



CITY 3
YOGI: NDA POISED FOR
RESONDING VICTORY

OPINION 6
IRAN-ISRAEL: ON THE BRINK
OF WAR OR HYPE

WORLD 10
ISRAELI STRIKES ON SOUTHERN
GAZA CITY OF RAFAH KILL 22

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12 SPORTS

Bihar ravaged by drugs deluge after liquor ban

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
PATNA/BHAGALPUR

The ban on liquor is ideally taking a toll in all aspects including social, economical on the citizens of Bihar. While the 'banned' alcoholic substance is made available easily by 'peddlers' in form of women and children, what is worrying the elderly generation of the State is the proliferation of drugs in form of ganja, cocaine, heroin and other psychotropic substances. Beggars too are involved in transportation of liquor to in the dry State of Bihar.

What the concerned people term "sukha nasha" has penetrated deeply in villages, rural areas, towns and cities and youths particularly teenagers, college students, daily wagers are hooked to these illegal intoxicating agents taking a toll on the future of Bihar once known as land of Buddha and Mahavira. The liquor ban which came into force almost seven years ago is ruining the health of youths and economy since all kinds of brands are "smuggled" from neighbouring Nepal, Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand.

Lallan Mahota, a resident of Bihiya in Patna, when asked about what is the major concern in the ensuing general elections, expressed dismay over the precarious situation bothering majority of the household in the State. "Sukha Nasha ghus chuka hai Sir. Sharab bund ho gaya lekin youth tareh tareh ke drugs le rahe hain. Yahan har varg ke log ki inka naam bhi pata ho gaya jo Bihar mein jaanta bhi nahi tha. Sarkarein soyi hai," Mahto said. He meant to say drugs which the people of Bihar never knew are conveniently available while the Government is in

deep slumber. As far as liquor ban is concerned, Faraz, from Nathnagar in Bhagalpur, said the ban is only on paper and administration while anyone desires to consume liquor they get it delivered. The modus operandi is more vulnerable. "Alcohol is supplied by using kids in their school bags or women folks worth ₹100-₹200 as delivery charge as there can be no needle of suspicion on them. People from poor background are more into this and what will shock you is that those involved in this illegal supply



chain of liquor have become lakhapatis (millionaires). Any kind of brand is available twice its original price and hence the 'traders' have built homes of marble," Faraz said and also took this journalist to show one of the duplex (though unverifiable) that was built in two years time by a person who was into manihari (cosmetic hawkers). Unfortunately and interestingly, those who cannot afford such expensive liquor or drugs get intoxicated by use of tertiary forms like cough syrups, nail polish spirits, shoe lotions, thinner, diluter and many more.

In most of the cities including Muzzafarpur, Darbhanga, Purnea, Katihar the above mentioned daily use items are considered for use of minor hallucinations. The use of shoe lotions or spirit is rampant and these are used by young people by rolling the open can of shoe lotion in a piece of cloth like hand kerchief or dhoti and then inhaled for intoxicate self. The family which are prone to above mentioned issues are now talking openly about their wards involvement either in liquor peddling for

want of money or their wards being prey to use of the sukha nasha. "My 21-year-old son is on ganja dosage. I took him to rehabilitation centre in Phulwari near Patna even. He is still into it and when taken to task he threatens to harm himself. I have no option but have urged my son to take only two times a day. I have also given him a tea stall to engage. He supports his ganja intake by liquor peddling in a bag of a leading coaching institute in Patna city," explained Vishnu Yadav, a hamlet near Malighat Chowk in Muzzafarpur.

Continued on Page 8



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Jalore, on Sunday

PTI

Country punishing Congress for its sins: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
JALORE/NEW DELHI

In a veiled attack on Congress leader Sonia Gandhi for choosing the Rajya Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi without naming her on Sunday said those who cannot win an election have taken the Rajya Sabha route to Parliament. Addressing a public meeting in Rajasthan's Jalore, Modi said, "Jo log chunav nahi lad sakte, jeet sakte (those who can't contest and win an election) fled the ground and shook the Rajya Sabha route". Jalore will go to the election in

the second phase on April 26. Modi also addressed a rally in Banswara n support of BJP's Mahendrajeet Singh Malviya. Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi is among the MPs elected to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan in February. In a major decision, Sonia vacated her Raebareli seat citing her health condition. The Congress is yet to announce any candidate from Raebareli, and so is the BJP for the seat that will go to the polls on May 20. Several Congress veterans have not been fielded in this Lok Sabha election, but the party has rejected suggestions

that they were shying away from contesting. Congress first sent a leader from South (KC Venugopal) to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan; then Rajasthan helped former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. "Manmohan was ill for a long time. But was he ever seen here in Rajasthan? Now Rajasthan has again come to Congress's help. Another Congress leader (Sonia Gandhi) has been elected from Rajasthan to the Rajya Sabha," he said. Modi said the country is punishing the Congress for its

"sins" and the party that had once won 400 seats is unable to contest 300 seats in this Lok Sabha election. "In the first phase of voting, half of Rajasthan has punished Congress. Rajasthan, which is full of patriotism, knows that Congress can never make India strong," PM Modi said. He said the country does not want the conditions which existed before 2014 to return. "The Congress has hollowed out the country by spreading termites of nepotism and corruption.

And today, the country is angry with the Congress and is punishing it for these sins. The youths are so angry that they do not want to see the Congress' face again." PM Modi was addressing the public meeting in Bhinmal in support of BJP candidate Lumbaram Chaudhary. "They have formed an opportunistic INDI Alliance, (it is like) a kite whose string has been cut before it could fly," he said. Modi said it was an alliance only in name as its constituents were fighting against each other in many States.

Continued on Page 8

Kerala poll campaign reaches crescendo

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Election campaign for the Lok Sabha poll to be held in Kerala reached a crescendo by Sunday, the last Sunday before the April 26 polling. Unemployment, poverty, farmers and fall in standards of education are out of e narratives as secularism, pluralism and safety of minorities are the hotly discussed topics in public rallies as well as street side meetings across the state. The three glamour stars of the CPI(M), Sitaram Yechuri, Prakash Karat and Brinda Karat (popularly known as the "available polit bureau") are rocking the State with their claims that their political outfit is the most secular one in the world.



"Secularism which is better than our secularism could be seen only in dreams," the trio speak in unison while blaming the Narendra Modi Government for destroying the secular fabric as well as pluralism of India. "No force in this world could raise their fingers at Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan or his family members. Vijayan is the best chief minister and administrator India has ever seen. His life is dedicated to serve the poor and downtrodden in the country. His name is synonymous with secularism of the highest order," thundered Yechuri while addressing rallies at Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi. The CPI(M) general secretary also dared Modi, the BJP and the ED to arrest Pinarayi Vijayan against whom they have foisted many fake cases. "No scams have taken place in the cooperative banks of the State and no financial irregularities have come to the notice of the State government. What business the ED has got to do in Kerala?" asked Yechuri.

Continued on Page 2

INDIA Bloc leaders throng Ranchi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI

The leaders of INDIA Bloc, including the wives of jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren allege that the BJP-led Centre is ruling the nation with the sole agenda to topple non-BJP State Governments and put them behind bars by faking charges. While Kejriwal's wife Sunita accused the Central Government of denying insulin to her husband alleging that it wants to kill him, Hemants wife Kalpana alleged the BJP was trying to topple Governments in Opposition-ruled States. Both spoke at the INDIA Bloc 'Ulgulan Nyay' rally, which was attended by leaders of 28 parties. Addressing the joint rally in Ranchi as part of campaign for the Lok Sabha polls, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on hit out at the BJP for trying to "terrorise" Hemant Soren, and asserted that the JMM leader preferred going to jail rather than parting ways with the INDIA bloc. He was addressing the Opposition INDIA Bloc's 'Ulgulan Nyay' rally at Prabhat Tara ground in Ranchi, which was attended by leaders of the anti-BJP alliance. Kharge also attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleging that he insulted President Droupadi Murmu and the tribal community by not inviting her to Ram temple consecration and



Leaders of Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) during 'Ulgulan Nyay' rally, in Ranchi, on Sunday

PTI

inauguration of the Parliament building. Addressing the rally, Sunita asserted that the opposition INDIA bloc will fight against the "dictatorship" of the BJP and win. "They want to kill my husband Arvind Kejriwal. His food is under camera observation; he is denied insulin. My husband is a sugar patient who has been on insulin for 12 years; he needs 50 units of insulin daily," Sunita said at the Ulgulan Nyay Rally in Ranchi. "We will fight against dictatorship and win. The gates of jail will break and Arvind Kejriwal and Hemant Soren will come out," she said. Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21 in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. He is lodged in Tihar jail. The ED also arrested



Soren on the night of January 31 in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud. Kalpana also read out a message from jail by her husband Hemant Soren. "Arvind Kejriwal and my husband Hemant Soren were jailed just before the elections by forces that were hatching conspiracies against their governments," she alleged. Reading out her husband's message, she said, "Central agencies such as the ED and CBI are being misused to suppress the opposition's voice but BJP and such forces will be driven out from Jharkhand." Urging the people to show the "exit doors" to the BJP, she claimed that if the party wins the ongoing elections it would be a "big threat" to tribals. Kalpana Soren is likely to contest the bypoll to the Gandey Assembly seat, which is slated for May 20.

BJP, AAP political showdown over insulin for Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■
NEW DELHI

Amidst politics over surrounding Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's diabetes treatment in Tihar jail, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Sunday alleged that the Tihar authorities have requested a diabetologist from AIIMS, contradicting their earlier claim of adequate medical facilities for diabetics in the prison. After the AAP shared a letter written by the Director General of Prisons requesting a senior AIIMS doctor for Kejriwal, countering the prison authorities claim of adequate medical facilities in Tihar jail, Samajwadi party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said high-level cognisance should be taken of the news that he is being denied insulin. Yadav in a post on X said, "Kejriwal has a fundamental right to good health. This news is unbelievable that he is being denied insulin to control his rising sugar level in jail. Immediate high level cognisance of this news should be taken and it should be found out whose instructions are behind this conspiracy." He



also used the hashtag 'Give_Insulin_to_Kejriwal' and 'Nahi_Chahiye_BJP' in his post. Reacting to this, South Delhi BJP candidate and leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said the AAP is trying to make Kejriwal's issue alive to get sympathy vote in the upcoming Lok Sabha. "AAP leaders are playing a victim card but they are silent on corruption in their eight years rule. Team Kejriwal is the biggest liar in the country. Their politics depends on fake narratives. Look how they conduct four to five press conferences on the same issue, just to spread lies," he added.

Carrying insulin, the workers and leaders of the AAP protested outside the Tihar jail in west Delhi on Sunday and demanded that insulin be given to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who is suffering from diabetes. Delhi Cabinet Minister Atishi and AAP MLA Sanjeev Jha were present at the protest site. Scores of party workers carrying placards saying 'Kejriwal ko insulin do' sang 'Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram' outside the jail. Earlier, AAP Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj hit out at the jail administration — alleging a flip-flop — and reiterated the party's claim that a conspiracy was being hatched for Arvind Kejriwal's "slow death" in the prison. The Delhi Minister alleged manipulation in Kejriwal's treatment, claiming that a normal doctor's recommendations were being used to deny the CM insulin. Meanwhile sources said doctors from AIIMS Delhi provided a 40-minute consultation to jailed Kejriwal in Tihar Jail via video conferencing on Saturday, during which he was assured of no serious health concerns and was advised to continue taking the prescribed medicines.

Continued on Page 8

India grapples with erratic weather

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

With the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicting light rain on Monday in the national Capital, Delhiites might get respite from the relentless hot weather they experienced in the last two days. Overall, India currently finds itself divided between two relentless and erratic weather patterns, providing no relief to residents. If Odisha and a few other States are experiencing unabated scorching heat, with temperatures soaring to as high as 42 degree centigrade and prompting the issuance of an orange alert, Himachal Pradesh is grappling with heavy rain and snowfall, resulting in infrastructure damage and road

closures. Unfortunately, the situation is not expected to improve in the next few days. The IMD has issued an orange alert for Odisha and West Bengal for the next two days, signaling a severe heat wave. Additionally, a yellow alert has been issued for Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu for the next five days due to scorching temperatures prevailing across several states. These alerts highlight the severity of the weather conditions and emphasize the need for caution and preparedness among residents. In response to the intense heat wave, the Odisha government has declared summer vacation for school students from April 25, following a three-day closure of all schools from April 18 to 20



File Photo

due to temperatures exceeding 45 degrees Celsius in some areas. On Saturday Odisha reported its first death due to heatstroke in Balasore district while 71 people have been admitted in various hospitals due to heat related illness, as per the reports.

Conversely, for Himachal Pradesh which is grappling with heavy rain and snowfall, the IMD has issued a yellow alert for the next two days, warning of thunderstorms with lightning at isolated places on April 22 and 23.

The Himalayan State Government has reported closure of approximately 104 roads, with Lahaul and Spiti bearing the brunt with 99 closures. The heavy rainfall has also caused a bridge to wash away in Kangra, as reported by the Himachal Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority. The yellow alert signifies severely bad weather lasting for several days and suggests that the weather conditions could worsen, leading to disruptions in daily activities. The temperature in Delhi is expected to hover around 38 degrees Celsius in the next two-three days. After this, the temperature may increase slowly by 1-2 degrees. "In Delhi, our estimate is that the temperature is expected to remain around 38

degrees Celcius in the coming 2-3 days. After this, it may increase slowly by 1-2 degrees and with it, there is a possibility of light rain on Monday," Senior scientist of IMD Delhi, Naresh Kumar said. In addition to immediate weather concerns, the IMD has forecasted an above-normal rainfall season across the country during the southwest monsoon. This forecast, indicating rainfall reaching 106 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA), comes amid moderate El Nino conditions over the equatorial Pacific region. However, projections suggest that the El Nino condition may weaken to neutral El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions in the early part of the monsoon season.

Continued on Page 8

STF nets 4 more in paper leak case

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF) on Sunday claimed to have arrested four members of gang leaking the question paper of the Review Officer/Assistant Examination 2023. The exam, conducted by the Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission (UPPSC), was held on February 11 last.

After reports of the question paper circulating online emerged on the eve of the exam, the government had cancelled the paper on March 2 and tasked the STF with investigating the case. The arrests followed extensive investigations. The arrested accused were identified as Dr Sharad Singh Patel, Abhishek Shukla, Kamlesh Kumar Pal, and Arpit Vineet Yashvant. They were apprehended from Vrindavan Yojana near Kalindi Park in Lucknow. While 12 accused have been arrested in connection with the case, the alleged mastermind, Subhash Prakash, a resident of Bhopal, continues to be at large, and efforts are underway to apprehend him.

RO/ARO EXAM

“Subhash happens to be an accomplice of Rajeev Nayan Mishra, who was arrested by STF in connection with a police constable exam last month,” said STF. Investigations revealed that Dr Sharad Singh Patel, previously detained by Varanasi Police in July 2022, conspired with Saurabh Shukla and Kamlesh Kumar Pal to leak the examination paper. Further inquiries uncovered the involvement of Arpit Vineet Yashvant from Bishop Johnson Girls’ School and College in Prayagraj, who allegedly agreed to leak the paper for a sum of Rs 5 lakh.

In their interrogation, it surfaced that on the day of the examination, Kamlesh Kumar Pal arrived at Bishop Johnson Girls’ School and College in Prayagraj around 6:30 am. Upon receiving the paper at 6:45 am and after the departure of the sector magistrate, Arpit Vineet Yashvant took Kamlesh Kumar Pal to the strong room on the first floor. While the guards and Arpit remained in

their respective rooms, Kamlesh Kumar Pal took his bundle to the nearby medical room, where he opened it using a cutter and photographed all series of papers using his mobile. He then resealed the bundle and left the room. Kamlesh Kumar Pal sent the leaked paper series to Saurabh Shukla, who forwarded it to Dr Sharad Singh Patel. Patel, in turn, sent the paper series to Rajeev Nayan Mishra. In another development, a suspect wanted in connection with a case of cowslaughter was apprehended by an STF team at the Agra Expressway Toll Plaza in Kakori on Sunday. The suspect, identified as Janak Raj Sharma of Ambala in Haryana, was carrying a cash reward of Rs 25,000. He was arrested based on a tip-off, and police seized Rs 20,000 in cash along with other documents, including an Aadhaar card, and two mobile phones. Janak Raj admitted to his involvement in the crime and provided information about his accomplice Naveen.

Heat wave alert in Lucknow, 18 other districts

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Meteorological department has issued a heat wave alert for 19 districts in the eastern part of the state for the next five days. According to senior scientist Mohammed Danish, within two days, these districts, including Lucknow, will experience heat wave conditions, with temperatures reaching 42-43 degree Celsius. “These conditions are expected due to wind patterns, clear skies, and warming effects, compounded by the absence of any circulation system,” he explained.

“Lucknow’s temperature is anticipated to rise in the next two days,” he added. Meanwhile, a western disturbance is forecast to bring light rainfall to western Uttar Pradesh on Monday. The 19 districts expected to face heat wave conditions include Prayagraj, Sonbhadra, Mirzapur, Chandauli, Sant Ravidas Nagar, Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Azamgarh, Mau, Ballia, Deoria, Gorakhpur, Sant Kabir Nagar, Kushinagar, Maharajganj, Siddharthnagar,

Balrampur, Shravasti, and Ambedkarnagar. Western districts such as Shamli, Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Baghpat, Meerut, Bijnor, and Moradabad, along with surrounding areas, are expected to receive light rainfall. In light of the impending heat wave, the public is advised to take precautions. “Stay hydrated, carry water while travelling, and consider using ORS or homemade beverages like lassi and lemonade to replenish lost fluids,” a doctor from the CMO office recommended.

He also suggested consuming seasonal fruits and vegetables with high water content and covering exposed areas with wet clothes and using umbrellas when working outdoors. “Ensure cool indoor environments with proper air circulation, keep windows and curtains closed during the day, and avoid consuming stale or exposed food items,” he emphasised.

In case of emergencies, individuals are urged to contact the nearest health centre.

Dalit widow alleges sexual assault by acquaintance

Case registered on court intervention

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A Dalit widow alleged that she was sexually assaulted at her house in Chintah. Police registered a case after nearly a year, following a court’s intervention.

In her complaint to the special judge, SC/ST Court, she stated that one Imran of Insaf Nagar in Indira Nagar forcibly touched her and attempted to outrage her modesty on July 21, 2023, at her house where she was all alone.

“I sent a complaint through a registered post to the office of the police commissioner on July 27 but no case was registered. My attempts to get the case registered directly at the police station also failed,” she was quoted as saying by the police.

According to the FIR, she said was left with no option but to move court which instructed the police to register a case in this regard.

Explaining in detail her ordeal in the complaint, she said she

used to visit the house of her married daughter in Indira Nagar and during this period of time, she met Imran. Imran himself broke a dialogue with the victim asking if she resided at the house she visited often. The victim told him that it was her married daughter’s house and both were on talking terms soon. Imran showed closeness when he came to know that the woman resided in Chintah as he also belonged to Chintah. In due course of time, Imran developed a fancy for her and she gauged the evil design in his mind and started distancing herself from him. However, Imran stuck to her and looked for the excuses to strike a dialogue with her. “One day, he asked me to let him show a plot as he wanted to invest in it and this way, he visited my house. He started visiting my house regularly in connection with the land deal. I showed him several lands/plots in Chintah but he did not select any of them,” she

said. She added that on the fateful day, Imran reached her house when she was taking a bath. “He knocked on the doors and I asked to wait. However, he entered the house and then the bathroom where he grasped me and touched my private parts. Shell shocked, I shouted at him. He gagged me and threatened to rape me. I bit his palm after which his grip loosened. I cried for help and neighbours, including one Vinod, rushed to my rescue. This made Imran nervous and he fled the scene. He was spotted by the villagers while fleeing my house,” the victim said.

She said she had four daughters all of them were married. “Now, I am all alone after the death of my husband. Imran had a nefarious design in his mind for me and he even threatened to kill me,” she alleged.

She also alleged that Imran also used casteist remarks while fleeing her house.

Mahavir Jayanti celebrated

Lucknow (PNS): The 2623rd birth anniversary of Lord Mahavir, the 24th Tirthankar of Jainism, was celebrated in the state capital on Sunday. Various programmes, including ‘prabhhat pheri,’ ‘panchamrit abhishek,’ ‘shobha yatra,’ and several others were organised to mark the occasion. Under the aegis of Shri Jain Dharma Pravardhini Sabha, a ‘shobha yatra’ began from Shri Digambar Jain Temple in Charbagh, led by president Vinay Kumar Jain. Devotees danced and sang bhajans during the yatra, with the flower-decorated chariot of the lord being a focal point.

Lord Mahavir’s ‘aarti’ was performed at various stops along the way. Later, a cultural programme and religious gathering took place in the evening at Mahavir Park, Daliganj. Additionally, the birth anniversary of Lord Mahavir was celebrated at the Jain temple in Vishal Khand, Gomtinagar. A palanquin procession was taken out. The devotees pledged to follow Lord Mahavir’s teachings and principles such as ‘Ahimsa Paramo Dharma’ (Non-violence is the highest religion), adopting vegetarianism, and fostering compassion towards others.



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amid a surge in heart attack cases claiming the lives of young individuals, a 38-year-old teacher succumbed to cardiac arrest at his residence in Chintah on Sunday. Vinay Kumar Shukla, a resident of Hind City Colony on Dewa Road, Chintah, and originally from Sitapur, collapsed while preparing for school for an exam duty.

According to Sub-Inspector Awadhesh Kumar Chaturvedi of Hazratganj, Shukla was rushed to Civil Hospital around 10:45 am but he was declared dead upon arrival. “Shukla’s friend and colleague Ashish Prakash from Vikas Nagar took him to the hospital,” Chaturvedi said.

Shukla’s sudden demise shocked residents and colleagues alike, highlighting the unpredictability of such tragedies at a relatively young age.

In a separate incident, a retired army man, Anil Kumar, allegedly took his own life at his residence in Gandhi Nagar, Telibagh, under PGI police station on Saturday night. Anil was found hanging from the ceiling by a bedsheet tied around his neck. His family had left for a marriage function, leaving him home alone. His wife Vinita Devi spotted the body and informed police around 4 am on Sunday.

informed the police. Investigating officer Awadhesh Kumar Chaturvedi (SI) said that the deceased appeared to be around 45 years old and likely succumbed to some illness.

In another incident, a man lost his life in a road accident in Bijnor police station area on Friday. Triloki Mishra, a resident of Shanti Nagar in Sarojininagar, was injured when a speeding vehicle collided with the auto-rickshaw he was travelling in. Another motorcyclist, Sandeep Sharma of Kanshiram Colony in Chintah, was killed in a hit-and-run case on April 18. Additionally, a human skull and bones were discovered in Rampur Devrai village of BKT on Sunday afternoon, prompting suspicion of foul play. The police, led by ADCP (North) Jitendra Dubey, launched an investigation and called in forensic experts to examine the scene and gather evidence.

Cop denied leave; pregnant wife, unborn child die

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A shocking case has come to light from Jalaun where the police station in-charge did not give emergency leave to a constable due to which he could not reach home and his wife and unborn child died due to delay in reaching hospital.

After the death of the duo, the constable has accused the SHO of not giving him leave which resulted in the tragedy. Although later the top officials gave him leave but by then it was too late. At present, the constable has been sent to his native village.

Constable Vikas Nirmal Diwakar of 2018 batch is a resident of Belahar village under Kuravali police station of

Mainpuri. He is posted in Rampura police station of Jalaun district. The constable said that he had kept requesting SHO Arjun Singh to grant him leave to go home as his wife’s delivery was expected anytime and there was no one else to look after her in case of an emergency. He claimed that the SHO did not listen to his requests and refused to sanction him leave.

According to information, the constable’s wife had labour pain on Friday. On learning that constable was not at home, the family members took his wife to the village hospital from where she was sent to the district hospital in Mainpuri. The pregnant woman was later referred to

Agra from Mainpuri. However, on the way to Agra, the woman and the unborn child died. Constable Vikas has complained to the superintendent of police about the “Hitler-like attitude of SHO Rampura Arjun Singh”. SP Dr Iraj Raja is of the view that in this case somewhere the fault lies with the SHO Rampura, who did not grant leave in such a condition. Constable Vikas is posted in Rampura police station. He had taken casual leaves and earned leaves for many days, and due to excess leave, the SHO did not approve his leave. The SP has informed all the COs, SOs that no constable should be unnecessarily harassed for taking leave.

Teenager among 2 murdered

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Gonda was rocked by two sensational killings, including the murder of a teenager. Superintendent of Police Vineet Jaiswal said the police recovered the body of Manish Yadav (15) of Khatikan Purwa of Dalpatpur gram panchayat under Itiyathok police station area. The police officer said that Manish Yadav, a class seven student, had left his house without informing anyone on Saturday night and did not return.

The teenager’s body was recovered outside the village on Sunday morning and there were injury marks on his neck. The SP said that one person had been taken into custody and he was being questioned. Meanwhile, Additional

Superintendent of Police (East) Manoj Rawat said that the half-burnt body of a youth was recovered from a pit at the side of the road in Mankapur police station area of Gonda district. He said the half-burnt body of Koili (30), a labourer and native of Gwari in Sitapur district, was recovered from a pit outside the village. The officer said that after receiving the information, the police reached the spot and sent the body for post-mortem. He said that a companion of the deceased had been taken into custody and was being questioned and after receiving the complaint of the family, a case would be registered and action would be taken. Meanwhile, four people were booked in connection with an incident of meat being found inside a temple in Ballia, police said on Sunday.

Sikanderpur Police Station SHO Dinesh Pathak said a piece of meat was found in the Hanuman temple in Mالدah Chhatti area on Saturday afternoon.

When the temple goers spotted the meat, they became infuriated and blocked the Sikanderpur-Belthara highway in protest. The blockade was ended only after police assured the protesters of action against the culprits.

Pathak said on the complaint of Amber Pandey, an office-bearer of a Hindu right wing group, an FIR under Section 295 of the Indian Penal Code (desecration of a place of worship) was registered against Ram Dayal, Ram Niwas, Kamaluddin and Manzoor Hasan.

A police force has been deployed in the village to prevent any flare ups, police said.

JM Park to offer cricket, tennis, skating coaching facilities soon

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The cricket and tennis coaching facilities, along with permanent skating courts, are slated to be available at Janeshwar Mishra Park (JMP) starting May 15. Lucknow Development Authority Vice-Chairman Indramani Tripathi, accompanied by chief engineer AK Singh, revealed this plan during a discussion on sports infrastructure on Sunday.

Cricket and tennis coaching will run on an experimental basis for six weeks, primarily targeting school students, to gauge the effectiveness of a potential sports academy.

Any issues identified during this period will be rectified to ensure a smooth transition to a full-fledged academy if the

experiment proves successful. LDA has collaborated with the Sports Authority of India (SAI) to plan the academy, with coaches provided by SAI and funding sourced internally. If successful, the academy could become a major sports hub, potentially attracting government funding.

SAI has committed to providing one tennis and three cricket coaches for the summer camp, with four part-time coaches dedicated to skating. The vast land of JMP could accommodate three large stadiums, offering ample space for various sports and cultural activities, benefiting the public. The upcoming summer camp will be free of charge, with nominal fees expected once it transitions into an academy.

Lake drilling to unearth climate secrets

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

In a first-of-its-kind initiative, the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP) is studying the monsoonal changes taking place in the country. BSIP director Mahesh Thakkar said on Sunday said that they would be studying the sediments of 20 lakes in the country. He said that they have com-

pleted drilling of two lakes in Uttar Pradesh, including Surha Taal in Ballia, and Bakhira Taal in Sant Kabirnagar. “We have reached more than ten metres of depth in these lakes, which are part of the Ganga river. When the Ganga river comes down to the plains, it meanders and these meandering portions which are cut off are called the ‘Oxbow’ lakes. The sediments from these lakes will give a clear picture of the past climatic conditions, past flood systems, past rainy systems and all other details of the climate,” he explained.

He said that in the coming days, they would be venturing into Himachal Pradesh, and Ladakh and then focusing on Rajasthan, Assam, and Gujarat.

“If the climate is conducive, we will go to Madhya Pradesh too. We have identified almost 20 lakes in the country,” he added.

“India is a big country with different geographical regions that provide varying climatic

zones together with diverse vegetation types governed by the southwest and the north-east monsoon, depending upon the season. These monsoonal winds exhibit a rich variety of natural variations on different timescales ranging across sub-seasonal, intra-seasonal, inter-annual, multi-decadal and centennial timescales, which are evident from instrumental records and palaeoclimate reconstructions, commonly known as monsoon variability. The frequency of extreme Indian summer monsoon (ISM) events has increased in recent decades,” he elaborated.

He pointed out that the duration and intensity of ISM have altered during the past few years and are unpredictable, causing tremendous agricultural and economic loss.

“Climate modelling requires rigorous and accurate palaeoclimatic data for forecasting change in the future, which will be generated in this mega-project in the coming years. The lake samples need signif-

icant time to be analysed. Still, this exercise will lead to filling gaps in information regarding the monsoon, accessing the chronological lag and disparity in long-term records, and ascertaining the causal mechanisms of climate versus vegetation,” he said, adding the lake drilling programme was conceived in 2021.

“Lakes are considerably the best recorders of climate variability on terrestrial ecosystems as sediments accumulated from the surrounding environment and microorganisms produced within provide high-resolution histories of local environmental conditions, lake water chemistry, temperature and lake productivity in the past,” he said.

“This is a long-term flagship programme of BSIP which will go on for several years. However, it will establish a clear and robust picture and record of monsoon behaviour of past tens of thousands of years of history and credible data on palaeoclimate” he added.

Stress on early detection of liver diseases

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The department of hepatology, SGPGI, organised a workshop aimed at enhancing the knowledge and awareness of healthcare workers regarding the increasing burden of liver diseases. Director Dr RK Dhiman highlighted that liver diseases commonly stem from factors such as alcohol consumption, viral hepatitis, and fatty liver. He likened the prevalence of fatty liver disease to a pandemic, stressing its severity comparable to that of the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasised the importance of early detection in preventing the progression to cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Dr Arjay Kumar from the department of hepatology discussed the escalating issue of alcohol consumption in society and its association with various liver diseases. He highlighted simple screening questions to identify individuals at risk of alcoholic liver disease.

CITYBRIEFS

GET-TOGETHER

The department of medical genetics at Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences hosted a get-together event for haemophilia A and B patients, highlighting transformative changes in their lives. Head of the department Dr. Shubha Phadke lauded the National Health Mission for providing free medications, enabling patients to self-administer injections and receive prophylactic therapy. Success stories were shared, including Aditya’s outstanding academic achievement and a 14-year-old’s recovery from crippling knee joint bleeds. Since 1990, the department has offered comprehensive care, now improved with anti-haemophilia factors since 2009. This initiative, funded by NHM, demonstrates how government support transforms lives.

SILVER JUBILEE

Delhi Public School, Indira Nagar, celebrated its silver jubilee (25 years) of academic prowess, character building,

and community engagement. The event was a grand affair, attended by management, dignitaries, guests, alumni, former faculty, staff and parents commemorating the school’s journey of growth and achievements. The school choir captivated the audience with a melodious rendition of the Superhouse Education Foundation song.

ELECTED

Head of the department of gastroenterology, SGPGIMS, Prof. Praveer Rai has been elected as the joint secretary of the Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy of India, result of



which was declared in the recently-held ‘Endocon 24’ in New Delhi. Prof. Praveer Rai, a pioneer in advanced endoscopic procedures, is already a member of the Asian Endoscopic Ultrasound Group. He said he would ensure that the care of patients undergoing endoscopy was optimised.

Patanjali Ayurved fully respects the dignity of the Hon’ble Supreme Court. We sincerely apologize for the mistake of publishing advertisements and holding a press conference even after our advocates made a statement in the apex court. We are committed to not let such a mistake be repeated ever in the future. We reassure you that we shall remain committed to uphold the constitution and the dignity of the Hon’ble Supreme Court.

Patanjali Ayurved Limited, Haridwar, Uttarakhand.



NOTICE

I Javed Mujib R/o 69/71 Mazar Wali Gali Lal Kuwan, Bheri Mandi Rajendra nagar lucknow. I have changed my son's name as MOHAMMAD AMAAN JAVED in place of AMAAN JAVED Mujib. Vide Affidavit dtd 16.04.2024 sworn Before notary

Yogi: NDA poised for resounding victory

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, said that the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance was poised for another resounding victory under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing a press conference at his official residence here, Yogi expressed optimism regarding the outcome of the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections, emphasising the palpable enthusiasm among voters towards extending Prime Minister Modi's decade-long tenure.

The chief minister added that the people had taken it upon themselves to expose the lies of the opposition parties. "The electorate is supporting the BJP and its allies, reaffirming their trust in the ruling coalition," he remarked.

Responding to a query, he attributed the recent spate of violence in non-BJP governed states to what he termed as the "repercussion of appeasement politics". Yogi Adityanath described incidents such as the clashes during Ram Navami and Holi celebrations in West Bengal and other non-BJP-ruled regions as provocative actions against the majority populace.

"The attack on the Ram Navami procession in West Bengal is a matter of concern and at the same time it gives a message to the people that a state government which cannot ensure security of a peaceful procession is incapable of guar-



anteeing safety of women and the citizens at large," he said. Denouncing "vote bank politics under the guise of appeasement", he asserted that history has it that such politics fuel communal tension.

Yogi Adityanath urged voters to give a fitting lesson to the opposition parties that compromise citizens' safety with their votes.

Before embarking on his electoral campaign in Chhattisgarh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath stated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts were instrumental in facilitating Lord Ram's homecoming after a hiatus of 500 years.

He also noted the deep-rooted connection between Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh with the former being the parental home of Lord Shri Ram's mother Kaushalya. Describing Chhattisgarh as the maternal home of Lord Ram and a cherished place for fol-

lowers of the Sanatan religion, Yogi Adityanath emphasised the widespread anticipation among the populace akin to that witnessed in Uttar Pradesh and across the nation. He highlighted the sentiment of reverence towards one's maternal home, asserting that the people of Chhattisgarh share a similar eagerness to engage with the narrative of Uttar Pradesh and Ayodhya.

Yogi Adityanath seized the opportunity to rally support for Prime Minister Modi, urging citizens to express gratitude through their votes for the government's efforts in upholding the Indian ethos and advancing welfare schemes for the underprivileged.

He viewed the forthcoming democratic processes as an avenue for citizens to demonstrate appreciation towards Modi's leadership and contribute to the progress of the nation.

Maya slams Amroha MP for 'betraying' people

PNS ■ AMROHA/GHAZIABAD

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Sunday accused the Member of Parliament from Amroha and former BSP leader Danish Ali of "betraying" people of the constituency and the party. She said the person whom the party sent to the Lok Sabha in 2019 by getting him elected did not respect the party.

She also said that if electronic voting machines (EVMs) were not tampered with, it would be difficult for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party to win the Lok Sabha polls this time. The BSP chief and former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh made these remarks while addressing separate election rallies in Amroha and Ghaziabad districts of western UP on Sunday.

"The person who won on the BSP ticket did not take care of the people or their development. He betrayed the people and the party," Mayawati said while addressing a public meeting at Joya Grounds in Amroha without taking any name. Addressing the Amroha rally in support of BSP candidate Mujahid Hussain, Mayawati said that the present MP had also betrayed the local Muslims but this time the party had fielded another Muslim candidate from Amroha. She said that seeing the crowd, she was convinced that this time also the BSP would win from Amroha.

Ali, who won the Lok Sabha seat in 2019 on a BSP ticket, was expelled from the party "for anti-party activities" in January this year. He later joined the Congress, which fielded him from Amroha.

Attacking the Congress, Mayawati said that after Independence, the grand old



party ruled the country and states but because of its wrong policies and work culture, it lost power in many parts of the country. "The same situation is with its allies... that is why the BJP came to power at the Centre," she said.

She also hit out at the BJP, saying that due to its casteist, capitalist and communal policies, the BJP would have to face a tough fight in this parliamentary election.

The BSP chief said like the Congress, the BJP was also misusing government agencies of the country. She said today the farmers of the country were troubled.

"Due to their wrong policies, the middle class people are also unhappy and troubled. Inflation and corruption have increased in the country and

the state," she said. "Whenever the BSP formed the government in the state, we took special care of the farmers. We gave them a fair price for their crops. The BJP government has supported the capitalists only. The poor, backward, Dalits, Muslims have been sidelined. Schemes are not reaching them. Apart from this, the reservation quota has also been kept incomplete. Government work is continuously being given to the private sector. Exploitation of Dalits and Muslims has not stopped in this government. The condition of poor people is not good," she said.

In the Ghaziabad rally organised in support of BSP candidate Nand Kishore Pundir, Mayawati accused the BJP of neglecting the Kshatriya com-

munity. "A large number of upper caste people live in western UP, but sadly the BJP and other parties who consider themselves supporters of the Kshatriya community, have neglected the community in this election," she said.

She further said that the BSP has given full respect to the Kshatriya community along with other communities in western UP and has given them proper representation in ticket distribution.

The BJP this time has replaced Ghaziabad MP and Union minister VK Singh, who belongs to the Kshatriya community, with former UP minister Atul Garg.

Referring to the recent panchayats of Kshatriya community, Mayawati said, "I came to know that it was decided in the

panchayats their votes will go to the party which has given maximum representation to the Lok Sabha elections. I express my gratitude to them that they have taken the right decision for their honour and respect."

She further said, "We have fielded Nand Kishore Pundir of the Kshatriya community from the Ghaziabad seat, but this does not mean that we have neglected the people of Sikh community."

Referring to the Gurjar community, she said that Praveen Bainsla, who belongs to the community, has been given a ticket from Baghpat.

Polling in Amroha and Ghaziabad will be held in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections on April 26.

PM dedicated to public service, says Khanna

Lucknow (PNS): A Vyapari Prabuddh Jan Sammelan was organised by All-India Udyog Vyapar Mandal in Lucknow, with Finance Minister Suresh Khanna as the chief guest.

Khanna lauded the traders as the enlightened segment. He highlighted the contrast between previous governments and the current one, emphasising PM Narendra Modi's dedication to public service and the implementation of schemes for the benefit of the poor. Khanna urged the traders to support the BJP and ensure a resounding victory for Rajnath Singh in the upcoming elections. BJP city president Anand Dwivedi highlighted the developmental projects in Lucknow, including the 21-km-long Shaheed Path, which has transformed the city's landscape. He also discussed the upcoming 104-km outer ring road, expected to accelerate the city's development.

Meanwhile, the BJP district unit has started its targeted outreach to voters at polling booths in the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency, focusing on areas where it faced defeat in 2019. BJP city president Anand Dwivedi revealed plans tailored to the 1893 polling booths in the constituency, dividing them into categories based on past performance.

Poll crucial for protecting community's rights, pluralism, say Muslim voters

Aligarh: Campaigning in Aligarh is subdued with major parties focusing on their core support bases. In the Muslim community, views on this Lok Sabha election seem to vary, with some seeing it as crucial for India's pluralism while others feel neglected by political parties. Muslims are a sizeable community in the Aligarh parliamentary constituency. According to the 2011 Census, Islam is the second-most popular religion in Aligarh city, a lock-making hub in western Uttar Pradesh, with over 40 per cent of people following it.

"For me, this election is about safeguarding the Constitution, which grants me and everyone else in this country the right to equality," Shadab Khan, a 45-year-old driver at the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), said.

Many others in Aligarh's Muslim community echoed his sentiment. Syed Aamir, a worker at a local eatery in the city's Shamshad market, described this election as a matter of survival for pluralism in India.

"If we don't vote now, we may lose this chance forever," Aamir said. There is also a sense of

disillusionment among some Muslim voters as well, such as Mohammad Shiraz from Aligarh's Civil Lines area who feels overlooked by political parties.

"The ruling party doesn't need our vote and the opposition assumes we have no choice but to vote for them. That is why even though the elections are just a few days away, no party worker has approached us, let alone candidates," Shiraz said, highlighting a perceived lack of engagement from political actors. Amid all this, election campaigning in Aligarh remains relatively subdued, with candidates from major parties like the BJP and the Samajwadi Party (SP) focusing heavily on specific demographic groups.

The BJP's incumbent MP Satish Gautam is prioritising outreach to the trader community, a traditional support base for his party, while the SP is concentrating on mobilising support from Jat villages.

"Our alliance is fighting on Hindu-Muslim unity in Aligarh, that goes without saying, but just like in exams, you concentrate more on tough subjects. We are doing the same but we carry

the welfare of the Muslim community in our hearts," a Samajwadi Party functionary told PTI.

Mohammad Sajjad, a professor at AMU's history department, that in the current atmosphere of "majoritarian consolidation", minority voters often feel redundant. He felt that issues such as economic inequality and religious pluralism have been overshadowing.

"The way majoritarian consolidation has been observed for many years, the question is not about Muslim votes anymore. It is about whether Hindu voters should lean towards Hindutva or a pluralist and tolerant Hinduism. Whether they will vote based on economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, economic inequality or solely on matters of religious supremacism," he told PTI.

"This decision will ultimately be made by the majority community; the minority of 10-12 per cent does not retain such specific importance. This is something the Hindus have to decide," Sajjad added.

AMU, one of India's largest residential universities, stands as a focal point in this narrative. According to academic experts

like Dr Iftekhar Ahmad Ansari, the institution embodies India's secular and pluralistic ethos but also faces the challenge of adapting to evolving democratic and societal demands.

"Muslims have never voted as a conservative block as they have been labelled to. They have not voted en-masse... but they vote for those who can best conserve and foster their culture which they have been brought up into and that is the plural culture," Ansari said.

"Even at AMU, the perception of Muslims of having conservative mindset or that they have the herd mentality is not the fact here... they have been very open-minded," the associate professor at the political science department told PTI. Professor Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi also expressed similar views, saying there is not a single Muslim here who can be termed "anti-national".

"The Muslims here would talk about their rights and doing that does not make you anti-national," he said. Aligarh goes to poll in the second phase of elections on April 26. Khair, Baroli, Atroli, Kol and Aligarh city are assembly segments in the Aligarh parliamentary constituency. **PTI**

Min: SP struggling to save its Mainpuri, Kannauj bastions

Mathura: The Samajwadi Party is struggling to save its bastions of Mainpuri and Kannauj in the Lok Sabha elections, Uttar Pradesh Minister Laxmi Narayan Chaudhary said on Sunday and claimed that there is no impact of its alliance with the Congress.

The Congress virtually has no public support in the state. As a result, there is no impact of its alliance with the Samajwadi Party, he claimed.

Chaudhary, the minister for sugarcane development, said, "The Samajwadi Party is struggling to save its Mainpuri and Kannauj seats and it will be extremely difficult for the party to save those."

In Mainpuri, the BJP has fielded UP Minister Jaiveer Singh against Dimple Yadav, the incumbent MP and the wife of Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav. Mainpuri goes to the polls in the third phase on May 7.

In Kannauj, which goes to the polls in the fourth phase on May 13, the BJP has fielded sitting MP Subrat Pathak. The Samajwadi Party is yet to announce its candidate from the seat.

Chaudhary further claimed that the BJP's alliance with the



"THE SAMAJWADI PARTY IS STRUGGLING TO SAVE ITS MAINPURI AND KANNAUJ SEATS AND IT WILL BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR THE PARTY TO SAVE THOSE"

Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) will prevent the division of about 20 per cent Jat votes as more than 70 per cent people from the community have so far been voting for the saffron party. The minister also asserted that the BJP will sweep western Uttar Pradesh, like it did in previous elections. "In Mathura, Hema Malini will set a record for victory margin in the state,"

he said. The BJP's Hema Malini is eyeing a third term in the Lok Sabha from Mathura.

Owing to the welfare programmes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the administration of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the BJP will register convincing victories in all 80 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

Chaudhary admitted that while the poll battle will not be a cakewalk for the party in a few areas due to the caste factor, the BJP will ultimately win the elections on the back of the government's welfare programmes. The minister also lashed out at Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati, saying, "Her latest trick to give tickets to Muslims is not going to work. I have visited three constituencies of western Uttar Pradesh but did not find any support for the BSP"

Chaudhary claimed the BJP will also get votes from Muslims after the Centre introduced a law criminalising triple talaq and other welfare programmes. Mathura will vote in the second phase of polling on April 26, alongside Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr and Aligarh. **PTI**

Nodal officers overseeing wheat procurement in UP districts

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

On the instruction of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Uttar Pradesh government has deployed nodal officers to oversee the procurement of wheat from farmers during the current Rabi marketing season. In its ongoing pursuit to augment the income of farmers of the state, the Yogi Adityanath government has set a target of purchasing 60 lakh metric tons of wheat in 2024-25.

To facilitate this substantial procurement, the government has set up 6,500 wheat purchasing centres across the state. During the last season, the government had set up 6,414 purchasing centres. The nodal officers, acting on the directives of the chief minister, are assessing the on-ground arrangements for wheat procurement across various locations. Approximately 3,00,000 farmers have successfully enrolled in the procurement process, a testament to the transparency pursued by the state government. Presently, 2,75,759 farmers have registered across 6,414 purchasing

centres, with 1,91,492 already undergoing verification. Notably, 72,100 farmers utilised the public portal for registration, while 2,02,805 were registered through various agencies. Additionally, 854 sharecroppers have also been included in the registration process.

Following directives from CM Yogi, overseeing nodal officers have diligently submitted their reports on wheat procurement progress to the government.

Principal Secretary (Food and Civil Supplies) Alok Kumar, who is the nodal officer for Lucknow division, made on-site inspections in Sitapur and Lakhimpur. Notably, Sitapur farmers have articulated bonus demands amidst the procurement process. Sitapur has witnessed the purchase of 1,680 quintals of wheat, while Lakhimpur Kheri has recorded a substantial procurement of 13,000 quintals.

Similarly, Food Commissioner Saurabh Babu, responsible for Chitrakoot, Jhansi, and Kanpur divisions, visited Mahoba, Hamirpur, Jalaun and Kanpur Dehat. His report highlights a

daily procurement rate of 100 quintals in Mahoba, alongside bonus demands from farmers in Kanpur Dehat.

Special Secretary (Food and Civil Supplies) Abhishek Goyal, who is the nodal officer for Ayodhya division, inspected Amethi and Barabanki. He noted the commencement of wheat harvesting in these regions, though it is yet to be available in the markets. Despite this, all preparations for wheat procurement have been meticulously completed, with operations poised to commence promptly upon market arrivals. The government has acted on the recommendations made by the nodal officers, issuing essential directives about wheat procurement. Notably, Special Secretary (Food and Civil Supplies) Prabhash Kumar is the nodal officer for the Meerut division. At the same time, Kamta Prasad Singh, Additional Commissioner, Food and Civil Supplies, fulfils this role for the Moradabad division.

Special Secretary (Agriculture) Ajay Kumar Dwivedi oversees the Saharanpur division, and

UPPCU Managing Director Shrikant Goswami holds responsibility for the Jhansi division. Vineet Prakash, Special Secretary of the nodal Agricultural Marketing department, is assigned to the Basti division. At the same time, Narendra Prasad Pandey, Special Secretary of the nodal Cooperative department oversees the Agra division.

Similarly, Vinod Kumar Singh, Managing Director of nodal UPSS, supervises the Chitrakoot division, with Rajeev Kumar Mishra, Additional Commissioner of Food and Civil Supplies, undertaking responsibilities of the Bareilly division. Additional Commissioner of the nodal Cooperative department, Manoj Kumar, oversees the Aligarh division. Each officer visited their respective districts and submitted comprehensive reports to the government. These reports facilitated the government to issue requisite guidelines concerning wheat procurement, ensuring alignment with operational requirements on the ground.

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government will provide case-to-case customised packages for the establishment of ultra mega category projects of special importance in the state.

This provision has been included in the Industrial Investment and Employment Promotion Policy 2022. The Infrastructure and Industrial Development department has made some amendments in the provisions of the policy.

As part of the amendment, instead of the nodal agency, a committee formed under the chairmanship of CEO Invest UP has been entrusted with the responsibility of examining such projects and recommending special packages. Following the recommendation of this committee, such large projects can be provided customised packages after approval by the high-level Empowered Committee and the Cabinet. According to the amendments made in the Industrial Investment and Employment Promotion Policy 2022, the

Uttar Pradesh government may consider providing specially customised incentive packages on a case-by-case basis for projects of special importance in the Ultra Mega category. Initially, the policy provisioned that such applications would be submitted to the nodal agency for review based on their significance. For this, a settlement committee will be formed under the chairmanship of the Infrastructure and Industrial Development commissioner, whose member secretary will be the CEO of Invest UP. However, this provision has now been amended.

As per the amendment, a committee formed under the chairmanship of the CEO of Invest UP will now examine proposals of special significance concerning the Ultra Mega category. The committee may recommend eligibility for receiving special packages. After the recommendation of Invest UP, the department will examine and obtain the recommendation of the high-level Empowered Committee constituted under the policy. The

approval of the Council of Ministers will be obtained based on the recommendation of the Empowered Committee.

In addition, several important positions have been aligned in the old provisions. Projects recommended by the additional chief secretary/principal secretary of the Administration and Industrial Development department, additional chief secretary/principal secretary of the Finance department, additional chief secretary/principal secretary of the Planning department, additional chief secretary/principal secretary of the Commercial Tax department, additional chief secretary/principal secretary of the MSME department, managing director of PICUP, CEO of UPSIDA and other authorities as nominated by the CEO of Invest UP, and a negotiation committee comprising members appointed by the Infrastructure and Industrial Development Commissioner or CEO of Invest UP will be sent to the chief minister for final approval.

Two dead in wall collapse

Lucknow (PNS): Two men were killed when a wall collapsed on a wedding tent here in Bhasuda village in Pilibhit, police said on Sunday. The incident took place Saturday night when people were eating food at the wedding venue, Bisalpur SHO Ashok Pal said.

Two men, Mahavir, 25, and Chandraveer, 30, succumbed during treatment. Eight more, Mango Devi, Chhedilal, Hiralal, Guddu, Ashok, Harnandan, Shreyas and Ram Charan, are still under care.

Meanwhile, three people were killed after being run over by a truck in Musahi Churk village of Sonbhadra district, police said on Sunday. The incident occurred around 9 pm on Saturday night. CO of the area Rahul Pandey said the deceased have been identified as Sunil (25) of village Saini Kala of Etah district, and Rajesh (30) and Jitendra (35) of Mainpuri district.

The three were in the village to attend a marriage ceremony and walking along a road when the truck hit them. The bodies have been sent for postmortem.

BJP will win all 80 seats in UP: Patel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Regional president (Kashi) of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Dilip Patel while addressing a meeting of Regional Election Management Committee at the party office in Rohania here on Sunday gave important guidelines to the regional monitoring team. He said the Lok Sabha elections have already started in the country and voting is to be held in seven phases. He said that the voting will be held on 14 Lok Sabha seats of Kashi region in the fifth, sixth and seventh phases.

Patel said the Lok Sabha elections are being monitored at the district, region, state and national level. He said that the monitoring team looking after the work of booth management has to be concerned about the fact that the meetings of youth, women,



Regional BJP president Dilip Patel addressing party's monitoring committee meeting in Varanasi on Sunday.

farmers, backward classes and Scheduled Castes are held at the booths in every Lok Sabha falling under Kashi region. "If it has happened then take the information and fill it in the prescribed format and send it to the state office," Patel instructed the team.

According to him, two programmes have to be organised at each Shakti Kendra. "First is to organise a conference of Panna chiefs and second a street meeting at Shakti Kendra," he instructed, adding that it should be ensured that the conference of booth presi-

dents are held at the assembly level apart from the conferences of frontal units of the party in every assembly. Patel said information about the place, date, time and chief guest of these mentioned programmes to be held in each Lok Sabha constituency has to be sent to the state office daily. Patel said regular monitoring of public meetings, travel, meetings, public relations etc of big leaders in every Lok Sabha constituency has to be done.

He said in those places where voting is going to be held in the fifth phase, nominations will start from April 26. He said that voting is scheduled to be held in the fifth phase in Amethi and Kaushambi Lok Sabha constituencies falling under Kashi region whereas in the sixth phase, voting will be held in Sultanpur, Pratapgarh, Phulpur Allahabad, Jaunpur, Machhalishahar and Bhadohi

Lok Sabha constituencies and in the seventh phase in Ghazipur, Chandauli, Varanasi, Mirzapur and Robertson.

On the occasion he expressed confidence that the Bharatiya Janata Party will win all 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, including 14 Lok Sabha seats of Kashi region. Regional general secretary Ashok Chaurasia conducted the meeting while the vote of thanks was proposed by regional general secretary Santosh Patel.

The meeting was also attended by Nagendra Raghuvanshi, Rajesh Rajbhar, Ashish Baghel, regional media in-charge Navratn Rath, co-media in charge Santosh Solapurkar, Anil Srivastava, Nandji Pandey, Jaishigh Pal, Shripakash Shukla, Dr Ashok Rai, Sandeep Keshari, Shailendra Mishra etc

Sangam city grapples with heat wave

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

People in Sangam city are grappling with heat wave for the last three-four days. The maximum temperature here on Sunday was recorded at 43.4 degrees Celsius, while the minimum temperature was 26 degrees Celsius. Most of roads remained deserted due to scorching sun. Most of the people preferred to remain indoors and are venturing out of their homes only for important work.

On the other hand, people are also falling ill due to increasing heat. Separate wards have been reserved for this purpose in all the big government hospitals of the city so that patients did not face any inconvenience in their treatment.

The Meteorological Department estimates that this extreme heat and heat wave will continue for the next 10 days. The maximum temperature

recorded on Saturday was 43.1 degrees Celsius.

After the mercury crossed 40 degrees Celsius these days, an alert has also been issued by the district administration. Complete guidelines have also been issued regarding how to protect against heat wave.

Helpline numbers have also been issued. Relief Commissioner Office's Number is 1070 and District Emergency Operation Centre Prayagraj Control Room Number is 05322641577 and 05322641578.

District Magistrate (DM) Navneet Kumar Chahal has also issued suggestions related to protection from heat and sunstroke. To avoid hot winds, people should cover the window with reflectors such as aluminum foil and cardboard so that the outside heat can be prevented. Black curtains should be placed on windows and doors from where hot

winds come. One should also get first aid training to deal with emergencies and never leave children or pets alone in a closed vehicle. Stay indoors as much as possible and avoid the heat of the sun, he added.

PLASTIC CLEANLINESS DRIVE: Ahead of the World Earth Day on Monday, the Isha Foundation volunteers here took proactive steps towards environmental conservation by organising a plastic cleanliness drive at Sangam and Bade Hanuman Mandir on Sunday.

The volunteers gathered near the Ganga ghat early on Sunday morning.

Slogans like "Mitti Bachao, Plastic Hatao, Jeevan ko Khushal Banao" were raised. On the occasion the volunteers also took a pledge to minimise the use of plastics in daily activities, marking a commitment towards sustainable living practices.

Scooty rallies under SVEEP taken out

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Under the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme, scooty rallies were taken out from eight places here on Sunday. District Magistrate/ District Election Officer (DM/DEO) S Rajalingam, along with Chief Development Officer (CDO)/ Officer-in-charge SVEEP Himanshu Nagpal flagged off one of these scooty rallies from UP College Gate. Speaking on the occasion, the DM said voting is the biggest festival of democracy so it is everyone's responsibility to celebrate this festival well and vote. The CDO also appealed to the people to go to their respective polling centres on June 1 and exercise their franchise under all circumstances. These rallies were taken out with an aim to ensure maximum voting in the Lok Sabha General Elections-2024. The **scooty rally** flagged off from UP College Gate reached Circuit House via Atulanand School,



Shivpur Central Jail Road, Ambedkar crossing, Mint House, JHV Mall and District Court. The nodal officer was Additional Municipal Commissioner of Nagar Nigam. The people participating in the rally were wearing stickers saying 'Matdaan Ka Mahaparva, Aayo Vote Kare'.

Among the other rallies, one of the rallies was taken out from Kabirchaura to Rajghat via Maidagin and Machhodari and its nodal officer was Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) while the other from Malviya crossing near BHU Gate to Nagar Nigam Headquarters Sagra via Ravindrपुरi, Chetmani crossing, Bhavaniya Pokhari, Jal Santhan, Kamachha Temple

and Rathayatra crossing and its nodal officer was District Inspector of Schools (DIOS).

Among others, one rally was taken out from Mohansarai to Gangapur Nagar Panchayat under the leadership of Block Development Officer (BDO) Arajilina, while other from Kapsethi BRC Centre to Block Headquarters, Sevapuri under leadership of BDO Sevapuri. Besides, one scooty rally was taken out from Pindra Bazaar to Phulpur Bazaar under leadership of Pindra BDO, while others from Deepraj Tiraha Katari to Cholaipur Bazaar Tiraha and Chiragaon Block Headquarters to Umraha Bazaar under the leadership of BDOs of Cholaipur and Chiragaon respectively.

Sankat Mochan Sangeet Mahotsav to be held from Apr 27 to May 2

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The 101st edition of internationally famous Sankat Mochan Sangeet Mahotsav will be held at Sankat Mochan Temple premises from April 27 to May 2.

Giving this information at a press conference here on Sunday, Mahant of Sankat Mochan Temple Prof Vishwambhar Nath Mishra said that the prior to this, a special 'shringer' of Lord Hanuman will be held on Chaitra Purnima on April 23 and then Ramnaan Sakirtan will be held.

Prof Mishra said that there will be a gathering of artists from India and abroad during the festival. Sanju Sahai of London and Ustad Akram Khan will present their programmes on tabla. Overall, about 150 artistes from India and abroad will present their programmes in this famous music festival. He said this year, the young artistes of

Banaras Gharana will be given opportunities and more than 10 Padma awardees will participate in the festival.

According to him, the main attraction on the opening day will be Pt Ratikant Mahapatra (Odissi), Pt Satish Vyas (Santoor) and Pt Sajjan Mishra (vocal) while on the second day, U Rajesh (Mendalium) and Pt Shivmani (Drum) will present their programmes apart from Pt Vishwa Mohan Bhatt (Mohun Veena) and Pt Ajay Pohankar (vocal). The main attraction on the third day will be Malini Awasthi (vocal) while Anup Jalota will present his bhajans on April 30. On the penultimate day, Ullas Kalalkar (vocal) and Rakesh Chaurasia (flute) will be the main attraction while on the last day, Bhawna Ramanna (Bharatnatyam) and famous Bollywood singer Kavita Krishnamurthy will present their programmes.

Edentulism major health problem: Prof Bansal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The five-day Workshop on Dental Implantology (WDI-2024) entitled 'Simple implantology for beginners to advanced workers' was inaugurated at Faculty of Dental Sciences (FDS), Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU) here on Saturday.

The chief guest of the inaugural function was IMS-BHU Director Prof SN Shankhwar while Dean, FDS Prof HC Baranwal and Dean (Research) IMS-BHU Prof Gopal Nath were the guest of honours. The other dignitaries who were present on the dais were organising chairman Prof Rajesh Bansal and secretary Prof Chandresh Jaiswara.

Prof Rajesh Bansal said that main purpose of the workshop is to provide sufficient knowledge and skills to the participants so that they can initiate their own implant practice after going back to their clinics/hospitals. In this workshop participants have joined from

various parts of the country. He said that during the last two days of the workshop the participants would be trained regarding various techniques to replace teeth of partial or complete edentulous patients.

He said that in the workshop, a special emphasis will be given to replacement of teeth in case of postmenopausal women who acquire osteoporosis due to reduced levels of estrogen. It will be demonstrated surgically that how the rarified bone can be condensed and implants can be placed successfully in such cases.

Dr Amit Sharma emphasised the fact that implant supported fixed teeth can be given to patients who have severe atrophy of bone and are denied such services by main stream doctors. Prof Bansal said, "Edentulism is a major health problem in developing countries like India. As age increases the number of teeth lost also increases due to dental caries and periodontitis along with age related senile and degenerative changes. From a biological

point of view, replacement of a single missing tooth with an implant is a much better modality. In this, a tapered screw is inserted in the jaw bone and a crown is attached to the head of the implant and it functions more or less like a natural tooth. This is a relatively new device and is much better than the old three-unit fixed partial denture in which the healthy innocent teeth on either side of the missing tooth are subjected to circumferential grinding and trimming which makes them prone to caries and periodontitis." He said extraction of these trimmed teeth makes the situation even more difficult due to increase in edentulous span. On the other hand implants are quite helpful also in stabilising even the complete dentures which otherwise cannot be firm and stable in their position due to lack of rigid support. Implants have been proved to be more efficient in improving the mastication and maintaining the bone health for longer duration, he added.

HPC's role in accelerating scientific advancements highlighted



The HPC Symposium 2024 being inaugurated at IIT Kanpur.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K) successfully hosted its HPC Symposium 2024, bringing together leading researchers and students to explore the transformative power of High Performance Computing (HPC). This annual event serves as a crucial platform for facilitating collaboration and innovation in this rapidly evolving field. IIT Kanpur boasts a rich history in HPC, having established the first academic institution-based HPC system in India with the IBM 1620. This commitment continued with the institute's role in the National Supercomputing Mission, leading to the acquisition of a 1.6 petaflops HPC system and the commissioning of Param Sanganak, a top-10 ranked supercomputer in India by the

end of 2020. The symposium, led by Prof Nishant Nair, Dean, Digital Infrastructure and Automation and Prof Preeti Malakar, HPC coordinator, commenced with an opening ceremony marked by enthusiasm and distinguished guests. Prof Abhay Karandikar, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology, delivered the keynote address, highlighting the critical role of HPC in accelerating scientific advancements and innovation.

The symposium generated valuable insights into research carried out at IIT Kanpur using HPC systems, including sessions by eminent professors like Prof Amalendu Chandra, Department of Chemistry; Prof Sanjay Mittal, Department of Aerospace Engineering; Prof Mahendra K Verma, Department of Physics; Prof Vishal Agarwal, Department of Chemical Engineering; Prof

Ashoke De, Department of Aerospace Engineering, Prof Indranil Saha Dalal, Department of Chemical Engineering, Prof Ashutosh Modi, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Prof Rajdip Mukherjee, Department of Materials Science and Engineering; and Prof Supratik Banerjee, Department of Physics. "The symposium has been an excellent platform for showcasing the exceptional research facilitated by our HPC systems," said Prof Nishant Nair, Dean, Digital Infrastructure and Automation, IIT Kanpur. "We are grateful to the National Supercomputing Mission for their support, which has enabled us to push the boundaries of computational power." Engaging poster presentations by students and a thought-provoking brainstorming session on IIT Kanpur's vision for exascale computing further enriched the symposium, which concluded on a high note with a discussion on the pivotal role of HPC clusters at IIT Kanpur in propelling the research activities of the institute to the frontiers of science and technology.

LABOURER DIES: A labourer was fatally knocked down by a truck in Kanpur debat late on Saturday night. He was identified as Ranvir Singh (45) of Raruwa village in Gajner police station area. The kin of the deceased rushed to spot and staged agitation. The police also reached there and pacified the issue.

Seminar concludes



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The two-day national seminar on "Epic India : History, Politics, Art and Culture" organised at the Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Kidwai Nagar, concluded on Saturday. Taking the programme forward, the third technical session was chaired by Prof Kalpana Srivastava (BED) and Basant Patel (Associate Professor, Department of History, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel University, Gujarat). The special speakers were Dr Manisha Diyan and Dr Sunil Singh. Dr Vasant Patel presented an analysis on understanding the objectives and problems of present life and solving them through Karmyoga.

Welcoming the guests Principal Prof Anju Chaudhary said the spirit of selfless action described in our epics not only encourages personal and social development, but also maintains peace and balance in life. Chief guest Shyam Shankar Singh (Regional Higher Education Officer, Kanpur) said, "Whenever we experience frustration and disappointment, these epics infuse energy and hope within us."

Applied science lab inaugurated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Opportunity School at IIT Kanpur on Saturday inaugurated 'Vigyanalaya' - An Applied Science Laboratory. Prof Abhay Karandikar, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, officially launched it in the presence of Prof S Ganesh, Director of IIT Kanpur, Prof Kantesh Balani, Dean of Resources and Alumni, and other Deans, Prof Harish Chandra Verma, Prof Sudeep Bhattacharjee, School's Management Committee Chairman, Dr Chetna Mishra, Principal of the School, Pradnya Khandekar, students and teachers and IIT Kanpur campus community among others.

Opportunity School, established in 1967, is providing education to the children of economically weaker section from in and around IIT Kanpur campus. Since February 2020, the school is operating from the new building 'Shri Harihar Prasad Singh building' built with the generous contribution by Dr Chandralekha Singh.

'Vigyanalaya', a second to none laboratory envisioned by Padma Shri and IIT Kanpur's former faculty, Department of Physics, Prof Harish Chandra Verma and the late Prof Sameer Khandekar, former faculty, Department of Mechanical Engineering, IIT Kanpur, will be a place to explore all aspects of science, from basic to complex, inspired by real-life problems, aims to ignite curiosity and creativity among students



Prof Abhay Karandikar, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India inaugurating 'Vigyanalaya' - An Applied Science Laboratory

towards scientific exploration and innovation. During the inauguration, students showcased various innovative experiments and models like magnetic car races, bottle water experiments and crafts made from recycled papers. They impressively addressed guest inquiries, displaying their confidence and understanding.

Vigyanalaya also functions as a scientific instrument's repository, offering a wide array of tools across different scientific disciplines. From advanced measurement devices to lab equipment for chemistry, biology, and physics, including telescopes and microscopes, Vigyanalaya provides essential resources for scientific learning. The laboratory facilitates diverse activities, ranging from basic tasks like crafting earthworm models to more

complex concepts such as electrolysis and designing sensor devices with Arduino. They also engage younger students in activities like replicating room wall drawings, fostering skills in estimation, ratio, precision engineering and unit conversions. The Vigyanalaya inauguration was followed by 'Abhyudaya', the school's annual cultural programme. The event featured traditional rituals like the lighting of lamps and Saraswati Vandana, along with performances by students portraying famous Indian scientists and showcasing skits focused on environmental conservation and scientific concepts. The cultural extravaganza included Rajasthani folk dances like Ghoomar, colourful Holi folk dances and energetic Punjabi folk dances, captivating the audience. The pro-

gramme concluded with a vote of thanks and the national anthem.

NEW KANPUR CITY PROJECT: The Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) arranged talks with land owners and motivated them to sell their land for use in its proposed New Kanpur City Project. A team of KDA officials led by the OSD (Land Bank), Zone I, Dr Ravi Pratap Singh and comprising tehsildar, naib tehsildar and amins visited the place of farmers/land owners on Sunday and informed them about the special camp being organised at KDA premises daily for this purpose. The drive aimed at convincing more and more farmers/land owners to sell their land for use in the much-awaited New Kanpur City Project.

ATHLETICS COMPETITION: Secretary, UP Athletics Association (UPAA) Dr Devesh Dubey, said the 31st UP State Open Athletics Championships-2024 was organised at the Athletics Stadium CSJM University, Kanpur, and the Athletics Stadium, Indian Air Force Hindan, Ghaziabad, on April 19 and 20. Total 42 events were organised during the two-day championships. On the basis of performance in this championship, the UP team will be selected to participate in the 27th National Federation Cup Seniors Athletics Competition 2024 scheduled to be held from May 12 to 15 at Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar (Odisha).

St John Ambulance Brigade's annual inspection programme held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The annual inspection programme of St John Ambulance Brigade, Prayagraj, for the year 2023-24 was successfully held at the Central Hospital, North Central Railway (NCR) here on Sunday. The programme was inaugurated by Deputy Commissioner and Chief Medical Superintendent Dr Satya Prakash Sharma by hoisting the flag. He took the salute while inspecting the parade organ-



ised by the Brigade members.

In his address he said the Brigade has been established for human service. A grand exhibition was organised on the work done by the Brigade in the financial year which was inaugurated by CORE Commander (Administration)

MK Kulshrestha. He appreciated the work of the brigade and praised the volunteers of the brigade.

Divisional Commander (Medical) Dr Ashish Aggarwal presented the details of the achievements of the work done by the Brigade in the financial year before all the officers and members. Assistant Divisional Commercial Manager Dinesh Kumar also addressed the programme. Medical Director/Central Hospital/ NCR, Prayagraj, Dr SK Handu was present in the

programme as the chief guest and Chief Health Director Dr Rakesh Nigam as special guest.

The brigade members were honoured with citation and award for the selfless service rendered rendered last year. The programme was conducted by former divisional finance manager MH Ansari. Ambulance Officer Uday Chandra Maurya, Vidhyabhushan Srivastava, Alok Verma, Anoop Srivastava, Satpal Singh, Om Prakash and others were present.

Environmental awareness campaign conducted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

On the eve of World Earth Day on April 22, an environmental awareness campaign was conducted among morning walkers at Surya Sarovar under the joint aegis of Vikas Evam Shiksha Samiti (VESS) India and international organisation Earth Day Network here on Sunday. Leading the campaign, director of VESS India Dr Rajesh Srivastava and deputy director Anamika Tiwari appealed to the people



present to leave plastic bags and adopt cloth bags. They said that the use of plastic has a very adverse effect on the environ-

ment as it causes land, water and air pollution and adversely affects the health of humans and other living beings.

Therefore, they said that it is absolutely necessary to increase sensitivity towards the environment. Dr Srivastava said that it is the joint responsibility of all of us to keep the earth safe. "If water, forest, land and air are not left then human existence will cease to exist and in such a situation, we all need to take this issue very seriously so that a sustainable environment can be created," he said. The other activists who were also present were Shriwasi, Shikha Rai, Neelu Mittal and Chandrabhusan.

Tirthankaras teachings on non violence gained new relevance: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said here teachings of Indian Tirthankaras have gained a new relevance at a time when “many countries are getting into wars” and , asserted that India is making a place for itself as “Vishwa Bandhu in a divided world.” Addressing the 2,550th Bhagwan Mahaveer Nirvan Mahotsav, he also said India is now projecting the principles of truth and non-violence on the global fora as a solution to the problems in the world, and its cultural image is playing a big role in it as well. The Prime Minister also released a commemorative stamp and a coin on the occasion and thanked the Jain community for their blessings. He said his Government put emphasis on promoting her-

itage as well as material development when it came to power in 2014 at a time when the country was engulfed in despair, a swipe at the previous UPA dispensation. He cited his Government's promotion of Indian heritage like yoga and Ayurveda, asserting that the country's new generation now believes that self-pride is its identity. Modi praised the dance drama ‘Vartaman Mein Vardhaman’ that was showcased on the occasion and said the dedication of the youth towards the values of Bhagwan Mahaveer is a sign of the nation moving forward in the right direction. Modi also bowed before the Jain saints present at the event and conveyed his best wishes to all on the auspicious occasion of Mahaveer Jayanti on Sunday. In his address, he said the “teachings of our Tirthankaras have gained a new relevance in the time when, globally, many



countries are getting into wars”. Tirthankaras are gurus or preachers of Jainism. Modi recalled the philosophies

such as Anekantavada and Syadvada that teach people to look at all the aspects and embrace the views of others

too. Today, humanity is expecting peace from India in these times of conflict, he said. The “new role” of this “New India”

is being credited to India's growing capabilities and foreign policy.” But, I want to tell you that the our cultural image has a big role in it,” he said. “Today we put forward the principles of truth and non-violence with full confidence on the global fora. We tell the world that the solution to global problems is found in the ancient Indian culture and tradition. This is why India is making a place for itself as ‘Vishwa Bandhu’ in a divided world”, the prime minister added. He mentioned India's initiatives such as Mission LiFE for combating climate change and the vision of ‘One Earth One Family and One Future’ along with a roadmap of One World-One Sun-One Grid and International Solar Alliance. During his address, Modi also paid tributes to Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Maharaj who passed away in February and

recalled his recent meeting with him, saying “his blessings are still guiding us”. Referring to the Lok Sabha polls, he said a big festival of democracy is happening “and, the country believes from here a new journey into future will also begin”. The prime minister also suggested to the audience that they should use their franchise early in the day and added in a lighter vein that saints have links to lotus, a flower often used in holy events which also is the BJP's poll symbol. “We are celebrating Bhagwan Mahaveer's Nirvan Diwas even after 2500 years and I'm sure that the nation will continue to celebrate his values for thousands of years to come”, he said. He asked people to follow the teachings of Bhagwan Mahaveer as revival of those values is the demand of the time. The prime minister said

that Jainism is the path of ‘jin’ or the victorious. The event is a rare occasion and is happening at the beginning of ‘Amrit Kaal’, Modi said, adding the country is working to make centenary year of freedom a “golden centenary”. The Prime Minister underlined that the idea of ‘Amrit Kaal’ is not merely a resolution but India's spiritual inspiration. “For India, modernity is its body, spirituality is its soul. If spirituality is removed from modernity, anarchy is born,” he said. Modi said India is emerging from the period of corruption and despair as more than 25 crore Indians have come out of poverty. Union ministers of state for Culture Arjun Ram Meghwal and Meenakshi Lekhi were also present on the occasion among other dignitaries and saints from the Jain community.

Steel cutting ceremony of Cadet Training Ship held at TN shipyard

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Steel Cutting ceremony of the Sthird Cadet Training Ship (Yard-18005) was held at L&T Shipyard, Kattupalli, Tamil Nadu on Saturday. The ceremony was presided by Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane in the presence of Arun Ramchandani, Executive Vice President, L&T Precision Engineering & System, navy said here. Giving details, officials said the contract for indigenous design and construction of three Cadet Training Ships was concluded between MoD and M/s L&T in March 2023. These Cadet Training Ships will be utilised for training officer cadets at sea after their basic training ashore. These ships



will also extend training facility to cadets from friendly foreign countries. These ships are likely to be delivered to the Indian Navy commencing Sep 2026. This is yet another significant

milestone in Indian Navy's pursuit towards indigenous shipbuilding and is in consonance with Government of India's vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Make in India' initiative.

Connecting Sikkim to railway network gets major boost

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project(SRRP), which will connect Sikkim to the railway network for the first time, has got a major boost with the completion of an 855-metre-long emergency exit tunnel. A 20-metre section of the tunnel runs under National Highway(NH)-10, along the Teesta river, and according to officials, mining through its soft and loose soil was the most challenging part of the whole project as there was a high risk that it might cave in, snapping Sikkim's road connectivity with the rest of the country. “NH-10 is the only road network that connects Sikkim with other parts of the country. It was a huge challenge for us to mine a tunnel 18 metres below the highway, because the soil is very soft and loose, just like the river sand bed (fine to coarse-grained), with



alternate bands of pebble, cobble and boulders,” an official from Ircon International, which is constructing the project, said. “Mining for only that 20-metre distance, which is the width of NH-10 including

the impact areas on both sides along the highway, has been the most challenging moment of the project so far. We completed it successfully, without causing a single millimetre of deformation to the highway,” he added.

Railway officials said they used the secant-piling method, rarely used in tunnel mining. After getting it proof-checked by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ircon officials prepared a case study, explaining the ingenu-

ity of the mining work. The study says, “To provide fool-proof safety to NH-10, it was suggested to prepare a secant pile wall. Secant piles are designed by constructing reinforced concrete piles that interlock with each other and are reinforced with steel rebar. Typically, primary piles are cast in situ, leaving space in between them, and this is followed by secondary piles cut into the primary piles to form a continuous wall of piles.” The Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project (SRRP), covering a total length of 44.96 km between Sivok in West Bengal and Ranpo in Sikkim), has 14 tunnels, 12 bridges (13 major, nine minor) and five railway stations — Sivok, Riyang, Teesta Bazar, Melli and Rangpo. The Indian Railway has set a new deadline of August 2025 to finish the SRRP that will connect Sikkim with the rest of the country through the rail network for the first time.

Researchers identify abnormal accumulation of proteins in cells that cause Alzheimer’s



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Researchers from Tokyo Metropolitan University have identified how proteins collect abnormally in neurons, a feature of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. They used fruit flies to show that depletion of mitochondria in axons can directly lead to protein accumulation. At the same time, significantly high amounts of a protein called eIF2β were found. Restoring the levels to normal led to a recovery in protein recycling. Such findings promise new treatments for neurodegenerative diseases. Every cell in our bodies is a busy factory, where proteins are constantly being produced and disassembled. Any changes or lapses in either the production or recycling phases can lead to serious illnesses. Neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), for example, are known to be accompanied by an abnormal build-up of proteins in neurons. However, the trigger behind this accumulation remains unknown. A team led by Associate Professor Kanae Ando of Tokyo Metropolitan University have been trying to determine the causes of abnormal protein build-up by studying Drosophila fruit flies, a commonly studied model organism that has many key similarities with human physiology. They focused on the presence of mitochondria in axons, the long tendril-like appendages that stretch out of neurons and form the neces-

sary connections that allow signals to be transmitted inside our brains. It is known that the levels of mitochondria in axons can drop with age, and during the progress of neurodegenerative diseases. Now, the team have discovered that the depletion of mitochondria in axons has a direct bearing on protein build-up. They used genetic modification to suppress the production of miltion, a key protein in the transport of mitochondria along axons. It was found that this led to abnormal levels of protein building up in fruit fly neurons, a result of the breakdown of autophagy, the recycling of proteins in cells. Through proteomic analysis, they were able to identify a significant upregulation in eIF2β, a key subunit of the eIF2 protein complex responsible for the initiation of protein production (or translation). The eIF2a subunit was also found to be chemically modified. Both of these issues hamper the healthy action of eIF2. Importantly, by artificially suppressing levels of eIF2β, the team discovered that they could restore the autophagy that was lost and regain some of the neuron function that was impaired due to axonal mitochondria loss. This not only shows that depletion of mitochondria in axons can cause abnormal protein accumulation, but that this happens via upregulation of eIF2β. As populations age and the prevalence of neurodegenerative conditions continues to increase, the team's findings present a vital step in developing therapies to combat these serious illnesses.

Take action against hospitals involved in illegal organ transplants: Health Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Alarmed at the kidney transplant racket which was busted in Jaipur, where a Bangladeshi national was found to have undergone a kidney removal procedure under suspicious financial arrangements, the Union health ministry has directed all states and Union Territories (UTs) to investigate violations and take necessary action against hospitals involved in illegal organ transplants. The recent case of the organ trafficking racket, involving Bangladeshi nationals, in Haryana and Rajasthan, seemed like a warning bell for the authorities, calling for urgency to address illegal

organ trafficking and ensuring ethical transplant practices across the country. Dr Atul Goel, Director General of Health Services (DGHS), Union Health Ministry in a letter to the States and authorities emphasized the need for regular collection and sharing of transplant data, including cases involving foreign nationals, with the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) on a monthly basis. He highlighted a surge in organ transplants involving foreigners and stressed the importance of monitoring such cases. The letter, issued on April 10, instructed the appropriate state authorities to investigate transplant cases involving foreign nationals and take action in



case of any violations of the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994.

This includes suspension of registration for hospitals engaged in illegal activities. “Investigate any violation of the

THOTA, 1994 and rules thereunder and take appropriate action including suspension of registration for performing Organ Transplant, of the hospitals involved in illegal activities,” the letter said. Furthermore, the ministry mandated the generation of a unique NOTTO-ID for both donors and recipients in all transplant cases, ensuring compliance with allocation protocols and timely identification. Regular inspections of registered transplant hospitals were also recommended to monitor activities and ensure quality transplantation. “It should be ensured that a unique NOTTO-ID for both donor and recipient is generated by the hospital from

NOTTO website (Notto.Mohfw.Gov.In), in all cases of organ transplant, whether from a living donor or deceased donor,” the letter said. Despite previous requests, complete transplant data, especially regarding foreign cases, has not been consistently shared with NOTTO. The health ministry urged states and UTs to submit an action-taken report on these instructions within 15 days. A senior official from the Ministry said “the involvement of foreign nationals in these cases adds another layer of complexity, necessitating enhanced monitoring and regulation to prevent exploitation and uphold ethical standards in organ transplantation.”

INDIA coalition Government will return country to higher growth trajectory, claims Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has caused an “unprecedented decline” in worker wages adjusted for price rise and said that an INDIA coalition Government will return the country to a higher growth trajectory. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said multiple data sources, including the Modi government's own official statistics, are unanimous in showing the simple fact that workers can buy less today than they could 10 years ago. A combination of slow wage growth and back-breaking inflation has caused an unprecedented decline in real wages, he said in a statement. “Labour Bureau's Wage Rate Index (Government Data): Between 2014 and 2023, real wages for labourers have stagnated, with clear declines in real wages in Modi-II,” he said. Ramesh also pointed out that the Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Statistics said that under former prime minister Manmohan Singh, real



wages for agricultural labourers grew at 6.8 per cent each year. “Under PM Modi, real wages for agricultural labourers declined by -1.3 per cent each year,” he said. “Periodic Labour Force Survey Series (Government Data): Average real earnings over time have stagnated between 2017 and 2022 across all employment types - salaried workers, casual workers, and self-employed workers,” he said in a statement. Citing Center for Labour Research and Action data, Ramesh said real wages of brick kiln workers have stagnated or declined between 2014 and 2022. Brick kilns involve intensive labour and are a low-paying work of last resort for India's

poorest, he pointed out. “Stagnant wages underpin the economy's poor performance under PM Modi: Real wages for India's people have stagnated since the PM came to office,” the Congress leader said in the statement. “Stagnant real wages have dragged down consumption growth as revealed by the NSSO's Consumption Expenditure Survey which showed a decline in rural consumption for the first time in almost 50 years (and which the Modi Sarkar tried to suppress),” he said. With slowing consumption growth and deepening fear, the private sector no longer has an incentive to invest in the economy, Ramesh argued. “Investment in India has dropped to historic low levels,

threatening our long-term growth: Investment as % of GDP (10-year average) was 33.4% under the UPA but just 28.7% under Modi. FDI as % of GDP rose from 0.8% in 2004 to 1.7% in 2014 under Manmohan Singh's stewardship. It has fallen to just 1.5% of GDP as of 2022,” the statement read. He further pointed out that manufacturing as a percentage of GDP (10-year average) fell from 16.5 per cent in UPA to 14.5 per cent under Modi and the gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) in India, or the total investment in fixed assets, averaged 32 per cent for the 10 years of Manmohan Singh, while the GFCF under Modi has been below 29 per cent for 10 years. “Together, all these factors are dragging down economic growth and causing an unemployment crisis,” Ramesh said. “In the economy, all good things go together. The UPA performed strongly on real wages for workers, private-sector investment, and consumption growth, enabling 7.5% real GDP growth rates, compared to the Modi Sarkar's 5.8% average,” he said in the statement.

Jaro Education announces collaboration with CEC IIT Roorkee

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading higher Edtech firm, Jaro Education, has announced a transformative collaboration with the Continuing Education Centre at IIT Roorkee (CEC IITR), underscoring a shared commitment to inspiring excellence in a technology-driven world. “This collaboration signifies a significant moment in technical education, combining Jaro Education's expertise in business intelligence, marketing, and technology infrastructure with IIT Roorkee's unparalleled academic excellence,” the company said in a statement. Renowned for its excellence in higher technological education, engineering, and research, IIT Roorkee has long been regarded as a beacon of innovation and academic prowess. Consistently ranked among the world's top technological institutions, IIT Roorkee boasts a rich history of shaping the country's technical landscape. Through this strategic alliance, Jaro Education aims to leverage IIT Roorkee's esteemed faculty and cutting-

edge curriculum to offer new-age and holistic technical courses. “CEC IIT Roorkee is proud and excited to announce a collaborative effort with Jaro Education,” said Coordinator of Continuing Education Centre at IIT Roorkee. “This exciting new program leverages the strengths of both institutions to equip learners with the skills they need to flourish in today's technology-driven world. It aligns perfectly with CEC's commitment to providing learners with the knowledge and tools needed to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of our professions,” the institute said in a statement. “We are excited to begin on this journey with top Institute like IIT Roorkee. This partnership presents an extraordinary opportunity to equip working professionals with cutting-edge skills tailored to the dynamic demands of today's rapidly evolving technological landscape. We empower individuals to not just survive, but thrive in the face of relentless disruption,” said CEO at Jaro Education, Ranjita Raman.

New beginnings

The CJI hopes new criminal justice laws will expedite cases lingering on for long years

Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud has lauded the enactment of new criminal justice laws, hailing it as a watershed moment for the nation's judicial organ. The judiciary plays a pivotal role in shaping the legal landscape and the CJI's endorsement of the new laws underscores the profound impact these legislative reforms are poised to have on the Indian society. The recent amendments to criminal justice laws mark a paradigm shift in how the legal system approaches crime, punishment and rehabilitation. With a focus on expediting trials, enhancing victim protection and ensuring fair treatment to all parties involved, these laws signify a departure from archaic colonial practices towards a more equitable and efficient framework. One of the key aspects of the new laws is the emphasis on expeditious trials. Delayed justice has long been a concern in India, with cases hanging in courts for years. At times, individuals awaiting trial may spend more time in jail than they would have if found guilty and sentenced.



This situation can extend for years, if not decades. As of December 2022, 4,34,302 prisoners in Indian jails were under trial, which is 75.8 per cent of the total prison population.

The new criminal laws set out to correct this. By streamlining procedures and introducing stringent timelines for trials, the amendments aim to address this issue and ensure that justice is swift and accessible to all. Moreover, the heightened emphasis on victim protection programmes is a crucial development. Victims of crime often find themselves marginalised within the legal process, facing intimidation, harassment and prolonged trauma. The new laws incorporate provisions

to safeguard their rights, providing them with legal support, counselling services and other forms of assistance to navigate the judicial system with dignity and resilience. Furthermore, the reforms underscore the principle of equality before the law by ensuring fair treatment to all individuals, irrespective of their social status or background. By promoting transparency, accountability and due processes, the amendments seek to instill public confidence in the legal system. The CJI has rightly emphasised the transformative potential of these legislative changes, highlighting their role in fostering a more just and equitable society. However, while the enactment of these laws represents a significant milestone, their success ultimately hinges on their implementation. Effective enforcement, adequate resource allocation and ongoing monitoring are imperative to ensure that the intended objectives are achieved in practice. Nonetheless, a beginning has been made to correct the existing anomalies. Moreover, the journey towards a more equitable criminal justice system is an ongoing process that requires continuous evaluation and refinement. As societal dynamics evolve and new challenges emerge, it is essential to remain adaptive and responsive, constantly seeking ways to enhance the effectiveness and fairness of the legal framework.

PICTALK

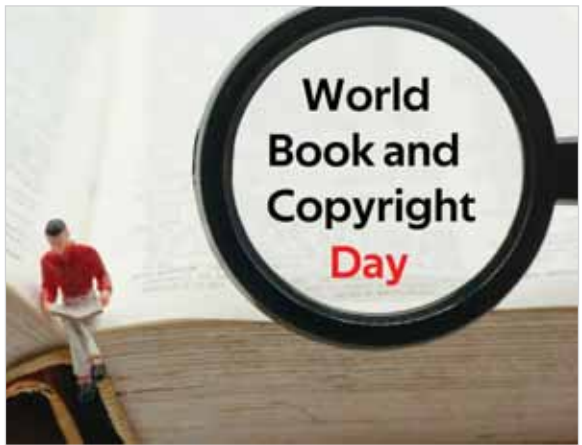


Students celebrate their success after the declaration of Uttar Pradesh Board 10th and 12th class results, in Noida PTI

Celebrating World Book and Copyright Day

From serving as conduits of wisdom and imagination to safeguarding cultural heritage, books play a vital role in shaping our collective consciousness

Books have long served as companions to humanity, bridging the present with the past and future through a rich tapestry of historical narratives and fiction. Each book, a product of its time, reflects the sociocultural nuances prevalent in the society of its era. They serve as invaluable archives, documenting the thoughts, experiences and ideas of past generations, offering us a well-spring of wisdom to draw from and learn. By delving into literature spanning different epochs, we glean insights into the beliefs, values and perspectives of our predecessors, acting as conduits for the transmission of ideas across generations and cultures. Moreover, books kindle the flames of imagination, inspiring us to envision and strive for the seemingly impossible. As repositories of knowledge, wisdom and creativity, books provide solace in solitude and guidance in uncertainty. A singularly remarkable tome possesses the power to transport us to distant realms, broadening our horizons and fueling our imaginations. They serve as windows to diverse societies and cultures,



offering immersive experiences that transcend geographical boundaries. Whether through captivating novels or enlightening travelogues, books possess the remarkable ability to transport us to unexplored territories, fostering empathy and understanding. In the realm of creativity and innovation, books serve as catalysts, igniting the flames of imagination and propelling us towards new frontiers. They enable us to visualise and conceptualise in ways that transcend the limitations of our physical reality. Moreover, in the preservation

of cultural heritage, books play an indispensable role, in safeguarding languages, traditions and values for posterity. By recording historical events, traditions and societal norms, they provide invaluable insights into the tapestry of human civilization, ensuring that our cultural legacy endures through the ages. Yet, as we navigate the digital age, the landscape of literature undergoes profound transformations. The advent of e-books and interactive digital formats ushers in new possibilities, offering enhanced reading experiences enriched with augmented reality, virtu-

al reality and artificial intelligence. However, amidst this digital revolution, the sanctity of copyright laws faces unprecedented challenges. Rampant piracy and unauthorised distribution of digital copies undermine the rights of authors and publishers, necessitating renewed efforts to uphold intellectual property rights. Hence, on April 23rd, World Book and Copyright Day, under the auspices of UNESCO, serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring power of books and the imperative to uphold copyright laws. This year's theme, "Read Your Way," encourages individuals to celebrate the joy of reading while fostering awareness about the importance of respecting intellectual property rights. As we commemorate this day, let us reaffirm our commitment to preserving the legacy of literature and honouring the contributions of literary luminaries past and present.

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



BIJU DHARAMAPALAN

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

Iran-Israel: On the brink of war or hype



NISHIKANT OJHA

Iran's attack and Israel's retaliation threaten to reshape the established rules of engagement and have the potential to destabilise the region

Iran launched a significant assault on Israel during the night of April 13-14, deploying 300 drones and missiles from its territory towards Israeli territories, including Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the southern Negev. This bold action marks an unprecedented event since Israel's founding in 1948.

The attack on Israel by Iran was a direct response to an airstrike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, on April 1, which Iran accuses Israel of carrying out. This assault resulted in the deaths of sixteen individuals, including two Revolutionary Guards generals. Iran's drone and missile assault on Israel, lasting several hours, has reshaped the established rules of engagement between the two nations and heightened tensions in the West Asia, potentially paving the way for a broader conflict with destabilising effects on the region. The strike on Damascus was viewed as a significant Israeli action against Iranian interests in Syria, surpassing previous incidents. Iran had been issuing warnings of retaliatory actions against Israel following an earlier airstrike that destroyed Iran's consulate in Syria, which was seen as a breach of diplomatic conventions.

Iran justified its actions by citing Article 51 of the UN Charter, following the Israeli attack on the Iranian Embassy in Damascus. The drone attack was interpreted as a message from Tehran to Tel Aviv. Despite refraining from officially declaring it as an "Act of War," Tehran's response aimed to prevent being dragged into a larger conflict while signalling a readiness to retaliate more forcefully to maintain regional deterrence. The targeted strikes on Israel aimed to re-establish Iranian deterrence and highlight a shift in Tehran's approach to risk. By setting new red lines in the conflict with Israel, Iran made it clear that it would take action if Israel's actions against Iran and its allies persisted. While some may perceive the attack as a failure due to Israel's successful interception of Iranian drones and missiles, a more severe strike using precision-guided ballistic missiles could have inflicted



greater harm on Israel with less time to react.

In simpler terms, if Iran truly intended to harm Israel, they would have kept their plans secret and employed more powerful weapons to catch Israel off guard. By providing advance notice and employing less effective tactics, it seems like Iran was issuing a warning rather than seeking to inflict serious damage. It's akin to saying, "If you cross the line, there will be serious consequences in the future."

In a similar fashion, Israel also retaliated with quadcopter strikes with little damage to Iran. A warning for warning if you like. Regarding India's stance, which maintains strategic relationships with both Iran and Israel, it finds itself walking a diplomatic tightrope due to its ties with both nations. India has a longstanding partnership with Iran, with Tehran being a major supplier of crude oil despite challenges from Western sanctions. The Chabahar Port serves as a crucial gateway for Indian goods to Afghanistan and Central Asia, given Pakistan's restrictions on land transit. India also has robust defence and security ties with Israel, which supported India during the Kargil War and is a leading supplier of military equipment. Trade between India and Israel has grown to approximately \$7.5 billion.



THE GAZA CONFLICT IS IMPACTING BOTH BIDEN'S AND TRUMP'S POLITICAL PROSPECTS. BIDEN FACES CHALLENGES WITH VOTERS SYMPATHETIC TO PALESTINIANS, WHO HAVE EXPRESSED DISCONTENT WITH HIS GAZA POLICY BY VOTING 'UNCOMMITTED' IN DEMOCRATIC PRIMARIES

During Italy's presidency of the G7, leaders are expected to jointly urge Israel to show restraint following an unprecedented attack by Iran over the weekend, which involved numerous drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles aimed at the Jewish State.

The United States, Britain and several European Union nations have proposed expanding existing sanctions against Iran due to its involvement in Russia's conflict in Ukraine, with a focus on restricting drone and missile transfers to Iran. The dividing line isn't merely between Iran and Israel or Ukraine and Russia; rather, it lies within the emerging power dynamics of these two central regions.

The Gaza conflict is impacting both Biden and Trump's political prospects. Biden faces challenges with voters sympathetic to Palestinians, who have expressed discontent with his Gaza policy by voting "uncommitted" in Democratic primaries, potentially leading to decreased voter turnout in the upcoming presidential election. Biden's stance on the conflict puts him in a difficult position, balancing support for Netanyahu to maintain pro-Israeli voter support while avoiding alienating progressive Democrats. If Trump returns to office, it could disrupt Western grand strategy, especially concerning support for

Netanyahu's Gaza approach and relations with European allies. The impact of the recent hostilities on the U.S. president's approach remains uncertain. Israel has shown mixed reactions, reopening a Gaza crossing and participating in ceasefire negotiations while also indicating intentions to invade areas like Rafah. Biden's success in brokering a peace deal would align with his grand strategy, but achieving a temporary ceasefire is just the initial step in a complex process. Prolonged conflict in the West Asia could significantly complicate broader Western geopolitical goals. Iran is one of the most heavily armed States in the area, boasting a sizable standing army of around 5,80,000 personnel and possessing an estimated stockpile of 3,000 ballistic missiles, as indicated by Western assessments. Despite this military capability, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, has emphasized in the past six months during the Gaza conflict that Iran seeks to avoid being drawn into a broader confrontation. So, Iran is not willing to go to war, but it also remains prepared for any kind of conflict if provoked.

(The writer is an eminent expert on counter-terrorism in West Asia and advisor to cyber and aerospace Security; Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CLIMATE'S CAPRICIOUS FURY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "India Battles Volatile and Unpredictable Weather", published on April 21, this is my response. The Indian Meteorological Department's promising forecast of above-normal monsoon rainfall offers a glimmer of hope for agriculture and water resources. However, amidst this optimism, lies the harsh reality of erratic weather wreaking havoc across the nation. India's climate resembles a rollercoaster ride, with unpredictable twists affecting lives from Uttar Pradesh to Kerala. The recent contrast of Delhi's moderate cold one day to record-breaking warmth the next epitomises the volatility of regional climates. Rambha Devi, an 80-year-old, reflects on humanity's disregard for nature. She witnesses nature's retaliation through extreme weather: scorching heat waves, torrential rains and unpredictable storms, disrupting lives and livelihoods. Farmers like Ramesh Tiwari and Priya share tales of crop destruction, leaving families struggling. Dr. Mrutyunjay Mohapatra warns of increased heavy rainfall events, exacerbating challenges. As the world faces climate extremes, proactive measures are crucial. Marginalised communities are particularly vulnerable, emphasising the urgent need for climate resilience. Vaibhav Chaturvedi underscores the necessity for immediate action to mitigate the compounded impacts of climate change.

Aarav Patel | Mumbai

EDUCATION EVOLUTION

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Transformative trends in India's higher education", published on April 20, this is my response. India's higher education landscape is experiencing a significant evolution spurred by policy reforms and technological advancements. Initiatives like the New Education Policy and increased FDI signal a shift towards innovation and global competitiveness. The burgeoning market size, coupled with a vast network of institutions, underscores the sector's importance in shaping the country's future.

Political manoeuvrings



Apropos the news article, "Rahul Gandhi holds on to Wayanad despite speculation", published on April 20, this is my response. The dynamics of political alliances and rivalries in Kerala reveal a complex web of strategies and ambitions. Rahul Gandhi's decision to contest from Wayanad underscores the importance of securing a stronghold in the region, amidst shift-

ing allegiances and ideological battles. The CPI(M)'s resentment towards the Congress, softened by tactical considerations, reflects the pragmatic nature of politics. While public posturing may suggest discord, behind the scenes, strategic alliances are being nurtured to counter a common adversary—the BJP. A K Antony's nuanced silence on CPI(M) candidates speaks volumes about the intricate history of alliances and betrayals in Kerala politics. His past affiliations highlight the fluidity of loyalties, where former foes become temporary allies in pursuit of power. As Kerala gears up for future elections, the blurred lines between secularism and opportunism will continue to shape the political landscape, reminding us that in politics, alliances are often forged in the crucible of expediency.

Vikram Singh | Delhi

Digitalisation, accelerated by the pandemic, offers opportunities for wider access and skill development. The changing course preferences reflect a demand for interdisciplinary learning and industry-relevant skills. EdTech's rise democratises education but requires addressing digital disparities. Ensuring quality amidst diversification necessitates robust regulatory frameworks. The push for internationalisation promises to enrich educational practices and boost the economy. As India navigates these changes, smart scaling is imperative, ensuring not just expansion but also excellence and inclusivity. This journey towards a globally competitive education system holds the promise of empowering every student for a brighter tomorrow.

Rajiv Mishra | Lucknow

BURDENS AND LIBERATION

Madam —Apropos the news article, "Mind, the key to Hidden Fortune", published on April 20, this is my response. The story of the woman and her son, burdened by past debts and future anxieties, resonates deeply with the human struggle for liber-

ation. There's a narrative of hidden treasures, not just of material wealth but of profound lessons on the nature of existence. In their quest to protect their riches from creditors, they unwittingly ensnared themselves in a cycle of fear and secrecy, failing to embrace the present moment. The tragedy of their lives underscores a universal truth: true freedom lies in being untethered from the shackles of past regrets and future uncertainties. Through the lens of Buddhist wisdom, the narrative acquires a timeless relevance. The Zen Master's insight into the nature of the mind echoes the imperative of being anchored in the present. Similarly, the young monk's realisation that he is already where he seeks to be symbolises the attainment of true happiness through mindfulness. In essence, the story serves as a poignant reminder that true wealth lies not in external possessions but in the liberation of the mind from the constraints of time.

Rohan Desai | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF FOMO

In the age of social media, the Fear Of Missing Out has become rampant



SHAINY SHARMA

Ever found individuals befuddling when they see photos or updates from parties, gatherings, or events they were not invited to or witness their colleagues or peers receiving accolades, promotions or career advancements... Well such situations may evoke FOMO in individuals who feel stagnant or unproductive in comparison. "FOMO," or the Fear of Missing Out, arises from a perceived discrepancy between one's own experiences and the experiences of others. Whether online or offline, the fear of missing out can exert a powerful influence on individuals emotions, behaviours and decision-making processes, thereby highlighting the need for self-awareness and coping mechanisms to navigate the pressures of modern life. Now a days it is a prevalent phenomenon among Generation Z (Gen Z) and other demographics. It can be a double-edged sword, driving ambition while fostering anxiety. There is no denying the fact that Gen Z have grown up in a digital age which is characterized by constant connectivity and instant access to information promoting products, experiences and lifestyles that appear glamorous and desirable. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, X and Facebook have become integral part of their daily lives, shaping their perceptions, behaviours and social interactions in profound ways. Various studies and research too have consistently shown a strong association between social media usage and FOMO among this generation, the consequences of which extends beyond mere discomfort and impact mental health, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. Individuals plagued by FOMO due to the constant exposure to curated content and the pressure to maintain a certain online image may experience increased stress, anxiety, depression and feeling of loneliness as they constantly compare their lives to others' highlight reels.



To mitigate the negative effects of FOMO on Gen Z, it becomes utmost important to promote digital literacy, encourage healthy social media habits and foster offline connections and experiences. Now this can include multiple practices such as practicing mindfulness or journaling that promote gratitude and positive thinking. Setting boundaries for screen time and cultivating meaningful relationships and activities that are not dependent on social media validation. Additionally, fostering a supportive and inclusive online community can help alleviate feelings of FOMO by emphasizing authenticity, empathy and acceptance. Not only this but practicing the art of Digital Detox will allow individuals to reconnect with themselves and prioritize meaningful offline interactions and relationships. This will result in emphasizing the importance of quality over quantity when it comes to social connections and encourage face-to-face communication, genuine conversations and shared experiences with their friends and loved ones. Also, encouraging them to engage in activities such as sports, art, music or dance will not only provide opportunities for personal growth and development but also reduces dependence on social media for validation and self-worth. Practicing such activities will encourage the Generation Z to seek support from trusted friends, family members or mental health professionals if they're struggling with feelings of FOMO or its effects on their well-being. Remember, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) raises stress hormones, inflammation and dysregulates an individual's nervous system. One needs to learn to self-love and be protective of their time and energy. In the hyper connected world, it does take courage to be with own thoughts so, try to be one...

(The write is an educator; views are personal)

With power freebies, debt comes calling

UTTAM GUPTA

The core dilemma persists: How to prevent debt while ensuring universal electricity access? This issue entails policy intricacies and power sector reforms



In an interview, Union Power Minister RK Singh revealed he has been telling States that electricity is not free. "If any State wants to give free power to any category of people, they can go ahead and do so, but you have to pay for it". Singh's exhortation to the States assumes significance in the backdrop of a spate of announcements by the latter to give free electricity to certain consumers which affect the viability of power distribution companies or discoms (they buy power from generating companies or gencos and supply to the consumers). He argues "like any other commodity, generation and distribution of electricity involves cost and if a State is to provide it for free to a section of consumers, it also needs to have finances to pay the genco. If the genco isn't paid, electricity will not be produced in the first place". But, there can't be any compromise on the generation of electricity as any shortfall could lead to a stoppage of economic activity. To meet the surge in demand (due to the impending summer), the Union Government has invoked the provisions of the Electricity Act (2003) under Section 11 asking gas-based gencos and thermal plants based on imported coal to increase generation even if it entails extra cost. That is the reaction to meeting incremental demand. How could it tolerate massive cuts in generation inevitable when gencos are not paid? So, States must ensure that they are paid. When pressurized, the concerned States borrow money to pay the gencos resulting in a debt trap. For instance, in the first two years of the AAP Government, Punjab borrowed as much as Rs 47,000 crore adding to the already high debt of the State. How can the States avoid debt trap? The Electricity Act (2003) and the Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Power require the discoms to fix the charge (or tariff) on electricity supplied to consumers in a manner such that the average revenue realization (ARR) from its sale is equal to the average cost of supply (it includes the cost of purchase, transmission and distribution), or ACS. The discoms are



CURRENTLY, ALMOST 95 PER CENT OF POWER CONSUMERS IN PUNJAB AVAIL OF SUBSIDIES. A MAJOR PORTION OF WHICH ISN'T EVEN REIMBURSED TO DISCOMS

free to decide the modalities of how this is to be ensured subject to approval by the concerned State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs). Ideally, the discoms should charge from 'all' consumers a tariff equal to the total cost of supply say Rs 'X' crore divided by the number of units. But, they don't follow this principle. They charge less from certain consumers especially households (HHs) and farmers. For instance, in Delhi, the tariff applicable to HHs consuming 200 units a month is Rs 3 per unit which is about half of the ACS. Including a plethora of levies adding to 44.6 per cent, the shortfall comes to Rs 4.3 per unit. For HHs consuming between 201 and 400 units, the tariff is Rs 4.5 per unit implying an under-recovery of Rs 1.5 per unit. Including the levies, this comes to Rs 2.2 per unit. These under-recoveries are cross-subsidized by charging more from industries and business establishments for which the tariff can go up to a high of Rs 16 per unit. The low tariff charged from the target consumers (read: HHs consuming up to 400 units a month) is nothing but a freebie given by political parties. But, it goes unnoticed as the State exchequer doesn't have to pay for these under-recoveries. The industries that are made to foot the bill can't even murmur as discom being the sole supplier of electricity, they have no other option. But, political parties don't want the target HHs to even pay this small tariff. In Delhi, the AAP Government tells discoms not to raise any bill on HHs consuming up to 200 units. Likewise, in Punjab, consumption of up to 300 units a month by an HH is free. This extra under-recovery of Rs 4.3 per unit in Delhi (applicable tariff Rs 3 per unit plus 44.6 per cent levies) has to be reimbursed by the State to the dis-

com. But, most States don't reimburse or do it partially and after considerable delay. This leads to losses of discoms. The availability of free power also drives people to manipulate their reported consumption. For instance, in Punjab, an HH consuming 900 units a month, gets three meters installed to keep consumption of each under 300 units thereby ensuring zero bills. Reportedly, more than 100,000 meters have been bifurcated or trifurcated enabling even high-end consumers to avail of the free bonanza. As for farmers who are eligible for free power in the State, they report even consumption for running multiple ACs in their homes under farming head thereby avoiding any payment. As a consequence, currently, almost over 95 per cent of power consumers in Punjab avail of subsidies, a major portion of which isn't even reimbursed to discoms. Discoms' losses also increase due to AT&C (aggregate technical and commercial) losses - a sophisticated nomenclature for power theft. According to Singh, AT&C's losses used to be high at 27 per cent. In Punjab, reportedly, an overwhelming share of electricity that leaves the generating stations/power dispatch centres remains unaccounted for. The discoms have funded these losses by borrowings from banks and other financial institutions (FIs) apart from keeping bills pending. At the end of FY 2021-22, their total debt was Rs 620,000 crore. In June 2022, they owed about Rs 1,40,000 crore to Gencos and transmission companies (transcos). The Center has taken several measures to force discoms to clear their dues. The late payment surcharge (LPS) Rules, implemented in 2022 made it mandatory for discoms to clear their legacy dues as existing on June 3, 2022, in a time-bound manner in 12 EMIs with the

benefit of non-applicability of the LPS after its implementation date. The rules are also provided for time-bound clearance of current dues failing, which will attract a power supply cut. This has resulted in legacy dues decreasing from Rs 1,40,000 crore in June 2022 to around Rs 70,000 crore in July 2023 and further down to Rs 40,000 crore currently. Under the 'Reforms-Linked, Result-Based Scheme for Distribution' (RLRBSD) launched in July 2021, the Centre has undertaken a massive investment of Rs 300,000 crore to improve the reliability and quality of the power supply and enhance the efficiency of discoms. It has compulsory pre-paid and smart metering components to be implemented across the power supply chain, including in about 250 million households. As a result, AT&C losses decreased from 22.32 per cent during 2020-21 to 13.5 per cent during 2022-23. However, according to the Minister, today power pilferage is 15 per cent. On this much electricity, discoms get 'nil' revenue. On a much larger percentage of power used by target HHs and farmers, the States promise to pay on their behalf. But, they don't pay in full and whatever payment comes, it is delayed. Even for making payments, the States borrow money. And, the vicious cycle continues. It won't end unless discoms are unshackled from State controls and given the freedom to decide their pricing and distribution policies. If, States want certain HHs and farmers to get power free, let them give the money directly to them. This reform will also pave the way for the deregulation of electricity distribution, more options for consumers to source their needs and a reduction in tariffs.

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

Govt schemes are transforming lives in rural Rajasthan

Loyara village serves as a microcosm of resilience and progress, fuelled by education and community empowerment

We typically receive our ration between the 1st and 3rd of each month. If it's ever delayed, my grandchildren inquire why we haven't received it from the ration dealer. The younger generation in my household is quite aware. They've made sure that all the necessary ration-related documents are in order, ensuring a seamless supply. Also, my pension now arrives punctually. Thanks to various Government schemes, these youngsters are reaping benefits. They educate themselves about these schemes and then proactively apply for them at the Panchayat office," shares 76-year-old Amba Bai, residing in Loyara village within



MOHAN LAL GAMETI

Udaipur district, Rajasthan. Situated just 8 km from Udaipur, this village falls within the Badgaon tehsil. With a population of approximately 2500, the majority belong to the Scheduled Tribe community. Alongside the OBC Dangi community, there are various other castes. The village reflects the influence of its proximity to Udaipur city,

evident in the transition of most houses to concrete structures. However, economically, the village still grapples with challenges. While individuals from OBC and general castes are involved in agriculture, trade, and animal husbandry, the majority of male members from the Scheduled Tribes work as labourers in marble factories surrounding Udaipur city. Some also engage in daily wage labour. Meanwhile, women in these households contribute to the family's income by working as domestic helpers in affluent homes within the city. Economically, Loyara village may face challenges, but socially and educationally, it has seen significant

development. Consequently, awareness about Government schemes has risen among the villagers, leading to increased benefits. The younger generation in the village has embraced education, with even Scheduled Tribe boys and girls pursuing studies up to the 12th grade. This educational advancement has also fostered greater awareness within the community. For instance, the Public Distribution System (PDS), part of the Food Security scheme, has been embraced in the village. Shiv Lal, aged 45, attests to this positive change. Despite working in a marble factory in Bengaluru after completing his 12th grade, he remains well-informed about



Government schemes benefiting his family and the village. He recalls, "In the past, the ration dealer would often deny us ration with flimsy excuses. But now, thanks to education and awareness, such actions are no longer tolerated. Whenever we face ration shortages, we raise our concerns and seek information from the Panchayat office. Even in my absence,

my children handle these matters diligently, ensuring the timely arrival of our ration." Taru Bai, a respected elder at 70, sheds light on the changing face of education and Government support in Loyara village. "Back in my day, girls rarely pursued education," she recalls. "But now, over half of the girls in our community are completing high school, and they're bringing back valuable information about Government programs. Their schooling has even helped smooth out the process for my pension, as they handle all the paperwork." Looking back, Taru Bai remembers, "We used to hear about Government schemes, but getting clear

information was a challenge, even after asking around at the Panchayat. But things are different now; the younger generation knows exactly how to navigate these programs and fill out the necessary forms." However, amidst these educational strides, economic challenges persist. "The majority of the Scheduled Tribe families in the village are economically very weak. Most families do not have enough money to start a business, nor do they have enough land to do farming or vegetable production. Although the new generation has started studying, only a few people from this community are in Government jobs. But I think as the trend of educa-

tion and awareness has increased among children, they will also soon start getting recruited in Government jobs." In the same village, there is also the family of Mangi Lal and Tulsiram, who are deprived of the benefits of the PDS. Last year, the ration status of Mangi Lal's family which consists of seven members, was changed from BPL to APL. As a result, they stopped receiving ration. Similarly, Tulsiram mentions that due to missing documents, their family is unable to access ration benefits. For this, they've been in constant communication with the e-Mitra.

(The author is a social worker from Rajasthan; views are personal)

Sena (UBT) refuses to remove words Jai Bhavani, Hindu from party song

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday joined issue with the Election Commission of India by refusing to remove words “Jai Bhavani” and “Hindu” from the song released by his party to popularise its new symbol “Mashaal” (flaming torch) for the Lok Sabha polls. Responding to a notice issued by the ECO for removal of words “Hindu” and “Jai Bhavani” from the party’s promotional song, Uddhav said that the removal of “Jai Bhavani” from the song was an “insult” to Maharashtra and his party would not remove the word from the song. “The words ‘Jai Bhavani’ and

‘Jai Shivaji’ are slogans in the song. The ECI is asking to remove the word ‘Jai Bhavani’ from the song. But, we will not remove the song ‘Jai Bhavani’ from the song,” Uddhav said, while addressing a news conference at his residence “Matoshri” in north-west Mumbai. “The directive by the ECI is an insult to the self-respect and Goddess of Maharashtra. The directive smacks of political motives. I did not realise there could be so much hate towards Maharashtra’s deity Bhavani,” he said. “Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj founded Hindavi Swaraj with the blessings of goddess Tulja Bhavani. We are not asking for votes in the name of the goddess or Hindu religion. This is an insult and will not be tol-

erated. We will continue the practice of raising slogans ‘Jai Bhavani’ and ‘Jai Shivaji’ at our public meetings,” he said. On the directive by the ECI to his party for removal of the word “Hindu” from his party’s promotional song, the Sena (UBT) chief said: “After we presented the entire song brought to popularise our party symbol ‘Mashaal’, the ECI has asked to remove the word ‘Hindu’ from the song. This is not acceptable to us.” “If the ECI takes action against us, it will have to tell us what it did when Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who while campaigning for the Karnataka Assembly elections, had asked people to say Jai Bajrang Bali and press the button on EVMs. Amit Shah had told people to vote for the BJP



to get Ram Lalla darshan for free in Ayodhya,” Uddhav said. The Sena (UBT) chief wondered if the election laws had been changed and if it was okay now for the political

parties to ask for votes in the name of religion. “The ECI has not responded to our letter and the reminder we sent. In the reminder, we had said if the laws have been changed, we will also say ‘Har

Har Mahadev’ at our election rallies,” Uddhav said. It may be recalled that on November 16, 2023, the Shiv Sena (UBT) chief had accused the ECI of practising “double standards” while implementing the model code of conduct for the poll, to favour the BJP. Citing how his late Sena supremo Bal Thackeray was disenfranchised in 1995 for six years for his communal speeches in the 1986 State Assembly by-polls, Uddhav had demanded to know if the ECI – which had acted against his father for “pro-Hindutva” campaign -- had changed its rules in acting those violating the model code of conduct. In his criticism of the ECI, Uddhav had said that the ECI had failed to act against Prime

Minister Narendra Modi for his appeal to the voters in the recent Karnataka Assembly polls to “say Bajrangbali ki jai while voting.” Uddhav had also drawn the attention of the ECI to the statement made in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly polls by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who had gone to town, promising the voters that if the BJP was voted back to power in Madhya Pradesh it “would take all the voters in the state” free of cost to Ayodhya for darshan at the upcoming Lord Ram temple there. In a letter shot off to the ECI, the Sens (UBT) had alleged that the double standards applied by the Commission were “intriguing” yet “understandable” since it is publicly perceived to be in alignment

Once diehard Mamata fans, these farmers feel betrayed now

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■
KRISHNAGAR/MAJHDIA

Framers of Palasgachi are a politically dejected lot. They have lost faith in all political outfits. Their only and last hope was Mamata Banerjee but even she has betrayed them. Their only ray of hope is the Calcutta High Court which has for the time being prevented the State Forest Department Government from evicting them. Ask from Ramjivan Sardar, Palash Mali, Asfakur and many others like them and they will tell you about their woes. These are not their real names because they fear persecution from the local Trinamool Congress dons who would “impose fines on us and take away our cattle for opening our mouth in the media.” The Government gave them notice of eviction in the name of preservation and develop-



ment of forest land “but we know they will have this land for the land sharks who will open fisheries or poultry ... we vote for Trinamool Congress but we cannot give them money ... so we are tortured like this.” “We have been voting for Didi ever since she started her Singur movement in 2006 ... we went in hordes to Singur and spent several nights in dharna alongside her ... then she was voted to power against an oppressive CPI(M) ... but after that it was the same old thing ... One who goes to Lanka becomes a Ravan,” says

Asfakur. About 150 families inhabit the area that falls under the Bahadurpur beat of Krishnagar Forest Range. “Our ancestors have been living here for the past more than 100 years ... maybe before the Independence ... not Government, neither the Congress, nor the CPI(M) evicted us ... but now the Forest Department has served eviction notice through the local panchayat,” Sardar says adding repeated letters to the District Magistrate, local MLA, MP and even Abhishek Banerjee have yielded no result. “Then we even wrote to the Chief Minister in the address of her Nabanna (State Secretariat) office but no response came ... now as we were confirmed that no one stands for the poor we moved the Calcutta High Court which has for the time being prevented them from evicting us ... but we don’t

know till how long this will continue,” says another farmer. The High Court has directed the Government to grant them land Patta under the Recognition of Forest Rights Act. Though the farmers are filling up the requisite forms to secure landed rights they are skeptic about the Government’s ideas. “We don’t have more money to take the battle till the Supreme Court if the Government preferred to fight further up... or if the government finds out some new ways to harass us,” they say. “Now you say, we have no jobs because that is stolen by the ministers’ men ... we don’t have money to do business ... we only had this small bighas of land ... if this goes then where do we go,” asks Mali an old man who cannot see without his number glasses and is dependent on his son who in turn is dependent on cultivating a couple of bighas of land.

All parties worried about lower voting percentage

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Most political parties in Bengal are anxious about the comparatively lower percentage of voting in the first round of elections that took place on April 19 in three constituencies of Cooch Behar, Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri. According to Election Commission sources the three constituencies of North Bengal have witnessed about 81.91 percent polling. This is about 1.5 percent less than the voting percentage in 2019 when about 83.66 percent voters cast their votes. While Jalpaiguri recorded highest 83.66 percent voting, Cooch Behar witnessed 82.17 percent voters turning out to vote. Alipurduar politically the coolest of the three seats saw 79.76 voters exercising their franchise. In 2019 Cooch Behar saw 84 percent polling, Alipurduar witnessed about 84 percent voters’ turnout in Jalpaiguri the figure was 86.51 percent.



While polling in the vicinity of 80-81 percent is quite high by the north Indian standards in Bengal it is quite on the lower side and is a cause of concern for the politicians and psephologists. While all the parties publicly claimed that the lower percentage of votes meant that it was going in their favour privately most “Lesser percentage of votes may indicate three things,” BK

Haldar a professor of political science said. “First it could be because due to stricter security bandobast 2 percent bogus voters were filtered out ... or it could also be that voters remained indoors because of heat ... but that may not be the plausible reason because unlike in South Bengal there is no heat-wave like condition in North Bengal which is adjacent to Himalayan Terai region ... the third reason

could be disinterest among the people because they do not want to vote,” he said. However a senior journalist at Siliguri said, “both the BJP and the TMC are a tad worried about the possible rise in the vote percentage of the Left which though will not win is sure to hurt either of the sides ... this is the reason why we saw maximum booth capture by the TMC men the Left bastions in Jalpaiguri.” No Left leader would choose to react. The TMC on the other hand said that the fall of vote percentage was because the infighting in BJP particularly in Alipurduar where the party preferred a sitting MLA Manoj Tigga to the outgoing MP John Barla. “Can you imagine a drop of 5 percent ... it means that Barla has played a game,” a local TMC leader Arup Dasgupta said adding TMC is winning two out of three seats denying the general perception that his party has already suffered a defeat in this area.

Raesi LS seat: Stage set for clash between BJP, Congress

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

After witnessing a close fight in the Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha seat the stage is set for another round of clash between the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) and the Congress party candidate on the Jammu Reasi Lok Sabha seat in the second phase of polling on April 26. 22 candidates are in the fray and an estimated 17.80 lakh voters are eligible to vote in the constituency spread across Jammu, Samba, and Reasi and one segment of Rajouri district. The straight contest is between the two-time sitting Member of Parliament Jugal Kishore Sharma of BJP and the working President of the J&K Congress unit Raman Bhalla. Jagdish Raj of Bahujan Samaj Party and Advocate Ankur Sharma of Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal are the two other prominent faces trying their luck in the poll arena. After witnessing a healthy voter turnout in the Udhampur-Doda Lok Sabha seat, upbeat Congress workers have intensified their campaign to woo



the disgruntled voters across Jammu. The Congress party candidate Raman Bhalla, who is also contesting for the second time from the same seat, is focusing more on the unemployed youth, recruitment scams, border residents, and farmers’ community to expose the tall claims of BJP that they have transformed the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir after the Abrogation of Article 370 in the last five years. The Congress party is consistently raising the issue of loss of statehood, removal of special status under Article 370, and the failure of the BJP to hold an

assembly, panchayat, and urban local bodies elections. On the other hand, BJP MP Jugal Kishore counters the charge by claiming the Narendra Modi-led BJP government at the centre has taken several historic initiatives with the abrogation of Article 370, thus giving acceleration to the ongoing mega projects of development. Sharma claims the centre has ensured the restoration of peace, eradication of terrorism, ceasefire along the borders and empowerment of the deprived sections of the society. So far BJP has organized only one big rally in Jammu.

Majority of women candidates in Maharashtra LS polls carry political family tag

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

Politicians of various hues appear to have taken the proverb “Charity begins at home” seriously when it comes to women empowerment in electoral politics. Or else how do you explain the fact that a majority of the women in the Maharashtra Lok Sabha poll fray are related to either political dynasties or families? For instance, the fiercest political battle being waged in Maharashtra is between prominent women members of the Pawar family in Baramati constituency where NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar’s daughter and three-time MP Supriya Sule is taking on deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar’s wife Sunetra Pawar of the NCP (AP). Elsewhere in the neighbouring Marathwada, Sunetra Pawar’s cousin Padmasinh Patil’s daughter-in-law Archana Patil of the NCP (AP) is battling it out with Shiv Sena (UBT) nominee

Omprakash Raje Nimbalkar, who is the cousin of her husband and BJP MLA Rana Jagjitsinh Patil, at Osmanabad. In Beed constituency of the same region, Pankaja Munde, who is the daughter of late senior BJP leader Gopinath Munde and niece of late BJP leader Pramod Mahajan, is taking on Bajrang Sonawane of the NCP (SP). In Solapur (SC) constituency of western Maharashtra, Maharashtra’s former Chief Minister and ex-Union Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde’s daughter and three-time MLA Praniti Shinde is contesting against BJP’s MLA Ram Satpute. In Amravati constituency of Vidarbha region, sitting Independent MP Navneet Rana -- who is contesting on a BJP ticket this time around -- is the wife of three-time Independent MLA from Badnera Ravi Rana. Navneet Rana is locking horns with Balwant Wankhede, the Daryapur MLA..

Bihar ravaged by drugs...

From Page 1

Vishnu remarked that the entire State machinery, political parties and their leaders including the current contestants on Lok Sabha elections are aware this kind of liquor and drugs mechanism in the State but they do not pay heed and majority of the families are under this influence in some of their either way. Despite of prohibition implemented the State is facing hooch tragedies like reported in recent times from Muzaffarpur, Gopalganj, Bettiah, Samastipur, Vaishali, Nawada and even Chief Minister Nitish Kumar’s home district Nalanda. The Nitish-led Bihar Government oscillating between the BJP-led NDA-alliance and the RJD-led Mahagathbandhan has been facing a barrage of criticism from the Opposition ranks of the time over poor implementation of the liquor ban in the State. The liquor ban was enforced in Bihar in April 2016 when Nitish took over as the CM with the support of the RJD and the Congress a move that was appreciated for couple of years.

Kerala poll campaign...

From Page 1

He said the CPI(M)-led LDF would sweep the election in Kerala and emerge as a force that decides who would be the next Prime Minister of the country. Karat and his spouse repeated the same in the rallies they addressed. The District Election Officer in Kozhikode suspended four more polling officials for violating the code of conduct while making senior citizens cast their votes. The polling officials have been selected from state government officials who are known for their commitment to the CPI(M). Leaders of both the Congress and the CPI(M) are unanimous in their description

of BJP as communal and fascist force. But Pinarayi Vijayan, party’s Kerala secretary M v Govindan, the trio from Delhi and Congress leaders have issued 100 per cent marks to Muslim League, Welfare Party, SDPI, the banned PFI and the PDP as secular parties. There are 20 seats at stake in Kerala. Chief Minister Vijayan has said that the secularism and pluralism practiced by his party is always ahead of the secularism of Congress. Prime Minister Narendra Modi while speaking to a Malayalam news channel said that the State’s highest political authority and his family are entangled in the gold smuggling case and also in the

monthly pay-off to a private enterprise based in Bangalore. The Gold Smuggling scam has reached the doors of the Chief Minister’s Office and residence, pointed out Modi. On Friday, the colorful Thrissur Pooram annual festival came to a sudden halt at the instance of CPI(M) and some Islamic outfits. Though no reason has been issued by the police to put the Pooram festival on hold, the connoisseurs like Nandakishore and R K Damodaran, well known poet, expressed apprehensions over the development and said that this is a prelude to things that may happen in the eventuality of the CPI(M) win.

India grapples with erratic...

From Page 1 Additionally, below-normal northern hemisphere snow cover extent during the last three months could influence upcoming weather patterns, including the monsoon season. In a press statement, the Odisha Government said all schools, including those run by government, government-aided and private, will remain closed from April 25. The government has also announced morning classes from 6.30 am to 10.30 am in schools for three days from April 22 to April 24. Till 2.30 pm on Sunday, the highest temperature recorded in the state’s Jharsuguda and Keonjhar towns was 43.6 deg C. Six other places have recorded a maximum temperature above 40 deg C. They were Hirakud (41.8 deg C), Rourkela (41.8 deg C), Sambalpur (41.7,

Bhubaneswar (41.6), Chandbali (41.6) and Balasore (40.5 deg C), IMD scientist Umashankar Das said. A study conducted by researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology and the University of Augsburg, which has been published in the Journal of Hydrometeorology, has said that the Indian subcontinent is likely to experience an increasing number of extreme weather events in future. The fertile and densely populated plain around the Indus and Ganges rivers is therefore likely to become a climate change hotspot, which could have severe consequences for several hundred million people, said the study after investigating what was referred to as compound extreme events. “The damage caused by the combination of such weather phenomena is usually especially severe,” said Professor Doctor Harald Kunstmann from the Center of Climate Resilience at the University of Augsburg.

Country punishing Congress for its...

From Page 1

“In this Lok Sabha election, there are twenty five per cent seats in the country where people of this alliance are busy finishing off each other, contesting elections against each other. “If there is so much fighting before the elections, then you can imagine how much more they will fight for the loot after the elections. Can we hand over such a big country to these people?” Modi alleged that the Congress, which ruled for 60 years, had deprived “our mothers and sisters” of even “small things like toilets, gas, electricity, water, bank accounts”. Referring to the rule of the Congress-led UPA, PM Modi alleged that people used to threaten the weak Congress-led government and everyone was busy looting the country. “No one cared about the

prime minister. The government used to run with remote control. A leader of his own party calls a media meeting, tears up an ordinance passed by the cabinet and throws it away. Can the Congress party and its family, a symbol of instability, run the country?” Modi said. Prime Minister Modi said the country does not want the conditions that existed before 2014 to return. He alleged that the previous Congress government in the state committed a scam in the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme and did not allow its work to be completed. “Now our Bhajanlal Rajasthan government has come. It is also investigating the scam. If there was no Congress government here, by now we would have come very close to the target of providing water to every house.”

He said, “We have to take the development of Rajasthan and the country to new heights. I have set out with this resolve. We have to make India the third-largest economic power in the world. We have to make ‘Developed India-Developed Rajasthan’.” “Modi has guaranteed that this sitting in Delhi will bear the expenses of up to Rs 5 lakh for the treatment of elderly persons above 70 years of age in every family. “As a son, it is my responsibility to take care of my parents’ health,” he said There are 25 Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan. The first phase of polling for 12 seats was held on April 19, while the remaining 13 will go to polls in the second phase on April 26. The BJP had swept the state in 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

BJP, AAP political...

From Page 1

In a letter to AIIMS, Sanjay Benival, Director General of Prisons, on Saturday requested the hospital to arrange a senior diabetologist for Kejriwal. Soon after the AAP Ministers’ flip-flop charge, the jail administration said a senior doctor from AIIMS was consulted via video conferencing following a request by the Chief Minister’s wife Sunita Kejriwal. The senior AAP leader said if a diabetic patient measures his sugar, his sugar is increasing very fast and decreasing very fast. That is why if a sugar patient is severely diabetic, then he roams around with glucose, toffee or any other sweet in his pocket. Many times, you must have seen that when a diabetic patient becomes unconscious, people say give him sugar water or glucose so that he can recover. If his sugar level comes up, then he can survive otherwise

he will die. The Tihar administration responded to Bharadwaj’s charge and said appropriate senior specialists from AIIMS provided consultation to Kejriwal through video conference on Saturday. After a 40-minute detailed consultation, Kejriwal was assured that there was no serious concern and was advised to continue with the prescribed medicines, which will be evaluated and reviewed regularly,” a jail official said. The video conference was organised by the Tihar Jail administration on a request by Kejriwal’s wife Sunita Kejriwal. Apart from a senior specialist from the hospital, medical officers of Tihar were also on the call. The AIIMS specialist was provided with a complete record of CGM (Glucose Monitoring Sensor) and details of diet and medicines being taken by Kejriwal. “Neither the

issue of insulin was raised by Kejriwal, nor was it suggested by the doctors,” the official added. At the press conference, however, Bharadwaj reiterated that a “conspiracy” was being hatched to harm Kejriwal in judicial custody. “There are two sides to it. Arvind Kejriwal says he needs insulin and he needs to consult a doctor. He said he wanted to consult his private doctor over a video call. On the other hand, BJP and Tihar Jail are saying that he is okay and doesn’t need insulin. As per them, he’s fine,” the Delhi minister added. However, a note from the LG’s office questioned the Chief Minister “surprisingly” seeking treatment at a private clinic in Telangana, calling it “curious”, and drew attention to the “south Indian liquor cartel that played a key role in framing and execution of the excise policy of the AAP Government.”

Ukrainian and Western leaders laud US aid package

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian and Western leaders welcomed a desperately needed aid package passed by the US House of Representatives, as the Kremlin warned the passage of the bill would “further ruin” Ukraine and cause more deaths. The House swiftly approved \$95 billion in foreign aid for Ukraine, Israel and other US allies in a rare Saturday session as Democrats and Republicans banded together after months of hard-right resistance over

renewed American support for repelling Russia’s invasion. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had warned that his country would lose the war without US funding, said that he was grateful for the decision of US lawmakers. “We appreciate every sign of support for our country and its independence, people and way of life, which Russia is attempting to bury under the rubble,” he wrote on social media site X. “America has demonstrated its leadership since the first days of this war. Exactly this type of

leadership is required to maintain a rules-based international order and predictability for all nations,” he said. The Ukrainian president noted that his country’s “warriors on the front lines” would feel the benefit of the aid package. One such “warrior” is infantry soldier Oleksandr, fighting around Avdiivka, the city in the Donetsk region that Ukraine lost to Russia in February after months of intense combat. “For us it’s so important to have this support from the US and our partners,” Oleksandr told The Associated Press. He did

not give his full name for security reasons. “With this we can stop them and reduce our losses. It’s the first step to have the possibility to liberate our territory.” Ammunition shortages linked to the aid holdup over the past six months have led Ukrainian military commanders to ration shells, a disadvantage that Russia seized on this year — taking the city of Avdiivka and currently inching towards the town of Chasiv Yar, also in the Donetsk region. “The Russians come at us in waves — we become exhaust-

ed, we have to leave our positions. This is repeated many times,” Oleksandr said. “Not having enough ammunition means we can’t cover the area that is our responsibility to hold when they are assaulting us.” In Kyiv, civilians shared their views on the US aid package. “I heard our president officially say that we can lose the war without this help. Thanks very much and yesterday was a great event,” said Kateryna Ruda, 43. Tatyana Ryavchenuk, the wife of a Ukrainian soldier, noted the need for more weapons,

lamenting that soldiers “have nothing to protect us.” “They need weapons, they need gear, they need it. We always need help. Because without help, our enemy can advance further and can be in the center of our city,” the 26-year-old said. Other Western leaders also lauded the aid package. “Ukraine is using the weapons provided by NATO Allies to destroy Russian combat capabilities. This makes us all safer, in Europe & North America,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg wrote on X.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that “Ukraine deserves all the support it can get against Russia”. Her statement was echoed by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who called it “a strong signal in these times.” “We stand with the Ukrainians fighting for their free, democratic and independent country,” Scholz posted on X. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk thanked House Speaker Mike Johnson, while also noting the holdup in Congress. “Better late than too late. And I hope it is not too late for

Ukraine,” he wrote on X. In Russia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the approval of aid to Ukraine “expected and predictable.” The decision “will make the United States of America richer, further ruin Ukraine and result in the deaths of even more Ukrainians, the fault of the Kyiv regime,” Peskov was quoted as saying by Russian news agency Ria Novosti. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also took to social media to speak against the aid package.

Israeli strikes on southern Gaza city of Rafah kill 22, mostly children

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli strikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight killed 22 people, including 18 children, health officials said Sunday, as the United States was on track to approve billions of dollars of additional military aid to its close ally. Israel has carried out near-daily air raids on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million has sought refuge from fighting elsewhere. It has also vowed to expand its ground offensive to the city on the border with Egypt despite international calls for restraint, including from the US. The House of Representatives approved a \$26 billion aid package on Saturday that includes around \$9 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza. The first strike killed a man, his wife and their 3-year-old child, according to the nearby Kuwaiti Hospital, which received the bodies. The woman was pregnant and the doctors managed to save the baby, the hospital said. The second strike killed 17 children and two women, all from the same extended family, according to hospital records. First responders were still searching the rubble. An airstrike in Rafah the night

before killed nine people, including six children. Mohammed al-Beheiri said his daughter, Rasha, and her six children, ranging in age from 18 months to 16 years, were among those killed overnight and into Sunday. Her husband’s second wife and their three children were still under the rubble, al-Beheiri said. The Israel-Hamas war has killed over 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, devastated Gaza’s two largest cities and left a swath of destruction across the territory. Around 80% of the population have fled their homes to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave, which experts say is on the brink of famine. The conflict, now in its seventh month, has sparked regional unrest pitting Israel and the US against Iran and allied militant groups across the Middle East. Israel and Iran traded fire directly earlier this month, raising fears of all-out war between the longtime foes. Tensions have also spiked in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Israeli troops killed two Palestinians who the military says attacked a checkpoint with a knife and a gun near the southern West Bank town of Hebron early Sunday. The Palestinian Health Ministry said the two killed were 18 and

19 years old, from the same family. No Israeli forces were wounded, the army said. The Palestinian Red Crescent rescue service meanwhile said it has recovered a total of 14 bodies from an Israeli raid in the Nur Shams urban refugee camp in the West Bank that began late Thursday. Those killed include three militants from the Islamic Jihad group and a 15-year-old boy. The military says it killed 10 militants in the camp and arrested eight suspects. Nine Israeli soldiers and officers were wounded. In a separate incident in the West Bank, an Israeli man was wounded in an explosion Sunday, the Magen David Adom rescue service said. A video circulating online shows a man approaching a Palestinian flag that had been planted in a field. When he kicks it, it appears to trigger an explosive device. At least 469 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Most have been killed during Israeli military arrest raids, which often trigger gunbattles, or in violent protests. The war in Gaza was sparked by an unprecedented Oct 7 raid into southern Israel in which

Hamas and other militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel says militants are still holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others. Thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets to call for new elections to replace Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a deal with Hamas to release the hostages. Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until Hamas is destroyed and all the hostages are returned. The war has killed at least 34,097 Palestinians and wounded another 76,980, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its count but says at least two-thirds have been children and women. It also says the real toll is likely higher as many bodies are stuck beneath the rubble left by airstrikes or are in areas that are unreachable for medics. Israel blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the militants fight in dense, residential neighbourhoods, but the military rarely comments on individual strikes, which often kill women and children. The military says it has killed over 13,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence.



People gather around a component from an intercepted ballistic missile that fell near the Dead Sea in Israel on Saturday. Open fighting between Israel and Iran began April 1 with the suspected Israeli killing of Iranian generals at an Iranian diplomatic compound in Syria. That prompted Iran’s retaliatory barrage last weekend of more than 300 missiles and drones that the US, Israel and regional and international partners helped bat down without significant damage in Israel. And then came Friday’s strikes that hit near military and nuclear targets in Iran.

AP/PTI

Vehicle crashes into birthday party; two dead, 15 injured

AP ■ BERLIN TOWN (US)

A young brother and sister died and 15 people were injured, several seriously, when vehicle driven by a suspected drunken driver crashed into a birthday party Saturday at a boat club, a Michigan sheriff said. Monroe County Sheriff Troy Goodnough said an 8-year-old girl and her 5-year-old brother died in the crash when a 66-year-old woman crashed 25 feet into the building at about 3 p.m. at the Swan Creek Boat Club in Berlin Township, about 30 miles south of Detroit. He did not identify the woman driving the vehicle but said she was taken into custody suspected of operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated causing death. He said she was cooperating with authorities.

Khamenei acknowledges Tehran hit little in attack on Israel

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Iran’s supreme leader on Sunday dismissed any discussion of whether Tehran’s unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel hit anything there, a tacit acknowledgment that despite launching a massive assault, few projectiles actually made through to their targets. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s comments before senior military leaders didn’t not touch on the apparent Israeli retaliatory strike Friday on the central city of Isfahan, even though air defences opened fire and Iran grounded commercial flights across much of the country. Analysts believe both Iran and Israel, regional archrivals locked in a shadow war for years, are trying to dial back tensions following a series of escalatory attacks between them as Israel’s war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip rages on and inflames the wider region.

Khamenei, 85, made the comments in a meeting attended by the top ranks of Iran’s regular military, police and paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, a powerful force within its Shiite theocracy. “Debates by the other party about how many missiles were fired, how many of them hit the target and how many didn’t, these are of secondary importance,” Khamenei said in remarks aired by state television. “The main issue is the emergence of the Iranian nation and Iranian military’s will in an important international arena. This is what matters.” Iran launched hundreds of drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles that sought to overwhelm Israel’s air defences in the April 13 attack — the first on Israel by a foreign power since Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein launched Scud missiles at Israel in the 1991 Gulf War. However, Israeli air defences

and fighter jets, backed by the US, the United Kingdom and neighbouring Jordan, shot down the vast majority of the incoming fire. Satellite images analysed Saturday by The Associated Press showed the Iranian attack caused only minor damage at the Nevatim air base in southern Israel, including taking a chunk out of a taxiway that Israel quickly repaired. Iran’s attack came in response to a suspected Israeli strike on April 1 targeting a consular building next to the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, Syria, which killed two Guard generals and others. “Today, thanks to the work done by our armed forces, the Revolutionary Guard, the army, the police, each in its own way, praise be to Allah the image of the country around the world has become commendable,” added Khamenei, despite Iran facing public anger over its economy and crackdowns on dissent.

Litmus test for President Muizzu as Maldives goes to polls amidst regional power dynamics

PTI ■ MALE

Maldivians on Sunday cast their ballots in a crucial parliamentary election, seen as a litmus test for President Mohamed Muizzu, whose policies are being closely monitored by both India and China amidst regional power dynamics. According to information released by the Elections Commission (EC), 181,406 people cast their ballots as of 4:00 pm local time, making for a voter turnout of 63.73 per cent. This includes 88,230 women and 93,176 men. About 284,000 people were eligible to vote. A total of 602 ballot boxes have been set up in the Maldives and three other countries for the parliamentary election. Polling stations are also open in 34 resorts, prisons, and other industrial islands. The countries in which ballot boxes are placed for voting are Thiruvananthapuram in India, Colombo in Sri Lanka and



Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, psmnews.mv reported. Parliamentarians will be elected to a total of 93 constituencies, with 368 candidates contesting from six parties, including Muizzu’s People’s National

Congress (PNC) and the main opposition the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), and as independents. Muizzu cast his vote at the polling station in Thaaajuddin School at 8:40 am. Speaking to

reporters after casting the ballot, he urged every citizen to exercise their right to vote as soon as possible, newsportal edition.mv reported. “Voting is a constitutional right and responsibility afforded to every citizen. All citizens should come out and exercise their right to vote as soon as possible. It is the responsibility of eligible voters to not wait until evening and quickly attend their respective polling stations to cast ballots,” he said. No major issues or complaints were noted during the voting, the EC said. “Nothing major has been noted as a complaint up until now. There have been complaints about showing ballot papers. That is, complaints about ballots put in the box without being folded,” Hassan Zakariyya, EC member and spokesperson, was quoted as saying by Adhaddhu news portal. Such complaints have also been few, he said.

Russia warns Pakistan of banning rice imports over phytosanitary concerns

PTI ■ KARACHI

Russia has warned Pakistan that it would ban rice imports again if Moscow’s phytosanitary concerns are not addressed in future consignments after a quarantine organism was detected in the rice consignment. The warning came after Russia’s Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (FSVPS) issued a notification regarding violations of international and Russian phytosanitary requirements over a shipment of rice imported from Pakistan. Dated April 2, the notification highlights the presence of a quarantine organism, “Megaselia scalaris (Loew),” in the rice consignment.

Pakistan’s trade representative at its embassy in Russia was asked to carry out an immediate investigation into the matter. The Russian authorities have written to the Pakistan embassy to prevent such violations and ensure all Pakistani rice exporters follow phytosanitary standards to ensure the safety of agricultural products traded between the two countries. The trade wing of the Pakistani embassy in Moscow, while forwarding the Russian authority’s letter to the Department of Plant Protection (DPP) in the Ministry of Food Security and other relevant government offices, has warned of a possible ban on rice exports in future if more complaints were received from Russian author-

ities. Russia had previously imposed a ban on rice imports from Pakistan in 2019 because of health safety reasons. Similarly, in December 2006, Russia stopped the import of rice from Pakistan for not meeting food safety standards. Chairman of the Pakistan Rice Exporters Association, Chela Ram Kewlani, said that Pakistani rice exporters needed to be very careful in choosing and packaging all rice for export. He said that Pakistan had benefited from India banning exports of non-Basmati rice last year, given that India has a nearly 40 per cent share in the globally traded rice. Last year, India banned the export of white non-Basmati

and parboiled rice. According to a leading Pakistani rice dealer, about 700,000 tonnes of rice were exported in December 2023 alone, the highest in a month for the fiscal year. He said Pakistan exported rice with an increase in higher production and demand and elevated global prices last year. The Rice Export Corporation is projecting a 60 per cent jump in exports of Basmati rice to over a million tonnes and a 36 per cent jump for non-Basmati rice to 4.25 million tonnes from Pakistan. It is eyeing exports of above five million metric tonnes of all rice in the fiscal year of 2023/2024, which would be much higher than last fiscal year’s exports of 3.7 million tonnes.

PTI ■ LONDON

Tarun Ghulati, the Indian-origin candidate in the race to challenge Sadiq Khan from winning a third term as Mayor of London, has said that the citizens of the UK capital have been let down by all the major political parties and he wants to run London like a “seasoned CEO” which delivers profits for all. The Delhi-born businessman believes his investment expertise is what London needs to revive its fortunes as the “global bank of the world” by attracting the investment it needs. The 63-year-old is standing as an Independent candidate among 13 contestants in the fray for the local elections on May 2, when Londoners will vote for their Mayor and also for members of the London Assembly. “I view London as a unique global city, akin to the ‘global bank of the world’ where diverse cultures converge to flourish,” Ghulati said in a speech this week. “As Mayor, I will build London’s balance sheet such that it is the premier choice for investment, safeguarding safety and prosperity for all its residents. I will transform and run London effectively and efficiently like a seasoned CEO. London will be a profitable corporate where profitability means the wellbeing of all. You will all be part of the journey. Let’s do it for our



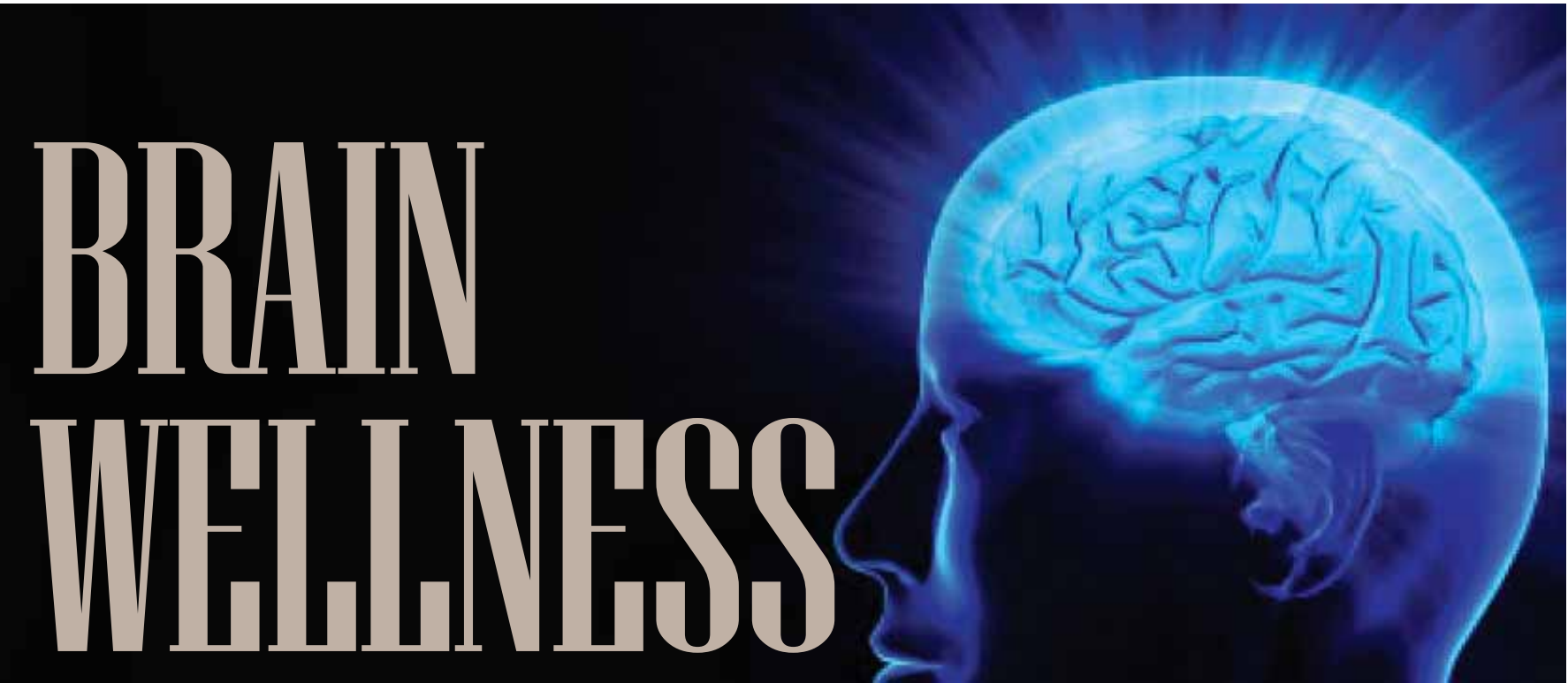
Indian-origin candidate for London Mayor Tarun Ghulati addresses a gathering in London.

PTI

London, our home,” he said. Safety on the streets of the city is among his other major priorities, with visible community policing and more officers patrolling on the beat on the agenda. “It is about having enough bobbies on the beat, having the resources for police officers to do their jobs; which means making the streets safe for women to walk at night, with muggers and burglars being caught and punished,” he said. Scrapping some of the Labour

Party incumbent Sadiq Khan’s unpopular policies, such as the high costs associated with Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) charges and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) across the city, also make up Ghulati’s key policy planks. “We did not want ULEZ, LTNs or 20mph speed limits and many other poor policies... Climate change is happening and we need to mitigate its effects but that cannot be done by making everyone live 15

minutes from home or to penalise commuters in areas with little public transport. What changes we need to make must be paced with public opinion, not imposed in an arbitrary way on wallets coping with the cost of living,” said Ghulati, who has called London his home for 20 years. He is equally scathing about the Conservative Party candidate for Mayor, Susan Hall, who he claims failed to block the Mayor’s controversial policies despite being an Assembly member for London for many years. “I would not be a candidate for Mayor if the political candidates were doing what they should be doing. They have let us down. This is all about London and Londoners,” he declared. Creating more affordable housing, minimising council tax, increasing focus on tourism to the UK capital and ensuring free school meals are among some of Ghulati’s other focus areas. He claims to have canvassed from borough to borough across London to garner his required signatures to support his mayoral candidature. Ghulati also features in the official mini manifesto booklet, which costs each candidate GBP 10,000. The winning mayoral candidate will be responsible for all local issues affecting Londoners, from transport and policing to housing and the environment.



The Centre has set up a ‘National Task Force on Brain Health’, to address the rising concerns surrounding neurological disorders in India. ARCHANA JYOTI speaks to its Chairman and Director of IHBAS, DR RAJINDER K DHAMIJA, unveiling the task force’s healthcare impact

In low- and middle-income countries, 43 per cent of children under the age of five face challenges in reaching their developmental potential due to factors like extreme poverty and growth stunting. This not only results in financial losses but also predicts a 26 per cent reduction in annual earnings during adulthood. Against such disturbing background, the Government’s top think tank Niti Aayog’s has come forward to set up the high-level panel to formulate policies for primary, secondary, and tertiary level hospitals in the country. Spearheaded by Dr RK Dhamija who is also the Director of the Delhi-based Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Services (IHBAS), the task force has nine members. These are Dr Manjri Tripathi, HOD Neurology, AIIMS Delhi, Dr Veena Kalra, ex-professor and Head Paediatrics, AIIMS Delhi, Dr Rabinder Singh, Neuro-rehabilitation scientist, ICMR, Rajib Kumar Sen, senior advisor, NITI Aayog, Indrani Kaushal, Economic Advisor, Union Health Ministry, the others are Radhika Chakravathy B and Rajesh Yadav, Joint Secretaries from Union Ministry of Social and Justice empowerment and Dr Suvarna from NIMHANS, Bangalore.

Excerpts from the interview: Dr Dhamija, kindly tell us more about the establishment of the National Task Force on Brain Health and its objectives? Thank you for having me. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in its 75th General Assembly adopted the Inter-sectoral Global Action Plan on epilepsy and other neurological disorders 2022–2031. This provides the vision, goal, guiding principles and strategic objectives with their action areas and targets for member states. India being major economic power is also signatory to this resolution which suggests a range of proposed actions for member states. The task force is in line with WHO resolution as well as in response to the growing challenges posed by neurological disorders, especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its primary objective is to address the gaps in brain healthcare accessibility and quality across all levels of healthcare



DR RAJINDER K DHAMIJA
Chairman, National Task Force on Brain Health and Director IHBAS, Delhi

delivery in India, from Aayushman Arogya Mandirs to District Hospitals and tertiary institutions.

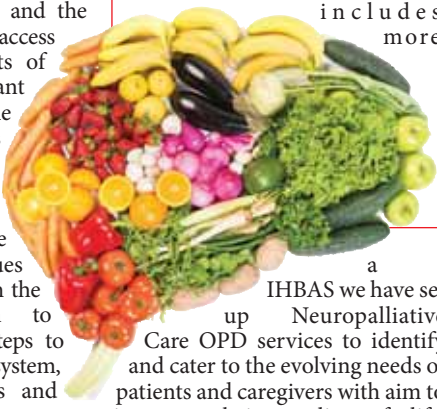
How do you envision it making an impact? As I said, the increasing prevalence of neurological disorders and the disparities in healthcare access across different segments of society were significant motivating factors in the establishment of this central task force. The government recognized the urgent need for a coordinated effort to tackle these issues comprehensively. Through the task force, we aim to recommend actionable steps to strengthen the healthcare system, improve early diagnosis and treatment, and promote neurological health through preventive measures.

Can you elaborate on some of the specific challenges or gaps in brain healthcare that the task force aims to address? Certainly. One major challenge is the unequal distribution of healthcare resources, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This leads to disparities in access to specialized care and diagnostic facilities for neurological conditions. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness about neurological disorders among the general population, which often results in delayed diagnosis and treatment. The task force will work towards bridging these gaps by recommending strategies to improve healthcare infrastructure, raise awareness, and enhance the capacity of healthcare providers. Here I would like to mention that

Tips to Boost Your Brain

DR JAMES E. GALVIN, a professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine in his study points out

- Yoga can help you relax. It has been found that people who did two weeks of Yoga Nidra—a specific type of yoga that incorporates meditation and mindfulness—had improvements in sleep quality, attention, and memory.
- Good nutrition is key for brain health. The Alzheimer’s association recommends a diet that includes more veggies and lean meats with fewer fatty and processed foods. Galvin cites a study published in *Frontiers in Nutrition* which found foods high in fat can negatively impact the brain.
- Regular exercise can also help your brain.
- Staying socially engaged can protect the brain. Chronic isolation can increase the risk of premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.
- Sleep is also vital for overall brain health. According to Johns Hopkins, a healthy amount of sleep promotes “brain plasticity” or the brain’s ability to adapt to input.



IHBAS we set up Neuropalliative Care OPD services to identify and cater to the evolving needs of patients and caregivers with aim to improve their quality of life, enhance well-being and overall psychosocial functioning through holistic multidisciplinary approach. What are some of the key priorities or focus areas for the task force particularly in the coming months? Your brain allows you to think, feel, communicate, move, coordinate, remember, make decisions, and live a productive life. That’s why keeping it healthy is so important and that’s what will be our panel’s priority. We will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current state of brain healthcare in India, including an analysis of existing policies, infrastructure, and resources. Based on this assessment, we will develop a set of action, give recommendations to address the identified gaps and challenges. The panel has to submit report by July 15, 2024.

How do you see the task force

Brain health is the state of brain functioning across cognitive, sensory, social-emotional, behavioural and motor domains, allowing a person to realize their full potential over the life course, irrespective of the presence or absence of disorders.

contributing to the broader goal of improving brain healthcare in India? Our ultimate aim is to create a more inclusive and effective healthcare system that meets the needs of all individuals affected by neurological disorders. Through collaboration with government

TAILORED SUNSCREEN Matched to Your Skin Type

Majority of dermatologists focus on the important role sunscreen plays in protecting our skin from the harmful UV radiation. But sunscreen selection can be daunting with the plethora of options available in the market, **DR ATULA GUPTA**, senior dermatologist, says and suggests the ideal sunscreen for each skin type to ensure effective protection

THE TWO SUNSCREENS: PHYSICAL VS. CHEMICAL

Physical Sunscreens (Mineral Sunscreens): Physical sunscreens contain minerals like titanium dioxide and zinc oxide. They act as a physical barrier that reflects and scatters UVA and UVB rays. Physical sunscreens offer broad-spectrum protection and are generally well-tolerated even on sensitive skin. But they can leave a white cast on the skin, especially with higher concentrations of minerals.

Chemical Sunscreens: These sunscreens use organic compounds like oxybenzone, avobenzone, and octinoxate. They absorb UV radiation, converting it into heat that is then released from the skin. Chemical sunscreens are lightweight and cosmetically elegant, offering a clear, non-greasy feel. But some people may experience irritation due to certain chemical ingredients.



DR ATULA GUPTA

SUNSCREEN SELECTION FOR SKIN TYPE

Normal Skin: Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher. Look for lightweight, non-greasy formulas and sunscreens with added antioxidants for extra skin nourishment.

Dry Skin: Choose fragrance-free, moisturizing sunscreens. Lotions or creams containing hyaluronic acid or ceramides can provide added hydration. Seek sunscreens labelled as “hydrating” or “moisturizing” for more benefit.

Oily Skin: Look for oil-free, non-comedogenic (won’t clog pores) sunscreens. Lotions with a matte finish or lightweight gels are ideal for oily skin. Gel-based or matte-finish sunscreens control the extrashine. Ingredients like niacinamide or zinc oxide can also help regulate oil production.

Sensitive Skin: The gentlest option for sensitive skin are mineral based sunscreens. Opt for fragrance-free products with calming ingredients like aloe vera or colloidal oatmeal. Opt for hypoallergenic sunscreens to minimize irritation. Perform a patch test before full application to ensure safety.

Combination Skin: Sunscreens labelled for combination skin often have a balanced, lightweight formula. Gel-creams or lotions can provide sun protection without excess

oiliness. Consider lightweight, gel-based sunscreens that provide hydration without greasiness. Choose products that balance oil production in the T-zone while moisturizing drier areas. Sunscreens labelled as “for all skin types” or “balancing” are often suitable.

Aging/Mature Skin: Opt for sunscreens with added anti-aging ingredients like peptides or retinoids. Broad-spectrum sunscreens with SPF 30 or higher help prevent premature aging. Look for formulations targeting fine lines, wrinkles, and age spots for holistic care.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

When selecting a sunscreen, factors beyond skin type should be considered:

Sun Protection Factor (SPF): This rating indicates protection against UVB rays, the primary cause of sunburn. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends an SPF of 30 for daily use, with higher SPFs needed for extended sun exposure or people with fairer skin.

Broad-Spectrum Protection: Ensure the sunscreen protects against both UVA and UVB rays. UVA rays penetrate deeper into the skin and contribute to premature aging and skin cancer.

Water Resistance: For activities involving water or sweat, choose a water-resistant sunscreen. Reapplication is crucial after swimming or excessive sweating. Additionally, complement your sunscreen with other sun protection measures such as wearing protective clothing, seeking shade, and avoiding peak sun hours. Consult with your dermatologist to address any specific skin concerns. With the right sunscreen regimen, you can safeguard your skin against sun damage and maintain a healthy, radiant complexion for years to come.



10,000 STEPS FOR BETTER HEALTH

Walking 10,000 steps a day has emerged as a widely acknowledged benchmark for daily physical activity, endorsed by health professionals worldwide. Neuro and Spine Surgeon, DR VIKAS KUMAR, at Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Ranchi, Jharkhand, underscores the significance of this goal. Let's delve into the key benefits, as guided by Dr Kumar

- The capacity of the lungs increases
- Mood improves (increases serotonin and dopamine - good hormones).
- Improvement in the venous system.
- Enhances immune function.
- Speeds up digestion.
- Works against disabilities in old age (strengthens joints).
- Helps in weight loss.
- Improves heart health.
- Reduces the risk of stroke.
- Corrects diabetes (forms new insulin receptors).
- Reduces blood pressure



NUTRITIOUS DELIGHT

Chef **RAJIV KUMAR MALHOTRA**, known for his culinary expertise at Habitat World, India Habitat Centre, shares with **SHARMILA CHAND** the essence of summer embodied in their latest creation: the Kodo Millet & Fresh Mango Salad. The delectable blend has the wholesome goodness of kodo millet intertwines with the sweet succulence of fresh mango, creating a symphony of taste and health in every delightful bite

RECIPE

Kodo Millet & Fresh Mango Salad



METHOD

Cook Kodo Millet: Rinse the kodo millet under cold water. In a pot, add 1 part kodo millet to 2 parts water. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, for 20-25 minutes, or until the millet is tender and the water is absorbed. Once cooked, let it cool & squeeze extra water.

Prepare Ingredients: Peel the mango and dice it into bite-sized pieces. Dice the bell pepper into small pieces. Wash the rocket

lettuce in cold water & tear it into bite-sized pieces.

Assemble Salad: In a large bowl, combine the cooked and cooled kodo millet, diced mango, pomegranate seeds, corn diced bell pepper, torn rocket lettuce, sliced almonds, and raisins.

Prepare Dressing: In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, and fennel seed powder until well combined. Season with Salt &



Pepper. Drizzle the dressing over the salad ingredients.

Toss Gently: Using salad tongs or two large spoons, gently toss the salad until all ingredients are evenly coated with the dressing. Serve in bowls.

(Sharmila Chand writes on food, travel, art, holistic wellness and lifestyle)



Gujarat Titans' comfortable win over plummeting Punjab Kings

PTI ■ MULLANPUR

R Sai Kishore starred on a dominant day for the spinners as Gujarat Titans tamed Punjab Kings by three wickets for their fourth win in the 2024 IPL here on Sunday.

The spin trio of Sai Kishore (4/33), Rashid Khan (1/15) and Noor Ahmed (2/20) exposed an ill-equipped Punjab Kings with their guile to dismiss them for a below-par 142.

Liam Livingstone, who juggles between leg-break and off-spin, struck twice in the middle overs to keep Punjab Kings alive in the game. However, he did not get much support from fellow spinner Harpreet Brar, who leaked 35 in his four overs in a low-scoring affair.

With 42 runs to get off 30 balls, Titans eventually recorded a comfortable win in 19.1 overs courtesy a pressure releasing cameo from Rahul Tewatia (36 not out off 16).

It was Gujarat Titans' fourth win in eight games while Punjab Kings suffered their sixth loss in eight matches.

Shubman Gill (35 off 29) got tough runs at the top of the order before falling to a mistimed aerial hit off Livingstone. Sai Sudharsan (31 off 33) also found stroke making hard while the dangerous David



Miller was Livingstone's second victim. Punjab Kings were able to apply the pressure in the middle overs but Tewatia defused their threat with a timely onslaught comprising six boundaries. Earlier, there was enough help for the spinners and Punjab Kings' surrender against Sai Kishore and Co made the visitors' task easier.

Punjab Kings, who have been among the worst performing batting teams in the powerplay this season, made brisk start to reach 45 for no loss in five overs. However, their innings went downhill thereafter as the spin trio of Sai Kishore, Rashid and Noor exposed the opposition with their guile.

Struggling up till now, Prabhsimran Singh (35 off 21) found some much needed rhythm before he fell in the sixth over, triggering a dramatic collapse. Soon after guiding Mohit Sharma (2/32)

for a six over third man, Prabhsimran charged down the wicket only to be caught behind.

The spin trio then broke the backbone of Punjab batting. Left-arm spinner Sai Kishore, who led Tamil Nadu to the Ranji Trophy semi-final this season, varied his pace effectively to trouble the opposition batters.

Pressure was maintained from other end as well via Noor and Rashid. Noor's first victim was Rilee Rossouw (9 off 7), who was trapped lbw while attempting a sweep shot. Skipper Sam Curran (20 off 19) departed in the following over from Rashid and the DRS call that ruled him lbw left him and his opponents surprised.

Livingstone (6 off 9) tried to work a Noor googly towards mid-wicket but leading edge went to Rahul Tewatia stationed at the first slip.

Sai Kishore also got rid of an out of sorts Jitesh Sharma (13 off 12) to make it 86 for five in 12th over. As often has been the case this season, the uncapped duo of Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma were required to do the heavy lifting but they fell cheaply this time to make matters worse for Punjab.

Thanks to Harpreet Brar (29 off 12), the hosts got past the 140-run mark.

KKR eke out one-run win over RCB

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Karn Sharma's scarcely believable last-over assault on Mitchell Starc gave Royal Challengers Bengaluru a glimmer of hope but the Kolkata Knight Riders kept their nerves to eke out a dramatic one-run win off the last ball in their IPL match here on Sunday.

The Royal Challengers required 21 runs off the last over bowled by left-arm pacer Starc while chasing a daunting 223-run target set by the Knight Riders. The result seemed a foregone conclusion with Karn and Mohammed Siraj at the crease, but the former nearly turned the match on its head.

Karn, a leg-spinner with no real pedigree with the bat, hammered three sixes off Starc to reduce the margin to three runs off two balls. But Starc redeemed himself taking a return catch to dismiss Karn (20, 7b, 3x6) and Lockie Ferguson was run out off the last ball as RCB ended up at 222 all out in 20 overs.

However, in a match with more twists and turns than a hilly road, it was KKR who first snatched the initiative making 222 for six around opener Phil Salt's aggressive 14-ball 48 and skipper Shreyas Iyer's

composed 36-ball 50. But the Royal Challengers were not bogged down by the imposing nature of their chase. Will Jacks (55, 32b; 4x4, 5x6) and Rajat Patidar (52; 23b, 3x4, 5x6) laid a fine foundation through a 102-run alliance for the third wicket that came off just 48 balls.

But from 137 for 2, RCB soon slipped to 155 for 6 with Andre Russell inflicting a double blow dismissing both Jacks and Russell inside three balls with his clever variation of slower balls.

Sunil Narine (2/34) also claimed two wickets in his final over to reduce RCB to 155 for six but Dinesh Karthik kept their hopes alive in a splendid partnership with Impact Sub Suyash Prabhudesai.

Returning to bowl in the penultimate over, Russell dismissed Karthik with a slower ball to make the equation tougher for RCB — 21 runs off six balls. Karn nearly dragged RCB over the line but the Eden Gardens night belonged to the Knights as they aced the final moments of a heart-stopper.

KKR now have five wins from seven matches and climbed to second spot with 10 points, two behind leaders Rajasthan Royals. This was RCB's sixth loss on the trot, and seventh in

eight matches, as their campaign is as good as over, lying on 10th with just two points.

But RCB had their moments as Jacks was at his furious best against Starc, spanking him for 22 runs in an over en route his 29-ball fifty, his second in four matches.

Jacks' show rubbed on Patidar who produced a 21-ball fifty, taking KKR's best bowler Narine to cleaners as RCB maintained a run-rate over 12. Virat Kohli began with a first-ball boundary and pulled Harshit Rana for a six in the first over before taking on Starc with disdain.

He backed away to a delivery on his legs to hammer it over fine-leg and the whole Eden was chanting 'Kohli, Kohli'.

But his inning was cut short in a debatable fashion when Kohli was given out to a delivery that seemed a waist-high full toss with Rana taking a return catch. He was out of his crease at the time of impact but the replays confirmed that the ball was dipping in its trajectory as the decision was upheld upon review. Kohli was seen in an animated discussion with the on-field umpire before leaving the field with his anger in full view.

In the next over, Varun

Mi eye revenge against RR in reverse fixture

PTI ■ JAIPUR

A resurgent Mumbai Indians will need to address their bowling woes as they look to exact revenge on table-toppers Rajasthan Royals in their reverse fixture of the Indian Premier League here on Monday.

With three wins in last four games, MI have hit the recovery road to reach sixth spot in the points table after a poor start this season, while RR are on a ramping run as they occupy the top spot with 12 points.

The five-time champions survived a late onslaught from Ashutosh Sharma to eke out a nine-run win over Punjab Kings in the last game.

It was once again Jasprit Bumrah, who was left to do the heavy lifting as he stood out with his three wickets. The star India pacer shone with the new ball and then returned to produce a breakthrough, and he did all

this without conceding much. With 13 scalps, Bumrah tops the list of the most wickets this IPL. He also has the second-best economy of just under six runs but while he has been on the mark, his bowling colleagues have struggled.

Gerald Coetzee, too, has made an impact with 12 wickets but has gone for runs. But Akash Madhwal and skipper Hardik Pandya have been inconsistent.

While Shreyas Gopal has taken a wicket each in the three games he has played so far, MI also need to use the experience of veteran Afghanistan all-rounder Mohammed Nabi as a bowler. In batting, former skipper Rohit Sharma's scintillating century, albeit in a losing cause, has been the highlight, while Ishan Kishan has been inconsistent. Hardik, too, hasn't made much of an impact so far, while Tilak Verma has done moderately well.



A huge positive for MI is Suryakumar Yadav's return to form. His 53-ball 78 against PBKS was the cornerstone of MI innings and on his day he can destroy any attack.

The last time MI faced the RR bowling unit, they looked like a rabbit caught in the headlights, as Trent Boult removed three of their top-order batters for naught and

the veteran left-arm pacer will again be a massive threat. Avesh Khan has been entrusted with the responsibility of bowling at the death and he has done

well. Kuldeep Sen, too, showed his skills but he needs to work on his economy. With 12 wickets, leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal has been

RR's most valuable player in the bowling department, though off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has struggled.

For RR, Riyan Parag has been the batter of the season. The young Assam batter has reinvented himself and his 318 runs is one of the reasons why RR find themselves at the top of the pecking order.

While the batting has revolved around him, skipper Sanju Samson too has produced some fine knocks for the team, aggregating 276 runs so far.

England's Jos Buttler single-handedly chased down a 200-plus total to win RR their last match against Kolkata Knight Riders but the form of fellow opener Yashasvi Jaiswal has been a matter of concern as he has failed to capitalise on his starts.

Shimron Hetmyer has also hit top gear when needed, rescuing the team against PBKS the other day.

TEAMS

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Rovman Powell, Shubham Dube, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Abid Mushtaq, Nandre Burger, Tanush Kotian, Keshav Maharaj.

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.

You cannot always rely on Kohli: Varun to RCB

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

It's high time India's domestic players step up for Royal Challengers Bengaluru this IPL season and reduce the dependence on Virat Kohli, former India pacer Varun Aaron said on Sunday.

Kohli has been the standout performer for RCB this IPL season and is the current Orange Cap holder with 361 runs in 7 innings. His strike rate is 147.34, with the highest score being 113 not out.

Speaking to Star Sports, Aaron said, "It's just that RCB are not finding the rhythm, the domestic players are just not stepping up."

The 34-year-old Aaron, who announced his retirement from first-class cricket earlier this year, added, "If you have to be anywhere at the top of the table or the middle of the table at this point of the table, you have to have domestic players who are firing and you cannot always rely on Virat Kohli."

"The other guys have to step up and also all their money, is sitting in the dug-out. You can't spend that much cash on players and not have them play."

In 2014, Aaron was bought by Royal Challengers Bangalore for Rs 2 crore, and was retained by the franchise ahead of the 2016 auction. Australia's former skipper in



the limited overs formats, Aaron Finch feels RCB needs an explosive middle-order batter who can complement Kohli.

"He's (Kohli) scored a lot of runs everywhere. He's a modern day great. And I think the fact that he's getting runs and RCB are still not making it is a positive sign in one degree."

"It's that when Virat is playing well, that genuinely carries the rest of the players with him."

"They just need to find a partnership with him, they need to find an explosive middle order player who is in form, Lomror has been in and out, so it's got all the makings of an epic game," Finch said.

RCB are playing Kolkata

Knight Riders at Eden Gardens on Sunday. Speaking of Travis Head's blazing 89-run knock for Sunrisers Hyderabad against Delhi Capitals in Delhi on Saturday, Finch said the left-handed opener has taken the "fear of failure out of his mind."

"It's always been in him, the ability to play like this. I guess the freedom to express himself and be able to deal with the ups and downs of playing such an aggressive and high-risk brand of cricket, I think has just released him to a new level."

"And I think if you look back at the World Cup final, he kept playing his shots even when there was wickets falling around him, the ball was moving. Because he's

taken the fear of failure out of his mind.

"If he misses out five or six times in a row, it doesn't bother him because he knows he's one shot away. He's the type of player that needs one ball in the middle. And that's all it will take for him to get going again," Finch said.

In a match that saw over 460 runs being scored, seamer T Natrajan finished with excellent figures of 4/19, and Finch believed the bowler getting all his wickets in the death when the game was as good as over, prevented him from getting the Man-of-the-Match Award.

"When 460 runs are scored in a game and a guy gets 4 for 19, that's a special performance. I think the thing that didn't give him the man of the match is the 4 wickets were right at the death when the game was done and dusted."

Set an imposing target of 267, DC were stopped at 199. "I think the ability of Delhi to get that run rate under 12 an over was extraordinary and at that stage of the innings, they were in the box seat to win it."

"The wicket slowed up a bit just like Pat Cummins talked about it and the ball got a little softer and made it easier for the slower bowlers to grip. It was just one of those things where they couldn't sustain it," Finch said.

Watched a lot of Kuldeep videos, did simulation: Abhishek

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Thoroughly dissecting Kuldeep Yadav's bowling videos and doing match simulation by facing left-arm wrist spinners in the nets went a long way in helping Abhishek Sharma annihilate the India international during Sunrisers Hyderabad's 67-run victory over Delhi Capitals in an IPL game here.

Abhishek smashed 46 off just 12 balls with half a dozen of sixes and four of them came off Kuldeep's deliveries.

Kuldeep has been DC's most consistent bowler with his guile and variations troubling the batters, but Abhishek

went back and forth to disturb his length and forced him to go flatter.

So what was his preparation like for Kuldeep?

"Personally, I always try to plan really well for the spinners and the main bowlers of the other team and this year... This match also, I was very careful with Kuldeep because I know he is their main bowler and I've been watching his videos," the Punjab state team skipper said after the match.

"I try to play similar bowlers a day before, net bowlers and local bowlers, and that helps me a lot. I try to just make sure that they are pretty much



similar to the bowlers that I'm going to face. So that helps me a lot," Abhishek explained.

Not bowling because of Impact Player Rule

While he is primarily a batter, Abhishek also bowls handy left-arm spin but hasn't been summoned a lot to bowl in

this edition, thanks to the Impact Player rule.

Does he think it can affect his selection or chances of showcasing his other facet of the game?

"No, I think everybody knows that I can bowl, but obviously, there's because of this impact player, there's always an extra bowler or a better, so probably with every all-rounders, this is going to happen. Even this happened last year."

"For me, especially, I believe that I should be ready whenever I'm called. Just get the chance because I know somehow I will get the chance and I should be ready for that."

We are not getting too far ahead of ourselves: Head

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Riding on explosive starts, Sunrisers Hyderabad may have won four games on the bounce this IPL season, but their swashbuckling opener Travis Head says "we are not getting too far ahead of ourselves."

SRH crushed Delhi Capitals by 67 runs in their most recent match here on Saturday, following sensational knocks from their in-form openers Travis Head (89) and Abhishek Sharma (46).

SRH have made a habit of posting big totals this season, going past 260 for the third time on Saturday.



"It is very enjoyable. It is nice to be here and play well, and it is hard not to smile and enjoy yourself with the batting order that we have got, and the order is working well through the first seven, so it is very enjoyable," Head told JioCinema.

Batting first, Hyderabad

scored their fourth 200+ innings this edition by scoring 266 runs, while Delhi were bowled out for 199 runs at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. This was SRH's fifth win of the season.

Head also spoke on SRH's momentum and positive energy around the team.

"We will take it easy for a minute. I think it was Murali's (Muttiah Muralitharan) birthday a couple of days ago, so we have a party for him tomorrow night, so that will be enjoyable."

"I think it's a nice group, we are not getting too far ahead of ourselves. Obviously, we are excited. We have got four wins on the bounce now, we

are playing well, and the energy is always better when you are winning."

"The environment is really good. That's what Dan (Daniel Vettori) and Pat Cummins are going to bring. If there is a loss here or there, a couple of poor performances, that's okay. We are showing how good we can be."

"As long as we can keep instilling that confidence around how well we are playing, I guess the ceiling is as high as it wants to be," Head said.

Former India pacer Zaheer Khan praised Jake Fraser-McGurk (65 runs) and T Natarajan (4/19).