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WORLD 10 ELON MUSK MAKES SURPRISE VISIT TO BEIJING

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KKR WARY OF DC, MARAUDING MCGURK 12 SPORTS

Pakistan's narco plot busted by India



Indian Coast Guard (ICG) personnel with 14 crew members of a Pakistani boat after apprehending them from Indian waters. ICG also seized narcotics from the boat. (PTI)

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) in coordination with the Narcotics Control Board (NCB) and anti-terrorist squad of Gujarat on Sunday seized 86 kilograms of drugs worth over ₹600 crore from a Pakistani boat and apprehended 14 crew off Gujarat coast.

anti-narcotics operation at sea. The operation was an epitome of inter-agency coordination wherein ICG, ATS and NCB collaborated seamlessly which culminated in the successful operation. The ships and aircraft of ICG were deployed on concurrent missions to effect the operation. ICG ship Rajratan, which had NCB and ATS officials embarked, positively identified the suspect boat. No amount of evasive manoeuvring tactics

employed by the drug laden boat could save it from the swift and strong ICG ship Rajratan. Ship's specialist team embarked the suspect boat and after thorough checks, confirmed the presence of the sizeable amount of narcotics. The Pakistani boat, along with its crew, has been apprehended and is being brought to Porbandar for further investigations. The joint operations of ICG and ATS, which has led to eleven such successful law

enforcement operations in the last three years itself reaffirms the synergy for national objectives. Incidentally, the seizure on Sunday just a day after the NCB busted three labs manufacturing the banned drug mephedrone, popularly known as 'meow meow', in Gujarat and Rajasthan and arrested seven people in connection with the matter. The anti-drugs agency has seized narcotics worth approximately ₹300 crore. The labs were busted after the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) of Gujarat Police received information from a confidential source regarding the labs operating in Gujarat and Rajasthan, producing the drug mephedrone. Union Home Minister Amit Shah on February 28 this year lauded the Indian Navy and NCB's joint operation in seizing almost 3,300 kilograms of contraband off the coast of Gujarat and called it a 'testament' to the Government's unwavering commitment to making India a drug-free nation. The Narcotics Control Bureau, along with the Indian Navy, intercepted a suspicious boat off the Gujarat coast, seizing nearly 3,300 kilograms of contraband. Continued on Page 8



Village guard martyred in JK

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A member of the Village Defence Guard (VDG), part of security forces combing a forest area to track down terrorists, sacrificed his life during a gunfight with the ultras in a remote village of Basantgarh in the Udhampur district on Sunday. This marks the third incident of terrorist-related violence in poll-bound Jammu and Kashmir since last week. This is the first major terrorist strike in the area after 2018. Till the time of filing the report massive cordon and search operations were mounted in the thickly forested belt to track down the footprints of the group of terrorists. A joint team of security forces led by elite Para commandos of the Indian Army were rushed to the spot to flush out the hiding group of terrorists, believed to have infiltrated recently from the border belt of Kathua. Senior Army, police and CRPF officers rushed to the spot to synergise anti-terrorist operations. According to ground reports, aerial surveillance was also mounted to prevent the terrorists from breaching the outer cordon in the area while area domination parties were closing in with utmost care to avoid more collateral damage during the anti-terrorist operation. According to a statement issued by the Jammu and Kashmir police, "J&K Police sprang into action after intel on terrorists near Basantgarh Police station of Udhampur district. The clash erupted as police confronted hiding terrorists. One VDG member was injured." Continued on Page 8

Poll tension escalates in NE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GUWAHATI/ IMPHAL/ KOHIMA

Amidst the heavy deployment of security forces for ensuing general elections, several parts of North East India particularly Nagaland, Manipur again, Assam have been hit by violence. People from Nagaland made a beeline to neighbouring Assam to buy essential commodities as the indefinite shutdown of businesses to protest "extortion" by Naga political groups threw normal life out of gear in the State with the stir entering the third day on Sunday. While in Manipur which continues to be strife torn for more than a year now, one person was killed and three others injured in a gunfight between village volunteers of two warring communities in ethnic strife-torn Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Sunday. Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh strongly condemned the militant attack on security forces in Bishnupur district that claimed the lives of two CRPF personnel and vowed to nab the culprits without delay. The Nagaland shutdown was called by the Dimapur Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DCCI) on Friday also to protest alleged government inaction to protect businesses in Dimapur, the commercial hub of the state. The Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce and Industries supported the call, following which shutdowns were imposed in other districts from Saturday. Markets remained shut across the State, with people from Nagaland, especially those living along the inter-State boundary with Assam, went to the neighbouring State to buy essential commodities. Continued on Page 8



Repoll in six Manipur booths on April 30

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Repolling will be held in six polling stations in the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency on April 30, officials said. The repolling was necessitated as unidentified persons had damaged EVMs and VVPATs before the completion of voting at four of these six polling stations on April 26, while EVM malfunctioning was reported at one polling station, and voting could not be completed at another due to "threat and intimidation by unknown miscreants", they said. Voting at four polling stations in Ukhrul assembly segment, and one each in Chingai assembly seat in Ukhrul and Karong in Senapati was declared null and void and repolling will be conducted on April 30, a notification issued by the office of Manipur's Chief Electoral Officer said.



Former president of Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee Arvinder Singh Lovely (R), along with Rajkumar Chauhan (L), speaks during a Press conference after resigning from the post in New Delhi at his residence on Sunday. Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Blow to Congress as Delhi Congress chief resigns

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a big jolt to the Congress in Delhi ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) president Arvinder Singh Lovely resigned from his post citing various issues including, alliance with Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and selection of party candidates for North West Delhi and North East Delhi parliamentary seats. The shock resignation of Lovely less than a month before the seven seats of the national Capital go to polls, has put the grand old party's Lok Sabha election campaign in limbo. This was the second resignation by a former Minister to hit the Congress in the Capital in less than a week. Lovely was appointed as the Delhi Congress president on August 31, 2023. In his resignation letter sent to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday, Lovely also said all unanimous decisions taken by the senior Delhi unit leaders have been "unilaterally vetoed" by AICC Delhi in-charge Deepak Babaria. Lovely also claimed the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) was not given any intimation about the decision to field Kanhaiya Kumar from North East Delhi seat and Udit Raj from North West Delhi seat before the

official announcement was made by the party high command. Kharge accepted the resignation of Lovely. Later addressing a Press conference, Lovely said he has only resigned as chief of the Congress' Delhi unit and is not joining any other political party. His clarification came after Congress former MLA Asif Mohammad Khan claimed that the BJP would field Lovely from the East Delhi constituency, replacing Harsh Malhotra. "I have only resigned as Delhi Congress chief and I am not joining any political party," he said. Lovely said his resignation reflected the pain of Congress workers saddened by the fact that the "ideals they had been fighting for during the last seven to eight years" were being compromised. In his letter, Lovely said several AAP Ministers have been jailed over corruption charges, still the Congress formed an alliance with Arvind Kejriwal's party for the Lok Sabha elections amid opposition by party workers. On instructions from AICC General Secretary (Organisation), I even went to the extent of visiting Kejriwal's residence on the night of his Arrest along with Subhash Chopra and Sandeep Dikshit, despite the same being against my position on the matter, Lovely said. Continued on Page 8

EC asks AAP to modify its poll campaign song

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) has asked the Aam Aadmi Party to modify the content of its Lok Sabha elections' campaign song, "Jail ke jawab mein hum vote denge". While the Aam Aadmi Party has claimed the poll body has "banned" its Lok Sabha campaign song. Sources in the Chief Electoral office of Delhi said the AAP was asked to modify the contents of the song since it violated EC's guidelines and advertising codes. The over two-minute campaign song, penned and sung by AAP MLA Dilip Pandey, was released at the party headquarters here on Thursday. Sources from the Delhi Chief Electoral Office said the song was not banned but the party was asked to resubmit the proposal with certain modifications, in accordance with Advertising Codes prescribed under the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994 and ECI guideline/norms circulated through a letter dated August 24, 2023, for the certification. The Delhi poll panel said



certain images and phrases are "slanderous" remarks and "criticism of the ruling party on the basis of unverified facts" and also cast aspersions on the judiciary and police. Addressing a Press conference, AAP senior leader Atishi accused the Election Commission of becoming a "political weapon of the BJP" and turning a blind eye to its violations. She also asserted that the campaign song does not mention the BJP and does not violate the Model Code of Conduct. "It includes factual videos and incidents, whether it is the picture of Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, whether it is the video of police's misbehaviour with Manish Sisodia in the Rouse Avenue

Trouble mounts for Gowda's grandson

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/ BENGALURU

The Karnataka Government on Sunday constituted a Special Investigation Team to probe an alleged sex scandal involving Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is the grandson of JD(S) supremo and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda. The move came following a letter by chairperson of Women's Commission Dr Nagalakshmi Chowdhary to the Government. The 33-year-old Prajwal was the NDA candidate in the Hassan Lok Sabha constituency, which went to polls on April 26. The JD (S) joined the NDA in September last year. The SIT of IPS officers is led by the Additional Director General of Police (CID) Bijay Kumar Singh. The other two are Assistant Inspector General of Police Suman D Pennekar and Mysuru Superintendent of Police Seema Latkar. The SIT has been directed to complete its investigation soon. Some explicit video clips allegedly involving Prajwal had started making the rounds in Hassan in recent days. The decision to constitute an SIT was announced by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The police have information that Prajwal, who is the son of MLA and former Minister H D Revanna, has left the country, Continued on Page 8



according to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's office. Dr Chowdhary on Thursday wrote to Siddaramaiah and state police chief Alok Mohan seeking a probe into the videos that are in circulation in Hassan. Through his election agent, Prajwal has lodged a complaint with the authorities that the videos are "doctored" and being circulated to tarnish his image ahead of the elections. Home Minister G Parameshwara told reporters, "In case he (Prajwal) has gone to the foreign country, SIT will be responsible for bringing him back and continuing the investigation. We will not tell the SIT to do the investigation this or that way." Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said, "...We are hanging our heads in shame." "I saw in the media that he has 'escaped'. This is an

unpardonable crime. It is a matter of shame. He is an MP and the grandson of a former Prime Minister. He represented the same constituency which the former Prime Minister had represented," Shivakumar, also state Congress chief, said. It said already an FIR has been lodged at the Holenarasipur police station under section 354(A) (Sexual harassment), 354(D) (Stalking) and 506 (Criminal Intimidation) and 509 (Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code, which the SIT will investigate in detail. The order said all the cases pertaining to this incident registered in various parts of the state should be transferred to the SIT, which will utilise the resources of the CID during the investigation. JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy said he would like to wait for the facts to come out of the investigation into an alleged sex scandal involving his nephew and Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, but asserted that there is no question of forgiving anyone who has committed a crime as per law. He said he has nothing to do with Prajwal Revanna reportedly leaving the country, and it is the responsibility of the SIT to get him back if required.

Delhi, other State Legislative meetings dwindle

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Data compiled by think tank PRS Legislative Research shows that the State Assemblies of Delhi, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Telangana and Nagaland have been meeting for fewer than 22 days a year, with the number of sittings decreasing over time. Among States, the Maharashtra Assembly met for the highest number of days (41), followed by West Bengal (40), and Karnataka (39). At least 13 States, including Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Telangana met for less than 20 days. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Uttarakhand met for less than 10 days. Goa doubled its sittings from 13 in

cumulatively worth about ₹53 lakh crore. The data shows state assemblies sat for an average of 22 days in 2023, and the average duration of sittings was five hours. In 2023, seven states continued sessions for more than six months without proroguing it, and with long gaps between sittings, it said. Maharashtra met for the highest number of days (41), followed by West Bengal (40), and Karnataka (39). At least 13 States, including Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Telangana met for less than 20 days. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Uttarakhand met for less than 10 days. Goa doubled its sittings from 13 in



2022 to 26 in 2023. Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Telangana also met for more days in 2023, as compared to 2022. Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab met for fewer days in 2023 as compared to the previous year. Kerala, which met for 61 days in 2021, and 41 days in

held more than 80 per cent of their sittings in the budget session. Tamil Nadu held 72 per cent of its sittings in the budget session, lower than 91 per cent in 2022. In Delhi, the same session continued from March to December 2023, with 14 sittings. Punjab Assembly session held between March and October 2023 had 10 sittings. Punjab had approached the Supreme Court in February 2023, stating that the Governor was not summoning the Budget Session. The court stated that the governor was bound by the advice of the state Cabinet. Meanwhile, in Rajasthan, the assembly session in 2023

continued from January to August. In 2021 and 2022, Rajasthan had only one session, which continued from January to December. In West Bengal, a session that began in July 2023 was not prorogued till March 2024, and the session held in February to pass the Budget did not start with the customary address by the Governor. In Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, sessions continued for more than a year. In Sikkim, the session which began in March 2022 was prorogued only in April 2023. In Telangana, one session continued from September 2021 till August 2023, when the term of the House ended. Continued on Page 8

Narrow escape for 4 in house collapse after cylinder blast

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A family of four, including a one-year-old child, narrowly survived after their dilapidated house collapsed following a cylinder explosion in Chowk area on Sunday morning. They were rescued from under the debris and rushed to a hospital. The incident occurred in Ghazi Mandi near Shia PG College under Chowk police station. Both the Chowk police and fire department responded swiftly upon receiving news. The injured were identified as Rajkumar Kashyap (52), Pinky (38), their one-year-old daughter Vidisha, and Jagdish (70). Chowk fire station officer Pushpendra Kumar Yadav stated that local residents had already assisted in pulling out the family members from under the debris before the officials reached the scene. Rajkumar Kashyap, Pinky, and their daughter Vidisha suffered severe burns. Preliminary investigations revealed that the incident occurred around 11:40 am at the residence of Gulab Kashyap. Pinky Kashyap was cooking when a gas leak from a loosely joined pipe ignited, leading to the cylinder explosion. The impact was so intense



that the two-storey building came crashing down, trapping the family inside. Two fire tenders were despatched from Chowk, although accessibility was challenging due to the narrow bylanes. Pushpendra Kumar Yadav clarified that the injuries were primarily caused by the cylinder explosion rather than

the house collapse. Pinky and the elderly man sustained the most severe injuries. Meanwhile, reckless driving by a bus driver claimed the life of a youth during the guests' welcome on the occasion of his cousin sister's marriage in Mohanlaljanj on April 25. As per reports, Abhinendra Pratap Singh of Barabanki had visited

the Shivgarh Resort Hotel for the occasion. He was welcoming the guests while standing at the gate of the venue when a bus knocked him down. Abhinendra suffered grievous injuries and was rushed to CHC Mohanlaljanj where he was pronounced dead. His father filed a complaint in this regard on Sunday.

Journalist, wife attacked with sharp-edged weapons

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two men and their accomplices allegedly attacked a journalist and his wife in broad daylight as they were en route to the Chandrika Devi temple in Bakshi-Ka-Talab, in Bazaarkhala police station area on Saturday. According to an FIR registered on the complaint of the victim's wife, Kshama Tiwari, she and her husband Kavi Tiwari aka Amit Tiwari were going to BKT on a motorcycle. Around 5 pm, two accused, identified as Monis and Ehsan, intercepted them on the Haiderganj fly-over. She alleged that Monis and Ehsan were accompanied by 4-5 unidentified men, all armed with sharp-edged weapons. "Upon seeing us, Monis and Ehsan shouted and encouraged their accomplices, claiming Kavi had been a nuisance to them for some time and should be dealt with. They proceeded to attack Kavi with sharp-edged weapons, causing injuries to his hands. Despite Kavi's attempts to defend himself, he sustained cuts to his fingers, chin, under the lower lips, head, and other body parts. I pleaded for help, but bystanders hesitated to intervene due to the attackers' aggression. Some did stop out of sympathy, but the attackers threatened them before fleeing the scene," the victim's wife was quoted as saying by the police. Kavi was taken to Civil Hospital for treatment. DCP, West, Durgesh Kumar confirmed that a case was registered based on the complaint of Kavi Tiwari's wife, and efforts are underway. The police indicated that there had been ongoing disputes between the accused and the victim. Meanwhile, thieves made off with Rs 30,000 in cash and ornaments worth several lakh from a house in Mohanlaljanj when the owner and his wife were out of the city for work. Reports said Chandra Prakash Tiwari of Gokul Vihar and his wife work in Basti district and had left their house on April 22. On April 25, they returned home and found the house burgled. The house is located close to Harikansh Garhi police outpost.

Polling personnel training by master trainers from today



Preparations underway at KKC College for training of polling personnel

Pioneer

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Master trainers will begin training polling personnel for the Lok Sabha elections in Lucknow from Monday. As part of a unique initiative by the district administration, a state-of-the-art training centre has been established at Shri Jai Narain Misra Post Graduate (KKC) College, specifically for this purpose. The training sessions will utilise smart boards installed across 40 rooms in the college. A senior official from the district administration outlined the training schedule, which will be conducted in two shifts. Each shift will accommodate

1,600 personnel, including pre-riding officers and polling officers. Training materials have been developed to familiarise the personnel with polling station layouts and dispersion points. They will also receive information about webcasting procedures and the 'Matdan Pratishat Sankalan' app, which provides voter turnout details. Polling personnel will undergo assessments, with additional training provided for those whose performance requires improvement. Approximately 250 master trainers will conduct sessions in 40 classrooms, accommodating 40 participants per class. This training

marks a departure from traditional oral classes, utilising smart TVs for the first time. Certain individuals, including pregnant women and those nearing retirement, have been exempted from polling duty. Meanwhile, the Lucknow Municipal Corporation organised 'Chunav Pathshalas' in various areas and local neighbourhoods. These sessions involved citizens, employees, and students taking oathes to increase voter participation. Municipal corporation officers and employees also engaged with citizens to raise awareness about voting locations and encourage voter turnout.

14-year-old girl gangraped in house

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Taking advantage of her loneliness, three youths gangraped a 14-year-old girl at her house in Chinhat. Her parents had gone to attend a wedding and the girl was home alone. Neighbours got a whiff of the incident when two of the accused were found standing guard outside the house of the victim. The neighbours alerted the victim's parents, who returned home and nabbed one of the accused. Later, police arrested two of the accused, said to be minors, while the third is at large. The Chinhat SHO said that a case under IPC sections 376D (gangrape), 452 (trespassing), 504 (insult), 506 (criminal

intimidation) and POCSO Act had been registered against the accused. According to the police, the victim's parents had gone to a wedding on Friday night, leaving the minor girl at home. Around midnight, the three accused entered the house and took turns in raping the 14-year-old girl. "On being informed by neighbours, the family members of the victim hurriedly returned home. The accused standing outside ran away while the one inside was nabbed and handed over to police," a spokesperson said. The victim's father said that when he entered the house, he found the accused with his minor daughter who was struggling to wriggle herself

free. "The accused tried to run away on seeing us but we nabbed him and handed him over to the police later," he added. The police nabbed another accused later. The police sent the girl for a medical test and started further investigations into the case. Meanwhile in Lakhimpur Kheri, a 17-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a man who held her hostage for three days here, police said on Saturday. The accused, Aman (21), has been arrested and sent to jail today, they said. On April 21, the girl's mother filed a complaint with Dhaurahra police in which she accused Aman of forcibly taking away her when she was on her way back home on April 19.

She alleged that the accused held her daughter captive at his home, raped and assaulted her, police said. According to the FIR, the girl somehow got free from the captivity and returned home on April 21. Following this they moved to the police. Initially, a case under sections 343 (wrongful confinement), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 504 (intentional insult) of the IPC was lodged but after the girl returned home from captivity, section 376 (rape) and the POCSO Act were added to the FIR, Deputy SP Dhaurahra PP Singh said. The accused was arrested and sent to jail on Saturday, he said, adding that the matter is being investigated.

TV actors' day out in city

Lucknow (PNS): Actors Ulka Gupta and Karan Vohra, who were in Lucknow on Sunday to promote their show 'Main Hoon Saath Tere', engaged with fans and the media, discussing their respective roles. They explored prominent locations in the city and interacted with fans. Karan expressed gratitude for returning to the TV with this captivating love story. "I feel blessed to portray Aryaman in this beautifully written character. It allows me to showcase my acting range and I believe the character and storyline

will deeply connect with the audience. Ulka and I are in Lucknow today to meet the media and our fans. We explored the city, and I fulfilled a request from my wife by purchasing a lovely chikankari suit," Karan said. Elaborating on the storyline, Ulka highlighted the journey of single mother Janvi facing numerous challenges while raising her son Kian. "Set in Gwalior, the show takes us on an emotional rollercoaster as Janvi navigates her world to keep her son happy. Although

Kian doesn't miss having a father, he feels the absence of a male figure in his mother's life, seeing her manage everything alone. The plot intensifies when Janvi encounters affluent businessman Aryaman, leading them to work together," she explained. Ulka shared her excitement about returning to television and playing a mother character early in her career. Drawing inspiration from her mother, she emphasised the responsibility of portraying a single mother on television. She said she hopes Janvi's simplicity, warmth, and resilience will inspire viewers.

6 killed as bus, truck collide

Lucknow (PNS): In a tragic accident in Unnao on Sunday afternoon, a speeding truck ripped through one side of a bus after colliding head-on with it, killing six passengers and injuring over two dozen others. The accident took place near Jamalpur village on Hardoi-Unnao road in Safipur Kotwali police station area. The police took the injured to the community health centre in Safipur from where they were referred to the district hospitals in Unnao and Kanpur after giving them first aid. The condition of many of the injured was said to be critical and the death toll may increase. Circle Officer of Safipur Rishikant Shukla confirmed the death of six passengers in the accident. He said efforts were being made to ascertain the identities of those killed in the mishap. Reports said that the private bus going to Unnao from Bangarnau had reached near Jamalpur village in Safipur Kotwali police station area when a speeding truck coming from the front collided head-on with it and ripped through its right side. In another road accident reported from Hardoi, a 65-year-old man and his son were killed and six members of the family were injured when their car rammied into a tree in the Sawaijpur area of the district. The injured were taken to the local community health centre from where they were referred to the district hospital.

Doctors explore emerging concepts in haematology

Lucknow (PNS): Under the auspices of the Uttar Pradesh Haematology Group, the first annual conclave organised by KGMU commenced at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Convention Centre. The event is being spearheaded by Vice-Chancellor Prof Soniya Nityananda and chaired by Prof AK Tripathi. Organising secretary Dr SP Verma stated that the theme of the conclave is 'Exploring emerging concepts in haematology'. Thirty prominent haematologists from across the country are participating in the conclave. Additionally, over 200 delegates from Uttar Pradesh are in attendance. The conclave features lectures on haematology-related topics such as lymphoma, myeloma, anaemia, bleeding disorders, and aplastic anaemia. During the first session, the treatment of blood cancer was extensively discussed. Dr Devdutt Basu, who came from Pudukkottai, highlighted the availability of at-home medications resembling regular medicines for blood cancer patients. He emphasised the effectiveness of new-generation medications. Chronic myelogenous

leukaemia/chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CML/CLL) are blood cancers that can be effectively managed with medications, allowing patients to lead normal lives. Dr Basu also mentioned the availability of medicines for other myeloproliferative neoplasms. Dr Toofani Kanti Dolai from Kolkata stressed the importance of accurate diagnosis in blood cancer treatment, often guided by bone marrow examination. Dr Pankaj Malhotra from Chandigarh discussed oral treatments for CLL, noting that some patients may not require ongoing medication. In the Prof AK Tripathi Oration, Prof MB Agarwal from Mumbai elaborated on the significance of platelets in health, highlighting their role in critical bodily functions. He emphasised that low platelet count often signals serious health conditions. During the first session, a quiz was conducted among haematology students pursuing DM, with teams from SGPGI and KGMU participating. The SGPGI team emerged victorious in this engaging competition.

CITYBRIEFS



CRESCENDO
Crescendo, the cultural festival of Seth MR Jaipuria Schools Group, returned for the seventh year in a row. The grand finale took place on Sunday. This year, the theme was 'India of the 1990s'. The finale week saw competition among over 3,500 students. In Lucknow, Mayor Sushma Kharkwal was the chief guest. The event champions were Seth MR Jaipuria School, Gomti Nagar, followed by Seth MR Jaipuria School's Banaras Babatpur Campus, and Seth MR Jaipuria School's Banaras Parao Campus. The top 10 schools were awarded medals and trophies.

PLACEMENT DRIVE
The Training and Placement Cell at the Faculty of

Engineering and Technology, Lucknow University, organised a recruitment drive in which two students were roped in by Swiggy, while 45 students were selected for internships at Outlook Group across various positions. LU Vice-Chancellor Prof AK Rai congratulated the successful students. Placement cell incharge Himanshu Pandey said two MBA students — Sakshi Srivastava and Shiv Manish Srivastava — were selected by Swiggy as sales managers with a package of Rs 6 lakh per annum. Those elected for the internships will receive a stipend of up to Rs 20,000. Upon successful completion, an additional Rs 12,000 will be awarded, along with offers for full-time positions.



Former president of KKC Students' Union Rajesh Shukla felicitated Additional Government Advocate, Lucknow High Court, Surya Prakash Upadhyay's son Aditya Hriday Upadhyay on his selection in the Civil Services, and wished him success.

Lucknow airport is world-class: KP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Renowned cricketer Kevin Pietersen of South Africa origin has lauded the developmental initiatives undertaken by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. During a recent visit to the new terminal of Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport in Lucknow for IPL-2024, Pietersen expressed his astonishment, describing the airport as "world-class". Having traversed through some of the world's busiest and largest airports, Pietersen remarked that he had never encountered such a splendid airport terminal before. Pietersen commended Chief Minister Yogi for the remarkable infrastructure and took to social media X to share his admiration, tagging Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath while praising the Lucknow airport. Pietersen, known for his aggressive batting on the cricket field, wrote in his post, "The 'Street of Flowers' in the new airport terminal of Lucknow is truly world-class. Everyone has done a fantastic job for this beautiful state of Uttar Pradesh. I am sure Chief



Minister Yogi Adityanath will be very proud of this. India is progressing rapidly." The Yogi government has expanded both the terminals of Lucknow airport, enhancing its capacity significantly. The third terminal of Lucknow airport started operating in March, with an annual capacity of 80 lakh passengers. Currently, four international airports and 11 domestic airports are operational in Uttar Pradesh while construction of six airports is progressing rapidly.

Now, app to help detect mental health issues!

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

The Med Tech Centre at Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS) has developed an application which can help in screening one's mental health. Chief operating officer of the Med Tech Centre Shyam Kumar said that through this app, one can record voice samples on different occasions to detect if they are facing mental health problems. He said that the app has been developed by the Manodayam startup founded by Sanjay Bhardwaj and incubated with the Med Tech Centre. "The voice of a person is recorded in the app and there is an AI-

based algorithm behind it which will tell you if you are having some mental health issues such as anxiety or depression only through the voice sampling," he said. He said that the algorithm has been developed with the collaboration of IIT-Kanpur. "This app does not go on the language which the person may be using but is based on acoustics where the pitch of the voice of the speaker is tested. The voice is tested on multiple occasions throughout the day," he explained. He said that in a way it is a self-assessment wherein a person can download the app and then test themselves for mental health

The app does not go on the language which the person may be using but is based on acoustics where the pitch of the voice of the speaker is tested. The voice is tested on multiple occasions throughout the day

issues. "We have also made a suggestion that the detection part is okay but an end-to-end solution must also be provided, wherein after a person who detects the issue should be suggested as to what course of action they should take next for solving the problem," Kumar said. He added that they realise that this app has huge potential in different sectors such as in

school students, young professionals in corporate sector and in the defence sector where people are facing mental health problems. Kumar said that mental health issues are increasing in India and the reason for developing such an app was that one should not remain closeted with the problem and instead reach out for help. Kumar said that the aim of

Med Tech Centre (Software Technology Park of India) is to promote medical electronics. "We nurture more innovations in the medical domain. We conduct quite a few programmes year on year to try and attract the startups. In each problem challenge programme, we provide a problem statement which is given by the industry or the domain expert. The startups which want to solve the problem apply for the programme and the selection committee tries to scrutinise them. Here we have a world-class facility. We have IOT labs and medi-electronic labs. We also have a 3D printer for creating 3D prototypes," he elaborated.



I, Uttam Kumar S/o Late Lal Bahadur Singh residing at P. No. Plot No. 27 Khasra No. 204 Raghunandan Vihar Colony Chinhat Lucknow -226028 Uttar Pradesh, hereby declare that I have changed my son's name Vishal Singh to Utkarsh Maurya. In future he should be known as Utkarsh Maurya.

FORM NO. 5
DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL
600/1 University Road, Near Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow - 226007
(Area of Jurisdiction-Part of Uttar Pradesh)

Summons for filing Reply & Appearance by Publication
Date: _____

(Summons to defendant under Section 19(3) of the Recovery of the debts and Bankruptcy Act, 1953 read with Rules 12 and 13 of the Debt Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules, 1993).
Original Application No. 615 of 2022

Indian BankApplicant
Versus
Sri Vishal Prajapati & anotherDefendants

1. Sri Vishal Prajapati, Son of Sri Sunil Kumar resident of House No. 258/49, Nandan Mahal, Shankar Dayal Road, Lucknow-226004.
2. Sri Abhishek Singh, Son of Sri Ajit Singh, resident of House No. E-3517, Rajajipuram, Lucknow-226017; Also at: Block-F, House No.809, Rajaji Puram, Lucknow-226017.

In the above noted application, you are required to file reply in paper book form in two sets along with documents and affidavits (if any), personally or through your duly authorized agent or legal practitioner in this tribunal, after serving copy of the same on the applicant or his counsel/duly authorized agent after publication of the summons and thereafter to appear before the Tribunal on **05.09.2024 at 10.30 A.M.**, failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absence. Registrar
Debts Recovery Tribunal, Lucknow

Cong, SP and BSP suffering like fish out of water, says Yogi

PNS ■ AONLA

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, likened the predicament of the Congress party, the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samajwadi Party to that of a fish out of water in the absence of power. Addressing a public meeting at Subhash Inter College Grounds in Aonla Lok Sabha constituency to seek votes for Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Dharmendra Kashyap, Yogi said that these parties were adrift without authority. Commencing his address with a reflection on Aonla's historical prominence, Yogi Adityanath juxtaposed a narrative of India's transformative trajectory over the past decade under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's stewardship with a scathing critique of the oppositions INDI Alliance. The chief minister posed ten probing questions to Congress, SP and BSP, evoking the legendary tale of Yaksha's interrogation of Dharmaraj Yudhishtir. Asserting the need for accountability, the chief minister underscored the prolonged stints of Congress rule spanning six to six and a half decades and the sporadic reigns of SP and BSP, totalling three to four terms, while pointing to the persisting challenges faced by the state. Urging reflection on issues of national identity and security, development stagnation, hunger-related fatalities, farmer suicides, communal unrest, and economic setbacks attributed to what he characterised as the misguided appeasement policies of previous administrations, the chief minister's pointed queries demanded answers on culpability. With a searing indictment of



perceived negligence in addressing unemployment, infrastructure deficiencies, and erosion of public trust, the chief minister's questions underscored a deep-seated frustration with the alleged failures of governance spanning decades across these political entities. The chief minister lambasted the selective condolences offered by the SP, drawing a sharp contrast between their response to the passing of Mulayam Singh Yadav and the lack of acknowledgement for

the late Kalyan Singh's contribution to the development of Uttar Pradesh and the Ram Janmabhoomi cause. Expressing dismay at the apparent prioritisation of political allegiances over genuine expressions of respect, the chief minister questioned the ethical foundation of a party that allegedly disregards the legacies of public service in favour of alliances with controversial figures. Accusing the SP of dynastic politics, the chief minister highlighted the monopolisation

of party tickets within a single family, suggesting a myopic approach to governance that prioritises familial ties over broader societal interests. Drawing analogies between the idiosyncratic people in the SP family and the complex characters of the Mahabharata epic, the chief minister underscored the perceived disconnect of the SP leadership from the needs and aspirations of the broader electorate. Furthermore, the chief minister criticised the Congress and SP for allegedly stoking com-

munal tensions and hindering progress, asserting that their divisive tactics pose a threat to both national and state interests. He also held the Congress responsible for the delay in the construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, alleging that the party hindered the project's realisation. "However, truth ultimately triumphed," he added. He underscored the importance of prioritising unity and progress over divisive agendas. The chief minister asked people if they had confidence in the opposition's ability to combat organised crime. Citing a history of alleged collaboration between the opposition and criminal elements, the chief minister portrayed them as intertwined entities, contrasting this image with the government's stance against mafia influence. The chief minister likened the opposition's purported complacency to individuals seeking mercy from the forces they should be combating. Emphasising the importance of fostering an environment conducive to honest labour rather than succumbing to criminal influence, the chief minister advocated for initiatives like the SVANidhi and SVAMITVA schemes, prioritising empowerment over exploitation. This call for a government dedicated to uplift citizens through progressive policies underscored the chief minister's vision for a safer, more prosperous society. Continuing his attack on the opposition, the chief minister cautioned people against the opportunistic motives of caste-based traders, urging them not to be swayed by their appeals. Drawing upon the principles of the Constitution, the chief minister reminded the audi-

ence of the sanctity of reservations, accusing the Congress of seeking to dilute these provisions for personal gain. Asserting the opposition's alleged designs on inherited property through proposed taxation schemes, the chief minister urged vigilance against attempts to undermine the rights of the Hindu community. In a heartfelt plea to the electorate, the chief minister underscored the significance of aligning with a government prioritising the nation's welfare. Emphasising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for security and progress, the chief minister asserted that only the BJP could ensure the nation's safety. Urging voters not to be swayed by individuals who claim to stand for the country while advancing personal agendas, the chief minister stressed the importance of aligning with those genuinely dedicated to national interests. Reinforcing the notion that the government should reflect the will of the people it serves, the chief minister highlighted the BJP's commitment to upholding national interests, development, security, and the values of the Sanatan faith. Encouraging voters to support the nationalist mission and grant Prime Minister Modi a third term, the chief minister rallied support for a government that prioritises the nation's welfare above all else. Notable figures present at the gathering included Aonla MLA and cabinet minister Dharampal Singh, BJP district president Adesh Pratap Singh, district panchayat chairperson Rashmi Patel, MLAs Shyam Bihari Lal, Raghavendra Sharma, Rajeev Singh, and former MLA Dharmendra Shukla.

'Vote kamal for India's prosperity'

PNS ■ ETAH

In a momentous event witnessed in Ayodhya after centuries, when Ram Lalla made a historic return, marking a significant milestone in the town's religious landscape, the artisans and craftsmen of Jalesar joined forces to transport a colossal bell weighing 21 tons to the temple. The resonating chime of the bell awakens the country's faith with devotees thanking the people of Jalesar, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath remarked on Sunday. Addressing a rally in support of Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Prof SP Singh Baghel from Agra Lok Sabha constituency, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasised the significance of this moment in history and urged voters to align with the 'Kamal' (lotus) symbol, ensuring electoral victory and invoking blessings for the nation's prosperity from the divine feet of Ram Lalla. He added: "Despite decades of governance by the Congress and subsequent regimes led by Samajwadi Party-Bahujan Samaj Party, little to no attention was paid to Jalesar or the revered temple of Ram Lalla. In stark contrast, the prevailing sentiment now is reverence and devotion, as countless devotees flock daily in Ayodhya to offer their prayers." Yogi also mentioned the joyous festivities of Holi intertwined with the sacred observance of Ram Lalla's long-awaited birth anniversary after five centuries when Lord Surya Dev bestowed the auspicious Tilak on Suryavanshi jewel Lord Ram

precisely at noon on the occasion of Ram Navami. Yogi attributed this significant milestone to the governance of the BJP, underscoring a shift in the political landscape. He pointed out the reluctance of past administrations, including those led by SP, BSP and Congress, to embrace the reverence for Ram Lalla's presence, suggesting a departure from their erstwhile approach to faith and security. The chief minister accused the Congress and the INDI Alliance of advocating for the implementation of a personal law akin to the Taliban system within India. Expressing alarm at this proposal, he questioned the wisdom behind importing such governance models into the country. He criticised the Congress and the SP for what he perceived as a pattern of endangering faith, national sovereignty and security, suggesting their alignment with elements fostering chaos and disorder. The chief minister made pointed remarks regarding the leadership and dedication exhibited by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the contrasting behaviour of the SP. He underscored the contributions of late Kalyan Singh to both state development and the Ram Janmabhoomi cause, lamenting the lack of condolences from the SP upon Singh's passing. Drawing a sharp comparison, Yogi highlighted the prime minister's respectful gesture upon Mulayam Singh Yadav's demise. He criticised the SP's priorities, noting their condolences for figures associated with the underworld while ignoring stalwarts like Kalyan Singh.

In Hathras, heeng market, neglect & discontent dominate discourse

Hathras (PTI): Before one arrives at Hathras' famed 'heeng' (asafoetida) market, the pungent smell of the condiment greets visitors, almost pinpointing the place. As one gets to the market, a scene of disrepair takes over — roads riddled with potholes and littered with debris, and congested lanes dotted with dilapidated houses. For local traders and residents, these are physical manifestations of the government's "neglect" that mirror broader systemic challenges. Hathras heeng received the coveted Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2023 but it appears to have done little for the local traders, who are seeking change and accountability in this Lok Sabha election. "Our leaders need to focus on improving our living conditions instead of engaging in empty rhetoric," said heeng trader Rohit Upadhyay. Pritish Jindal, a shopkeeper, said, "We contribute significantly to the local economy and yet we are burdened with excessive taxes and receive little in return in terms of infrastructure or support." Some feel bogged down by the "soaring" Goods and Services Tax rates.

"This is the biggest heeng market in the world. Heeng brought from Iran and Iraq is processed here and the market is known for this process worldwide. Despite the significant business here, we feel ignored when it comes to key issues like inflation, unemployment and infrastructure. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) has devastated our trade," said Lalit Vashney, another heeng trader. "The soaring Goods and Services Tax rates are suffocating our businesses. Profit margins are shrinking, making it increasingly challenging to sustain our livelihoods," said another trader Ramesh Gupta. The Goods and Services Tax rate for heeng is 18 per cent. According to the local trade union, India imported 1,500 tonnes of asafoetida milk worth Rs 940 crore last year. Ranging from Rs 100 per kg to Rs 35,000 per kg, about 90 per cent of heeng is sourced from Afghanistan, 8 per cent from Uzbekistan and 2 per cent from Iran, according to the union. Hathras goes to polls in the third round of Lok Sabha polls on May 7. The western Uttar Pradesh constituency will see a direct fight between the Bharatiya Janata Party

and the Samajwadi Party. While the Bharatiya Janata Party has fielded state minister Anoop Pradhan Balmiki from the seat, the Samajwadi Party has fielded Jasveer Valmiki. "The Bharatiya Janata Party has fielded a state minister from here. Aware of the weak competition from the opposition, they are not coming here to address our grievances," claimed a local trader who did not wish to be named. Reviving Hathras' economic hubs is one of the issues on Valmiki's poll agenda. "The neglect of our markets is a symptom of larger governance failures, the Samajwadi Party candidate said. "If elected, I will prioritise infrastructure development and advocate for tax relief to bolster our local businesses," he said. On the other hand, Balmiki's campaign so far has been focused on the progress made at the national level under the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government. Polling for all seven phases of Lok Sabha elections will be counted on June 4. Irrespective of who loses, the traders hope they will win this time.

SP candidate from Ballia booked for spreading enmity, hatred

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party candidate from Ballia Lok Sabha constituency, Sanatan Pandey, has been booked by police for allegedly spreading enmity, hatred and animosity among sections of society and also threatening the district election officer. Superintendent of Police Dev Ranjan Verma said on Sunday that on the complaint filed by Sub-Inspector Makhhan Singh in Ballia city, an FIR had been lodged against Pandey under sections 171 F (exercising undue influence in elections), 189 (threatening a public servant), 186 (obstructing a public servant in public work), 505 (2) (spreading hatred and animosity between different groups) of the Indian Penal Code and sections 125 and 136 of the Representation of People's Act, 1950. He said Pandey had tried to spread enmity, hatred and hostility in society while commenting on the tenure and works of the present government on April 27 and had also threatened the district election officer. In a clip of Pandey's statement that has been widely circulat-

ed on social media, during an interaction with reporters on Saturday, he can be heard saying that he had been winning the election last time but the administration cost him his victory. "I accepted my defeat last time because I did not want to challenge the Election Commission," he told the reporters. "During the last elections, I was attacked outside the counting centre and my vehicle was damaged by people on the side of the government," he alleged. Pandey also said that he would not allow anything similar to happen this time. "I have taken an oath this time. If the people of Ballia want to defeat me, I will accept it. But if the people of Ballia want to make me the victor, then the local administration or the BJP will not be able to stop me from getting my winning certificate," he further said. "If they do so, either my body or the collector's body will come out..." Pandey said. Pandey lost the Lok Sabha election in 2019 as an SP candidate to Bharatiya Janata Party's Virendra Singh Mast by a margin of 16,000 votes.

This time, he is pitted against former Ballia MP Neeraj Shekhar of the BJP. Ballia will go to the polls in the last phase on June 1. **MCC VIOLATION CASE AGAINST AKASH ANAND** Meanwhile, a case of Model Code of Conduct violation was registered against Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati's nephew Akash Anand and four others on Sunday for allegedly using objectionable language at a poll rally in Sitapur, police said. The action came after the district administration took suo motu cognisance of Anand's speech at the rally earlier in the day, they said. "This government is a bulldozer government and a government of traitors. The party that leaves its youth hungry and enslaves its elderly is a terrorist government. Taliban runs such a government in Afghanistan," the BSP leader said. In his address, Anand also cited a National Crime Records Bureau report of 16,000 kidnapping incidents in the state and accused the government of failing to pro-

vide safety to women and children. The Bharatiya Janata Party is a party of thieves who took Rs 16,000 crores through electoral bonds, he further alleged. The case was registered against Anand, the BSP's national coordinator, party candidates Mahendra Yadav, Shyam Awasthi and Akshay Kalra and rally organiser Vikas Rajvanshi, Superintendent of Police (Sitapur) Chakresh Mishra said. He added that the case was registered under sections IPC 171C (undue influence at elections), 153B (imputation, assertions prejudicial to national integration) and 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and section 125 of the RP Act (promoting enmity between classes in connection with election). The speech was given to incite violence and with the use of unparliamentary language, violating the Model Code of Conduct, Mishra said. Sitapur will vote in the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha polls on May 13.

Rajnath to file nomination papers today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Seeking a consecutive third term in the Lok Sabha, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will file his nomination papers for Lucknow Lok Sabha seat on Monday. Lucknow will go to the polls along with 13 other constituencies on May 20 in the fifth of the seven-phased Lok Sabha elections. Bharatiya Janata Party's Lucknow district chief Anand Dwivedi said Rajnath Singh would proceed to file his nomination papers from the UP BJP office. He said from the state office of the BJP, Rajnath Singh would proceed on a motorised chariot to the Collectorate to file his nomination along with ministers, mayor, senior party functionaries and others, at 10 am. Before contesting his first election from Lucknow in 2014, Rajnath had won the Lok Sabha polls from Ghaziabad in 2009. At that time, late Lalji Tandon was the MP from Lucknow after former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee bowed out of electoral politics after serving as Lucknow MP for five consecutive terms.

Mayawati announces candidate for Amethi

Lucknow (PNS): While the Congress is yet to come out with its candidates for Amethi and Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha seats, Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Sunday announced her party's candidate from Amethi. The BSP declared Ravi Prakash Maurya as its candidate from Amethi. The Bharatiya Janata Party has fielded its sitting MP Smriti Irani from Amethi. Irani had defeated former Congress president and sitting MP Rahul Gandhi in Amethi in the 2019 parliamentary election. Congress is likely to field Rahul Gandhi from Amethi. The BSP also announced the names of Syed Danish as its candidate from Sant Kabir Nagar and Sabiha Ansari from Azamgarh Lok Sabha constituency. Mayawati has fielded Thakur Prasad Yadav from Rae Bareilly constituency.

INDIA bloc has clear edge in first two phases: Shivpal

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party leader Shivpal Singh Yadav claimed that the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) had established a clear edge in the first two phases of the Lok Sabha elections held on April 19 and 26. He said the Samajwadi Party-Congress alliance would continue in Uttar Pradesh after the Lok Sabha elections and both the parties would go to polls together in 2027 UP assembly elections. Shivpal Yadav countered the repeated charge by Prime Minister Narendra Modi about dynasty politics. "How can a person who has no family and is unaware of the values and responsibilities of family can question others and level charges of parivarvaad," he said. He added, "Those who do not have a family cannot understand its importance. Any attack on my family helps us to consolidate our position in this

election. People know the importance of family. On this issue, voters are with my family." Responding to a jibe by the prime minister on Akhilesh Yadav-Rahul Gandhi joining hands, Shivpal Yadav said "is bar jodi hit hai". (The Akhilesh Yadav-Rahul Gandhi combo is a hit in UP this time). He said the attack on the 'jodi' was out of fear as they (BJP) know that the INDIA bloc has an edge not only in UP but also in South India. Questioning the intentions of the Bharatiya Janata Party assertion of winning over 400 Lok Sabha seats, the SP leader said, "The BJP's game plan is to change the Constitution by securing 400 seats. But people are aware of the BJP's politics and they do not want a change in the Constitution. The electorate will foil the intentions of the BJP". Aditya Yadav, son of Shivpal Yadav, is making his political debut and is contesting the Lok Sabha election from

Budaun constituency, presently held by the BJP. The father-son duo are campaigning in Budaun in a bid to wrest this Lok Sabha seat from the BJP in the Rohilkhand region that has been a traditional stronghold of the SP. Shivpal Yadav addressed several whistle-stop meetings in Budaun on Sunday. The SP leader is knocking on every door in Budaun as his son Aditya looks to make his maiden entry into the Lok Sabha. SP candidate Dharmendra Yadav lost the Budaun Lok Sabha seat to BJP's Sanghamitra Maurya in the 2019 parliamentary election by about 18,454 votes. Yadav-Muslim voters have a sizeable presence in Budaun and are expected to act as 'shock absorbers' for the SP to mitigate the loss of other constituents, if any. Initially, Shivpal Yadav, the SP's Jaswantnagar MLA, was named as the party candidate for the Budaun Lok Sabha seat. It was at his instance that Aditya Yadav replaced him.

BJP won't win any seat in 3rd phase: Akhilesh

Sambhal: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday claimed the BJP will not win any seat in the third phase of the Lok Sabha polls and that the ruling party misunderstood the "direction of the wind" when it made its slogan of "400 paar". Addressing a rally in Sambhal, Yadav also said the Samajwadi Party had an advantage in the third phase, saying that elections on May 7 will be held between Sambhal and "his home" in Etawah and Mainpuri. "BJP people did not know the direction of the wind, so they kept saying '400 paar' (winning over 400 seats) and when they realised the public sentiment after the two phases of the election, BJP forgot its slogan," the former UP chief minister said. "The wind that came from the west (western UP) in the first phase will change the BJP government. The similar trend was seen in the second phase also. People are not accepting the BJP," the SP chief said. "It is now your responsibility in the third phase," he added to those gathered for the rally

taken out in support of party candidate Zia ur Rahman Barq. "These elections are being held from this part till our home. Netaji (SP founder Mulayam Singh Yadav) has also been an MP from this area (Sambhal). Voting is going to take place from here to Mainpuri. I can say that the BJP is not going to open its account in any Lok Sabha seat here," Yadav said. Mulayam Singh, an ex-CM and the SP chief's father, was elected an MP from Sambhal Lok Sabha constituency twice in 1998 and 1999. "Next to you, Samajwadi Party is winning in Rampur and Moradabad and if all the Lok Sabha seats nearby are winning, then will the people of Sambhal be left behind?" "When the seats where BJP lost with the highest number of votes are counted, the name of Sambhal Lok Sabha should be included in that count also," he further urged the voters. Yadav also said the election in Sambhal are an opportunity to pay tribute to party MP Shafiqur Rahman Barq, who

was declared as the SP candidate but died earlier this year. After his death, his grandson, Zia ur Rahman Barq got the party ticket. "We gave the ticket to the very popular Shafiqur Rahman Barq Sahab but he is no longer with us. This is an opportunity to pay tribute to him... He always stood for the rights of his people," he said. The SP chief also said that the Lok Sabha polls are a fight between those that want to "abolish the Constitution" and the INDIA bloc and the socialists who want to protect the Constitution. "Bharatiya Janata Party is conspiring to abolish the Constitution and take away our and your right to vote. So this is an election to save the Constitution and our rights," he said. Those who are out to change the Constitution will be changed by the public, the SP leader said. Asserting that the BJP insulted the farmers, Yadav said, "The INDIA alliance government will waive off the loans of farmers. We will provide facilities to farmers. We will guarantee MSP

for crops." He added that the BJP betrayed the youth just like the farmers. "It was promised to provide two crore jobs every year to the youth. Ever since BJP came to government, papers of every recruitment exam are being leaked," the SP leader said. Yadav said that the BJP government has "abolished permanent recruitment in the Army" and "introduced the Agniveer scheme and made it a four-year job". Yadav said he was worried that under the current government, even policemen may be asked to serve for only three years like the Agniveer. In Uttar Pradesh, voting took place on eight seats in the first phase on April 19 and eight seats in the second phase on April 26, and most of these seats were in Western Uttar Pradesh. In the third phase, voting will be held on 10 seats in Sambhal, Hathras, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Firozabad, Mainpuri, Etah, Badaun, Amla and Bareilly on May 7. Voting is scheduled to be held in all seven phases on 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh. **PTI**

Oath administered to people to vote

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A women's car rally event was organised for voter awareness at Banaras Club here on Sunday. District Magistrate/District Election Officer (DM/DEO) S Rajalingam lit the lamp and administered the oath to the people to vote. On the occasion a pigeon was released as a symbol of peace and then, the DM flagged off the women's car rally.



DM S Rajalingam flagging off women's car rally for voter awareness in Varanasi on Sunday.

Making people aware about their voting, the DM said that everyone's participation in this great festival of democracy is necessary for a strong democracy. "Every voter must cast his/her vote. For the convenience and information of voters, as many people as possible should download the Voter Helpline App in their mobile phones", he said, adding that this time during the Lok Sabha elections on June 1, there should be 100 per cent voting in the district. The DM, along with CDO/Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) in-charge Himanshu Nagpal also wrote messages to ensure voting under every condition and

also took selfies with people. A large number of people present were sworn in to exercise their franchise in every situation.

Earlier, the DM and CDO held a meeting with gram pradhans (village heads) in the Commissioner auditorium and gave necessary guidelines for maximum voting in the district in the Lok Sabha General Election 2024. The DM said the role of gram pradhans is very important in increasing the voting percentage in the Lok Sabha elections. He said the gram pradhans should contact such voters, who are living in other cities or

outside due to various reasons, through some means or the other and try to invite them to vote. He said in view of the heat gram pradhans must provide their active cooperation in making arrangements like cool drinking water, adequate shade etc at the polling booths of their respective gram panchayats.

Similarly, the DM said by giving significant support in getting 100 per cent, they should ensure that the voter slips reach all the voters by BLOs on time. He said action should be taken to add the names of eligible voters whose names are still missing from the

voter list and for the convenience and information of voters, the Voter Helpline App should be downloaded in the mobile phones of as many people as possible. "For maximum voting in the district, all the gram pradhans should also organise voter awareness programmes at their level", he said, adding that everyone's participation in this great festival of democracy is necessary for a strong democracy.

The CDO said, "It should be ensured that every voter casts his/her vote and a group of youths should be formed in every gram sabha to motivate and make people aware about voting. The best arrangements should be made at polling booths. Along with basic facilities, suggestions should be given to make the booths attractive and create selfie points", he said, adding that the gram pradhans should make better efforts to ensure maximum voting. He said the booths where there is good voting, the respective gram pradhans will be honoured. The DM also administered the oath of voting to gram pradhans present in the meeting. District panchayat raj officer, additional district panchayat raj

officer and a large number of gram pradhans were also present.

Meanwhile, the DM and CDO were part of the human chain formed from Sant Atulanand School to Golghar Kutchery via Sadar Tehsil, Bhojbeer and Circuit House under City North assembly segment of Varanasi Lok Sabha seat. Such human chains were formed in all the assembly constituencies of the district. During the events, the officers laid special emphasis on ensuring that people should exercise their franchise in every situation in the voting to be held on June 1. The human chains were also formed from Bhairav Talab Temple to Harpur Ring Road Under Pass under Rohania assembly constituency, from the block headquarters to Seva Bharti Inter College under Sewapuri assembly constituency, from Pindra Bazaar to Phulpur Bazaar under Pindra assembly constituency, from Deepraj Tiraha Katari to Dharsauna Bazaar under Ajgara assembly constituency and from Sandahan crossing to Purva Mahadev Mahavidyalaya under Shivpur assembly constituency. Such human chains were formed at a total of six places.

Endeavour to reveal secrets of Gyanvapi: Historian

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Famous historian and writer Dr Vikram Sampath said the Hindu side had never given up the fight to get Gyanvapi back. He was speaking at the launch of the book, 'Prateeksha Shiva Ki: Gyan-Vapi Kashi Ke Satya Ka Ughatan' organised under the auspices of Kashi Manthan and Prabha Khaitan Foundation held in the auditorium of Malviya Moolya Anushilan Kendra located at BHU here on Saturday. This book, 'Waiting for Shiva: Unearthing the Truth of Kashi's Gyan Vapi' by Dr Vikram Sampath has already been published in English and is being discussed a lot for revealing the secrets of Gyanvapi. Now it is the release of the Hindi version of this book translated by Achyut Singh. Advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain, who came into limelight due to the judicial battle of Gyanvapi, folk singer Padma Shri Malini Awasthi, Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust member Venkataraman Ghanapati, chief archak (priest) of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Shrikanth Mishra, Ehsaas- Women of Varanasi convenor Bharti Madhok and coordinator of Kashi Manthan Dr Mayank Narayan Singh were also present. After the book release, a discussion session, Dr Sampat said in writing this book, he got the support of Shankaracharya of Shringeri Peeth Abhinav Shankara Bharti, Harishankar Jain, Vishnu Shankar Jain and others. He said that his endeavour was to reveal the secrets of Gyanvapi by studying the orig-



Historian Dr Vikram Sampath telling about his book 'Waiting for Shiva: Unearthing the Truth of Kashi's Gyan Vapi' at BHU in Varanasi

inal sources. According to him, for this book he studied Marichi Samhita, Shiv Purana, Vayu Purana, Linga Purana, Brahmayavarta Purana, Padma Purana and Skanda Purana etc. He said to understand the original Sanskrit books, he took help from KS Kannan, a former professor at IIT Madras who lives in Bengaluru and Dr Meera etc. He said through this book it will be proved that the Hindu side had never given up the fight for the liberation of Gyanvapi.

Vishnu Jain said the idea of this book was born after meeting Dr Sampat at a literary fest. "Through this book, the general public will be helped in understanding the historical background of the ongoing controversy regarding Gyanvapi. Dr Sampath has prepared this book with great effort. He has presented all the promises from the British era in a sequential manner", he said. Malini Awasthi said Kashi has been the stronghold of Bhakti movement. "When one tries to understand the time sequence of the Bhakti movement, one will come to know that the movement started with the singing of Bhagwat during the period of

destruction of temples," she said, adding that history is witness that the battle of Gyanvapi was fought by the entire India from North to South.

The programme started with recital of Manglacharan by Srinivas Ghanpati, Harsh Ghanpati and the guests paid floral tributes on the statue of Mahamana Malaviya. The facilitator of the discussion session was Dr Mayank Narayan Singh. He said the aim of Kashi Manthan is to create a strong nationalist generation through education, engagement, enlightenment and empowerment. The programme was conducted by Shubhangi and the question-answer session by Suresh Rishabh. Prabha Khaitan Foundation was introduced by Shrutii Agarwal (Ehsaas - Women of Prayagraj). She said 'Ehsaas' is a project of Prabha Khaitan Foundation whose only objective is the empowerment of women. The vote of thanks was given by Bharti Madhok, Dr Pankaj Singh, Prof SK Tiwari, Prof Amit Nandandhar Dwivedi, Ratnak Tripathi, Deepak Madhok, Dr Dharendra Rai, Dr Jyoti Rana, Dr E Hasan, Dr Sumil Tiwari and others were also present.

Youth killed, two injured as bikes collide

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A youth died and two others were seriously injured when their bikes collided head on near Premadham Kari village on Sheoli-Rura road in Kanpur Dehat late on Saturday night. The police sent all the three injured to the district hospital where the doctor present on emergency duty declared one of them as

brought dead. Balendra Pal of Lukhaddaura village, Rura, was living with family in his newly constructed house in Premadham Kari. His son Rohit (25) was returning home after getting petrol filled in his bike late on Saturday night when the accident took place near Premadham Kari village on Sheoli-Rura road as a result of which he was seriously injured. Arpit and Nikhil

of Turki Mau, Moosanagar, on the other bike were also injured. Police sent all the three injured to the district hospital where Rohit was declared dead by the Dr Jaivardhan present on emergency duty. Inspector Rura SN Singh said after autopsy and complaint from kin of the deceased, further action will be taken in the matter.

In another incident a youth

was killed allegedly by his brother in Vidhnu police station area. The body was found floating in a pond adjacent to his house on Sunday morning. On getting information the police rushed to spot and carried out probe in the matter. Station Officer Prem Chand Kanauiya said Dinesh was killed following his objection to the illicit relations of his wife with the brother Manoj.

PROJECT: Under the directives of the OSD (Land Bank), Zone-1, Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) Dr Ravi Pratap Singh, a team comprising Naib Tehsildar and amins met the farmers of Singhpur Kachhar, Gangpur Chakbada, Hindupur and Sambharpur villages on Saturday and convinced them to sell their land for use in the proposed New Kanpur City Project.

'Most people suffering from kidney problems due to poor lifestyle'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A workshop on kidney transplant was organised here on Saturday. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Anil Prasad Bhatt, Director, Nephrology and Kidney Transplant, Jaypee Hospital, who has achieved a proud milestone by performing more than 1,000 successful kidney transplants, said, "More than 12,000 kidney transplants are being done every year in India and most of the people are suffering from kidney problems due to poor lifestyle. Transplant is a successful process and with the help of transplant, new life is provided to the patients but still it is seen that there is a lack of awareness among the people regarding kidney donation due to which many people put their lives at stake. When the kidney function is reduced to only 10 per cent then that condition is called kidney failure and in such a situation, the only option left for the patients is dialysis or transplant." He said now with the most modern methods, the donor's kidney is removed from the body through a laparoscope, the biggest advantage of which is that the donor suffers very lit-

tle pain and is quickly discharged from the hospital. Along with this, there are donors with multiple vessels (more veins in the kidney), kidney transplant of children, transplant between unmatched blood group (ABO incompatible) and imbalance in immunity. He also gave information about chronic kidney failure and said, "Current medical research shows that the main causes of kidney disease are diabetes, blood pressure, nephritis, taking pain killers and other medicines without medical advice. When kidney disease reaches an incurable stage, the patient should undergo a transplant because this frees the patient from undergoing dialysis throughout his life. Along with this, the patient also gets many other benefits from it. Financially, the patient gets relief because the entire transplant is done in almost the same amount that the patient spends on dialysis in a year. After transplantation the patient can complete his daily routine like a healthy person. In the case of children, it is even more beneficial because after transplantation, the child's body develops properly."

CYBER SECURITY: IIT

Kanpur, ranked among the top four engineering colleges in India, has opened its doors to the fourth batch of eMasters programme in cyber security.

The programme prepares cyber security professionals to navigate the ever-evolving cyber threat landscape, helping professionals build capabilities for understanding the cyber threats, vulnerabilities and risks posed by cyber threat actors to their organisational network and business functions.

Professionals and cyber security enthusiasts are trained through the course work to make them well-versed with the latest concepts in cyber security, including application security, web security, network security, mobile security, hardware security, cryptography, IoT security, critical infrastructure security, machine learning based security tooling, and relevant topics in Computer Science such as operating systems, networking and mathematics relevant to cyber security. IIT Kanpur's world class cyber security research and technology innovation hub C3iHub planned the curriculum and is in charge of coordinating the programme.

Sajan mesmerises audience

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Eminent vocalist Padam Bhusan Pt Sajan Mishra kept the audience spellbound on the opening day of the 101st edition of internationally famous six-day Sankat Mochan Sangeet Mahotsav. When his programme ended in the wee hours on Sunday, a good number of music lovers were present in Sankat Mochan Temple premises. The festival began earlier with Odissi dance by Pt Ratikant Mohapatra and artistes of Srijan Sanstha of Bhubaneswar.

Pt Sajan Mishra, who came into the limelight by singing along with his elder brother late Pt Rajan Mishra, now presents his programmes along with promising young talents. He mesmerised the audience presenting Raag Bhairvi 'mann sumirat nishidin tumharo naam...'. He was supported by Swaransh Mishra (vocal), Pt Shubb Maharaj (tabla), both from Delhi, Pt Dharmnath Mishra (Lucknow) on samvadi (Jalandhar) and Vinayak Sahai (Jalandhar) on sarangi. The first day programme began on late on Saturday evening with the Odissi dance of Pt Ratikant Mohapatra after taking permission from Mahant Prof Vishwambhar Nath Mishra. For the last 25 years, Pt Ratikant Mohapatra is contin-

uously presenting his programme in this festival. In his first presentation, he effectively showed the pain of Shabari waiting for Lord Ram and her joy of meeting Lord Ram. In the 20-minute presentation, Pt Ratikant showed the Odissi tradition of his father Pt Kelucharan Mahapatra. Pt Ratikant Mohapatra and Sujata Mohapatra ended the first presentation of the function with Jatayu Moksha Prasang. He was also supported by Rajshree Praharaj, Aishwarya Shinde, Preetisha Mahapatra and G Sanjay. Then it was the turn of promising 12-year-old Avantika Maharaj of Banaras Gharana who enthralled the audience by juggling the tabla playing of five generations in a 30-minute performance. It was followed by presentation of Vinayak Sahay (Jalandhar) on sarangi. Then famous vocalist from Mumbai Nandini Narendra Bedekar presented her programme. She was supported by Pt Vinod Lele (Delhi) on tabla and Pt Vinay Mishra (Delhi) on samvadi (harmonium). The fourth programme of the day was presented by famous santoor player from Mumbai Padam Shri Pt Satish Vyas who was accompanied by Pt Ojas Yogesh Adhya (Mumbai) on tabla. Then Meenakshi Majumdar (vocal) from Kolkata presented her programme.

Multi superspecialty hospital inaugurated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Justice Neeraj Tiwari of Allahabad High Court inaugurated a multi superspecialty hospital here on Sunday afternoon under whose roof treatment of all those diseases will be possible for which patients and their relatives had to wander till now. Shanti Vilas Hospital, equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and hi-tech medical machines, will be operated by Shanti Vilas Medicare Private Limited. Dr Ajay Shukla (ENT surgeon), Managing Director of Shanti Vilas Hospital (Multi Super Speciality) established on Amarnath Jha Marg, Georgetown, said in this hospital all diseases, including heart, kidney etc will be treated. For this, People had to go to different hospitals.

Justice Neeraj Tiwari, who



was present as the chief guest, said it is a big thing to have treatment for various diseases in the Shanti Vilas Hospital premises. It will provide relief to patients and attendants from trouble. The team of expert doctors here will treat even the most serious diseases at affordable rates. Special guest CMO Dr Ashu Pandey said such a systematic medical system will provide patients with the abil-

ity to fight diseases mentally. Dr Shukla is a well-known ENT surgeon and is well versed in medical field. Hence, he will be aware of the patients' illnesses and their compulsions. The priority of how patients should be treated with ease will be decided by the vision of the hospital. He said we have full confidence that Dr Shukla along with his team will set an example of harmony between patients and doctors through this hospital.

Massive fire in timber store

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A massive fire broke out in in A timber store located in Bansmandi, Muthiganj, on Sunday morning. As a result goods worth lakhs were reduced to ashes. Eight fire tenders struggled for four hours to control the fire. Chief Fire Officer Dr RK Pandey suspect-

ed that the cause of the fire could be a short-circuit. He said the depth of the building was very high and a huge quantity of wood, ply and other items were stored in it. Since all the items were highly inflammable, the fire spread rapidly.

Meanwhile Ajit Kushwaha, the prime accused in the Ritesh murder case that took place in

Koraon on Thursday night, was apprehended by the police on Saturday. DCP Yamunanagar Shradha Narendra Pandey said that Ajit Kushwaha, the main accused has been arrested and is under interrogation. Besides, a student preparing for the civil services exam committed suicide by jumping before a train.

SPSEC demonstrates commitment to preserve India's cultural heritage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Shri Govind Hari Singhania Centre for Advanced Learning (SPSEC) has once again demonstrated its unwavering commitment to preserving India's rich cultural heritage and fostering a deep appreciation for traditional art forms among its students. In alignment with the National Educational Policy's directive to provide students with exposure to diverse art forms across the country, the SPSEC has organised a month-long workshop on Adivasi Warli Art from April 8 to May 4. Led by the Warli artist, Rajesh Laxman Mor, hailing from the historic village of Navanath in Maharashtra, the workshop provided students with a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the ancient artistry of Warli painting. With over 15 years of experience in Adivasi Warli painting and a distinguished portfolio showcased at prestigious platforms, Mor's guidance enriched the students' understanding of this venerable art form. Addressing mediapersons, Mor highlighted the historic significance and intricate techniques of Warli art, tracing its origins



Warli artist Rajesh Laxman Mor (extreme right) addressing mediapersons at SPSEC.

back approximately 3000 years to the forest hills of the Sahyadri range near Mumbai. The simplicity and geometric elegance of Warli art have captivated art enthusiasts worldwide, embodying the cultural essence of India's indigenous communities. Principal Bhawna Gupta commended the institution's initiative in organising the Warli Art Workshop, emphasising its role in nurturing cultural pride and artistic fervour among students. This workshop marks the fourth consecutive engagement following successful workshops on Pattachitra, Cherial, and Madhubani painting traditions, underscoring SPSEC's holistic approach to education. Over 800 students from classes III to XII and a multitude of aficionados

of Warli art form participated in the workshop showcasing their talent during a captivating exhibition organised by the institution. The appreciation of the students for the exposure provided by SPSEC to learn these traditional art forms from artists like Mor reflects the school's dedication to holistic development and cultural enrichment. The commendable efforts of the school administration, led by Manorama Govind Hari Singhania, Chairperson of the School, along with Vice-Chairman, Abhishek Singhania, Vice-Chairperson, Varsha Singhania and Vice-Chairman and Director, Partho P Kar, have received resounding praise for their transformative impact on the artistic journey of the students.

Emphasis on prioritising children's well-being

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

As summer approaches, parents face the challenge of ensuring their children remain healthy and active during the warmer months. Recent findings from the National Family Health Survey paint a worrying picture, with obesity rates among children steadily climbing. According to the latest data, 3.4 per cent of children under five are now overweight compared to 2.1 per cent just a few years ago. Additionally, as per UNICEF's World Obesity Atlas for 2022, India will have over 27 million obese children by 2030, representing a staggering one in 10 children globally. In light of these concerning statistics, it becomes imperative for parents to prioritise their children's well-being.

In response to these challenges, Dr Neha Agarwal, Consultant Paediatrician and Endocrinologist at Regency Hospital, emphasises the importance of proactive measures to combat obesity and promote a healthy lifestyle among children. "Understanding the complications of obesity and knowing when to seek medical advice are crucial for parents to safeguard their children's

health," said Dr Neha Agarwal. "Children who experience obesity are at a heightened risk of developing adult-onset health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus, dyslipidemia, obstructive sleep apnea, and polycystic ovarian disease in girls. These adverse health effects can persist into adulthood, elevating the likelihood of cardiovascular diseases, metabolic disorders, and a reduced life expectancy," Dr Agarwal said. In light of these challenges, here are some practical strategies to keep obese children healthy and active this summer: Encourage healthy eating habits by prioritising nutritional balance and incorporating plenty of fruits and vegetables into their meals, engage them in enjoyable physical activities such as swimming, hiking, biking or skating, and organise playdates to keep them active, involve them in household chores to instil a sense of responsibility and keep them physically active within the home environment, maintain a stock of nutritious snacks like fresh fruits, vegetables and wholegrain options to encourage healthy eating habits and limit sedentary behaviour by promoting outdoor activities.

Golden jubilee celebrations begin with 'Swarnotsav'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Seth Anandram Jaipuria School commenced its yearlong golden jubilee celebrations with an inaugural ceremony 'Swarnotsav' and entertainment evening on Saturday. Founded in 1974, the school is the flagship K-12 institution of Seth Anandram Jaipuria Group of Educational Institutions, presently being led by its chairman Shishir Jaipuria. Over the last five decades, the school has emerged as the topmost school in Kanpur and one of the best in Uttar Pradesh for delivering quality education that matches global standards and promotes holistic development of students. The completion of 50 years marks a landmark in the school's history and journey.

The inaugural ceremony of the golden jubilee celebrations was graced by the presence of the chief guest, Satish Mahana, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Uttar Pradesh, Shishir Jaipuria and members of the Jaipuria family, school principal Shikha Banerjee, leadership team from the group, distinguished guests, students, teachers and around 700 alumni from dif-

ferent parts of India and the world. The ceremony was preceded by an exhibition titled 'Anand Pradarshini' inaugurated by Sunita Jaipuria, Vice-Chairperson of Seth Anandram Jaipuria Education Society. The exhibition paid an ode to the founding fathers and showcased the school's vision for sustainability, technology integration and the future of education. A formal lamp lighting ceremony marked an auspicious start to the inaugural ceremony followed by cultural performances by the students. A nine-minute movie capturing the school's legacy and landmark moments in its history was formally released and screened. In his welcome address, Shishir Jaipuria said, "The school's golden jubilee is an occasion to celebrate and reflect upon the vision and purpose of education. We envision a future in which we shall harness the potential of technology, incorporate best pedagogy, empower student agency, and stimulate holistic development of learners. We don't just wish to create academic achievers, but nurture responsible and conscious global citizens."

A special address was delivered by Sandeep Mahendra, Chairman of Governing Council, Jaipuria Old Students' Association. He said a large number of school's alumni from across the world are reconnecting with the school. A postal stamp bearing the Jaipuria logo was officially released during the ceremony by the chief guest. In his address, Satish Mahana congratulated the school on the completion of 50 years. He said, "Today our country needs nation builders who will propel us towards the ideal of the developed India. Educators and educational institutions have a pivotal role to play in realising India's growth potential by educating the country's youth. Our schools are the temples in which this bright future is forged." The vote of thanks was proposed by the school principal Shikha Banerjee and the ceremony concluded with the National Anthem. The inaugural function was followed by a musical evening for the alumni at a resort. The golden jubilee celebrations will be spread out during the course of the academic year 2024-25 with three more major events

Rahul insulting Indian maharajas for sake of appeasement politics: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of insulting India's rajahs and maharajas, but remaining silent on the atrocities committed by nawabs, nizams, sultans and badshahs for the sake of appeasement politics. Addressing back-to-back rallies in Belagavi, Sirsi, Davangere and Hosapete, he also continued his attack against the Congress on the "inheritance tax" issue and targeted the party's government in Karnataka on law and order, corruption and development issues.

"The BJP is working on increasing the assets of the people, but Congress's shehzada (referring to Rahul Gandhi) and his sister (Priyanka Gandhi Vadra), both are announcing that if they come to power, they will do an 'X-ray' of the country," Modi said. "They will X-ray your property, bank lockers, lands, vehicles, also 'streedhan' and ornaments of women, gold, the 'mangalsutra'. These people will raid every house and capture your assets. After capturing, they are talking about redistributing it, they want it to give it to their loved vote bank... Will you allow this loot to happen?" he asked. "I want to warn the Congress," Modi said.

"Let go of this intention. Until Modi is alive, I will not allow it," Modi said. "Congress has ensured the writing of our history and our freedom struggle with an eye on appeasement and vote bank. Even today, the Congress's shehzada (prince) is carrying forward that sin. You might have heard Congress's shehzada's recent statement -- he says Bharath's rajahs and



maharajas were atyachari (oppressive)," "He (Gandhi) has accused them (rajahs and maharajas) of usurping the lands and properties of people and poor... Congress' shehzada has insulted great personalities like Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Kittur Rani Chennamma, whose administration and patriotism inspires us even today," the prime minister said. Recalling the contribution of the erstwhile Mysuru royal family, and saying they are respected across the country even today, Modi added, "The Congress' shehzada's statements were intentional, aimed at vote-bank politics and appeasement." "Shahzada spoke ill about rajahs and maharajas, but the shehzada's mouth was locked regarding the 'atyachar' that nawabs, nizams, sultans and badshahs committed in India's history. His mouth was shut on them, but on rajahs and maharajas he speaks ill and insults them," he said. Alleging that Gandhi cannot remember Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's oppressions, Modi said, "He (Aurangzeb) made a number of our temples impure and destroyed them. Congress is happily making alliances with parties that praise Aurangzeb... They don't remember people who destroyed our religious places, indulged in

killing, killing of cows. They don't remember the nawab, who played a role in the partition of India." He recalled the contributions of the Raja of Banaras in setting up Banaras Hindu University, and Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar in the reconstruction of temples. "The Congress's shehzada doesn't remember the contributions of rajahs and maharajas. For the sake of the vote bank, he shows the guts to speak against rajahs and maharajas, but doesn't have the courage to speak against nawabs, sultans and badshahs," he said, adding that Congress's "appeasement mindset" has come out in the open before the country, and that it reflects in their manifesto. Since the time Congress came to power in Karnataka, the law and order in the entire state has worsened. Citing the recent murder of Hubballi student Neha Hiremath on her college premises, which created a "sensation" in the country, he claimed that despite the family seeking action, Congress government gave priority to appeasement. Even when there was a bomb blast in a Bengaluru cafe, the Congress government did not take it seriously initially; they even termed it a cylinder blast initially. "Why are you —

Congress — lying to the people of the country. If you can't, leave and go home," Modi said. The Congress, for the sake of votes, is taking the support of the banned PFI — the anti-national organisation that supported terrorism, he claimed. "To win one seat in Wayanad, are you surrendering to them? BJP has banned PFI and has put its leaders behind bars," he said. Stating that those who turned down the invitation for the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya will be rejected by the people in Lok Sabha elections, Modi attacked the Congress and its allies. A decision on building the Ram temple should have been taken the very next day of the country's independence, he said. He also alleged that the "same forces" tried till the last minute to ensure that the Ram temple was not built and had approached the court on the last day as well. Moreover, Modi claimed that the INDIA bloc has come up with a "formula" under which the parties in the opposition alliance will get the PM's post for one year each, in case they come to power. "With such a system, the good of the country cannot be expected," he said, as he urged the people not to waste their vote.

RSS has always been in favour of reservation, says RSS chief Bhagwat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HYDERABAD, NEW DELHI

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday asserted the organisation has always been supportive of reservation, and advocated for its implementation as long as "discrimination exists," comments that came in the wake of a viral video claiming the Sangh was against the quota system.

The remarks also assume significance as the Opposition, especially the Congress has mounted an attack against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the ruling BJP at the Centre, accusing them of being opposed to reservation. Speaking at the inauguration of Vidya Bharati Vignana Kendra here, Bhagwat referred to the video in circulation and said it falsely claims the RSS was opposed to reservation. The video shows him as holding a meeting, he said but claimed it never happened. "RSS has been supporting reservations as per the Constitution since the time it came."

"The Sangh says that reservation should continue till the time people, to those whom it is given, feel they need it; or, it is given due to social reasons till discrimination exists," he added. With the help of technology and Artificial Intelligence, what did not happen can also be shown (as to have happened), he said. Bhagwat's pro-reservation statement also comes in the backdrop of the Congress alleging that BJP and RSS are against the quota system. In his response to Bhagwat's remarks on the matter, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed though the RSS is now saying it was not against reservation, it had earlier spoken



about opposing the quota system. Addressing a campaign rally at Daman and Diu on Sunday, Rahul said the Bhagwat "makes a statement that RSS is not against reservation." "It was he (Mohan Bhagwat) who had made a statement that he was opposed to reservation. Those who are against the reservation (policy) are joining their party (BJP). They welcome all those who are against reservation, and then he (Bhagwat) says he is not against reservation," Gandhi alleged. Incidentally, in a sharp attack on the RSS, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy had earlier said that when the organisation was founded in 1925, it had decided to announce the nation as a "Hindu country" and to scrap the reservations in 100 years, i.e by 2025. Meanwhile, Bhagwat said good as well as bad things circulate on social media and it is not the quality of social media but that of the person who is using it, he said. It is the selfishness of the person to circulate among people such made-up things and generate a controversy, but "we are not concerned with it" ("us se hamara koi sambandh nahi hai"), he said. Such things happen during the ongoing election environment, he opined.

Central Government delegation on three days visit to Bangladesh



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Central Government delegation is on a three-day visit to Bangladesh beginning Sunday to further boost bilateral ties on governance matters, according to an official statement. The visit is being undertaken on the invitation of the Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration and will focus on the mid-career capacity building programs in field administration for Bangladesh civil servants, said the statement issued by the Personnel Ministry on Sunday. "V Srinivas, Secretary of Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) will lead a four-member delegation to Bangladesh from April 28-30, 2024 for bilateral discussions regarding renewal of memorandum of understanding (MoU) between National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) India and Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration for the period 2024-2029," it said. The NCGG and the Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration have collaborated for conducting capacity building programs for Bangladesh civil servants since 2014. Under the bilateral col-

laboration, 71 capacity building programmes were held and 2,600 Bangladesh civil servants have visited the NCGG since 2014, the statement said. "The Bangladesh government has emphasised on the utility of these training programmes and conveyed interest in renewal of the MoU between NCGG and the Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration under which these training programmes are being organised for the next five years when it expires in 2025," it added. During the three-day visit, Secretary Srinivas will hold bilateral meetings with Minister of Public Administration, Senior Secretary Ministry of Public Administration, Director General of the Civil Services Administration Academy, Director General of the Public Administration Training Centre, Director General Governance Innovation Unit in the Prime Minister's Office and the Additional Secretary Career Planning and Training Wing of Ministry of Public Administration. Srinivas will address the participants of the law and administration courses and faculty of Bangladesh Civil Services Administration Academy on "Institutionalization of SMART Governance to Enhance Public Service Delivery", the statement added.

PM is indifferent to people of Karnataka: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is indulging in "fear mongering" as he is "desperate" after facing a "washout" in the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh posed questions for the Prime Minister ahead of his rallies in Karnataka.

"After the Phase II washout, a desperate PM is on a spree of Karnataka rallies today. Instead of lying and fear mongering, these are the questions he should answer," Ramesh said, listing his posers. "Why have BJP MPs performed so poorly as the people's representatives? After a 7-month delay, why has the Centre released less than 20% of drought relief funds? Why is the Centre holding up the Upper Bhadra and Mahadayi projects?" the Congress leader said on X. Elaborating on what he said were "julia details", Ramesh asked where have BJP MPs been while the Modi government has been "unleashing its vengeance" on Karnataka. Citing the latest data from the Parliamentary Research



Service (PRS), Ramesh claimed that the BJP MPs from Karnataka have shown a blatant disregard for their responsibilities, and displayed lack of commitment to serving their constituents. "While the national average attendance in Parliament was 79%, the average of the 28 Karnataka MPs was even lower at 71%. The review revealed that 26 of these MPs never raised Karnataka's concerns - the release of MGNREGA funds, drought and flood relief assistance, and the Centre's denial of additional allocations of rice for PDS," he said. Analysing the transcripts of all debates, PRS found that very few MPs even tried to initiate policies or programmes to

address their constituencies' issues, Ramesh said. "Three MPs did not ask a single question in five years, and five MPs did not participate in a single debate. While most MPs were criticised for neglecting the state, seven MPs only focused on the RSS-BJP's unconstitutional agendas in their constituencies," he alleged. "Perhaps the most damning finding was that 14 of the 28 were directly or indirectly involved in abetting communal violence in their localities. Will PM Modi apologise for foisting these ineffectual MPs on the people of Karnataka? Or was this his design all along to elect non-performing BJP MPs so that he can ignore the voice

of Karnataka?" he said. Ramesh also said it has been more than seven months since the Karnataka government sought more than Rs 18,000 crore of relief from the Centre as per disaster relief rules. Karnataka is reeling under an acute drought situation, with 223 out of 236 talukas facing drought conditions and 196 taluks being categorised as severely hit, he noted. As early as September 2023, the Karnataka government had approached the Modi government to release funds of Rs 18,171 crore for drought relief, he said. "The rules of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, state that the Centre must take a final decision on the release of funds within one month of receiving the Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) report. For Karnataka, this period expired in December 2023. Last month, the Finance Minister made the excuse that her hands are tied since the Model Code of Conduct came into force," he said. "After being forced to the Supreme Court by the Karnataka Government, the Centre has finally sanctioned funds but only a mere Rs 3,498 crore. This is less than

20% of the total amount requested," he said. Why is PM Modi so "indifferent" to the people of Karnataka, Ramesh asked. "In last year's Union Budget, the Modi government had proudly announced a Rs 5,300 crore grant for the Upper Bhadra Project. More than a year later, state Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda has revealed that not a 'single paisa' of this grant has been released," Ramesh said. During his assembly election campaign, Prime Minister Modi had also claimed to resolve long-standing issues with the Mahadayi-Kalasa Banduri Nala Project but earlier this year, clearance for the project has been deferred by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, he said. "These projects are crucial to expanding drinking water and irrigation access in a state that has been reeling under a severe drought. Why has the Modi Government neglected these essential infrastructure projects? What vendetta does the PM have against the people of Karnataka?" Ramesh said and asked the prime minister to break his "silence" on these issues.

CDS Chauhan concludes comprehensive visit to France

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan concluded a comprehensive visit to France starting April 21, which has reaffirmed the continued long-standing strategic partnership between India and France, and further reinforcing the bilateral Defence Cooperation between the two nations, defence ministry said here on Sunday.

Giving details here, officials said the interactions of CDS with Patrick Pailoux, Director of Civil and Military Cabinet of the Minister of French Armed Forces, and Lt General Vincent Giraud, Chief of Military Cabinet of Minister of the Armed Forces at the apex level and also with his counterpart, General Thierry Burkhard (CEMA) have enabled exchange of views on areas of common interests and mutual security concerns. Deliberations at France's Directorate General of Armament for enhancing the exchange of high-end dual-use technologies followed by inter-



actions with the top leadership of the French Defence industry, including Dassault, Safran and Naval Groups, and Thales Alenia Space, towards futuristic capacity building of the Indian Armed Forces, would provide an impetus to indigenisation. The exchanges at the French Land Forces Command (CFT), the French Space Command (CDE), and the School of Military Studies (Ecole Militaire), while providing India's point of view on security challenges, have also provided opportunities for

enhancing defence collaboration in space, modernisation initiatives and also augmenting bilateral training between both nations. The CDS also paid tributes at the War Memorials of Neuve-Chapelle and Villers-Guislain, to the extraordinary bravery of soldiers of the Indian Expeditionary Force who fought on the Western Front during the First World War, towards enhancing peace and tranquility in the region. These memorials stand testimony to the long-standing Indo-French relationship.

2.4 billion workers at risk of heat exposure: ILO report

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ram Dayal (45), a seasoned plumber, found himself battling the scorching heat of a summer day while repairing a burst pipe on a roadside in the national capital. Despite his experience, the relentless heat left him feeling lightheaded and fatigued, prompting him to prioritise his safety by taking breaks in the shade to avoid heat exhaustion.

Ram Dayal's case is reflection of the challenges faced by millions of workers worldwide, as highlighted in a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO). The report reveals that a staggering 2.4 billion workers, constituting 70% of the global workforce, are at heightened risk of heat exposure due to climate change. This alarming trend has sharply increased since 2000, with dire consequences such as heat-related illnesses claiming



nearly 19,000 lives annually and causing chronic health issues for millions. The hazards posed by climate change extend beyond heat exposure, impacting workers across various sectors. From agriculture and construction to fishing and transport, outdoor workers face elevated risks of heat-related illnesses like heatstroke. Moreover, indoor workers are not immune, facing risks from sources of heat or poor ventilation.

The report, 'Ensuring safety and health at work in a changing climate', describes a "cocktail of hazards", including increased exposure to harmful ultraviolet radiation, worsened air pollution, and heightened risks of vector-borne diseases like malaria and dengue fever. These factors contribute to a range of health problems, spanning from cancer and heart disease to respiratory ailments and mental health issues.

Increase in ocean surface temperatures to have far reaching consequences

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A significant increase in surface temperatures within the ocean, ranging from 1.4 to 3 degrees Celsius between 2020 and 2100 is expected to have far-reaching consequences, including pushing the Indian Ocean into a state of near-permanent heatwaves. This will intensify cyclones, affect the monsoon, and lead to a rise in sea levels, a new study led by Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) has flagged concerns. It showed that marine heatwaves (periods of abnormally high ocean temperatures) are projected to increase from 20 days per year (during 1970-2000) to 220-250 days per year, pushing the tropical Indian Ocean into a basin-wide near-permanent heatwave state by the end of the 21st century. Marine heat waves cause habi-



tat destruction due to coral bleaching, seagrass destruction, and loss of kelp forests, affecting the fisheries sector adversely. They also lead to the rapid intensification of cyclones. The rapid warming in the Indian Ocean is not limited to the surface. The heat content of the Indian Ocean, from the surface to a depth of 2,000 meters, is currently increasing

at the rate of 4.5 zetta-joules per decade and is predicted to increase at a rate of 16-22 zetta-joules per decade in the future, the study titled "Future projection for the tropical Indian Ocean" said. "The future increase in heat content is comparable to adding the energy equivalent of one Hiroshima atomic bomb detonation every second, all day, every day, for a

decade," Koll said. The maximum warming will occur in the northwestern Indian Ocean, including the Arabian Sea, while there will be reduced warming off the Sumatra and Java coasts. Amid the accelerated ocean warming, the seasonal cycle of surface temperatures is projected to shift, which could increase extreme weather events over the Indo-Pacific region. Sea surface temperatures above 28 degrees Celsius are generally conducive to deep convection and cyclogenesis. Heavy rainfall events and extremely severe cyclones have already increased since the 1950s and are projected to increase further with increasing ocean temperatures, the authors said. The increased ocean heat could also lead to a rise in sea level. Thermal expansion of water contributes to more than half of the sea level rise in the Indian Ocean, which is larger than the contribution from glacier and sea-ice melt-

ing. The Indian Ocean Dipole, a phenomenon that affects the monsoon and cyclone formation, is also predicted to change. The frequency of extreme dipole events is predicted to increase by 66 per cent whereas the frequency of moderate events is to decrease by 52 per cent by the end of the 21st century. The authors of the study predicted that ocean acidification will intensify, with surface pH decreasing from a pH above 8.1 to below 7.7 by the end of the century. Surface chlorophyll and net primary productivity are also predicted to decline. Bordered by 40 countries, and home to a third of the global population, changes to climate in the Indian Ocean region have major societal and economic impacts. Currently, the Indian Ocean and its surrounding countries stand out globally as the region with the highest risk of natural hazards, with coastal communities vulnerable to weather and climate extremes.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Orange hills

Nainital is just one example of ongoing forest fires damaging the fragile ecosystem in Uttarakhand

Historically, Uttarakhand is somehow a little more prone than other hill States in India to the scourge of frequent forest fires, especially in summers. Otherwise famous for its breathtaking beauty and lush greenery, the State has of late again experienced a series of jungle blazes: To give an idea of the seriousness of the situation, more than 500 have been reported since January and one almost every hour in the past 24 hours. The latest incident has struck perilously close to the inhabited areas in Nainital, gutting 108 ha of forest land and sounding alarm bells for the residents and authorities alike. With the situation worsening, the Army and IAF have been pressed into action to aid containment efforts. These fires, often man-made to clear dead vegetation or fuelled by natural friction amid dry vegetation and exacerbated by strong winds, pose a significant threat to the fragile ecosystem. Despite concerted containment efforts, the inferno has spread its tendrils closer to human population. The IAF helicopters equipped

with water-spraying capabilities are deployed to douse the flames, offering a crucial advantage in reaching inaccessible terrain. Additionally, Army personnel are working on ground to create firebreaks and prevent further spread. As for the bright side of this challenge, the wildfires have brought out the best in humans — cooperating with authorities and fighting it together. Amid the suffocating chaos and burning uncertainty, the spirit of community resilience has shone brightly. Local residents, alongside volunteers and NGOs, have rallied together to support firefighting efforts and offer assistance to those affected.



From food and shelter to lending a helping hand in evacuation efforts, the collective response has underscored the strength of solidarity in the face of adversity. However, these forest fires carry grave environmental implications. The loss of precious flora and fauna, coupled with the release of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere, underscores the urgent need for proactive measures to mitigate future fire outbreaks. Strengthening forest management practices, implementing early warning systems and fostering community awareness are paramount in safeguarding the region's biodiversity and mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfires. It is about time that a comprehensive policy was framed to fight the wildfire menace. The Uttarakhand Government must draw from the US experiences in California, where such fires are frequent but they manage them rather well and swiftly with an early warning system, besides a mechanism for controlled burns. As the battle against the Nainital forest fire rages on, it serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of our natural ecosystems as also the resilience of the human spirit. With the combined efforts of authorities, armed forces and local communities, there is hope that the flames will soon be extinguished. However, the aftermath of this crisis should serve as a catalyst for concerted action towards building a more resilient and sustainable future for Uttarakhand and beyond.

Pakistan paying for its misplaced priorities



BHOPINDER SINGH

Ambassador Asif Durrani acknowledges the Pak Government's shortcomings in handling the Afghanistan situation and underscores a reality check for Islamabad's foreign policy

Pakistan's Special Representative on Afghanistan, Ambassador Asif Durrani, conceded the grave reality of the Pakistani Government's abject failure in Afghanistan. Speaking at a conference titled, "Pakistan in the Emerging Geopolitical Landscape", the diplomat accepted that the ensuing price of the flared tensions along the Durand Line far exceeded the human and financial cost of all the wars with India, put together!

Cold and frightening statistics like the loss of over 80,000 lives in the so-called 'War on Terror' which Islamabad joined in 2001 (including 8000 security personnel) and an estimated economic loss of \$150 billion—the reality check of what ought to worry Pakistan, i.e., between its traditional enemy across the Line-of-Control, or the one across the Durand Line—couldn't have been clearer. To make matters worse for Islamabad, it isn't even close to the end of its miseries as the deadly attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have shot up by 65% and the accompanying suicide attacks by 500%! In such a scenario to persist with India as the 'enemy number 1' is not only to suffer from an acute sense of Ostrich syndrome, but also to refuse the hard lessons of Karma i.e., what goes around, comes around.

The fixation with India owes itself to the wounds of the partition and the desperate need of various institutions to have an 'enemy' to legitimise themselves in the eyes of the citizenry e.g., clergy, military, politicians etc., as also, as to defend the flawed 'two-nation theory' that ostensibly rationalises Pakistan. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 exposed the hollowness and amorality of a nation created in the name of religion - the current equation with Afghanistan further exposes the untenability of a relationship based on co-religionism. That religion can never be the basis of nationhood or indeed ensure a 'brotherly relation' (as insincerely claimed with a neighbour, is further proved. At the end of the day, what matters is, 'intent' or neat. Over time, intent has an



inevitable way of revealing itself that cannot be suppressed by homilies of co-religionism. As the speech by Ambassador Durrani accepted, "After the withdrawal of NATO forces, it was hoped that peace in Afghanistan would bring peace to the region. However, such expectations were short-lived". Anyone with a modicum of understanding about history (especially about Afghanistan, the home to many 'Great Games') ought to have known that to 'control' the narrative in Afghanistan was not just impossible and impractical, but also counter-productive. The worst-kept secret of nurturing a desire to have 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan could not be hidden even from its creation, the Afghan Taliban. While the Afghans had accepted the support and infrastructure afforded by Pakistani regimes of all hues and shades since the late 1970s — to expect the proud Afghan (even a Pak-created Taliban) to toe Islamabad's line blindly was an affront to the cultural-civilisational identity of an Afghan. Not only did the Taliban Government bolt out from the shackles of controls, 'advisories' and condescending platitudes from Islamabad, but it knowingly harboured and supported its ideological offshoot i.e., the Pak-facing Tehreek-e-Taliban

Pakistan (TTP) fighters, who attack Pakistan with impunity and deadly consequences. A grim observation of the situation suggests that the attacks on Pakistan are not just a phenomenon afflicting disaffected Pakistani folks across the Afghan side, but that the "worrying aspect is the participation of Afghan nationals in these attacks". Basically, either as genuinely motivated or even as trained mercenaries, Afghan nationals are attacking Pakistan! The project of demonising India by the Pakistanis has failed spectacularly amongst the conservative Afghans, as even they harbour a rather warm perception of the Indians, as opposed to that of the Pakistanis. At the end of the day, the difference in sovereign intent emanating from Islamabad, versus those emanating from Delhi, has surfaced. Beyond certain constraints mandated by their self-invented image, ideology and inert conservatism, the language used by the Taliban Government officials bears a stark contrast, from the one that was imagined when the US/NATO forces abandoned Kabul and the Taliban stormed into Kabul.

Today, given the 'dark' investments made by the Pakistani State it finds itself in an awkward and inextricable position. Try hard as it might, the

Pakistanis are struggling to undo and trace back the steps that it took to create the prevailing environment, infrastructure and instinct in the region. As Ambassador Durrani lamented, "Afghanistan has become a permanent fixture in Pakistan's regional paradigm for over four decades". Therefore, all support or otherwise to Pakistan is seen from the lens of Afghanistan. Ironically, Pakistani complaints about the situation with Afghanistan fall on deaf ears as the global community attributes much of what went wrong with the Afghan storyline, to the Pakistanis themselves. In some sense, it is a 'cry wolf' situation for the Pakistanis and there simply aren't too many takers or sympathisers of the Pakistani woes. A deeper introspection would reveal the rot in the thinking of the Pakistani system set in 1947 when it thought that religion was to be its trump card. History is instructive, that religion can never be a basis of Statehood for any moral and sustainable nation. Both Bangladesh and Afghanistan discredit the 'two-nation theory'.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

“ THE PROJECT OF DEMONISING INDIA BY THE PAKISTANIS HAS FAILED SPECTACULARLY AMONGST THE CONSERVATIVE AFGHANS, AS EVEN THEY HARBOUR A RATHER WARM PERCEPTION OF THE INDIANS, AS OPPOSED TO THAT OF THE PAKISTANIS

PICTALK



'Veerakumaris' gather to participate in the the Karaga festival at Sri Dharmarajana Swamy Temple, in Bengaluru PTI

Political parties must prioritise environmental preservation

Political leadership must prioritise sustainability and combating plastic pollution to safeguard ecosystems and human health

It's election time in India and various political parties vie for their space in the hearts of the public. Even when political parties give multiple offers, including providing sustainable living in their manifestos, there is no concrete measure to tackle issues affecting our planet. Even for the few who speak about the environment, the vision is for the future, not immediate. What we want is a manifesto that speaks about protecting our planet the moment it comes to power. Every political party stresses developmental politics. But what is the use of development if our planet's status is in a dilemma? The climate is changing; glaciers and the water table are receding and water scarcity is severe in parts of the country. We haven't devised a concrete step in managing our garbage, even in our capital city. Is it a lack of scientific knowledge? We have one CSIR lab exclusively working on the environment and many other research institutions working on similar lines. Still, we fail in this? Is it a lack of political will? Nobody knows the actual reason behind this. Every



part of the planet suffers from anthropogenic activities during this Anthropocene period. In the electioneering process, political parties also create lots of garbage containing lots of plastic materials. During elections, political parties often use a variety of promotional materials such as banners, posters, flyers and flags, many of which are made of plastic or contain plastic components. Political rallies, public events and gatherings organised by political parties often generate significant amounts of waste, including plastic cups, plates and other disposable items. Improper waste management practices at these events can result in plastic litter ending up in the environment. Why can't the Government ban plastic from its production source? After manufacturing and selling to the vendors, for namesake, the official makes some per-

iodic visits and fines poor vendors. It's like keeping sweets near a diabetic patient and telling him not to touch them. Plastic pollution has significantly threatened ecosystems, wildlife and human health worldwide. Plastic pollution in oceans is a well-documented problem with devastating effects on marine life. Sea turtles, whales, seabirds and fish often mistake plastic debris for food or become entangled in plastic waste, leading to injury or death. Additionally, plastic fragments, known as microplastics, are ingested by smaller organisms and can bioaccumulate up the food chain, posing risks to human health. Coral reefs, often called the "rainforests of the sea," are highly sensitive ecosystems that provide habitat for numerous marine species. Plastic pollution can smother coral reefs, blocking sunlight and inhibiting coral growth. Chemicals released by plastic degradation can also harm coral health, contributing to reef degradation and loss. Political parties can influence public opinion and behaviour through messaging

and advocacy efforts. Parties that prioritise environmental issues and promote sustainable practices can help raise awareness about the harms of plastic pollution and encourage individuals and communities to take action. They should teach their followers to follow clean environmental practices in their party functions and their daily lives. In India, political parties have the power to shape policies and promote initiatives that influence people's attitudes and behaviours toward plastics. So, they should take responsibility. We don't have decades to wait for the results. Already, the global temperature has reached its threshold. Any further increase may cause unforeseen consequences on the life on this planet. We need a political mindset to change our attitude towards plastics and the environment immediately. It will be good if we always remember that we don't have a 'planet B' to sustain humanity.

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



BIJU DHARAMPALAN

SC UPHOLDS EVMs

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Supreme Court rejects 100 per cent VVPAT verification plea", published on April 27, this is my response. The Supreme Court has rightly reaffirmed its faith in the working of EVMs and refused the return of ballot papers. They seem to be satisfied with several safeguards and stringent checks which have been an integral part of EVM functioning. It is also a welcome move by the court that they have now given number 2 and 3 placed candidates an option to check and verify 5 per cent microchips per assembly segment so that they remain fully satisfied. One additional burden the Election Commission has to make is to also store symbol loading units for 45 days in addition to EVMs. Now hopefully this EVM issue should be closed for good and the opposition must create a narrative which resonates with the voters. The ruling party has given a lot of opportunities to the opposition where the former could have been put on the mat but the latter failed to do so. There are still 5 phases to go in the current elections and the opposition would do better to channel their energy in the right direction and highlight BJP's negative points than keep crying over EVMs.

Bal Govind | Noida

JAMMU ELECTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Stage set for phase II LS Polls", published on April 25, this is my response. The second phase of the Lok Sabha elections is completed now. The EVMs had made it captured the fate of Jammu as well. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are specifically annoyed with the governance of J&K as a Union Territory. The bigger mandate of J&K so disclosed appears to be extremely annoying with the BJP the people want to topple the UT administration to put in place proper Statehood.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

No moral high ground for India or the US



Apropos the editorial, "All is well", published on April 27, this is my response. Neither the US nor India can claim to be on the moral high ground to point an accusing finger at each other. The regularly occurring deaths of Indian students in the US are as much a blot on that nation as are the deaths of hundreds of innocent Manipuris in the State of Manipur. India's response to the allegations made by the USA has been rather dismissive because we all know the truth about Manipur. The US apart, even the Opposition parties of India had raised a quarrel over the situation in Manipur and rightly so. Therefore, for India to say that the US report is "deeply biased" and reflects a "significant misunderstanding of the ground realities" is to turn a blind eye to the facts. Both countries need to introspect and take measures to set their own house in order instead of indulging in a provocative blame game.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

The hope of Congress restoration is high along with the National Conference & PDP party compared to the Bhartiya Janta Party. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are anxiously waiting for this very moment. Hope the design will be fulfilled soon and very soon Jammu and Kashmir will enjoy complete Statehood like other Indian States.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

Madam — In every domain, women are enchanting their presence. The inclusion of women in the decision-making process is their fundamental right and it is also pivotal for sustainable development. If women have significant representation, we will attain legal parity in economic opportunities and also unleash the benefits and economic progressions linked with this assortment. Also, they will influence voter's opinions, mobilise support and actively participate in the electoral process. A

paradigm shift of the Government's strong focus on women-led development, going beyond women-centric, represents a key pillar of India's progress. The Government is promoting women's empowerment by implementing a host of schemes, like, Skill Upgradation and Mahila Coir Yojana, Women Scientists Scheme, PM Mudra Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and many more. On top of that The Women's Reservation Bill passed by the parliament, gave women a significant voice in the Lok Sabha and State assemblies. In 2024, the launch of the Alliance for Global Good-Equity and Equality, focus on investing in women with the theme for International Women's Day 2024 - "Invest in Women, Accelerate Progress," shows that Indian leadership is now gaining global recognition for women's empowerment.

Apurva Garg | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

THE CRISIS OF SELF-IDENTITY

Discovering the self brings change, peace and liberation



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Today, almost every country in the world has been putting in hard efforts to make a Better World that is free from all kinds of fear and insecurities and is safe for all. However, in this whole exercise, we must not forget the fact that the breakthrough in man's efforts to bring change comes only when he knows his real identity. The present world crisis, which is generally known as the crisis of values, is in fact, a deep crisis of self-identity. This crisis of values also has resulted from the loss of the knowledge of the real identity of the self. While man has discovered many 'lost continents' or land masses on the globe, this continent of the self has yet to be discovered or rediscovered by all of us. Thus man has first to be made aware of the truth that he has, in him, a certain potential of divine qualities or a core of human values and that these qualities or values, within him, have gone deep down in the sea of the Subconscious and the Unconscious Mind and have now to be brought again to the surface, into the light and have to be used as the keyboard for actions. Man has also to be given a realisation of the truth that, with the cremation or burial of the dead body, man's all deeds good or bad done by him during his lifetime, or the abilities and qualities acquired by him over some time, are not all lost.

Neither does man's good actions go unrewarded forever nor does he go unpunished for his bad actions. Unless and until man realises that, in truth, he is an eternal being, a soul or a being-of-light and that so are other beings, his outlook and his attitude towards all others does not undergo a total change. When, however, he realises his real identity, he takes a new 'mental and spiritual birth' so to say and then an improvement in his self and his relationships with others takes place automat-



ically and naturally even as day follows night. So, we may adopt whatever strategy we think is suitable for a particular country or a group of people but let us keep in mind that, sooner or later, we have to give to all those who come in touch with us the knowledge of the real identity of self, for without this knowledge, there is no going nearer to our goal of a better world.

Today we all identify ourselves with the body that we have acquired because we are unaware of the immortal entity called 'soul' which resides within us and functions through our body. This ignorance about the existence of the soul thus results in 'body-consciousness' or a worldly approach towards life, as a result of which throughout our life we struggle to improve our condition of life without understanding the fact as to why the physical and mental conditions and environments of two individuals differ widely right from the time of their birth. We get baffled by human sufferings & untimely deaths on a mass scale caused by natural calamities, terrorism, violence and wars due to which we constantly fear for our death all the time.

In this whole merry-go-round, we fail to realise that unless these basic aspects of life are rightly understood, the body-conscious approach is bound to be there. Considering one's physical existence as the 'be all and end all' of everything results in man's adopting wrong values in life which in turn leads to his committing wrong acts and consequently causes suffering to him. No wonder, despite striving hard, he is unable to avoid sorrow and suffering in life. Hence to live a peaceful, contented, happy and liberated life, proper knowledge of one's real self i.e. the soul, its functioning and its role in the world drama is a 'must'.

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

Market-oriented gig skill sets under focus



DINESH SOOD

As the job landscape evolves, the focus is now on fostering market-driven skill sets to meet the demands of a changing workforce



In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving job market, employers are not just interested in hiring candidates with degrees from prestigious institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) or the Indian Institutes of Management (IIM), they now prioritise hiring candidates with specific skill sets.

Despite the widespread recognition of IITs for academic excellence and coveted placement opportunities, recent worrisome reports have revealed that they are not delivering as per their ranking and perception.

Every year among thousands of students who dream to get admission in IITs, only 20-25 per cent of them remain lucky charm to clear the JEE (Joint Entrance Exam) advanced process to get admission while pursuing their academic excellence and coveted placement opportunities every year they look forward to the placement season with an eye on big-ticket jobs.

However, The 2024 placement season is described as "lacklustre" by IIT students. This is a worrying situation in IIT-Bombay, which is ranked third among engineering institutes in India by NIRF. According to the Global IIT Alumni Support Group, nearly 36% of students were unable to secure jobs for the 2024 placements. Although IIT-Bombay contested this report, stating that only 6.1% of students remained unplaced, the situation is still concerning.

The Global IIT Alumni Support Group data shows that nearly 30-40% of IIT students are still unplaced in the top-ranked 8 older IITs like Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur and others, while around 50-60% of students are still unplaced in the 15 newer IITs like BHU (Varanasi), Ropar and others.

The unemployment crisis in India is par-



NEARLY 83 PER CENT OF THOSE UNEMPLOYED IN INDIA ARE YOUNG AND AMONG THESE UNEMPLOYED YOUNG INDIANS, NEARLY 66 PER CENT ARE EDUCATED

ticularly acute among educated youth. The cost of an engineering degree remains at Rs 8-10 lakh, yet the placement rate remains around 30%. Furthermore, there is an influx of MBA degree holders entering the market, even though the demand has dropped by 55% this year. This raises the question of the value of a college/university degree.

Being highly educated is no guarantee of employment in India, as the International Labor Organisation (ILO) report reveals. Nearly 83% of those unemployed in India are young and among these unemployed young Indians, nearly 66% are educated. According to the ILO report, the "youth unemployment rate has increased with the level of education, with the highest rates among those with a graduate degree or higher." On the other hand, those without university degrees or even school dropouts have a higher employment rate.

Several highly educated youths set an example by adopting odd entrepreneurship and proudly titled it MBAs Chaiwalas and Chatwalas.

Despite the promise of creating 100 million jobs through the flagship "Make in India" initiative, the expected job creation did not materialise in the last 10 years. Raghuram Rajan, the former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, has emphasised the need to make the workforce more employable and create jobs. Every year, around 7-8 million young

Indians enter the workforce, but many remain unemployed.

It is a proven fact that our youth with higher education degrees are not well-skilled. One of the main reasons why skills are more important than higher degrees is because they are directly applicable to the job at hand.

A candidate with a degree may have a broad understanding of a subject, but without the specific skills needed to perform the job, they may struggle to succeed. On the other hand, a candidate with the right set of skills, even if they don't have a higher degree, may be able to hit the ground running. It is essential to note that having relevant skills is more crucial than having higher degrees since skills are directly applicable to the job at hand.

A candidate with a degree may have a broad understanding of a subject, but without the specific skills required to perform the job, they may struggle to succeed. Conversely, a candidate with the right set of skills, even if they don't have a higher degree, can hit the ground running and perform exceptionally well. For example, gig skill courses like digital marketing and beauty-wellness are available for around Rs 30 to 50 thousand and have a placement scope of over 90 per cent.

A gig economy offers a shot: The gig economy in India is vibrant, skill-driven and bucking the unemployed youths. According to a report by gig work platform Taskmo (which has over 7,50,000 gig workers registered) youth participation in the gig economy

has increased an astounding eightfold between 2019 and 2022, with most of the young people coming from Tier-I and Tier-II cities. In 2022, a projection report by Niti Aayog on the gig economy predicted a higher demand for skilled gig workers in the future. Areas such as digital marketing, social media management, logistics, healthcare and beauty-wellness will be in high demand, reflecting the diverse needs of employers and the evolution of the job market. The gig workforce is expected to expand to 23.5 million by 2029-30, from 7.7 million in 2021-22.

It's fascinating to see that a professionally trained gig worker, such as a hairdresser, can earn more than an MBA or IITan's. Jawed Habib, a hair stylist expert entrepreneur, is an excellent example of this. With his global exposure, he's inspiring young people to envision beauty wellness as a profession of the future. It's important to note that having a higher degree is no longer the only way to get hired or advance in a career. Employers are increasingly looking for candidates with specific skills that are directly applicable to the job and can help the company succeed. Therefore, it's crucial to focus on market-driven gig skill sets.

(The writer is a co-founder and MD, of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), network member of India International Skill Centres; views expressed are personal.)

Taiwan urges for stronger global health governance

Taiwan advocates for global health governance, urging inclusion and collaboration to ensure human rights

Despite not being a WHO member State, Taiwan emphasises the importance of contributing insights into pandemic management and learning from international best practices. Taiwan's proactive approach to pandemic response underscores its commitment to global health. Advocating for amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) and inclusion in the pandemic agreement, Taiwan seeks to collaborate on monitoring, reporting and exchanging vital health data to enhance global health security. Additionally, Taiwan champions universal health coverage and humanitarian efforts to uphold the fundamental human right to health worldwide. The three years of



HSUEH JUI-YUAN

the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a terrible loss of life and exacerbated health inequalities. The global economy slumped and, worldwide, people's lives were affected. This experience demonstrated that the present global health governance framework is not effective in responding to threats to global health. Although COVID-19 is no longer labelled a public health emergency of international

concern (PHEIC) and trade and economic activity globally have returned to normal, the World Health Organisation (WHO) cautions against the threat of a Disease X pandemic. Therefore, countries across the globe must unite to bolster health governance.

WHO and many countries began reviewing response strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Weaknesses in the International Health Regulations (2005) as concerns managing this crisis were revealed. As a result, changes are afoot. Proposed revisions include enhanced surveillance, reporting and information sharing; improved response readiness; and revised criteria for declaring PHEICs. At the same time, there is vigorous debate around a new

pandemic agreement, which aims to craft a robust global pandemic governance framework grounded in accountability, transparency and equity. It may be approved at the 77th World Health Assembly. As Taiwan is not a WHO member State, it cannot directly influence revisions to the International Health Regulations (2005) or the drafting of the pandemic agreement. Nevertheless, we remain greatly concerned about the content of and developments regarding these central documents.

We are eager to contribute our insights into pandemic management and learn from international best practices. Taiwan was the nation that initially identified the epidemic risk

and promptly executed adaptive measures. Taiwan also proactively shared vital information with global partners and garnered public trust through a commitment to openness. We strongly endorse the passage and implementation of amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) and the pandemic agreement. We call on WHO to include Taiwan as a signatory to these documents.

We urge WHO to support Taiwan's inclusion in overseeing global health. Taiwan remains committed to participating based on the principles of professionalism, pragmatism and making contributions. Taiwan seeks to cooperate with WHO to remedy geographic gaps in global health security and to con-

struct a comprehensive global health framework.

The WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All has found that at least 140 countries recognise health as a fundamental human right in their constitutions. Despite this, many nations have not passed and implemented laws to ensure that their citizens have access to healthcare services. Taiwan has worked hard to reach universal health coverage and has consistently improved the quality of health care over the past few decades in line with WHO recommendations.

Taiwan has effectively integrated and allocated social welfare resources to enhance primary and oral health care for all, implement mental health programs and

strengthen the social safety net. Taiwan has put in place an agile and resilient healthcare system able to combat both communicable and non-communicable diseases. We are improving health for all individuals throughout their entire lives.

The theme for World Health Day 2024 is "My health, my right." This is a way to advocate for every individual, everywhere, to have access to quality health services, education and information, as well as enjoy safe drinking water, clean air, good nutrition, quality housing, decent working conditions and freedom from discrimination. Through a public-private partnership, Taiwan has been contributing to global efforts to realise the

right to health in collaboration with partner countries and international organisations.

Taiwan should be included, as a matter of pragmatism, in the World Health Assembly and all WHO meetings, activities and mechanisms, particularly those concerned with the WHO pandemic agreement. This would better empower Taiwan to collaborate with global partners to uphold the fundamental human right to health stipulated in the WHO Constitution and the vision of leaving no one behind espoused in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

(The author is Minister of Health and Welfare Republic of China (Taiwan); views are personal.)



Real Kerala Story turns sour as Begum unearths secrets

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

When Doordarshan, the public broadcaster, aired the movie "The Kerala Story", a film based on real life incidents attributing to Love Jihad, the secular brigade went berserk and staged agitations demanding the cancellation of the screening of the film. "This is an attempt to portray the State in bad light in front of the world and we strongly object the Doordarshan airing a movie like this," said Pinarayi Vijayan, chief minister of the State. Thousands of Hindu and Christian girls had been trapped in love relationship by love jihadis, made them convert to Islam and sent away to the war-torn Syria, Jordan and Iraq to fight with the IS terrorists. These girls were dumped as sex slaves in IS strongholds after some time. Last month (March 2024) saw the Kerala experiencing a frenzy under the title "The Real Kerala Story" which told how people came together and pooled in Rs 34 crore as blood money to save the life of a Kozhikode youth from death penalty in a Saudi Arabia

prison. Abdul Rahim, a resident of Kozhikode district had come to Saudi in November 2006 with a house driver visa was given the task of looking after his master's son, a paralysed boy of 15 years who needed round-the-clock aid. The boy had a contraption attached to his neck through which he breathed and was fed. In December 2006, Rahim has taken the boy out for a ride as per his master's order. While he was driving the car, the boy got furious and spat on the face of Rahim. The driver claims that he pushed the boy down to escape from his wrath and in the melee the contraption fell down resulting in the boy's death. Shocked over by the development, Raheem telephoned his friend who rushed to the spot and they together made a story that the car came under attack of robbers and it was during the attack, the boy lost his life. But the investigators established in the court that it was a case of murder. The trial court sentenced Rahim to death which was upheld by the Supreme Court of that country. Though Rahim's family sought clemency from death sentence, the victim's family was adamant that the accused should face the death sentence. Despite the Supreme Court's decision well wishers of Rahim tried to save the youth from the gallows and the court asked the relatives of the victim whether the accused could be saved from death by accepting blood money which ran to Rs 34 crore. This was flashed across Kerala as a major breakthrough and "Save Rahim" initiative succeeded in mobilizing Rs 34 crore through crowd finding. It is here the story took a twist. The CPI(M), Congress and the Muslim League lambasted the Narendra Modi Government for its indifference to Rahim's case. Begum Nuzrath Jahan, a social activist from Kozhikode, who had cultivated a network of friends and officials in West Asian countries got into he act and spoke to highly placed Saudi officials who informed her that the report on blood money was fake. "The Court had asked the family of the victim whether they would agree to a deal involving the accused pay blood money and pardon

Rahim from undergoing death penalty, I even spoke to Alavikkutty Musliyar, a Keralite who worked as a translator in this case. He told me that no such deal has been brokered," Nuzrath Jahan told The Pioneer. She said this was a serious issue but the Saudi Government has not intimidated the Indian embassy in Riyadh anything about this case. If only a Government to Government communication takes place, the Indian Government could speak to the Saudi Government in cases like this. Don't you think Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Foreign Minister Dr Jayasankar will sit idle once they are intimidated about such a deal?" asked Nuzrath Jahan. Now, the question is who authorised whom to crowd-fund the blood money and what are they going to do with the money so collected. Nuzrath Jahan also mentioned that the possibility of hawala racket and money laundering should be probed in this case. "Kerala's Real Story" has turned out to be an embarrassment to liberals, secularists and anti-fascist forces.

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Defer Lok Sabha polls on Anantnag Rajouri seat: Ball in EC court

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The sudden closure of Mughal road, connecting the Shopian district with Poonch, due to fresh snowfall and inclement weather conditions has further pushed the ball into the court of the Election Commission of India as it is likely to decide on whether to defer the polling day on the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat. Meanwhile, the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo and Chief Electoral Officer PK Pole have submitted a detailed report about weather and road conditions in the Anantnag-Poonch-Rajouri (APR) Parliamentary constituency to the Election Commission of India (ECI). The polling is scheduled for May 7 during the third phase of polling. According to official sources, the Returning Officer collected feedback from all the contesting candidates and their authorized representatives on record before replying to the Chief Electoral Officer. After analysing the ground reports the Election



Commission is expected to take a call on whether to revise the schedule of Anantnag's seat or go ahead with the current date. The ECI had earlier sought a report on weather conditions, accessibility and other factors etc in the Anantnag constituency following representations submitted by political parties and three candidates seeking rescheduling of the election due to adverse weather conditions including snowfall on Mughal Road and Pir Ki Gali. Prominent candidates in the fray from Anantnag include PDP chief and former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, former Minister Mian Altaf (National Conference), Zaffar Manhas (Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party) and Advocate Mohammad Parray (DPAP). The BJP hasn't fielded any candidate in Anantnag constituency.

BJP organises birth centenary celebration of Karpoori Thakur

SAMAR PANDEY ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP Poorvanchal Morcha organised the birth centenary celebration of Bharat Ratna Karpoori Thakur at Ambedkar International Centre on Sunday in the Presence of many senior BJP leaders and people from the Poorvanchal region in Delhi. Many senior BJP leaders were present there including Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva, MP Manoj Tiwari and Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary. Thousands of people from the Poorvanchal region in Delhi attended the event including YouTube influencer Manish Kashyap associated with the BJP Poorvanchal Morcha. A short video film was screened at the event on the life and achievements of Thakur, emphasizing his significant contributions to Indian politics. Samrat Chaudhary praised Thakur's legacy, highlighting his role in the fight for the cause of the poor. He credited Thakur with revolutionary politics and implementing progressive measures such as



reserving 4% for women despite opposition. Chaudhary also praised Prime Minister Modi for fulfilling Thakur's dream of seeing a marginalized individual become the Prime Minister. He further said that Bihar has had two chief Ministers who banned alcohol while Delhi has a Chief Minister who indulged in corruption related to alcohol. Virendra Sachdeva underscored Thakur's dedication to ensuring government schemes reached every household, noting the Modi government's alignment with Thakur's vision. Manoj Tiwari praised Prime Minister Modi for recognising Thakur's work and the good policies that help the country. He further said that the past governments did not give enough credit to Thakur.

It is because of conspiracy of BJP, CPM that 25,000 people have lost jobs: Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Taking a sharp aim at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress and the Left in one shot Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said while the former was a peddler of bluffs, the latter were true aides of the BJP insofar as they were helping in slicing the Trinamool Congress votes to help the saffron party win. "The Prime Minister is a peddler of lies ... rather I should say he is bluffing the country ... dividing the people in the name of religion to win the elections ... Modi is bluffing the people by telling that the women's ornaments would be seized" and the citizen's wealth would be taken away if other parties came to power," Banerjee said. Asserting that "if the BJP returns to power then there

will be no election in India again ... if they return to power they will sell the country like they have been doing ... they will sell the religions, they will sell the culture and they will sell everything India stands for," Banerjee said "they will come as they do before the elections and distribute money to buy votes but they should not be allowed to do so ... we must defeat the BJP". She said, how Modi "only spreads hatred and divides the people in the name of religion ... he divides dalits, OBCs ... he divides man from man in the name of Citizenship Amendment Act, Uniform Civil Code and National Register for Citizens but we will not let that happen in Bengal." The Chief Minister was speaking at election rallies in Malda South and North con-

stituencies of North Bengal. The erstwhile Malda constituency a strong bastion of the then Railway Minister ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury has been divided into two seats of Malda North and South. While Malda North seat is held by BJP's Khagen Murmu a former CPI(M) MLA, Malda South seat was last time won by Congress' Abu Hasem Khan Chowdhury. Recounting how the BJP Government had deprived by not paying its dues in 100-days' work and other schemes Banerjee said "on the one hand they deprive us economically and on the other hand they publicise their own names on the ration bags as you can see the picture of the Prime Minister or the BJP's logo on them ... why should they give such publicity pictures when both the State



and the Centre are paying for the ration." Hitting the Prime Minister hard for referring to the 26,000 illegally appointed school staff who lost their jobs upon a Calcutta High Court order, the Chief Minister asked "whether you are happy that these people have lost their jobs." She said, "it is because of the conspiracy of the BJP and the

CPI(M) that 25,000 people have lost their jobs ... the BJP is a job eater ... they cannot give jobs but they can take them ... they can increase prices, and sell the country but cannot create employment whereas the TMC government is sitting with lakhs of jobs for the people." In an apparent attempt to stoke the "BJP-TMC" binary in Bengal Banerjee attacked

the Left and the Congress for helping the saffron outfit by dividing votes to make the path of the BJP smooth. Saying that there was no existence of Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance in Bengal Banerjee said, "There is no INDIA in here ... it is outside of Bengal and after the elections the TMC will play a big role in Delhi to make INDIA a viable force but in our State the Left and the Congress have joined hands in the name of INDIA --- which anyway was conceived and christened by me --- to help the BJP win." Elsewhere at an election rally in the neighbouring Murshidabad district BJP president JP Nadda rained fire on the Chief Minister for her policy of appeasement. "Instead of bringing a majboor sarkar (strong Government) in the Centre"

the TMC was trying to bring a "majboor sarkar (helpless Government)" which would be dependent on the allies and would follow the policies of appeasement and corruption, he said. Saying that Banerjee's policy was to support "soft terrorism" he reminded how the Bengal Government was opposing the CAA and in turn supporting infiltration. "Her Government has sympathy for those who terrorise people but not those who love the motherland," he said. Referring to the land grab and sexual harassment of women at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas by TMC strongman Sheikh Shahjahan, the BJP leader said, "the way the women were tortured and the way her Government tried to protect the people like Shahjahan is very unfortunate particularly in a State that is

led by a woman Chief Minister." While both Malda and Murshidabad are Muslim majority districts the population of the Muslims in Malda is about 55 percent whereas the account for about 66 percent in Murshidabad. Like in Malda North constituency which is already held by the saffron party, the BJP is seeing a hope in Murshidabad too where the party has fielded Nirmal Kumar Saha a doctor at Behrampur seat. He is contesting against Bengal Congress president and five-time MP Adhir Chowdhury backed by the Left and the TMC's Yusuf Pathan a former India cricket player. The remaining two seats of Murshidabad and Jangipur are presently held by the TMC.

Tihar revoked permission for Sunita to meet husband: AAP



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday claimed that the Tihar Jail administration has revoked the permission for the wife of jailed Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Sunita Kejriwal to meet her husband. "The meeting, which was scheduled for tomorrow (Monday), has now been cancelled, leaving both the Kejriwal family and AAP supporters dismayed," said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), adding that the Tihar Jail administration has not cited any reason yet for cancelling Sunita Kejriwal's meeting. However, the prison administration is yet to respond to the AAP claims. Kejriwal, who was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the alleged excise scam, is lodged in Tihar's Jail No-2. The jailed Delhi CM, Kejriwal, has provided a list of six individuals, with whom he wants to meet in prison. The ED has termed CM Kejriwal the "kingpin and the key conspirator" of the alleged excise scam in collusion with other ministers of the Delhi government, AAP leaders, and other persons.

India thwarts... Delhi, other...

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The Indian Navy, in a statement, declared this seizure the "largest" in recent times in terms of quantity. The items seized included 3,089 kg of charas, 158 kilograms of methamphetamine, and 25 kilograms of morphine. Commending the joint operation, Home Minister Shah posted on X, "Pursuing PM Narendra Modi's vision of a drug-free Bharat, our agencies today achieved the grand success of making the biggest offshore seizure of drugs in the nation. In a joint operation carried out by the NCB, the Navy, and the Gujarat Police, a gigantic consignment of 3132 kilograms of drugs was seized." He also said, "The historic success is a testament to our government's unwavering commitment to making our nation drug-free. On this occasion, I congratulate the NCB, the Navy, and the Gujarat Police."

Blow to Congress...

From Page 1
Lovely further said while he respected the party's alliance decision with AAP, he was upset by Congress's North East Delhi seat candidate Kanhaiya Kumar praising AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal. The resignation of Lovely, which is also shared on his social media account, brought into public domain the internal rift in the Delhi unit of the party. It also showed the discontent within the grand old party's local unit over its alliance with foe-turned friend Aam Aadmi Party. The prevailing situation in Delhi Congress and its tie up with the AAP may impact the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi which will go to polls on May 25. Talking to the pioneer, over dozen of Congress leaders said they will not be involved in the election process. Last week, four time MLA and 15 years minister in the Sheila Dikshit regime in the national capital, Rajkumar Chauhan also resigned last week alleging that he was mistreated by a senior functionary when he questioned the basis on which the candidate for North West Delhi constituency was decided.

Delhi, other...

From Page 1
Despite the low number of sittings, State Assemblies passed more than 500 bills as well as state budgets worth over Rs 53 lakh crore in 2023. In 2023, 44 per cent of all the bills passed in assemblies were passed within a day of introduction. Gujarat, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Puducherry, and Punjab assemblies passed all Bills on the day they were introduced, or the very next day. Kerala and Meghalaya assemblies on the contrary took more than five days to pass more than 90 per cent of their Bills. While 59 per cent of bills received the Governor's assent within a month. In seven states, including Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, all bills received assent within a month. The states with the highest percentage of bills (passed in 2023) that did not get assent within two months were Assam (80 per cent), Nagaland (57 per cent), Jharkhand (50 per cent) and West Bengal (50 per cent). In West Bengal, on average, a bill received assent 92 days after its passing. Other states where it took a comparatively longer time for bills to receive assent are Assam (73 days), Jharkhand (72), Kerala (67), and Himachal Pradesh (55). "When Assemblies sit for a few days, and meet for only a few hours on these days, the time spent on transacting business is also low. In 2023, five states met for less than 50 hours. Seven states met between 50 and 100 hours, eight states between 100 and 150 hours, and six States for 150 hours or more. In 2023, 44 per cent of all the Bills passed, were passed on the day they were introduced in the Assembly or the very next day. The trend was also similar in the last two years (56 per cent in 2022, and 44 per cent in 2021). In 2023, five States - Gujarat, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Puducherry, and Punjab passed all Bills on the day they were introduced, or the very next day. These States passed all Bills within a day in 2022 and 2021 as well," the data says.

Village guard martyred in...

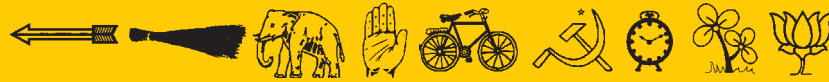
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The joint operation was still underway with the Army & CRPF. A police spokesman in Jammu added, "Today morning, a party of police picket Sang carrying along with them VDG members proceeded towards Chochru Gala heights where a face-off ensued with a group of hiding terrorists." Official sources in Basantgarh told The Pioneer, "The VDG member had initially received bullet injuries when a police party came face to face with the terrorists. However, the VDG member later succumbed to his injuries." The deceased VDG member has been identified by the Jammu and Kashmir police as Mohd Sharief S/O Abdul Rahman R/O Khaned. He is survived by his family of five daughters and other loved ones. The mortal remains of the VDG member were shifted to PHC, Basantgarh where a team of doctors conducted the postmortem before handing over the dead body to the family for the final rites. On April 23, the brother of a Territorial Army personnel, working in the Social Welfare Department was shot dead in cold blood by 'unidentified' terrorists while he was returning home after offering prayers in the village Kunda Top of Thanamandi area in the Rajouri district.

Poll tension escalates...

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No restriction on the movement of people and traffic has been imposed. The Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CNCCI) announced that the indefinite state-wide shutdown would continue but would be relaxed only for six hours from noon to 6 pm on Monday to allow the public to procure essential items. CNCCI president Khekugha Muru said the decision was taken in consideration of the fact that the shutdown was imposed in many districts without giving prior notice to the people. CNCCI urged the government to take steps to stop "unabated" extortion, and intimidation by underground groups. State Home Commissioner Vikeyie Kenya has directed the police to take stringent measures as "such activities reflect adversely on the law enforcing agency as well as on the state government." He instructed the district administrations and the police to report any violation of the ceasefire ground rules to the Ceasefire Monitoring Group for appropriate action and also continue arresting "underground cadres", found extorting, under the National Security Act. On the other hand, the DCCI on Saturday submitted a five-point charter of demands to the state government through the deputy commissioner of Dimapur. DCCI demanded that the state government immediately clarify whether taxation by NPGs was legal or illegal. It also wondered whether the business community should pay GST or the taxation of NPGs. The DCCI asked the government to declare "summoning business community members to NPG offices, camps and monitoring cells" as illegal and law enforcing agencies be empowered to act against such places. The DCCI also demanded that extortion, kidnapping, and waylaying of transport should be dealt with swiftly with full force and without impunity. Further, dozens of gunmen had attacked Koutruk in Imphal West district on Sunday morning from elevated hilltops of neighbouring Kangpokpi district prompting village volunteers deployed in the fringe village to retaliate, the police said. Exchange of fire gradually spread to adjacent villages of Kadangband and Senjam Chirang, they said. Koutruk village has been witness to intense gunfights between village volunteers of two warring communities since ethnic violence broke out on May 3 last year. It has been identified as one of the most vulnerable areas for gun attacks. More than 200 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic strife between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kukis since May 3 last year. Meanwhile, denouncing the killing, the Kangpokpi district-based Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU) has called for a 12-hour shutdown in the district from noon of April 28. Two CRPF personnel were killed and two others injured after militants attacked an IRBn (India Reserve Battalion) camp at Naranseina in Moirang police station area in Manipur early on Saturday. Claiming that peace is being gradually restored in the state, Biren Singh highlighted the successful conduct of Lok Sabha elections, indicating increased confidence among people. He, however, lamented the targeting of security personnel who were deployed to protect the state's people.

EC ask AAP to...

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It includes factual videos and incidents, whether it is the picture of Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, whether it is the video of police's misbehaviour with Shri Manish Sisodia in the Rouse Avenue Court, whether it is the brutal detention of our volunteers in protests, everything is factual. Does the EC want to suppress the truth? Does the poll agency want to hide the misconduct of the police or the political misuse of the probe agencies by the BJP?" she concluded. Reacting to this, Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor has said that the Aam Aadmi Party leaders master the art of playing victim card, they first violate laws and when objected to by any authority or person they start playing victim card. Kapoor has said that as per law content of campaign songs or campaign pamphlets need to be approved by the Chief Electoral Officer Delhi prior to public launch.



SP has accepted defeat even before end of contest: Yogi

PNS ■ BUDAUN

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Sunday that the Samajwadi Party had accepted defeat even before the conclusion of the Lok Sabha elections. He remarked: "The frequent changes in candidates by the Samajwadi Party indicates that the party has accepted defeat even before the elections are over." Taking a dig at the Congress and SP, Yogi Adityanath said that those who challenged divine power were destined to fall, adding that the SP had turned the Lok Sabha elections into a mockery. Referring to the Congress manifesto while addressing a public meeting in Bilsil, Budaun, the chief minister said, "Congress is working on hidden agendas against the nation. Former prime ministers used to hesitate to visit Ayodhya. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the first prime minister who visited Ayodhya and witnessed 'pran pratishtha' of Ram Lalla in his magnificent temple after 500 years." He also urged people to support the BJP candidate and regional president Durvijay Shakya. Taking a jibe at SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle Shripal Singh Yadav, Chief Minister Yogi remarked, "It appears that even the 'chacha' has realised that it is time to step back, while the 'bhatija' has stumbled even before the start. This is evident in Shahjahanpur, Rampur and Meerut. However, the public knows their tactics and will not succumb to it." Chief Minister Yogi stated that with the



connection of the Ganga Expressway, this region was becoming a part of the industrial development process. "Before 2014, terrorist activities used to occur in India, and Pakistan would celebrate, while the Indian government remained silent. Today, even if a firecracker goes off in Pakistan, it starts giving explanations because it knows when and where a surgical strike might occur," Yogi added. "Presently, the country is establishing new milestones of security, and prosperity with highways, expressways and development. A long series of welfare schemes for the poor is available to the public," Yogi added.

The chief minister stated that previous governments played with faith. "People from the Congress used to say that Ram and Krishna never existed. Today, after 500 years, the anticipation has ended, and Ram Lalla is now enshrined in his magnificent temple," he said. "We will honour the great personalities and faith in every district. We have started with Kashi and Ayodhya, and after Braj, Budaun is also on the list," he pointed out. Chief Minister Yogi cautioned people against the Congress, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party, alleging that they had a hidden agenda against India. "They are planning to tamper with reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the Backward Classes and are preparing to impose an inheritance tax on your property after surveying it," he stated. He mentioned, "We have tackled the mafia and goons. The SP did not utter a single word of condolence on the death of former chief minister Kalyan Singh but visited the home of a mafia to read the Fatih upon his death." Yogi emphasised that people must cast their votes for a self-reliant and developed India. On this occasion, Union minister BN Verma, BJP regional president and candidate from Budaun Durvijay Shakya, BJP state vice-president Dinesh Sharma, MP Sanghamitra Maurya, MLA Bilsil Harish Shakya, MLC Vagish Pathak, MLA Mahesh Gupta, Rajiv Kumar Singh, Vimal Krishna were present.

We are alive as PM Modi got vaccines for us during COVID pandemic: Fadnavis

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday appealed to people to put aside other issues and vote for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he kept everyone alive by making vaccines available during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fadnavis sought votes over vaccines during his addresses at Madha and Barshi towns in 32 Solapur district. The senior BJP leader held his first rally at Barshi, part of the Osmanabad parliamentary constituency, where Archana Patil of the NCP is contesting against incumbent MP Omraje Nimbalkar of the Shiv Sena (UBT). Madha falls under the Madha Lok Sabha constituency, where the BJP has renominated its sitting MP Ranjitsinh Nimbalkar against Dhairyashel Mohite Patil of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP). Dhairyashel resigned from the BJP earlier this month. "Put aside other issues and vote for Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he kept us alive during the pandemic. He took the initiative and under his leadership, India

not only produced its own vaccine but also supplied it to other countries," said Fadnavis. He was referring to India's 'Vaccine Maitri' programme under which anti-COVID jabs were supplied to several nations. The country was not in a strong position before Modi came to power, he said. "Earlier, people from Pakistan could easily come here and carry out terror attacks. The then prime minister would go to the US to complain about Pakistan, but nothing would happen. After Modi came to power, we retaliated by surgical airstrike and carried out a strong message," he said. Today, India is prospering while Pakistan is heading towards bankruptcy, Fadnavis said. Asked about Dhairyashel, a BJP ex-district general secretary and nephew of former deputy chief minister Vijaysinh Mohite Patil, Fadnavis said, "When Sharad Pawar had almost ended his (Vijaysinh's) political career, we (BJP) stood behind him. It is up to Mohite Patil now to decide the future course of action. I do not think all the members of the Mohite Patil family agree with Dhairyashel's decision."

Future of Kerala LDF convenor hangs in balance

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI



The life of EP Jayarajan, convenor of the Left Democratic Front who is also the second senior-most leader of the CPI(M) is in danger as his party has shunned him from almost all positions. Though he has not been officially declared as persona non grata, the CPI(M) has made it known through some of the leaders that Jayarajan's days as LDF convenor is almost over. The CPI's State secretary Binoy Viswam had the audacity to declare that Jayarajan had erred in meeting BJP leader Prakash Jawadekar and he should face action for the same. The general impression is that Viswam would not have made such a statement without a prodding by CPI(M) leadership. The controversy erupted on election day (April 26) when BJP's Alappuzha candidate Sobha Surendran declared that a top CPI(M) leader was likely to cross over to the Hindutva party disgusted with the goings on in his party. Though she did not give the name of the CPI(M) leader, it was declared by K. Sudhakaran, the KPCC chief and Kannur Lok Sabha candidate that Jayarajan was the person who was in talks with Jawadekar. Jayarajan is already on record stating that the BJP has fielded some of the best candidates in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Being an election day, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and CPI(M) secretary M V Govindan said that there was nothing unusual in the LDF convenor meeting the BJP leader. But by Saturday, the same Vijayan and Govindan changed the tune and came down heavily on Jayarajan. It is an open secret that Jayarajan and Govindan do not see to eye on any issues as the former had hoped that he would be appointed party secretary after the demise of Kodiyeri Balakrishnan. But Pinarayi Vijayan preferred Govindan, a side kick who

would always toe his line of thinking. Jayarajan was also keeping away from party affairs for quite some time because of his animosity with Govindan. The CPI(M) State Committee is meeting on Monday to discuss the ramifications caused by the Jayarajan-Jawadekar meet. Usually, violation of party guidelines warrant punishment like death penalty. The 2012 gruesome murder of T P Chandrasekhar, a senior CPI(M) leader in Malabar by party assailants is a reminder to all those who challenge the party leadership. Since there is a discernible change in the tone of Vijayan and Govindan from their initial stance, it is certain that Jayarajan would be removed from the post of LDF convenor. The CPI(M) has its own police and judiciary system that decides the fate of those challenging party diktats. If past instances are any proof, Jayarajan is likely to meet the same fate as that of Chandrasekhar because in the CPI(M) it is an unconscionable sin to violate party's decisions. The BJP and Sangh Parivar are untouchables as far as the Marxists are concerned and any dealings with them command capital punishment. Thomas Issac, former finance minister and head of the Christian faction in the CPI(M) has come out in the open demanding severe action against Jayarajan.

BJP Government politicising probe agencies just like Congress earlier, claims Mayawati

PTI ■ MORENA (MP)



Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Sunday claimed the BJP was politicising probe agencies just like the Congress earlier and asserted poverty and unemployment had increased in the country in the last two years. Addressing a Lok Sabha poll rally here, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister claimed it would not be easy for the Bharatiya Janata Party to win if "free and fair" elections are held and there is no "tampering" of EVMs. "It seems the BJP has

politicised investigation agencies just like the Congress earlier. "The BJP government has also failed to check poverty, unemployment and prices, all of which have risen in the past two years. The Centre is

giving rations to the extremely poor but the solution is creating employment," she said. "Corruption has not gone down and the borders of the country are not completely safe till now. This is a matter of concern. You must take every effort to stop the BJP and Congress from coming to power," she said. The BJP's promise of "achhe din" (good days) for the poor and weaker sections as well as the middle class and labourers has not been fulfilled and people now know the ruling party's "guarantees" are hollow, Mayawati said. "Even as promises remain

unfulfilled, the BJP is putting its strength and time to create profits for capitalists and the rich, who are its loved ones," she said. Mayawati told the gathering Bahujan Samaj Party was formed because the Congress did not work for Dalits, tribals and Other Backward Classes. "Like earlier Congress governments, the ruling BJP also has a casteist, communal and capitalist mindset. They are applying every trick to retain power. Muslims are being persecuted. You must work to stop BJP and Congress from coming to power," the former UP CM told the gathering.

FIR against couple for sharing voting booth video on social media

PNS ■ ALIGARH

An FIR has been registered against Yogesh Gautam and his wife on behalf of the Inspector of Bannadevi police station for making video of the EVM and making it viral. According to this case, they went to the Indian Public School center in Sarsaul and casted their vote on EVM and made a video of it. After this, they made that video viral by posting it on his Facebook ID. Despite the Election Commission's ban on taking photos and videos of EVMs during voting, people are not agreeing to do so. Incidents of taking such photos and

making videos have also taken place in Aligarh city. In this case, independent candidate Pandit Keshav Dev of Anti-Corruption Army has raised the demand for cancellation of elections. A memorandum has also been given to ADM city in this regard. It is alleged that both of them have violated the confidentiality of the voting process. This is influencing the voters without having any impact on the voting and is in the category of crime. This is also a violation of the code of conduct. Inspector Pankaj Kumar Mishra has confirmed the registration of the case.

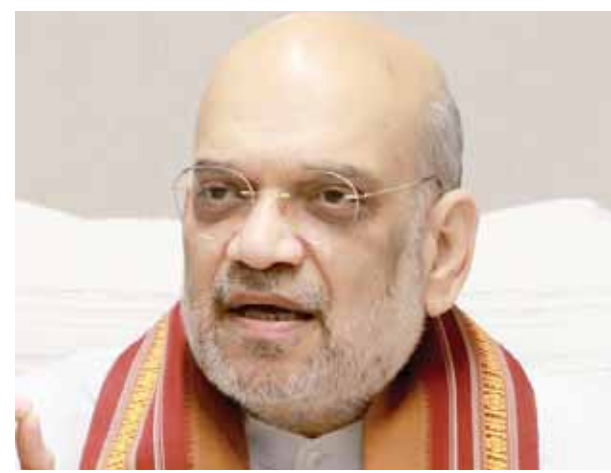
BJP will neither remove quota nor allow anyone to do so, says Shah

PTI ■ KASGANJ/MAINPURI/ETAWAH (UP)

The BJP will neither remove reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs nor will it allow anyone to do so, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Sunday, calling it a "Modi guarantee". Opposition parties have repeatedly claimed that the BJP's call for "abki baar 400 paar" is aimed at winning 400 seats in the Lok Sabha elections to have the numbers in Parliament to scrap quotas for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Speaking at a rally in support of Rajveer Singh, the BJP candidate from Etah-Kasganj, Shah alleged that the opposition parties ignored people from backward

communities, who were granted their rights by Narendra Modi after he became prime minister. Targeting Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, he said, "Rahul Gandhi says that if the BJP gets 400 seats, it will remove reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs nor will it allow anyone to do so," Shah said. "I want to say that it is a Modi guarantee that neither will the BJP remove reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs nor will it allow anyone to do so," Shah said. The home minister also hit out at the opposition for keeping the Ram temple issue "hanging" and said the public has to choose between "those who opened fire at karsevaks and those who built the Ram temple." Attacking opposition party leaders for not attending the

Ram temple consecration ceremony, Shah said in Kasganj, "The people who did not go to the consecration ceremony, they know that they are the people who shot at karsevaks." He asserted that there are two groups to choose from — "one that fired shots at Ram bhakts and one that built the Ram temple." "The Congress, Rahul 'baba' and the party of Akhilesh Yadav (Samajwadi Party) kept the Ram temple issue hanging for more than 70 years. You made Modi ji the prime minister for a second time and he did 'Jai Shri Ram' by doing the consecration ceremony on January 22," Shah said. In Mainpuri, campaigning for BJP candidate Jaiveer Singh Thakur — who is contesting against Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav's wife Dimple



Yadav — the home minister said, "Akhilesh (Yadav) ji, Dimple (Yadav) ji, because of whose fear did you people not go to the Ram temple consecration? Even Azam Khan is now in jail!" Shah alleged that the

Samajwadi Party leaders did not attend the ceremony due to fear of losing their vote bank. "But the BJP is not afraid of (losing) vote banks. We built a temple where Lord Shri Ram was born," he said.

Listing the BJP government's schemes, including free ration and homes to the poor, Shah said in Kasganj the free ration scheme will continue till 2029 if the BJP returns to power. He also hit out at Samajwadi Party chief Yadav for allegedly fielding only members of his family. Alleging that people had to migrate during the Samajwadi Party government, Shah said "goondas are forced to migrate not people" under BJP rule in Uttar Pradesh. "In Uttar Pradesh, where once bombs exploded, today 'bombs' are being manufactured for export under the leadership of Modi," Shah said in Kasganj. In Mainpuri, Shah claimed that the BJP will win all 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. Targeting Yadav, he said the wind in favour of the BJP has

blown from the west and it will wipe out the Samajwadi Party and the Congress everywhere via Mainpuri and Azamgarh. He also asserted that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will win 400 seats under Modi's leadership. Taking a swipe at the INDIA bloc, Shah asked who the prime minister would be if the opposition alliance won a majority. He also asked the gathering if anyone except Modi can effectively run the country. In Kasganj, Shah claimed that the BJP will secure more than 100 seats from the constituencies that went to the polls in the first two phases while the Congress and the Samajwadi Party will not be able to open their accounts. Campaigning for Ram Shankar Katheria in Etawah,

Shah said that on one side, there is a "corrupt INDI alliance" while on the other, there is Narendra Modi, who doesn't have any allegations against him despite serving as a chief minister and the prime minister for more than 23 years. "On one hand, there is Rahul Gandhi who leaves for vacations in Thailand in the summers. On the other hand, there is Narendra Modi who celebrated Diwali with soldiers on the border for 23 years," Shah said. He also accused the opposition for protecting Article 370, which granted special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, for their vote bank. Polling in Etah-Kasganj and Mainpuri will be held in the third phase on May 7. Etawah goes to the polls in the fourth phase on May 13.

Mamata wants Government at Centre that is soft on terrorism: Nadda

PTI ■ BAHARAMPUR/RANAGHAT

BJP president J P Nadda on Sunday alleged that Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee desires a central government that is "soft on terrorism" and believes in appeasement. Addressing back-to-back rallies in Baharampur in Murshidabad district and Ranaghat in Nadia district of West Bengal, Nadda claimed that the TMC government in the state helmed by Banerjee is known for corruption, extortion, appeasement, and discrimination. "We want a 'Majboot Sarkar' (strong government), but Mamata Banerjee desires a 'Majboor Sarkar' (weak government). She aims for a government in Delhi that condones appeasement, corruption, discrimination, and sympathises with

terrorists," he alleged. "On the contrary, Modi's 'Majboot Sarkar' believes in development, prosperity, national security, and responds to terrorism with surgical strikes," Nadda asserted. Further criticising the TMC government, Nadda said, "Mamata Banerjee's administration fosters appeasement, discrimination, and a lenient approach toward terrorists, extending sympathy to them." He slammed the TMC for allegedly spreading misinformation about the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), emphasising that the Act aims to grant citizenship, not revoke it. "The TMC, for the sake of vote-bank politics, opposes the CAA. Why do they oppose granting citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist refugees? What links do



infiltrators have with the TMC that they oppose the CAA? We condemn her politics of appeasement, which favours infiltrators and opposes the CAA," Nadda alleged. Referring to the recent school job scam that caused nearly 26,000 job losses, Nadda accused the TMC government of indulging in rampant corruption and malpractice.

"The West Bengal government is embroiled in countless scandals. The recent teachers' recruitment scam deprived thousands of people livelihood and opportunities, which shows corruption and loot are routine in the state," he said. The Calcutta High Court on Monday declared the recruitment process of the State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools as "null and void," ordering the cancellation of all appointments made through it. On incidents in Sandeshkhal, where local TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh and his associates were accused of sexual abuse and land-grabbing, Nadda lamented the lack of safety for women under Mamata Banerjee's rule.

"The abuse of women under Mamata Banerjee's administration is deplorable. Despite being a woman chief minister, she has failed to ensure the safety of women in the state," he added. Accusing the TMC of "betraying" women in the state, Nadda remarked, "Mamata Banerjee had come to power giving the slogan of 'Maa-Mati-Manush' (Mother-Land-People), but today, neither our mothers nor sisters are safe in West Bengal. The poor have had their land seized by TMC goons, and extortion has become rampant." Seizing on Congress leader Sam Pitroda's remarks regarding wealth redistribution, Nadda criticised the Congress and INDIA bloc for its alleged intention to deprive Dalits of their rights for political gains.

BJP manifesto guarantees developed India, Congress document divisive, says Rajnath

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The BJP's 'sankalp patra' (manifesto) for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls is a concrete guarantee of a new, capable and developed India, whereas the one issued by the Congress is divisive and is inspired by appeasement politics, Union Minister Rajnath Singh said on Sunday. The Congress failed to eradicate poverty during its long rule, while the Narendra Modi government managed to get 25 crore citizens out of poverty in the past 8-9 years, Singh said. "The Congress lacks leadership, policy and intention to take the country forward. The BJP government is committed to bring India among the top three economies by 2027. Our



sankalp patra is the concrete guarantee of a new, capable and developed India. The Congress' manifesto is divisive and inspired by appeasement," he claimed. Asserting that India will become the world's third largest economy by 2027, Singh said there were several reasons for it, foremost among them being the strong and credible leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has vision, mission and

passion. On the other hand, the Congress does not have a leader, policy or intention, adding that the party was the "biggest organiser" of the "Olympics of corruption" that was played in 10 years of UPA rule. "The Congress talked about ending poverty since the times of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Manmohan Singh. But failed to do so despite ruling for over 50 years. In just the last 8-9 years, our government has succeeded in bringing 25 crore people above the poverty line," Singh said. He asserted that the Modi government was still not content and wanted to completely eradicate poverty from the nation in the next 5-10 years.

Top Qatari official calls for Israel, Hamas to step up efforts for truce

AP ■ TEL AVIV

A senior Qatari official has urged both Israel and Hamas to show "more commitment and more seriousness" in cease-fire negotiations in interviews with Israeli media, as pressure builds on both sides to move toward a deal that would set Israeli hostages free and bring potential respite in the nearly 7-month-long war in Gaza.

The interviews with liberal daily Haaretz and Israeli public broadcaster Kan were published and aired Saturday evening. They came as Israel still promises to invade Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah despite global concern for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians sheltering there, and as the sides are exchanging proposals surrounding a cease-fire deal.

Qatar, which hosts Hamas headquarters in Doha, has been a key intermediary throughout the Israel-Hamas war. Along with the US and Egypt, Qatar was instrumental in helping negotiate a brief halt to the fighting in November that led to the release of dozens of hostages. The sides have held numerous rounds of negotiations since, none of which produced an additional truce. In a sign of its frustration, Qatar earlier this month said it was reassessing its role as mediator.

In the interviews, Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari expressed disappointment in both Hamas and Israel, saying each side has made its decisions based on political interests and not with the good of civilians in mind.

"We were hoping to see more commitment and more seriousness on both sides," he told Haaretz. He did not reveal details of the current state of the talks, other than to say they have "effectively stopped" with "both sides entrenched in their positions."

"If there is a renewed sense of commitment on both sides, I'm sure we can reach a deal," he said. The Israeli journalists conducted the interviews in

French diplomat mediates Hezbollah-Israel ceasefire

AP ■ BEIRUT

French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné arrived in Lebanon Sunday as part of diplomatic attempts to broker a deescalation in the conflict on the Lebanon-Israel border. Séjourné was set to meet with United Nations peacekeeping forces in south Lebanon and with Lebanon's parliament speaker, army chief, foreign minister and caretaker prime minister.

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah has exchanged strikes near-daily with Israeli forces in the border region — and sometimes beyond — for almost seven months against the backdrop of Israel's war against Hezbollah ally Hamas in Gaza. Israeli strikes have killed more than 350 people in Lebanon, most of them fighters with Hezbollah and allied groups but also including more than 50 civilians.

Strikes by Hezbollah have killed 10 civilians and 12 soldiers in Israel. A French diplomatic official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to journalists

Qatar, which has no formal diplomatic ties with Israel. Relations between Qatar and Israel have been strained throughout the war, as some politicians in Israel, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have criticised Qatar for not putting enough pressure on Hamas.

Israeli legislators have also cleared the way for the country to expel Al Jazeera, the Qatar-owned broadcaster. Al-Ansari's remarks came after an Egyptian delegation had discussed with Israeli officials a "new vision" for a prolonged cease-fire in Gaza, according to an Egyptian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to freely discuss the developments. But the progress seemed minimal. The Egyptian official

said the purpose of Séjourné's visit was to convey France's "fears of a war on Lebanon" and to submit an amendment to a proposal Paris had previously presented to Lebanon for a diplomatic resolution to the border conflict.

Western diplomats have brought forward a series of proposals for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah.

Most of those would hinge on Hezbollah moving its forces several kilometres from the border, a beefed-up Lebanese army presence and negotiations for Israeli forces to withdraw from disputed points along the border where Lebanon says Israel has been occupying small patches of Lebanese territory since it withdrew from the rest of south Lebanon in 2000.

The previous French proposal would have involved Hezbollah withdrawing its forces 10 kilometres from the border.

Hezbollah has signalled willingness to entertain the proposals but has said there will be no deal in Lebanon before there is a cease-fire in Gaza.

said Israeli officials are open to discussing establishing a permanent cease-fire in Gaza as part of the second phase of a deal.

"They showed willingness to do so but not commitment," the official said. Israel has refused to end the war until it defeats Hamas.

The second phase would start after the release of civilian and sick hostages, and would include negotiating the release of soldiers, he added. Senior Palestinian prisoners would be released and a reconstruction process launched. Senior Hamas official Basem Naim said in a message to The Associated Press that a delegation from the group will head to Cairo to discuss the latest proposals. He did not elaborate, but

Egypt's state-owned al-Qahera TV said the delegation would arrive on Monday. Negotiations earlier this month centred on a six-week cease-fire proposal and the release of 40 civilian and sick hostages held by Hamas in exchange for freeing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

There is growing international pressure for Hamas and Israel to reach a cease-fire deal and avert an Israeli attack on Rafah.

A letter penned by US President Joe Biden along with 17 other world leaders urged Hamas to release the hostages immediately.

Hamas in recent days has released new videos of three hostages it holds, which appear to be meant to push Israel to make concessions. Israel meanwhile has massed dozens of tanks and armoured vehicles ahead of an expected offensive in Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population is seeking shelter.

The planned incursion has raised global alarm because of concerns over potential harm to civilians.

The troop buildup may also be a pressure tactic on Hamas in the truce talks. Israel sees Rafah as Hamas' last major stronghold and has vowed to attack the militant group there in its bid to destroy its military and governing capabilities.

The war was sparked by Hamas' attack on October 7 into southern Israel, which killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, according to Israeli authorities, who say another 250 people were taken hostage. Hamas and other groups are holding about 130 people, including the remains of about 30, Israeli authorities say. Israel's retaliatory assault on Hamas has killed more than 34,000 people, most of them women and children, according to health authorities in Gaza, who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants in their tally.

The Israeli military says it has killed at least 12,000 militants, without providing evidence to back the claim.

Sunak declines to rule out July election amid MP defection

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Sunday refused to categorically rule out a July general election amid a damaging defection by one of his Conservative Party MPs to the Opposition Labour Party, just days before local and mayoral elections in the country on May 2. Dan Poulter, a doctor and Central Suffolk and North Ipswich member of Parliament said he will switch his allegiance to the Opposition benches before standing down as a parliamentarian at the next election because he can no longer defend the Tory government's track record on the National Health Service (NHS). Against the backdrop of this latest embarrassment, Sunak was asked during a 'Sky News' interview that his repeated assertion of a general election in the "second half of this



year" could also mean July.

"When it comes to a general election, I've been very clear about that multiple times, and again, I'm not going to say anything more than I've already said," said Sunak, who was then pressed five times to rule out an election during what would be a peak summer

month for the UK. "You're going to try and draw whatever conclusion you want from what I say. I'm going to always try and say the same thing. You should just listen to what I said, [the] same thing I've said all year," he replied.

On the state-funded NHS, Sunak pointed to a drop in the waiting times for patients seeking treatment and pointed to some of his other successes as Prime Minister, such as bringing down inflation, hiking the defence budget and getting the Safety of Rwanda Bill passed through Parliament to start deporting illegal migrants to the east African country from later this year.

"And when the election comes, there'll be a clear choice because the Labour Party has tried to frustrate our Rwanda bill because they don't believe in stopping the boats; their eco-

nomics plan will put people's taxes up. They haven't said that they will invest more in our defence, and they certainly don't agree with reforming our welfare system to support people into work," said Sunak. He, however, admitted that "local elections are always difficult for incumbent parties" as the voting patterns on Thursdays are widely seen as a precursor to what can be expected from a general election — which legally must take place by January 2025 at the latest. Meanwhile, some UK media reports suggest that keeping the threat of a summer election on the table — earlier than the expected October/November timeline — is being used as a tactic by Downing Street to deter any internal party rebellion against Sunak's leadership in the wake of potentially disastrous local poll results later this week.

Funeral held for 20 soldiers killed in arms depot blast

AP ■ CAMBODIA

A funeral was held Sunday for 20 soldiers who died at an army base in southwestern Cambodia in a huge explosion of stored munitions that also wounded several others and damaged nearby houses. There has been no public explanation of what caused the Saturday afternoon blast at the base in Kompong Speu province, though there were no suggestions it was triggered deliberately. Defence Minister Tea Seiba, representing Prime Minister Hun Manet, presided over the Buddhist funeral ceremony, which was attended by relatives of the victims and fellow soldiers. Cambodian flags covered the wooden coffins. A villager living nearby told The Associated Press on Sunday that he trembled after hearing the blast because he had never before experienced such a loud explosion. "When the explosion happened, I was fixing my house with some construction workers," said Chim Sothea.

"Suddenly there was a loud explosion, causing my house to shake and breaking tiles on my roof. They fell down but luckily they didn't fall inside the house." Images showed several badly damaged buildings on the base, at least one with its roof blown off, and soldiers receiving treatment in a hospital. Other photos showed nearby houses with holes in their roofs. Four buildings on the base — three for storage and one work facility — were destroyed and several military vehicles damaged, Col Youeng Sokhon, an army officer at the site, said in a report to army chief Gen Mao Sophan. Another villager, who asked to be named only as Sopha, said the military closed the road to the base and "villagers were in a panic, seeking a safe place." He moved his family to his parent's home, farther away from the base. When he returned to his own house hours later, he found it undamaged but other villagers' houses had broken windows, doors and roofs, he

said. Cambodia, like many countries in the region, has been suffering from an extended heat wave, and the province where the blast took place registered a high of 39 C (102 F) on Saturday. While high temperatures normally can't detonate ammunition, they can degrade the stability of explosives over a period of time, with the risk that a single small explosion can set off a fire and a chain reaction. In March 2005, a nighttime blast at an arms depot in the north-western provincial town of Battambang triggered an hours-long spray of shells and bullets, killing at least six people and causing panic. A 2014 report by the Swiss-based group Small Arms Survey highlighted the dangers of poorly stored or mis-handled munitions, calling it a "global problem." It noted that from 1979 through 2013 there were more than 500 incidents involving unplanned explosions at munitions sites.

Elon Musk makes surprise visit to Beijing; meets Premier Li Qiang

Beijing (PTI) On a surprise visit to Beijing amid speculation that he may unveil Tesla's autonomous driving technology in the burgeoning electric vehicle (EV) market in China, billionaire Elon Musk on Sunday met Chinese Premier Li Qiang and discussed future expansion plans for his automobile.

Premier Li met with Musk, CEO of the US electric carmaker Tesla, in Beijing on Sunday, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The SpaceX and Tesla chief travelled to China at the invitation of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, meeting with CCPIT president Ren Hongbin to discuss further cooperation with the country, official broadcaster CTGN reported.

Musk is expected to meet senior Chinese officials at the State Council and "old friends" in Beijing, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

His Tesla has become a popular EV in China after he set up a USD seven billion factory in Shanghai which went into production in 2020.

Musk, who recently skipped a scheduled visit to India to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to firm up plans to open a Tesla factory in the country, is visiting Beijing when his Tesla market in China is threatened by the local EVs increasing sales.

The Austin-based (Texas) Tesla has faced fierce competition from Chinese EV makers in the past few years. It has cut the prices of its Shanghai-made vehicles by up to six per cent to maintain its leading position in China's premium EV segment.

Grace Tao, Tesla's vice-president of external relations in China, wrote a commentary piece in China's official newspaper People's Daily on Friday, saying autonomous driving is a key growth driver for the country's new energy vehicle sector, arguing that the technology will hatch new business models such as robotaxis, a vision that Musk has embraced, the Post reported.

Musk's latest visit to China coincides with the 2024 Beijing Auto Show, which kicked off on Thursday.

Biden pokes fun at Trump's age, critiques ahead of election

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden roasted his predecessor and political rival, Donald Trump and poked fun at his age at the annual dinner for Washington's political and media elites, saying "I am a grown man running against a six-year-old".

The White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA) dinner on Saturday night provided the platform for Biden, 81, to continue his criticism of Trump, 77, with cutting humour. The high-profile event came against the backdrop of growing protests over Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war.

Of course, the 2024 election's in full swing and, yes, age is an issue: I'm a grown man running against a 6-year-old," Biden said in a roughly 10-minute speech, referring to former President Trump, whom he called "Sleepy Don." Speaking to an audience of nearly 3,000 journalists, celebrities and politicians, Biden added, "Age is the only thing we have in common. My vice president actually endorses me."

"Donald has had a few tough days lately. You might call it 'stormy' weather," Biden said, an oblique reference to Stormy Daniels, a porn actress who claims she had an affair and received a hush-money payment in the days before the 2016 election, a deal at the centre of his New York trial.

The president went on to draw a contrast between his reelection campaign, which has ramped up since his State of the Union address last month, and that of Trump. Biden and Trump have both secured the delegates they need to win their respective party nominations in the November 5 presidential race, setting a rematch of their 2020 election showdown. After a slew of jokes targeting

Trump, Biden then took a more sombre tone to talk about his 2024 rival to the room of journalists, lawmakers and celebrities.

"The defeated former president has made no secret of his attack on our democracy. He said he wants to be a dictator on day one, and so much more. He tells supporters he is their revenge and retribution. When in God's name [have] you ever heard another president say something like that?" Biden asked, referring to Trump's recent remarks.

"We have to take this seriously. Eight years ago, you could've written off [that] it was just Trump talk, but no longer. Not after January 6," Biden said, calling on the audience to "move past the horse race numbers" and "focus on what's actually at stake."

Comedian Colin Jost followed Biden's remarks at the dinner on Saturday with a roast of the incumbent and other political figures in the room, offering comic relief against a backdrop of congressional tensions and conflict abroad. Demonstrators protested media coverage of the Israel-Hamas war and the administration's handling of the conflict near the Washington Hilton event space — and Biden notably didn't make direct reference to the protests or the conflict during his speech.

As journalists and celebrities entered the Washington Hilton, protesters accused them of cosigning the president's handling of the Israel-Hamas war, shouting, "Shame on you!" while urging them to speak out against the killing of journalists in Gaza. Since Hamas' October 7 attacks, at least 97 journalists — 92 of them Palestinian — have been killed in the region, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, a non-profit that has been tracking the death toll.

Chants of 'shame on you' at White House dinner

AP ■ WASHINGTON

An election-year roast of President Joe Biden before journalists, celebrities and politicians at the annual White House Correspondents' dinner Saturday butted up against growing public discord over the Israel-Hamas war, with large protests outside the event condemning both Biden's handling of the conflict and the Western news' media coverage of it.

In previous years, Biden, like most of his predecessors, has used the glitzy annual White House Correspondents' Association gala to needle media coverage of his administration and jab at political rivals, notably Republican rival Donald Trump.

With hundreds of protesters rallying against the war in Gaza outside the event and concerns over the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the perils for journalists covering the conflict, the war hung over this year's event.

"Shame on you!" protesters draped in the traditional



Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his wife, Evan Ryan, pose for photographers as they arrive at the annual White House Correspondents' Association Dinner in Washington on Saturday.

Palestinian keffiyeh cloth shouted, running after men in tuxedos and suits and women

in long dresses who were holding clutch purses, as guests and other participants hurried

inside. Chants accused US journalists of uncovering the war and misrepresenting it. "Western media we see you, and all the horrors that you hide," crowds chanted at one point.

Other protesters lay sprawled motionless on the pavement, next to mock-ups of flak vests with "press" insignia. Ralliers cried "Free, free Palestine." They cheered when at one point someone inside the Washington Hilton — where the dinner has been held for decades — unfurled a Palestinian flag from a top-floor hotel window.

Criticism of the Biden administration's support for Israel's 6-month-old military offensive in Gaza has spread through American college campuses, with students pitching encampments in an effort to force their universities to divest from Israel. Counterprotests back Israel's offensive and complain of anti-Semitism.

Biden's speech before an expected crowd of nearly 3,000

people was being followed by entertainer Colin Jost from "Saturday Night Live."

There will also likely be a spotlight on the many journalists detained and otherwise persecuted around the globe for doing their jobs, including Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who has been imprisoned in Russia since March 2023.

Law enforcement, including the Secret Service, have instituted extra street closures and other measures to ensure what Secret Service spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said would be the "highest levels of safety and security for attendees."

The agency was working with Washington police to protect demonstrators' right to assemble, Guglielmi said. However, "we will remain intolerant to any violent or destructive behavior."

Protest organizers said they wanted to bring attention to the high numbers of Palestinian and other Arab journalists killed by Israel's military since the war began in October.

Houthi rebels claim downing US drone, release footage of wreckage

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Yemen's Houthi rebels on Saturday claimed shooting down another of the US military's MQ-9 Reaper drones, airing footage of parts that corresponded to known pieces of the unmanned aircraft. The Houthis said they shot down the Reaper with a surface-to-air missile, part of a renewed series of assaults this week by the rebels after a relative lull in their pressure campaign over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. US Air Force Lt. Col. Bryon J. McGarry, a Defence Department spokesperson, acknowledged to The Associated Press on Saturday that "a US Air Force MQ-9 drone crashed in Yemen." He said an investiga-

tion was underway, without elaborating. The Houthis described the downing as happening Thursday over their stronghold in the country's Saada province.

Footage released by the Houthis included what they described as the missile launch targeting the drone, with a man off-camera reciting the Houthis slogan after it was hit: "God is the greatest; death to America; death to Israel; curse the Jews; victory to Islam." The footage included several close-ups on parts of the drone that included the logo of General Atomics, which manufactures the drone, and serial numbers corresponding with known parts made by the company. Since the Houthis

seized the country's north and its capital of Sanaa in 2014, the US military has lost at least five drones to the rebels counting Thursday's shootdown — in 2017, 2019, 2023 and this year. Reapers, which cost around USD 30 million apiece, can fly at altitudes up to 50,000 feet and have an endurance of up to 24 hours before needing to land.

The drone shootdown comes as the Houthis launch attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, demanding Israel ends the war in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage.

Pope Francis visits Venice

AP ■ VENICE

Venice has always been a place of contrasts, of breathtaking beauty and devastating fragility, where history, religion, art and nature have collided over the centuries to produce an otherworldly gem of a city. But even for a place that prides itself on its culture of unusual encounters, Pope Francis' visit Sunday stood out.

Francis travelled to the lagoon city to visit the Holy See's pavilion at the Biennale contemporary art show and meet with the people who created it. But because the Vatican decided to mount its exhibit in Venice's women's prison, and invited inmates to collaborate with the artists, the whole project took on a far more complex meaning, touching on Francis' belief in the power of art to uplift and unify, and of the need to give hope and solidarity to society's

most marginalised. Francis hit on both messages during his visit, which began in the courtyard of the Giudecca prison where he met with the women inmates one by one. As some of them wept, Francis urged them to use their time in prison as a chance for "moral and material rebirth." "Paradoxically, a stay in prison can mark the beginning of something new, through the rediscovery of the unsuspected beauty in us and in others, as symbolised by the artistic event you are hosting and the project to which you actively contribute," Francis said. Francis then met with Biennale artists in the prison chapel, decorated with an installation by Brazilian visual artist Sonia Gomes of objects dangling from the ceiling, meant to draw the viewer's gaze upward. He urged the artists to embrace the Biennale's theme this year

"Strangers Everywhere," to show solidarity with all those on the margins. "Art has the status of a city of refuge, a city that disobeys the regime of violence and discrimination in order to create forms of human belonging capable of recognising, including, protecting and embracing everyone," Francis said. The Vatican exhibit has turned the Giudecca prison, a former convent for reformed prostitutes, into one of the must-see attractions of this year's Biennale, even though to see it visitors must reserve in advance and go through a security check. It has become an unusual art world darling that greets visitors at the entrance with Maurizio Cattelan's wall mural of two giant filthy feet, a work that recalls Caravaggio's dirty feet or the feet that Francis washes each year in a Holy Thursday ritual that he routinely performs on prisoners.



TYPES OF MICROTIA



MICROTIA CHALLENGES

Microtia, a congenital condition involving underdeveloped or absent outer ears, poses significant challenges for kids and families. ARCHANA JYOTI explores the medical, psychological, and societal aspects of the disorder

Microtia affects one out of every 3,000 newborns. It happens when the ear or ears do not fully develop during the first trimester of pregnancy; as a result, the kid is born without any ear or with ears that are small or underdeveloped. Although microtia is identified at birth, the condition's cause is not fully understood. It can cause facial difficulties, and hearing impairments in newborns.

unfairly labeled as "imbecile" or "stupid." Consequently, there's a significant demand for corrective surgeries in Western countries to address these deformities and mitigate associated social stigma. In India, microtia, characterized by varying degrees of underdevelopment or absence of the external ear, presents another significant challenge. Unilateral involvement is common, and the severity ranges from minor defects to total absence (anotia). The intricate anatomy of the ear, with its complex cartilage structure and close adherence to the skin, complicates reconstruction efforts.

Ear reconstruction for microtia typically involves a staged approach. The first stage involves creating a 3D cartilaginous framework, often sourced from autogenous rib cartilage (typically from the 6th to 9th ribs). The optimal age for this procedure is usually between 7 to 10 years when rib cartilage is soft and more moldable. Alternatively, some surgeons opt for ready-made frameworks composed of inert materials like Medpore or silicone. Careful dissection is essential during rib cartilage harvesting due to the proximity of vital thoracic structures.

In the second stage of reconstruction, typically performed around six months after the initial procedure, the framework is lifted from the back and skin grafted. Subsequent stages may involve further refinement and correction, such as lobular correction. Various techniques, such as the Brent, Nagata, and Fermin techniques, have been developed to address the complexities of ear reconstruction. These

techniques offer surgeons options for achieving optimal outcomes based on individual patient needs and anatomical considerations. Overall, ear reconstruction for congenital deformities requires a nuanced understanding of anatomy, meticulous surgical technique, and a tailored approach to each patient's unique circumstances.



DR MAHESH MANGAL
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Microtia is a birth deformity. The ear develops by six developing points and whenever there is some problem in development of these points it results in ear defects. Ear anomalies have a wide spectrum ranging from complete absence of external ear to minor deformities. It is not very uncommon in India. Hearing takes place by two mechanisms, one is through the bone around the ear and another is through the internal ear. Whenever the internal ear is affected or it is not developed, then the person hears through bone conduction. In cases of bilateral microtia, the development of the internal ear is affected which results in loss of hearing and development of the patient. But not so in cases of unilateral microtia. Microtia is also synchronous in some patients and they have other facial deformities as well.

Parents of Microtia Kid Navigate Journey with Love

As the parents of a girl with microtia, our journey has been filled with conflicting emotions and difficult decisions. On one hand, we want nothing more than to ensure the best possible outcome for my child—to give her every opportunity to thrive, to overcome any obstacles she may face, and to live a happy, fulfilling life. But on the other hand, we're faced with the harsh reality of our child's condition—the likely surgeries, the therapies, the financial burdens, and the emotional toll it will take on our family. We're forced to grapple with questions of risk and uncertainty, wondering if the benefits of treatment outweigh the potential drawbacks and if we're making the right choices for our child's future.

As my daughter grew older, she's ten years old now, and became more aware of her differences, she began to ask questions of her own. Why do I look different? Why do people stare at me? Will I ever be like everyone else? And as much as we tried to reassure her and provide answers, we couldn't help but wonder if we were doing enough to help her feel accepted and loved just the way she is. But amidst all the questions, one thing will remain constant: No matter how difficult the road ahead may be, we'll stand by her side every step of the way, offering support, encouragement, and unconditional acceptance, no matter what.

(Agony of a parent of a child with Microtia disorder)

Reconstruction in microtia is a multi-stage procedure. It takes three to four stages, a duration of one to one and a half years to complete all these stages. Usually, the procedure is started at the age of nine to ten years and by that age adult size of the ear is achieved. In cases of unilateral microtia, we take the image of a normal ear and accordingly, the size and shape of the ear are reconstructed. Patients who do not prefer multistage procedures are given the option of osteo-integrated artificial ear implants for reconstruction. In a private hospital setup, a patient has to pay for treatment procedures. But in a government hospital, it is free of cost.

Microtia is not preventable it is a congenital anomaly and happens in the first three months of pregnancy. It is very difficult to diagnose by ultrasound during pregnancy as the ear is such a small structure. Ear deformities from birth broadly include those affecting the outer ear/pinna and Ear canal-like altered shape or absence of pinna-Anotia/microtia/macrotia/Bat ear/Cup ear/Cryptotia/Coloboma/Stahl's ear/Satyr ear/Darwin's Tubercle/Preauricular skin tags and sinus or atresia or stenosis of the ear canal. It can involve the middle part of the ear or inner ear- which is not visible but causes hearing loss.



DR SONAM RATHI
Consultant, ENT
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Microtia can affect hearing- if the canal is narrow or completely blocked- conductive hearing loss. Also, sensorineural hearing loss is associated with malformation/deformity of the inner or middle ear. It can also be due to factors during pregnancy in the mother like consuming alcohol or some medication for acne such as Isotretinoin or due to malfunction of thyroid hormone.

Some Genetic abnormalities & syndromes such as Treacher Collins, Trisomy 13,18,21, Klippel Feil syndrome, TORCH infection, Rh incompatibility, radiation, and even Gestational Diabetes are also responsible. Yes, most of these are correct. Requiring multistage reconstruction using rib cartilage or artificial prosthetic materials, formation of the ear canal, or simply an artificial pinna prosthesis if the patient wants just a cosmetic correction. A Graduated Approach is needed including Pinnoplasty - Otoplasty, Incisionless otoplasty, Nonsurgicand al Otoplasty, along with correction of hearing loss if any. Cost ranges from a few thousand for a prosthesis to 3-4 lakhs for multistage pinna reconstruction.

JOURNEY WITHIN
Conquering Procrastination

Spiritual and Meditation Guru, **DR ARCHIKA SUDHANSHU**, suggests ways to how to overcome procrastination. **Understanding the Problem:** Procrastination can be caused by fear of failure, perfectionism, lack of motivation, or poor time management skills. Finding what triggers your procrastination is important. Awareness is the first step towards change.



DR ARCHIKA SUDHANSHU
Spiritual and Meditation Guru

Divide work into smaller and manageable tasks: Large and challenging tasks often become the focal point of procrastination. It is important to break them down into smaller, more manageable tasks. The initial hurdle is often the hardest to overcome, but once you get into the flow, you might be surprised at how much you can accomplish. Convince yourself to work on the task for just 25 minutes before taking a break, so it doesn't feel like an endless uphill struggle. Additionally, set up small rewards for completing tasks or reaching milestones. This positive reinforcement helps your brain associate productivity with satisfaction.

Work on SMART Goal: SMART means Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. It offers individuals a structured approach to defining objectives. By following these principles, individuals create a clear roadmap that outlines exactly what needs to be accomplished, how progress will be tracked, and when goals will be achieved.

Avoid distractions: Minimize distractions by silencing your phone, working in a quiet area, and using website blockers. A cluttered environment can drain mental energy, so keep your workplace clean to promote a calm and focused environment.

Plan your day: Allocate specific time slots in your calendar for work focused on individual tasks rather than relying solely on willpower to manage your schedule.

Practice Self-Compassion: We all experience procrastination sometimes. Be gentle with yourself, accept it, create a plan to progress, and

regain momentum. Reflect on past accomplishments tackling difficult tasks. Often, in moments of uncertainty, we overlook our history of overcoming challenges.

Daily positive affirmations: Daily positive affirmations such as "progress, not perfection" and "one day, one step at a time" can aid in conquering procrastination. The fear of imperfection often hinders action, leading to procrastination. Embrace mistakes as opportunities for growth without fear of failure. Always think positive: Shift focus from potential threats to exciting possibilities. Have confidence in your ability to overcome challenges. Use meditation techniques to recognize and address negative emotions that may trigger procrastination.

Cultivate a growth mindset: Nurture a growth mindset, embracing the belief that skills and abilities can evolve through dedication and practice. By perceiving tasks as chances for personal development rather than mere obstacles, we are more inclined to face them directly. Surround yourself with productive and positive people.

Stay consistent and don't compare your progress to others: Visualize your daily progress to stay motivated. Consistent, effective planning enhances motivation. Focus on your own journey and celebrate your victory. Trust in your self-worth and maintain positive self-talk.

Exercise Regularly: Engage in physical activities like short walks, light workouts, or yoga to boost focus, energy, and overall health. Although procrastination may seem terrifying, it can be overcome by fostering a growth mindset.

FROM THE DOCTOR'S DIARY

The perils of Sugar

- Refined sugar on your skin is called aging
- Refined sugar in your teeth is called cavities
- Refined sugar in your eyes is called glaucoma
- Refined sugar in your sleep is called insomnia
- Refined sugar in your blood is called diabetes
- Refined sugar in a baby's brain is called ADHD
- Excess refined sugar in your system is called cancer
- Refined sugar in an adults brain is called dementia and Alzheimer



Mindful eating is healthy eating

SHARMILA CHAND explores mindful eating with a dish prepared by **CHEF MANISH MEHROTRA**,

Culinary Director - Indian Accent, emphasizing its focus on nurturing a healthier relationship with food. It's not about dieting but rather savoring each bite, embracing nutrients, happiness, and fulfillment in every meal, she says

Holistic Wellness is a very broad term that denotes mental, physical, and emotional well-being, including every single molecule of our body. 'Mindful Eating' is one significant aspect of Holistic Wellbeing. You embark on a healthy culinary journey through the awareness of the right ingredients, the kind of herbs and spices used, and of course, the style of cooking. Hence, it's not about dieting or depriving yourself; it's about building a healthier relationship with food and enjoying every bite. Take it slow and let your meals be a source of nutrients, happiness, and fulfillment.

KOLHAPURI CHICKEN SALAD, AVOCADO KOSHIMBIR

INGREDIENTS

For Chicken

- Chicken breast 100 gms
- Salt to taste
- Kolhapuri masala 1 tsp
- Olive oil 2 tsp
- Ginger, finely chopped ½ tsp
- Garlic, finely chopped ½ tsp
- Green chilies, finely chopped ½ tsp
- Fresh cream 1 tbsp
- Masala gravy (see p. 176) 1 tsp
- For Avocado Koshimbir
- Onion, diced 2 tsp
- Tomatoes, deseeded and diced 2 tsp
- Seedless cucumber, diced 2 tsp
- Avocado, diced 1 tbsp
- Coriander leaves, chopped ½ tsp
- Lime juice ½ tsp
- Chaat masala ½ tsp
- Tamarind chutney 1 tsp
- Green chutney 1 tsp
- Crushed roasted peanuts 2 tsp

TO SERVE

- Sunflower seeds, roasted as garnish
- Coriander leaves as garnish
- Edible flowers as garnish

METHOD

Prepare Chicken

- ◆ Cut chicken breast into thin, long slices. Marinate with salt, half the quantity of Kolhapuri masala, and olive oil for at least an hour.
- ◆ Heat a non-stick pan, without oil. When it is hot, place the marinated chicken on the pan and cook. Do not overcook; the chicken should still be juicy in the center when done. Keep aside to cool.
- ◆ When the chicken has cooled, shred it into juliennes.
- ◆ Heat oil in a pan. Sauté chopped ginger, garlic, and green chilies. Add masala

gravy and the remaining Kolhapuri masala. Sauté well. Add fresh cream. Cook the masalas in the cream till the mixture is semi-dry. Add shredded chicken and toss well till coated.

- ◆ Prepare Avocado Koshimbir:
- ◆ In a mixing bowl, add diced onions, tomatoes, cucumber, avocado, and coriander. Mix well. Sprinkle lime juice, chaat masala, tamarind chutney, and green chutney. Toss well. Finish with crushed peanuts.

SERVE

Mold avocado koshimbir on the center of a plate. Arrange shredded chicken salad on top. Garnish with roasted sunflower seeds (optional), coriander leaves and edible flowers. The sunflower seeds add extra crunch to the salad.

(Sharmila Chand is an Author and Freelance Journalist. She writes on Food, Travel, Art, Holistic Wellness, and Lifestyle)



ORAL HEALTH

Diet, Mint, Ginger Impact

Oral health isn't just about brushing and flossing your teeth. Your dietary choices are also extremely important. The starchy or sugary foods we love are also loved by the bacteria in your mouth that can cause gum disease. Keeping your teeth healthy long-term is still difficult. This means maintaining a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, protein-rich foods, calcium-rich foods, and whole grains for a healthy smile as well as a healthy body. Always aim for a balanced diet. It is the most important key to staying healthy and young. Incorporating natural foods should be your goal so that you can reduce your consumption of processed foods. Taking care of your oral health also has a big impact on your overall health. So one important thing you need to keep in mind is that whatever you eat comes out of your mouth. Hence, bacteria can also travel from your mouth to other parts of your body and this puts you at risk of many diseases.

Mint can significantly benefit your oral health due to its antiseptic properties. This is why it is such a popular

Dental health isn't just about brushing and flossing—it's heavily influenced by what you eat, RAJDEEP JOSHI says as he explains how natural foods like mint and ginger play a role in combating bacteria and strengthening teeth



MINT & GINGER HEALTHY DRINK

INGREDIENTS

- 8/10 mint leaves
- 2 tsp fresh ginger juice
- 1/2 tsp coriander
- 1/4 tsp Chaat Masala
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- 1/2 tsp fennel powder
- 2 1/2 tsp jaggery

(Jaggery is a natural sweetener and has many health benefits, replacing your regular sugar with jaggery can be very beneficial. is.)

- 3 cup water
- Salt to taste

How to make the recipe

In a mixing bowl add mint leaves, fennel powder, chaat masala, jaggery, ginger paste, lemon juice, salt, and a little water. Grind in a food processor or mixer grinder to a paste. Take the paste in a mixing bowl, add 3 cups of water, and mix well. Refrigerate the water for 2 hours (it is optional) and serve the healthy drink.

(The author is a Nutrition Coach)



Gaikwad's 98 guides CSK to victory

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's 98 was complemented by a clinical bowling display, led by pacer Tushar Deshpande, as Chennai Super Kings defeated Sunrisers Hyderabad by 78 runs in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

Invited to bat, Gaikwad's valiant 54-ball knock was the driving force which propelled CSK to an imposing 212 for three. He was ably supported by Daryl Mitchell, who returned to form with a crucial 32-ball 52 before Shivam Dube's 20-ball 39 not out took CSK past the 200 mark.

In response, SRH's ultra-cautious batting approach backfired again as they couldn't recover from Deshpande's (4/27 in 3 overs) three-wicket burst with the new ball and the middle-overs squeeze to be all out for 134 in 18.5 overs as CSK snapped their two-game losing streak.

Following the win, CSK moved to the third spot with 10 points, same as Kolkata Knight Riders,



Lucknow Super Giants and Delhi Capitals. SRH, who are also on 10 points, slipped to fourth after their fourth loss. Chasing 213 to win, Travis Head (13) and Abhishek Sharma (15) made rapid starts but Deshpande got rid of the former with a slower wide ball and then returned to remove impact sub Anmolpreet Singh with an outswinger on the stumps as the batter went for a golden duck. Abhishek was next caught at deep point as Deshpande broke

their back, leaving SRH at 40 for 3 in the fourth over. Nitish Reddy (15) and Aiden Markram (32) tried to steady the ship but Ravindra Jadeja bamboozled the former with a bouncer, while Matheesha Pathirana produced a superb yorker to uproot the middle stump of the South African. At 85-5 in 10.5 overs, Heinrich Klaasen and Abdul Samad joined hands but runs were tough to come by as the bowlers executed their plans to perfectly. With an improbable 104 needed off 30 balls, Klaasen, Samad, Pat Cummins and Shahbaz Ahmed all holed out as Mitchell claimed five catches in the outfield during the match. Earlier, Gaikwad missed out on a successive hundred by a whisker but his 107-run stand with Mitchell was the cornerstone of CSK's innings. It is CSK's 35th 200-plus total, the most by any side in T20 cricket. Gaikwad was the star of the CSK batting as he hit 10 fours and three sixes in his innings. Opening the innings, Ajinkya Rahane (9) perished early again

with Bhuvneshwar Kumar earning his prized wicket in the third over but Gaikwad kept CSK going. The skipper did not take advantage of it as Mitchell closed out the game much sooner than expected. The Englishman plundered as many as 10 sixes in his breathtaking effort. Put in to bat, Shikhar Dhawan (58 off 30) had made full use of his promotion in the batting order while Sai Sudharsan (84 not out off 49) stayed till the end to guide Gujarat Titans to 200 for three. Titans introduced spin very early

KOHLI, JACKS STAR FOR RCB

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Will Jacks slammed a sensational hundred while Virat Kohli upped his game in the middle overs as Royal Challengers Bengaluru outplayed Gujarat Titans by nine wickets in the IPL here on Sunday.

Kohli (70 not out of 44), whose approach in the middle overs was questioned in the previous game, employed the sweep shot against the spinners to make a statement before Jacks (100 not out off 41) cut loose to gun down the 201-run target with as many 24 balls to spare.

Jacks went berserk in what turned out to be the final over of the game, hammering as many as four sixes and four off Rashid Khan to close out the game much sooner than expected. The Englishman plundered as many as 10 sixes in his breathtaking effort. Put in to bat, Shikhar Dhawan (58 off 30) had made full use of his promotion in the batting order while Sai Sudharsan (84 not out off 49) stayed till the end to guide Gujarat Titans to 200 for three. Titans introduced spin very early



and Kohli was up to the task, collecting back to back sixes off left-arm spinner Ravi Sai Kishore to make his intent crystal clear. He was particularly harsh towards another Afghan spinner Noor Ahmed, sweeping him at will before bring up his fifty off 32 balls. Thereafter, Kohli did not need to do much as Jacks put the Titans bowlers to sword. RCB, who are enduring another tough season, picked up their third win in 10 games while Titans suffered their sixth loss in 10 matches. The Fa du Plessis-

led team seemed to have finally found some momentum, having picked a back to back win on Sunday. Earlier, batting at number four, Shikhar Dhawan teamed up with Sudharsan to give Gujarat Titans a much needed push after a tepid start. The duo shared an 86-run stand off 45 balls. RCB came out to bat in the scorching Ahmedabad heat with Glenn Maxwell returning to their playing eleven from a "mental and physical health" break. Wriddhiman Saha (5 off 4) was dismissed early as the first over

bowled by left-arm spinner Swapnil Singh. The former India wicketkeeper tried to make room for an aerial hit over extra cover but ended up mistiming to Karn Sharma at third man. Skipper Shubman Gill (16) was undone by the on-field brilliance from Cameron Green who ran towards his left to take a stunning catch at long-on off Maxwell. With Sudharsan at the other end, Titans decided to do something different and sent Shikhar ahead of the likes of Azmatullah Omarzai and David Miller. The move worked as Shikhar milked the spinners mainly in the cow corner region, hammering five sixes and three fours. He completed the half-century with a maximum over long-on off Green before Mohammed Siraj cleaned him up with a sharp yorker. Miller (26 not out off 19) joined Sudharsan in the middle and two shared an unbeaten 69 run stand off 36 balls to push the team to a par score. Sudharsan's second straight fifty plus score comprised eight fours and four sixes.

India should pick two wrist spinners for T20 WC: Irfan

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former all-rounder Irfan Pathan said India must pick five specialist bowlers along with two wrist-spinners in their squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup to be played in the Caribbean and the USA.

With the May 1 deadline for the squad announcement approaching fast, discussions have intensified around the combination of India's squad for the showpiece event starting on June 2.

"You need five good bowlers - that's a must. What are your wicket-taking options? When you're talking about Ravindra Jadeja at No. 8 and playing as a spin (all-rounder), I would rather have two wrist-spinners playing," Pathan told Star Sports.

"I would rather have two proper wrist-spinners playing, (Ravi) Bishnoi and Kuldeep (Yadav), in my playing XI. If you look at Bishnoi's numbers, you know, when he played, he was pretty good." Pathan, however, is not in favour of calling up Rajasthan Royals' Yuzvendra Chahal for the World Cup.



"Yes, we're talking about Chahal right now because of the IPL performances but don't forget the fielding part of it as well. If you have to balance the fielding, you have to balance where a bowler can bowl at the particular area," he said. Pathan conceded that Jasprit Bumrah is the only automatic selection among the bowlers. "There's only one player who you can blindly say (certain for selection) is Bumrah. But apart from Bumrah, you need at least two fast bowlers who can be part of the regular XI," the former India cricketer said. "The biggest problem the Indian team has is the

combination of fast bowling. It's very important to fix that combination, so go towards experience. "With Bumrah, you can see (Mohammed) Siraj and Arshdeep (Singh) there, which I don't think is ideal, but this is the only option you have now," he said. Former India batter K Srikanth added. However, former Australia all-rounder Tom Moody backed Siraj. "He looks mentally and physically fatigued. He has come into this IPL having played a lot of all format cricket for India for a long period of time," he said. "He plays his cricket in the IPL at probably the hardest venue (Bengaluru) whether you bowl quick or you bowl spin - that needs to be taken into consideration. The third thing is he's playing in a poor side. RCB have been a poor side this year and it's very hard to rise with what's happening around you." "I would back him 100 per cent to step up in the World Cup, purely because if you look at historically what he's done for India and even what he did in the IPL last year," Moody added.

Samson, Rahul put their hands up for WC selection: Smith

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The classy fifties made by Sanju Samson and KL Rahul in the IPL has intensified the race for the second wicketkeeper's slot in the Indian team for the upcoming T20 World Cup, reckoned former South African captain Graeme Smith.

The Indian squad for the marquee event in June is set to

be announced soon and Rishabh Pant is set to be drafted in as the first-choice wicketkeeper-batter. "They (Rahul and Samson) needed to build a partnership. Rahul did it with (Deepak) Hooda and Sanju did it beautifully with Dhruv Jurel. The difference was that Sanju finished the game, while KL got out at a key phase. But it was brilliant to see both excellent players put their

hands up for World Cup selection," said Smith in JioCinema. Rahul made a 48-ball 76 for Lucknow Super Giants, but Samson trumped that effort with an unbeaten 71 off 33 balls as Rajasthan Royals cruised to a seven-wicket victory. Former Australian pacer Brett Lee lauded Jurel for supporting Samson with a fine 52 not out off 34 balls

during their unbroken fourth wicket stand that was worth 121 runs. "He's a quality batter. He's got proper cricket shots. He can play all formats of the game and knows when to go through the gears as needed. "His shots are classy and have the power to go towards the cow corner. He shows his class and continues to grow in stature," said the New South Welshman.

Batters have evolved quicker than bowlers in IPL: Klusener

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Super Giants assistant coach Lance Klusener placed the quicker evolution of batters as reason behind the frequent tall team totals in the ongoing Indian Premier League.

The teams have been going past 200 and even 250 quite effortlessly in this IPL, and the former South African all-rounder opined that the modest performance by bowlers at death overs too has helped batters to add quick runs.

"Just looking at the bowling

performances throughout the competition, for me, they have been quite disappointing. There hasn't been a lot of good bowling," Klusener told the media after LSG's seven-wicket loss to Rajasthan Royals here on Saturday. "There's been a lot of ordinary bowling and batsmen are just so good these days, they're taking advantage. Maybe the batsmen have evolved a lot quicker than the bowlers in this competition. "I haven't seen a lot of good death bowling in the competition and that's why



teams have been able to take advantage. Sure, surfaces have

been flat. I haven't seen a lot of swing either," he added. Klusener observed that the bowlers are opting for several variations at death but they have not been using the wide yorkers enough. "It's easy to overcomplicate. If you run in and execute even four out of six yorkers...We don't see that anymore. We don't see that skill," he said. "We're going to slower balls and a whole lot of other variations. That pure death bowling of yorkers, whether it's wide or straight, that's a skill that we don't see very often these days," he added.

OTHER SPORTS

Archery WC: India men team shocks Olympic champions Korea to bag historic gold

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

Indian men's recurve team of Dhiraj Bommadevara, Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav shocked reigning Olympic champions South Korea in a historic win to land an Archery World Cup gold medal after 14 years, here on Sunday.

This triumph over the archery powerhouse in well over a decade also comes as a boost to their chances of securing a berth in the upcoming Paris Olympics.

The trio of Dhiraj, Tarundeep and Pravin showed ice-cool composure to get the better of mighty Koreans without dropping a set. The 40-year-old Army man Tarundeep was also a part of



the gold medal-winning team in Shanghai World Cup Stage 4 in August 2010. Then the recurve team comprising Rahul Banerjee, Tarundeep and Jayanta defeated Japan. In a battle between the top-two seeds of the competition, India won 5-1 (57-57, 57-55, 55-53), taking their gold medal count to five in the season-opening Stage 1 World Cup. The success also rubbed on

the recurve mixed team of Ankit Bhakart and Dhiraj who trounced Alejandra Valencia and Matias Grande of Mexico 6-0 (35-31, 38-35, 39-37) to win bronze. On a comeback trail after missing the whole 2023 after becoming mother in December 2022, Deepika Kumari faltered in the final hurdle to settle for a silver in the women's recurve individual session.

Messi gets two goals in front of record New England crowd

AP ■ MASSACHUSETTS (US)

Lionel Messi scored two goals to excite a New England Revolution-record crowd, leading Inter Miami CF to a 4-1 victory on Saturday night.

Messi didn't disappoint the crowd of 65,612 that filled Gillette Stadium, scoring on a left-footed kick from deep inside the box for his ninth goal of the season, breaking a 1-all tie in the 68th minute. In fact, he made a little history, too. Miami posted on the social platform X that he was the first player in MLS history to record 16 goal contributions in his first seven games of a season. "Obviously, he's done it his whole life. We expect it from him," said teammate

Benjamin Cremaschi, who scored the third goal after Messi's shot was stopped. "He makes it look so easy. We're just happy that we have him by our side. When he has the opportunity, he takes it." The attendance beat the previous record of 61,316, when the Revolution lost to the LA Galaxy in the 2002 MLS final. In the opening half, he was a few feet inside the box, scoring on a left-foot kick to tie it at 1-1 in the 32nd minute. "I thought in the first half, after (our) goal, we had them locked up pretty good," New England coach Caleb Porter said. "They weren't getting many chances, they weren't getting a lot of time and space to operate," he said.

Indian women team seals Uber Cup quarterfinal spot

PTI ■ CHENGDU (CHINA)

Isharani Baruah and Anmol Kharb shone bright as the Indian women's team entered the quarterfinals of the Uber Cup badminton tournament with a lopsided 4-1 win over Singapore in the second tie of group A, here on Sunday. Asian champions India, who had defeated Canada 4-1 in the opening tie, produced another fine show as they recovered from the opening match loss of Ashmita Chaliha and went on to win the rest of the contests with ease to come up trumps. It turned out to be a fine weekend for the young and inexperienced Indian side who were missing the big guns, but they displayed their skill and temperament at the big stage to win two out of two ties. China blanked Canada 3-0 in another group A match and



the result was enough for both India and their Asian neighbours to seal the quarterfinal spot. With the twin victories, India are now placed in the second position behind China in group A. The two teams will clash on Tuesday in their final group match to decide the top spot. The 53rd-ranked Chaliha, who had outwitted Canada's Michelle Li on Saturday, found the going tough

against world No. 18 Yeo Jia Min on Sunday, going down 15-21, 18-21. National champions Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra, ranked 67, then brought India back with a 21-15, 21-16 win over Xiao En Heng and Jin Yu Jia in the first women's doubles. Isharani, ranked 83rd, went on to double India's lead by claiming a 21-13, 21-16 win over Insyirah Khan in the second singles.

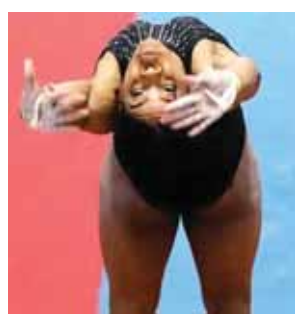
2012 Olympic champion Gabby competes for first time in eight years at American Classic

AP ■ TEXAS

Whether the gymnastics star's return to the sport carries all the way to the Paris Olympics remains to be seen. Douglas, who became the first Black woman to win the Olympic all-around title when she triumphed in London in 2012, competed for the first time in eight

years on Saturday at the American Classic. The 28-year-old looked rusty in spots and promising in others while posting a score of 50.65 in the all-around. Douglas qualified in multiple events for the U.S. Championships in Fort Worth, Texas, next month. She will get another chance to qualify for the all-around competition at nationals

when she takes the floor at the the U.S. Classic in Hartford, Connecticut, on May 18. Douglas last competed at the 2016 Rio Olympics, where she helped the Americans claim a second straight gold in the team competition. She took an extended break from the sport but never officially retired. The itch to come back returned while



watching the 2022 U.S. Championships, and she's spent the better part of the last two years training in the Dallas area with an eye toward trying to make the five-woman U.S. Team that will be heavily favored to win gold in Paris this summer. Her comeback, however, has been shrouded in mystery. She was supposed to compete at Winter Cup in February

but she pulled out of the competition just days before after testing positive for COVID-19. She has limited press exposure and unlike 2020 Olympic gold medalist Sunisa Lee and Jade Carey - both of whom competed at American Classic - she opted not to participate in podium training on Friday. Douglas walked out onto the floor about an hour before

competition and showed flashes of what turned her into a star in London. Her double-twisting Yurchenko on vault had plenty of amplitude and on bars - her best event - she had the pieces of a routine that would certainly be competitive at the elite level. The challenge will be finding a way to put all the pieces together consistently.

Douglas came off bars twice and her floor routine lacked the crispness and endurance to stack up with what will be required for anyone hoping to make a serious bid for the Olympic team. There is time for Douglas, but not much. The U.S. Classic is in three weeks. The U.S. Championships are in five and the Olympic Trials await in Minneapolis in late June.

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