thursday. Left Wing Extremism-related violence has declined in the country by 52 per cent and the number of deaths by 69 per cent from 6,035 to 1,868 in 2014-23 compared to 2004-14, according to Union home ministry data. Since the formation of the Vishnu Deo Sai government in Chhattisgarh in December 2023, pro-active operations have been carried out and, as a result, at least 80 Naxals have been eliminated and more than 125 arrested while 150 have surrendered since January, an official said. Late last year, following a detailed review of the security situation in Naxal-affected states, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had directed security forces to carry out operations against Maoists proactively. Shah's direction led to the formation of a high-powered committee, the members of which included director generals of police, director gen-



erals of the Central Reserve Police Force, the Border Security Forces, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police and the Intelligence Bureau, and other officials of the anti-Maoist grid. The result of the pro-active action against Naxals is now visible on the ground, the official said. On Tuesday, security personnel gunned down 29 Naxalites, including some senior members, in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district in the biggest ever encounter in the state. This was the highest number of fatalities suffered by Maoists in a single encounter in the history of the state's fight against Left Wing Extremism (LWE). Three security personnel suffered injuries in the fierce gun-battle that also led to a large quantity of weapons being seized. Security forces started setting up camps in Maoist-dominated areas since 2014. More than 250 such camps were set up after 2019, ending the security vacuum. According to home ministry data, LWE incidents have reduced from 14,862 to 7,128 in 2004-14 compared to 2014-23. The number of deaths of security personnel due to Left Wing Extremism has declined by 72 per cent from 1,750 in 2004-14 to 485 during 2014-23, while the number of civilian deaths has declined by 68 per cent from 4,285 to 1,383. The number of districts with incidents of violence was 96 in 2010. This declined by 53 per cent to 45 in 2022. Along with this, the number of police stations reporting violence decreased from 465 in 2010 to 176 in 2022. In the last five years, more than 5,000 post offices were set up in 90 districts that have Maoist presence or where the ultras were present. As many as 1,298 banks branches were opened and 1,348 ATMs made operational in the 30 most-affected districts, officials said. A total of 4,885 mobile towers were constructed at a cost of Rs 2,690 crore in Naxal-hit areas and 9,356 km roads constructed at a cost of Rs 10,718 crore. The officials said 121 Eklavya residential schools, 43 ITIs and 38 skill development centres were set up to engage the local youth.

Before booking tourist vehicle, check it is not requisitioned by EC for polls

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

If you've eagerly planned your All-India trip through a tour operator during the upcoming Lok Sabha polls slated from Friday, it's prudent to verify in advance whether the vehicle you've booked has been requisitioned by the Election Commission for polling officials. This precautionary step ensures that your travel plans remain uninterrupted amidst the electoral activities. In fact, the tour operators in the country particularly those catering inbound tourists ie foreign travelers are already in a jittery mode as polls kick off from Friday. They feel that deployment of their vehicles such as taxis or cars by the Election Commission (EC) at the centre and the States in the last moment to ferry polling officials to the booths and for ancillary tasks for voting days and consequent shortage causes disruption in the seamless services as they have to arrange alternate vehicles. On their behalf, the All India Tour Operators (IATO), the national body of the tourism industry has appealed to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar to exempt tourist vehicles with All India Tourist Permits for election-related deployment, emphasizing the impact on tourism services and the risk of legal reper-

"We understand that vehicles are required for election-related tasks but indiscriminate requisitioning of vehicles will cause inconvenience to many tourists. This does not bode well for the sector," he added. "Many tourists have already booked accommodations and finalised their itineraries. If a large chunk of vehicles is withdrawn for election purposes, tourists will face inconveniences," added Rajnish Kaistha, Senior Vice President of the IATO. As the tourism industry strives to rebound post-Covid-19, any shortage of vehicles during the peak travel season could pose significant challenges. "Many tourists are now booking and an inflow of tourists has started. If there is a shortage of vehicles for tourists during the forthcoming season, it would be another challenge for the industry. Of course the EC pays for the services," said Kaistha, founder of the Paradise Holidays (I) Pvt. Ltd. Tour operators commonly utilize all kinds of vehicles including SUVs and sedans to ferry travelers to various destinations for sightseeing purposes. The IATO has also appealed to the Union Tourism Ministry to ensure that ASI/State monuments remain accessible to tourists during the election period, recognizing the significance of monument visits in tourist itineraries.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Time bomb

Currently at 1.44 billion, India's population may double in 77 years unless we curb the trend

India stands at a pivotal juncture in its demographic journey; its population already surpassing China's to reach a staggering 1.44 billion. The prospect of this number potentially doubling within 77 years presents a formidable challenge. True, India's burgeoning population holds the promise of a significant demographic dividend: A youthful workforce, if equipped with the right skills and opportunities, can be the driver for economic growth, innovation and productivity. With appropriate investments in education, healthcare and employment opportunities, India has the potential to emerge as an economic powerhouse. But this is easier said than done. Alongside the opportunities, India also grapples with formidable challenges stemming from its rapid population growth. The strain on resources and infrastructure is palpable, with sectors like healthcare, education, housing and transportation already stretched thin. Overpopulation exacerbates the demand for food, water, energy and housing, leading to environmental degradation and perpetuating socio-economic disparities.



Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. First of all, there must be a concerted effort to invest in human capital. Education and healthcare must be prioritised to empower individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate meaningfully in economy. Mercifully, our population growth rate is showing a downward trend. To arrest the spiralling growth, a comprehensive population strategy is urgently needed, but the nation does not have any such plan.

One reason could be that any attempt to control the population would be highly unpopular. Indira Gandhi, along with Sanjay Gandhi, tried it in the 1970s which eventually led to her downfall. All political parties also learnt their lesson. Of course, we are no China and no coercive measures should be taken but the Government can make concerted efforts to reward family planning and penalise large family sizes. Comprehensive programmes aimed at empowering individuals, especially women, about reproductive health and contraception can help stabilise population growth. Furthermore, investments in sectors such as healthcare, sanitation, transportation and housing are necessary to meet the needs of the growing population. Sustainable development practices must be embraced to mitigate environmental degradation. Job creation is also paramount for managing population growth effectively. Policies that promote entrepreneurship, attract investments and support the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises can help generate employment opportunities. Gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives that enhance access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities are essential. Empowered women are more likely to make informed choices about family planning, leading to smaller family sizes and improved maternal and child health outcomes. There is no dearth of solutions but the big question is, who will bell the cat?

PICTALK



Foreign tourists during celebrations of World Heritage Day at the Agra Fort, in Agra

The enduring ties between India and Iran



BHOPINDER SINGH

Amid geopolitical complexities, India finds itself navigating a delicate balance between Iran, Israel and its domestic constituencies

Persians have had a civilisational connection with Hindustan (Persian for India) since antiquity. There is a powerful India connect, even for the most epochal person defining the politics of the post-Iran Revolution (1979) i.e., Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. His paternal grandfather, Seyed Ahmad Musavi 'Hindi', was born in Kintoor, near Lucknow. Musavi was to leave Awadh and settle in Khomein but was popularly known as 'Hindi' in Persia! Later, 'Hindi' was to be the pen name for Ruhollah Khomeini's poetry. In India itself, Shiite dynasties flourished as refugees escaping persecution from Arab-Sunni strains settled and thrived in Deccan, Rampur, Awadh, Bengal etc., with Lucknow emerging as the epicentre of Indian Shi'ism. Unlike the Middle East, the sectarian tensions were relatively less as the Gazetteer of Gilgit Agency noted, "Wherever Sunnis and Shias are found living together, they seem to practice a mutual tolerance rare in other Muhammadan communities. Except in Chilas and the Indus valley below or, there is, generally speaking, a complete absence of fanaticism". But, times changed and polemical writings of supremacist and sectarian assertions increased, causing bloody rift and polarisation. Soon, even in India the numerically lesser Shias were harassed by the substantially larger Sunni populace, leaving only pockets of Lucknow and Kargil area to have Shias in majority, as other enclaves were predominantly Sunni dominated.

'Shiaphobia' acquired even more sinister propulsion in neighbouring Pakistan and the air of the Sunni-Shia divide soon acquired political/sovereign overtones with Iran emerging as the transnational voice of Shiite sensibilities. The Ummah (Muslim world) got divided into two broad 'blocs' on sectarian lines and the shadows of Iran-versus-Arab Sheikdoms undercurrents played out violently in areas with mixed populations e.g., Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Pakistan and even so in India, though the sectarian tensions were not so pronounced here. This unique phenomenon of the relative security, freedom and thriving of Shias in India (where their percentage was in a similar minority to many other Islamic countries with the Sunni majority) did not go unnoticed in Tehran. India was a rare haven for Shias in modern times and Iran reciprocated the same by occasionally taking a pro-India stand on platforms like the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). That the fate of minority Shias in Pakistan was particularly beleaguered, made Tehran adopt pro-Delhi postures as geopolitical quid pro quo. As the Arab Sheikdoms were particularly close to the Pakistanis during the Cold War, Iran acted on the rebound by deepening relations with India. But the inevitable consequences of the Iranian Revolution and the need for it to take more puritanical stances and aspire to take over Ummah leadership from Saudi-led Sheikdoms led to it occasionally striking contradictory postures on issues like Kashmir et al. But situational and sectarian angularity ensured that both Iran and India were on the same side in sensitive theatres like Afghanistan, opposing the Pakistan-led Taliban forces. However, at the same time, India was recalibrating its relations by cosyng up to both the United States of America and Israel, strategically. The cost of Delhi's engagement with Washington and Tel Aviv led



to sticky situations like India stopping oil purchases from Iran owing to US-imposed sanctions, as well as stuttering on strategic projects like Chabahar Port. Yet all along there was always an unsaid understanding between Delhi and Tehran of the other's compulsions leading it to be forced into certain decisions — the bilateral trust and intent were rarely questioned. While India's drift towards 'majoritarian' politics led to natural concerns within the Ummah (even though Sheikdoms were officially bonding frenetically owing to India's emergence on the global highway), the local dynamics for Shias remained protected with the ruling political persuasion co-opting the Shias, actively. Both during the 2014 and 2019 General Elections, prominent Shia leaders in Lucknow actively supported the winning dispensation. Again, it didn't go unnoticed in Iran which remains hypersensitive to the fate of Shias across the world. India was an honourable exception in terms of its treatment of the minority Shias. This undeniable reality helped nuance the parallel (and unprecedented) outreach of Delhi with the capitals of Sheikdoms and Tel Aviv. Today, when the Israel-Palestine war has metastasised into dragging Iran into the conflict, picking sides for Delhi becomes tricky. The



INTERESTINGLY, BOTH ISRAEL AND IRAN HAVE STRONG CONSTITUENCIES WITHIN THEIR NARRATIVES THAT CAN CONVINCE THEIR POWERS-THAT-BE OF INDIA'S 'LARGER COMPULSIONS'

template of 'strategic independence' (used in the Russia-Ukraine conflict) could be afforded to this conflict which conjoins morality with practicality to take a deliberately mealy-mouthed position that offends none and yet genuinely beseeches peace. Delhi would know about the latent and conflated emotions of the Indian Muslims on the conflict, especially for the Shias when it comes to Iran. From the electoral lens, the dispensation recognises its investment in the Shias and Pasmanda (a backward caste) but the situation does get complex with Israel in the admixture, as that has a similar resonance in the 'majoritarian' calculus as a valorised counterpoise to Pan-Islamism. Israel often gets lionised disproportionately and morality becomes increasingly irrelevant. Interestingly both Israel and Iran have strong constituencies within their narrative that can convince their powers-that-be of India's 'larger compulsions'. It is these powerful backdoor channels, civilisational bonhomie and calibrated diplomatese that must be deployed as both countries are vital to India's future. India needs to prioritise peace over binary choices. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLITICAL CHARADE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Contribute fully in 400 seats goal: PM to Bengal", published on April 17, this is my response. If Sandeshkhal has indeed "sent shivers down the entire nation"; surely it must be asked whether the country had been "immersed in a coma" revolving around spine-chilling gangrapes /murder/forced cremation /naked parade of women folks in Uttar Pradesh Gujarat Kathua or Manipur!

So the TMC Government of West Bengal is "allowing infiltration" to "boost" its "vote bank"! So who mans the Indo-Bangladesh international border? West Bengal police under the TMC-led West Bengal Government or Border security forces under the BJP-led Centre! Period. And "TMC Government opposes" Ram Navami celebration in West Bengal" should feature as "joke of the century"! If announcing a State Government holiday for a purely North Indian festival, absolutely alien to Bengali culture, gets "credited" as "Opposition" to Ram Navami with the Who's Who of the TMC, zealously participating in such processions; then the word "Opposition" itself must be urgently amended in the dictionary! Lastly, it must be answered why despite winning as many as unprecedented 18 Lok Sabha seats from West Bengal in 2019, not a single Bengali was allowed to lead a ministry in the Union Cabinet in the last 5 years!

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

TENSION IN WEST ASIA

Madam — The tension in the West Asia region has escalated since Iran has directly launched missile attacks on Israel. The area is already facing challenges due to Israel's war operation in Gaza after the October 7 attack by Hamas. More than thirty thousand people have already died due to this out of which the majority are women and children. USA and other regional players like Hezbollah and Houthis have also been involved in the conflict in these six months. Further escalation of war can lead to serious conse-

Chhattisgarh encounter aftermath



Apropos the news article, "Chhattisgarh encounter leaves 29 Naxals dead", published on April 17, this is my response. In the dense forests of Chhattisgarh, where at least 29 Naxals were neutralised, including the top leaders, Shankar Rao and Lalita, divisional committee members of the CPI (Maoist)'s North Bastar Division. This clash, occurring just days before the Lok Sabha polls in Bastar, signifies the ongoing battle against insurgency in the region. More than 60,000 security personnel have been deployed in the district to oversee the electoral

process. This is the highest casualty suffered by the Maoists in a single incident since 2018 when 37 of them were killed in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district.

The Maoist rebels may have had reasons to hold a grudge against the government, but their romantic notion of revolution is misplaced because they'll never succeed in displacing the Government or creating their own Communist paradise in Bastar, or any other region of the country. So yes, they'll probably try to continue their usual attacks, but with the continued, concerted push by the security forces into their strongholds, those attacks will become fewer and far between. We have lack of military and other security personnel but still, activity is not controlled. Advishi have their livelihood in the jungle. Government cannot replace them in the name of development. However, I think Maoists' best bet would be to put down their arms and try to effect change through the ballot box.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

quences in the region and the world. West Asia is often termed as the energy basket of the globe due to its potential to produce oils. Many important sea trade routes connecting Asia to other parts of the world also go through this region. Any direct war between Tehran and Tel Aviv can pause oil supply and disrupt the sea routes. The war can also pull other regional powers into it. Global organisations and leaders should mediate between the countries and convince them to avoid future intensifications of conflict. The leaders of both Iran and Israel should also stop provoking each other. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza also needs to be stopped immediately as it is the root cause behind the conflict in the region.

Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal

TOO MUCH IS TOO BAD

Madam — Apropos the news article, "RCB Maxwell takes a mental and physical break from IPL 2024", published on April 17, this is my response. Many players from

the ongoing IPL have been playing all three game formats almost continuously throughout the year, so their endurance limit, patience and love for the game must be appreciated. The saying, "Eat cricket, talk cricket, sleep cricket" is highly suitable in their case. But too much of anything is too bad in many ways.

It wrecks their physical and mental health, playing becomes mechanical & casual, keeps them away for longer periods from their family, spectators will be bored to see the same faces again and again etc. Further cricket became a profession and business, no more a gentleman's game played leisurely and IPL affected the way test cricket is played and reduced its popularity and the number of spectators in the stadiums watching it. No other game has reached such a situation as that of cricket. It is time to restrict the amount of cricket played for its good.

O Prasada Rao | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

How justified is abusive language on OTT?

The impact of abusive language on societal norms is profound; content creators must deliver realistic but responsible content

The Over-the-Top (OTT) platform has revolutionised India's entertainment landscape and has created a niche for itself among audiences. It is considered to be progressive, realistic, has variety and also caters to the needs of all age groups. However, there has been a lot of noise about the proliferation of abusive language in many of the web series that have raised a lot of general and even legal objections. Recently the Supreme Court (March 2024) has given its verdict that the use of abusive language on OTT cannot be regarded as a criminal offence, as it would lead to an infringement of free speech and violate artistic creativity. This leaves us with an open debate about whether under the guise of freedom of speech, we can use foul language that may be affecting the cultural values of people. The use of abusive language in OTT content shapes how audiences perceive the characters, themes and overall tenor of the content. It may add authenticity to certain narratives or characters. If nothing else, it has become a fashion Statement and is more



saleable. It can be categorised as a demerit good with a high order of negative externality. Undoubtedly, the onus of the use of such language in society does not lie on OTT, it reflects something already present, but it has certainly contributed to making it more prominent. Some viewers avoid using such foul language, as they consider it to be morally incorrect and undignified. After all, what is the use of good education, if it does not teach us to differentiate between decent and indecent? With the explosion of cuss words on OTT, even this section of society is affected. The young generation, at tender ages, is exposed to such language and easily gets influ-

enced by it. It can become pervasive in everyday usage, hindering effective articulation of thoughts and ideas and challenging the professional and academic standards. It can be detrimental to social interactions and emotional well-being, hampering overall personality development. Simply providing a statutory warning of the content not suitable for a certain age, does not complete the responsibility of the makers. With the availability of the internet and its easy access via gadgets in every home, it is practically not possible to refrain kids from watching such content every time. With the nuclear family setups and working parents' culture gaining strength, it becomes even more difficult. We in India have reformed the education system with the introduction of the National Education Policy and Indian Knowledge System. It thrives on providing a high-quality education system rooted in Indian ethos contributing to transforming India into a value-based superpower. So, while at one place when we are trying to imbibe and revive our rich heritage, at the

same time, we are defending, if not promoting, the use of indecent language. We have a zero-tolerance policy against abuse in educational institutes, but a child tends to learn from the overall environment of which OTT is presently an unavoidable part. Besides, another aspect of the foul language on OTT incorporates gender-specific derogatory terms, predominantly objectifying women. Indian society has always given a special place to women and their role is spread across the cultural, economic and spiritual fabric of our society. The worship of goddesses reflects the deep-rooted respect and reverence for women in our culture. Undeniably, women are behind building the strong-rooted edifice of values and ethics, the society does not feel any responsibility to uphold their dignity. A good and progressive social environment is one where individuals feel respected, secure and valued. (The author is an assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)



KAJLEEN KAUR



FIRST COLUMN

A VISION FOR INDIA'S GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

The BJP manifesto focuses on strategy to make India a champion of Global South



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) unveiled its election manifesto earlier this week, opting for a departure from the conventional strategy of enticing voters with freebies and subsidies. Instead, the manifesto takes on the guise of a policy document, delineating the achievements of the PM Modi administration over the past decade and pledging to propel India into a developed economy within the next 25 years. Notably absent from the document is any significant mention of Pakistan, a focal point of India's foreign policy for years, in either the BJP manifesto or the Prime Minister's interviews.

The manifesto underscores the government's emphasis on foreign policy, echoing the strategic vision cultivated during India's G20 presidency. It celebrates India's emergence onto the global stage, exemplified by the unanimous consensus achieved for the New Delhi Declaration, a feat accomplished amidst doubts about US-Russia concordance. Prime Minister Modi elucidated his approach in an interview, emphasising the imperative of working towards global good without personal reservations, a principle that guided India's diplomatic endeavours.

In delineating the government's foreign policy outlook, Prime Minister Modi reiterated the cornerstone principles of "Neighbour First" and "Act East" since assuming office. The Act East policy has extended India's influence into the ASEAN region, fostering positive perceptions even among nations geographically distant. India's proactive assistance to neighbours during crises, such as earthquake relief in Nepal and aiding Sri Lanka during times of turmoil, exemplifies its commitment to regional solidarity.



The manifesto boasts of the safe repatriation of 1.5 crore distressed Indian citizens and positions India as a vocal advocate for the Global South, a central tenet of its foreign policy stance. Technological innovations like the Digital India stack, including UPI, have amplified India's presence on global platforms, albeit challenges persist in enhancing the acceptability of the Indian rupee in international trade. The document briefly touches upon India's burgeoning focus on the Indo-Pacific, a region of strategic interest for major global players and pledges to safeguard navigation rights and maritime security.

Under Modi's leadership, the manifesto pledges to bolster India's standing as a champion of the Global South, leveraging the Prime Minister's 5S approach of respect, dialogue, cooperation, peace and prosperity. It articulates aspirations for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and vows to enhance collaboration within the Indo-Pacific region to foster mutual growth and security.

Furthermore, the manifesto underscores the importance of securing critical minerals essential for the digital age, signalling intentions to forge partnerships with friendly nations to integrate India more deeply into global supply chains. In sum, the BJP's manifesto serves as a testament to continuity in India's foreign policy objectives, underlining a commitment to advancing the nation's interests on the global stage.

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

Sustainability through global collaboration



RAJDEEP PATHAK

President Dennis Francis, at the helm of the 78th UN General Assembly session, champions sustainability as pivotal to economic advancement

While the news of increasing temperatures in the Capital City of Delhi in the coming weeks and months hit the headlines, in a resounding affirmation of the symbiotic relationship between sustainability and economic progress, President Dennis Francis (heading the 78th session of the UN General Assembly), recently in an exclusive interview with PTI, unequivocally asserted that the pursuit of sustainability stands as the cornerstone of 21st-century development endeavours. He also emphasised the imperative of integrating sustainability into the fabric of global advancement. Dennis Francis is all set to inaugurate the "Sustainability Week" at the United Nations headquarters scheduled for April 15-19, 2024. Under the overarching theme of "Paving the Way for a Sustainable Future", this landmark event will spotlight pivotal sectors such as tourism, infrastructure connectivity, transportation, energy and debt, dedicating its discourse to the multifaceted dimensions of sustainability in each domain.

In this PTI exclusive, President Francis outlines a strategic focus on key economic sectors — tourism, transportation, infrastructure, energy and debt management — to drive transformative sustainability. He highlights challenges like climate change, energy security and debt entrapment, emphasising their nexus with poverty, education, housing and national security. Francis further underscores sustainability as both a moral imperative and a catalyst for equitable global progress, envisioning judicious decisions in these realms as key to profound shifts towards a sustainable future.

During the upcoming 'Sustainability Week', Dennis will host a series of high-level events including debates on 'debt sustainability' and 'socio-economic equality'; discussions on 'tourism and sustainable transport', an informal dialogue on 'global resilience through infrastructure connectivity' and a stocktaking session for the completion of the 'UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All' - all aimed at advancing the implementation of SDG 7 for sustainable development.

Dennis (in the interview) fervently promotes the fusion of sustainability and economic advancement, underscoring their intrinsic interdependence for societal well-being. He advocates for a transformative approach toward sustainable lifestyles, condemning antiquated resource exploitation methods exacerbating climate instability. He envisions a future where profitability harmonises with environmental stewardship, fostering equity and resilience. 'Sustainability Week' precedes the 'Summit of the Future', to instil sustainability as a collective imperative for safeguarding resources for posterity. He further emphasised the pressing requirement to refocus endeavours on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which saw a setback in target achievement because of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing conflicts. 'Sustainability Week' aims to revive dedication to impactful measures, crucial for reorienting the SDGs towards their intended trajectory.

Through collective action, the aim should be to uplift communities, inspire hope and advance the global agenda for sustainability and equity. The need is to empower communities, foster optimism and promote sustainability and equity worldwide.



INDIA'S SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS EXTEND TO BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION, WASTE MANAGEMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY, EXEMPLIFIED BY SCHEMES LIKE MGNREGA AND AYUSHMAN BHARAT

Governments, communities and organisations per se are uniting to tackle environmental challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss and renewable energy promotion. For example, in Scandinavia, countries like Denmark have been leaders in wind energy production, investing heavily in offshore wind farms and renewable energy infrastructure. Denmark's commitment to sustainability has led to a significant reduction in carbon emissions and reliance on fossil fuels.

Moreover, in Southeast Asia, Singapore pioneers innovative strategies to address river and ocean waste, utilising advanced wastewater treatment and strict plastic regulations, effectively curbing marine pollution. Meanwhile, Africa's 'Great Green Wall' initiative fights desertification in the bio-geographical Sahel region by planting trees and promoting sustainable land management, revitalising degraded landscapes and fostering biodiversity. Across Latin America, Costa Rica exemplifies biodiversity conservation through national parks and eco-tourism, fostering sustainable development while preserving its rich natural heritage, resulting in both environmental protection and economic prosperity. Some of these diverse efforts demonstrate global commitment to environmental management, enhancing resilience and also safeguarding ecosystems for future generations.

India's proactive stance towards achieving the SDGs is evident through multifaceted commitments across sectors. Initiatives like the 'National Solar Mission' and 'Jal Jeevan Mission', 'National Health Mission', etc., highlight the resolve to tackle environmental challenges. India further aims to generate great renewable energy capacity, emphasising reduced reliance on fossil fuels. Water conservation programs such as rainwater harvesting and the

'Jal Jeevan Mission' underscore India's dedication to ensuring water security, aiming to provide piped water supply to all households by 2024. This commitment is reinforced by experts like waterman, Rajendra Singh and CEO of Centre for Science and Environment, Sunita Narain, who stress the importance of renewable energy and community-driven water conservation efforts.

Additionally, India's sustainability efforts extend to biodiversity conservation, rural development, healthcare, education, waste management and gender equality, exemplified by schemes like MGNREGA and Ayushman Bharat. Dr. Vandana Shiva emphasises that sustainability encompasses socio-economic factors, with India's inclusive policies striving to create a more equitable and resilient society through integrated policymaking.

It may be noted that India initiated its climate action journey in 2009 by pledging to decrease emissions intensity by 20-25 per cent by 2020, achieving a commendable 24 per cent reduction. Subsequently aligning with the Paris Agreement, India outlined its 'Nationally Determined Contributions' in 2015, aiming for a 33-35 per cent emissions intensity reduction by 2030. Additional goals include enhancing non-fossil fuel energy generation, expanding carbon sinks and targeting 'NET ZERO' emissions by 2070. National efforts are reinforced by initiatives such as the 'National Action Plan on Climate Change' and the 'National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change', focusing on renewable energy, sustainable habitat and adaptation strategies.

As per media reports, by April 2023, India had made substantial progress toward 14 of the 33 SDGs, with improvements in neonatal and under-five mortality; sanitation

and electricity access. Challenges like adolescent pregnancy, clean cooking fuel and water facilities persist. Legislative amendments promoting renewable energy and carbon credit trading, along with initiatives such as the 'Green Hydrogen Mission', highlight India's commitment to sustainability. "Business Today" report of August 25, 2023, suggests that these efforts, coupled with the implementation of the 'Sustainable Development Goals National Indicator Framework', positioned India as a global leader in sustainability, as reflected in its ranking in the 'Climate Change Performance Index', indicating promising future progress.

India has implemented various environmental conservation initiatives like the 'Swachh Bharat Mission' 'Namami Gange', etc., along with legislative measures such as the 'Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act' and so on. The introduction of the 'Sustainable Development Goals National Indicator Framework' by the National Statistics Office in 2023 signifies efforts to monitor progress. However, despite advancements in climate action, financing SDGs remains a challenge. Proactive measures, integrating sustainability into policymaking and engaging communities are essential for achieving the ambitious 2030 SDG targets globally, ensuring equity and resilience. The imperative for proactive engagement by dedicated and committed citizens, not only within India but globally, underscores the exigency of collective action. Such involvement is paramount in addressing contemporary challenges, necessitating concerted efforts on a global scale. The choice is ours — perish or preserve.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

Corruption and political defections: A telltale sign of democratic decay

The electoral arithmetic, rather than the principles of righteousness, often dictates the trajectory of political decisions

Last week, while flitting through the contents of a leading daily newspaper in India, an interesting article caught hold of my attention and it made a compulsive reading throughout. The article was captioned — 'Since 2014, 25 Opposition leaders facing corruption probe crossed over to BJP, 23 of them got relieve'. The article was, undoubtedly, a telltale commentary on the holes in the prevalent political system in our country. It was an embarrassing account of the glaringly apparent fact that political parties of all hues and shades are compelled to flow with the tides produced by the fault lines in our political system and that too sometimes for sheer political survival.



ATUL SEHGAL

It may not be worthwhile to go deep into the finer nuances of the above account and be brazenly judgemental of hallowed political parties and personalities. It appears to be proper to dwell on the deficiencies of the current system in Bharat and regretfully State that the electoral arithmetic is the biggest bane of our political system. To build up the numbers for gathering the elusive major-

ity, political parties, under a legal system that is speckled with loopholes, have to resort to such shenanigans to assemble numbers to make stable governments and even make strong governments that can govern smoothly. Our democracy has definite deficiencies. Rather it is anything but perfect. A multi-party democracy is better described as a non-ideal, diluted form of democracy, especially so in a culturally variegated society like ours. The purest form of democracy is outlined in our ancient scripture Manusmriti. While making a mention of Manusmriti, it needs to be clarified that this observation is not to be taken lightly even if there is controversy associated with this ancient scrip-

ture. That controversy sprang from its distorted version, due to historical extrapolations by unscrupulous persons. The original, uncorrupted version of Manusmriti is a divine blueprint of an ideal governance system. The scripture talks of democracy indicating the following three characteristic features of democracy (prajatantra)

1. Partyless system of elections and governance
2. Right to recall the elected representatives by the voters
3. Congruous with the principles of righteousness or Dharma

It would also be relevant to State here that the above primaeva, divine scripture also provides a structural frame for the democratic governance system. It talks of



three assemblies — Rajyarsabha (executive assembly), Vidyaryasabha (subject specialist assembly) and Dharmaryasabha (assembly of religious experts). The last-mentioned assembly or council is composed of persons of distinguished moral standing and impeccable character who

act collectively as some kind of moral authority on the functioning of the executive council. It is easy to see how far the existing polity and governance structure are away from the above-mentioned ideal polity and governance system in a democratic set-up. In a party less democratic polity, all problems of electoral arithmetic and the evils that they engender are bound to vanish. There are going to be no big election rallies, no stupendous spending on elections, no horse-trading, no party switching, no turncoats, no go slow on prosecuting the corrupt and criminal politicians and no silly concepts of majoritarianism or minorityism. There is going to be no

minority-centred governance. It is also not difficult to understand how many secondary evils of the extant political system in our country will get eliminated if we were to incorporate the tenets of the sacred scripture Manusmriti in our polity and governance. It may be farfetched to expect that we can carve out from the present system something exactly conforming to the above utopian structure but even if we incorporate therein one or two important features like party less democratic system in our country, great benefit can accrue to our governance. In light of what is Stated above, we certainly need to reform our democratic system which does not deliver

too well. Accordingly, we look forward to the expectedly third term Modi Government bringing about wide constitutional, electoral and bureaucratic reforms to enable our nation to progress by kangaroo leaps, which it is capable of. Bharat is divinely destined to become the leading global nation-State of the world while maintaining its pristine stature as the moral and spiritual trailblazer of the world. This is so because Bharat is the land of saints, sages and seers who have been the beacons for humanity through the course of its long and chequered historical existence on this planet.

(The author is a management consultant; views are personal)



After Azad exit, Anantnag turns battleground for INDIA Bloc candidates

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Swift entry and exit of the Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) Chairman Ghulam Nabi Azad from the poll arena has made the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat a new battleground of the INDI Alliance constituents -- the National Conference and the Peoples Democratic Party in Kashmir valley. Instead of putting up a united front both the Kashmir-based political parties are bent upon staking their credibility in the eyes of the electorate. Former Congress stalwart Ghulam Nabi Azad after announcing his candidature from the seat decided to withdraw his name at the last minute raising speculations about his party's hold over the electorate in the region. The JKNC has fielded the tallest Gujjar leader Mian Altaf Ahmad, five-time MLA from the Kangan Assembly seat

while former Chief Minister and PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti is testing political waters from the newly carved out Lok Sabha seat to resurrect her political career. In the absence of any BJP candidate in the fray, the role of a third candidate Zaffar Iqbal Manhas, belonging to the Jammu and Kashmir APNI party becomes equally important as he is expected to be the biggest beneficiary of the voters belonging to the Pahari community. According to official sources, a total of 18,16,371 voters comprising 9,23,434 men and 8,92,910 women are expected to exercise their right to vote on the Anantnag-Rajouri Parliamentary seat. Out of them, as many as 7,29,830 voters are distributed across seven assembly segments of Rajouri and Poonch districts, while the remaining 10,86,541 voters are in eleven constituencies of three dis-

tricts—Shopian, Kulgam and Anantnag of South Kashmir. Approximately 60 percent of the total 7,29,830 voters in Rajouri and Poonch districts belong to the Pahari community while the remaining 40 percent are Gujjar and Bakerwal community votes. The votes of the Pahari community are expected to tilt the balance of power in the favour of the winning candidate. Ground reports suggested a large number of Pahari community former public representatives, who contested the Panchayat and District Development Council polls are making up their minds to support a like-minded candidate in the fray. Meanwhile, all three candidates including PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti, Mian Altaf Ahmad of JKNC and Zaffar Iqbal Manhas of JKAPNI party filed their nomination papers in the office of the Returning Officer in Anantnag on



Thursday. JKNC leader was accompanied by Omar Abdullah and Congress General Secretary GA Mir and others while Mehbooba Mufti was joined by senior party leaders at the time of filing her nomination papers. Interacting with the media persons, Mehbooba Mufti appealed to the people not to

boycott the elections. She emphasized that these elections are crucial for responding to the BJP's actions against the dignity, identity, and resources of Jammu and Kashmir. Mehbooba stressed that the people must use their voting power to defeat the BJP. "I urge all the people of Jammu and Kashmir not to boycott the elections. There are attempts to

encourage boycotts, particularly in South Kashmir. We must expose these conspiracies. Vote for the candidate whom you believe will advocate for the oppressed people. Our land, resources, jobs are being snatched away from us and there are attempts to turn Kashmiris into bonded slaves. This is our land and we will not allow its plundering at any cost. People must vote this time and vote cautiously in favour of the candidates who can represent them and speak truth to power without any fear and any partiality," Mehbooba said. Talking to reporters after filing nomination papers, Omar Abdullah said he was hopeful that Mian Altaf Ahmad, the influential Gujjar leader from Kangan in central Kashmir, would emerge victorious. "On behalf of the INDIA bloc, National Conference candidate Mian Altaf Ahmad has submitted his nomination

papers to the DC (returning officer). We are hopeful that Mian Sahib will emerge victorious. On behalf of NC president Farooq Abdullah, we are very thankful to G A Mir who came here from Delhi, especially for this," the NC vice president said. Reacting to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's statement on the destruction caused by gun culture in Jammu and Kashmir, Abdullah said the National Conference has been the worst victim of violence. "We know very well where the gun culture came from. No party has been a bigger victim of this gun culture than the National Conference. We have lost more than 4,000 senior workers, party office bearers, and former legislators," he added. On former chief minister Ghulam Nabi Azad withdrawing from the contest in Anantnag Lok Sabha seat,

Abdullah said he knew about it beforehand. "We knew that he would not contest. He did not contest from his Doda seat, why would he contest from Anantnag? Now his party has fielded a new candidate. How much support they have among the people you will come to know shortly," he said. On the BJP not fielding any candidates on the three seats in the valley, Abdullah said, "There are still 24 hours left. Who knows they might just do it!" Senior Congress leader GA Mir said he was confident of a sweep for INDIA bloc candidates in Jammu and Kashmir. "Jammu and Kashmir will not be divided into several parties. It is a direct contest between INDIA bloc and NDA. There is no scope for third, fourth or fifth parties this time. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are mature enough politically," Mir told reporters.

ED arrests AAP MLA Amanatullah

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday arrested Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Amanatullah Khan in connection with an alleged money laundering case, related to Delhi Waqf Board, after questioning for several hours. The AAP MLA appeared before the ED on Thursday morning. The deposition of the 50-year-old legislator from the Okhla Assembly seat comes after the Supreme Court last week refused to entertain his anticipatory bail application in the case related to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Waqf Board during his chairmanship. The apex court directed him to join the investigation on April 18. Speaking to reporters before entering the ED office, Khan claimed he followed the rules when he was the chairman of the Waqf Board and did everything after taking legal opinion and as per the new Act (for the board) that came in 2013, he said. The money laundering case against Khan stems from a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) FIR and three Delhi



Police complaints. The ED, which had conducted raids on the premises of the legislator, has claimed Khan acquired "huge proceeds of crime" in cash through illegal recruitment of staff in the Delhi Waqf Board and invested those to purchase immovable assets in the name of his associates. The ED had alleged in a statement that "illegal recruitment" of staff took place in the Waqf Board and "illegal personal gains" were made by unfairly leasing the Waqf Board properties during Khan's chairmanship (2018-2022). Khan, the ED said, "acquired huge proceeds of crime out of the said criminal activities in cash and this cash amount was invested in purchase of various immovable properties in Delhi in the name of his associates."

TV channel criticises Modi, Shah; BJP workers upset

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Even as the election day is approaching in Kerala, the BJP has caught itself in a strange situation as a satellite TV news channel owned and operated by Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar has unleashed a non-stop campaign against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and the BJP. What adds spice to this campaign is the fact that Rajeev Chandrasekhar is the BJP candidate from Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha constituency. Asianet News, owned by Rajeev Chandrasekhar, was telecasting a programme on Thursday lampooning Suresh Gopi, the BJP candidate from Thrissur constituency. What has upset the people is the kind of humiliation meted out to Modi and Shah by the Channel ostensibly at the instance of Rajeev Chandrasekhar.

Tight security in Manipur...

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Voting will be held in 1,319 polling stations in Inner Manipur, in addition to 29 special polling stations set up for people displaced due to the ethnic strife, he said. Manipur has witnessed violent ethnic clashes between hills-based Kukis and valley-based Meiteis that left over 200 dead and thousands homeless since May 3 last year. A total of 70 polling stations have been identified as either vulnerable or critical in Imphal West district and adequate security arrangements, including the deployment of central armed police forces, have been made, he said. Outer Manipur, which is reserved for Scheduled Tribes, will witness a four-cornered contest between Naga People's Front's K Timothy Zimik, Congress' Alfred Kanngam Arthur and Independent candidates Kho John and Alyson Abonmai, with all the candidates being Nagas. The BJP has not fielded any candidate and has declared support for its ally NPE. There are over 10.22 lakh voters in the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seat. A total of 22 special polling stations have been established for internally displaced people in Churachandpur district and

24 in Kangpokpi, officials said. Campaigning ended at 4 pm on Wednesday for the segments that are going to polls in the first phase. Canvassing has been low-key in the State due to the ethnic strife. Meanwhile, polling personnel have been dispatched to their respective polling stations on Thursday. Around 5,000 polling personnel have been sent to 530 polling stations, in addition to eight special polling stations for internally displaced people, across 13 assembly segments in Imphal West district, Th Kirankumar said. Imphal East District Election Officer Kh Diana said 1,782 polling personnel have been sent to 441 polling stations across 10 Assembly segments, besides nine special polling stations for internally displaced people. She said polling stations in Wangkhei and Yaikul Assembly constituencies will be manned by women. A total of 58 vulnerable and 67 critical polling stations have been identified in Imphal East district, Diana said. In Thoubal district, 248 polling stations have been set up, of which 123 are for Inner Manipur and 125 for Outer Manipur.

Western UP in the...

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Out of the same eight seats, the BJP secured only three, marking a substantial decline from its previous dominance and ending with 62 seats overall, a decrease of nine from the 2014 elections. The recent political developments in the western region, following the demise of farmer and Jat leader Ajit Singh in 2021, have reshaped the political landscape. His absence presents both opportunities and challenges for parties traditionally aligned with him. "The BJP's strategic decision to confer Bharat Ratna upon former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh proved instrumental, prompting Jayant to realign with the saffron party," explains political analyst Manoj Bhadra. "The electoral outcome will determine the wisdom of Jayant's decision," says Bhadra. The shifting political scenario has compelled both the SP and BSP to recalibrate their strategies. In a bid to court Muslim voters, SP has labelled BSP as the "B-team of the BJP," while the BSP's strategic move to field candidates from demographics traditionally aligned with the BJP has sparked interest. Even a slight deviation from

the anticipated voting patterns rooted in caste affiliations could disrupt the BJP's electoral calculations, particularly in constituencies like Muzaffarnagar, where victories were secured by narrow margins. However, apprehensions linger among both the Samajwadi Party and the BJP regarding the BSP's ability to appeal to Muslim voters, suggesting a potential shift in voting behaviour compared to past elections. Traditionally, minority votes have been split between SP and BSP candidates, resulting in a fragmented electoral landscape favouring the BJP. Yet, the consolidation of minority votes behind the SP in the 2022 Assembly elections hinted at a potential change in dynamics. While Jatavs, a prominent Dalit sub-group in western UP, are expected to remain loyal to Mayawati's BSP, the presence of Chandrashekhar Azad in Nagina presents challenges to BSP's dominance in this constituency. The electoral contest in Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Moradabad, Bijnor, and Kairana hinges on various factors, including BSP candidates' ability to sustain support from their respective communities and attract votes from minorities.

Uneasy lull in poll-bound...

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In 2019 the BJP trounced the TMC in all these constituencies which had traditionally been a stronghold of the Left and Congress. With all the top TMC and BJP leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee campaigning extensively issues that have come up during their campaign were Citizenship Amendment Act, corruption, infiltration. While Banerjee repeatedly attacked the Centre for dividing the people by invoking CAA and NRC and warned them against stepping into their trap, Modi raised the issue of corruption, infiltration from Bangladesh and the vulnerability of women in TMC raj as the incidents at Sandeshkhali would prove. The Left Front however have been raising the other issues like unemployment, price rise, low wages, closure of tea gardens etc. In the first phase, a total of 56,26,108 voters including 28,62,494 men, 27,63,506 women and 108 third-gender are likely to exercise their franchise in 5,814 booths.

Country gears up...

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Polling will be held in all seats of Tamil Nadu (39), Uttarakhand (5), Arunachal Pradesh (2), Meghalaya (2), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1), Mizoram (1), Nagaland (1), Puducherry (1), Sikkim (1) and Lakshadweep (1). Besides, there will be voting in 12 seats in Rajasthan, 8 in Uttar Pradesh, 6 in Madhya Pradesh, 5 seats each in Assam and Maharashtra, 4 in Bihar, 3 in West Bengal, 2 seats in Manipur, and one seat each in Tripura, Jammu and Kashmir and Chhattisgarh. Campaigning for the first phase ended Wednesday evening. On the eve of the Lok Sabha polls' first phase, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Thursday reminded people of the significance of each vote, saying there have been instances when one vote has mattered in a critical contest. Elections are the most beautiful expression of India's democracy and there is "nothing like voting," he said in a video message. In view of the heatwave, Kumar said people must take all precautions. "But I know the spirit of the Indian voter will beat the summer heat," he said. "In our great democracy, elections belong to you, the choice belongs to you... You are deciding the Government. You are doing it for your sake, for your family and children, for your village or town and, of course, for the country," he said. "I call upon the youth to lead a revolution in electoral participation," the Chief Election Commissioner said as he urged people to cast their ballot. Webcasting will be done in more than 50 per cent of the polling stations along with deployment of micro observers in all polling stations. Additionally, 361 observers -- 127 general, 67

police and 167 expenditure observers -- have already reached their constituencies days before the polls. They will serve as the eyes and ears of the commission. Special observers have also been deployed in certain States. "Assured Minimum Facilities like water, shed, toilets, ramps, volunteers, wheelchairs, and electricity are in place to ensure that every voter, including elderly and persons with disabilities, can cast their vote with ease. Fifteen model polling stations are being set up across the 102 PCs with local themes. More than 5,000 polling stations will be completely managed by women including security staff and at over 1000 Polling stations by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)," it said. Amongst the prominent leaders trying their electoral luck in phase one are Union Ministers Nitin Gadkari from Nagpur, Kiren Rijiju from Arunachal Pradesh (West), Arjun Ram Meghwal from Bikaner, Sarbananda Sonowal from Dibrugarh in Assam, Sanjeev Balyan from Muzaffarnagar in western UP, Jitendra Singh from Udhampur in Jammu and Kashmir and Bhupendra Yadav from Alwar in Rajasthan. Tamilisai Soundararajan, who recently resigned as governor of Telangana and Lt Governor of Puducherry to return to active politics, is contesting from Chennai South Lok Sabha constituency. Nakul Nath, son of Congress leader and former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath, is seeking reelection from Chhindwara. Of the two Lok Sabha constituencies in Tripura, the seat of West Tripura that votes in the first phase will see a high-voltage clash between former Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb and State Congress president Ashish Kumar Saha.

BJP faces a tough...

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The NDA-led by the BJP and its youthful State chief K Annamalai has Pattali Makkal Katchi, Tamil Manila Congress, Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam led by TTV Dhinakaran and an independent by name O Panneerselvam (yes, the three time Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu but right now a politician without a party). The BJP has 23 candidates in the line-up while the PMK has 10 and the TMC has fielded three candidates. Out of the 23 candidates fielded by the BJP, four candidates belonging to various fringe outfits contest under the Lotus symbol. The most keenly watched bout is at Coimbatore where Annamalai is taking on the DMK and the AIADMK rivals. "This is going to be an election with a difference as Annamalai is leading a rejuvenated BJP and there is a general feeling that the Hindutva party would win in at least five seats," said GC

Shekhar, veteran journalist. The DMK led front's main drawback is an internal contradiction. The Congress is campaigning together with MDMK-led by Vaiko and VCK-led by Thol Thirumavalavan. Both Vaiko and Thirumavalavan are supporters of Velupillai Prabhakaran and the terrorist outfit LTTE which played a major role in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Vaiko and Thirumavalavan light up lamps and organise memorial meetings on the birth day of Prabhakaran whom they address as Thampi and Annan respectively. The main contenders in the DMK include Kanimozhi, Karunanidhi's daughter by his third wife Rajathi, from Thoothukudi and her close "friend" A Raja, the 2G spectrum scam tainted former Union Minister (who is pitted against Union Minister Murugan of the BJP).

ED attaches Shilpa...

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They are currently lodged in jail under judicial custody. The main accused, Ajay Bhardwaj and Mahender Bhardwaj, are absconding, the ED said, adding that it had attached properties worth Rs 69 crore in the case earlier. Two chargesheets have been filed in the case till now, the first in June 2019 and the second in February this year.

Confusions galore in...

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Aurangabad was once represented by Union Minister Giriraj Singh but in the 2019 general election, the seat was won by then union LJP's Chandan Singh. This time, the Nawada seat has fallen to the BJP under the NDA's seat-sharing arrangements, and the party has fielded Vivek Thakur. In Nawada, BJP's Vivek Thakur cannot ride on the name of "Modi" as he faces a tough fight against Shrawan Kushwaha, the OBC Mahagathbandhan candidate, and independent candidates Vinod Yadav and Bhojpuri singer Gunjan Singh as his opponents. Nagpur where he is taking on Congress Vikas Thakre, who is an MLA from Nagpur West and a former Mayor and whose candidature is being supported by the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA). Nagpur being the headquarters of RSS and he being close to its chief Mohan Bhagwat, Gadkari has everything going in for him in the orange city which is the home turf of the BJP and also the home town of Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. Considered the "Development Man", Gadkari is popular among sections of voters in Nagpur, including Muslims. He had won by a huge margin of 2.16 votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls against the Congress'

Kejriwal on a sweet...

From Page 1

This is being done to create a medical emergency, to obtain sympathetic treatment from the court of law on medical grounds," ED counsel Zohab Hossain submitted before the court. Hossain said the details came to be known after the agency wrote to Tihar jail and sought information about Kejriwal's diet and the medicines being taken by him. The ED counsel said medical doctors are posted in jail round-the-clock, who are measuring blood sugar levels of Kejriwal twice a day. According to the ED, the jail authorities on 17.04.2024 have already asked AIMS to prescribe medical diet after considering his blood sugar data and the fact that he is a case of diabetes mellitus type II with chronic constipation with chronic cough (chronic bronchitis) and is under regular treatment. Kejriwal, meanwhile, withdrew his application

from the court seeking virtual consultation with his doctor thrice a week for monitoring his blood sugar level and other vitals, claiming that his sugar levels were fluctuating. Kejriwal's legal team has, however, insisted that all food items on the Chief Minister's diet chart had been prescribed by his doctor. His lawyer accused the ED of cooking up excuses to stop the supply of home-cooked food, which was permitted by the court in view of the AAP leader's diabetes. He said the investigating agency is making these allegations only for the media. Jain also said he is withdrawing the present application and that he will file a better one. "He is only eating what is prescribed by doctors. The ED is trying to stop supply of home-cooked food. This concerns the health of the Chief Minister..." Vivek Jain, the AAP leader's lawyer, said after the court proceeding.

BJP fights to retain...

The BJP is also hoping that the two rallies addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi -- one each at Chandrapur and Ramtek and a rally addressed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah at Bhandara-Gondia may bring dividends to it in the polls. Confident of doing well in the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls, the Congress is banking heavily on the under-currents of anti-incumbency, caste arithmetic of Dalits, Muslims and Kumbi community and the strength of its local leaders. Congress'

leader Rahul Gandhi and its current president Mallikarjun Kharge addressed one rally each at Bhandara-Gondia and Nagpur respectively. All the same, Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole has gone to town saying that his party will bag all the five seats in the first phase of polling due to the "massive anger" nursed by the people against the Narendra Modi Government. Incidentally, Vidarbha region was once the bastion of the Congress, before the BJP dislodged its position and took full control of the region, also known as eastern Maharashtra. Of the total 10 Lok Sabha seats in Vidarbha, the BJP had -- in the 2019 polls -- had walked away with nine seats -

including the one seat (Amravati) wrested by actress-turned-politician Navnit Ravi Rana who joined the BJP subsequently, while the managed just one seat -- that of Chandrapur. From among the five seats -- for which elections are being held on Friday, the BJP had bagged three seats -- Gadchiroli-Chimur, Bhandara-Gondia and Nagpur, while its then ally Shiv Sena had won Ramtek seat and the Congress had managed to win Chandrapur seats. In the current elections, direct contests are being witnessed in four out of the five constituencies. Two-time sitting MP and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari is sitting pretty and is confident of scoring a hat trick in the orange city of

Nagpur where he is taking on Congress Vikas Thakre, who is an MLA from Nagpur West and a former Mayor and whose candidature is being supported by the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA). Nagpur being the headquarters of RSS and he being close to its chief Mohan Bhagwat, Gadkari has everything going in for him in the orange city which is the home turf of the BJP and also the home town of Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. Considered the "Development Man", Gadkari is popular among sections of voters in Nagpur, including Muslims. He had won by a huge margin of 2.16 votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls against the Congress'

Nana Patole, who is currently the State Congress president. In Chandrapur which was the only seat that the Congress had won, the Congress has nominated Pratibha Dhanorkar, the widow of late sitting MP Suresh Narayan Dhanorkar alias Balubhau alias Balu Dhanorkar, against Maharashtra's Forest Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar, a six time MLA and a former State BJP president. In the neighbouring naxalite-belt of Gadchiroli-Chimur (ST) seat, the BJP has re-nominated Ashok Nete against Gandhian scholar Namdeo Kirsan of the Congress. Senior Congress leader and current leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly Vijay

Wadettiwar is throwing everything into the campaign to ensure the victory of his party's candidate. In Bhandara-Gondiya, sitting BJP MP Sunil Mendhe is taking on Dr Prashant Padole of the Congress, who enjoys goodwill in the constituency. A first-timer, he is a distant relative of State Congress chief Nana Patole. In Ramtek (SC), the Congress has put up Shyamkumar Barve, a loyalist of local party leader Sunil Kedar, as its candidate against the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena nominee Raju Parve. Parve recently resigned from the Congress and joined the Shiv Sena in presence of Shinde and Deputy Chief Ministers Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar.



Six candidates in fray in Mizoram

PTI ■ AIZAWL

All arrangements have been made for Friday's polling for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Mizoram in which six candidates are in the fray, a senior election official said.

Over 6.56 lakh electorates, including 4.4 lakh female voters are eligible to cast their votes, he said.

Mizoram additional chief electoral officer H Lianzela told PTI that voting will begin in all 1,276 polling stations across the state at 7 am and end at 5 pm.

The official said that the 510-km long international border with Myanmar and 318 km with Bangladesh has been sealed.

Besides, movement of traffic in the state boundaries with Assam, Manipur and Tripura has also been restricted.

At least 6,500 polling personnel have been deployed for the Lok Sabha polls.

Polling parties designated for 168 remote polling stations in south Mizoram's Lunglei and Lawngtlai districts and Mamit

All arrangements made for LS polls



district in the western part of the state have left for their respective polling stations on Wednesday, Lianzela said.

The remaining polling personnel left for their designated polling stations on Thursday, he added.

Security has been tightened across the state and adequate measures have been taken along the international border and inter-state borders, a senior police officer said.

More than 3,500 policemen and 12 companies of the

Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) have been deployed to ensure peaceful elections, state Inspector General of Police (Headquarters) Lalbiakthanga Khiantge said.

The ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) has fielded debutant Richard Vanlalhmangaiha, while the main opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) fielded sitting lone Rajya Sabha member from the state, K Vanlalvena.

Congress has fielded former

state Home secretary Lalbiakzama, while BJP nominated its state president Vanlalhmauka and the People's Conference (PC) party fielded a woman candidate, Rita Malsawmi.

Lahriatrenga Chhangte, who had unsuccessfully contested the last Lok Sabha polls in 2019, is again trying his luck as an independent candidate this time.

Although there are six contenders, experts believe that it will be mainly a three-cornered contest among ZPM, MNF and Congress.

Since 1972 when Mizoram first voted in the Lok Sabha polls, the ruling parties in the state usually won the polls except on two occasions in 1980 and 1998 when the Lok Sabha polls were swept by the opposition party by forging electoral alliances.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, then-ruling MNF nominee C Lalrosanga defeated his nearest opponent Lalnghinglova Hmar, an independent candidate backed by Congress and ZPM, by a margin of 8,140 votes.

Voting for Naxal-hit Bastar to be held today

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Amid heightened security measures, the Naxal-affected Bastar Lok Sabha constituency in Chhattisgarh will go to polls in the first phase of general elections on Friday, where 11 candidates are in fray.

Maoists' call to boycott elections poses a challenge to security forces, but their morale seems to be high following a major counter-insurgency operation in Kanker district on April 16 in which 29 Naxals, including senior cadres, were gunned down by them. Kanker is part of the Bastar region. Congress' firebrand leader Kawsai Lakhma will take on BJP's Mahesh Kashyap, a fresh face, in Bastar, which the saffron party has lost in 2019.

All preparations have been made for conducting a free and fair election in Bastar, the lone Lok Sabha constituency going to polls in the first phase in the state on April 19, state's Chief Electoral Officer Reena Babasaheb Kangale told reporters on Thursday.

Polling in booths of Kondagaon, Narayanpur, Chitrakot, Dantewada, Bijapur and Konta assembly constituencies in the Bastar Lok Sabha seat will be held from 7 am to 3 pm.

Besides, in the Bastar assembly constituency, the polling will be held from 7 am to 5 pm. In the Jagdalpur assembly segment, 175 booths will see voting from 7 am to 3 pm and 72 booths from 7 am to 3 pm, she said. A total of 11 candidates are in the fray in Bastar, where 14,72,207 voters — 7,71,679 women, 7,00,476 men and 52 members of third gender — are eligible to exercise their franchise, the official said.

There are 1,603 service voters, 12,703 divyang (differently-abled) voters, 47,010 voters in



the age group of 18 to 19 years, 3,487 in the age group of above 85 years of age and 119 voters above 100 years of age, she said. As many as 1,961 polling booths have been set up in the constituency. Of them, 191 will be 'Sangwari' booths (managed by women personnel), 42 'adarsi' polling booths while 8 others will be managed each by 'diyangian' and 36 by youths, she said.

Total 9,864 polling personnel have been deployed for the first phase, Kangale added.

Sufficient security arrangements have been made in all eight assembly constituencies in this Lok Sabha seat to ensure peaceful and fair elections. In the first phase, 61 polling booths have been categorised as 'vulnerable' and 196 as 'critical', she said.

Webcasting will be done in 811 out of the total 1,961 booths, she said. Seven helicopters, including three of Indian Air Force (IAF) and as many others of Border Security Force (BSF), were used to ferry 919 polling personnel in 156 polling booths of remote and sensitive areas in the last two days. Of these 156 polling booths, 76 are located in Bijapur district, 42 in Sukma, 33 in Narayanpur, 3 in Dantewada and 2 in Kondagaon, she said.

Remaining 1,805 polling teams were dispatched to their

destinations through buses on Thursday, she said.

According to officials, around 300 companies of various units of state police and 350 companies of CAPFs, including Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Border Security Force (BSF), (more than 60,000 personnel) have been deployed to guard the constituency on the polling day.

A police official said patrolling on the ground, as well as by drones keeping a hawk eye from above, is in place to track the movement of Naxals, especially in areas close to polling booths and camps of security forces.

The Maoist ultras have, like previous years, given a call for a poll boycott, with posters and pamphlets found in some pockets of the constituency in the past one month. Congress leader Lakhma is fighting the election from the Bastar Lok Sabha seat against BJP's Kashyap. The Congress denied ticket to its sitting MP Deepak Baj and fielded Lakhma, an incumbent MLA.

The six-term MLA, Lakhma had served as minister in the previous Congress government in the state. The ruling BJP has pinned its hopes on Kashyap, who had been an active member of Vishwa Hindu Parishad in the past. Acrimonious exchanges

between main rivals BJP and the Congress over issues like corruption, poverty and pre-poll promises made by them dominated the high-decibel campaign for the first phase of Lok Sabha elections in the state.

The saffron party's campaign was spearheaded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who addressed one rally each in the constituency, and Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai. In their rallies, BJP leaders targeted the Congress, particularly its previous government in the state headed by Bhupesh Baghel, over corruption and highlighted construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, who addressed one rally, led the campaign for the opposition outfit along with his colleague Sachin Pilot and state party chief Deepak Baj, and mounted a counter-offensive, claiming their party thinks for the poor, while the BJP-led central government works only for the rich.

The Congress based its campaign on its poll promises, including the Mahalakshmi Yojana, caste census, recruitment to 30 lakh vacant government posts, apprenticeships for youth and abolishing the contractual system in government companies and farm loan waiver. There are a total of 11 Lok Sabha seats in Chhattisgarh and the elections will be held in three phases. After the Bastar seat polling on Friday, voting in three seats — Rajanandgaon, Kanker (ST) and Mahasamund will be held in the second phase on April 26. The remaining seven seats — Raipur, Durg, Bilaspur, Janjgir-Champa (SC), Korba, Surguja (ST) and Raigarh (ST) — will vote in the third phase on May 7.

Gujarat BJP chief misses Vijay Muhurat due to crowd at roadshow

PTI ■ NAVSARI

Gujarat BJP president C R Paatil could not file his nomination for the Navsari Lok Sabha seat at an 'auspicious' time on Thursday after too many supporters turned up at his roadshow in the morning, said party office-bearers.

The sitting MP will now file his nomination at 'Vijay Muhurat' — 12.39 pm — on Friday, they said.

As per the schedule shared by the state BJP a few days back, Paatil was supposed to submit

his nomination papers to Navsari collector exactly at Vijay Muhurat. Many poll candidates prefer to file their papers at 12.39 pm, believing any task undertaken or commenced at this precise time ensures victory.

Paatil on Thursday set out to file his nomination by leading a massive roadshow from his party office to the collector's office here, said senior BJP leader and former state minister Narottam Patel. Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and many state leaders also joined him



during the roadshow.

"Since a large number of people converged on the roadshow route to greet Paatil, he could not reach the collector's office in time and

missed the (Vijay) muhurat of 12.39 pm. We follow Hindu culture and that's why the muhurat is important for us. It has been decided that Paatil will file his papers tomorrow (Friday) sharp at 12.39 pm," said Patel.

Jigar Jani, a priest who was supposed to perform some rituals ahead of the submission of the nomination form by the BJP leader, confirmed that Paatil will file his papers on Friday because he missed Thursday's Vijay Muhurat due to the huge crowd at his roadshow.

Direct, triangular contests in Assam Lone Puducherry segment all set for polling

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam is all set to witness direct and triangular contests for the first of the three-phased Lok Sabha polls in five constituencies to decide the fate of 35 candidates, including that of Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal.

Polling will begin at 7 am and conclude at 5 pm in Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Kaziranga, Sonitpur and Lakhimpur.

A total electorate of 86,47,869, comprising 43,64,859 women who outnumber the 42,82,887 male voters, and 123 third genders, are eligible to exercise their franchise in 10,001 polling booths.

Voting will be held amid tight security with 60 companies of security forces deployed across the five constituencies.

The BJP is contesting in all the five seats, the Congress in four and supporting the Assam Jatiya Parishad contestant in one, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in two and the All India Trinamool Congress and CPI(M) in one seat each. A direct contest is on the cards between the BJP and Congress in Jorhat, Kaziranga and Lakhimpur while in Dibrugarh and Sonitpur, there is likely to be a triangular fight among the ruling party, Congress, AJP and AAP.

The prestigious Dibrugarh constituency has three candidates in fray with Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal, a Rajya Sabha MP, pitted against the United Opposition Forum, Assam (UOFA) candidate Lurinjyoti Gogoi of the AJP and Aam Aadmi Party's Manoj Dhanowar.

In Jorhat, four candidates are in contention, with Lok Sabha's Deputy Leader of the Opposition Gaurav Gogoi locked in a direct contest with sitting BJP MP Topon Gogoi.

Gogoi had to shift his constituency to Jorhat from Kaliabor, which has been renamed as Kaziranga following a delimitation exercise in the state last year. In Kaziranga, BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa is locked in a direct contest with former Congress MLA Roselina Tirkay, with both candidates belonging to the tea workers' community.



Kaziranga has the highest number of 11 candidates in the fray.

In Sonitpur, also renamed from the earlier Tezpur after delimitation, there are eight nominees with a triangular contest likely between BJP MLA Ranjit Dutta, Congress candidate Prem Lal Ganju and AAP's Rishiraj Kaundinya. Lakhimpur has nine contestants, prominent among them being sitting BJP MP Pradan Baruah and Uday Shankar Hazarika of the Congress.

Assam Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel said all arrangements have been made for conducting the polls in a free, fair, safe and peaceful manner.

Live monitoring and webcasting will be available in all the 5,509 polling stations, as per the EC's direction, he said.

Out of the 10,001 polling booths in the first phase, 92 are model polling stations, 11 are People with Disability (PwD)-managed ones and 752 are female-managed booths.

A total of 40,004 polling and presiding officers will be engaged, and Ballot Units (BUs), Control Unit (CUs) and VVPATs will be put to use. Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF) like provision for drinking water, adequate furniture, waiting shed, toilet, lighting, creche for children, signage and ramps will be available at all the polling stations, officials said.

Besides, arrangements like transport facility for the elderly, assistance from volunteers and provision for wheelchairs have made at the booths.

PTI ■ PUDUCHERRY

The fate of 26 candidates in fray for the Lok Sabha polls will be sealed on Friday when voters spread across four regions will pick the lone MP from this Union Territory, where the fight is largely confined between the ruling BJP and Congress.

BJP leader and Home Minister A Namassivayam, fielded on behalf of the AINRC-BJP combine, will face-off Congress MP and PCC president V Vaithilingam, while AIADMK's G Tamizhvendhan is also testing his luck as a debutant.

The Union Territory has a total of 10,23,699 voters spread over Puducherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam regions. Polling will be held between 7 AM and 6 PM Friday. The election authorities have set up 967 polling booths in the whole of Puducherry, a much sought-after tourist destination. Authorities have also appealed to voters to avoid using motorised vehicles to reach the polling booths to achieve 'green election'.

The election is a battle of prestige between the BJP and the Congress. Although no major issue is involved in the fight, the parties and their



respective contestants have made promises to the electorate that no stone would be left unturned to ensure

statehood for Puducherry, located about 200 km from Tamil Nadu capital Chennai. There are three women

contestants including the Naam Tamizhar Katchi nominee R Menaka, a Siddha doctor.

In addition to local police the territorial administration had procured 10 companies of Central Armed Police Force for election duty. All polling booths are linked with webcast and micro observers would also keep close watch, District Election Officer A Kulothungan said.

Poll campaign was by and large peaceful particularly during the visit of leaders from Tamil Nadu, such as DMK President M K Stalin and AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami.

Voters to decide fate of three candidates in Nagaland

PTI ■ KOHIMA

All arrangements have been made for the smooth conduct of elections to the lone Lok Sabha in Nagaland where over 13.25 lakh voters on Friday will decide the fate of three candidates in the fray.

Congress nominee S Supongmeren Jamir, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) and People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) candidate Chumben Murry and Independent Hayithung Tungoe Lotha are contesting the elections.

BJP President J P Nadda, Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, Deputy Chief Ministers T R Zeliang and Y



Patton addressed several rallies in support of their candidate. Congress leaders Jairam Ramesh and Randeep Singh Surjewala along with other AICC leaders have campaigned for Congress candidate Jamir.

Polling will start at 7 am and

Nagaland has more female electors at 6,64,460 voters as against 6,60,923 male voters, he said.

Altogether 180 polling parties for the 2,342 polling stations have left for their polling booths, officials said.

Of the total 2,342 polling booths, 588 polling stations have been marked as critical and vulnerable, he said.

There are 506 all-women polling stations while four booths will be managed by persons with disabilities. An official said 1,097 polling stations will have webcasting facility and 82 will be under offline videography. Besides 48 companies of CAPF, another 50 companies

of the state police, Indian Reserve Battalions, Special Task Force and 600 Home Guards personnel and Village guards will be deployed during the polling exercise, a senior police officer said. Officials said that while the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) has declared abstention from voting, polling parties have been dispatched for the 738 polling stations in the six districts - Mon, Tuensang, Longleng, Kiphire, Shamator and Noklak - of the area.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, NDPP's Tokheho Yephthomi had defeated Congress candidate K L Chishi by 13,000 votes.

12 LS seats in Rajasthan to go to polls in first phase

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Twelve of 25 Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan will go to polls in the first phase of Lok Sabha elections on Friday. A Union minister is among the 114 candidates in the fray.

Polling will be held in twelve out of 25 Lok Sabha seats — Churu, Nagaurn, Ganganagar, Jhunjhunu, Bikaner, Sikar, Jaipur Rural, Jaipur, Alwar, Bharatpur, Karauli-Dholpur and Dausa, from 7 am to 6 pm.

According to chief electoral officer Praveen Gupta, a total of 2.54 crore voters are set to vote in the first phase on Friday.

The Bharatiya Janata Party won all 25 seats in Rajasthan on its own in 2014, and in

2019, NDA won 25 seats, the saffron party won 24 seats and the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party won one seat.

One of the key constituencies Nagaur is set to witness a keen contest between the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP) candidate and former MP Hanuman Beniwal in alliance with Congress against BJP candidate and former Congress MP Jyoti Mirdha. Beniwal with the BJP's support in the 2019 elections defeated Mirdha, who was then a Congress candidate. However, Beniwal separated from the NDA in 2020 over the farmer's agitation issue.

In the Churu Lok Sabha constituency, former BJP MP Rahul Kaswan is contesting as

Congress candidate against BJP candidate and paralympic Devendra Jhajharia.

Dalit leader and Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, who has been representing Bikaner Lok Sabha seat since 2009, is contesting the Lok Sabha elections for 4th time. He is contesting against Congress candidate and former state minister Govind Ram Meghwal.

In Sikar, the Congress' Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc partner, the CPI(M) has fielded former MLA Amra Ram against the BJP's incumbent MP Sumedanand Saraswati. Amra Ram had been an MLA from the Danta Ramgarh and



the Dhod seats. Sikar is the hometown of the Congress' Rajasthan unit chief Govind Singh Dotasra. Of the eight assembly segments in

Sikar, five are with the Congress.

During the election campaign, the ruling BJP mainly focused on the popularity of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi and the work done by it in various sectors including infrastructure and schemes like Ujjawala.

The party also promoted its Sankalp Patra and highlighted Modi's 'guarantees'.

The saffron party, which came to power in the state in December last year, also targeted Congress over issues such as corruption, paper leaks, and crime against women during the rule of Ashok Gehlot-led former Congress government in the state.

The party's campaign was led by Modi, who held multiple rallies in the state, including a roadshow in Dausa. Union Minister Amit Shah also held a

roadshow in Jaipur. BJP Chief JP Nadda, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and his Madhya Pradesh counterpart Mohan Yadav, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also addressed public rallies in the state.

On the other hand, Congress raised the issues of misuse of central agencies like the Enforcement Directorate and CBI against opposition leaders and said the Constitution and democracy were under threat under the BJP rule.

The grand old party also focused its election campaign on inflation and unemployment. In its Nyay Patra, the party promised to fill 30 lakh vacancies in government jobs,

one-year apprenticeship programmes for young graduates, and a legal guarantee on minimum support price for crops.

Congress Chief Mallikarjun Kharge, leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, former chief minister Ashok Gehlot and other leaders conducted a series of campaign meetings for the party's candidates across the state.

The second phase of the elections in Rajasthan will be held on April 26. Polls will hold on 13 Lok Sabha constituencies — Tonk, Ajmer, Pali, Jodhpur, Barmer, Jalore, Udaipur, Banswara, Chittorgarh, Rajasamand, Bhilwara, Kota and Jhalwar — in the second phase.

US, UK impose new curbs on Iran

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US and UK on Thursday imposed a new round of sanctions on Iran as concern grows that Tehran's unprecedented attack on Israel could fuel a wider war in the Middle East. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control targeted 16 people and two entities in Iran that produce engines that power the drones used in the April 13 attack on Israel. Additionally, the UK is targeting several Iranian military organizations, individuals and entities involved in Iran's drone and ballistic missile industries. "We will continue to deploy our sanctions authority to counter Iran with further actions in the days and weeks ahead," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a statement. The action comes after US officials earlier this week warned that they were readying new sanctions in response to Iran's activity in the region and to prevent future attacks. Lawmakers on Capitol Hill also have been quickly pushing forward legislation that would financially punish the Islamic Republic and its leaders. Iran's attack on Israel early Sunday came in response to what it says was an Israeli strike on Iran's consulate in Syria earlier this month. Israel's military chief said Monday that his country will respond to the Iranian attack, while world leaders caution against retaliation, trying to avoid a spiral of violence. European Union leaders also vowed on Wednesday to ramp up sanctions on Iran, targeting its drone and missile deliveries to proxies in Gaza, Yemen and Lebanon. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the existing EU sanctions regime would be strengthened and expanded to punish Tehran and help prevent future attacks on Israel. At the same time, he said, Israel needed to exercise restraint. "I don't want to exaggerate, but we are on the edge of a war, a regional war in the Middle East, which will be sending shockwaves to the rest of the world, and in particular to Europe," he warned. "So stop it."

EU official urges G7 to expand Iran sanctions

Capri (AP): The European Union's top diplomat urged Group of Seven foreign ministers on Thursday to take quick, concrete steps to provide more air defence systems to Ukraine, warning that continued delays could tilt the war in Moscow's favour. Without more Patriot air defence missile systems to guard against incoming Russian strikes, "the electricity system of Ukraine will be destroyed. And no country can fight without having electricity at home, in the factories, in the front line," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned. He was speaking on the sidelines of a G7 foreign ministers meeting on the Italian resort island of Capri, where Russia's war in Ukraine and surging tensions in the Middle East over Iran's unpre-

cedented attack on Israel were topping the agenda. Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani opened the first working session of the meeting by calling for new sanctions against Iran for its weekend attack and concrete help for Ukraine to defend itself from Moscow's invasion. "If Ukraine loses, Putin will never sit at the peace table," Tajani warned. Russia's war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war were taking centre stage at the Capri meeting, which dovetailed with other regional diplomatic efforts sending the same messages. On Wednesday, EU leaders meeting in Brussels vowed to ramp up sanctions on Iran to target its drone and missile deliveries to proxies in Gaza, Yemen and Lebanon. Borrell

said the existing EU sanctions regime on Iran would be strengthened and expanded to punish Tehran for its attack and help prevent future ones on Israel. At the same time, he said, Israel needed to exercise restraint. "I don't want to exaggerate but we are on the edge of a war, a regional war in the Middle East, which will be sending shockwaves to the rest of the world, and in particular to Europe," he warned. "So stop it." Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg were attending the Capri meeting as guests. Kuleba underlined his country's need for essential military support, including artillery, ammunition, and air defense systems to bolster its capacity as Russia pushes along the front line.

Croatia's PM optimistic of new govt after inconclusive vote

AP ■ ZAGREB

Croatia's ruling conservatives said Thursday that talks have already started about the formation of a new governing majority following a highly contested parliamentary election that saw a far-right party emerge as a potential kingmaker. Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, who is the leader of the Croatian Democratic Union party, or HDZ, said that the party has contacted some of the potential future partners and more talks will take place on Thursday. Preliminary results of the vote on Wednesday showed that Plenkovic's HDZ won 61 seats in the 151-seat parliament, which means the party has to form a coalition government to stay in power. The main opponent, center-left Social Democratic Party, backed by President Zoran Milanovic, got 42 seats while the far-right Homeland Movement was third, with 14 seats, according to the



Prime Minister incumbent Andrej Plenkovic waves after claiming victory in a parliamentary election in Zagreb, Croatia on Thursday

tally released by the State Election Commission. Plenkovic offered no details about the potential future alliance. If he remains the prime minister, that would mark his third consecutive term at the post. "Everything is going well," he wrote on Facebook. "You will

soon know with whom we will form the new majority." Plenkovic has faced accusations of corruption as Croatia, a European Union and NATO member, struggles with the highest inflation rate in the eurozone, a labor shortage and a surge in migration.

EU leaders mull tougher sanctions against Iran

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union leaders debated ways to ramp up sanctions against Iran at a summit on Wednesday as concern grows that Tehran's unprecedented attack on Israel could fuel a wider war in the Middle East. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reminded the gathering that his country still badly needs support to combat Russia's invasion. French President Emmanuel Macron urged his EU counterparts in Brussels to "adapt" and "expand" sanctions against Iran. The EU has already slapped sanctions on the Islamic Republic but Macron said new measures should target "those who are helping to produce the missiles and drones that were used" in the weekend attack. According to a draft statement prepared for the meeting also focusing on the war in Ukraine and ways to boost the bloc's economic competitiveness, the leaders are to warn that "the EU is ready to take further restrictive measures

against Iran, notably in relation to unmanned aerial vehicles and missiles." The statement also calls "on Iran and its proxies to cease all attacks" and urges all sides to exercise "utmost restraint and to refrain from any action that may increase tensions in the region." EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has tasked his staff with drawing up new measures but expanding sanctions, however, is not a simple step — the EU has already targeted those responsible for making drones that Iran has sold to Russia for use in its war against Ukraine. The idea is to expand that list to include missiles, although there is no evidence that Iran has sold missiles to Russia. Borrell said that proxy forces backed by Iran in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria could also be targeted with sanctions. Some seek sanctions on those providing Iran with the components to make drones, measures already approved in July 2023. Borrell said his team would look at whether to expand the list of components, or develop ways to stop the

sanctions from being circumvented. Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, said his position is that the "Iranian Revolutionary Guard should be put on the sanctions list" and that this "would be a very important signal." But that would pose legal challenges. Borrell said an EU member country would have to provide evidence that the Revolutionary Guard has been involved in acts of terrorism against it — something that none have so far claimed. The United States is also preparing new sanctions targeting Iran's missile and drone program and entities supporting the Revolutionary Guard and Iran's Defence Ministry, according to White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan. EU leaders in Brussels are also expected to renew their call for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and the release of hostages, "as well as increasing humanitarian aid at scale to Palestinians in need."

Regional tensions have mounted since the Oct. 7 start of the latest Israel-Hamas war, when Palestinian militant Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups, backed by Iran, carried out a devastating cross-border attack that killed 1,200 people in Israel and seized 250 as hostages. Israel responded with an offensive in Gaza that has caused widespread devastation and killed over 33,800 people, according to Gaza's health officials. Russia's two-year war in Ukraine was also on the agenda, with Zelenskyy addressing the Brussels meeting remotely and repeating his pleas for more air defense systems, including Patriot missile systems. "They are needed in Ukraine right now, needed to stop (Russian President Vladimir) Putin from relying on terrorist methods," he said, according to a transcript provided by the EU. Zelenskyy also asked for more "weapons for our soldiers" and "shells for artillery. Vehicles. Drones. Everything that helps to hold the front line."

Since launched the February 2022 full-scale invasion, Russia has captured nearly a quarter of Ukraine. Ukrainian soldiers are outnumbered, outgunned and in desperate need of more troops and ammunition while doubt is increasing about Western military aid. Zelenskyy said repeatedly Ukraine must bolster its air defenses and replenish its ammunition supplies amid Russian pushes along the front line. "Putin now hopes that he will succeed in his counteroffensive, and the only root of this hope is the shortage of weapons among our soldiers," Zelenskyy said. Talks on Thursday will focus on how to bolster the EU's competitiveness and improve the single market. The leaders will discuss a proposal by former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta for an EU-wide effort to subsidize industry in response to the Biden administration's support for investment in environmentally friendly technology, and China's subsidies for electric cars and solar panels.

UN agency in Gaza battles Israel's dissolution demand

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The head of the UN agency that has helped millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank for decades urged the Security Council on Wednesday to ensure its survival as Israel again demanded its dissolution, accusing the agency of becoming part of Hamas' "terror war machine." Philippe Lazzarini told the council that dismantling the agency known as UNRWA would deepen Gaza's humanitarian crisis and speed up the onset of famine. International experts have warned of imminent famine in northern Gaza and said half the territory's 2.3 million people could be pushed to the brink of starvation if the six-month Israeli-Hamas war intensifies. Lazzarini said ending the agency's operations also would have other "lasting repercussions" on Gaza, leaving a half

million children without education and "fueling anger, resentment and endless cycles of violence." In addition, it would jeopardise the transition when the war ends by depriving Gaza's population of essential services, including health care, food and other humanitarian aid, he said. Israeli Ambassador Gilad Erdan claimed, without providing evidence, that UNRWA has been totally infiltrated by Hamas, which controlled Gaza before the war. He also accused UNRWA of being part of a Palestinian plot to annihilate Israel and becoming "the world's biggest advocate for a one-state solution" run by Palestinians. "Today in Gaza, UNRWA is Hamas and Hamas is UNRWA," Erdan said. "Israel cannot and will not allow UNRWA to continue in Gaza as it did in the past," he said, telling the council there

UAE struggles to recover after heaviest rainfall

Dubai (AP): The United Arab Emirates struggled on Thursday to recover from the heaviest recorded rainfall ever to hit the desert nation, as its main airport worked to restore normal operations even as floodwater still covered portions of major highways and roads. Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel, allowed global carriers on Thursday morning to again fly into Terminal 1 at the airfield. "Flights continue to be delayed and disrupted, so we urge you to only come to Terminal 1 if you have a confirmed booking," the airport said on the social platform X. The long-haul carrier Emirates, whose operations had been struggling since the storm Tuesday, had stopped travellers flying out of the UAE from checking into their flights as they tried to move out connecting passengers. Pilots and flight crews had been struggling to reach the airport given the water on roadways. But on Thursday, they lifted that order to allow customers into the airport. Others who arrived at the airport described hours-long waits to get their baggage, with some just giving up to head home or to whatever hotel would have them. The UAE, a hereditarily ruled, autocratic nation on the Arabian Peninsula, typically sees little rainfall in its arid desert climate. However, a massive storm forecasters had been warning about for days blew through the country's seven sheikhdoms. By the end of Tuesday, more than 142 millimeters (5.59 inches) of rainfall had soaked Dubai over 24 hours. An average year sees 94.7 millimeters (3.73 inches) of rain at Dubai International Airport. Other areas of the country saw even more precipitation. The UAE's drainage systems quickly became overwhelmed, flooding out neighborhoods, business districts and even portions of the 12-lane Sheikh Zayed Road highway running through Dubai. The state-run WAM news agency called the rain "a historic weather event" that surpassed "anything documented since the start of data collection in 1949."

Sydney shopping mall reopens after stabbings

Sydney (AP): A Sydney shopping mall opened to the public on Thursday for the first time since a mass stabbing in which six people died, while the Australian prime minister raised giving citizenship to an immigrant security guard who was wounded while confronting the knife-wielding attacker. The deadly rampage through Westfield Bondi Junction on Saturday was the earlier of two knife attacks by lone assailants over three days that have traumatized Sydney. The man who stabbed 18 people in Saturday's attack was shot dead by police. A 16-year-old boy is in police custody after he allegedly stabbed a Christian bishop and priest during a church service on Monday. Police allege the boy had a religious or ideological motivation and attacked during the streamed service to cause intimidation.

Juror dismissed from Trump hush money trial as prosecutors seek to hold ex-Prez in contempt

AP ■ NEW YORK

A juror in Donald Trump's hush money trial was dismissed Thursday after expressing doubt about her ability to be fair and impartial, and the status of a second New Yorker picked for the panel was in limbo amid concerns that some of his answers in court may not be accurate. The setbacks in the selection process emerged during a frenetic morning in which prosecutors also asked for Trump to be held in contempt and fined over a series of social media posts this week, while the judge in the case barred reporters from identifying jurors' employers. The seating of the full jury — whenever it comes — will be a seminal moment in the case, setting the stage for a trial that will place the former president's legal jeopardy at the heart of the campaign against Democrat Joe Biden. The trial will also feature potentially

unflattering testimony about Trump's private life in the years before he became president. The jury selection process picked up momentum Tuesday with the selection of seven jurors. But on Thursday, Judge Juan Merchan revealed in court that one of the seven, a cancer nurse, had "conveyed that after sleeping on it overnight she had concerns about her ability to be fair and impartial in this case." And though jurors' names are being kept confidential, the woman said her family members and friends questioned her about being a juror. Prosecutors also raised questions about a second juror, a man who works in information technology, saying they had located an article from the 1990s about a man with the same name as the juror being arrested for tearing down political advertisements in suburban Westchester County. The posters were on the political

right, prosecutors said. The man said under questioning this week that he had not been convicted of a crime. Merchan asked the juror to come to court Thursday morning for additional questioning. Twelve jurors and six alternates must be seated to hear the trial. Merchan said Tuesday that opening statements could begin as soon as Monday. The process of picking a jury is a critical phase of any criminal trial but especially so when the defendant is a former president and the presumptive Republican nominee. Prospective jurors have been grilled on their social media posts, personal lives and political views as the lawyers and judge search for biases that would prevent them from being impartial. Inside the court, there's broad acknowledgment of the futility in trying to find jurors without knowledge of Trump. A prosecutor this week said that lawyers were not looking

for people who had been "living under a rock for the past eight years." But Thursday's events laid bare the inherent challenges of selecting a jury for such a landmark, high-publicity case. After dismissing the nurse from the jury, Merchan ordered journalists in court not to report prospective jurors' answers to questions about their current and former employers. He said that "as evidenced by what's happened already, it's become a problem." The answers also will be redacted from court transcripts. Prosecutors had asked that the employer inquiries be axed from the jury questionnaire. Defence lawyer Todd Blanche responded that "depriving us of the information because of what the press is doing isn't the answer." The district attorney's office on Monday sought a \$3,000 fine for Trump for three Truth Social posts they said violated the order.

'Israeli agents likely killed Hezbollah-linked currency exchanger'

Beit Meri (AP): Lebanon's interior minister alleged Wednesday that the mysterious abduction and killing of a Hezbollah-linked Lebanese currency exchanger in a villa on the edge of a quiet mountain resort town earlier this month was likely the work of Israeli operatives. The killing of Mohammad Srour, 57, who was sanctioned by the U.S., was like something out of an international spy thriller. Pistols equipped with silencers and gloves were found in a bucket of water and chemicals at the scene, apparently intended to remove fingerprints and other evidence, Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi said in an interview with The Associated Press. Thousand of dollars in cash were left scattered around Srour's body, as if to dispel any speculation that robbery was the motive. "Lebanese security

agencies have suspicion or accusations that Mossad was behind this operation," Mawlawi said, referring to the Israeli spy agency. "The way the crime was carried out led to this suspicion." He provided no specific evidence for his allegations. Mawlawi said the investigation is still ongoing and once it's over the results will be made public and referred to judicial authorities. The Israeli prime minister's office, which oversees Mossad, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The suspicion by Lebanon's security agencies that the crime could be the work of Israeli agents comes at a time when Lebanon's southern border region has been rocked by ongoing clashes between militants of the Hamas-allied Hezbollah group and Israeli troops.

Indonesians leave homes near erupting volcano, airport closes

AP ■ MANADO

Indonesian authorities closed an airport and residents left homes near an erupting volcano Thursday due to the dangers of spreading ash, falling rocks, hot volcanic clouds and the possibility of a tsunami. Mount Ruang on the northern side of Sulawesi Island had at least five large eruptions Wednesday, causing the Centre for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation to issue its highest level alert, indicating an active eruption. The crater emitted white-gray smoke continuously during the day Thursday, reaching more than 500 metres (1,640 feet) above the peak. People have been ordered to stay at least 6 kilometres (3.7



miles) from the 725-metre (2,378 foot) mountain. More than 11,000 people live in the affected area and were told to leave. At least 800 have done so.

An international airport in Manado city was temporarily closed Thursday as volcanic ash was spewed into the air. "We have to close flight operations at Sam Ratulangi Airport due to the spread of volcanic ash, which could endanger flight safety," said Ambar Suryoko, head of the regional airport authority. The volcanology centre noted the risks from the volcanic eruption include the possibility that part of the volcano could collapse into the sea and cause a tsunami. Tagulandang Island, east of the volcano, could be at risk if that occurred, and its residents were among those being told to evacuate. "People who live in the Tagulandang Island area and

are within a 6-kilometre radius must be immediately evacuated to a safe place outside the 6-kilometre radius, and especially those who live near the coast should be aware of the potential for incandescent rocks to erupt, hot clouds and tsunami waves that could be triggered by the collapse of a volcanic body into the sea," Abdul Muhari, spokesperson of the National Disaster Mitigation Agency, said on Thursday. The agency said residents will be relocated to Manado, the nearest city, on Sulawesi island, a journey of six hours by boat. Volcanic eruptions have triggered past tsunamis in Indonesia, including an 1871 eruption at Mount Ruang and the 2018 eruption of the Anak Krakatau volcano.

Reuters photographer wins top photo award

AP ■ PARIS

Reuters photographer Mohammed Salem captured this year's prestigious World Press Photo of the Year award Thursday with a depiction of loss and sorrow in Gaza, a heartrending photo of a Palestinian woman cradling the body of her young niece. The photograph, taken in Khan Younis just days after Salem's own child was born, shows 36-year-old Inas Abu Maamar holding five-year-old Saly, who was killed along with her mother and sister when an Israeli missile struck their home. Salem, who is Palestinian, described this photo filed Nov. 2 last year, as a "powerful and sad moment that sums up the broader sense of what was happening in the Gaza Strip." The image "truly encapsulates this sense of impact," said global jury chair Fiona Shields, The



This image provided by World Press Photo and taken by Lee-Ann Olwage for GEO is part of a series titled Valim-babena which won the World Press Photo Story of the Year Award and shows Joeline (Fara) Ralaraniriana (41) and her daughter, Odliatemix Ralaraniriana (5), lie together on the bed they share with Dada Paul Rakotazandry (91) in their home in Mandrosoa Ivato, Antananarivo, Madagascar. Fara is the sole provider for the family of three and struggles to balance her time between caring for her father, work and spending time with her daughter. AP/PTI

Guardian newspaper's head of photography. "It is incredibly moving to view and at the same time an argument for peace, which is extremely powerful when peace can sometimes feel like an unlikely fantasy," she added. The World Press Photo jury praised the shot's sense of care and respect and its offering of a "metaphorical and literal glimpse into unimaginable loss." This is not the first time Salem has been recognized for his work on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; he received a World Press Photo award more than a decade ago for another depiction of the human toll of conflict in the Gaza strip. In the three other global categories announced Thursday, South Africa's Lee-Ann Olwage won Photo Story of the Year for her touching series "Valim-babena," featured in GEO magazine.



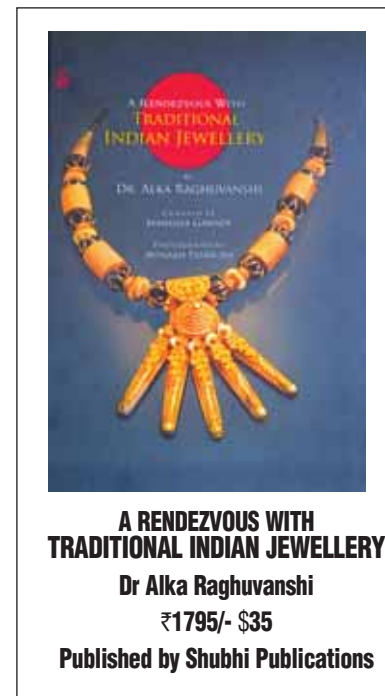
HERITAGE INDIAN JEWELLERY DAZZLES THE WORLD

DR ALKA RAGHUVANSHI'S passion for Indian jewelry shines through every page of her book, attracting not just jewelry enthusiasts and historians, but also the layman who simply admires beauty, writes SAKSHI PRIYA



Published posthumously, Dr Alka Raghuvanshi's *Rendezvous with Traditional Indian Jewellery* is a mesmerizing exploration of this exquisite Indian art form. This is not just another book. It is a soulful journey into the heart of India's rich cultural heritage, where intricate artistry meets profound symbolism. While it explores the intricate world of traditional Indian jewelry, the book is lavishly illustrated with pictures that provide a comprehensive overview of the history, craftsmanship, and significance of Indian jewelry, nudging its readers to appreciate this ancient and vibrant art form.

Ehaas and Shubhi Publications recently launched Dr Raghuvanshi's last written book on the occasion of her 63rd birth anniversary. The book is curated by Manisha Gawade and contains stunning photographs by Avinash Pasricha. One of the most striking aspects of the book is its meticulous attention to detail. Dr. Raghuvanshi delves into the origins of Indian jewelry, tracing its evolution from ancient times to the present day. She explores the diverse influences that have shaped



Indian jewelry, from the intricate designs of the Mughal era to the vibrant colours and motifs visible in South Indian jewelry. The book is divided into several thematic chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect. From the exquisite craftsmanship of the Nizam's word-acclaimed jewelry treasure trove to the intricate designs of silver accessories, each chapter offers a fascinating glimpse into the world of Indian jewelry. The photographs accompanying the text are stunning, showcasing the beauty and intricacy of each piece. One of the book's most captivating sections is its exploration of the symbolism behind this traditional Indian art form. Dr. Raghuvanshi explains how each piece of jewelry is imbued with deep meaning, reflecting the wearer's social status, religious



beliefs, and cultural identity. For example, the *mangaimala*, (necklace of mangoes), symbolises fertility and abundance, while the *vanki*, (upper arm ornament), is a symbol of protection and strength. The book also sheds light on the craftsmanship and techniques used in creating jewelry by gold and silversmiths way back in recorded history. The author describes the painstaking process of creating *Jadau* jewels from Avadh, highlighting the skill and artistry of the craftsmen involved in blending precious stones with gold. She also explains the painstaking process of reconditioning old jewelry, where creations from decades ago are transformed into modern works of art while retaining their traditional charm.

In addition to, the book also examines the cultural and historical significance of jewelry in India. Dr Raghuvanshi discusses how jewelry has been used as a form of adornment, protection, and status symbol throughout India's history. This includes the role of these masterpieces played in rituals and ceremonies, where each article of adornment served as an expression of identity and spirituality. Furthermore, the book provides a comprehensive look at the different styles and techniques of jewelry making across the length and breadth of India. The



author delves into the varied materials used in jewelry making, from precious metals like gold and silver to gemstones like diamonds and emeralds. She also discusses the different techniques used in jewelry making, such as *Kundan* and *Meenakari* work, that highlight the diversity and skill Indian artisans proudly boast of.

One of the most compelling features in the book is its focus on regional variations in Indian jewelry. This section, accompanied by stunning visuals, deals with how different regions of India have carved a niche for themselves through their individual, and therefore signature, styles and techniques of jewelry making, that reflect the diverse cultural heritage of the country. From the intricate designs of Rajasthan to the vibrant colors of Gujarat, each region has its distinct aesthetics that is beautifully brought out in the book.

Arguably, *Rendezvous with Traditional Indian Jewellery* is a captivating exploration of one of India's most cherished art forms, their legacy and their evolution over the years. Dr. Alka Raghuvanshi's passion for Indian jewelry shines through in every page, making this book a must-have in the libraries of those genuinely interested in the art, culture, and heritage of India. From a jewelry enthusiast to a historian, or for the layman who simply admires beauty, this book is a delight and inspiration.

The flag of Sanatan Dharma flies high

RASHMI SAMANT takes on her rivals head on through a scintillating narrative of a small town Indian girl fighting against all odds at Oxford to survive and expose the ugly face of self-styled secularists and their anti-India rants, says **KUMAR CHELLAPPAN**

The year 2016 saw US based Indologist Rajiv Malhotra come out with *Academic Hinduphobia*, a sequel to his celebrated work *Breaking India* (Co-authored with Aravindan Neelakantan). This was published in 2011 and observations made by the author in the book actually came true in 2015 when anti-India forces held demonstrations in New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University raising the infamous slogan "Bharat teri tukde honge." (India will be severed into pieces). Following this, there was no going back for anti-India forces to propagate their one-point agenda to balkanise India. However, this anti-India call exposed these forces, underlining the fact that despite their attempts to conceal their real intent, the truth would eventually be out. I remember a conversation I had with a US security expert at IIT Madras in 2009 wherein he pointed out that the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid was an act of terrorism. That abruptly ended our chat. Back then, the term Hinduphobia was yet to find space in the national narrative. In 2016, Malhotra, through his book, guided readers to the glaring realities of the times with his scholarly and erudite research, at a time when our own citizens promoted anti-Hindu

feelings across the world with writers of eminence, and self-styled historians and sociologists para-dropping into India. Gradually, a bunch of disgruntled and discontented judges as well as academics joined the chorus, churning out half truths and outright lies against Sanatan Dharma. Their interpretation of Sanatan Dharma was more lethal than the deadly Covid-19, widely spread by the DMK through a relentless campaign by a select group of so-called "intellectuals". It is at this juncture that a young graduate from Oxford University decided to chronicle her bitter experiences in the Holy Grail of modern education. Rashmi Samant, an Udupi-born engineering graduate, got admission for her a post-graduation programme at Oxford University purely based on merit. This young lady, through her book *A Hindu in Oxford*, decided to tell us about her trials and tribulations at the reputed University when she became the president of the Oxford Students Union. One must admire this young lady's courage and determination to awaken the world to the "real" Oxford which, as I understand, today survives only on a historical past. The British excelled in marketing their educational institutions, giving

Indians an academic inferiority complex vis-a-vis their British counterparts that unfortunately pushed them to pursue their higher studies study in these very institutions. I do not include author Samant in this category. But for her intellectual honesty, she would not have penned this path-breaking book. Rashmi Samant, a young girl from the small time temple town of Udupi in Karnataka went on to create a tremendous impact on the international community as the first Hindu woman to occupy the post of Oxford's students' union as its president. This has served as a major morale booster for Hindus across the world. However, forces inimical to India in general and Sanatan Dharma in particular, found Sawant's views unpalatable and thus began the author's sufferings. As mentioned earlier, there is a media blitzkrieg across the globe tarnishing Sanatan Dharma and questioning the heritage of Indian tradition. Ramayana and Mahabharata, two great Indian epics are portrayed as myth and fiction by this section of people. The sustained campaign against Sanatan Dharma was successful in creating a negative impact in western countries even as Indians themselves were too diffident to fight the baseless charges and allegations.



To begin with, Samant too was a victim of Hinduphobia. Her troubles began when she decided to run for the presidency of Oxford Students Union. The list of Asians who have occupied the presidency of OSU include Lalith Athulathmudali, a former Sri Lankan minister for internal security, and Benazir Bhutto, the assassinated former Prime Minister of Pakistan, who was also the president of the Oxford Debating Union. The main weapon in the hands of anti-India forces operating primarily in Europe and the US are our very own citizens whose round-the-trip airfare and accommodation in deluxe hotels and hefty pay packets are bankrolled by the West in return for their tirade against India. Unfortunately, a news-starved western media is only too willing to report whatever anti-India statements come from these Indian quarters. Our *desi* (local) intellectuals label Sanatan Dharma as the embodiment of all that is evil and bad. The present generation of Europeans and Americans have grown up absorbing these lies unthinkingly. Several Indian so-called activists have been detained and arrested by the police in connection with charges of conspiracies; they continue to toil behind bars. This, not because of a weak

Indian judiciary that cannot grant them bail but the fact the charges filed against them are grave and true. India is ridiculed and criticised for legislations enacted by the Central Government which are only measures to strengthen the country's internal security, not an attempt to discriminate against people based on their religion and community. When the Citizens Amendment Act (CAA) was passed by the Indian Parliament, opposition to the same by a particular religious community came down like an avalanche. Instead of reading and understanding the legislation, sectarian groups took to the streets, holding the citizenry to ransom. India perhaps is the only country which allows roads and public places for people to offer their Friday prayers. Any attempt or enactment of any law to restrict anti-nationals is therefore termed by the Government's critics as saffronisation. For this "intellectual" group it is almost a sin to learn Sanskrit. This group and even our modern generation are unaware of the fact that the world's greatest literary works have been penned in Sanskrit. So much so that learning Hindi and Sanskrit is a taboo in Dravida Nadu. The world needs to know about these ground realities, as also the fact that the protagonists of

Hinduphobia have amassed untold and undisclosed wealth in India and abroad. Even as I write this review, a social media message reports about Communist leader Binoy Viswam's opposition to allow foreign universities to open their campuses in India. His aversion is inexplicable considering his wife, daughter and son-in-law have all been educated in foreign universities. Viswam is the leader of a cynical political outfit which continues to deny that India's Chandrayaan mission was indeed a success. In this anarchist world peopled by the likes of Viswam, anything against Hinduism "will sell, sell well". Rashmi Samant has taken on her rivals head on through a scintillating narrative of how a small town Indian girl fought against all odds in the civilised world of Oxford, where there were countless people baying for her blood. For this grit and determination Samant deserves a salute for pouring out her heart in the public domain. *A Hindu In Oxford* is a wonderful work and a beacon of hope that truth alone shall prevail in the end. Udupi is well-known for its Lord Krishna Temple and the delicacies served by the master chefs from this coastal area. In a nutshell, Samant has immortalised Udupi and her personal journey in her book, making it an absolute must read.



MUMBAI INDIANS SURVIVE A SCARE, PIP PUNJAB KINGS BY 9 RUNS

PTI ■ MULLANPUR

Ashutosh Sharma gave Mumbai Indians a mighty scare with a sensational 61 before the five-time champions scraped through with a nine-run win over Punjab Kings in the IPL here on Thursday. Ashutosh unleashed a flurry of sixes in his 28-ball knock which brought Punjab on the brink to near the finish line but his dismissal in the 18th over turned the game back in favour of Mumbai Indians. Punjab, who were left tottering at 17/4 in their chase of 193, came back roaring through Ashutosh and Shashank Singh (41 off 25) before ending at 183 all-out in 19.1 overs. Suryakumar Yadav (78) starred with the bat for

Mumbai Indians to take them to 192 for seven. It was Mumbai's third win in seven games while Punjab's slide continued with their fifth loss in seven matches. Despite an early four-wicket burst from pacers Jasprit Bumrah (3/21) and Gerald Coetzee (3/32), MI once again paid a heavy price of being ordinary with the ball. Akash Madhwal gave away 46 for one wicket in his 3.1 overs. Ashutosh produced a breathtaking knock, hammering seven sixes and two fours after Shashank's counterattack brought Punjab back on track following early wickets. The right-handed Shashank smacked each of his three sixes off leg-spinner Shreyas Gopal (1/26). Ashutosh was adroit with his strokes particularly on the leg-side.

Harpreet Brar proved he is no mug with the bat either, as the left-handed tailender unleashed lofted hits in his vital 20-ball 21 with two fours and a six. At the top of the order, Prabhsimran Singh's (0) poor run persisted when the right-hander edged one behind to be caught by a diving Ishan Kishan, with Coetzee redeeming himself after a poor start with the ball. Bumrah put Mumbai Indians in complete command with twin strikes in his opening over. On his fourth delivery, the ace pacer fired a vicious inswinging yorker which left Rilee Rossouw (0) nearly toppling over with his off and middle stump uprooted. Later in the over, a smart review against an on-field call for a wide resulted in Bumrah bagging his second



wicket off an innocuous delivery. This one, fired down the leg, had the ball kissing Sam Curran's (6) bat before settling into Ishan Kishan's glove, which was confirmed by the DRS review. Coetzee then piled further misery on fallible Punjab as he bounced out Liam Livingstone (1). Earlier, Suryakumar and Tilak Varma (34 not out off 18) produced gritty knocks on a sluggish wicket to fire Mumbai Indians to a competitive total. On a typically low and slow surface here, MI batters struggled for timing yet garnered the highest total so far at IPL's newest venue. Rohit (36 off 25) and Suryakumar provided the bedrock with a sturdy 81-run stand for the second wicket before Varma and

Tim David (14 off seven) found their mojo. Playing in his 250th IPL match, Rohit brought up his 6,500 runs in the competition. Before he was hit on the helmet off his own shot while looking to paddle sweep Sam Curran, Rohit also survived an on-field leg-before call through DRS. The right-hander was eventually dismissed when an outside edge was snaffled by Brar at backward point for another fine catch. Having consumed 34 balls for his fifty, Suryakumar flourished late in the innings to top score for Mumbai. His exchanges with Kagiso Rabada were particularly entertaining, with two of the best in business trying to battle it out on a tough surface.

LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS FACE STERN HOME TEST AGAINST QUALITY CSK BOWLING

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

A set of probing questionnaires awaits the Lucknow Super Giants on their home turf as Chennai Super Kings' cerebral bowling unit will look to use its variation to the fullest on a two-paced Ekana Stadium track during their IPL clash here on Friday. The two teams endured contrasting fortunes in their previous couple of matches. While Rituraj Gaikwad's team, still 'marshalled' by the peerless Mahendra Singh Dhoni, is coming into the game with back-to-back victories, LSG under KL Rahul have endured a mini-slump with successive defeats. With LSG's batting unit not exactly inspiring the highest level of confidence despite its firepower, it remains to be seen how it tackles an attack where each bowler brings something different to the table. Matheesha Pathirana, with his yorkers, is literally unplayable at the death, while Mustafizur Rahman has at least three variations of cutters, including one with scrambled seam. Ravindra Jadeja, on tracks where the ball grips like it often happens at the Ekana, could be more than a handful. At Lucknow, it could be an option to play the extra spinner in Matheesha Theekshana to make full use of the conditions. The average first innings score in Lucknow this season has



been 175, which is at least 15 sub-par compared to some of the other grounds, and this is exactly the kind of total where Dhoni, like the seasoned 'Concert Master' of an orchestra team, controls the 'pitch and tune'. Lucknow, on the other hand, have had issues with injuries. Their young pace sensation Mayank Yadav had to sit out of the last two games after suffering lower abdominal strain after playing just two and a quarter games. The 21-year-old has resumed training on Wednesday and his blistering pace could seriously have an impact on the match as most of the other bowlers playing this game are either medium-fast or fast medium. But there is still no clarity if Mayank will be playing on Friday. In the spin department, Ravi Bishnoi has been bowling tight spells, but his one dimensional

skill of bowling one googly after another has been found out as he got only four wickets in the six game so far. Bishnoi vs a rampaging Shivam Dube will be a mouth-watering contest and will add a spicy sub-plot to the main battle. The batting is a bigger issue for LSG as one of their mainstays — Quinton de Kock, after consecutive half-tons, has hit a rough patch in the previous three games. The contentious 'Impact Player' rule has also meant that Krunal Pandya, a more than capable left-hander, has been batting as low as No. 7 and faced 41 deliveries cumulatively in six games — an average seven balls per game. Krunal isn't exactly a finisher, and not using him at optimum level has also been a problem. Even skipper KL Rahul (204 runs at 138 SR) hasn't been at his best and his safe starts have been more damaging than

beneficial. Young Ayush Badoni too seems to be playing for his place in the side. Only Nicholas Pooran, with 19 sixes in six games, have looked dangerous. While CSK will look to consolidate their place in the points table with what could be their fifth win, a defeat would further push LSG southwards. **SQUAD:** Chennai Super Kings: MS Dhoni (wk), Aravelly Avanish (wk), Devon Conway, Rituraj Gaikwad (c), Ajinkya Rahane, Shaik Rasheed, Moen Ali, Shivam Dube, RS Hangargekar, Ravindra Jadeja, Ajay Yadav Mandal, Daryl Mitchell, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Nishant Sindhu, Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, Mukesh Choudhary, Mustafizur Rahman, Matheesha Pathirana, Simarjeet Singh, Prashant Solanki, Shardul Thakur, Maheesh Theekshana, Sameer Rizvi. Lucknow Super Giants: KL Rahul (c), Quinton de Kock, Nicholas Pooran, Ayush Badoni, Kyle Mayers, Marcus Stoinis, Deepak Hooda, Devdutt Padikkal, Ravi Bishnoi, Naveen-ul-Haq, Krunal Pandya, Yuvraj Singh, Prerak Mankad, Yash Thakur, Amit Mishra, Shamar Joseph, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan, K. Gowtham, Shivam Mavi, Arshin Kulkarni, M. Siddharth, Ashtan Turner, Matt Henry, Mohd. Arshad Khan.

Pant mobility will give him and Team India management encouragement: Pietersen

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Former England captain Kevin Pietersen feels Rishabh Pant and the Indian team management should feel very encouraged by the comeback-man's mobility in the IPL game against Gujarat Titans here as the T20 World Cup draws closer. Pant grabbed two catches, effected a stumping and then played a 16-run cameo in Delhi Capitals' six-wicket triumph over Gujarat Titans here on Wednesday. He was adjudged 'Player of the Match' based purely on his keeping skills, a first in IPL since Dinesh Karthik won one in



2009 edition in South Africa. Pant is the top contender for the wicketkeeper's slot in the Indian squad that will be chosen for the showpiece in June. "His mobility was

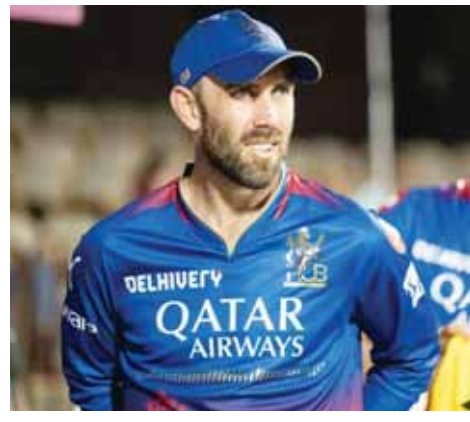
something that will give him great encouragement, which will also encourage Team India. Of course, he needs game time, as everyone does when coming back from an

injury," Pietersen said on 'Star Sports Cricket Live'. "He's returning from a horrific injury, so game time is crucial for him. To prepare for the T20 World Cup, he should play these 14-15 IPL games because it's significant leading into a T20 World Cup. If he plays that much cricket, he will be ready," he added referring to the life-threatening car crash in which Pant suffered multiple injuries in 2022. Pietersen was also impressed by Pant's captaincy during the game, saying he used his resources quite tactfully. DC dismissed GT for 89 runs in 17.3 overs before overhauling the target in 8.5 overs.

Down with hip strain, RCB Maxwell unlikely to play against KKR on Sunday

PTI ■ KOLKATA

On a "mental and physical break" to fight his poor form, Royal Challengers Bengaluru all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has revealed that he is also nursing a "hip strain" and is unlikely to return for his team's away IPL match against Kolkata Knight Riders here on Sunday. The 35-year-old, who has managed just 32 runs in six innings with an average of 5.33, pulled out of their previous match against Sunrisers Hyderabad saying "physical and mental toll probably just wore me down a little bit."



On ESPN's 'Around the Wicket' show he also disclosed his hip injury. "I've actually got a little bit of a hip strain so I've got a few more days off and during recovery," he said. "So I've got a little period here where I'm still training, still trying to get myself right. If there is a spot that becomes available, I'll obviously put my hand up and take it." "It's not one of those things where I've set a date that I'll be out for three games then I'll come back whenever I'm ready. That's that's not how it works. I haven't been at a level that's good enough to warrant a spot on the side this year."

OTHER SPORTS

Zhou will be a star regardless of who wins the Chinese Formula 1 race in Shanghai

AP ■ SHANGHAI

Formula 1 returns to China this weekend after a five-year absence. And, no matter who wins on Sunday, the star locally will be China-born driver Zhou Guanyu. Despite his so-so results, Zhou is being promoted as a celebrity in China. He's the subject of a new film as the first Chinese driver to compete in F1. And he's, of course, a favourite of sponsors who want a Chinese connection. Ahead of the first Grand Prix weekend in Shanghai since 2019, Zhou described it as more than a race for him, saying "with a Chinese driver on the grid, we will write history." By the time he got to the driver's news conference on Thursday, where the questions to him ranged from China's economy and politics to his burgeoning auto industry's future potential in F1, Zhou had spent more than a week doing promotional work and meetings with sponsors, backers and fans. "I've been extremely busy, you know - the busiest man, probably, in Shanghai over the last week and a half," he said. "A lot of activities done. It's great to see the support from the country already."



Zhou has never won a Formula 1 race. In 48 races since 2022, he's yet to even reach the podium — meaning a finish in the first three places. In the last F1 race almost two weeks ago in Japan, his Sauber retired with a gearbox failure and he placed 18th out of 20. In the season standings in 2023, he was also 18th with only six points from 22 races. But, the numbers don't matter much in the search for a hometown hero in F1. "The pressure, of course, this race is a little bit higher, but I don't think it gets much more than for me than my debut in Formula 1," he said. "Because by now everything feels a lot more familiar than back in the day. First day here is completely different... Now's third season. So, I'm just going to use that." Zhou was born in Shanghai and, though he's spent many of his formative years in England, Sunday's Chinese GP is a homecoming for him - and the race. The last F1 in China was run contested in 2019, and the next four were cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that tickets sold out quicker than ever for the Chinese GP, with interest in the sport growing exponentially since he watched his first F1 race.



Juventus ordered to pay Ronaldo more than USD 10 million in salary dispute

AP ■ TURIN (ITALY)

Juventus has been ordered to pay Cristiano Ronaldo more than USD 10 million by an arbitration board following a salary dispute. The dispute regarded a move by Juventus players to defer part of their salaries during the coronavirus pandemic. The 9.8 million euros (USD 10.5 million) that Juventus was ordered to pay Ronaldo is half the amount that the five-time Ballon d'Or winner had been seeking from the Turin club in back wages. Juventus said in a statement late Wednesday that

"with the support of its legal counsel" it's "reviewing the decision made by the arbitration board, reserving all assessments and initiatives to preserve its rights." Ronaldo played for Juventus from 2018-21, helping the club to two Serie A titles. Former Juventus president Andrea Agnelli and the entire club board resigned in 2023 amid an investigation into false accounting - which then resulted in a 10-point penalty for Juventus in Serie A and a ban by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) from Europe for this season.

Real Madrid beats Man City 4-3 on penalties to advance to the Champions League semifinals

AP ■ MANCHESTER (ENGLAND)

Real Madrid weathered the storm, silenced the crowd and ultimately ended Manchester City's brief hold on the Champions League. The all-time kings of Europe moved a step closer to a record-extending 15th title in the competition they have dominated after a 4-3 win Wednesday on penalties at Etihad Stadium. But not before being pushed to the limit by defending champion City. "I was pretty much dead on my feet at the end," Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham said. "It's so difficult. They are continuously probing with the ball and move you around. Most teams would fall apart when City get on top of you, but we stood up really well." The game had gone to the uncertainty of a shootout after ending 1-1 on the night and 4-4 on aggregate. City dominated the chances after going behind to Rodrygo's goal in the 12th minute, but only had Kevin de Bruyne's leveler in the 76th to show for its superiority, which included



64% of possession and 18 corners to Madrid's one through extra time. That counted for little as Antonio Rudiger struck the decisive spot kick after Bernardo Silva and Mateo Kovacic both saw their penalties saved. "In this competition, that's the way football happens," City manager Pep Guardiola said. "In other sports, for (these) statistics, we would have won." Guardiola had few complaints. He accepted his team had failed to capitalize against a Madrid team that was forced to defend deep against wave after wave of attack.

Erling Haaland hit the bar with one header in the first half De Bruyne sent an effort sailing over from inside the box in the second. Madrid dug deep, held on and now faces Bayern Munich in the semifinals after the Germans beat Arsenal 1-0 on Wednesday and 3-2 on aggregate. "Today it came down to mentality," Bellingham said. The defeat ended City's bid to become the first English team to win back-to-back Champions League titles and its pursuit of successive trebles. It is still challenging for the Premier League title and FA Cup.

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