



CITY 3 MODI: RENDER KEYS OF CONG, SP DYNASTIC ENTITIES INEFFECTIVE

OPINION 6 MAYA SEES POLITICAL GRASS GREENER IN HARIT PRADESH

WORLD 10 ISRAELI MILITARY INTELLIGENCE CHIEF RESIGNS

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LSG EYE A WIN IN DHONI'S BASTION 12 SPORTS

BJP, Opposition lock horns over Modi remark EC's task force to tackle low poll turnout



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP and Opposition leaders on Monday engaged in a war of words over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comments on 'redistribution of country's wealth by Congress favouring Muslims' made at an elections rally in Rajasthan a day earlier, with Opposition terming the remarks as communally divisive and also complained to the Election Commission of India while BJP saying the PM has called a spade a spade and has echoed people's sentiments.

Targeting Modi, the Congress on Monday accused him of attempting to create communal polarisation for electoral gains. AICC general secretary in-charge of organisation K C Venugopal said the prime minister was quoting something that wasn't there in the Congress manifesto and that he was attempting to create "communal polarisation" in the country for electoral gains. BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said that the opposition is in pain as Modi has shown them the mirror about its past. His remarks have resonated with people as for the opposition INDIA Bloc those who have illegally entered the country are more important than citizens if they happen to be Muslims, he alleged. Addressing a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara, Modi alleged that the Congress



plans to give people's hard-earned money and valuables to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children". In his remarks in Rajasthan, Modi had said, "Earlier, when their (Congress) government was in power, they had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's assets. This means to whom will this property be distributed? It will be distributed among those who have more children." Congress urged the Election Commission to take action against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his 'redistribution of wealth' remarks made at a poll rally in Rajasthan, alleging they were 'divisive', 'malicious' and targeted a particular religious community. They alleged that Modi was using religion to ask voters to refrain from voting for it and was making



false and defamatory statements against the Opposition party and its leaders. Congress accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of speaking in a "poisonous language" and said that he has several new tactics for diverting attention from real issues but the end of this "business of lies" is near. Sharing the Congress' latest advertisement that focuses on rising prices and unemployment on Monday, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said, "Unemployment and inflation are at their peak in the country and Narendra Modi says 'everything is fine.'" "He (Modi) has several new techniques to 'divert from the issues', But the end of the business of lies is near," Rahul Gandhi said in a social media

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Among concerns over rising temperature given the forecast of above normal maximum temperatures and heatwaves in certain parts of the country, the Election Commission on Monday decided to set up a task force comprising officials from concerned agencies that will review the impact of heatwave and humidity, five days before each polling phase for any concerning developments and mitigatory measures, if necessary. This comes after the India Meteorological Department (IMD) told the Election Commission that there is "no major concern" regarding heatwave for the second phase of Lok Sabha polls to be held on April 26. Director General, IMD, Mrutunjay Mohapatra also told the poll panel that the weather forecast is "normal" for the 13 States and Union Territories going to polls in phase two, according to an official statement. The Commission on Monday held a meeting with the agencies concerned involving Additional Secretary Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Head of Department, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and DG Meteorology, India Meteorological Department (IMD) to understand the developing weather situation and discuss measures to mitigate any risk due to hot weather conditions during



Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu addresses the media in New Delhi on Monday. PTI

the period of Lok Sabha polls ending on June 1. The meeting also comes amid concerns that heatwave could affect voter turnout. Notably, low turnout during the first phase of polling on April 19, is attributed to hot weather or heatwave conditions in especially Hindi belt regions — Bihar, Western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh. The EC's data showed 65.5 per cent voter turnout for the first phase as compared to over 69 per cent in 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The officials said that it is difficult to identify sections of the voters turned low this time. Low voting percentage in the Hindi belt Western Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand has become a cause of concern for the political parties. The Opposition claimed that BJP core voters did come to cast their vote while some section

of BJP supporters say people did not come to vote as it was clear that Modi is coming to power for the third time. "The Commission directed MoHFW to issue necessary instructions to health authorities in states to prepare for and extend assistance in case of heatwave conditions affecting election operations. The Commission will hold a separate review with State CEOs to ensure adequate arrangements at polling stations including shamiyana, drinking water, fans, and other assured minimum facilities, etc. as per its existing advisory dated March 16, 2024.. IEC (Information, Education and Communication) activities shall be carried out amongst the public for precautionary measures (Do's & Don'ts) to mitigate the heat wave impact in polling station areas," the EC said in a statement. Continued on Page 8



IMD advisory aids farmers amid climate threats

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

From mitigating water stagnation in the rain-hit Northeastern States like Arunachal Pradesh and Karnataka and Goa to protecting fruit orchards from hail damage in Telangana and ensuring light, frequent irrigation to mitigate heat stress in Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, East Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued tailored warnings to farmers of different regions in the country. The IMD advisory is for the next five days to help farmers mitigate as well as combat the adverse effects of weather conditions on their crops and maximise agricultural productivity. Climate change induced erratic weather threat looms large on the country's agriculture and its allied sectors which is the largest source of livelihood in India. Low yields can hit the rural

economy and push inflation in urban areas as well, say experts. Farmers in Telangana have been suggested to install hail nets or hail caps in fruit orchards to prevent mechanical damage. "Provide horticultural support to horticultural crops and stake vegetables," said the IMD circular issued on Monday. Light to moderate rains or thundershowers will be experienced in the next three days till April 24, post which the dry weather will prevail in the State. IMD has issued yellow alerts for various districts of Telangana, predicting thundershowers accompanied with lightning and gusty winds of around 30-40 kmph in these places. Similarly, farmers in North Eastern States (e.g., Arunachal Pradesh) have been asked to drain out excess water from crop fields to prevent water stagnation. Continued on Page 8

Setback for Mamata in WB

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In a major blow to the Trinamool Congress in the midst of general elections the Calcutta High Court on Monday ordered the cancellation of appointments of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff made through the recruitment process of State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal Government-sponsored and aided schools, declaring the selection process as "null and void". The court directed the "illegal recruits" to return their emoluments drawn in the past several years within four weeks.



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign meeting for Lok Sabha polls, in North Dinajpur district. PTI

As the order came barely a couple of days after Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari presaged a "massive explosion that will shake the foundations of the TMC," Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee immediately called the court order "illegal" and vowed to move the Supreme Court for justice. "Now you can see the relationship between what he (Adhikari) said about a possible explosion and the order that has come today... this is an illegal order... I am not talking about the Judges but the order... we do not accept this order dictated by the BJP... We do not accept this order that will throw 26,000 people out of their jobs affecting 1.5 lakh or even more people directly... we will go to the higher court," Banerjee said at an election rally in North Dinajpur.

Bengal SSC Chairman Siddharth Majumdar said that the SSC would move the Apex Court. "We will go through the 300-page order... discuss and understand the legal aspects," he said. Incidentally Adhikari had a couple of days ago said that "a big explosion is coming in the next week that will shake the very foundation of this corrupt and anti-people Government," leading Banerjee to tell the people in a different rally that the BJP was out to assassinate her and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee who is also the general secretary of the party. In the devastating order which is unprecedented in the history of Bengal and

probably rare in the Indian judicial history the Bench of Justice Debangshu Basak and Justice Shabbir Rashidi, the Court not only directed the entire panel of 25,750 teachers and non-teaching staff appointed through a School Level Selection Test in 2016 and asked the CBI to undertake further investigation on the appointment process, and submit a report within three months. The Bench also directed the CBI to investigate into the government proposal to regularize the services of alleged illegally appointed teachers by creating supernumerary posts. Continued on Page 8

Court rejects Kejriwal's plea for daily doctor consultation

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Rejecting Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea seeking daily consultations with his doctor through video conferencing, Special Judge Kaveri Baweja on Monday directed Director, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to constitute a medical board of a Senior Endocrinologist/ Diabetologist which will decide whether he needs insulin or not. Special Judge for CBI and ED cases Kaveri Baweja passed the order while declining Kejriwal's plea for video consultation with his doctor in the presence of his wife. The Court in its order said home-cooked food can be provided to Kejriwal but it must strictly adhere to the diet chart given by his doctor on April 1. The board will decide whether he should be administered insulin and also take a call on the diet and exercise plan he needs to follow, the court said. It said there shall be no deviations from the diet plan prescribed by the medical board. "The said Medical Board is further requested to prescribe a diet and exercise plan, if required, for the Applicant considering his medical requirements and relevant data regarding his vital statistics. Continued on Page 8



BJP leader Mukesh Dalal receives the 'certificate of election' after he was elected unopposed from Surat Lok Sabha seat, in Surat, on Monday. PTI

BJP seals first election win as its Surat candidate elected unopposed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SURAT/NEW DELHI

In a sort of 'opening' its electoral account in the ensuing general elections, BJP candidate Mukesh Dalal was on Monday elected unopposed from Surat Lok Sabha constituency in Gujarat after all other nominees withdrew from the fray. "I declare that Mukeshkumar Chandrakant Dalal, I sponsored by the BJP, has been duly elected to fill the seat in the House from Surat parliamentary constituency," District Collector cum election officer Saurabh Pardhi told media persons as he handed over the certificate of election to Dalal. Reacting to the development, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh claimed that democracy is under threat. The candidature of Congress' Nilesh Kumbhani from Surat seat was rejected on Sunday after the district returning officer prima facie found discrepancies in the signature of the proposers. The nomination form of Suresh Padsala, the Congress' substitute candidate from Surat, was also invalidated. Voting for all 26 constituencies in Gujarat is scheduled for May 7, but with the result of Surat seat already out, polling will be held on 25 seats. Except for Dalal, all 8 candidates in the fray from Surat-4 Independents, 3 from smaller parties and Pyarelal Bharti of Bahujan Samaj Party

withdrew their nomination papers on the last day, as per the Surat district election office. Congress on Sunday alleged that Kumbhani's nomination form was rejected at the behest of the BJP and said it would challenge the rejection in the High Court. "Surat has presented the first Lotus to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. I congratulate our candidate for Surat Lok Sabha seat Mukesh Dalal for getting elected unopposed," Gujarat unit BJP president C R Paatil posted on social media. In the 2019 polls, BJP won all 26 constituencies in Gujarat, the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Congress claimed the BJP was frightened by the anger of MSME owners and the business community and attempted "match-fixing" even in the Surat Lok Sabha seat which the ruling party has been winning since 1984. "Aap chronology samajhiye" (Understand the chronology): Surat District Election Officer rejects the Congress' candidate for Surat Lok Sabha Nilesh Kumbhani's nomination for 'discrepancies in the verification of signatures of three proposers'. On similar grounds, officials reject the nomination of Suresh Padsala, the INC's substitute candidate from Surat. Continued on Page 8

Teenage chess prodigy Gukesh makes history

PTI ■ TORONTO

India's 17-year-old Grandmaster D Gukesh scripted history by winning the Candidates Chess Tournament here to become the youngest ever challenger to the world title, bettering a record created by the legendary Garry Kasparov 40 years ago. Gukesh played out an easy draw with American Hikaru Nakamura in the 14th and final round to finish with nine out of a possible 14 points in the tournament that is held to decide the

challenger to the world champion. The triumph entitles Gukesh a clash against reigning world champion Ding Liren of China in the last quarter of the year. The Chennai-based teen bettered Kasparov's record by quite a distance as the Russian great was 22 when he qualified in 1984 to clash with compatriot Anatoly Karpov. "So relieved and so happy. I was following this crazy game (between Fabio Caruana and Ian Nepomniachtchi), and



then I went for a walk with my second (Gregorz Gazevsky), I think that helped," Gukesh said after winning. Gukesh also won a cash award of 88,500 Euros (approx ₹78.5 lakh). The total prize fund of the Candidates was 5,00,000 Euros. He became only the second Indian after the great Viswanathan Anand to win the prestigious tournament. Five-time world champion Anand's triumph came in 2014. "Congratulations to @DGukesh for becoming the

youngest challenger. The @WacaChess family is so proud of what you have done. I'm personally very proud of how you played and handled tough situations. Enjoy the moment," Anand posted on 'X' to congratulate the youngster, who like him, also hails from Chennai. Needing at least a draw, Gukesh gave nothing away to Nakamura, a clear signal that the teenager is ready for the big stage and is going to be the next biggest star in the chess world. Continued on Page 8

Render keys of Cong, SP dynastic entities ineffective: Modi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that the residents of Aligarh have sealed off the factories of nepotism, corruption and appeasement run by the Congress and Samajwadi Party, rendering the keys of both dynastic entities ineffective. Modi, who arrived in Aligarh on Monday to bolster Bharatiya Janata Party's electoral prospects in Aligarh and Hathras Lok Sabha constituencies, implored voters to ensure resounding victories for Satish Gautam and Anoop Valmiki. Addressing the crowd, Modi said: "The key to a prosperous future and a developed India lies within your grasp. Seize this opportunity to liberate the nation entirely from the shackles of poverty, corruption and entrenched dynastic politics." He underscored that every vote cast in favour of BJP candidates would directly resonate as support for his leadership. Emphasising the significance of civic duty, Modi encouraged voters to prioritise casting their ballots before indulging in any other activities. In a fervent address, Narendra Modi recounted the tumultuous past when the nation grappled with constant border skirmishes, resulting in the martyrdom of valiant soldiers. While refraining from explicitly mentioning Pakistan, he asserted that the arsenal once wielded by adversaries has now been rendered ineffective. Reflecting on the erstwhile era marred by frequent bomb blasts, Modi noted the sombre necessity for government advisories cautioning against unidentified objects. However, attributing it to the transformative initiatives of the Narendra Modi-Yogi Adityanath administration, he hailed the cessation of such incidents as a remarkable feat.

Touching upon the vexed issue of Article 370, Modi highlighted the erstwhile climate of separatism in Kashmir, characterised by brazen stone-pelting at security forces. Yet, he heralded a definitive end to such unrest, underscoring the pivotal role of peace and security as precursors to developmental endeavours. Speaking on Uttar Pradesh's law and order landscape in the past, the prime minister highlighted the prevalence of riots and curfews in Aligarh, where neighbouring residents sought permission before venturing into the city. In a scathing critique, Modi attributed riots, murders, gang warfare and extortion as hallmarks of the SP's governance, forming the bedrock of their political agenda. He lamented the bygone era when the freedom of movement for women was severely curtailed, evoking a poignant reminder of the challenges that once beleaguered the state. Continuing his attack on the Congress-SP alliance, the prime minister accused the parties of perpetuating politics of appeasement. Emphasising their failure to enact substantial measures for the advancement of Muslims on political, social and economic fronts, the prime minister asserted that the opposition's discomfort arises when the plight of Pasmanda Muslims is brought to light. He further lambasted the purported exploitation of Pasmanda Muslims by the elite, contrasting it with his administration's efforts to enact legislation safeguarding their rights, notably through the prohibition of 'Triple Talaq'. Highlighting initiatives such as the expansion of Haj quotas and facilitating solo female pilgrimages, the prime minister underscored his government's commitment to addressing the needs of the Muslim commu-



PM Narendra Modi with CM Yogi Adityanath and others in Aligarh on Monday

nity. During a discourse on welfare programmes, the prime minister lashed out at the Congress and SP for neglecting the concerns of the populace. Specifically addressing the issue of inadequate ration distribution despite payments, he highlighted the prevalent exploitation by middlemen. Contrastingly, the prime minister asserted that current initiatives have provided relief to numerous residents of Aligarh and Hathras, who now benefit from free ration distribution. Additionally, he pointed out the accessibility of free healthcare services under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, benefitting thousands of families in the regions above. Notably, the prime minister reiterated his administration's commitment to providing healthcare security to senior citizens, guaranteeing free treatment worth up to Rs 5 lakh for individuals aged 70 and above. Accusing the Congress of har-

bouring intentions to plunder the nation's assets, the prime minister cautioned against what he deemed alarming proposals the Congress and its coalition partners put forth. He highlighted the contentious stance of Congress leaders, including their purported intent to scrutinise earnings and possessions of individuals, with plans to seize and redistribute private properties if they assume power. Expressing concern over the potential implications for women's assets, the prime minister emphasised the sanctity of possessions, including our 'mother's mangalsutra' and even the smallest holdings, and underscored the need for legal protection. Drawing parallels with extremist ideologies, he cautioned against policies reminiscent of Maoist and communist agendas, attributing past devastations to similar approaches.

Asserting the alignment of the Indi Alliance with these contentious principles, the prime minister reiterated his stance that Congress perceives the pillaging of the nation's wealth as its inherent prerogative. Referring to the Defence Industrial Corridor in Aligarh, the prime minister emphasised the pivotal role Uttar Pradesh is set to play in India's journey towards self-reliance, particularly in production of defence equipment. He also criticised the Congress for its alleged involvement in corruption scandals related to defence procurements over the decades. Highlighting recent achievements in defence exports, he announced plans for the production of BrahMos missiles within UP, signalling a significant step towards bolstering domestic defence manufacturing capabilities. Moreover, he underscored the synergies between the Defence

Time to put Aligarh lock on fate of Cong, SP, BSP: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday said that the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Congress neglected the development of Aligarh, manipulated faith and tried to breach security. He stated, "Now is the chance to put 'Aligarh lock' on their fate and entrust the country's leadership to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the third term." Seeking votes in favour of Aligarh MP and BJP candidate Satish Gautam and Anup Valmiki 'Pradhan' from Hathras, the chief minister continued, "By doing so, India will emerge as a major global power. The entire nation's voice is uniting with the prime minister's vision for a self-reliant and developed India. From all corners, the chant 'Phir Ek Baar, Modi Sarkar, Abki Baar 400 Paar' is echoing." Prime Minister Narendra Modi was also present during

this address. The chief minister urged the gathering to simply look for the lotus symbol and show appreciation for Modi's decade-long efforts by casting their vote. Emphasising that the first phase of elections has been completed, the chief minister remarked, "There was immense excitement and enthusiasm among the people across 102 Lok Sabha constituencies. Prime Minister Modi's decade-long contributions are garnering the BJP overwhelming support of the people. Opposition parties are unlikely to get even a single seat in UP. I urge voters to maintain this momentum into the second and third phases as well." Chief Minister Yogi highlighted that the developmental initiatives, in addition to heritage preservation efforts and welfare schemes implemented over the past decade are unparalleled and praiseworthy. "We have all been granted the chance to play a significant

role in shaping India into a developed nation," he remarked. Chief Minister Yogi stated that Prime Minister Modi has fulfilled the long-standing demands of the people of Aligarh and Hathras. "Living up to the expectations of the common people, Prime Minister Modi himself came here to establish a university in the name of great freedom fighter Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh. Now the university is ready and the session has also started." He added: "Aligarh has also got the Defence Industrial Corridor. The Surya Tilak ceremony for Lord Ram was conducted in Ayodhya on Ram Navami. Prime Minister Modi has blessed us with these extraordinary opportunities, bringing both joy and pride." Yogi government ministers Asim Arun, Sandeep Singh, Hathras candidate Anup Valmiki 'Pradhan', and Aligarh MP Satish Gautam among others were present in the public meeting.

Industrial Corridor and the Dedicated Freight Corridor in Aligarh, foreseeing substantial benefits for regional industries. The prime minister celebrated the historic milestone of witnessing the grand Ram temple after centuries, attributing its realisation to a culmination of efforts spanning generations. Reflecting on the temple's significance, he noted the apparent unease among members of the Indi Alliance, who harboured long standing reservations regarding its construction. Undeterred by opposition sen-

timents, the prime minister hailed the temple's completion as a testament to India's progress and spiritual prosperity. **MODI PRAISES YOGI** Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Monday, showered Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with words of praise during an election rally held in Aligarh. He said: "Having Yogi as a colleague fills me with a sense of pride." Addressing a large public meeting, Prime Minister Modi recalled a time when women couldn't freely step out

of their homes in UP and added, "Under Yogi's administration, criminals dare not disrupt the peace of the citizens." Modi also emphasised, "Those who solely associate Yogi with bulldozers should broaden their perspective. The industrial development witnessed in Uttar Pradesh under Yogi's leadership rivals the development achieved from independence until his tenure began. His One District One Product (ODOP) initiative is now gaining nationwide admiration."

Ramayana stars rally for 'Ram'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a heartwarming reunion that resonated deeply with fans of the beloved television series 'Ramayana', Deepika Chikhalia and Sunil Lahiri, renowned for portraying the roles of Sita and Lakshman respectively, joined hands with their on-screen co-star Arun Govil who played the role of Ram, for a spirited roadshow in support of his candidacy in the upcoming Meerut Lok Sabha election. The roadshow, held in Meerut, marked a poignant moment as the duo embarked on a political journey together to rally support for Govil, who is contesting as a Bharatiya Janata Party candidate. Commencing from the Mansa Devi temple of Meerut, the roadshow wound its way through the city streets, evoking memories of the iconic characters from 'Ramayana'. Deepika, resplendent in a saffron saree, stood close to Arun Govil, while Sunil Lahiri stood behind them in an open jeep, reminiscent of their beloved roles. As they traversed through the city, the trio greeted the enthusiastic crowd with folded hands, eliciting chants of 'Jai Shri Ram'. At various intersections, people showered flowers on them,

welcoming them with open arms. The roadshow provided ample opportunities for citizens to interact with the beloved actors, further strengthening their connection with the public. The grand roadshow aimed to garner widespread support for Arun Govil's candidacy, leveraging the immense popularity of 'Ramayana' and its iconic characters. This event serves as a reminiscent echo of the trio's previous appearance together on January 22 during the auspicious consecration of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya. "The convergence of entertainment and politics underscores the evolving landscape of Indian elections, where popular cultural icons play a significant role in shaping public opinion and garnering support for political candidates," remarked political analyst Prabha Shanker Asthana. Renowned personalities, including singers Kailash Kheter, Sonu Nigam, Anoop Jalota, Hansraj Hans, Lakhbir Singh Lakha, and veteran actors Hema Malini, extended their endorsement to Govil through heartfelt messages and social media posts, amplifying his outreach efforts across diverse demographics.

BSP expels Bareilly zonal coordinator, district president

Lucknow (PNS): The tussle within the Bahujan Samaj Party over issuing symbols to two candidates for Aonla Lok Sabha seat took a new turn on Monday when the party expelled the zonal coordinator and district president of Bareilly, accusing them of indulging in anti-party activities. Omkar Katib of Mirganj has been made the Bareilly district president again. Meanwhile, a video has gone viral about two people getting the party symbol, sparking discussions. In this, the name of a big party leader is also coming out. Abid Ali and Satyaveer had got the BSP symbol from Aonla Lok Sabha seat. The controversy that arose after both of them got the party symbol was settled when Abid Ali was declared the party candidate after talks with party chief Mayawati. In the viral video, the name of a party office-bearer is coming out and he is being held responsible for two people getting the party symbol in Aonla. The dispute reached the district headquarters and on Monday, district president Rajiv Kumar was removed and the command of the party was given to Omkar Katib. Not only this, on the instructions of the party high command, zonal convenor Brahma Swaroop Sagar and former district president Rajiv Kumar were expelled from the party.

2nd phase important for Cong

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Congress, which is contesting the Lok Sabha elections in alliance with Samajwadi Party, has equal share with the alliance partner in the eight seats which will go to polls in the second phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh. Both the parties are contesting on four seats each. Congress has fielded two Dalits, one Muslim and one Brahmin woman on these seats. Congress has also fielded a Dalit candidate on the general seat of Mathura. The party is preparing to put in all its strength on these seats through its star campaigners. Polling in these constituencies will be held on April 26. In the second phase polls, Mathura, Ghaziabad, Amroha and Bulandshahr reserved seats are in the quota of Congress. In these seats, Congress has fielded Mukesh Dhangar of Dalit community from Mathura, Shivram Valmiki from Bulandshahr reserved seat, Dolly Sharma from Ghaziabad and Kunwar Danish Ali from Amroha. Apart from Danish Ali, the remaining three are from Congress' own cadre. Danish Ali is the current MP of Amroha and has left the Bahujan Samaj Party and joined Congress. The record of recent elections on the other three seats is also not satisfactory for Congress.

THE PARTY IS PREPARING TO PUT IN ALL ITS STRENGTH ON THE EIGHT SEATS GOING TO POLLS IN THE SECOND PHASE THROUGH ITS STAR CAMPAIGNERS

Congress' performance in Ghaziabad Lok Sabha constituency has been comparatively better. In the 2009 election, Bharatiya Janata Party's Rajnath Singh was elected MP from this seat while Congress' Surendra Prakash Goyal was in second place. Then in 2014 and 2019, BJP's General VK Singh was elected MP. In the year 2014, he defeated Congress' Raj Babbar and in 2019 he defeated SP's Suresh Bansal. In the 2019 election, Congress' Dolly Sharma was in third place. This time BJP has fielded Atul Garg in place of General VK Singh, while Congress has fielded Dolly Sharma again. However, this time she also has the support of SP. In recent years, Congress last got success in Mathura Lok Sabha constituency in 2004, when its candidate Manvendra Singh was elected MP. After this, Rashtriya Lok Dal's Jayant Chaudhary was elected MP in 2009 and BJP's Hema Malini was elected MP in 2014 and

2019. In the 2009 elections, Congress' Manvendra Singh came third. Then in the 2019 elections also, Congress' Mahesh Pathak came third. This time Congress and SP joint candidate Mukesh Dhangar is in the fray against BJP and RLD joint candidate Hema Malini. Congress has not opened its account in Amroha Lok Sabha constituency since 1984. BSP's Kunwar Danish Ali was elected MP in 2019, BJP's Kanwar Singh Tanwar in 2014 and RLD's Devendra Nagpal in 2009, while independent Harish Nagpal was elected MP in 2004. This time Congress has placed its bet on MP Danish Ali, who had won on the BSP ticket, due to alliance with SP. The SP had also won this seat once in 1996. This time Danish Ali, as the joint candidate of Congress and SP, is pitted against BJP and RLD joint candidate Kanwar Singh Tanwar. BSP has fielded Mujahideen Hussain as its candidate. BJP also holds the Bulandshahr reserved Lok Sabha seat. In the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, BJP's Bhola Singh won by defeating BSP candidates, while in the 2019 election, Congress was at third place. This time Shivram Valmiki is the joint candidate of Congress and SP and Bhola Singh is the joint candidate of BJP and RLD. BSP has fielded Nagina MP Girish Chand Jatav from this seat.

Development works aligned with people's aspirations, says Yogi

Lucknow (PNS): Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Monday, asserted that development and heritage are two of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's focus areas, pointing out that in the Bharatiya Janata Party government, the country has witnessed for the first time that development works are inseparably aligned with the aspirations of people. Addressing the media here on Monday, the chief minister remarked, "Unprecedented work has been done both in terms of development and heritage under Prime Minister Modi's leadership." He added: "Infrastructure is one area which gets maximum support of people and the government's achievements are significant in this regard. The number of highways has doubled. Similarly, since 2014, the number of airports has increased from 74 to more than 150. During the Congress regime, there was only one AIIMS, which increased to six under Atal Bihari Vajpayee's prime ministership, and further expanded to 22 during Prime Minister Modi's tenure." Notably, the proliferation of IITs, IIMs, IIITs, and the implementation of the One District One Medical College initiative are emblematic of the new nar-

rative of development, he elaborated. Yogi stated that for the first time in the country, respect for heritage has also been observed, citing the restoration of the Vishwanath Dham in Kashi, the grandeur of Mahakaal, Kedarnath, Badrinath, and Somnath temples, and the consecration ceremony of Lord Ram Lalla in Ayodhya after a gap of five centuries, as glaring examples of this. "Previously, accommodating 50 people simultaneously at the Kashi Vishwanath Temple was challenging. Now, even if 50,000 visitors arrive, there are no issues. Similarly, hosting 500 individuals in Ayodhya posed difficulties in the past, but today, even accommodating 5 lakh people presents no trouble," he noted. Chief Minister Yogi stated that the harmony between 'Vikas' (development) and 'Virasat' (heritage) witnessed in the country today was attributable to the vision and determination of Prime Minister Modi's leadership. He expressed confidence that this support will turn into blessings allowing the National Democratic Alliance to form a majority government once again under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

NOTA underscores growing discontent among voters

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In the past decade, the introduction of the NOTA (None of the Above) option by the Election Commission has reshaped the electoral landscape in Uttar Pradesh, with its impact becoming increasingly palpable. As voters exercise their right to reject all candidates, the figures from recent elections paint a compelling picture of NOTA's rising influence. During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Robertsganj constituency in Uttar Pradesh witnessed a notable surge in NOTA votes and it secured the fourth position. Moreover, in Machhlishahr Lok Sabha constituency, where the margin between victory and defeat was a mere 181 votes, a staggering 10,830 voters opted for NOTA, underscoring its significance as a decisive factor. Across the 13 parliamentary constituencies of Purvanchal, the

trend of rising NOTA votes has been evident year after year. For instance, in the Varanasi Lok Sabha seat, while 2,051 votes were cast for NOTA in 2014, the number surged to 4,037 in 2019, resulting in the defeat of 22 candidates. Similarly, in Ballia, NOTA secured the fourth position with 9,615 votes, indicating a growing sentiment of discontent among voters. According to data from the Election Commission of India, the proportion of voters opting for NOTA in Uttar Pradesh increased from 0.71 per cent in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections to 0.84 per cent in 2019. This shift signifies a rising disenchantment among voters with the available political options. In the 2014 elections, nine candidates in Ballia received fewer votes than NOTA, highlighting a significant rejection of traditional party candidates. Despite the presence of established par-

ties and independents, NOTA emerged as a formidable contender, garnering 6,670 votes in the constituency. The electoral dynamics of Ballia further exemplify the evolving role of NOTA. With a voter turnout of 53.3 per cent in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and 15 candidates vying for the seat, Bharat Singh of the Bharatiya Janata Party clinched victory with 3,59,758 votes, while Neeraj Shekhar of the Samajwadi Party secured the runner-up position with 2,20,324 votes. As NOTA continues to gain traction in Uttar Pradesh elections, it signifies a growing demand for better governance and representation, compelling political parties to introspect and address the concerns of the electorate. With its increasing prominence, NOTA has undeniably emerged as a significant force shaping the state's political landscape.

Baghpat election a litmus test for Jayant

PRABHA SHANKER ■ LUCKNOW

Baghpat, historically known as Vyaghrprastha (the land of tigers), is one of the politically significant regions in Uttar Pradesh. It is one of the 80 Lok Sabha constituencies in Uttar Pradesh and voting will take place there in the second phase of parliamentary elections on April 26. The Baghpat Lok Sabha constituency in west UP comprises five Vidhan Sabha segments - Siwalkhas, Chhaprauli, Baraut, Baghpat and Modi Nagar. The incumbent Member of Parliament is Dr Satya Pal Singh, representing the Bharatiya Janata Party. In the 2019 general elections, Dr Satya Pal Singh secured victory with 5,25,789 votes, defeating Rashtriya Lok Dal chief Jayant Chaudhary by a margin of 23,502 votes as the constituency registered 64.68 per cent voter turnout. The day-time temperature on the day of polling is likely to remain

higher. This region was once under the influence of farmer and Jat leader Ajit Singh, a maverick politician who used any opportunity to the hilt. In his prime days in politics, it was said whether Ajit Singh wins or loses, no party can afford to ignore him and every party wanted him in its fold if foraying into west UP. After Ajit Singh, his son Jayant Chaudhary stepped into his shoes and took over command of the RLD. With Jayant having a good hold over Jats, his support is considered crucial by all parties for electoral success in Baghpat. Sensing this, the National Democratic Alliance succeeded in wooing Jayant into its fold by conferring Bharat Ratna on his late grandfather, former prime minister Chaudhary Charan Singh. The RLD had contested the 2019 Lok Sabha election in alliance with Samajwadi Party and the coming together of Jat, Dalit and Muslim voters gave

a tough fight to the Bharatiya Janata Party in Baghpat. Though Jayant Chaudhary lost the Baghpat seat, the margin of victory of Dr Satpal Malik of the BJP was about 23,000 votes. Now the Lok Sabha election 2024 will be a litmus test of Jayant's decision to join the NDA. This time, RLD's Raj Kumar Sagwan is contesting from Baghpat. The SP has fielded Amarpal Sharma, a Brahmin, and Bahujan Samaj Party Parveen Bansal, setting the stage for a triangular contest. Interestingly, this is the first time that no one from the Chaudhary dynasty is contesting election from Baghpat. Recently, in reaction to SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's statement about his (Jayant) being a turncoat, Jayant said the statement aimed at discrediting him among his core voters in the west UP and on the seats under his influence. He reacted to the SP chief's jibe, saying he had not been a

turncoat but he had trounced his opponents. "Ise palatna nahi pathkani dena kahte hai. Hum bhi thoda bahut mall vidhya jante hai." In his speeches, Jayant has invoked Ajit Singh and late prime minister Bharat Ratna Chaudhary Charan Singh. Political analysts say Jayant even tries to keep his support base intact in west UP by saying "those who begged for votes in the name of Chaudhary Charan Singh are now not happy with Bharat Ratna being conferred on him". "You can check their social media accounts to find out if I am right. They could not even welcome my grandfather getting Bharat Ratna for his contribution to the country," he said in a meeting in Muzaffarnagar. Jayant has opted to pose himself a defender, saying he would not react to comments on him by his former ally. By saying that he would not speak anything personal, he has taken a

soft stand to keep intact his support base among Muslims, who are weighing the options between RLD and SP. Baghpat Lok Sabha constituency encompasses the entire Baghpat district, part of Ghaziabad district, and part of Meerut district. With a literacy rate of 62.53 per cent, this parliamentary seat has approximately 2,27,946 Scheduled Caste voters comprising 14.2 per cent of the population as per the 2011 Census. The rural-urban distribution stands at 74.9 per cent (12,02,335) and 25.1 per cent (4,02,919), respectively, based on the 2011 Census. In the 2019 parliamentary election, Baghpat had 16,05,254 voters who voted in 1,796 polling booths, achieving a turnout of 64.2 per cent. The 2017 assembly election witnessed a turnout of 65.8 per cent, reflecting the active political engagement in the region. Baghpat is best known for the Pura Maha Dev hill shrine.

IGS serves as platform to showcase innovative environmental solutions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Marking World Earth Day, the Indian Army, in a collaborative effort with the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K), hosted the prestigious India Green Summit (IGS) 2024 at Jhansi military station. The summit, under the overall mentorship of Lt Gen Prit Pal Singh, AVSM GOC of Sudharshan Chakra Corps, served as a platform to showcase innovative environmental solutions and facilitate crucial discussions on climate change and sustainable development within the military infrastructure. The event, attended by Indian Army and Air Force officers from various parts of the country, brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including esteemed organisations such as the Building Materials and Technology Promotion Council (BMPTC), Indian Green Building Council (IGBC), India Meteorological Department (IMD), Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), School of Planning and Governance (SPG), Climate Resilient Observing Systems Promotion Council (CROPS) and Construction Industry Development Council (CIDC). Additionally, 15 organisations, including Tata BlueScope, showcased the latest sustainable development

technologies, focusing on advanced sustainable construction practices. The India Green Summit took on added significance as it commemorated the anniversary of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed last year on Earth Day between



IIT Kanpur and the Commander Works Engineer of Jhansi station. This pioneering collaboration aims to transform Jhansi military station into a carbon-neutral facility, highlighting the shared commitment of the Indian Army and IIT Kanpur to environmental responsibilities.

Organised by Prof Rajeev Jindal, Department of Sustainable Energy Engineering, IIT Kanpur and Colonel Akhil Singh Charak from Military Engineering Services, and managed by Progression Global, the summit served as a platform to highlight the synergy between technological innovation and

sustainable military practices. The General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the White Tiger division Maj Gen MK Mathur delivered the keynote address of the event, iterating on the importance of the green and sustainable takeaways that will guide future actions

towards environmental responsibility within the military. Prof Rajeev Jindal, Department of Sustainable Energy Engineering, IIT Kanpur, expressed, "The India Green Summit 2024 exemplifies the power of collaboration between academia and the military. By working together, we can develop innovative solutions to ensure a sustainable future for our defense infrastructure. The successful transformation of Jhansi Military Station into a carbon-neutral facility will serve as a model for other military establishments across the country." The summit featured several keynote speeches and engaging panel discussions that delved into critical topics ranging from climate change mitigation strategies to sustainable building technologies and exploring innovations in renewable energy and water conservation tailored specifically for military applications. Participants gained valuable insights from experts on the practical implementation of these technologies in development projects across various military stations throughout India. Colonel Akhil Singh Charak from Military Engineering Services, commented, "The Indian Army prioritises both national security and environmental responsibility. The India Green Summit 2024 served as an invaluable platform for exploring innovative sustainable technologies and building strong partnerships with leading institutions like IIT Kanpur. The knowledge and collaborations forged here will be crucial in achieving our objective of creating environmentally responsible military facilities across India." The partnerships and collaborative efforts showcased at the India Green Summit will continue to serve as a guiding light for other military stations nationwide to adopt similar sustainable practices, aiming for a greener, more sustainable future in line with national and global environmental goals.

Man found dead

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

An elderly man, who had arrived in Raipur village of Purwa Kotwali police station area of Unnao three days ago to attend a programme, was found dead in a pit on the roadside on Monday morning. His kin rushed to the spot and after identifying the body alleged his killing. They also staged massive agitation and blocked the Mangatkhedha-Kantha road. ASP Akhilesh Singh assured the kin of initiating action against the guilty and sent the body for autopsy. He said on receipt of autopsy report, exact cause of death will be ascertained.

Kanhaiyalal alias Kandhai of Medpur village had arrived in Raipur village on April 18 to attend a programme. On his failing to return to home, his kin had lodged a missing report with the police on April 19. Since then, both police and kin were searching for Kanhaiyalal. On Monday morning, villagers found the body of an elderly man lying in a pit on the roadside near Raipur village on Mangatkhedha-Kantha road. His kin immediately rushed to the spot and alleged that after killing him, his body was dumped in the pit. They staged agitation and blocked the road. ASP Akhilesh Singh, CO Somendra Vishwas, inspector Kunwar Bahadur Singh along with forensic team reached the spot and carried out investigations. ASP assured of initiating action against the guilty.

Various awareness campaigns organised on World Earth Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Various awareness campaigns, including a street play, were organised on World Earth Day by the Scouts and Guides on Monday on the theme of the day 'Planet vs Plastic' to eliminate the use of plastic.

Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer (SDME/Carriage & Wagon) Anubhav Pathak said as we are moving ahead in the 21st century, the health of our planet is emerging as a serious concern. "Earth Day, which is celebrated globally on April 22, provides an important platform to raise awareness about environmental issues and advocate sustainable practices," he said.

He said the theme 'Planet vs Plastic' of the day highlights the commitment to significantly reduce the use of plastics to protect both ecological and human health. He said the day started in 1970 has become a global celebration, attended by more than a billion people annually in more than 193 countries. "This day is dedicated to educating and organising individuals, communities and governments on the importance of the environment and the need for its conservation and restoration," he said.

North Eastern Railway (NER) Bharat Scouts staged a



Scouts and Guides launching a campaign at Dashashwamedh Ghat on World Earth Day in Varanasi on Monday.

street play with various messages at Dashashwamedh Ghat to make the common people aware.

Under the theme 'Planet vs Plastic' they sent a message to reduce plastic production by 60 per cent, eliminate single-use plastic and reduce the widespread pollution threatening our natural and urban environment, protect the environment and human beings, to reduce the impact and keep the earth air-conditioned.

Along with this, under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, plastic waste was collected and

recycled waste was donated. The event was conducted by leader of NER Bharat Scouts and Guides Piyush Sharma, saying that overcoming climate change is possible if everyone is committed to saving the earth's environment and our collective future. In the said campaign, Vikas Sharma, Pradeep Kumar, Akash Gupta, Pushkar Rawat, Prashant Prakash, Ramchandra Yadav, Himanshu Bhardwaj along with members of Bharat Scout and Guide District Association Varanasi were also present.

Purpose of celebrating Earth Day is to spread awareness: Shukla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

With an aim to raise public awareness about the harmful effects of plastic pollution on the environment and inhabitants of the Earth, the activists of Namami Gange removed plastic waste from the Ganga on World Earth Day here on Monday. They appealed to the people to make the river plastic free. On the occasion the toxic polythene waste was also taken out from the Ganga and then dumped in dustbin. The theme of Earth Day 2024 is 'Planet vs Plastic' and its aim is to promote a global movement to significantly reduce the use and manufacture of plastics.



A talk show being organised on World Earth Day in Varanasi on Monday.

Regional coordinator of Namami Gange (Kashi region) Rajesh Shukla said the objective behind celebrating World Earth Day is to spread awareness towards nature. "By facing the challenges in nature conservation, the main problems like population growth, pollution

and deforestation have to be solved. The aim of the day is to spread awareness about various environmental protection measures while protecting the earth and its natural resources in the race for development," he said and emphasised on organising and encouraging activities for promoting environmental awareness, sustainability and conservation. Gulshan Sharma, Ravi Seth, Sunil Tiwari etc were also present on the occasion.

Meanwhile, on World

Earth Day, a talk show on 'Planet vs You' was organised in the morning assembly of Children's Valley English School, Mahmoorganj. This event was organised under the joint aegis of Earth Day Network and Vikas Evam Shiksha Samiti (VESS) India. The keynote speaker of the event was environmentalist Dr Rajesh Srivastava. He warned the children about the dangers of plastic and advised them to use cloth bags instead of plastic ones. Children also showed

their commitment to use cotton bags. On the occasion children prepared very interesting posters and showed their thinking regarding World Earth Day. Some cloth bags sent by Earth Day Network were handed over to the school family so that they could be put to use. With this, school families as well as children and their guardians can be motivated to use cloth bags and plastic can be eliminated from people's lives.

Dr Srivastava said it is necessary to eliminate plastic to create a sustainable environment. "Not just one person, community or organisation but everyone will have to step forward and take a pledge to end it, only then any meaningful initiative will be taken in this direction," he added. School manager Virat Chaturvedi, Principal Hemraj Vishwakarma along with teachers like Sheela, Mridula, Muskaan, Shivam, Vivek, Umashankar etc were also present.

Emphasis on reducing use of plastic

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

World Earth Day was celebrated at the training centre of IFFCO Phulpur in collaboration with Jeevan Jyoti Hospital.

This year's theme is Earth vs Plastic which aims to draw the people's attention to the ill effects of plastic on the earth. Chief guest Senior Executive Director (Unit Head) Sanjay Kudesia said we should reduce the use of plastic. Nano fertilizer is environment and soil friendly which we are promoting. Dr Arpit Bansal, from Jeevan Jyoti Hospital, who was the main speaker, said we should reduce the use of plastic in our everyday life and avoid single use plastic as much as possible. The programme was conducted by Umesh Kumar and Amit Srivastava.

General Managers Sanjay Vaish and MD Mishra, JGMs MD Mishra & Dr. Anita Mishra, HOD Human Resources Shambhu Shekhar, President of IFFCO Officers' Association Anurag Tiwari, General Secretary Swyam Prakash and a large number of



IFFCO employees were present in the programme.

Meanwhile a seminar on the topic 'Role of students in cleanliness and protection of the earth' was organised on Monday by Municipal Corporation, Prayagraj, in association with Kinnar Akhara, Prayagraj, at Naveen Mahila Seva Sadan Inter College. It was presided over by Mahamandaleshwar Kaushalya Nand Giri (Tina Maa), senior member of UP Kinnar Welfare Board, president of Samarjit trust and state president of UP Kinnar Akhara, who while highlighting the cleanliness and environmental work being done by the

Kinnar community appealed to the students to plant trees around them, make polythene free cities and make each other aware. Mahamandaleshwar

Kaushalyanand Giri also administered oath to the girl students. Project officer of Municipal Corporation Vijay Bahadur Singh said it raises awareness and inspires change, fostering a deeper connection with nature. He motivated students and teachers on garbage disposal. Principal of Naveen Mahila Seva Sadan Inter College Vibha and its other staff members, including Shalini, Ashok Kumar Patel, Rohit Chandel, Namrata Singh, Nidhi Singh etc. were present.

MAN KILLED IN ACCIDENT: A 42-year-old newspaper hawker was killed when his bicycle was hit by a speeding vehicle in Bamrauli area on Monday. The Puramufi police registered an FIR against the unknown vehicle. Police are locating the vehicle with the help of CCTV cameras installed around the incident site. Anil Chauhan of Bamrauli, was a newspaper hawker. He was coming to Civil Lines on bicycle early on Monday when he was hit by the speeding vehicle near Salim Market in Bamrauli. The head injury proved fatal.

In another incident a 16-year-old boy committed suicide by hanging himself after failing in High School examination of UP Board late on Sunday night. The victim was identified as Pramod, a resident of Padampur village of Langra in Antu police station area of Pratapgarh. He had failed in the examination the results of which were declared here on Saturday. He went to his room and committed suicide by hanging himself in his room on Sunday night.

MoU to facilitate collaboration on areas of RDE, emission norms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK) and National Automotive Test tracks (NATRAX) announced the signing of a MoU to facilitate collaboration on the areas of Real Drive Emission (RDE) and emission norms, as well as other areas as deemed fit in the future. The MoU was signed by Dr Manish Jaiswal, Director of NATRAX and Prof Tarun Gupta, Dean, Research and Development, IIT Kanpur.

towards the latest EU standards and knowledge-sharing to create innovative solutions to be utilised by industry in the future.

Prof. Tarun Gupta, Dean of R&D, IIT Kanpur said, "The collaboration with NATRAX is a remarkable opportunity to bridge the gap between academic research and real-world application. Vehicular emissions are a critical area to be addressed for cleaner and more sustainable transportation solutions. By combining IIT Kanpur's expertise in emissions research with NATRAX's state-of-the-art testing facilities, we can accelerate the development of innovative solutions to meet the future needs of the automotive industry. This will

also help us to empower the Indian automotive industry to compete on a global scale and nurture the next generation of automotive engineers and researchers."

Dr Manish Jaiswal, Director of NATRAX, said, "We believe that this collaboration will focus on developing technologies and platforms that can assist industry in design and real time test analysis of any automotive vehicle. The physical test of an automobile shall involve fact-checking, data analysis and content curation. The partnership will prioritise transparency, accountability and responsible use of technologies to ensure the highest standards maintained by automotive industry."

Building on this MoU, future partnerships will be towards new regulations in the disposal of batteries, engine and flex fuels and safety related to transportation. It was also mutually agreed to work towards developing internship programs for MTech students of IIT Kanpur at NATRAX.

IIT Kanpur is one of the premier institutes that provides meaningful education, conducts original research of the highest standard and provides leadership in technological innovation for the industrial growth of the country. IIT Kanpur imparts and undertakes cutting-edge research in various areas of science, engineering, design, management and humanities.

Mishap death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A 13-year-old boy riding a bicycle was killed after being hit a dumper at a crossing under the Ghatampur Kotwali police station area on Monday morning. The police have impounded the dumper. Ram Vaish Vishwakarma, a native of Balkhandi Naka, Banda, presently lives in Achhi Mohal (North), Ghatampur. His son Raunak (13) was a student of class VII in an inter college on Moosanaagar Road. The accident took place when Raunak was going to school. On Monday Inspector Pradip Singh said the body was being sent for autopsy. On the basis of complaint, an FIR will be lodged and action will be taken in it. Meanwhile two persons, including a woman, were killed when a speeding dumper knocked them on Kanpur-Sagar highway on Sunday night.

11 IIT (BHU) alumni fare well in UPSC exam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Indian Institute of Technology (Banaras Hindu University) alumni fared well in Union Public Service Commission examination, 2023, and brought laurels not only to the IIT (BHU) but also to this holy city. These 11 alumni secured top ranks in this prestigious Civil Service examinations. Upholding its philosophy that 'Education is character', the institute continues to stand as a beacon of holistic excellence. The IIT (BHU) alumni who secured the final ranks in the examinations are Arfa Usmani (MAT '18) getting All India Rank (AIR) 111, Siddharth Srivastava (MEC '17) AIR 118, Aayush Shrivastava (MEC '22) AIR 327, Nirdesh Gangwar (MIN '20)

AIR 360, Abhijeet Pandey (MIN '16) AIR 451, Harshvardhan Pandey (CIV '16) AIR 489, Aditya Kesari (CIV '22) AIR 503, Yogender Meena (MEC '19) AIR 647, Shubham Kumar Mahato (MIN '20) AIR 857, Ritu Meena (CER '17) AIR 930 and Vijay Pratap Singh (CHE '18) AIR 960. IIT (BHU) Varanasi takes pride in producing top rankers year after year, including notable achievers such as Gaurav Budania (AIR 13 in UPSC 2020), Ashish and Shruti Rajlakshmi (AIR 23 and 25 in UPSC 2021) and Suryabhan Yadav and Sanskriti Somani (AIR 27 and 49 in UPSC 2022).

Giving this information, Dean (Research & Development) Prof Vikash Kumar Dubey said this remarkable achievement

underscores the dedication and resilience of IIT (BHU)'s alumni, who consistently excel in the challenging UPSC examination. With 10 alumni securing top ranks in 2022 and 5 in 2021, this achievement further solidifies the institute's position as a frontrunner in the field of civil services. "This success is a testament to the institute's legacy of excellence in civil services, as well as its significant contributions to technological advancements, academia and more. As an institution of national importance, IIT (BHU) Varanasi is committed to fostering the all-around development of its students, enabling them to pursue their passions and contribute meaningfully to the nation," Prof Dubey said.

Chaitra Utsav organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Under the auspices of Bhava Prabha Padma Sansthan located in Bhadaini, Chaitra Utsav was organised in the Padma auditorium of the institute to commemorate the completion of Chaitra, a Hindi month.

The chief guest of the function was renowned homeopathic doctor Dr Ramesh Bhatia and the programme was presided over by Padma Shri Dr Rajeshwar Acharya. Speaking on the occasion, renowned vocalist Dr Acharya encouraged the artists with his blessings. Dr Ramesh Bhatia described Chaitra as the beginning period of creation. Dr Bhatia was honoured by providing *angavastram* by Dr

Acharya. There was also a special presence of poet Arvind Mishra 'Harsh' who presented his poetry reciting 'Me Shiv Ka Belpatra Hun...'

The first programme was the soulful singing of Shri Ram Bhajans by child artists, Prashasti Acharya and Prathamesh Acharya. The lyrics of the bhajan were 'Thumki Chalal Ramchandra...' and after this, assistant professor of the Music department in Shri Agrasen PG College Dr Shivani Shukla enthralled the audience presenting Chaiti 'Chait Maase Bole Re Koyalaha Ho Rama...'

The next programme was presented by folk artiste of Bokaro (Jharkhand) Ranjana Rai, who added joy to the atmosphere by reciting 'Chaiti'.

She concluded her programme with a Maithili song composed by poet Vidyapati with the words 'Pahunava Aaye Ho...'

In the same sequence, Sriveidi, a student of singing department of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) mesmerised the audience presenting bhajans.

The programme concluded with a devotional rendition of Shri Ram Bhajan by young artiste Harshit Upadhyay with the lyrics being 'Bhajiye Shri Ram Naam...' Dr Sandeep Rao Kewale accompanied all the artists on tabla.

The entire programme was conducted by Dr Preetesh Acharya. Dignitaries like litterateur Dr Anjani Mishra, Akshat Sharma etc were also present.

National business plan contest: Ansh, Aditya win first prize

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The National Business Plan Competition-2024 was organised on Monday under the aegis of Commerce Department of DAV PG College. In it the students suggested many new business plans. Ansh Mehra and Aditya Kumar Singh of DAV PG College, who won the first prize in the competition, presented a heritage plan important from the tourism point of view in Varanasi.

The second prize winner, Alisha Walecha, presented the Alisha Health Bloom Plan for diabetes patients. Krishna Yaduvanshi, who received the

third prize, presented a plan for rough copies and stationery materials for economically weaker students. The fourth prize went to the Green Architecture Business Plan based on sustainable development by Ishita Kesari and Kirti Chaurasia, students of Sunbeam College for Women. The fifth award was given to Mudit Jaitley of DAV for Auto Fair Rate Business Plan. Apart from that, participants presented business plans related to Match Mates app for roommates, plan for street dogs, event management, affordable houses etc.

The winning participants were rewarded by the executive

principal of the college Prof Satyagopal, vice-principal Dr Rahul and head of the department Prof Vijaynath Dubey by presenting them trophies and certificates.

The programme was coordinated by Dr Taru Singh and conducted by Dr Shantanu Saurabh. Dr Nazmul Hasan and Dr Siddharth Singh were included in the jury. On the occasion, teachers of the department like Dr Sanjay Kumar Shah, Sakshi Choudhary, Dr Anand Singh, Dr Shruti Agarwal, Dr Richa Gupta, Dr Rashmi Tripathi, Dr Satyarth Bandhal, Dr Priyanka Bahl, Dr Sonam Kapoor, Mitin Ahuja etc were also present.

Workshop on corporate communication held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A one-day national workshop on 'Corporate Communication, Media and Film Production' was organised by Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) on Monday. The training sessions were addressed by renowned film maker Dr Krishna Kant Bajpai, senior journalists Dr Vishwanath Gokarn, Meera Vohra and Devendra Nath Singh and public relations (PR) expert Medha Dubey.

The workshop included interactive training sessions on corporate communication, public relations, print media,

electronic media, film production, etc. Dr Krishna Kant Bajpai (Director, SMS Institute of Fashion Design & Technology, Film maker, Mumbai) delivered the first session on corporate communication and explained topics like internal communication, external communication, crisis communication, etc.

The second session was delivered by Dr Vishwanath Gokarn. Further sessions were hosted by Meera Vohra and Devendra Nath Singh.

Dr Shobhana Nerlikar, head of department, inaugurated the session and thanked all the experts for being present at the workshop and interacting with the students.

Opposition resorting to appeasement politics: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP alleged on Monday that the Opposition has resorted to blatant appeasement politics, anti-Hindu agenda and joining hands with anti-India forces in desperation, as it is becoming clear that the ruling NDA will reach its target of winning over 400 seats in the Lok Sabha polls. Its spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia cited the murder of Neha Hiremath (23), daughter of Congress councillor Niranjan Hiremath in Karnataka, and claimed that the state government is not taking appropriate action due to the religion of the accused.

Fayaz, who allegedly stabbed the victim on a college campus, has been arrested by the police. Bhatia said Niranjan Hiremath has stated that he had given to police names of eight persons who were allegedly involved in his daughter's murder but none



of them has been arrested and that the CBI should probe the case.

"Her father is himself saying that he has lost faith in the police but Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is shielding the accused," the BJP spokesperson alleged.

While BJP president J P Nadda met the victim's family members, no senior Congress leader such as Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra or the chief minister met them, he said. The BJP spokesperson claimed

that some people who raised the 'Jai Shri Ram' slogan during a Ram Navami procession were beaten up and said that there is a "jungle raj" in Karnataka.

Bhatia alleged that the Congress manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls seems to be inspired by Pakistan's founder M A Jinnah as it speaks of strengthening personal laws. Will the practice of triple talaq, which was banned and made a criminal offence by the Modi government, be brought back, he asked and also attacked the Congress for its leader P Chidambaram's assertion that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act will be repealed if the INDIA bloc comes to power. As the BJP's graph rises during the polls and it becomes clear that the ruling National Democratic Alliance will reach its target of over 400 seats, the opposition, especially the Congress, is turning desperate, Bhatia claimed.

Rajnath reviews military preparedness in Siachen

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday visited Siachen, the world's highest battlefield, and reviewed India's overall military preparedness in the region.

Singh's visit to Siachen came over a week after the Indian Army marked the 40th year of its presence in the strategically key region. The defence minister, accompanied by Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande, reviewed the overall security situation in the region, officials said. "Visited a forward post in Siachen. Had a wonderful interaction with the brave Army personnel who are guarding our nation in extremely challenging conditions," Singh said on 'X'.

"I laud their courage and professionalism in the line of duty," he said. Singh also interacted with the soldiers deployed in Siachen. The Siachen glacier at the height of around 20,000 feet in the Karakoram range is known as the highest militarised zone in the world



where soldiers have to battle frostbite and high winds. In his address to the soldiers, Singh lauded them for walking on the virtuous path of protecting the "motherland with valour and determination in extreme conditions." He emphasised that the nation will remain forever indebted to the armed forces personnel, as due to their sacrifices, every citizen feels

safe. "We are leading a peaceful life as we have an assurance that our brave soldiers stand steadfast at the borders. In the times to come, when the history of national security is written, the acts of bravery and iron-clad will of our soldiers in the icy cold glacier will be remembered with pride," he said. "It will forever be an inspiration for future generations,"

he said. The defence minister described Siachen as not an ordinary land, but a symbol of India's sovereignty and determination. He stated that just as Delhi is India's national capital, Mumbai is the financial capital and Bengaluru is the technology capital; Siachen is the capital of courage, grit and determination.

The nation recently celebrated the 40th anniversary of the success of Operation Meghdoot.

Singh termed the operation, which was launched by the Indian Army in Siachen on April 13, 1984, as a golden chapter of the country's military history. "The success of Operation Meghdoot is a matter of pride for all of us," he said.

The defence minister also laid a wreath at the Siachen War Memorial, as a mark of solemn tribute to the bravehearts who have made the supreme sacrifice in service of the country. Under its 'Operation Meghdoot' the Indian Army established its full control over the Siachen Glacier on April, 1984.

The Indian Army strengthened its presence in Siachen over the last few years. In January last year, Captain Shiva Chauhan from the Army's Corps of Engineers was posted at a frontline post in Siachen Glacier, in the first such operational deployment of an woman Army officer at the key battlefield.

NSDC, ISKCON to provide vocational training to underprivileged youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a groundbreaking collaboration aimed at empowering marginalized communities, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is all set to provide vocational training to tribal and underprivileged youth across multiple states.

The strategic partnership will initially focus on skilling youth from tribal and marginalized communities in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh, with plans to expand to other regions in the future. Through jointly conducted short-term courses, participants will receive industry-recognized certifications via the Skill India Digital Hub platform, enhancing their employability prospects.

Upon successful completion of the training programmes, the skilled youth will have



access to employment opportunities within India. Furthermore, they will be eligible for international job placements facilitated by NSDC International, a subsidiary of NSDC specializing in global mobility and placement arrangements.

As part of the collaboration, ISKCON will establish a Culinary School to empower tribal youth from regions such

as Palghar and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, as well as neighboring states like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. Notably, the trained individuals will have the opportunity to be employed at the upcoming Maha Kumbh Kitchen in Prayagraj in 2025, with provisions for international mobility facilitated in partnership with NSDC International.

The primary objective of this collaboration is to bolster local economies through the establishment of ECO villages and training centers, with a keen focus on providing skill development opportunities to tribal youth, women, and other marginalized communities.

Two additional projects will be implemented under the partnership, each designed to empower local youth and foster sustainable development. The first project aims to replicate the success of the Govardhan Eco Village (GEV) in Palghar, Maharashtra, by setting up similar self-sufficient and sustainable establishments in regions such as Nandurbar (Maharashtra), Jaipur Rural (Rajasthan), and Mandla and Balaghat (Madhya Pradesh), including areas surrounding the Kanha National Park.

The second project will focus on skill development to support the local economy, particularly in sectors such as Hospitality, Retail, and Logistics. By establishing Skill India Centers in

partnership with ISKCON, this initiative will equip local youth, including women, with the necessary skills for employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

NSDC's Skill India Centers have a proven track record of providing resources and support to empower youth in various sectors, facilitating their entry into the workforce and exploring international mobility opportunities. Through pre-incubation and entrepreneurship development training, budding entrepreneurs will receive crucial support in areas such as prototype development, accessing credit, mentorship, and establishing market linkages.

The collaboration between NSDC and ISKCON marks a significant stride towards fostering sustainable development through skill enhancement, ensuring that marginalized communities gain access to opportunities that lead to economic prosperity and overall social inclusion.

Indian universities demonstrate highest performance amongst G20 nations this year

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian universities demonstrated the highest performance improvement among all the G20 nations this year, a significant 14 per cent year-on-year improvement in their average ranking, according to QS president Nunzio Quacquarelli.

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was identified as the highest-ranked university in India in the coveted rankings announced by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the London-based higher education analytics firm. The university was ranked at 20th position globally for development studies.

The QS World University Rankings by Subject were announced earlier this month in which IIM-Ahmedabad figured among the top 25 institutions globally for business



and management studies while IIM-Bangalore and IIM-Calcutta were among the top 50. "This year, Indian universities demonstrated the highest performance improvement among all G20 nations (a significant 14 per cent year-on-year improvement in their average ranking). In terms of research output, India has become one of the world's most rapidly expanding research centres," it said.

From 2017 to 2022, India's research output surged by an impressive 54 per cent, making it the world's fourth-largest producer of research, the QS president said. "India now ranks prominently across in 44 out of the 55 QS Subject Rankings. Standout performances were noted in Computer Science, Chemistry, Biological Sciences, Business Studies and Physics, among others.

More than 2,000 criminal cases against MPs, MLAs decided in 2023: SC told

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Special courts for trial of criminal cases related to Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly decided more than 2,000 cases in 2023, the Supreme Court has been informed.

In an affidavit filed by senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, who has been appointed amicus curiae in a PIL seeking expeditious disposal of criminal cases against MPs/MLAs, said that more directions are needed for speedy adjudication of pending trials and their investigation under strict monitoring by the respective high courts, as there are around 501 candidates with criminal cases who are contesting the Lok Sabha elections in the first two phases.



Referring to a report of NGO 'Association of Democratic Reforms for the Lok Sabha elections 2024 Phase I and Phase II', Hansaria, assisted by advocate Sneha Kalita, said that out of 2,810 candidates (Phase I - 1618 candidates and Phase II - 1192 candidates), 501 (18 per cent) candidates have criminal cases against them, out of which, 327 (12 per cent) are serious

criminal cases (punishable with imprisonment of 5 years and more).

"The same was the position in 2019 Lok Sabha elections in which out of 7928 candidates, 1500 candidates (19%) had criminal cases, out of which 1070 candidates (13%) were serious criminal cases. However, out of 514 elected members of 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024), 225 members (44%) had criminal cases against them.

"Thus, the candidates with criminal cases have won more seats than candidates without criminal cases. In this context, it is necessary that this court may pass further orders for expeditious disposal of pending trials and investigation under strict monitoring by the respective high courts," the affidavit said.

Shoe insole technology to prevent diabetic foot ulcers unveiled

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A team of researchers has unveiled a novel shoe insole technology aimed at reducing the risk of diabetic foot ulcers, a serious complication that can result in hospitalization and even leg, foot or toe amputation.

Muthu BJ Wijesundara, principal research scientist at The University of Texas at Arlington Research Institute (UTARI), explained that the innovation targets a major cause of these ulcers: skin and soft tissue breakdown due to repetitive stress during walking. Diabetes often damages the small blood vessels supplying nerves, leading to poor circulation and foot ulcers, affecting approximately one-third of individuals with the condition. Despite numerous attempts with shoe insoles to



address this issue, their effectiveness in preventing ulcers has been limited, as per Wijesundara. In an article in the peer-reviewed International Journal of Lower Extremity Wounds, Wijesundara and UTA colleagues Veyssel Erel, Aida Nasirian and Yixin Gu, along

with Larry Lavery of UT Southwestern Medical Center, described their innovative insole technology. After this successful pilot project, the next step for the research team will be refining the technology to make it more accessible for users with varying weights and shoe sizes.

In India as in the world, the burden of diabetes-related amputations is a serious issue. According to a study by the Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism, the prevalence of diabetic foot ulcers in India is estimated to be between 15-25 per cent among people with diabetes. Yet another study, 'Lower limb amputation rehabilitation status in India: A review,' by Dr Raktim Swarnakar, Dr Shiv Lal Yadav, Dr Darshana Surendran from Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, AIIMS, Delhi, talks about the psychological impact of amputation which is profound, leading to a high prevalence of psychiatric disorders among amputees, ranging from 32%-84 per cent. "Rates of depression vary from 10.4%-63.0%, while post-trau-

matic stress disorder rates range from 3.3%-56.3% compared to the general population's rates of 10%-15%. Amputation can have adverse psychological effects, including a decrease in self-confidence, a sense of inadequacy, the development of a negative self-concept, and a distorted perception of body image, ultimately affecting the overall quality of life," said the doctors. The study appeared in the World Journal of Clinical Cases. Diabetic foot is a leading cause of disability worldwide, and amputations in patients with diabetes account for a significant portion of all amputations, with an average percentage of 68.6 per cent. The age group most affected by amputations was the 20s and 30s, which represents the productive population of the country, as per the Indian study.

India is fourth largest military spender in world

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India is the fourth largest military spender in the world with its military expenditure 83.6 billion dollars in year 2023. This is 4.2 per cent higher than in 2022, said the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in its annual report released on Monday. The biggest spender is USA and other three nations are China, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Total global military expenditure reached \$2443 billion in 2023, an increase of 6.8 per cent in real terms from 2022. This was the steepest year-on-year increase since 2009. The 10 largest spenders in 2023—led by the United States, China and Russia—all increased their military spending, according to SIPRI.

\$2443 billion. For the first time since 2009, military expenditure went up in all five of the geographical regions defined by SIPRI, with particularly large increases recorded in Europe, Asia and Oceania and the Middle East.

"The unprecedented rise in military spending is a direct response to the global deterioration in peace and security," said Nan Tian, Senior Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme. "States are prioritizing military strength but they risk an action-reaction spiral in the increasingly volatile geopolitical and security landscape." Russia's military spending increased by 24 per cent to an estimated \$109 billion in 2023, marking a 57 per cent rise since 2014, the year that Russia annexed Crimea. In 2023 Russia's military spending made up 16 per cent of total government spending and its

military burden (military spending as a share of gross domestic product, GDP) was 5.9 per cent.

Ukraine was the eighth largest spender in 2023, after a spending surge of 51 per cent to reach \$64.8 billion. This gave Ukraine a military burden of 37 per cent and represented 58 per cent of total government spending. Ukraine's military spending in 2023 was 59 per cent the size of Russia's. However, Ukraine also received at least \$35 billion in military aid during the year, including \$25.4 billion from the USA. Combined, this aid and Ukraine's own military spending were equivalent to about 91 per cent of Russian spending. In 2023, the 31 NATO members accounted for \$1341 billion, equal to 55 per cent of the world's military expenditure. Military spending by the USA rose by 2.3 per cent to reach \$916 billion in 2023, representing 68 per cent of total NATO military spending. In

2023, most European NATO members increased their military expenditure. Their combined share of the NATO total was 28 per cent, the highest in a decade. The remaining 4 per cent came from Canada and Türkiye.

"For European NATO states, the past two years of war in Ukraine have fundamentally changed the security outlook," said Lorenzo Scarazato, Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme. "This shift in threat perceptions is reflected in growing shares of GDP being directed towards military spending, with the NATO target of 2 per cent increasingly being seen as a baseline rather than a threshold to reach." China, the world's second largest military spender, allocated an estimated \$296 billion to the military in 2023, an increase of 6.0 per cent from 2022. This was the 29th con-

secutive year-on-year rise in China's military expenditure. China accounted for half of total military spending across the Asia and Oceania region. Several of China's neighbours have linked their own spending increases to China's rising military expenditure.

Japan allocated \$50.2 billion to its military in 2023, which was 11 per cent more than in 2022. Taiwan's military expenditure also grew by 11 per cent in 2023, reaching \$16.6 billion. "China is directing much of its growing military budget to boost the combat readiness of the People's Liberation Army," said Xiao Liang, Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme. "This has prompted the governments of Japan, Taiwan and others to significantly build up their military capabilities, a trend that will accelerate further in the coming years." Estimated military expendi-

ture in the Middle East increased by 9.0 per cent to \$200 billion in 2023. This was the highest annual growth rate in the region seen in the past decade.

Israel's military spending—the second largest in the region after Saudi Arabia—grew by 24 per cent to reach \$27.5 billion in 2023. The spending increase was mainly driven by Israel's large-scale offensive in Gaza in response to the attack on southern Israel by Hamas in October 2023. "The large increase in military spending in the Middle East in 2023 reflected the rapidly shifting situation in the region—from the warming of diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab countries in recent years to the outbreak of a major war in Gaza and fears of a region-wide conflict," said Diego Lopes da Silva, Senior Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme.

AFMS collaborates with IIT Delhi to develop medical devices

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Armed Forces Medical Services and IIT-Delhi on Monday joined hands to undertake collaborative research to develop novel medical devices and focus on solving health issues specific to serving soldiers in varied terrains.

AFMS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for collaborative research and training with the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi. "The scope of this MoU includes undertaking research and innovation to develop novel medical devices and focus on solving health issues specific to serving soldiers in varied terrains," the defence ministry said in a statement. The MoU was signed by Director General, Armed

Forces Medical Services, Lt Gen Daljit Singh and Director, IIT-Delhi, Prof. Rangan Banerjee.

IIT-Delhi has a robust biomedical research ecosystem which is ideal for providing the technical expertise required for research in the diverse medical challenges faced in the armed forces, including rehabilitation of amputees, officials said. Under the ambit of this agreement, faculty exchange programmes, joint academic activities and development of joint PhD programmes will also be planned, they said. On this occasion, Lt Gen Singh said AFMS is dedicated to providing the highest level of medical care to soldiers and collaboration with institutes of national importance like IITs is a significant step towards this commitment.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Cold comfort

All parties must own responsibility for the low voter turnout and work to reverse it

In the ongoing elections, a significant cause for concern has emerged with the low voter turnout, particularly in the Hindi heartland. This trend has set off alarm bells among political parties, forcing them to delve deeper into understanding the root causes of this apathy and strategise effectively to boost participation in the remaining phases. The Hindi heartland holds immense electoral significance. However, the voter turnout here was dishearteningly low on April 19. The polling of over 62 per cent, as per the Election Commission of India's figure, is lower compared to the first phase of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, when it stood at 69.43 per cent. The trend is not localised as voting was held in 102 Lok Sabha seats across 21 States and UTs. Was it the summer heat or other pressing engagements? If it is about the weather, it is understandable but if it is political disillusionment, then it is a matter of grave concern. It could well also be logistical challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, long queues at polling booths and difficulties in accessing polling stations. Despite several efforts by the EC, voters in large numbers chose not to go out to cast their vote. We have had several elections during summers where voters thronged polling stations; so maybe, and it is yet to be validated, voters are losing interest in the political system. Many voters do feel disconnected from the political process, perceiving that their votes do not significantly impact policymaking or address their concerns. This disenchantment often stems from the failure of political parties to fulfil their promises, leading to a sense of betrayal among the electorate. Traditionally, voting in the urban areas has always been low but now even voters in rural areas are giving it a pass. In such areas, where transportation facilities may be limited, reaching the polling booths becomes a daunting task for many individuals, particularly the elderly and physically challenged. Another aspect of voting in the first phase was zero voting in six districts of Nagaland. It is unprecedented and shocking, to say the least. It might have been a reaction of voters to what happened in Manipur or a call by disrupting elements; either way, it does not augur well for the country. We can agree on a few things which could have resulted in the voter's cold shoulder. Social and economic factors play a significant role in voter apathy. A large section of the population, especially in rural areas, faces issues like poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, which overshadow their engagement with the electoral process. Furthermore, the prevalence of identity politics and polarisation in the Hindi heartland may have contributed to a sense of disillusionment among voters. Divisive narratives propagated by certain political entities often sow seeds of distrust and alienation among communities, discouraging them from participating in the electoral process. Political parties must prioritise engaging with the electorate beyond election cycles, fostering dialogue and building trust through consistent communication and transparent governance.



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PICTALK



People purchase clay pots from a roadside shop during the summer season, in Agra

Maya sees political grass greener in Harit Pradesh



SIDHARTH MISHRA

BSP leader and former Chief Minister Mayawati has once again broached the issue of statehood for western UP, probably to remain electorally relevant in the days ahead



The first phase of polling in western Uttar Pradesh is over. On April 19, the Lok Sabha constituencies of Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Nagina, Moradabad, Rampur and Pilibhit witnessed polling. The next phase of polling is scheduled for April 26, when the constituencies of Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr (reserved), Aligarh, Meerut and Mathura would go to the hustings. On these seats, Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) leader and former Chief Minister Mayawati has trumpeted the old issue of a separate State for West UP, probably to remain electorally relevant in the times to come. Choosing the birth anniversary day of the man credited with the drafting of the Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar, Mayawati made a major announcement at a rally in Muzaffarnagar of according Statehood to western UP and also establishing a bench of the Allahabad High Court in the region, if voted to power at the Centre. This has once again brought the issue of Harit Pradesh, the name envisioned for western UP by late Chowdhary Ajit Singh, the erstwhile leader of the Rashtriya Lok Dal and heir of Chowdhary Charan Singh, the tallest leader of West UP.

The supporters of the formation of Harit Pradesh claim that it was Dr Ambedkar who had proposed the division of Uttar Pradesh into three separate States — Western, Central and Eastern — for better governance. In 1955, Dr Ambedkar proposed the idea of splitting Uttar Pradesh into three States through his book, 'Thoughts on Linguistic States'. He suggested the creation of three States, with Meerut as the capital of the Western Region, Allahabad as the capital of the Eastern Region and Kanpur as the capital of the Central region. This is what the BSP had in mind while proposing the split in 2011. During her reign as the Chief Minister, Mayawati had backed a resolution which got passed in the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly for breaking the State into four smaller States — West, Central, East and Bundelkhand. One part of the undivided Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, consisting of hill districts, had already been carved out in 2000. However, unlike Dr Ambedkar's thought, Mayawati's push is based on the arithmetic of electoral politics. When she proposes a separate State for western Uttar Pradesh, she has in mind the

substantial Dalit and Muslim population inhabiting the region. It was Mayawati's D-M (Dalit-Muslim) combination which had defeated the Samajwadi Party's M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) formation to wrest power in Uttar Pradesh in 2007. Working as a reporter for this publication in the early part of this century, one still remembers how the dominating community of the Jats and other upper castes, by the way of landholding rights, managed to keep the Dalits at bay from electoral process. The late Editor of the paper, Dr Chandan Mitra, had once given a headline to this reporter's story which said, 'Fair polls, free of Dalits'. It was only after the rise of the BSP, especially from the 2004 Lok Sabha election onwards, that the Dalit population of western UP got involved in the process not just in word but also in spirit. This is the time which also saw the emergence of D-M, which changed the electoral calculus of the State. This area has also seen the rise in the Muslim population. As per the 2011 Census, the total population of western Uttar Pradesh is 71,217,132, out of which 72.29 per cent is Hindu and 26.21 per cent is Muslim. The population in the Khadiaboli region is 29,669,035 (Hindus 59.19 per cent and Muslims 39.17 per cent) and the population of the Braj region is 29,754,755 (Hindus 82.78 per cent and Muslims 16 per cent). The districts speaking Khadiaboli, a slightly colloquial version of the Hindi language, include Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Shamli, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Meerut, Hapur, Amroha, Bijnor, some parts of Moradabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar and Bulandshahr. The Braj-speaking districts include Mathura, Hathras, Agra, Aligarh, Etah and some parts of Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr, Etawah and Mainpuri. The Muslim population share in the eight districts of Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Moradabad, Rampur, Jyotiba Phule Nagar, Meerut and Bareilly has increased from 29.93 per cent in 1951 to 40.43 per cent in 2011. This has made the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) raise the demand for the population control Bill, fearing a loss for space for the Hindu groups. No wonder there is a lot more than meets the eye than the mere explanation behind the demand for a separate State for good governance. It has more to do with politics than people. (The writer is a political analyst and president, Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views are personal.)



IN 1955, DR AMBEDKAR PROPOSED THE IDEA OF SPLITTING UTTAR PRADESH INTO THREE STATES. HE SUGGESTED MEERUT AS THE CAPITAL OF THE WESTERN REGION, ALLAHABAD AS THE CAPITAL OF THE EASTERN REGION AND KANPUR AS THE CAPITAL OF THE CENTRAL REGION

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

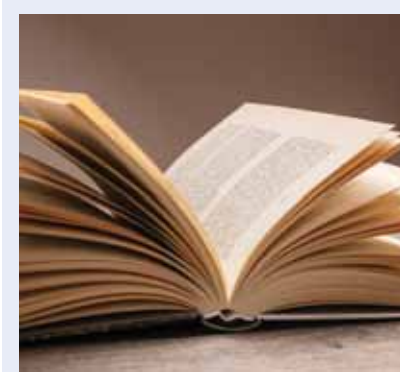
UNIFIED STRENGTH

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Astroturf | Mother symbolises convergence all nature driven energies", published on April 21, this is my response. The narrative delves into profound lessons encapsulated in the mythological portrayal of the Mother Goddess, particularly Durga, reflecting on the interplay of ego, collective responsibility and existential challenges. The symbolism of Durga's ten arms, each wielding a specific weapon offered by a Devata, signifies a unified approach to confront diverse energies and challenges emanating from all directions of existence. The analogy of the Mother's multifaceted role, akin to a nurturing mother tending to her child with selfless devotion, underscores the judicious and selfless application of power (Shakti) for the greater good. This portrayal transcends gender stereotypes, emphasising the universal essence of nurturing and protection inherent in the feminine principle. Moreover, the cyclical nature of creation and dissolution, mirrored in the evolution and devolution of nature-driven energies, underscores the perpetual flux of existence. The narrative urges a holistic understanding of existence, emphasising the imperative of harmonising individual virtues with collective existential needs for sustainable progress and evolution. Aditya Banerjee | Kolkata

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Govt schemes are transforming lives in rural Rajasthan", published on April 22, this is my response. The story of Loyara village in Udaipur district encapsulates the interplay of tradition and modernity, highlighting both progress and persistent challenges. Amba Bai's account resonates with the vital role of Government schemes in sustaining livelihoods, particularly for the elderly and economically vulnerable. The transition towards concrete structures mirrors urban influence, yet economic disparities persist, especially among Scheduled Tribes. Education emerges as a beacon of change, empowering youth to navigate bureaucratic hurdles and advocate for their rights. However, gaps in access to essential services persist, as seen in Mangi Lal and Tulsiram's plight. Loyara's narrative embodies the complex tapestry of rural India, where strides in education and awareness intersect with enduring economic constraints. As the village evolves, bridging these gaps remains imperative for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Pooja Khanna | Bengaluru

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Understanding the impact of FOMO", published on April 22, this is my response. In a world fueled by constant connectivity, the fear of missing out (FOMO) has become a prevalent concern, particularly among the younger generation. Social media platforms play a central role, in shaping perceptions and fueling comparisons. It's striking how curated content can trigger feelings of inadequacy, anxiety and loneliness. To counteract this, fostering digital literacy and promoting healthy social media habits is crucial. Encouraging offline connections and experiences, like sports or art, offers a reprieve from the digital noise. Setting boundaries for screen time and embracing mindfulness practices can cultivate gratitude and positive thinking. Moreover, prioritising quality over quantity in social connections reinforces the importance of genuine interactions. Creating inclusive online communities emphasises authenticity and empathy, countering the superficiality often found on social platforms. Ultimately, combating FOMO requires self-love and the courage to prioritise personal well-being over digital validation. In a hyper-connected world, finding solace in one's thoughts is a brave endeavour worth pursuing. Meera Krishnan | Chennai

Celebrating literary legacies



Apropos the news article, "Celebrating World Book and Copyright Day", published on April 22, this is my response. Books serve as timeless vessels of human thought, bridging generations and cultures. They embody the essence of our collective wisdom, offering insights into bygone eras while inspiring us to chart new territories of imagination. In today's digital age, they face both unprecedented opportunities and challenges. While e-books and digital formats enrich reading experiences, they also test the boundaries of copyright protection. World Book and Copyright Day, observed on April 23rd, prompts reflection on the enduring value of literature and the necessity of upholding intellectual property rights. This year's theme, "Read Your Way," underscores the joy of reading while advocating for respect towards authors and publishers. As we commemorate this day, let's renew our dedication to safeguarding literary legacies, ensuring that the flame of creativity continues to illuminate our collective path forward. Sangeeta Reddy | Hyderabad

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From tears to laughter: Navigating life's punchlines



SANJAY CHANDRA

From childhood taunts to adult jests, the journey of one man's relationship with humour is a winding road filled with laughter and tears

I turned into an overweight boy very early in my life. I still remember an incident from my childhood. My younger brother called me 'Fatsy' in front of a couple of house helps, who burst out laughing. I rushed inside the house in tears. Even now, at a more mature age, I still seethe at one-liners directed at me. More recently, my daughters attended a show by a famous stand-up comedian. My ignorance led me to find out more about the term. A stand-up comedian is a person, standing or sitting on stage, delivering tongue-in-cheek one-liners to an appreciative audience. Over a century, it has evolved into taking a punch at whatever the actor considers is wrong in the community - religion, beliefs, taboos and yes, the politician — that eternal punching bag. There are so many anecdotes that one would lose count of politicians trading barbs at others of their ilk. We have heard of Disraeli insulting a rival politician. If Gladstone fell into the Thames, that would be a misfortune and if anybody



pulled him out, that I suppose, would be a calamity. This one is beautiful when Lady Astor said to Churchill, if you were my husband, I'd poison your tea; to which Churchill's reply was a classic, Madam, if you were my wife, I'd drink it. Or the other one about Churchill, who quipped when berated by Bessie Braddock for being drunk, My dear, you are ugly, but tomorrow I shall be sober and you will still be ugly. Or this one about one of our politicians who wanted to make the roads in his State as smooth as the cheeks of a heyday film star — though he was probably only trying to pay a compliment. Many of these might be considered sexist at the very least. Recently, I sat with a few other authors addressing a group of young students during a literature festival. An erudite lady had an immediate connection with the appreciative audience as she spoke about her love for the Korean TV series — particularly her mention of the term Oppa. The students burst into loud laughter when one of their fellow authors wanted to know the meaning of the term. I only smiled knowingly, as if I understood the joke, not wanting to display my ignorance in public. We tend to lose our funny bone when humorous barbs, at least from the viewpoint of the narrator, are directed at us. At the same time, we do not hesitate to laugh, or smile, or even smirk — as I did, at someone else's discomfiture, when it suits us. Life would be far simpler if only we make as much effort in developing our funny bones, as we do in discussing international affairs, politics, religion and much more. Viktor Frankl, Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, summed it up almost a century earlier, The attempt to develop a sense of humour and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living. (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

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FIRST COLUMN

A TALE OF HIDDEN WEALTH, REGRET AND LIBERATION

These poignant stories have wisdom of the ages and lessons for all



RAVI VALLURI

Once upon a time there lived a woman. She was struck with an unexpected tragedy as her husband passed away untimely. The lady was now left with only one son and precious jewellery. Since she was hounded by creditors to repay the debts accrued by her husband, she conjured a trick to hide the wealth. In sheer desperation to keep the jewellery safe from creditors, the lady wrapped the precious wealth in a piece of cloth and hid it under a tree. The mother and son lived in an impoverished State. Her mind was always disturbed by the fact that she did not share this piece of vital information with her only son. As it turned out, she carried this secret to the grave.

Consequently, the son inherited plenty of debt, a barren hut and a cot. The son had to work hard for sustenance and to repay the ever-rising liabilities. He toiled hard to survive and regretted his misfortune. 'Property is not the sacred right. When a rich man becomes poor it is a misfortune, it is not a moral evil. When a poor man becomes destitute, it is a moral evil, teeming with consequences and is injurious to society and morality,' opined Lord Acton. Indeed, the impoverishment of the poor is heart-wrenching.

One day while cutting the branches of a tree, he stumbled upon the jewellery. Dumbfounded and stupefied, the strapping youngster hid the bijouterie in a pit he dug in the hut, petrified that the creditors would appropriate the wealth. He too committed the cardinal mistake of not sharing the secret with his wife and carried it to his grave. The mother and son were not mindful and wakeful enough to be in the Present Moment and remained prisoners of their past and future.



Two Buddhist monks were once discussing a flag flapping in the wind. While one felt it was the wind moving, the other conjectured it was the flag fluttering. The imbroglio could not be resolved and they sought the intervention of a Zen Master. The master impassively said, 'It is the MIND that moves, neither the flag nor the wind.'

Humans need freedom from their past and future to be in the present. And being in the NOW or present is true enlightenment and mindfulness. The past is full of sorrows and regrets while the future brims with anxieties and worries and humans are caged in that mindset, thereby postponing their happiness quotient. To appreciate true happiness and joy, the human mind should not vacillate between the past and the future but remain in the present.

A young monk was once travelling in pursuit of happiness and truth. During his travels, he encountered a massive river that he could not cross. A short while later, he saw a senior monk on the other side of the river. He hailed him and sought assistance to cross the river to reach the other side. The senior monk pondered and replied, 'You are already on the other side'. This fact can be appreciated only when the mind is centred. Breathing techniques such as Sudarshan Kriya, Pranayama, Yoga, Meditation and Vipassana all help in dissolving the mind so that it becomes centred. 'True happiness is not possible without freedom. We have to learn the habit of being free. We do not allow our past, the future, our projects, or our fear to get hold of us. We are free. Every step is free. Every step is nourishment. Every step is healing. Every step is joy,' says Thich Nhat Hanh.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

The timeless allure of bookstores



MIKE DOWNEY

In a world of fleeting attachments and transient experiences, one traveller finds solace and sustenance in the enduring sanctuaries of literature



I don't normally do nostalgia. The present is a place where I live and thrive and although thoughts of the past serve as a pleasant escape from reality, I tend to be very much permanently in the here and now in former times, I used to be convinced that if the psyche tends to dwell on past and romanticise it then could it be that the present isn't our current happy place and I want the future to continue to excite me. Complicated. I know.

Theatres, galleries and cinemas have come and gone in my life and as a rule, I have formed no specific sentimental attachment to them, even though much of my professional grown-up existence has been centred on these cultural havens. The one exception to that rule is the venerable bookshop. Of all these great edifices crucial to the health of our society the bookshop is the altar at which I worship — and which holds a timeless allure for me which occasionally translates into a wistful homesickness for the best that I have known in my life.

Having lived mostly a life of exile, first from my native Ireland and with more years in adulthood outside my native land than in it, from Belgrade to Munich and Paris to Istria and add to that the peripatetic life of the international film producer spending six months here in Prague, three months there in Iceland, Brazil and even India — sourcing quality English language literature outside of the Anglosphere has become a lifelong passion and quest. My global peregrinations, whether as a writer, theatre director or film producer have allowed me to cultivate relationships with some of the most amazing bookshops across the earth - I don't mean the Blackwells, the Shakespeare and Co's, the Dussmann's, the Strand's and the Foyle's of this world. I'm talking about havens much more intimate, personal and off the beaten track. Here are just a few of them as



INDIA'S EVER-POPULAR BOOK MARKETS REVEAL A PROFOUND NATIONAL LOVE FOR LITERATURE FROM THE BOI-PARA IN COLLEGE STREET IN KOLKATA TO MOORE MARKET IN CHENNAI AND FLORA FOUNTAIN IN MUMBAI

a taster: How I long for The Book Exchange, Amsterdam. This a canal-side, Dickensian warren on Kloveniers-burghal in the Venice of the North's red-light district, presided over by the idiosyncratic Jeff Stone who took it over in 2005, having been founded in 1978. Its four long, thin, deep floors are home to an extraordinary collection of over 80,000 second-hand English language books sold at bargain prices, in a studious atmosphere marked by a chaotic Bohemian that is the antithesis of the Amazons of this world. The whiff of reefer as it wafts over from the Plug 3 coffeeshop improves greatly the William Burroughs and Paul Bowles sales, so I'm told. Moving on from Paul Bowles and his palace in the Casbah, we arrive at the Luxor Book Palace, Prague. Last week, while prepping my new movie about Franz Kafka I took time out to visit this old friend on the famed Wenceslas Square I have been buying books here for the last 25 years and am always amazed by the laid-back atmosphere, the super helpful and smiling staff and the extraordinary selection of new books often at prices less than in the UK or New York. I don't know how they do it, but the self-styled Palace, which runs over 4 massive floors, manages to feel like a small privately run enterprise, full of nooks, crannies and all manner of Kafka-esque dead ends. I once ended up in the storeroom, looking for the young adult section. I was escorted back to where I belonged. In the foreign adult section. Speaking of being found, The Lost Bookstore, Chiang Mai

is very easy to find in a highly prominent position on the Ratchamanka Road. I came across it when receiving a planned adaptation of an early Anthony Burgess novel and was shocked to come across such a richly sourced treasure trove for book lovers and a selection of 60,000 books, from old to new, from every genre imaginable. It was here found a dog-eared copy of John Griesemer's Nobody Thinks of Greenland, an anti-war novel set in the Arctic which I eventually adapted into a feature film with American Pie's Jason Biggs in the lead.

In addition to these beauties, there are a few others around the globe that once visited always gave me the unique Proustian involuntary memory moments on my return. They are in no particular order: Book and Bed, Kyoto: sleeping inside a bookshelf is all part of the experience at this bookstore/ hostel and it rushes me back to the Japan distribution of my film Deathwatch and a junket I did there with Jamie Bell (Billy Elliot); the superb El Ateneo Grand Splendid, Buenos Aires, was an oasis of high culture at the end of a two-month research odyssey from Valparaiso in Chile around the coast of Patagonia in Darwin's reverse footsteps; Notting Hill Travel, London. I used to live around the corner from that lovely bookshop on Bleinheim Crescent. We all know the scene from the eponymous film in which Julia Roberts slowly pursues Hugh Grant between the shelves, followed by his infamous eye-turn and blushed slew of book recom-

mendations. But it is to India that I return. A five-year-long relationship with a Keralite Malayali, many many years ago, brought me into contact with the wonderful and varied book stalls of Thiruvananthapuram way back in the eighties.

I feel a deep nostalgia now as I write this for the timeless allure of the amazing book emporia of Palayam, next to the State Central Library, which at that time boasted 50-odd book stalls of all shapes sizes, creeds and colours. I could spend hours just sifting through the mazes of books just for the pleasure of discovering something, unique, precious and inspiring - something that no marketing campaign or advertising or critic's review could ever find for me.

It is the iconic book markets from all over India that bear witness to the extraordinarily diverse literary culture and heritage of the nation. India's ever-popular book markets reveal a profound national love for literature from the Boi-Para in College Street in Kolkata to Moore Market in Chennai and Flora Fountain in Mumbai.

Let's hear it for these affordable, yet rich havens for book lovers and seekers of literary gems and bargains. In the context of our theme of nostalgia and sentimentality - the huge success of the online book business may signal their death knell and they may not be with us for much longer.

(The writer is Chair of the European Film Academy and President of the LUX Prize of the European Parliament; view are personal)

Ladakh's path to autonomy: Overcoming adversity

Against the backdrop of historical marginalisation and neglect, Ladakh's journey towards autonomy has been marked by struggle, negotiation and triumph

The accession of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir to India on October 26, 1947, inflicted significant socio-economic and political setbacks on the Buddhist-dominated Leh district in the strategic Trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, renowned as "the roof of the world" and "the land of the Lamas". Likewise, the predominantly Buddhist Zaskar tehsil in the Karil district of Ladakh bore the brunt of these consequences, enduring even greater hardships than its counterpart, Leh.

The genesis of the Muslim-majority Kargil district in 1979 under Sheikh Abdullah's leadership aimed at fostering discord between



HARI OM

his co-religionists and the Buddhists, aiming to thwart the latter's aspirations for autonomy and union territory status for Ladakh. This move exacerbated the plight of the Buddhists, imperilling their religion, culture, societal fabric and demographic integrity due to two primary factors. Firstly, successive Kashmiri-dominated administrations viewed Ladakh as an

appendage to Kashmir, disregarding the political and economic aspirations of its Buddhist populace. Ladakh, akin to Jammu province, was seen as a colony by Kashmiri rulers, perpetuating a sense of marginalisation among the Buddhists. Secondly, the pernicious influence of the Kashmiri elite over New Delhi's corridors of power further marginalised the Buddhists' voices, with central authorities consistently favouring Kashmiri interests and dismissing Ladakh's concerns. In response to this systemic neglect, under the astute leadership of Head Lama Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, the Buddhists initiated protests in 1952, demanding meaningful political repre-

sentation and autonomy. Despite their fervent appeals and warnings, both Srinagar and New Delhi brushed aside their grievances, exacerbating disillusionment among the Buddhist populace. The culmination of discontent erupted in October 1989, with widespread protests and clashes between Buddhists and authorities. The resultant Tripartite Agreement of October 29, 1989, brokered by the central Government, temporarily assuaged tensions by establishing the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) at Leh. However, this resolution faced vehement opposition from Kashmiri leaders,



including Farooq Abdullah, who viewed it as a threat to Kashmiri hegemony. Despite the establishment of LAHDC Leh in 1995, the Buddhists remained dissat-

isfied due to continued interference from Kashmir-centric authorities, rendering the council ineffectual. Consequently, they intensified their agitation, advocat-

ing for Ladakh's Union Territory status and other demands, citing central rule as the sole recourse to address their grievances. The turning point came after June 19, 2018, when the central Government assumed direct control of Jammu and Kashmir, embarking on a series of measures to appease the Buddhist community. These included the establishment of the University of Ladakh, granting divisional status to Ladakh and ultimately, separating Ladakh from Jammu and Kashmir to fulfil the long-standing demand for Union Territory status. Additionally, substantial budgetary allocations were made to bolster Ladakh's development.

These initiatives underscored the efficacy of central rule in addressing the aspirations of the marginalised Buddhist population.

Rather than pursuing Statehood, the Buddhists are urged to strengthen LAHDC Leh and collaborate with the Modi Government to safeguard their cultural heritage and counter demographic challenges. The period between 2018 and 2023 epitomises a transformative phase for Ladakh, wherein central intervention proved instrumental in redressing historical injustices and empowering its Buddhist populace.

(The writer is former Dean of Jammu University's Faculty of Social Science; views are personal)



LS manifesto: NCP promises caste based census, MSP to farmers

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A caste-based census, bestowing of posthumous Bharat Ratna to Maharashtra's late chief minister Y B Chavan, according to classical language status to Marathi and an increase in the annual grant to farmers under the "Kisaan Samman Nidhi" are some of the promises made in the Lok Sabha poll manifesto released by the NCP (Ajit Pawar) on Monday.

The NCP (AP) manifesto, released by the party's national president Ajit Pawar and working President Praful Patel, promises to widen the scope of Agricultural Crop Insurance Scheme, to increase the loans to Rs 20 lakh from Rs 10 lakh under the Mudra Yojana Scheme and according to Constitutional status to National Backward Classes Commission.

Seeking to touch the emotional chord of the Maharashtrians, the NCP (AP) has promised to bestow late chief minister Y B Chavan with the coveted "Bharat Ratna". Describing late Y B Chavan as the Architect of "United Maharashtra", the NCP (AP) stated in its manifesto: "He is an inspiration to the NCP. His



political life is cultured and respected. As the nation's Deputy Prime Minister, Defence Minister, Chairman of the Eighth Finance Commission and the first chief minister of United Maharashtra, he has a lion's share in building the nation and Maharashtra," the manifesto said.

"NCP will play an important role in ensuring the Hon'ble Yeshwantrao Chavan Saheb is honoured with the Bharat Ratna," the manifesto added.

Vowing to bring the deprived and backward sections into the mainstream of the society, the NCP said that it would demand a caste-based census. "Our party believes in the

The NCP manifesto has promised to have Maulana Azad Research and Training Institute at the national level. Among other things, the party promises to make efforts for Maharashtra to become the skill development capital of India and to grow industries with modern skill development technology by increasing the scope of Vishwakarma Yojana for 12 Balutedar (artisans, craftsmen) classes. It will try to increase educated and skilled youth's remuneration to Rs 20,000 per month in private companies on contractual basis. The NCP (AP) proposes 50 per cent discount on railway and metro travel to senior citizens above 60 years all over the country and implementation of the Ayushman Bharat scheme for citizens aged above 70 years.

Promising to take up river-linking and river-purification projects on a large scale at the national level, the NCP (AP) said: "It is our endeavour to ensure that projects like Krishna-Bhima stabilization, Nar-Par scheme, and Western Ghats rainwater diversion to drought-prone areas are taken up as ambitious projects having a positive impact," the manifesto stated.

right to live as a human irrespective of caste, creed and religion. It believes in equality and unity. The NCP has faith in social reformer Sane Guruji's quote, 'The true religion is to offer love to the world. We must bring the deprived and backward sections of society into the mainstream. We will demand for a caste-based census,' the manifesto stated.

"We will continue to push for the implementation of measures and funds to ensure that the students from the minority communities will get opportunities of higher education, entrepreneurship and employment through the institution," the manifesto stated.



Former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu, founder of Sulabh International Bindeshwar Pathak and a host of other prominent persons were conferred with Padma Awards by President Droupadi Murmu at a ceremonial function held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here on Monday. Actor Mithun Chakraborty, singer Usha Uthup, former Uttar Pradesh governor Ram Naik and industrialist Sitaram Jindal were conferred with the Padma Bhushan

BJP seals first election win...

From Page 1
The Congress is left without a candidate," Ramesh stated.

"All other candidates withdrew their nomination except the BJP's candidate, Mukesh Dalal. The BJP candidate was declared 'elected unopposed' from the Surat Lok Sabha seat on April 22, 2024, nearly two weeks before polling on May 7, 2024," Ramesh added.

He claimed that the "distress" of micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) owners and the business community in PM Narendra Modi's "Anay Kaal" and their anger have "spooked the BJP so badly that they are attempting to 'match-fix' Surat Lok Sabha, which they have won consistently since the 1984 Lok Sabha elections!"

Setback for...

From Page 1

"If required the CBI can take these decision makers up in the ladder he or she may be in custody for the sake of investigation," advocate Shamim said.

Besides the defendant appointees were also asked

to return their financial benefits to the Government within four months.

The Bench formed by the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court on a direction of the Supreme Court extensively heard numerous petitions and appeals relating to the selection of candidates for appointment

by the SSC in the categories of teachers of Classes 9, 10, 11 and 12, and Group C and D staffers.

The Court earlier had directed the School Service Commission to find out the illegally appointed teachers but it failed to do so even as it failed to produce the hard copies of the OMR sheets and other digital and other digital and credible evidence to prove the bona fide of the exams.

The appointments were

made through the recruitment process of the State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools.

The recruitment scam has seen a number of senior bureaucrats and TMC politicians including the then number two in the Cabinet Partha Chatterjee going to jail along with MLA and TET chairman Manik Bhattacharya, and two other TMC legislators.

Different parts of Kashmir Valley abuzz with hectic political activities

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Different parts of Kashmir Valley are abuzz with hectic political activities in the run-up to the third round of polling on May 7.

From organizing big election rallies to street corner meetings and taking out road shows the leaders are roaming freely and reaching out to the electorate with their party programs and slogans to woo them to cast votes in their favor.

To prevent any upward incident the leaders have been advised to adhere to the standard operating procedures even as elaborate security arrangements remain intact.

Three former Chief Ministers Omar Abdullah, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Mehbooba Mufti are holding public rallies and attracting big crowds in their

election meetings. Leaders of the People's Conference and Jammu and Kashmir Apni party are also holding public rallies seeking votes and support for their party candidates.

Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat will witness a tight contest between National Conference candidate Mian Altaf Ahmad and PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti. Jammu and Kashmir Apni party candidate Zaffar Iqbal Manhas is also in the fray and is banking heavily on the support from like-minded political parties who are not contesting the elections to prevent the division of votes.

On Monday Chairman of the Apni Party Altaf Bukhari announced unconditional support to the Peoples Conference leader Sajad Lone in Baramulla parliamentary seat of Jammu and Kashmir. Lone is contest-

ing against Omar Abdullah. In 2019 the National Conference candidate Mohd Akbar Lone defeated the Peoples Conference candidate Raja Aijaz Ali by a margin of over 30,000 votes.

Lone had urged Bukhari on Saturday to extend support and defeat the National Conference from the Baramulla constituency.

On the other hand, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) President Mehbooba Mufti Monday said that Jammu & Kashmir needs a robust voice that will stand up against the "ill-designs" of New Delhi.

She said the ongoing contest for Lok Sabha is not a fight limited to PDP or NC, rather it is a fight to raise the voice of Jammu and Kashmir to convince New Delhi that decisions taken after August 05, 2019,



were "illegal" and "unconstitutional" which need to be reversed.

Addressing a public rally in Anantnag's Bijbehara, Mehbooba said that her existence is not limited to one place. "I am not confined to one place. Bijbehara is my

home town and Sirhama is my home. The people here have raised me," Mehbooba Mufti said. She said every contest remains tough for a candidate, but the love and affection she saw and received from Anantnag to Pir Pacha are heartwarming. "I am getting

reports that people have understood that they need a robust voice who will stand up to the powers in New Delhi and talk about the issues of Kashmir," she said.

While responding to a query, she said that the ongoing Lok Sabha election contest is not a fight between Mehbooba Mufti and Omar Abdullah, rather "This is the fight to take the voice of Jammu and Kashmir to New Delhi".

"People of Jammu & Kashmir will decide rightly while casting their votes," Mehbooba added.

Omar Abdullah Monday targeted the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) President Mehbooba Mufti for joining the INDIA alliance to get the seat.

Mufti selfishly tried to get a seat through the doors of Peoples

Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) and INDIA alliance", Omar said during a public rally in south Kashmir's Kulgam district.

Omar reminded the Kashmiris "NC and Congress urged late Mufti Mohammad Sayed to accept their support to keep BJP out of Kashmir. However, Mufti Sayeed accused NC of trying to enter their Government through backdoor", he alleged.

Omar said that "in 2016 when Mehbooba Mufti's Government was in shambles, NC went to Raj Bhavan and urged the Governor not to allow breaking the government as NC was aware by such tactics of distorted manners what repercussions it prevails on the people. Was that our selfishness?", he questioned.

He said "In 2018, Mehbooba Mufti sent her party's leader Altaf Bukhari to us for our support, proposing as CM, it was Farooq Abdullah who swiftly endorsed and signed the document without hesitation, was that our selfishness?".

"We still remember your speeches when you said there is only Narendra Modi who can solve Kashmir's issue but where is the solution, is there anything left without catastrophe? Our identity and existence is in danger", he said.

Omar said when Mufti could have represented the people of Kashmir instead she jeered at them. People have not forgotten whom you rubbed the salt in their wounds.

"What you did during your tenure as Chief Minister, bring some courage to apologize to the people for that", the NC Vice President asked.

Court rejects Kejriwal's plea for daily doctor...

From Page 1
The Medical Board may, as and when required, also physically examine the Applicant in Jail," the judge said. The judge asked the medical board to submit its report to the court at the earliest specifying as to whether Kejriwal required insulin to control his blood sugar levels.

"...the food items provided as home-cooked food are quite different from the diet prescribed by his own doctor of WHEALTH, Centre for Excellence in Diabetes and Weight Management," noted Baweja in her 15 pages order, adding that mangoes were not mentioned in the prescribed diet either.

Kejriwal had moved an application before the court, requesting online consultation with a private doctor every day for 15 minutes in the presence of his wife, Sunita Kejriwal, owing to his diabetic conditions.

The Chief Minister has been lodged in Tihar Jail since April 1, following his arrest in the Delhi excise policy case by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21. Kejriwal had alleged he was not being administered insulin in jail leading to "alarming" rise in his blood sugar levels.

"The Medical Board of AIIMS is also requested to submit its report to this court at the earliest specifying as to whether there is any requirement of administering Insulin to the Applicant at this juncture. Further, in case there is need of any medical intervention for the Applicant by any specialist in future, the decision in this regard shall be taken by the Jail Authorities in consultation with the Medical Board. vi) Jail Authorities shall also send medical report of the Applicant, to this court regularly on a fortnightly basis, till further orders," the order

said. "The Applicant (Kejriwal) shall however, continue to be provided with home cooked food, subject to the condition that it shall strictly be in compliance with the diet as prescribed by the above mentioned Medical Board. Till the time such Board prescribes a diet plan for the Applicant, his family may provide home cooked food to him, though it shall be strictly as per diet chart of his private doctor and as permitted vide order dated 01.04.2024," the order said.

The ED had claimed on Friday the AAP leader was consuming sugar-laden food like mangoes and sweets on a regular basis to create grounds for medical bail. Kejriwal responded sharply, accusing the central anti-money laundering agency of acting "petty" and "politicising" what he ate. The reply filed by the Jail Authorities also highlights the medical facilities available in Jail for the inmates. It is further stated that presently there are nearly 1000 inmates with diabetes who are being provided requisite medication by the Jail doctors. It further said 26 such inmates are also being administered Insulin on the basis of their medical requirement. Further, the Jail has adequate stock of insulin and this fact has also been apprised by Director General (Prisons) to the wife of the applicant.

The Aam Aadmi Party on Monday welcomed a Delhi court order directing AIIMS to constitute a medical board with diabetes specialist to examine Kejriwal's health issues. AAP leaders Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj said that today's court order to constitute a medical board of specialist doctors to examine the Chief Minister has proved that there was no diabetologist in the Tihar jail so far.

IMD advisory aids...

From Page 1

The farmers have also been suggested to postpone sowing of major crop maize and cowpea due to excessive moisture. (April 23)

Heavy to very heavy rainfall or snowfall will continue in isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh; heavy rains may lash Assam and Meghalaya, as per the IMD alert issued for Tuesday while scattered rain or snow with thunderstorms is predicted over Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

There will be isolated rain with thunderstorms over Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Jharkhand, West Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Konkan, Goa, Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada, Vidharbha, Chhattisgarh, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal and Karnataka, as per the MET Department.

In Karnataka and Goa,

farmers have been directed to make arrangements to drain excess water from crop fields to prevent water stagnation and also store harvested produce in safer places to avoid damage.

Farmers from Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh, North Interior Karnataka, South Interior Karnataka, Nagaland, and Manipur have been alerted to provide mechanical support to horticultural crops and stake vegetables to prevent further damage while those from Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, East Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, have been suggested to apply light and frequent irrigation to standing crops to tackle with heat stress.

These states are already reeling under intense heat waves and the temperature is likely to further soar in these States to touch as high as 45 degree centigrade.

Currently, temperature has already crossed 40 degree centigrade.

BJP, Opposition lock horns over Modi...

From Page 1

"The possibility of electoral loss bothers him, and that is why such language...How can individuals having a certain number of kids be a campaign issue?" he said. The Shiv Sena (UBT) leader also asked why PM Modi has not discussed his government's performance over the last 10 years.

Bhatia asked if the then prime minister Manmohan Singh had in 2006 not said that minorities, especially Muslims, have the first rights in the country's resources. He said the UPA was a black chapter in Indian democracy and if the INDIA alliance feels ashamed, so be it.

temperature exceeds 6.4 notches.

Director General of Meteorology of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said, "IMD is in continuous touch with the Election Commission of India.

Along with seasonal forecasts, we are doing monthly, week-wise and everyday forecasts and giving them forecasts about heat waves, and humidity levels. We are providing the ECI, inputs and forecasts about the places where elections are going to be held in different phases."

Previously, on April 11, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had chaired a meeting to review preparedness for the ensuing heat wave season.

The Prime Minister was briefed about the temperature outlook for the period from April to June 2024 including the forecasts for the upcoming hot weather season (April to June), the likelihood of above-normal maximum temperatures over most parts of the country, especially with high probability over Central India and western peninsular India.

broiling parts of West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar. Increasing nighttime heat is even more common in cities because of the urban heat island effect, in which metro areas are significantly hotter than their surroundings.

The threshold for a heat wave is met when the maximum temperature of a weather station reaches at least 40 degrees Celsius in the plains, 37 degrees in the coastal areas and 30 degrees in the hilly regions, and the departure from normal is at least 4.5 notches. A severe heat wave is declared if the departure from normal

Teenage chess prodigy Gukesh makes...

From Page 1
The black pieces did not matter much as Nakamura was sea in the Queen's Gambit Accepted and did not find any ways to pursue playing for an advantage.

Gukesh won a pawn and Nakamura had to find the path to equality in the ensuing rook and opposite coloured Bishops endgame. The game lasted till move 71 but the result was never in doubt.

With Gukesh ending on 9 points, all eyes were on the match between American Caruana and Russia's Nepomniachtchi.

"...Those 15 minutes were

probably the most stressful of this entire tournament, I was watching the commentary for sometime and then me and Gajevsky (his trainer) went for a walk and then my father came running," Gukesh revealed.

"Obviously the support system is huge, coming to my team I would not like to take their names but they know how grateful I am to them," he said.

The American outplayed Nepomniachtchi right from the opening and enjoyed a nearly winning position for several moves.

However, the clock did the talking here as Caruana

blundered on 39th move to allow a playable position. Things were far from over though, Caruana built his position all over again and was close to winning a second time when again his clock deceived him and he failed to find the correct continuation.

The resulting position was a drawn queen and pawns endgame where Caruana kept pressing to no avail.

Had any of these two players won, the tournament would have needed a tie-break as Gukesh and the winner would have ended up in joint lead.

Caruana, Nepomniachtchi

and Nakamura all ended on an identical 8.5 points for the shared second place while Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa ended fifth on seven points defeating Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan.

Nijat Gujrathi played out a quick draw with Firouzja Alireza of France in the final round to end on the sixth spot with six points in all.

Alireza finished seventh on five points while Abasov ended last on 3.5 points in all.

Gukesh has been making waves for a while now after becoming the third youngest in chess history to earn the Grandmaster title

at the age of 12. He later became the youngest to achieve an ELO rating of 2750.

The youngster's father Rajnikanth, who is an ENT surgeon but has stopped his practice to nurture Gukesh's chess dreams, accompanied him to the tournament. His mother Padma is a microbiologist.

Last year, Gukesh won a silver medal at the Hangzhou Asian Games. The dates and venue for the world championship are yet to be finalised.

"I haven't really thought about it a lot I just got to know the result, the main

strategy will be to play good moves. Really look forward to all the preparation and being there," Gukesh said.

Results final round (Indians unless specified): Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 8.5) drew with D Gukesh (9); Fabiano Caruana (USA, 8.5) drew with Ian Nepomniachtchi (FIDE, 8.5); Nijat Abasov (Aze, 3.5) lost to R Praggnanandhaa (7); Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 5) drew with Vidit Gujrathi (6). Final standings: 1. D Gukesh 2-4; Nakamura, Nepomniachtchi, Caruana 5. Praggnanandhaa 6. Gujrathi 7. Alireza 8. Abasov.

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Modi Government has eliminated terrorism: Shah

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has eliminated terrorism from the country while Naxalism is on the verge of ending.

Addressing an election rally in Chhattisgarh's Kanker town, Shah also asked Naxalites to surrender, or else they would be rooted out from the state in two years.

He asked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi that four generations of his family were in power in the country, but what they have done for the poor people in Chhattisgarh.

"The Congress says the minority (community) has the first right over the country's resources of the country, but we (BJP) say the poor, adivasis, Dalits and backwards have the first right over resources of the country," Shah said.

He also said that Congress leaders did not attend the consecration ceremony of



Lord Ram's idol at the Ayodhya temple in lure of their vote bank.

The Union minister hailed PM Modi, saying he has a "track record of 10 years and agenda for 25 years."

"Narendra Modi ji has

previous Congress rule and the alleged involvement of the former chief minister in the Mahadev betting app scam). After the formation of the BJP government in Chhattisgarh, Vishnu Deo Sai was elected as the chief minister and Vijay Sharma as the state home minister. In the last four months, 90 Naxalites were neutralised under the BJP government, Shah said.

While 123 Naxalites were arrested, 250 surrendered (during this period), he added.

Under PM Modi's leadership, Naxalism has been eliminated from all over the country, including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, Shah said.

"Elect Modi ji for the third term, the menace (of Naxalism) will be rooted out from Chhattisgarh in two years," he added.

Shah appealed to the people to vote for BJP's Kanker Lok Sabha seat candidate Bhojraj Nag.

eliminated terrorism from the country while Naxalism is on the verge of an ending. Mahadev app brand Bhupesh Baghel government did not take action against Naxalites," Shah said.

He was referring to the

Rahul will come and try to create division, do not fall for it: Irani to people in Amethi



PTI ■ AMETHI (UP)

Union minister and Lok Sabha MP Smriti Irani on Monday alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will come to Amethi after April 26 and divide the people in the name of casteism and visit one temple after the other.

Addressing roadside meetings during her election campaign in Bhetua and Bhadar areas here, Irani said, "After the voting in Wayanad on April 26, Rahul Gandhi will come here to tell everyone that Amethi is his family and stoke the fire of casteism in the society here."

She added, "Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party rejected the invitation for the consecration ceremony of Lord Shri Ram in Ayodhya but he will be seen roaming around the temples in Amethi. So there is a need to be careful and alert."

In a major upset for the Congress in 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Irani wrested Amethi from Rahul Gandhi, who had held the constituency for 15 years. The Congress has not yet declared its candidate from the seat but local party workers are rooting for Rahul Gandhi to contest again. The Union minister also

alleged that Rahul Gandhi never raised issues of Amethi in the Parliament and was often missing from the House.

She alleged that despite Rahul Gandhi being an MP for 15 years, 10 of them while there was UPA at the helm at Centre and UP under his ally (SP), still people in Amethi could not even get drinking water. People in Amethi could get drinking water supplied to their house only after Narendra Modi came to power, she claimed.

It is the fifth day in Amethi of Irani, who is seeking a second term from the constituency on a BJP ticket.

Geeta Kora files nomination as BJP candidate for Singhbhum

PTI ■ CHAIBASA (JHARKHAND)

Geeta Kora on Monday filed her nomination papers as the BJP candidate for the Singhbhum (ST) Lok Sabha constituency in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district.

Jharkhand BJP president Babul Marandi, senior party leaders and hundreds of party workers accompanied Kora as she submitted her nomination papers before the returning officer.

Exuding confidence about her victory, Kora told reporters that the enthusiasm of party workers "showed that BJP would achieve 400 seat target."

"Lots of work has been done for women by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He has a mission for development of women, tribals and others. I will take forward his mission of development in my constituency," Kora said.

JMM has fielded former state minister Joba Manjhi in the Singhbhum Lok Sabha seat against Geeta Kora, who is the wife of former chief minister Madhu Kora.

BJP releases Odia version of party Lok Sabha manifesto

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha BJP unit on Monday released the Odia version of the party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections.

Senior BJP leaders including election in-charge Vijaypal Singh Tomar, state president Manmohan Samal, former union minister Jual Oram and former state president Samir Mohanty were present during the release of the Odia version of the party's manifesto.

Centre's free ration scheme will be extended by another five years, three crore 'Lakhpati didi' will be created, the PM Awas Yojana will be expanded and drinking water supply will be taken to every home, said Tomar.

"If BJP forms a government in Odisha, we will implement all the promises made in the central manifesto in the state. The present government has not implemented the



Ayushman Bharat Yojana in Odisha for which migrant workers are facing hardship," he said. The Modi government is totally dedicated to women, youths and farmers. The Modi government has fulfilled all promises made in the poll manifesto in 2014 and 2019, Samal claimed.

The BJP will reach out to every household with the Odia version of the manifesto, the state party president said.

Congress synonymous with corruption, family rule, appeasement politics: Piyush Goyal

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

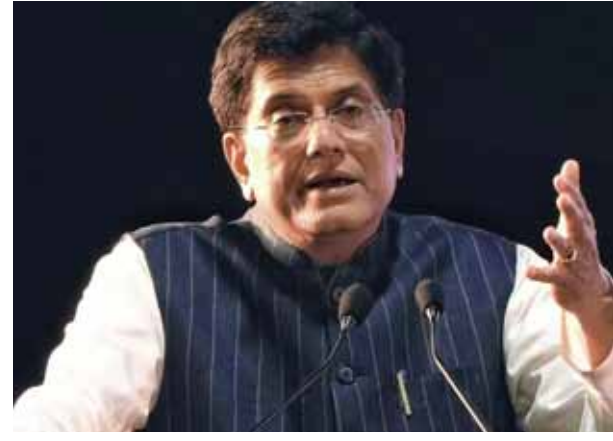
The Congress is synonymous with corruption, family rule and appeasement politics, Union Minister and senior BJP leader Piyush Goyal alleged on Monday. Congress had made promises since the era of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to eliminate poverty in the country, but it did not happen, he said.

He was addressing a rally in support of the BJP's Lok Sabha candidate from Telangana's Zaheerabad B B Patil. Patil,

who is a current MP, was with the BRS and defected to the BJP on March 1, just 15 days before the Model Code of Conduct came into force.

Goyal, who highlighted the Narendra Modi Government's pro-poor schemes and welfare measures including Ayushman Bharat, scheme aiming to provide free houses for four crore people, Jal Jeevan Mission and goal of constructing 11 crore toilets, alleged that the Congress only makes hollow promises.

"Modi cares for the poor and the marginalised sections of



society. Rahul Gandhi's grandmother (Indira Gandhi) promised to people that she will eliminate poverty. But, they did not work for the poor," he further claimed.

"Rajiv Gandhi told the country that he sends Rs 100 from Delhi and that only Rs 15 reaches the poor with 85 per cent being eaten away by middlemen and corruption," he said, "Vut, the problem remained unresolved."

He further attacked the Congress, saying, "Congress means corruption, Congress means family rule, Congress means appeasement politics."

In Telangana, the "corrupt BRS government" was voted out, but the new government in the state has not taken steps to check corruption, he claimed.

Stating that Modi has resolved to make the country a developed one, he said the nation would become developed only when it is free of corruption, when appeasement politics end and when all get equal justice. BJP never divides the society but unites, he claimed. Polling in Telangana for the Lok Sabha elections would be held on May 13.

12 members of royal families contesting Assembly, Lok Sabha polls in Odisha

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Twelve members of different royal families in Odisha are contesting the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections seeking votes of commoners. Elections to the 21 Lok Sabha constituencies in Odisha and 147 Assembly segments will be held simultaneously in the state from May 13 to June 1.

The ruling Biju Janata Dal had fielded eight members from royal families followed by BJP three and Congress one.

Ten members of the royal families are contesting Odisha Assembly elections while two are in the fray for Lok Sabha polls.

The BJD has fielded 28-year-old Sulakshana Geetanjali Devi, granddaughter of veteran leader late A N Singhdeo of Dharakote as its candidate for the Sanakhemundi assembly constituency.

A law degree-holder, Geetanjali is the fifth member of the Dharakote royal family to contest assembly election. Her grandfather A N Singhdeo was elected from the Surada constituency four times - 1967, 1971, 1977 and 1995 - as an MLA and in 1989 as the MP of Aska Lok Sabha constituency.

Her grandmother Shanti Devi and father Kishor Chandra Singhdeo had also been elected from the seat in the 1990 and 2004 elections respectively.

Her mother Nandini Devi had won from Sanakhemundi

seat in 2014. This time, Geetanjali will contest against Congress's sitting MLA Ramesh Chandra Jena in the May 20 election.

"I have been inspired by my grandfather, mother and father to join in the politics to serve the people. I thanked the chief minister for giving me the opportunity to serve the people of the constituency," said Geetanjali, who is the chairperson of the panchayat samiti of Dharakote.

The BJD has also fielded Chinmayananda Sriurup Deb, son of Usha Devi, royal scion of Chikiti to contest from Chikiti Assembly segment. Sriurup Deb, son of Usha Devi, Urban development minister, is the third member of the Chikiti royal family to make electoral debut from his mother's seat Chikiti. His grandfather Sachidananda Deo was elected in the seat in 1971, while his mother Usha Devi won five times in a row since 2000.

Deb who worked in a multinational IT company for over two decades and then started his own business after quitting the job.

"I have also been working with my mother in politics since 2018," said 48-year-old Deb. To provide service to the people and to make Chikiti a model constituency is his aim to enter politics," he added.

The BJP has re-nominated its MP Sangeeta Kumari Singh Deo from the Bolangir Lok Sabha seat. She hails from the Bolangir royal family.

BJP candidate says no truth in video; to approach EC SHOOTING ARROW CASE

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Alleging the Congress and AIMIM have a tacit understanding, BJP's candidate for Hyderabad Lok Sabha seat K Madhavi Latha on Monday said she will approach the Election Commission over the FIR against her by the city police.

An FIR was registered against Madhavi Latha following a complaint that she hurt the sentiments of the Muslim community by gesturing to shoot an arrow towards a place of worship, police said on Sunday.

A purported video of the incident was widely circulated on social media last week. She also said police should have verified the truth before booking an FIR against her.

"Police also should have some wisdom before booking an FIR. Why did they do so? They should have found out the truth before filing the FIR. Where is the truth in the video? This is how Congress and these people (AIMIM) are hand in glove... We are approaching the EC to find out the truth," she told PTI videos. Similar cases have been



booked against Muslims also when some social activists came to find out facts about Wafk properties, she said without elaborating.

She alleged that her opponents are keen to build their vote-banks in whichever way it is possible and it does not make any difference for them even if youth are deprived of jobs.

In the complaint, it is alleged Madhavi Latha made a gesture of drawing an arrow and shooting it towards the place of worship during a Ram Navami procession on April 17, hurting the sentiments of the Muslim community, police said.

The case was registered on

April 20 under Section 295-A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs) of the Indian Penal Code, they said.

After the clip went viral, Madhavi Latha said in a post on X that it had come to her notice that an incomplete video of her was being circulated to create negativity.

"I would like to clarify that it's an incomplete video and even because of such video if any one's sentiments are hurt then I would like to apologise as I respect all individuals," she had said.

LS elections: NCP releases manifesto

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Ajit Pawar on Monday released his party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections, highlighting that it will support the demand for a caste-based census, an issue its ally BJP has been sidestepping.

Addressing a gathering here, the deputy chief minister said the NCP will also demand the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award, for the late former Maharashtra chief minister and defence minister Yashwantrao Chavan.

"Our party believes in the right to live as a human irrespective of caste, creed and religion. It believes in equality and unity. The NCP has faith in social reformer Sane Guruji's quote, 'The true religion is to offer love to the world.' We must bring the deprived and backward sections of society into the mainstream. We will demand for a caste-based census," the manifesto stated.

Pawar said once the party is voted to power, it will demand a caste-based census.

The NCP's former ally, Congress, has been demanding a nationwide caste-based census, while the BJP has been finding ways to counter it.

Congress guarantees amount to inducing voters, claims JD(S)

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Janata Dal (Secular) on Monday urged the Election Commission to restrain the Congress from disseminating and distributing guarantee cards which it alleged was aimed at promoting electoral bribery and inducing voters for the coming Lok Sabha polls. In a letter to the poll panel, JD(S) State President and former Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy noted the Congress has published and released a manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections — Nyay Patra — which focus on five Nyays — justice with 25 guarantees covering the youth, women, farmers, workers and social justice.

"Under the above categorisation, Congress has tried to reach out to various groups in society by announcing various promises and assurances which amount to allurement and inducements resulting not only in non-implementation of related promises but also causing heavy burden on exchequers of State and Central governments," it alleged.

The party also alleged that six of those 25 guarantees have a direct impact and consequences on the minds of voters and these amount to "corrupt electoral malpractice" and "inducement of voters."

The regional party also alleged that the Congress has gone one step ahead as the guarantee cards that are being distributed to households across India bear the promissory signatures of prominent Congress leaders — Rahul Gandhi and M Mallikarjun Kharge and official endorsement purportedly containing QR code and also application form.

"These allurements and inducements to voters are in clear violation of Model Code of Conduct and violation of various provisions under the Representation of People's Act 1951," the JD(S) alleged.

It urged the EC to take swift and strong action to restrain the Congress party from distributing the guarantee cards to households to ensure conduct of free and fair elections.

Kerala CM poses questions to Rahul over CAA

PTI ■ KANNUR (KERALA)

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday continued to accuse the Congress of not being part of anti-CAA agitations in the country and sought to know from senior leader Rahul Gandhi whether the national leadership had barred its state unit from participating in the protests.

He alleged that the party's top brass had asked the state unit to withdraw from the anti-CAA agitations.

"This is just our guess. It may be right or wrong. If we are wrong, they (Congress) can tell that. Rahul Gandhi is touring

Kerala...He can tell that what you (CM) have said is not fact," Vijayan said.

Gandhi was not saying anything against it, as it is a fact, the chief minister alleged. As Lok Sabha polls are just four days away in the state, Vijayan was addressing an election meeting in Mattannur, in this northern district.

Targeting Gandhi, the Left veteran further said the Congress leader was carrying out a tour across the country when the CAA came out.

Though he had reacted to all the problems being faced by the country and the world, he did not respond to the contentious law, Vijayan



alleged.

The CM also claimed that Gandhi could not raise his voice on such issues because of the presence of leaders with a Sangh-Parivar mindset with him.

Lashing out at the BJP government at the Centre, he

BJP government's move.

"No civilised nation has decided citizenship on the basis of religion. No country divides refugees on the lines of their religion," Vijayan said.

India is making religion the basis for deciding citizenship. It is destroying secular values, he charged.

While several national leaders, including those from Communist parties, were arrested for protesting against the CAA in New Delhi years ago, no Congress leaders were among them, Vijayan alleged.

The CM accused the 18 Congress-led UDF MPs from the state of attending a feast hosted by the party president

on the day when the national capital witnessed the fiercest agitation against the CAA.

Vijayan further asked why the Congress, which is claimed to be a secular party, cannot oppose the RSS agenda being implemented in the country.

The LDF government in the state has been adopting a strong stand against dividing people on the lines of religion, he said.

The Marxist veteran also claimed that the southern state is witnessing a pro-LDF wave during the election campaign and that the ruling front would achieve a remarkable success in the Lok Sabha elections to be held on April 26.

Israeli Military Intelligence chief resigns

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's Military Intelligence Chief Major General Aharon Haliva resigned on Monday, taking responsibility for his unit's failures during the unprecedented October 7 Hamas attacks on the Jewish state. Haliva is the first General of the Israeli army's general staff to leave his position due to the failures that led to the massive attack by the Palestinian militant organisation Hamas and the subsequent war in Gaza. In his resignation letter written in Hebrew, Haliva said, "The Intelligence Division did not live up to the task we were entrusted with. Throughout my duties, I knew that alongside authority comes heavy responsibility." The General said he would like to "take responsibility" for what happened on October 7 and promised to do his best to complete as many of the war's goals as possible. Haliva also called for the establishment of a state investigative committee, "that can probe and find out in a thorough, in-depth, comprehensive and precise manner all the fac-



A photojournalist looks at part of the intercepted ballistic missile that fell near the Dead Sea in Israel, Sunday. The suspected Israeli killing of Iranian generals at an Iranian diplomatic compound in Syria on April 1 prompted Iran's retaliatory barrage last weekend of more than 300 missiles and drones that the U.S., Israel and regional and international partners helped bat down without significant damage in Israel. And then came Friday's apparent Israeli AP/PTI

tors and circumstances that led to the difficult events". At the same time, Haliva in the letter expressed his high appreciation for the performance of the Military Intelligence Directorate's personnel in the war. Confirming Haliva's resignation, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in a statement said, "In a decision with the Chief of Staff and with the approval of the Minister of Defence, Major General Aharon Haliva will conclude his role and retire from the IDF after appointing a successor through an orderly and professional process." "The Chief of Staff thanked Major General Aharon Haliva for his service over 38 years in the IDF, during which he contributed significantly as a fighter and commander for the security of the state," it said. Meanwhile, reacting to the MI Chief's resignation, Opposition Yesh Atid Party member, Vladimir Beliak, in a post on X demanded the immediate resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "The IDF Intelligence Directorate head was wise to resign.

First illegal migrants' flight to take off for Rwanda in 10-12 weeks: Sunak

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Monday announced that the first flight with illegal migrants will take off for Rwanda in 10 to 12 weeks "come what may" and claimed that all the preparation has been made for the process once the long-delayed legislation passes through Parliament. Stressing that he would not be giving out "sensitive operational detail" during a Downing Street briefing, the British Indian leader revealed that chartered commercial flights have been booked, an airfield has been identified and hundreds of escort officials trained to fly out the first set of migrants to Kigali while their asylum claims are processed. The press conference came as the government said Parliament will be sitting overnight on Monday for as long as it takes for the controversial Safety of Rwanda Bill to pass through all its stages to become law. The bill, which seeks to prevent legal

challenges by declaring Rwanda a safe country in law, has faced hurdles due to the House of Lords demanding amendments - something Sunak blamed on the Opposition Labour Party. "No ifs, no buts, these flights are going to Rwanda," Sunak told reporters. "The first flight will leave in 10 to 12 weeks. Of course, that is later than we wanted but we have always been clear that processing will take time and if Labour peers had not spent weeks holding up the Bill in the House of Lords to try to block these flights together we would have begun this process weeks ago," he said. "I can confirm that we have put an airfield on standby, booked commercial charter planes for specific slots and we have 500 highly trained individuals ready to escort illegal migrants all the way to Rwanda with 300 more trained in the coming weeks. We are ready. Plans are in place. And these flights will go come what may. No foreign court will stop us

from getting flights off," Sunak added. After the first flight takes off, Sunak said he expects a "steady rhythm" of such journeys over the course of the following months to meet his pledge for the policy to act as a deterrent and "stop the boats" of illegal migrants landing on the country's shores. "The priority is being able to deliver a regular rhythm, a drum beat of multiple flights a month over the summer and beyond because that is how you build a systematic deterrent and that is how you will stop the boats," said Sunak. Asked if the UK would consider leaving the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) if the European court attempts to block such flights, Sunak did not rule out the possibility: "Now is the time for the flights to go and I am not going to let a foreign court, given all of that, block us from getting flights up and this deterrent up and running."

Muizzu's party secures 'super majority' in parliamentary polls

PTI ■ MALE

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's party won 71 seats and secured a "super majority" in parliamentary elections, preliminary results suggested on Monday, a victory seen as a strong endorsement of his pro-Beijing foreign policy, as both India and China closely watched the outcome of the polls in the archipelago nation. Muizzu-led People's National Congress (PNC) won 68 out of 93 seats in Sunday's polls and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively, which is more than two-thirds of the Parliament, landing the party an easy supermajority with the power to amend the Constitution. Local media, which has described his party's win as a "supermajority", said the PNC is set to celebrate its landslide victory here on an artificial beach on Monday night. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by former

president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who is seen as a pro-India leader, held 65 seats in the previous parliament but won only 15 seats this time, Mihaaru, a news website, reported. Muizzu, 45, known for his pro-China leanings, has said that he wants to reduce India's influence in his country. In the 2019 elections, the then-ruling MDP won a super majority in Parliament, with 64 seats while the then-opposition PPM-PNC coalition won just eight. The Democrats, as well as Adhaalath Party, failed to win any seats at all. A total of 368 candidates were in the fray, including 130 independent candidates, 10 candidates from Jumhoori Party (JP), 39 from The Democrats, Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) 4, Adhaalath Party (AP) 4, and Maldives National Party (MNP) 2 nominees in the parliamentary election in Maldives, which has a strategic location in the Indian Ocean. About 40 in numbers - 10.76 per cent - of the candidates

were women. Provisional results have shown that only three women candidates secured seats out of the 93 constituencies in the 20th People's Majlis. Fathimath Saudha from the ruling PNC won the Faafu Nilandhoo constituency, Asma Raashed from the PNC won the Maafannu Medhu constituency, and Anara Naeem, an independent candidate, won the Kaafu Huraa constituency. Saudha is a family member of Muizzu. Asma and Anara have previously served as MPs in the 18th People's Majlis. With about 75 per cent of the eligible voters casting their ballots, Sunday's election saw a record-low voter turnout, provisional results suggested. A total of 284,663 people were eligible to vote, but only 215,860 exercised their franchise. The turnout was 81.32 per cent in the 2019 parliamentary elections, with 215,053 out of 264,446 eligible voters coming to vote. PNC Chairperson and Special Advisor to the President Abdul Raheem Abdulla said the

results showed that Maldivians did not want the country to be driven into political unrest again. Raheem said the reason for PNC's super majority in Parliament was the solid policies put forth by Muizzu. Raheem, who won the Fonadhoo constituency seat, said his win showed that Maldivians had paved the path for Muizzu to fulfil the targets of his presidency. "The people have proved that they will not leave the country forever at the mercy of the political squabbles, and challenges," he said. Raheem said Maldivians had learned over the past five months that President Muizzu is a leader who will not forget the pledges he makes. "The people have immense trust in President Muizzu," he said. Regarding MDP's loss, Raheem said the party failed to show tangible results despite winning the presidency twice. Meanwhile, main opposition MDP in a statement said despite their loss in Sunday's parliamentary election, they

will remain steadfast in their role of holding the government accountable and ensuring that democratic principles are upheld. Congratulating the winning candidates, the party called on them to uphold democratic values and work for the people's benefit. "As one of the key responsibilities of parliamentarians is to hold the government accountable, this party is confident that all who won [yesterday's] election will work to do so without hesitation," the statement read. Fayyaz Ismail, the opposition MDP Chairperson, congratulated the PNC for Sunday's success in parliamentary elections in a post on X: "Whilst today's result is disappointing this is a moment to reaffirm our commitment and work even closer with our communities." "MDP's MPs will be ready to work with the government for the betterment of our democratic values and to hold it accountable as a responsible opposition," the former economic minister said. MDP President and former foreign minister Abdulla Shahid said

the party's MPs "will uphold the responsibility entrusted to you with utmost determination." "We may not win every time. But today we can hold our heads high, and be proud of the work we did," Shahid added. The ruling coalition - PNC and Progressive Party of Maldives - said it will invite all Maldivian citizens to the ceremony it will host here on the Henveiru Artificial Beach on Monday to celebrate their indisputable win in the parliamentary election. The PNC said a special event named "Welcome - to the People's Nation's Majlis" will be held on Monday night for the people to commemorate and express their gratitude for the win. The election in the Maldives also came amidst deteriorating ties between the archipelago nation and India since Muizzu, 45, assumed power in November last year. During last year's presidential election, he had maintained a strident anti-India stand. While India was forced to withdraw most of its military

personnel manning three aviation platforms in the country, Muizzu travelled to China in January and met top Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping. China and the Maldives also signed a defence cooperation agreement and several other infrastructure development projects. The Maldives, India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), occupies a special place in its initiatives like 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' of the Indian government. On the other hand, China is expanding its footprints in IOR through its 'debt trap' diplomacy and 'String of Pearls' approach, a strategic initiative to create a network of military and commercial establishments in countries falling on the Indian Ocean. In 2013, Maldives joined China's 'Belt and Road' initiative to build ports and highways to expand trade - and China's influence - across Asia, Africa and Europe.

China hails Muizzu's victory

Beijing (PTI): China on Monday congratulated Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's People's National Congress (PNC) which has secured an absolute majority in Sunday's Parliament polls and expressed its willingness to deepen the "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" between the two countries. Muizzu-led PNC won 68 out of 93 seats in Sunday's polls and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively, which is more than two-thirds of the Parliament, landing the party an easy supermajority with the power to amend the Constitution. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by former president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who is seen as a pro-India leader, won only 15 seats this time. The parliamentary majority for the PNC would give Muizzu the legislative backing to shape the foreign policy of the strategically placed archipelagic state in the Indian Ocean geographically located close to India's southern coast. Commenting on the PNC's victory, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here that Beijing wants to congratulate the Maldives on the successful parliament election and respect the choice made by the people. "China stands ready to work with the Maldives to carry forward traditional friendship, expand exchanges and cooperation in various fields, deepen China-Maldives comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership and speed up the building of a China-Maldives community with a shared future to deliver greater benefits to our two peoples," he said. Ever since his election as President in October last year, Muizzu, who defeated the pro-India incumbent Solih, moved closer to China signing what the two countries term as a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" besides 20 agreements to assist Maldives infrastructure after meeting with President Xi Jinping here in January. China also announced a USD 130 million grant besides promising to send more Chinese tourists to the tourism-dependent Maldives.

European nations with Patriots hesitate to give their missile systems to Ukraine

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union countries possessing Patriot air defence systems appeared hesitant on Monday to give any to Ukraine, which is desperately seeking at least seven of the missile batteries to help fend off Russian air attacks. Russia's air force is vastly more powerful than Ukraine's, but sophisticated missile systems provided by Kyiv's Western partners can pose a major threat to Russian aviation as the Kremlin's forces slowly push forward along the roughly 1,000-km (620-mile) front line in the war. Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot said the Netherlands is "looking at every kind of possibility at the moment" and is offering financial support to a German initiative to help Ukraine bolster its air defences and to buy more drones. Asked at a meeting of European Union foreign and defense ministers why the Netherlands is reluctant to send some of its

Patriot systems, Slot said: "We are looking again if we can deplete our store of what we still have, but that will be difficult." Last week, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the military organisation "has mapped out existing capabilities across the alliance and there are systems that can be made available to Ukraine". He did not name the countries that possess Patriots. The Patriot is a guided missile system that can target aircraft, cruise missiles and shorter-range ballistic missiles. Each battery consists of a truck-mounted launching system with eight launchers that can hold up to four missile interceptors each, a ground radar, a control station and a generator. A key advantage of the US-made systems, apart from their effectiveness, is that Ukrainian troops are already trained to use them. But Patriots take a long time to make - as long as two years, some estimates suggest - so countries are reluctant to give

them up and leave themselves exposed. Germany had 12, but it is supplying three to Ukraine. Poland, which borders Ukraine, has two and needs them for its own defenses. Asked whether his country would provide any, Swedish Defence Minister Pål Jonson said: "I don't exclude that possibility, but right now we're focused on financial contributions." He said Sweden would send other systems that could "relieve some of the pressure" on the need for Patriots. Jonson also noted that more US deliveries of air defence systems might come, after the US House of Representatives passed a package over the weekend of \$61 billion in support, including \$13.8 billion for Ukraine to buy weapons. Questioned about whether Spain might step up with Patriots, Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said that his country "will make its decisions based on the power it has in its hands to support Ukraine."

Prosecutors will make history with opening statements in Trump's hush money trial

AP ■ NEW YORK

For the first time in history, prosecutors will present a criminal case against a former American president to a jury Monday as they accuse Donald Trump of a hush money scheme aimed at preventing damaging stories about his personal life from becoming public. A 12-person jury in Manhattan is set to hear opening statements from prosecutors and defense lawyers in the first of four criminal cases against the presumptive Republican presidential nominee to reach trial. The statements are expected to give jurors and the voting public the clearest view yet of the allegations at the heart of the case, as well as insight into Trump's expected defense. Attorneys will also introduce a colourful cast of characters who are expected to testify about the made-for-tabloids saga, including a porn actor

who says she had a sexual encounter with Trump and the lawyer who prosecutors say paid her to keep quiet about it. Trump arrived at the courthouse shortly before 9 am, minutes after castigating the case in capital letters on social media as "election interference" and a "witch hunt." He faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records - a charge punishable by up to four years in prison - though it's not clear if the judge would seek to put him behind bars. A conviction would not preclude Trump from becoming president again, but because it is a state case, he would not be able to attempt to pardon himself if found guilty. He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing. Unfolding as Trump vies to reclaim the White House, the trial will require him to spend his days in a courtroom rather than on the campaign trail, a reality he complained about

Monday morning when he posted on Truth Social about being "stuck" at his trial. He will have to listen as witnesses recount salacious and potentially unflattering details about his private life. Trump has nonetheless sought to turn his criminal defendant status into an asset for his campaign, fundraising off his legal jeopardy and repeatedly railing against a justice system that he has for years claimed is weaponized against him. Hearing the case is a jury that includes, among others, multiple lawyers, a sales professional, an investment banker and an English teacher. The case will test jurors' ability to set aside any bias but also Trump's ability to abide by the court's restrictions, such as a gag order that bars him from attacking witnesses. Prosecutors are seeking fines against him for alleged violations of that order. The case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg

revisits a chapter from Trump's history when his celebrity past collided with his political ambitions and, prosecutors say, he sought to prevent potentially damaging stories from surfacing through hush money payments. One such payment was a USD 130,000 sum that Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer, gave to porn actor Stormy Daniels to prevent her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump from emerging into public shortly before the 2016 election. Prosecutors say Trump obscured the true nature of the payments in internal records when his company reimbursed Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal charges in 2018 and is expected to be a star witness for the prosecution. Trump has denied having a sexual encounter with Daniels, and his lawyers argue that the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses.

Japan's anti-monopoly body orders Google to fix ad search limits affecting Yahoo

Tokyo (AP): Japan's antitrust watchdog said Monday that US search giant Google must fix its advertising search restrictions affecting Yahoo in Japan. The Japan Fair Trade Commission said in a statement that its recent study of Google's practices showed it was undermining fair competition in the advertising market. Yahoo Japan Corp., which has since merged with the Japanese social media platform Line, began keyword-targeted search advertising services using Google's technology after the two companies formed a tie-up in 2010. The FTC alleges that Google had imposed restrictions in its search advertising agreement with Yahoo Japan

that for more than seven years hindered its ability to compete in targeted search ads. An FTC investigation into whether that violated the Anti-Monopoly Law led Google to drop the restrictions. Google said in an emailed statement that it has cooperated fully with the commission's probe, and stressed the commission has not found it had outright violated anti-monopoly laws. It promised to carry out the commission's directives to offer "valuable" search functions to Japanese users and advertisers. Line Yahoo declined comment. Google will be under review for the next three years, to ensure it carries out needed changes, the commission said.

Raisi, Sharif agree on joint efforts to eradicate terror

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and Iran on Monday agreed on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held talks with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and discussed ways to promote bilateral ties at political, economic, trade and cultural levels, months after the two neighbours carried out tit-for-tat air strikes against alleged terrorist hideouts on rival lands. Raisi, the first head of state of any country to visit Pakistan after the February 8 general elections, was welcomed by Sharif at the Prime Minister House where the Iranian leader inspected the Guard of Honour. During their talks, President Raisi and Prime Minister Sharif

agreed on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism, state-run Radio Pakistan reported. It added that the two leaders also held discussions to increase trade and communication links between their countries. In the presence of Raisi and Sharif, the Iranian and Pakistani officials signed eight documents for promoting cooperation in various fields. Addressing a joint press conference, President Raisi said that Iran and Pakistan have decided to increase the trade volume to USD 10 billion. "We are committed to strengthening relations at the highest levels. The Economic and trade volume between Iran and Pakistan is not acceptable. We have decided as a first step to increase trade volume between

our two countries to \$10bn," Raisi said. In his remarks, Sharif said the entire Pakistani nation welcomes the visit of the Iranian President as he called for strengthening Pak-Iran ties despite challenges. "We have to keep this relationship strong despite the challenges we both face," he said. Sharif said he had detailed discussions with President Raisi on "religious, cultural, diplomatic, investment, and security matters" during their meeting. He described Raisi as an "ocean of political intelligence and wisdom", and said Iran would progress further under his leadership. "Pakistan and Iran can prosper and our borders can see progress," Sharif said.

Wet wipes containing plastic to be banned for sale in UK

PTI ■ LONDON

Wet wipes containing plastic will be banned from being sold in the UK following legislation to be tabled in Parliament soon, the British government announced on Monday, as the world marked as Earth Day. UK Environment Secretary Steve Barclay said the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) will table the legislation for England before Parliament's summer recess in July. The devolved regions of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are expected to follow on with their legislation later in the year to make it a UK-wide ban as part of an aligned approach. "Wet wipes containing plastic are polluting our waterways and causing microplastics to

enter the environment," said Barclay. "Defra will introduce legislation before the summer recess to crack down on this unnecessary source of pollution, following our successful single-use carrier bag charge and ban on microbeads in personal care products... Plastic-free wet wipes are readily available, and several retailers have already stopped selling wet wipes containing plastic," he said. The minister said it was part of a "step change" needed to protect the country's waterways from pollution. "The ban builds on a raft of actions already taken to protect our waterways and hold water companies accountable - including accelerating investment, putting water company fines back into the environment

and quadrupling the number of inspections of water company sites," he added. According to DEFRA's Beach Litter Monitoring Data for 2015-2020, an average of 20 wet wipes were found per 100 metres of beach surveyed across the UK. Once in the water environment, wet wipes containing plastic can accumulate biological and chemical pollutants, increasing the risk of harm to the animals and humans who encounter them. Banning them is expected to reduce plastic and microplastic pollution and reduce the volume of microplastics entering wastewater treatment sites when wrongly flushed. The ban follows a public consultation on the issue, which showed overwhelming support for such a move.

Man United escapes with shootout win in FA Cup semifinal

AP ■ LONDON

It was nearly a comeback for the ages for Coventry. Instead, it ended in another gut-wrenching penalty shootout loss at Wembley for the second-tier team as Manchester United limped into another FA Cup final. Coventry pulled off one of the most unexpected fightbacks in FA Cup history by rallying from three goals down against United to force extra time after a 3-3 draw in Sunday's semifinal game, only to falter at the end and let Erik ten Hag's team escape with a 4-2 win in the shootout. "It hurts a lot, especially coming back from 3-0 down and having the potential to win in extra time," Coventry striker Ellis Simms said. "To lose on penalties is gutting. ... We were unlucky but it just wasn't our day to get it."

Rasmus Hojlund scored the decisive penalty kick to save United from another embarrassing collapse after Callum O'Hare and Ben Sheaf had missed their spot kicks for Coventry. "It was an incredible game, a strange game too," Ten Hag said. "We had total control for so long and then gave it away in the last part of the game."

It was another heartbreaking ending at Wembley for Coventry, which also lost on penalties to Luton in last year's Championship playoff final to miss out on promotion to the Premier League. United's narrow escape sets up a second straight Manchester derby in the final against defending champion Manchester City, which beat Chelsea on Saturday. But it should never have been this close. United looked to be cruising toward the final after Bruno Fernandes' deflected shot put them 3-0 up in the 58th minute against a Championship side that had defied the odds just to make the semifinals. But Coventry is no stranger to comebacks, having scored twice in injury time to beat Wolverhampton in the quarterfinals, and staged an even greater one this time to set off wild celebrations in the sky-blue half of Wembley. Simms gave Coventry a glimmer of hope by sweeping home a cross from Fabio Tavares in the 71st, O'Hare netted the second with the help of a lucky deflection in the 79th and Haji Wright equalized from the penalty spot in the fifth minute of injury time after a handball by



Aaron Wan-Bissaka. United had taken the lead in the 23rd through Scott McTominay and Harry Maguire then headed in the second from a corner. That lead soon looked insurmountable after Fernandes' shot took a deflection to sneak inside the near post for United's third. But no lead seems safe for this

United side. This was a second late collapse in a matter of weeks after United gave up two injury-time goals in a 4-3 Premier League loss to Chelsea this month, when Ten Hag called on his team to learn how to close out games. They showed no signs of having learned that lesson, and Coventry came the closest to netting the winner in extra time against a shell-shocked United. Simms first hit the crossbar with a stinging strike and Victor Torp then thought he had scored the winner in the 120th minute - setting off more wild celebrations by the Coventry players and fans - but it was ruled out by VAR for a narrow offside to set up the penalty shootout. "We were 20 seconds away and a toenail offside, it's ridiculous," said Coventry manager Mark Robins, the former Manchester United player who scored a crucial FA Cup goal in 1990 that helped Alex Ferguson win his first trophy at the club. "Disappointed but we have to be really proud. Once the dust settles a lot of people will talk about that game for a long time." Casemiro missed United's first penalty by shooting straight at

goalkeeper Bradley Collins but Andre Onana saved O'Hare's spot kick before Sheaf sent his well over the crossbar. The win gives United a chance to salvage what has been a disappointing season. United only has an outside chance of qualifying for the Champions League next season and an FA Cup trophy - at rival City's expense - could be the only thing that will convince new minority owner Jim Ratcliffe to keep Ten Hag in charge for next season. The 71-year-old Ratcliffe was in the stands after running the London Marathon earlier in the day. Watching the last hour of United's performance may have been just as exhausting as the last part of that marathon. United's players hardly even celebrated when Hojlund's decisive penalty went in, with only Christian Eriksen running over to celebrate with his fellow Dane. Most of the players remained by the halfway line, almost sheepishly shaking hands with the Coventry players - knowing how close they had come to one of the club's most embarrassing defeats. Ten Hag, though, insisted that fans should look on the bright side after reaching back-to-back FA Cup finals.

Ruud beats Tsitsipas to win Barcelona Open

AP ■ BARCELONA

Casper Ruud took his revenge against Stefanos Tsitsipas by winning the Barcelona Open final in straight sets for his biggest career title, a week after losing to the Greek in the Monte Carlo Masters final. Ruud won 7-5, 6-3 for his first title of the season after losing the three other finals he played this year. "Honestly, this has been worth the wait," Ruud said after the triumph in Barcelona. "A lot of finals that I've lost have been tough, a bit disappointing, of course. Any time you reach a final, it's nonetheless a good week, so you can't be too hard on yourself, but this one has been a long time coming."

Seventh-ranked Tsitsipas had comfortably won in straight sets in Monte Carlo but this time Ruud prevailed, converting three of the six break points he earned. "I'm super happy to do it here in Barcelona in front of a packed stadium and on Rafa Nadal Court," the sixth-ranked Ruud said. "It's special to me because I looked up to him (Nadal) all my childhood, came here myself as a 13-year-old boy to watch him and the others play here. It's a great feeling."

Ruud is eyeing next month's French Open after finishing runner-up at Roland Garros last year, one of three Grand Slam finals he has lost. The 25-year-old Norwegian snapped a 10-match winning streak for Tsitsipas, who was 10-0 on clay this season and was seeking his 12th career title. Tsitsipas had lost all three of his previous Barcelona finals - in 2018, 2021 and 2023. It was the 11th career title for Ruud, and the 10th on clay.

AP ■ LONDON

Liverpool stays in hunt for Premier League title with 3-1 win at Fulham

Liverpool stayed in the hunt for the Premier League title and moved level on points with leader Arsenal with a 3-1 victory over Fulham that was illuminated by a brilliant free kick by Trent Alexander-Arnold. Liverpool bounced back from Thursday's exit to Atalanta in the Europa League quarterfinals and last weekend's home loss to Crystal Palace by winning at Craven Cottage after Jurgen Klopp dropped Mohamed Salah and Alexis Mac Allister to the bench. Alexander-Arnold's curling free-kick in the 32nd was canceled out by Timothy Castagne's first goal for Fulham in first-half stoppage time. Ryan Gravenberch and Diogo Jota scored in the second half

as Liverpool joined Arsenal on 74 points - one more than defending champion Manchester City, which has a game in hand. Fulham academy graduate Harvey Elliott, who swapped London for Merseyside in 2019, was galvanized by jeers from the home fans as he helped his side create the first chance of the match. The attacking midfielder player instinctively picked out Alexander-Arnold, whose cross could not be directed in by Luis Diaz's glancing header as the ball narrowly missed the inside of the post. Alexander-Arnold then showed off his elite ball-



striking ability. First, he received the ball centrally and he delivered a first-time side-footed pass in behind Fulham full-back Antonee Robinson before Diaz's low cross to Jota was struck wide of the right-hand post. Then, after Joao Palhinha brought down Jota on the counterattack, Alexander-Arnold stood over the set-

piece in an almost central position near the edge of the area and whipped the ball over the wall into the top left-hand corner. The Cottagers had been quiet all half but they came alive in added time to equalize. Rodrigo Muniz's blocked header off Alex Iwobi's cross fell kindly to the unmarked Castagne, who slammed his effort home from close range. Parity did not last long as, in the 53rd minute, Liverpool punished a series of errors to retake the lead. Iwobi's wayward pass found Elliott in a dangerous position and he opted to lay the ball off to Gravenberch, whose first-time curled effort flew past Bernd Leno to make it 2-1. Liverpool wrapped up the win in the 72nd after Cody Gakpo's pass split the defense and Jota finished with a strike into the bottom right-hand corner.



Bhavesh, Simranpreet win second 25m Pistol Olympic Selection Trials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bhavesh Shekhawat and Simranpreet Kaur Brar emerged winners in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol (RFP) and women's 25m pistol OST T2 trials respectively at the first-ever Olympic Selection Trials (OST) for Rifle and Pistol at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting ranges here on Monday. Bhavesh shot 34 in the RFP final, comfortably holding off OST T1 winner Anish Bhanwala (29), to extend his good form in the trials. Vijayveer Sidhu was third with 22-hits. Adarsh Singh (17) and Ankur Goel (13) finished fourth and fifth. In the women's pistol, Simranpreet continued her good run in the trials, firing 37-hits in the 10 series of five-shots each, to emerge triumphant. She too held off OST T1 winner and Olympian Manu Bhaker who signed-off with 35-hits on the day. Esha Singh with 30-hits took third and the final podium points available. Rhythm Sangwan (24), the second quota holder in the event, finished fourth while Abhidnya Patil (16) was fifth.

Nottingham Forest cries foul play in inflammatory social media post

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

It's 39 million views and an inflammatory social-media post that might be unlike anything ever seen in English soccer. The final whistle had just been blown on Nottingham Forest's 2-0 defeat at Everton in the Premier League on Sunday when a post on X, formerly Twitter, was published by the frustrated losing club. It went beyond criticizing match officials for perceived incompetence for the failure to award three penalties for what Forest said were a trio of clear fouls in the area during the game. It pointed to potential foul play by questioning the integrity of the VAR - Stuart Attwell - who, the club said, is a fan of a team, Luton, battling with Forest to

avoid relegation. Signing off, the post said Forest will "consider its options" about how to proceed. This matter, it seems, is far from over, not least because the Premier League is likely to come down hard on Forest in the coming days for its insinuations. Indeed, Forest - a two-time European champion - has rarely been out of the news since returning to the Premier League last season, after an absence of 24 years, under the stewardship of larger-than-life owner Evangelos Marinakis. Signing a record 21 players at a cost of around USD 160 million in the first transfer window after promotion showed this was a club which would be doing things differently. Forest has been made to pay for that wild spree, with the

club recently having been docked four points for breaching the league's financial rules. It is appealing against that sanction. This season, with the team again under the threat of relegation and currently in fourth-to-last place, Forest has adopted an us-against-the-world mentality for what it perceives to be a series of poor refereeing decisions hurting the team. It has even hired a former Premier League referee, Mark Clattenburg, as a consultant this season. Clattenburg has been scrutinizing the decisions of match officials and is answerable to Marinakis, a combustible Greek shipping magnate and media baron who - as the owner of Olympiakos, Greece's largest club - has been known for frequent public outbursts

against refereeing calls and run-ins with the Greek Football Federation. In his column for the British newspaper *The Daily Mail*, Clattenburg wrote on Monday that Forest has had to "endure some egregious refereeing" this season and that the decisions at Everton made it "as grim a game as they have encountered since returning to the Premier League." "It was a hat trick of howlers from the refereeing team and, unfortunately for Forest, a continuation of an unjust trend that has hampered their survival fight," Clattenburg wrote. A previous incident that angered Forest - and led to Marinakis going down to the touchline to express his unhappiness and later approach referee Paul Tierney - came in the team's 1-0 home loss to Liverpool in

March. The winning goal arrived in the ninth minute of stoppage time - just eight minutes had been allotted - and only after a controversial call by the referee, with Forest not getting the ball back when play was stopped after Liverpool defender Ibrahima Konate sustained a knock to the head at a Forest corner before the goal. Tierney blew his whistle with Forest in possession on the edge of Liverpool's area. After Konate quickly recovered, the referee dropped the ball to Liverpool goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher, who then started the attack that eventually led to the goal. Clattenburg pointed out that the ball should have gone back to the team that had possession when the game was stopped. That appears to be a clear

refereeing error, like the one made in Liverpool's loss at Tottenham in October when there was a mix-up in communication between the on-field referee and the VAR. After that mistake, Liverpool said it would "explore the range of options available, given the clear need for escalation and resolution." Tensions are running high and the finances at stake in the lucrative Premier League are leading to clubs - and their fans on social media - getting bolder and more vocal with their complaints, especially about the use of a video review system that is not proving to be the solution that was promised. Forest went too far, though, according to Jamie Carragher, a former Liverpool and England defender, who is now a leading pundit on British broadcaster Sky Sports.

Nelly Korda ties LPGA Tour record with 5th straight victory

AP ■ THE WOODLANDS (US)

Nelly Korda couldn't have imagined the incredible run she's put together this season while at home recovering from a blood clot that required surgery in 2022. "Because obviously then I was just more scared for my health," she said. "Competing was kind of on the back seat. I was not thinking about competing at all. But I think all of the sad times and the health scares that I have gone through have made me who I am today." Fully healthy now, Korda is seemingly unstoppable. The world's No. 1 player hasn't lost a tournament since January, and now she's a two-time major champion. Korda etched her name in the LPGA Tour record books Sunday, winning her record-tying fifth straight tournament with a two-stroke victory in the Chevron Championship. Korda joins Nancy Lopez (1978) and Annika Sorenstam (2004-05) as the only players to win five consecutive LPGA events. Her previous major victory was in 2021 at the Women's PGA Championship. "It's been an amazing feeling these past couple weeks knowing that I can go on this stretch and that if I stay in my bubble and I keep golf in a sense simple and let it flow, then I can have so, so much fun out here," she said. Korda shot a 3-under 69 in the final to outlast Maja Stark of Sweden, who birdied her final two holes to shoot 69 and pull within one. Korda stayed

aggressive on the par-5 18th, easily clearing the lake in front of the green and setting up an easy up-and-down birdie for a two-shot victory. She had a four-day total of 13-under 275 at Carlton Woods. Korda nearly aced the par-3 17th, with her tee shot hitting the hole and hopping in the air before settling within 10 feet. She settled for par to maintain her two-shot lead. Korda wowed the large crowd, which followed her throughout the day, by chipping into the wind for birdie on the par-4 10th hole to take a four-stroke lead. The 25-year-old raised her club above her head with one hand and pumped her fist after the ball rolled into the hole. Her parents - former Australian Open tennis champion Petr Korda and Regina Rajchrtova - beamed as she was presented with the trophy. "She had a difficult '22 and '23 in certain ways," Petr Korda said. "She did not win a tournament in '23 and some things probably made her humble and (she) put a lot of work into where she is right now. Without the work and commitment, she would not be here. So seeing that, I'm very happy." Korda's older sister, Jessica, is a six-time LPGA winner who's taking a break from golf after giving birth to her first child. Korda took home \$1.2 million from a purse of \$7.9 million, a significant increase from last year's purse of \$5.2 million. That brings her season earnings to \$2,424,216 and her career earnings to \$11,361,489. Winners had been jumping into Poppie's Pond off the 18th green at Mission Hills since 1988, and



Korda became the second to do it in Texas by doing a cannonball off a small dock into brown-tinged water. World No. 2 Lilia Vu was first to jump into the pond here after her win last season. Vu withdrew from this year's tournament before the first round after experiencing "severe discomfort" in her back during warmups. While still shivering from her post-win plunge Sunday, Korda confirmed she'll be competing in the JM Eagle LA Championship next week in Los Angeles. She was then asked about the possibility of becoming the first to ever win six straight LPGA tournaments.

"I'm going to enjoy this right now and then I'll think about that," she said. "But yeah, it's been an amazing time. Hopefully keep the streak alive. But I've been so grateful to compete week in and week out and get the five in a row, too." Masters champion Scottie Scheffler is on a similar tear, on his way to a fourth victory in five starts until rain interrupted the final round of the RBC Heritage. He couldn't help but check in on Korda. "I actually was checking the scores this afternoon when we were in the rain delay," he said. "I'm extremely happy for her and proud of her. That's some pretty special stuff. It's been a treat to watch."

Korda entered the last round one shot off the lead after completing the last seven holes of the weather-delayed third round early Sunday morning on a windy and unseasonably cool day. She was wiped out after her big win because she'd been up since 4 a.m. To prepare for the end of the third round. She birdied two of her first four holes to take the lead. Lauren Coughlin birdied Nos. 13 and 14 to get within two strokes, but bogeys on the 16th and 17th holes put her four behind. She shot a final-round 68 to finish tied for third with Brooke Henderson. Coughlin got emotional when discussing her best finish in a major. "It's really cool to see all of the work that I've put in, especially with my putting and my short game, and putting specifically showed off this week, as well," she said. Henderson was tied with Korda for second to start the last round after she shot a 64 in the third round to set a scoring record for the tournament since its move from Mission Hills, California, to Texas last year. But the Canadian, who has 13 LPGA wins with two majors, also faltered early in the final round, with a bogey and a double bogey in the first four holes. Haeran Ryu of South Korea shot a bogey-free 67 to enter the final round leading Korda by one. But the 2023 Rookie of the Year bogeyed the first two holes of the fourth round. She closed with a 74 and finished fifth. Eighteen-year-old amateur Jasmine Koo provided an unlikely highlight on the 18th hole. Her second shot bounced off the advertising board in the water and back into play.



RR ride Sandeep, Yashasvi brilliance to outclass MI

Jaipur (PTI): Yashasvi Jaiswal scored a hundred as table-toppers Rajasthan Royals defeated Mumbai Indians by nine wickets in their Indian Premier League match here on Monday.

Earlier, Sandeep Sharma grabbed a maiden five-wicket haul to help Rajasthan Royals restrict Mumbai Indians to 179/9. Following a rain interruption, RR completed the chase of 180 with eight balls to spare. Regaining his form, opener Jaiswal finished as RR's top-scorer with 104 off 60 balls. Earlier, Trent Boult (2/32) dismissed Rohit Sharma (6) in the first over, while Sandeep (5/18) claimed the wickets of Ishan Kishan (0) and Suryakumar Yadav (10) in successive overs to reduce MI to 20/3 after they opted to bat. But Tilak Varma weathered the storm and slammed three sixes and five fours en route to his 65. He got fine support from Nehal Wadehra (49 from 24 balls) as the duo put on 99 runs from 52 balls for the fifth wicket. Sharma then

returned to take three more wickets to complete his five-for. Yuzvendra Chahal entered history books with 200 dismissals in their clash here on Monday.

With their top-order blown away without any resistance for the second time this season by Rajasthan, MI were struggling at 52/4 at one stage. But Varma and Nehal Wadehra (49) fought their way through adversity to deliver the goods for Mumbai Indians, putting on 99 runs for the fifth wicket at the Sai Mansingh Stadium.

However, MI lost wickets in heap on either side of their fifth-wicket stand to post the lowest total for all teams batting first at this venue in this season. Varma produced his second fifty of the season whereas Wadehra missed out on his milestone by one run. This was after Chahal became the first bowler in IPL history to have completed 200 wickets, accounting for Afghanistan batter Mohammad Nabi in the



Rajasthan Royals bowler Sandeep Sharma in action during the match between Rajasthan Royals and Mumbai Indians, at Sai Mansingh Stadium, in Jaipur, on Monday

PTI eighth over to reach the milestone. Looking to get on top early on

and against Trent Boult, Rohit Sharma (6) perished in the first over after skying a catch to Sanju Samson.

MI slipped further when comeback man Sandeep had Ishan Kishan (0) edging one behind to Samson, with the RR skipper getting the decision overturned in his favour via DRS.

Kishan was guilty of playing away from the body without any movement of the feet as the ball took the edge to settle in Samson's gloves.

Sandeep created further issues for MI when he took out Suryakumar Yadav (10) from the equation, getting him caught by Rovman Powell. Suryakumar began well but was a tad early into his shot on this occasion, with an edge flying to Powell at mid-on.

Brief Scores:
Mumbai Indians: 179/9; 20 overs (Tilak Varma 65, Nehal Wadehra 49; Sandeep Sharma 5/18, Trent Boult 2/32)
Rajasthan Royals: 183/1 in 18.4 overs (Yashasvi Jaiswal 104 not out).

REVENGE ON CSK MIND IN DHONI BASTION

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Revenge will be on Rdefending champions Chennai Super Kings' minds when they host an unpredictable Lucknow Super Giants here in their reverse IPL fixture on Tuesday with both the teams desperate to break out of the mid-table logjam.

The last time the two teams faced off in Lucknow last week, KL Rahul and Quinton de Kock put up a record opening partnership which proved to be the difference as LSG joined CSK at eight points in the IPL standing.

The Super Kings have been a force to be reckoned with at home and they will look to set the record straight this time. Following the away loss, CSK will be eager to redeem themselves in the three consecutive home ties to march towards the playoffs.

For CSK, skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad and Shivam Dube have done bulk of the scoring and their failure against LSG meant they didn't get a flying start and also struggled in the middle overs.

While opener Rachin Ravindra's form is a concern, CSK also promoted Ajinkya



Rahane as the opener and as a result, Gaikwad pushed himself a spot down to three. Having scored three 50-plus scores as an opener so far, it would once again be a tricky call for Gaikwad to whether stick to the latest shuffle or promote himself back to the top.

While Ravindra Jadeja stepped up with a composed fifty, which allowed Moeen Ali and MS Dhoni to produce the late fireworks and give the team a fighting total, CSK would hope their top-order gets their act together before they face LSG

again. CSK's bowling unit was at their wits end against the rampaging duo of Rahul and Quinton de Kock. Young Matheesha Pathirana was their best bowler but the onus will be on pacers Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande and Mustafizur Rahman to produce a better show when they face the same opposition again.

Left-arm spinner Jadeja too struggled and will need to step up on their home turf, having done so in the past. For LSG, batting has been an

issue but they have shown how devastating they can be if their top-order fires. Rahul and Quinton were on a roll and they will once again have to do the heavy lifting at Chepauk. Also Nicholas Pooran has hit top gear when needed and LSG will bank on him a lot.

In bowling, LSG will hope for the return of young pace sensation Mayank Yadav, who had to sit out of two games after suffering lower abdominal strain.

Pacer Mohsin Khan and Yash Thakur did well to restrict CSK initially but found themselves in the firing line of Dhoni in the final overs, something they need to work on before they walk into his den. Matt Henry had a wicketless debut for LSG and he too will be eager to prove himself.

In the spin department, Krunal Pandya's two wickets made a lot of difference in the middle-overs and he will have to take the lead again against CSK, while young Ravi Bishnoi will have to get over the thrashing that he received from Ali to find his mojo back. The visitors would be fancying their chances but LSG would need consistency to pull off another win at CSK's fortress.



Conversation with Virat Kohli really helped me during bad phase: Riyan Parag

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

When Riyan Parag first arrived on the scene, he was known more for his unabashed expression of opinions on social media than for his batting. But then came a "good 10-15 minutes" of advice from the great Virat Kohli, and things changed for the better. From facing criticism for speaking his mind instead of delivering drab clichés in media interaction or on social media, the 22-year-old player from Assam is now staking a claim for India selection with stellar performances this IPL season.

On asking Kohli for advice, Parag told JioCinema, "In my second year, I was having a bad phase in the IPL. I was discussing with him on how to get out of that phase and how he used to handle similar situations, so I can learn from his experience as well."

"He gave me a good 10-15 minutes of his time and shared a few things with me, I think that really helped me."

Rajasthan Royals' Parag has been in top form this season, and is currently third in the list of highest run-scorers with 318 runs in seven

matches. Besides Kohli, Parag has also learned a lot from another cricket legend Rahul Dravid, who was previously associated with the RR franchise.

"I learnt a lot. Cricket-wise, we know he's one of the best in the business, one of the greatest cricketers of our time."

"Outside cricket, how we should conduct ourselves, get involved with the crowd, social media, and how to generally present ourselves outside of cricket, is something I learnt a lot about, from him."

Speaking about his maiden season in the IPL in 2019, Parag said the feeling was surreal when he first went out to bat, in a match against Chennai Super Kings with the legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni standing a few feet from the newcomer.

"It was a surreal feeling. I don't really remember how I was exactly feeling but I was nervous for sure. Playing against CSK, going in to bat, with Dhoni behind the wicket, was a surreal moment for sure, I'll never forget that. I was more excited than nervous and enjoyed every bit of it."

Starc is a superstar, do not think of him from investment standpoint: KKR CEO Mysore

+PTI ■ KOLKATA

Under scrutiny for his poor show in the ongoing season, IPL's costliest buy Mitchell Starc on Monday received the backing of Kolkata Knight Riders' managing director and CEO Venky Mysore, who said they don't think of him from an "investment standpoint".

KKR had bought Starc for a record Rs 24.75 crore but it always came with a caveat as the Aussie left-arm quick had limited experience in the shortest format and was making a comeback to IPL after nine years.

"He's a superstar and he's a quality player," Mysore said on the sideline of Knight Golf event at RCGC here.

"We don't think of it from an investment standpoint, because you go to the auction and things happen in the hands of the player, nor is it in the hands of anybody else."

"We just felt that an addition to the team like Mitchell Starc would add a lot of value, which it has. I mean, his presence itself in the lineup adds a different dynamic to the team, and there were specific skills that the support staff were looking for. So, we think we had that."

Starc's rustiness in the T20 format came to fore as he conceded 100 runs without taking any wicket from his eight overs in the first two matches.

It turned from bad to worse on Sunday when he leaked 54



runs from 16 balls at Eden Gardens, and in the final over, RCB No 9 Karn Sharma with little batting pedigree smashed him for three sixes in four balls. Starc, however, managed to salvage some pride taking a low return catch to dismiss Karn that eventually sealed a dramatic one-run victory.

"There are times when games are up and down. Everybody gets taken to the cleaners at times, and there are other times they come and just do their thing and win games for the team. So we're super happy having him in the setup," Mysore said.

With five wins from seven

matches at the halfway mark, the second placed KKR look a transformed side under mentor and two-time title winning former captain Gautam Gambhir.

Gambhir, who last represented the side in 2017, returned to his former franchise as a team mentor, relinquishing the same position at Lucknow Super Giants this season.

Mysore said Gambhir has added a lot of "weight" to the side.

"I think the consistency that is shown, I think we look like a more balanced and settled side this year. Needless to say, Gautam (Gambhir) coming in adds a lot of weight purely from the intensity that he brings, the experience that he brings."



Du Plessis, Curran fined for IPL Code of Conduct breaches

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Faf du Plessis has copped a Rs 12 lakh fine, while Punjab Kings captain has been penalised 50 per cent of his match fees for their respective offences, the IPL announced on Monday.

Du Plessis was fined for maintaining a slow over rate during RCB's thrilling one-run loss, their seventh of the ongoing season, to Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens on Sunday.

"Mr Faf du Plessis, Captain, Royal Challengers Bengaluru has been fined after his team maintained a slow over-rate during Match 36 of the TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens, Kolkata on April 21, 2024," an IPL statement read.

It was RCB's first over-rate offence of the season. Curran, on the other hand, was fined half of his match fees for a Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct which refers to "showing dissent at an umpire's decision" during PBKS' three-wicket loss to Gujarat Titans in Mullanpur on Sunday.

"Curran committed a Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. He admitted to the offence and accepted the Match Referee's sanction. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding," an IPL media release stated. The loss against GT was Punjab's fourth on the trot, they are now languishing on the ninth place in the points table.

PTI ■ MULLANPUR

Punjab Kings' bowling coach Charl Langeveldt has urged his middle-order batters to step up and "get more runs on the board" following their three-wicket loss to Gujarat Titans in the IPL here.

Punjab Kings made brisk start to reach 45 for no loss in five overs but their innings went downhill thereafter as they lost 7 for 47 runs to be all out for 142. GT overhauled the target in 19.1 overs.

It was their sixth loss in eight games.

"Disappointing. Players are hurt as well as the staff and the fans. We showed a lot of character with the ball. We had a good powerplay with the bat for the first time in three games but in the middle period, their spinners were too quality for our batters and we struggled."

"We just need middle order upfront to get more runs. We were probably 20 runs short on that wicket," Langeveldt said at the post-match press conference.

While Gujarat Titans used their spinners well with the trio of Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan and Noor Ahmad exposing the opposition with

We need middle order to get more runs: PBKS bowling coach Charl Langeveldt

their guile, PBKS picked Harpreet Singh Bhatia as their Impact Player due to the batting collapse even as Rahul Chahar stayed on the bench.

"It was the idea, we could have another spinner [Rahul] Chahar to play in but obviously when you're batting and you've had a collapse like that, it's better to get the runs on board," Langeveldt said.

"That's something we want to improve, get more runs on the board. We are going to travel now and we are going to play on better batting wickets and that would give the batters a bit more confidence going into the last few games. We take every game like a semi-final, final but yeah, it's one of those things"

"The batters are definitely going to be happy about the next venue (Eden Gardens, Kolkata). The bowlers need to



step up as well when we play at different venues, higher scoring grounds. Hopefully our batters will come good for us."

While PBKS are languishing on the second last position on the points table, Langeveldt tried to look at the positives.

"We still have to have that belief. We are a positive side, the boys showed a lot of character in the field. There's a lot to play for, we just need to win."

Rahul Tewatia played an unbeaten 18-ball 36-run innings and scored the winning runs for GT and fast bowler, Mohit Sharma was lavish in his praise for the dashing finisher.

"For the past three years, he (Rahul Tewatia) has been with the GT team. He's done it several times before (finishing games for his team). All credit goes to him," Mohit Sharma said.

"He practices the same scenarios at the nets. It is also a challenge for us when we bowl to him. He played a crucial innings, which was undoubtedly the turning point in the game for us."

We may have got away with Kohli wicket: Phil Salt

PTI ■ KOLKATA

It was a rub of the green call that Virat Kohli was dismissed off a high full toss and Kolkata Knight Riders managed to eke out a narrow one-run win in their high-scoring IPL match against RCB on Sunday, says stumper-batter Phil Salt.

The new Hawk-Eye technology to determine no-balls for height was used when TV umpire Michael Gough deemed a waist-high delivery from KKR's Harshit Rana fair.

Kohli was in full flow, scoring a brisk 18 runs off just seven balls, before Rana took a return catch to dismiss the star batter, as it became a pivotal moment

in RCB's narrow one-run loss while chasing a challenging target of 223 at Eden Gardens.

"It's split opinion, we know that. From our point of view, we feel like we may have got away with one there. It's the rub of the greens, one of those calls," said the world No 2 T20I batter at the Knight Golf event here.

The Englishman further said leveraging technology in this manner is ultimately beneficial for the game as he hinted at the possibility of a future review to assess the effectiveness of these technological advancements.

"They brought that data in, the no-ball data, for exactly that purpose. I feel like in 12

months' time maybe there'll be some sort of review. Is it working? Is it not working? Is it a new thing to the game?"

"But personally, from a player's point of view, any time you're using data and technology to be more precise and get the right decisions, that's a good thing for the game," Salt added.

Salt and Sunil Narine, the two KKR openers, have scored the bulk of runs (535 runs from seven innings) for the team who have won five from their seven matches to be in the forefront of a playoff spot.

"It's great batting with Sunil, he is a very, very low-key chill guy. He's got a very different sort of skill set when he's opening the



batting, as opposed to, up and down the order.

"I suppose one of the good things for me is he takes the pressure off, and I don't have to strike at a rate of 200 in my first 10 balls. Some games I might, but I don't have to."

"Normally, one of us gets going, and the other one feeds the strike. So, if we get a good start, we get a couple of boundaries away. You know, we can produce really big power plays, which is something that we've done."

They have went about their ways with a meticulous approach, picking the right bowler to attack and relied on match-ups, Salt said.

"Our conversations are mainly, who's going to take what ball, you know, who likes to match up, left arm spin, right arm pace, all that sort of a things."

"Normally one of us who wants to put their hand up and take that arm. We keep it very, very simple." Narine has been a revelation with the bat at the top of the order as the KKR spinner who was known as a pinch-hitter, has batted this time with poise and patience.

Narine struck his maiden T20 century, scoring 109 against Rajasthan Royals the other day.

GAUTI INSPIRES CONFIDENCE IN NARINE: TENDO: KKR fielding coach Ryan Ten Doeschate, a

member of their 2014 IPL title winning team under Gautam Gambhir, credited Narine's transformation to the former skipper who is now the mentor of the side.

"To be dead honest, I think Gauti did convince Sunil to open the batting and that also comes from the chemistry they have. They've worked together. Sunil played under him. I think it was a pretty easy."

"We've tried to get that up to order in other competitions as well. And he hasn't done it. But for whatever reason, Gambhir inspires a lot of confidence in Sunil. And he was happy to take the job on and hopefully that can continue," he added.

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