



BJP GUARANTEES VIKSIT BHARAT

Vision 2024: Narendra Modi to focus on GYAN



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nirmala Sitharaman and JP Nadda release the party's election manifesto Sankalp Patra Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With just four days ahead of the first phase of the polling, the BJP's manifesto for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls which Prime Minister Narendra Modi released in the presence of party president JP Nadda, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and other leaders, on Sunday featured India's Olympics bid in 2036, bringing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), making "One Nation, One Election" a reality, implementing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), making India the third-largest economy in the world, free

ration for the poor for the next five years under the Prime Minister Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, implementation of North East policy, building Thiruvalluvar cultural centres all over the world and the law against paper leaks, among other promises. It has promised to accelerate development of robust infrastructure along the Indo-China, Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Myanmar borders. This comes on a day of the birth anniversary of BR Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution. With its focus on a roadmap

for "Viksit Bharat" (developed India), the BJP's manifesto is replete with the word "Bharat" and "Bharatiya", instead of India and Indian. While the BJP manifesto did include the word "India", the prevalence of "Bharat" far outweighed its usage. The BJP's manifesto looks like a balance between two Indias - a socialist India, which needs hand-holding, while aspiring to be the next superpower that will call the shots. In its 76 pages Modi ki Gaurantee-2024" Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar" Sankalp Patra, the BJP's manifesto

listed out a comprehensive overview of the NDA Government's achievements. It also charted out the vision for building a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047. The manifesto's promises are categorised under 10 social groups, including the poor, middle class, women, youth, senior citizens, farmers, fishermen, labourers, traders and traditionally deprived sections like the SC and ST, and 14 issues, including secure India, prosperous India and ease of living in cities among others. The document also talks about expanding the 5G networks and taking the lead in the development of 6G

Modi ki Guarantee

● Bringing a Uniform Civil Code

● Making One Nation, One Election a reality

● Implementing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA)

● Making India the third-largest economy in the world

● Free ration for the poor for the next five years under the Prime Minister Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana

● The party will continue to provide free and quality healthcare services of up to ₹5 lakh to poor families under the Ayushman Bharat scheme

● Efforts to empower three crore rural women to become Lakhpati Didis

● Modi ki Guarantee on good governance;

● A transparent Government recruitment system

● Enactment of a law to prevent paper leaks

● Free electricity to poor households under the Prime Minister Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana

● Inclusion of autorickshaw, taxi, truck drivers and other drivers in all social security schemes

● Facilitating Digital Revolution by 6G

● Expanding Bullet Trains

● Theatrisation of Military Commands

● Preserving and Promoting the Legacy of Lord Ram

technology, making India a global manufacturing hub, organising Ramayan festivals across the globe to commemorate the "Pran Pratishtha of Ram Lalla", and working towards bringing back "Bharatiya idols and

artifacts that were taken away illegally from Bharat". It also spoke of considering bullet trains in north, south and east India and expanding "new age" trains like Vande Bharat, Amrit Bharat and Nammo Bharat.



Bansuri ignites Delhi campaign with Sushma Swaraj's spirit

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Draped in the saree once worn by her mother, former Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj, BJP's youngest candidate for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections in 2024, Bansuri Swaraj, said the scent lingering from it transports her to a comforting embrace, evoking fond memories of her mother's aanchal as she begins the campaign trail. Bansuri grew up in Delhi and said she is a 'dadi nani ke haathon se khilaya bachcha' (fed with the hands of maternal and paternal grandmothers). "My friends and teachers kept me grounded throughout. Both my parents ensured that I have a very normal upbringing," said Bansuri, who grew up in a family of politicians and lawyers. The fierce leader, with the oratory skills of her mother, lights up the brightest when she talks about her 'co-conspirator' and her 'favourite human being in the world'. Calling her mother's loss irreparable, she said, "I wish my mother was here for my life. No matter what age you lose your parents, it's never enough time. And I'll be honest, I don't miss Sushma Swaraj 'the neta'. I miss Sushma Swaraj, the mother. For me, she was always a mom. She was a Minister outside the house." Bansuri shared her mother's anecdote about the combination of sarees and sports shoes. "Meri ma kehti thi agar ek nari saree k neechee sports shoe pehn le, then she means business. (My mother used to say if a woman wears sports shoes beneath a saree, she means business). These sarees that I wear are actually my mother's. It's literally like being wrapped in her 'anchal", she said. An Oxford educated lawyer, Bansuri marked her 17th year as a litigator. She describes herself as 'innately a lawyer' and 'not a politician'. However, when asked the reason to leave her illustrious career, which includes being the Additional Advocate General for Haryana and enter the political fray as BJP's candidate on the New Delhi seat, she quipped,



Opposition says BJP Manifesto a jugglery of words

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Several Opposition party leaders from Congress, TMC, RJD, Left parties on Sunday dismissed the BJP manifesto, titled 'Modi ki Guarantee', asking what the Prime Minister's guarantee means. Congress trashed the BJP's poll manifesto as a "jumla patra" full of rhetoric, with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge saying Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantee is a "warranty of jumlas" as he has failed to fulfil his past promises. The Opposition party also accused Modi of not honouring his promises made on jobs, doubling farmers' income and tackling inflation, and alleged that the Prime Minister is now shifting the goalposts by talking about 2047. The Congress said the BJP manifesto should have been named "maafinama" and Modi should have apologised to farmers, youngsters, poor people and Dalits for not fulfilling the promises made in the last 10 years. Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said, "Two words are missing from the BJP's manifesto and Modi's speech — inflation and unemployment." "INDIA's plan is very clear — recruitment in 30 lakh posts and a permanent job of Rs 1 lakh to every educated



Congress fields Kanhaiya from North East Delhi

NEW DELHI : The Congress on Sunday announced 10 more candidates for the Lok Sabha polls. The party has fielded veteran politician J P Agarwal from Chandni Chowk against BJP's Praveen Khandelwal and Kanhaiya Kumar from North East Delhi against BJP's sitting MP Manoj Tiwari while Udit Raj is to contest from North-West Delhi against BJP's Yogendra Chandolia. The party has also fielded former Punjab CM Charanjit Singh Channi from Jalandhar — SC Lok Sabha seat. PNS

youngsters. This time the youngsters are not going to fall into Modi's trap. They will strengthen the hands of the Congress and bring an 'employment revolution' in the country," Rahul said in a social media post. Addressing a Press conference, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khara said in the manifesto for the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, Modi had promised to bring back black money by forming a special task force, but electoral bonds were introduced instead. Asked about the Ram temple issue, Khara said, "Ram is an issue of faith and not of politics. We will not allow the BJP to drag him into politics." Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also said the BJP's 'Sankalp Patra' is just a "sham". "Their real manifesto is the 'Samvidhan Badlo Patra'. In every street, state after State, BJP leaders and candidates are roaming around with the 'Samvidhan Badlo Patra' and talking about changing Babasaheb's Constitution in their speeches..." she said in a post in Hindi on X. Communist Party of India general secretary D Raja said Modi's guarantee is nothing but "degradation" of the country. "In a way, Modi's guarantee shows the commitment of the BJP-RSS combine to communal, fascist dictatorship.



People take part in a procession to celebrate Bengali New Year, Poila Baishakh, in Kolkata, on Sunday

PTI

Rising food prices cast a pall over festive celebrations

SAMAR PANDEY/RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI

While yet another round of two-month-long election festivities is underway, a sudden surge in the prices of all edible items — groceries, vegetables, fruits — has dampened the household spirit during the ensuing Navratri, Eid, Poila Baishakh, Bihu, and Baishaki festivals. Prices of any green vegetable, be it okra, beans, bottle gourd, or bitter gourd, are not less than ₹100 per kilogram. Even the usually affordable vegetable like cabbage is selling at ₹60 per

kilogram, while potatoes have risen to ₹30 per kilogram and onions to ₹40 per kilogram across the national Capital. During the festive season of Chaitra Navratri, the markets are witnessing a surge in fruit prices, such as banana, apple, and papaya, primarily driven by the increased demand for these fruits. Bananas, being both affordable and nutritious, are the preferred choice for devotees fasting during this period. Bananas, which typically sell at ₹40-50 per dozen, are now priced at ₹70 per dozen. Similarly, prices of apples, oranges, grapes, and papayas have gone up.

Apples, once sold at ₹100-120 per kilogram, now come for ₹150-180, while oranges are priced between ₹80-100 per kilogram, up from ₹30 per kilogram. Grapes, pomegranates, and papayas have also seen notable price increases. Praveen, a shopper, expressed concern over the price hike, noting that prices surge even before Navratri begins. Wholesale and retail prices have gone up, with people residing in different cities also facing hardship as India's favourite staple pulse — arhar dal — is burning a hole in the pockets at ₹180 per kilogram.

Desolate railway tracks transformed into a verdant oasis

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Blooming at the confluence of Railway tracks connecting New Delhi Railway Station to Nizamuddin and another towards Ghaziabad, a sprawling haven of green with blossoming flowers has been developed. Once a haven of crime where the administration struggled to identify victims of crimes on the railway tracks and its periphery, it has now been transformed. Christened as "Evergreen Nursery", the 2,500 square metres patch of land which can be viewed from the railway bogies, the elevated metro and now the Bharatmandapam, the



garden boasts of ornamental and garden plants worth even ₹one crore single plant with maximum of them imported from south East Asian countries and primarily from Thailand. Once a barren land full of filth, garbage, human and animal

carcasses, the one year old green patch with millions of plants has come up in partnership with Delhi Division of Northern Railway and the private party Evergreen Nursery adjacent to the Pragati Maidan Railway Halt.

Vivid varieties and species of ferns, Bougainvillea, Erica Palm, Money plant, rose, bonsai, Oleander (Nerium Indicum), Snake Plant besides the exotic shrubs like Redermachera sinica Thai, Pachira plant Thai, Podocarpus,

Aglaonema red Thai, Dicffenbachia Tiger, Philochemdrum Plant, Victoria, Boracia, Ficus Lyrata, Draco Stem, Rhapis palm are some names nurtured in the flower pots and the land that has been made fertile. However, the plants are not for sale and for any business but are rented out to railway stations, other Government buildings, convention halls etc. Plants nourished here now also adorn some of the country's border points and coastal areas as part of the beautification drive of the Central and several State Governments and PSUs. "The drive is totally inspired by

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Swachhata Mission. Now anywhere you go, not only the railway premises but other Government buildings all appear clean and green. The patch near Pragati Maidan used to be filth once upon a time and with the initiative of incumbent Railway Minister (Ashwini Vaishnav) several railway properties are being redeveloped as per the environmental needs. And all require people's support and hence many more such initiatives will come in near future," said Deepak Kumar, Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO), Northern Railways.

Met issues warning in 15 districts of Madhya Pradesh

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

In Madhya Pradesh, the Meteorological Department has issued an alert for 15 districts. There is a possibility of change in weather here in the afternoon. Sagar, Ashoknagar and North Seoni may experience rain and hailstorm along with lightning and there is also a possibility of thunderstorms.

Apart from this, there is a possibility of light thunderstorms with lightning in Mandla, Chhindwara, Damoh, Shivpuri, Anuppur, Sheopur. It may rain in the evening in Morena, Neemuch, Mandsaur, Dindori, Umaria, Shahdol, Jabalpur, Vidisha. For the last 7 days in Madhya Pradesh, along with storms

and rain, hailstorms have also been witnessed in different areas of the state. However, now the system will become a little weak. Still, there will be a possibility of thunderstorms and rain at some places.

The Met has issued warning of thunderstorm and gusty winds in Bhopal, Vidisha, Raigarh, Sehore, Narmadapuram, Betul, Ujjain, Shajapur, Mandsaur, Neemuch, Ashoknagar, Datia, Bhind, Rewa, Maunjanj, Satna, Maihar, Shahdol, Umaria, Katni, Jabalpur, Narsinghpur, Chhindwara, Seoni, Mandla, Balaghat, Panna, Damoh, Sagar while Rajgarh, Agarmalva, Guna, Shivpuri, Gwalior, Morena, Sheopur, Chhatrapur, Tikamgarh districts would witness thun-



derstorms, hailstorms and gusty winds. IMD Bhopal said due to western disturbance, cyclonic circulation and trough line, strong system is active in the

state. Due to this, the weather will change for two-three days. After this, the weather may clear for a few days, but there may be more activity of two western disturbances in the coming days. Due to this, rain and hail are expected. This way there will not be much heat in April.

Due to the weather of hail, rain and storm, the Meteorological Department has also issued advisory for the people. In which they have been asked to take necessary precautions.

There is a possibility of damage to crops in open areas due to hailstorm and strong wind. So keep it together. Thunderstorm lightning can cause damage to life and property. In such a situation, stay at a safe place. Stay indoors. Close windows and doors and avoid traveling if possible.

Take safe shelter and take shelter under trees. Remove plugs from electric and electronic equipment.

Wherever there is a possibility of rain in Eastern Madhya Pradesh, take measures to protect crops by avoiding irrigation and chemical spraying. In western Madhya Pradesh, where strong sunlight is expected, do light irrigation. Boundaries will also be formed in Sehore Assembly.



Followers of BR Ambedkar cut a cake to celebrate the 133rd birth anniversary of the leader, in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

Nirmaan-Tech Skills Expo 2024 commences at SISTec

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Sagar Group's NAAC & NBA Accredited Sagar Institute of Science and Technology (SISTec) Gandhi Nagar commenced its signature event, 12th edition of 'Nirmaan-Tech Skills Expo 2024'. The expo witnessed presence of technocrats pan India, who enthusiastically showcased their tech skills with models. More than 1000 budding technocrats from over 50 institutions participated in the expo pioneering modernization on various themes to make a confluence of technical innovations. The XII Edition of Nirmaan focused on 11 different themes in which students presented innovative ideas and projects on Renewable Energy, Clean and Green Technologies, Waste Management, Disaster Management, Technical innovations, Smart Vehicles, Smart Agriculture and Rural Development, Health and



Medicine, Smart Automation, Robotics and Drones, Fintech and other innovative domains solving real-life problems. A panel of judges and experts evaluated and interacted with the students on every project and mentored students to incubate. Seed Money as a reward for the winner in each above category will be rewarded to the winners. The Tech Skill Expo was inaugurated by Chief Guest Professor Gobardhan Das, Director of IISER Bhopal with Dr. B. M. Nandede, Director of SRFMTTI, Anantpur, Andhra Pradesh as

the Guest of Honor. Sagar Group Managing Director Mr. Siddharth Agrawal, Dr. Jyoti Deshmukh, Group Director SISTec and Dr. D. K. Rajoriya, Principal, SISTec, Gandhi Nagar were also present on the occasion.

Inaugurating Nirmaan Tech Skill Expo Professor Das said, "I congratulate SISTec for successfully organizing 'Nirmaan' to ignite the young minds and invoke innovative ideas. < This is one step closer to developing entrepreneurship skills amongst students." Speaking on the occasion, Siddharth Agrawal said "Nirmaan is a platform of great prospects to showcase talent and develop entrepreneurship skills as start-ups. It enhances the skills to think creatively to innovate and aims to build nation."

Boy could not be saved from borewell

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A six-year-old boy who fell into an open borewell in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district was located on Sunday after 40 hours of rescue operation but he was "unresponsive" and efforts were on to bring him out, an official said.

Rescue teams were supplying oxygen into the 70-feet-deep borewell and parallel pits were dug as part of efforts to reach him.

The child fell into the open borewell at Manika village, located close to the Uttar Pradesh border, at around 3 pm on Friday when was playing near it. He was stuck at a depth of around 40 feet, officials earlier said.

"The boy has been located and efforts are on to pull him out from the borewell. He is not responding," Rewa Collector Pratibha Pal told on Sunday.

Teams of the State Disaster Emergency Response Force (SDERF), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and local administration were at the site and making all efforts to bring the boy out of the borewell.

MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Saturday said he was monitoring the situation and is in constant touch with the local authorities.

Pits about 35 feet wide were dug on both sides of the borewell through which the rescue teams were trying to bring the boy out, an official earlier said. Oxygen was being supplied to the boy through a pipe.

Additional Superintendent of Police Anil Sonkar had earlier said, isten to the latest songs, only on JioSaavn.com

A team of the NDRF was called in from Varanasi in UP, he said, adding that unseasonal rains had affected the rescue operation.

Piplani police arrest two vehicle lifters, two motorcycles, one scooter seized

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Piplani police have nabbed two vehicle lifters including a minor boy and recovered 8 motorbikes and 2 scooters worth Rs 6 lakh from their possession on Saturday. Acting swiftly on information received that a person riding a motorbike near the Ganesh temple is stolen one. Based on the information police tracked the accused and nabbed him, he was identified as Raja Nayak alias Raja(23) of Raisen road. During the investigation, the accused confessed to have stolen seven motorbikes and two scooters from Bhopal while 1 motorbike from Ganjbasoda, the vehicle stealing was done with the help of his aide. Police nabbed the other

During the investigation, the accused confessed to have stolen seven motorbikes and two scooters from Bhopal

accused in the crime who was found to be a minor. The accused has been booked for 11 crimes by Piplani and Govindpura police while the minor has been booked twice for theft by Govindpura police. Meanwhile Bajaria police have arrested two vehicle lifters and recovered 6 vehicles worth Rs 3 lakh; accused used to steal

to fulfill their wants. In the investigation of complainant Nadeem Khan of Bajaria regarding his motorbike on April 11 which was black splendor bearing registration number MP04ZG9840 and when he found that someone was trying to break the lock to steal it, he tried to catch him but he escaped. On the information received, with the help of patrolling police party, police tracked the accused and nabbed him. The accused was identified as Kailash Kushwaha(33) of Vidisha who confessed to stealing vehicles with his aide Aamir Khan of Chhola Mandir. The two confessed stealing of 6 two-wheelers from different places of Bhopal city, which were intended to be sold outside the district.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and BJP State President VD Sharma in a public meeting during an election campaign ahead of the Lok Sabha election in Pipariya, Narmadapuram district, Madhya Pradesh on Sunday. Pioneer photo

133rd birth anniversary of Baba Saheb Ambedkar celebrated at BHEL

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL<

The 133rd birth anniversary of the creator of the Constitution of India and Bharat Ratna Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar was celebrated with traditional joy and enthusiasm at BHEL, Bhopal. SM Ramanathan, Executive Director, BHEL Bhopal was present as the Chief Guest in the program. B. K. Singh, General Manager (HR) presided over the programme. In the program, all the General Managers and S A Dongre, Additional General Manager and Liaison Officer SC (BHEL, Bhopal), executive members of Joint Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and OBC Employees Welfare Association garlanded the statue of Babasaheb. Representatives of various trade unions and a large number of employees were also present in the program.



Ramanathan said that 14th April is a golden day in the history of India. Babasaheb was not just an extraordinary individual, but an era pioneer who created a new modern India. Baba Saheb did unprecedented work in changing the social structure. Baba Saheb wanted to build an India which would be the most powerful in the world, would lead the entire world and its people would be powerful and independent from

dreams to build a powerful India. On this occasion, Singh said that the creator of the Constitution, Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, has included all the dimensions in the Constitution for proper justice and upliftment of every class and religion. Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar was an ardent patriot, while on the other hand he was also a savior of the oppressed, women and the poor. Baba Saheb's inspirational life is exemplary for countless people. He was a true nation builder and global leader who established new dimensions of social justice. In the end, certificates were given to the SC/ST and OBC meritorious students studying in schools of the township who secured first, second and third positions followed by Buddha Vandana.

Annual CME workshop concludes on practical dermatopathology

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The 6th Annual CME cum Workshop on Practical Dermatopathology took place at AIIMS Bhopal on Sunday. This national-level conference under the mentorship of Executive Director and CEO, Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh & guidance of Dean Academics Prof Rajneesh Joshi, was jointly organized by the Departments of Pathology and Lab Medicine, and Dermatology. More than 110 delegates from within the state of Madhya Pradesh and from states of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Puducherry registered for this CME cum Workshop.

The first day witnessed talks by eminent national faculty including Prof. Uma Nahar (PGI Chandigarh), Prof. Poonam Elhence (AIIMS Jodhpur), Prof. (Dr) Meera Thomas (CMC Vellore), Dr. Chirag Desai (Divya Sparsh Skin & Hair Clinic, Mumbai), Dr Irene Mathews (AIIMS Patna) and Dr. Siddharth Mani (INHS Sanjivani, Kochi) covering a wide range of topics in cutaneous disorders like vasculitis, panniculitis, granulomatous dis-

orders, immune-bullous lesions, cutaneous adnexal neoplasms, and dermoscopy and histopathology correlation. More than 30 scientific presentations were conducted on the first day in e-posters and oral paper category. A workshop in dermatopathology glass-slide viewing and trichoscopy took place on the second day. The event concluded with the final rounds of the Dermatopathology quiz for postgraduate residents where six teams from institutions of AIIMS Bhopal, GMC Bhopal, CIMS Bilaspur, RIMS Ranchi, MGMMC Indore, SAIMS Indore participated. The Executive Director and CEO, Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh lauded the efforts of the organizing team comprising of the organizing chairperson Prof (Dr) Vaishali Walke, (Head of the Dept of Pathology and Lab Medicine), Organizing Secretary Dr. Sramana Mukhopadhyay (Pathology), Co-chairperson Dr Prashansa Jaiswal (In-charge Department of Dermatology), Scientific Chairperson Prof Deepti Joshi, Joint Organising Secretary, Dr Jerene Mathews (Dermatology) and Treasurer Dr Manish Khandare (Dermatology) in putting up this collaborative workshop.

AIIMS remembers BR Ambedkar

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

AIIMS Bhopal celebrated Bharat Ratna Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's 133th Birth anniversary on 14th April 2024. Dr. Sunil Malik, President and Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh, Executive Director AIIMS, Bhopal paid homage by garlanding of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's photograph in presence of Dr. Rajnish Joshi, Dean, Academics and Dr. Shashank Puriwar, Medical Superintendent, AIIMS, Bhopal. Faculty members, residents, nursing officers and students reminded the contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar building the nation and took the oath to walk on path shown by the Dr. Ambedkar. All the dignitaries shared their thoughts and gave tribute to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The program was attended by faculties, employees and students of AIIMS, Bhopal. Senior faculties, students delivered the inspirational talk inspired by the life of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Executive Director & CEO Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh have enlightened everyone on different aspects of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's thoughts & contribution in Independent India and appealed everyone to follow his teaching and principles.

Medi-Caps University alumni reunion: A grand gathering

PNS ■ INDORE

The Medi-Caps Alumni Association organised its 2nd city chapter meet in Pune at the Hotel Grand Tamanna on April 13, which was a resounding success with a turnout of 132 enthusiastic alumni.

The event was not just a reunion; it was a celebration of shared experiences, growth, and the enduring bond between the alumni and their alma mater. Senior faculty members, including Mr. Jayesh Barve, Advisor Alumni Association, Mr. Sourabh Dave, President Alumni Association, Ms. Avani Subedar, Alumni Coordinator, graced the event with their presence, underscoring the institution's commitment to fostering lifelong connections with its graduates. One of the most heartening aspects of the event was the alumni's collective commitment to giving back to their alma mater.

At the event, the Alumni Association launched their alumni portal. The associ-

ation apprised the alumni about the recent MoU with Woosong University, South Korea, for the Student Exchange Programme, and alumni were also informed about new tie-ups between the university and South Korean universities for semiconductor chip design courses and chip testing and packaging courses. All alumni were very proud of the university's growth after hearing the information. Alumni also praised the efforts of the association in organising such events in different cities. One of the alumni and a renowned standup comedian, Mr. Pushkar Bendre, filled the hall with a lot of laughs.

The university's management also extended warm wishes and encouragement to the association. Chancellor R. C. Mittal, Vice-Chancellor Dr. D. K. Patnaik, OSD to Chancellor Palash Garg, Director Branding, Saloni Garg, and Alumni Relationship Manager, Suhani Sharma, extended their heartfelt congratulations and best wishes for the success of the event.



BJP candidate from Bhopal Lok Sabha constituency Alok Sharma polishing boots on the occasion of Baisakhi at TT Nagar Gurdwara in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

AIIMS Bhopal organises Swachhata Marathon

Bhopal: On the occasion of Swachhta Pakhwada and to celebrate the Bharat Ratan B R Ambedkar Jayanti in the association with RDA, AIIMS Bhopal organized the Swachhta Marathon on Sunday at 06.30 am, with the objective of spreading awareness of sanitation, waste segregation, and environmental protection.

Around 300 participants from faculty, staff, and students participated. Further, AIIMS Bhopal conducted a health and digital health awareness session, which was followed by a blood donation drive for staff & students of Maulana Azad National Institute of Technology, Bhopal. Around 150 voluntary staff &

students registered and donated blood during the drive. Prof. Ajai Singh, Executive Director & CEO of AIIMS Bhopal, expressed that AIIMS Bhopal is committed to preventive health, environment protection, and sanitation awareness and requested everyone to follow the teachings of Baba Saheb B. R. Ambedkar.

BJP will never end reservations: Shah



STAFF REPORTER ■
KHAIRAGARH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the BJP will never allow reservations to end and nor will it let the Congress do so. Speaking on the BJP's 'sankalp patra' (manifesto) released earlier in the day, he said when Narendra Modi becomes prime minister for a third time, the Uniform Civil Code will be implemented and 'One Nation One Election' will be introduced.

Addressing a rally in Khairagarh in Chhattisgarh, Shah asked people to give Modi a third term as prime minister so that Naxalism can be eliminated in the state in the next three years.

"Today is the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar. The entire nation is remembering him for his work towards upliftment of Dalits, Adivasis, backwards and the poor. On this day, people work to take the spirit of the Constitution drafted by him to the grassroots but even on

such a day the Congress is busy spreading lies," Shah said.

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge is claiming the Constitution will be changed if Modi becomes prime minister again and that party's functionaries allege BJP will end reservations after coming to power, Shah said.

"I want to make it clear that till BJP is in politics, we will not let anything happen to reservations. We will not allow Congress to end it either," the minister asserted.

Prime Minister Modi has strengthened the country and safeguarded it from terrorism, Shah said.

Modi had ended Maoist violence in his 10-year rule but the tail remains in Chhattisgarh, Shah said in Khairagarh, which is part of the Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha seat, where BJP's Santosh Pandey is up against former Congress chief minister Bhupesh Baghel.

"During the previous Congress government under Bhupesh Baghel, the fight against Naxalism slowed

down in Chhattisgarh. After the BJP came to power, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma intensified the fight against the menace," he said.

"More than 54 Naxalites have been neutralised, more than 150 have been arrested and more than 250 have surrendered (after the formation of Sai government)," he said.

Targeting former CM Baghel, Shah said the country was witness to several scams committed by the Congress but none of them had been named after a god, a reference to the multi-crore Mahadev betting app being probed by agencies.

"Keep the anger of Mahadev betting app in mind and press the lotus (BJP symbol) button with such force that the tremors are felt till Italy," he said, taking a swipe at the Italian origin of Congress leader Sonia Gandhi.

Slamming the Congress, Shah said the Modi government had increased

the budget for farmers' welfare to Rs 1.25 lakh crore. "I want to remind Rahul Gandhi that the amount during Congress rule was just Rs 22,000 crore," he said.

The Congress ruled the country for 75 years, but never made a tribal the president of the country, whereas PM Modi enhanced their prestige by ensuring Droupadi Murmu occupies the top post.

The Modi government abrogated Article 370, ensured construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and carried out surgical strikes to root out terrorism, Shah said.

"The Congress says people of Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan don't have anything to do with Kashmir. Khargeji, the youth of Rajnandgaon can sacrifice their lives for Kashmir," he said and went on ask the crowd if Article 370 should have been scrapped or not.

The crowd roared back that the scrapping of Article 370 was the right decision.

The Congress obstructed the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya for the past 70 years and used diversionary tactics, but Modi performed idol consecration on January 22, Shah said.

"Ram Navami is on April 17. For the first time, Ram Lalla will celebrate his birthday in a grand temple," he said.

When the UPA government under Sonia-Manmohan was at the Centre, terrorists used to enter from Pakistan at will and carry out attacks but under the leadership of Modi, surgical and air strikes were undertaken to eliminate terrorists, he said.

Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha seat will witness voting on April 26.

BJP manifesto as sacred as Constitution: CM



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai

said on Sunday that the BJP's manifesto was as sacred as the Constitution.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi released the BJP

manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections which focuses on women's empowerment and the upliftment of youth and the poor.

Addressing the media in Raipur, Sai said that in the last 10 years, the BJP has fulfilled every promise.

"In this manifesto, of the 24 pillars, 10 are social and 14 are economic pillars.

"In the last 10 years, 25 crore people were lifted out of poverty.

"Modi's government has made crores of people prosperous. Lakhs of people got jobs thanks to the Mudra Scheme. Now the resolution of this scheme will be doubled.

"India's historical development lies ahead."

Sai highlighted the key points of the manifesto and the achievements of the BJP government. Senior BJP leaders, including Raipur Lok Sabha candidate Brijmohan Agrawal, were present.

Unaccounted cash seized in Mahasamund



STAFF REPORTER ■
MAHASAMUND

Chhattisgarh Police has seized unaccounted cash from an Odisha-based man in Mahasamund district, police said on Sunday.

M a h a s a m u n d Superintendent of Police Ashutosh Singh said the police intercepted a car at the Rehtikhol check post on the Chhattisgarh-Odisha border on Saturday and found Rs 8.20 lakhs from Amit Sahu (42).

Man held for insulting, abusing PM Modi

STAFF REPORTER ■
BILASPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Sunday arrested a 26-year-old man in Bilaspur district after a video of him insulting and abusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi went viral on social media.

Arvind Kumar Soni has been nabbed from Masturi town, Bilaspur Additional Superintendent of Police (Rural) Archana Jha said.

Soni was booked under sections 294 (punishment for obscene act or words in public), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace) of the Indian Penal and section 151 of the Criminal Code of Procedure (CrPC) following the complaint lodged by BJP leader BP Singh.

Soni abused and insulted



Modi on Saturday after a public meeting of Congress leader Kanhaiya Kumar at Bhadora village when the latter was interacting with media persons.

Kanhaiya Kumar had come to Bilaspur district for electioneering for the

Congress Lok Sabha candidate Devendra Singh Yadav.

Yadav, a sitting Congress MLA from Bhilai, is pitted against BJP's Tokhan Sahu.

Bilaspur will see voting in the third phase of general elections on May 7.

Elderly woman killed in elephant attack

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIGARH

A 56-year-old woman was killed and a man was injured on Sunday in an elephant attack in Raigarh district of Chhattisgarh.

The incident took place at around 7:30 am near Jhingol village when people were collecting 'mahua' fruits, Raigarh Division Forest Officer Stylo Mandavi said.

A wild elephant suddenly arrived there and trampled Kalavati Rathhiya to death.

A man, Ramlal Rathhiya (35), sustained injuries in the attack and has been hospitalised.

The kin of the deceased were given instant relief of Rs 25,000.

A herd of five elephants



is roaming in the Tamnar area and villagers have been alerted.

According to the Forest

Department, around 250 people have been killed in elephant attacks in the state in the last three years.

Seven Maoists held in Sukma



STAFF REPORTER ■
SUKMA

Seven Maoists, one of them carrying a reward of Rs 1 lakh, were arrested on Sunday in Sukma district in Chhattisgarh.

Madvi Deva alias Dinesh Madvi and Banjam Pojja, Kawasi alias Wando Ayata, Kalmu Ganga, Kalmu Sanna,

Nuppo Pojja, Rawa Joga were apprehended in Kistaram area, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said.

Banjam Pojja was the president of Padiyaro Parivar Committee under the Kistram Area Committee of the outlawed Maoist group.

Kawasi, who carried the bounty, was the DAKMS

president under the Tetamgudu Revolutionary People's Council.

Kalmu Ganga was a Deputy Militia Commander.

A muzzle loading gun, 3kg of black powder explosive, an improvised explosive device weighing 8 kg, a bomb weighing 3 kg and two gelatin rods seized from them.

'Century Voting' cricket held to boost voter awareness



STAFF REPORTER ■
DURG

A cricket competition called 'Century Voting' was held in Chhattisgarh's Durg district on Sunday in a bid

to boost awareness and achieve the goal of 100 per cent voter turnout in the Lok Sabha elections.

The Collector XI team won the competition by one wicket, defeating the Citizen XI team.

Study finds 80 pc microplastics in blood clots behind heart attack, stroke

AGENCIES ■

A team of scientists in China detected a whopping 80 per cent of microplastics from blood clots that may have contributed to stroke, heart attack, and Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT).

Microplastics -- any type of plastic less than 5 mm long -- have long been known as a significant environmental and health concern worldwide.

The new study, published in the journal eBioMedicine, showed that the blood clot samples were found in the cerebral arteries in the brain, coronary arteries in the heart, and deep veins in the lower extremities of 30 patients.

"Microplastics found in



80 per cent of clots retrieved from blood vessels after heart attack, stroke, or deep venous thrombosis. This is really bad news. Plastics are

everywhere in modern life," Tatiana Prowell, Associate Professor of Oncology at Johns Hopkins University in the US, wrote in a post

on X.com.

The study stressed the need to accurately investigate the impact of microplastics on human

health. It showed that the presence of microplastics may increase the severity of heart attack, stroke, or deep venous thrombosis.

"Our findings suggest that microplastics of different concentrations, polymer types, and physical properties are present in human thrombi (blood clots) and that higher levels of microplastics may be associated with disease severity," said the researchers from the First Affiliated Hospital of Shantou University Medical College, China.

"Future research with a larger sample size is urgently needed to identify the sources of exposure and validate the observed trends in the study," they added.

101-year-old exercises her franchise for Phase-2

STAFF REPORTER ■
KANKER

Khunji Bai, a 101-year-old voter of Kanker district, exercised her franchise for the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Chhattisgarh through postal ballot on Sunday.

Postal ballot facilities are available to voters over 85 years of age, disabled voters and COVID-infected people.

There are a total of 82,476 voters over the age of 85 and 2,855 over the age of 100 in the state.

To avail of this service, eligible voters will have to fill out Form 12D.

Chhattisgarh will see elections on April 19 and 26 and May 7. The results will be announced on June 4 across the country.



Modi exhorts people to give another mandate to his party

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Releasing the the BJP's Sankalp Patra "BJP's Sankalp — Modi's Guarantee 2024" for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections which which has a special focus on the poor, youth, farmers and women, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday exhorted people to give another mandate to his party to shape India's 'destiny' for the next 1,000 years. Describing the party's 'Sankalp Patra' as a document of his guarantee, Modi highlighted the achievements of 10 years of his government at the Centre and said the BJP has delivered on every promise it made so far and asserted that the need for a stable government with full majority was necessary when the world was passing through uncertain times. "The need for a stable majority government increases at a

time when the world is passing through uncertain times," the prime minister said, referring to the several conflicts the world was grappling with. "This 'Sankalp Patra' strengthens the four strong pillars of a 'Viksit Bharat': 'Yuva Shakti', 'Nari Shakti', poor and farmers," he said. "I had said from the ramparts of the Red Fort that 'Yahi Samay hai, Sahi Samay hai' to shape India's destiny for the next 1,000 years...I present this Sankalp Patra to the people of the country as 'Modi ki guarantee' for their blessings. The country's 140 crore people's ambition is Modi's mission," he said. "Bless us, give us more strength for the welfare of crores of citizens of Maa Bharati, to realise the vision of 'Viksit Bharat', to implement this 'Sankalp Patra' at faster pace," he said, adding that in times of prevailing unrest in different parts of the



world, the necessity for a stable government with an unequivocal majority in India becomes even more pronounced. The prime minister stated that the BJP's focus is on the dignity and quality of life, as well as investment and employment. "Simultaneously, in the realm of digital infrastructure, efforts are underway to expand the reach of 5G technology while also laying the groundwork for advancements like 6G," he said. "The Sankalp Patra emphasizes both the quantity and quality of opportunities, with a focus on infrastructure development for generating employment on one hand, and promoting startups and global centers for high-value servicing on the other. I present this Sankalp Patra to the 140 crore citizens as a testament to 'Modi ki guarantee'. The BJP has formulated this Sankalp Patra to transform the dreams of 140 crore citizens into real-

ity," he said. "The BJP's Sankalp Patra will swiftly initiate its course after June 4, with the government already underway on its initial 100-day action plan. BJP has enacted the Nari Shakti Act, revoked Article 370, and implemented the CAA nationwide. Upholding the principles of Reform, Perform, and Transform, India is poised to advance rapidly," Modi said. During the unveiling of the Sankalp Patra, a film was showcased by the BJP, illustrating the welfare and transformative initiatives undertaken in the past 10 years, as well as the resolutions adopted by the party to propel the nation towards 'Viksit Bharat' in the forthcoming years. This film depicted how the BJP has, over the past 10 years, implemented every point of its Sankalp Patra as a guarantee on the ground. Speaking on the occasion PM

Modi said today marks a significant day as there is fervor for the New Year in many states across the country. BJP also aims to extend the Vande Bharat train network to every corner of the nation, introducing three models: Vande Bharat Sleeper, Vande Bharat Chair Car, and Vande Bharat Metro. The construction of the Ahmedabad-Mumbai Bullet Train is progressing, nearing completion. The party has pledged to operate a bullet train in all four directions of India, marking a significant step towards self-reliance. Speaking on the occasion, BJP president J P Nadda said the government's achievements over the last 10 years, such as the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution and the women's reservation law, were made possible due to the clear mandate given to the party by people.

BJP promises global outreach to promote legacy of Lord Ram

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The BJP in its Lok Sabha poll manifesto released on Sunday expressed its commitment to a "holistic" development of Ayodhya and promised to launch a global outreach programme for promoting the legacy of Lord Ram. The party also promised that it will celebrate 'Ramayan Utsav' across the globe to commemorate the 'Pran Pratishtha' of Ram Lalla at the recently built temple in Ayodhya if it retains power. "As millions of devotees from around the world visit Shri Ram Lalla in Ayodhya, we are

committed to the holistic development of the city," the BJP stated in its 'Sankalp Patra', which was released here by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the presence of BJP chief J P Nadda and Union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, and Nirmala Sitharaman. "Ramayan is celebrated across

the world, particularly in South and South-East Asia. We will launch a global outreach programme for documenting and promoting the tangible and intangible legacy of Lord Ram in all countries. We will celebrate Ramayan Utsav with great fervour across the globe to commemorate the Pran Pratishtha of Ram Lalla," it added. The BJP in its poll manifesto also promised that it will collaborate with other countries to restore and revitalise sites of "Bharatiya civilisation" and establish a "Bharatiya Sanskriti Kosh" to ensure the preservation and protection of "ancient Bharatiya civilization", classical languages, culture, and tradi-

tions through the extensive use of technology if it is voted to power again. "We will undertake significant new projects to develop religious and tourist sites inspired by the Kashi Vishwanath corridor model, across the length and breadth of our country," the party proposed in its manifesto. The ruling party also promised that it will continue to digitise all "Bharatiya manuscripts and epigraphs" in mission mode for their preservation and study and establish a dedicated scholarship programme to research ancient Bharatiya manuscripts and epigraphs if it gets another mandate to rule at the Centre.

BJP underscores commitment to defend Indian citizens from threats of terrorism

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Sunday underscored its commitment to defending India's citizens and interests at "home and abroad from all threats of terrorism" as it cited surgical and air strikes during the first term of the Modi government to highlight its zero-tolerance. "In the last ten years, we have taken a firm stand on protecting our country and citizens from the threats of terrorism and nationalism. We have followed a zero-tolerance policy on terrorism. We remain committed to keeping our

country and citizens safe," the party said in its manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls. It said, "We are committed to defending Bharat's citizens and interests at home and abroad from all threats of terrorism." The BJP government will establish military theatre commands for more efficient operations following the creation of the position of the Chief of Defence Staff for better coordination in the military, the party said. With the BJP projecting India's global rise as among the success of the Modi government, the manifesto includes a section on "Modi ki guarantee for

Vishwa Bandhu Bharat" to deliver a "Bharat first" foreign policy. It promises to consolidate the country's position as a voice of the Global South and its commitment to seeking permanent membership in the UN Security Council to "elevate Bharat's position in global decision-making." "We will continue our efforts to create a consensus among all members of the United Nations on the Comprehensive Convention against International Terrorism and other such efforts to combat terrorism," it said. Blaming the "gross neglect" by

previous governments for poor infrastructure in border areas, the party said the Modi dispensation has corrected this "grave error." "We will accelerate the development of robust infrastructure along the India-China, Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Myanmar borders. We will introduce technological solutions on fenced portions to make fencing smarter," the manifesto said. The section under "Modi ki guarantee" for 'safe India' affirms the party's commitment to eliminate the threat of drugs and Left Wing Extremism.

Childhood abuse takes profound toll on victim health: Study



ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

For many of us who endured childhood abuse or neglect, the scars aren't just emotional — they're physical, lingering long after the traumatic events themselves. While this has been a known fact, it was not yet well understood why this risk persists many decades after the ill-treatment first happened. Now, a new study has validated the profound toll this early-life adversity takes on the health, from brains to bodies of the victim of abuse. Published in the 'Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences', the study delved into the experiences of over 21,000 adults aged 40-70, including their histories of childhood maltreatment and their current health status. They analysed this data from the UK Biobank along with their body mass index (BMI), C-reactive protein levels (that reveal signs of inflammation) and their experiences of childhood ill-treatment and adult trauma. By studying brain scans of adults, the researchers from the University of Cambridge, UK found that there were widespread changes in the brain structure such as increased thickness and reduced volume, associated with obesity, inflammation and repeated trauma stemming from childhood ill-treatment. These structural changes, therefore suggested physical damage inflicted on the brain cells that affected their functioning, said Professor Edward Bullmore, Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge, and author of the study. "We've long known that childhood maltreatment increases the risk of mental illness. But now, with this deeper understanding of the physical changes it induces in the brain and body, we're

hopeful for the future. By identifying biomarkers early on, we can intervene sooner, providing targeted support to those who need it most." Responding to the study outcome, Shweta Sharma, Consultant Clinical Psychologist at Manipal Hospitals, Gurugram concurred that "experiencing abuse or neglect as a child can profoundly impact psychological and physiological development. Psychological theories suggest that adverse childhood experiences can disrupt attachment patterns, leading to difficulties in regulating emotions and behaviors. She was of the opinion that children who experience abuse or neglect often have disrupted attachment relationships with caregivers, and individuals may develop maladaptive coping mechanisms such as overeating, substance abuse, or engaging in risky behaviors. Overeating, in particular, can lead to obesity over time. Also, said Dr Sharma, who also happens to be General Secretary of Indian Association of Clinic Psychologists, childhood trauma can lead to chronic stress, which dysregulates the body's stress response system, including the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and the sympathetic nervous system. "Dysregulation in these systems can lead to increased inflammation in the body, as stress hormones such as cortisol can impact immune function. Overall, the combination of disrupted attachment, maladaptive coping mechanisms, chronic stress, epigenetic changes, and health behaviors contributes to the increased vulnerability of individuals who have experienced childhood abuse or neglect to obesity, inflammation, and trauma throughout their lives," she concluded.

BJP to build Thiruvalluvar cultural centres all over world: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Seeking to connect with the people of Tamil Nadu where his party is trying to gain a foothold, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday announced that the BJP will work towards building Thiruvalluvar cultural centres all over the world. "We will build Thiruvalluvar cultural centres all over the world. The world's oldest Tamil language is our pride. BJP will undertake every effort to enhance the global reputation of Tamil language," Modi said while releasing the BJP's manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls. Thiruvalluvar was a noted

Tamil poet and philosopher. The prime minister has in the past asked the youth to read Thiruvalluvar's book "Kural", a celebrated Tamil text which offers wisdom on ethics and morality in different aspects of life. For the BJP, Tamil Nadu is an unconquered frontier along with neighbouring Kerala, which sends 20 MPs to the Lok Sabha. Both states go to the polls in the first two phases of the general election, on April 19 and 26. Often considered a fringe player in Tamil Nadu's electoral arena dominated by the Dravidian heavyweights, a resurgent BJP in Tamil Nadu has seen its stock rising much beyond its expectations this



Ranjan Dimri

President, Vice President, PM pay floral tributes to Ambedkar on birth anniversary



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla offered floral tributes at the statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar in the Parliament House Complex on the occasion of his birth anniversary on Sunday. Union ministers, members of Parliament, former lawmakers and other dignitaries were also present on the occasion. Later, several dignitaries also offered floral tributes to Ambedkar's portrait in the Central Hall of the Samvidhan Sadan, the old Parliament building. Secretaries-General of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, Utpal Kumar Singh and P C Mody respectively, also offered floral tributes to Ambedkar in the Central Hall. Ambedkar's portrait was unveiled in the Central Hall by the then Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh on April 12, 1990. "On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the architect of our Constitution

and one of the most eminent nation builders, I extend my warm greetings and best wishes to all fellow citizens," the president said in a statement. "Babasaheb, a great son of Bharat, was not only the architect of the Indian Constitution but also a champion of social justice. He pioneered social change to build an egalitarian India, through a constitutional framework promoting rule of law, civil liberties, gender equality and empowerment of marginalised sections," Dhankhar said. Birla hailed Ambedkar as a great nation builder and said his life was synonymous with a unique struggle for social justice. "He was the vocal voice of the exploited and deprived sections of the society and always dedicated to protecting their rights. In the form of the Constitution, he has given us an inspiring guide which is a model for all democratic countries. His works guide us even today. It is our responsibility to follow the path shown by him and contribute to achieve the resolution of creating an inclusive society and a developed India," the Lok Sabha speaker said.

Trials for indigenous portable anti tank missile carried out successfully



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a further boost to self-reliance in defence manufacturing, the Indian Army has successfully carried out field trials of indigenously developed man-portable anti-tank guided missile (MPATGM) weapon system, paving way for its induction into the force's armoury. The weapon system has been designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), officials said here on Sunday. The overall system consisted of the MPATGM, launchers, target acquisition device and a fire control unit. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has complimented the DRDO and the Indian Army for the successful trials of the system, terming it as an important step towards achieving self-reliance in advanced technology-based defence system development. The MPATGM weapon system has been field evaluated in different flight configurations several times with an objective of proving the technology with high superiority, the defence ministry said.

"The warhead flight trials were successfully conducted at the Pokhran Field Firing Range on April 13. Missile performance and warhead performance were found to be remarkable," it said on Sunday. It said an adequate number of missile firing trials have been successfully conducted towards achieving compliance of complete operational envelope as stipulated in the General Staff Qualitative Requirements. "Penetration trials of the tandem warhead system of MPATGM have been successfully completed and it is found capable of defeating modern armour protected main battle tanks," it said. The weapon system is well-equipped for operation in both day and night. "The dual mode seeker functionality is a great value addition to the missile capability for tank warfare. With this, technology development and successful demonstration have been concluded and the system is now ready for final user evaluation trials leading towards its induction into the Indian Army," the ministry said. Chairman DRDO Samir V Kamat congratulated the teams associated with the trials.

Upcoming poll is about protecting Ambedkar accomplishment



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of orchestrating a systematic campaign to do away with the Constitution framed by B R Ambedkar and said the upcoming Lok Sabha election is about pre-empting and protecting Ambedkar's magnificent accomplishment. Ambedkar's birth anniversary was celebrated on Sunday. "Today our country celebrates the 133rd birth anniversary of the extraordinarily multifaceted Dr B R Ambedkar -- at a time when calls for doing away with the Constitution of India, which is his greatest legacy, are getting shriller. This is undoubtedly part of a systematic campaign orchestrated by none other than the Prime Minister himself," Congress chief spokesperson general Jairam Ramesh said in a statement. "The strategy is simple but full of hypocrisy: keep up the pretence of upholding that legacy while undermining it daily and getting drum-beaters to call for a new Constitution," he

added. "This is what the 2024 election is fundamentally all about -- the preservation and protection of Dr Ambedkar's magnificent accomplishment along with the values in which it is anchored and principles in which it is grounded," Ramesh said. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge paid homage to Ambedkar and visited Deekshabhoomi in Maharashtra's Nagpur, where the Dalit icon had embraced Buddhism. "Today, on the auspicious occasion of the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, we again pledged to protect the Constitution and democracy at the historic Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur. The entire country has to unite to save the Constitution," Kharge said. Earlier in the day, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera said the ultimate aim of the ruling BJP at the Centre is to alter the basis structure of the Constitution and that is why the leaders of the party keep talking about "400 paar" (winning more than 400 seats) in the Lok Sabha polls.

Congress spreading lies: Shah

BJP will never allow reservations to end, says Home Minister

PTI ■ KHAIRAGARH (CHHATTISGARH)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the BJP will never allow reservations to end and nor will it let Congress do so. Speaking at a rally in Khairagarh in Chhattisgarh, Shah also asked people to give Narendra Modi a third term as prime minister so that the menace of Naxalism can be eliminated in the state in the next three years. Modi had finished Maoist violence in his 10-year rule but the tail continues in Chhattisgarh, Shah said in Khairagarh, which is part of

Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha seat, where BJP's Santosh Pandey is up against former Congress chief minister Bhupesh Baghel. "Today is the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar. The entire nation is remembering him for his work towards upliftment of Dalits, Adivasis, backwards and the poor. On this day, people work to take the spirit of the Constitution drafted by him to the grassroots but even on such a day the Congress is busy spreading lies," Shah said. Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge is claiming the Constitution will be changed if Modi becomes prime minister again and the party's



functionaries allege BJP will end reservations after coming to power, Shah said. "I want to make it clear that till BJP is in politics, we will not let anything happen to reservations. We will not allow Congress to end it either," the Union Home minister asserted. Prime Minister Modi has strengthened the country and safeguarded it from terrorism, Shah said, adding the NDA government in its 10-year rule had eliminated Naxalism. "However, its tail is left in Chhattisgarh. Give Modi a third term as PM to ensure Naxalism can be eliminated in Chhattisgarh in three years," he

said. Targeting former CM Baghel, Shah said the country was witness to several scams committed by the Congress but none of them had been named after a god, a reference to the multi-crore Mahadev betting app scam that is being probed by agencies. "Baghel did not spare the name of Mahadev and committed a scam of Rs 508 crore. Keep the anger of Mahadev betting app in mind and press the lotus (BJP symbol) button with such force that the tremors are felt till Italy," he said in a swipe at the Italian origin of Congress leader Sonia Gandhi. Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha seat will witness voting on April 26.



Samajwadi Party releases fresh list of 7 candidates

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party on Sunday declared seven more Lok Sabha poll candidates for Uttar Pradesh, with the party fielding former MP Bhishm Shankar 'Kushal' Tiwari from Domariyaganj seat. With this, the Akhilesh Yadav-led party has announced the names of 57 candidates in the state, party leaders said. According to the list released by the SP on X, sitting MP from Shravasti and former BSP leader Ram Shiromani Verma has been fielded by the party from the seat. Besides, former MLA Laxminath alias Pappu Nishad has been named as party candidate from Sant Kabir Nagar Lok Sabha seat. The SP has also given the ticket to Babu Singh Kushwaha, a former close aide of BSP chief Mayawati. He has been made the SP candidate from Jaunpur, party spokesperson Rajpal Kashyap said. Ramashankar Rajbhar, a former BSP MP from Salempur, has been made the candidate by the SP in this election. He had represented Salempur in the Lok Sabha from 2009 to 2014. Apart from this, the SP has also fielded Amarnath Maurya from Phoolpur and Priya Saroj from Machhlisahr. Kashyap said Domariyaganj candidate Tiwari was the MP from Sant Kabir Nagar from 2009 to 2014, and from Khalilabad from 2007 to 2009. Tiwari was then with the BSP, and he joined the SP in December 2021. Kushwaha's Jan Adhikar Party was a part of the coalition Bhagidari Parivartan Morcha in the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. The party failed to win any seat in the election.



Omar rules out contesting Assembly elections till JK is UT

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

National Conference leader Omar Abdullah has ruled out contesting the assembly elections till Jammu and Kashmir remains a Union territory. "I don't fancy my chances for anything. I don't aspire to the office of the Chief Minister. And I most certainly do not aspire to lead a Union Territory. "I have made it abundantly clear that in the current situation that J-K finds itself in, I am not contesting assembly elections. I have said this all the way back from 2020 onwards and my position has not changed," Abdullah told PTI in an interview here on Saturday. Asked about the rationale behind leaving the family bastion of Srinagar Lok Sabha seat to contest from Baramulla, Abdullah, who has been elected to Lok Sabha three times, said it was not his habit to take the easy road. "Why should I shy away from a fight? Yes, the political wisdom would suggest that I fight from Srinagar because God forbid a setback for me would be a setback for the entire party. But this is not the first time that someone from the family has fought from a seat other than Srinagar," he said. Abdullah recalled his grandmother Akbar Jehan winning from the Anantnag constituency in the 1984 Lok Sabha polls. "I still remember as a child campaigning with my grandmother from Anantnag in 1984 after the murder of democracy when MLAs were bought, defections were engineered and my father's government was brought down. "My grandmother fought

and won from Anantnag," he added. Abdullah said his fight in the Baramulla Lok Sabha seat was not against a particular candidate but against the "might of the central government and the BJP". "The biggest onslaught of Delhi that we are seeing is in north Kashmir. The maximum effort to cobble unnatural alliances is in north Kashmir. "If you remember last Friday, while coming out of Hazratbal, the leader of Apni Party Altaf Bukhari while referring to Sajad Lone, was a little insulting. "He had called him do *eenton ki imarat* (a building of two bricks). No sooner had he uttered those words, senior BJP leader Tarun Chugh came running to Srinagar, went straight to Altaf Bukhari's residence, and summoned Sajad Lone there to patch up this alliance. "So, I am not fighting against an individual. My fight in north Kashmir is against the BJP, it is against the support it is giving to people on the ground," he said. On the claims made by the BJP about development in Jammu and Kashmir post abrogation of Article 370, the former chief minister said by any measure of human development, J-K is far better than some of the so-called developed states of the country. "In terms of the quality of life, J-K ranks above even the states like Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. In terms of basic things like the matrix that makes up the human development index, in terms of infant mortality, maternal mortality, development, girl child's education.

Modi dubs Rahul royal magician over his remark to remove poverty instantly

PTI ■ HOSHANGABAD (MP)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday mocked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, terming him a "royal magician" over his remark to eradicate poverty "with a single stroke" and said the country doesn't take him seriously. Addressing a rally at Pipariya town in Madhya Pradesh's Hoshangabad Lok Sabha constituency, Modi also targeted the opposition INDIA bloc over one of its constituents being in favour of nuclear disarmament and said they cannot protect the country. He also said the Congress always insulted Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, but the BJP government has honoured him. "The Congress shehzada announced to eradicate poverty with a single stroke. It is laughable. Where was this royal magician missing for so many years? His grandmother (former PM Indira Gandhi) had given the slogan of



'Garibi Hatao' 50 years ago," Modi said without naming Rahul Gandhi. The country does not take him seriously, the PM said. "They ran the government by remote control for 10 years before 2014. Now they have found a mantra instantly. They made such statements and have become a laughing stock. It is a joke on the poor," he said. Without naming any party, Modi

said a constituent of the INDIA bloc has called for nuclear disarmament -- referring to the CPI(M) manifesto. The party that cannot strengthen itself, can it strengthen the country? he asked. "In the manifestoes of INDI alliance partners, a number of dangerous promises were made. One of its partner's manifesto has promised nuclear disarmament of the country," he said.

"We should have nuclear weapons to protect our country; those saying otherwise can't protect India," he said. Modi further hit out at the Congress saying no sooner the son of a poor family became prime minister, the grand old party spread rumours that the Constitution and democracy were in danger. "Modi has reached here due to the Constitution scripted by Babasaheb," he said on the birth anniversary of Dr Ambedkar. "The Congress always insulted Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, we have honoured him," the PM said. He also said the Congress never recognised the contribution of adivasis (tribals), but the BJP government has honoured them. Because of the Constitution given by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, a tribal woman became the President of India, the PM said, referring to Droupadi Murmu's election to the country's top constitutional post.

Appeal for equal focus on politics, culture from Assam old rang manch

PTI ■ TEZPUR

As over a hundred people gathered in the courtyard of the century-old Baan Theatre in Tezpur in Assam on Sunday to celebrate Rongali Bihu, politics took the backseat even as the town prepares to vote for its new MP in less than a week. As the crowd partook in the celebrations, they were also up to this alliance. "So, I am not fighting against an individual. My fight in north Kashmir is against the BJP, it is against the support it is giving to people on the ground," he said. On the claims made by the BJP about development in Jammu and Kashmir post abrogation of Article 370, the former chief minister said by any measure of human development, J-K is far better than some of the so-called developed states of the country. "In terms of the quality of life, J-K ranks above even the states like Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. In terms of basic things like the matrix that makes up the human development index, in terms of infant mortality, maternal mortality, development, girl child's education.



FILE PHOTO

importance in Tezpur. When the old premise was devastated in a storm in 1953, the Baan Theatre was relocated to another place in the town from where it has been functioning since then. The new premise is currently being re-developed with state-of-the-art facilities by the state government. The Bihu celebration was held at the old Baan Theatre premise, which had witnessed performances by cultural icons like Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Phani Sarma. Santanu Baruah, president of ABUSS which runs the Baan Theatre (old), said, "Since Independence, politics and culture have been two sides of the same coin, especially in Assam. This is the first 'rang manch' (stage or theatre) in

Assam and stalwarts like Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Purna Narayan Sinha and others were related to it. He pointed out that just as these prominent people were icons of the cultural field, they were equally involved in the political sector also, and advocated equal participation in both spheres. Baurah rued the fact that even today children have to be lured to schools with the promise of free food, people have to be told how to vote and free ration is availed by 80 crore people in the country. He maintained that it indicated that the people were 'not culturally and politically conscious', as he urged the politicians to work for preserving and taking forward culture and literature

also, along with other aspects. Pointing to the current derelict condition of the Baan Theatre (old), the ABUSS president said, "The condition of this theatre reflects the state of politics in our country. We are still hopeful that there will be development. Grandson of Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Sanjay, also maintained that the government should do more for the cultural sector. "We always request the government for more focus on the cultural sector, but we haven't seen much been done. My one appeal to the new government will be to lend a helping hand to the artists," he said. Also, questioning the timing of the election, he added, "Our question is why are elections always held during the Bihu? It hampers our traditional celebration of 'Saat Bihu' (Bihu for seven days). Those in government jobs cannot be at home. Why can't this message from Assam go to the Central government that election should not be held here during the Saat Bihu? Tezpur was itself a Lok Sabha constituency till last year, when post-delimitation it was brought under the newly-carved Sonitpur seat.

Entire world sure of Modi win: Rajnath

PTI ■ JAMUI (BIHAR)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been receiving invitations for functions scheduled abroad next year, which shows that the "entire world believes his return to power is inevitable". Addressing an election rally in Bihar's Jamui district, the former BJP president said, "Election season is known to be volatile everywhere. People view these times with a degree of consternation, but not so in the case of India. The entire world believes PM Modi will be back for a third consecutive term in office." He is already being invited abroad for functions that are to be held next year, Singh claimed. The Defence Minister asserted that under Modi, India has transformed into a power "capable of repulsing cross-border terrorism as was seen during the surgical strikes". "Another example of India's rise in global stature was the release of retired navy officials, who were awarded death sentence by a court in Qatar, following a telephone call from Modi to the head of the West Asian state," said Singh.



Speaking hours after the release of BJP's 'Sankalp Patra' in Delhi in the presence of the PM, Singh, who headed the manifesto committee, said, "Unlike other parties, we fulfil the promises we make, be it Ram temple at Ayodhya or abrogation of Article 370." Referring to the law against triple talaq, he said, "We cracked down on the inhuman practice which caused untold miseries to our Muslim mothers and sisters, without worrying about criticisms from Congress and RJD which were concerned about their vote banks." Referring to RJD president Lalu Prasad as an "old friend", Singh, however, expressed disgust over a recent controversial utterance by the former's daughter Misa Bharti.

Slain Salwa Judum leader son enters LS poll fray

PTI ■ RAIPUR

He was just 19 when Naxalites killed his father, a former Salwa Judum leader. Defying the odds, he studied MBBS in Kyrgyzstan. Now, this man from a sleepy village in Chhattisgarh's insurgency-hit Bijapur district has entered the fray for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Meet Prakash Kumar Gota, an independent candidate from Scheduled-Tribe reserved Bastar Lok Sabha seat. Though the polls in Bastar are primarily a contest between the BJP and Congress, Gota claims he holds sway over tribal youths in the region. Talking to PTI, Gota said tribals constitute 32 per cent of the state's population, yet somehow, they have not been able to reap the benefits of

development works and schemes. "The two leading parties have always disappointed the people of Bastar, which is why I decided to enter the poll battle to bring real change in the region," he said. The 32-year-old member of the Muria tribe hails from Farsegarh village in Bijapur and is currently staying in a rented house in Jagdalpur, the headquarters of Bastar district, due to elections. His father, Chinna Ram Gota, an active leader of Salwa Judum, an anti-Maoist civil militia disbanded in 2011, was shot dead by Naxalites at his farm in Kukrel village, around 2 km away from Farsegarh in 2012. Maoists also killed his father's older brother in a similar attack in 2013. Gota said his father had

worked with late Congress leader Mahendra Karma, popularly called 'Bastar tiger' for his tough stand against Naxalites during the Salwa Judum movement. Karma was killed in the Jhiram valley Naxalite attack during the Congress's Parivartan Yatra in 2013. "I was a first-year student at a nursing college when my father was murdered. I had to quit my studies midway as my family's financial condition was not good. I have four brothers and two sisters. I am the second eldest. My mother is a housewife," Gota said. Gota worked as a sub-contractor for construction works in the area and tendu leaf collection, and this helped him fund his medical studies in Kyrgyzstan. "In 2016, I went to Kyrgyzstan for MBBS. I tried



unsuccessfully to avail an education loan. The struggle continued as I had to return home during the COVID-19 pandemic due to my family's financial condition," he said. Gota again worked as a sub-contractor and managed to resume his medical studies in Kyrgyzstan and returned to India in June 2023 after completing his MBBS.

He has, however, not appeared for the Foreign Medical Graduates Examination (FMGE) conducted by the National Board of Examination for eligibility to practice medicine in India. "Another tragedy struck my family in August last year when Naxalites abducted my older brother Mahesh Kumar,

who was the chief of the publicity wing of the BJP's Bijapur district unit," he said. Mahesh was later traced to a forest and admitted to a hospital in a critical condition. He has been in a coma ever since, he said. Asked why he did not join the BJP like his brother, Gota said he did not want to be in politics and wanted to take up a job. "There is a provision for a safe settlement and a government job under a rehabilitation scheme for victims of Maoist violence, but we did not get any of this. After all this, I was disappointed with the BJP and Congress," he said. Over the years, Bastar has become a Maoist stronghold due to large-scale poverty, illiteracy, and lack of health facilities and amenities, Gota said.

"My father contributed to the fight to free the region from the Naxalite menace, and I wanted to address all these issues to bring a change in Bastar," he said, citing why he wanted to contest the elections. However, Gota's decision to enter the fray was sudden. "When candidates had already started filing nominations for the first phase of the polls, my friends and social workers encouraged me to throw my hat in the ring," he said. People have been voluntarily contributing to and providing vehicles for Gota's campaign. "I cannot spend money in electioneering like big parties. I have some savings that have come in handy," he said. Gota exuded confidence about securing the support of the youth in the region.

"BJP nominee Mahesh Kashyap is a communal person and does not take all religions together, while the Congress's candidate Kawasi Lakhma is inactive. Both parties have ignored their dedicated workers and leaders while giving tickets," he said. Eleven Lok Sabha seats in Chhattisgarh will go to polls in three phases on April 19, April 26 and May 7, and the counting of votes will take place on June 4. Bastar will be the only seat to go to polls in the first phase. The ruling BJP has fielded Kashyap, a fresh face who had been an active member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and the Congress has given the ticket to Lakhma, an MLA who has served as a minister in the previous Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government.

Promises to keep

The BJP unveils its Lok Sabha poll manifesto with emphasis on ‘GYAN’ and development

The ruling BJP has unveiled its long-awaited manifesto, ‘Sankalp Patra’, for the Lok Sabha elections, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasising the party’s commitment to the welfare of ‘GYAN’ — Garib, Yuva, Annadaata and Naari Shakti (the poor, youth, farmers and women). Accompanied by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and BJP chief JP Nadda, the Prime Minister presented the manifesto at the party headquarters in New Delhi. Modi outlined that the paper’s thrust areas were centred around the concept of ‘Viksit Bharat’ — empowering the youth, women, farmers and the economically disadvantaged. He stressed the importance of enhancing both the dignity and quality of life for all citizens, promising initiatives such as providing piped gas to every household and supplying free electricity through solar power. The manifesto pledges to extend the Centre’s free ration scheme and prioritise self-reliance in essential food items like pulses, edible oils and vegetables to stabilise



prices and ensure food security. Additionally, it vows to expand flagship schemes like Ayushman Bharat and the PM Awas Yojana while ensuring access to clean drinking water in every home. In agriculture, the BJP promises to continue providing annual financial assistance of Rs 6,000 to farmers, enhance crop insurance through technology and implement periodic increases in the Minimum Support Prices. It also addresses the party’s commitment to implementing a uniform civil code, One Nation One Poll initiative, expansion of 5G networks, bolstering national security and abolishing waiting lists for train travel.

The main rival Congress’ manifesto, on the other hand, focuses on social welfare, economic reforms and addressing inequality through targeted interventions such as healthcare expansion, agricultural support and a caste census. In contrast, the BJP emphasises national security, infrastructure development and cultural issues, with a lesser emphasis on caste-based policies and regional grievances. Nadda reiterated the commitment to fulfil all promises encapsulated in ‘Modi Ki Guarantee’, the BJP’s slogan for the elections. Responding to the BJP’s manifesto, the Congress has criticised it over alleged shortcomings. Party spokesperson Pawan Khera labelled it a ‘maafinama’ or apology, highlighting unfulfilled promises from previous elections. Supriya Shrinate accused the BJP of misleading the public and ignoring critical issues such as ethnic violence in Manipur and protests in Ladakh. As the mudslinging match between the arch-rivals continues, it is for the people to judge who kept promises and who did not. Manifestos are no commitment and, therefore, not legally binding. Nonetheless, these do spell out a party’s ideology and the direction it wants to take the country in. As the campaign gains momentum, the debate over competing policy agendas is likely to intensify, shaping the discourse leading up to the polls. An informed voter would better not judge a party by its manifesto but by its track record.

PICTALK



A woman applies vermilion to another woman on the occasion of the Sautani festival, in Patna

Unravelling the Roy family’s legacy



PRAFULL GORADIA

The recent mudslinging between the TMC and BJP has highlighted a historical narrative concerning the role of the Roy family in the downfall of Bengal’s Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula

With the campaign for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections heating, mudslinging isn’t left behind, although one wishes this weren’t so. The Trinamool Congress has abused Smt. Amrita Roy, the BJP’s Krishnanagar Lok Sabha candidate, for belonging to the family of Krishna Chandra Roy, who had sided with the East India Company to take down Bengal’s Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula in 1757. The current Rajmata of Krishna Nagar has justified her family’s act, saying had they not done so, Sanatana Dharma and Bengali culture under the tyrannical Siraj would have ceased to exist. Moreover, Raja Krishna Chandra Roy, Amrita’s forefather wasn’t alone; Jagat Seth, Raja Naba Krishna Deb and above all Mir Jafar and many others wanted to see the end of Siraj-ud-Daula. Such was the ill-will he had generated.

What would have been Bengal’s fate had these merchant princes not contrived to overthrow Siraj? More than likely, Nadia district and today’s West Bengal might have gone to Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh. Pakistan’s first President Iskander Mirza was a direct descendant of Siraj-ud-Daula. The family lived in Murshidabad, but on the morrow of Partition, promptly migrated to Karachi, then Pakistan’s capital. Iskander first became defence secretary and then Pakistan’s president in March 1956. To go back to Murshidabad, Siraj-ud-Daula came to the throne in 1756. He soon showed his colours by dismissing his chief minister Rai Durlabh, picked by his grandfather Nawab Alivardi Khan. The young Nawab humiliated the wealthy state banker Jagat Seth by publicly slapping him in the durbar and threatening him with sunnat, i.e., circumcision (see Plassey to Pakistan by Humayun Mirza, son of Iskandar Mirza). The merchant princes were resentful of the rule by people of Central Asian stock and wanted more say in governance for the local people. However, they lacked the military organisation to effect an overthrow. Come 1757, upon the orders of the East India



Company’s Court of Directors in London, Robert Clive arrived from Madras, along with some sailors and soldiers, to teach Siraj-ud-Daula a last-lesson for humiliating the British at Fort William in Calcutta the previous year. This is where the Black Hole tragedy was perpetrated on the nawab’s orders. The nawabate’s merchant princes saw this as a rare opportunity to do away with this odious regime. British arms and Bengali money as well as contacts would ensure victory. Clive had only about 3,000 men, whereas Siraj-ud-Daula had an army of a lakh, plus a cavalry and elephants. This large army had to be truncated in numbers. Mir Jafar, who commanded half the army of the Nawab, was promised that if he helped to overthrow Siraj-ud-Daula, he would be made the Nawab. Consequently, over half of Siraj’s army did not fight. The Battle of Plassey on June 23, 1757, ended the saga of Siraj-ud-Daula and his life. At the time we are talking about, there were two cultures in Bengal, namely Bengali and Islamic. Since the 12th century, the region had been slipping out of Bengali influence and had become two-thirds Arabized. The Battle of Plassey

MIR JAFAR, WHO COMMANDED HALF THE ARMY OF THE NAWAB, WAS PROMISED THAT IF HE HELPED TO OVERTHROW SIRAJ-UD-DULA, HE WOULD BE MADE THE NAWAB. CONSEQUENTLY, OVER HALF OF SIRAJ’S ARMY DID NOT FIGHT

in 1757 was the first decisive setback. After Siraj was defeated and killed and his nawabate erased, Hindus for the first time in many years could celebrate puja openly. A grand Durga Puja was held at the palace of Raja Naba Krishna Deb, where the chief guest was Robert Clive. Imagine if Bengal had remained on the Islamic track, there would have been no historic renaissance for which Bengal is justly renowned and respected. There would have been no Raja Rammohan Roy, no Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, no Rabindranath Tagore, no Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda, no Yogi Aurobindo, no Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and certainly no Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. One can only imagine what this region might have become. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, more than a hundred years ago, had famously said “What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow”. But if the likes of Siraj-ud-Daula had continued on the throne, there would not have been a Bengal today. Gandhi did awaken Indians to the value of freedom, politics, soul and economics, but the find winner was Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army (INA). This

was admitted and affirmed by none other than Clement Atlee, Prime Minister of Britain from 1946 to 1951 the British leader who signed the Indian Independence Act of 1947 heralding India’s independence. After relinquishing office, Atlee came to India and was a guest of the then West Bengal Governor Justice P.B. Chakraborty. During a dinner conversation, Chakraborty asked his guest why the British quit India in a hurry in 1947, when there was no immediate cause, with the Quit India movement of 1942 having failed. The former British Prime Minister in reply quoted several reasons, principal among them being the erosion of loyalty to the British Crown among the Indian army, navy and air force, as a result of the action of Subhas Chandra Bose. Atlee’s reply to Chakraborty’s question on how much the non-violent satyagraha of Gandhi had influenced the British to free India, was “m-i-n-i-m-a-l”, with emphasis on each letter and a contemptuous smile. Had there been no Bengal, there wouldn’t have been a Netaji in the first place. (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BJP’S SOUTHERN STRATEGY

Madam — Apropos the editorial, “Southern Comfort”, published on April 12, this is my response. I fully agree that “Modi’s forays into the southern parts of the country may bear some fruits but it would be naive to think that the results will be immediately delivered; it will happen perhaps only sometime in future. Indeed, the BJP has managed to break ice in the northeast and southern India but that has taken considerable time and effort. Of course, efforts done now in the south would not go in vain and will pave the way for success in future elections”. He talks to the people about the failures of the incumbent DMK Government. In Kerala, the BJP is crazy to open its account. It is to be seen on 4th June. In Telangana, it fared well in the Assembly elections in 2023 improving its tally. It is quite encouraging for the party. In AP, the BJP party needs to do a lot of groundwork. Along with Naidu, it may get a few seats. In Karnataka, the BJP is equally poised with the Congress. Modi’s guarantees that the corrupt will be jailed in his third term may fetch the party some votes for in the south almost all the incumbent state Governments are mostly corrupt. So, the BJP is to open its gateway to the south in this scenario. More cannot be expected. It has to wait for a little more time to make its dent in the south as it did in the north-east.

N R Ramachandran | Chennai

THE UAE’S SWAMINARAYAN TEMPLE

Madam — Apropos the news story, “Swaminarayan Temple: The UAE’s Monument of Harmony”, published on April 13, this is my response. The tale of the Swaminarayan Temple in Abu Dhabi encapsulates more than just an architectural marvel; it speaks volumes about the convergence of faith, diplomacy and perseverance. The journey from prophecy to reality, spanning nearly three decades, mirrors the shared commitment of India and the UAE towards fostering cultural understanding

Fix accountability



Apropos news article, “Drunken driving leaves six school children dead”, published on April 12, this is my response. Six children were killed and 20 injured after a school bus carrying them overturned in Mahendragarh. Shockingly the driver was allegedly drunk and the bus did not have the fitness certificate. This is atrocious, after the accident they are finding fault. Many schools don’t follow Government rules. Hundreds of school buses are in the same condition. But who

bothers? Administration wakes up from the slumber only when poor kids lose their lives. Dismiss the district administration for not following inspection beforehand remove them from the job and do criminal proceedings against them why shouldn’t the city Traffic Police, Police Department & Transportation Department be made a party in the case for their negligence (since 2017 when the bus was operating without paying Road Tax, even the bus unfit to run. What are the RTO officials doing since 2017?), but this will never happen. People want to know, were the local traffic police sleeping till this mishap happened? Now they are saying the gross violation but no one checked & impounded the bus for these violations before the mishap? It’s a pity that their timely action would have saved precious lives. RIP the departed soul may the lord give their parents the desired strength to overcome the loss.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

and global harmony. Prime Minister Modi’s pivotal role, alongside the visionary leadership of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, underscores the significance of diplomatic collaborations in shaping monumental endeavours. Beyond its aesthetic allure, the temple stands as a symbol of inclusivity, with its design echoing the ethos of unity amidst diversity. The meticulous craftsmanship and innovative solutions employed in its construction exemplify human ingenuity overcoming geographical and climatic challenges. In essence, the Swaminarayan Temple in Abu Dhabi is not merely a place of worship; it’s a testament to the transformative power of collaboration, bridging nations and cultures in a shared pursuit of peace and progress.

Ishana Arya | Thane

REFLECTIONS ON JALLIANWALA BAGH

Madam — Apropos the news article, “Honouring the martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh”, published on April 12, this is my response. The tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh continues to echo through history, with its

Constitutional morality: The pillar of India’s democracy

Central to India’s dynamic democracy is the principle of constitutional morality, serving as a compass guiding the nation’s advancement and growth

Every Quadrennial year, the election season in India sets a stage for new hope, a new batch of electorates and especially a power in each electorate to exercise their right of adult universal suffrage. News channels are brimming with discourses and the candidates are doing their best to secure a seat in the political engine of society. The vibrancy of the largest democracy was foreseen by the members of the constituent assembly who wanted the ruling ideals to rise from the Constitution itself to guide the coming of a new independent nation. The father of the Indian Constitution, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar defined Constitutional morality as a paramount reverence for all the forms of the Constitution, enforcing obedience to authority and acting within these forms in addition to the habit of open speech and action subject only to definite legal control. He believed that constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment rather it needs to be cultivated consciously. In contemporary times, it has become a principal tool of activism in the



hands of the judicial wing of our country. Unlike other ideals of brotherhood, equality, fairness, non-arbitrariness, etc. which sprung from the need for pre-independent India, constitutional morality had to be injected into the bloodstream of the country. The Judiciary has brought back the discourse on constitutional morality through a slew of judgments in contemporary times. Thereby reinstating the nature of the Indian Constitution, an organic and living document, pulsating life into a more than half-century-old Manga Carta of India. The CJI of India, D.Y. Chandrachud speaking in the same vein said that judges go by the values derived from the Constitution that the courts are intended to espouse such as human dignity, personal liberty, equality, fairness, etc. He also added that the

Supreme Court is final not because they (judges) are right, but they are right because they are final. Transformational jurisprudence on constitutional morality is a pre-constitutional concept. For Instance, practice, which was within the bounds of the then — prevailing social morality, was abolished and this act was a part of constitutional morality, even though the constitution was drawn up years later. Post Independence may not have found an explicit place in the text but it is embedded in the essence of constitutionalism. It demands morality to be objective based on the prevailing dynamics of society. The conscience-keepers are duty-bound to draw a balance between individual/class liberty and societal acceptance of change in the socio-legal and politico scenario. From LGBTQ+ rights recognition in Navtej Singh Johar vs. Union of India to the striking down of section 497 of IPC, 1960, dealing with the law of adultery in Joseph Shine vs. Union of India, the Judiciary has advocated its mandate to include constitu-

tional morality over majoritarian or popular morality. Constitutional morality is derived from public morality, however, slightly divorced from it and sifted through constitutional idealism. The intersectionality of social and religious belief systems entangles it further, for instance, in the Sabarimala judgment, the debate circled between the popular socio-religious belief and the fundamental right of freedom of religion of a class of women (menstruating women) under Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, is a worthy example in this regard. Constitutional morality may also at times be at a crossroads with Jus naturale. Euthanasia as a practice or the Right to Abortion, both were initially entrenched in belief systems to be against societal morality. It was not until the Supreme Court of India balanced the interests of the right seekers and the opposers, allowing both the above practices in a judicially permissible manner, that it found its acceptance. (The writer is a research scholar; their views are personal)



ABHAYA DUBEY

FIRST COLUMN

SPIRITUAL SOLUTION
TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Limiting procreation is perhaps the most significant step towards sustainability



ACHARYA PRASHANT

Today the world that we live in, people are trying to do small, small good things, so that we can conveniently escape away from the fact that there is something humongously evil that we are doing. Most people are habituated towards consumption, it is not consumption per se that is the problem; it is the mad and blind consumption of stuff that is anyway not going to do you any good. That's the problem. So, wisdom or spiritual wisdom is not about the renunciation of consumption altogether. There are signs which clearly show the impact of various activities on climate change. For example: going car-free, avoiding transatlantic flight; choosing green energy; switching from an electric car to car-free; choosing a vegan diet; replacing a typical car with a hybrid; washing clothes in cold water rather than hot water; recycling; hanging dry clothes; upgrading to energy-efficient light bulbs. And the title of the graphic is 'Tonnes of CO2 equivalent saved per year for one person undertaking each action' (Wynes & Nicholas, 2017; Environmental Research Letters, Volume 12, Number 7). But these are 10 activities that are popular where all the do-gooders are busy doing all these ten activities and they walk around with great missionary zeal and even greater missionary pride.

And then there is this huge bar that corresponds to around sixty tonnes of CO2 which comes from doing a single action — which is, having one child. We don't talk about the largest contributor to climate change because this is where our ego lives, this is where the physical and bodily tendencies live. You must be wondering why I am speaking about this thing regarding procreation, regarding having kids. It's because this is the single most important issue facing you and me and the planet



and the millions of species today. This is the one thing that man immediately needs to address at this moment. There is no greater challenge in front of mankind — not the Third World War, not nuclear proliferation, nothing at all. This is the biggest challenge. Can you please either stop or limit having babies? This is the one challenge that nobody wants to talk about. If you can address this, then everything will be addressed. For every urge for development, you will see linkages between body identification, consumption, procreation and followed by devastation. When the global temperatures rise by three degrees or four degrees, all these baby flowers will wilt. Anyway, not too many species of flowers are going to remain to be planted. How much is climate change to blame? It affects at least 10,967 species on the IUCN Red List and projections suggest that if global temperatures increase by 2°C by 2100, about 18 per cent of all species on land will face a high risk of going extinct.

And this cannot be addressed merely by way of litigation. You require a spiritual movement; you require a deeply spiritual consciousness to understand what I am saying and act on what I am pointing to. You cannot limit the number of kids without first putting an end to this body-identification. As long as your material body is there, you will continue to consume, you will have to consume. We do not see the linkage between body-identification, consumption, procreation and devastation; we look at them as different things. This urge for development — what do you think, it has nothing to do with the devastation of this planet? What is exactly the definition of development? That which brings pleasure to you; that which brings comfort and convenience to you, right? That's how you define development. In the history of mankind, the time has come when without addressing that root problem, you cannot address any of the problems. And if you do not address the root problem now, there is going to be no tomorrow.

(The author is a Vedanta teacher, author and the founder of Prashant Advait Foundation; views are personal)

Income inequalities hamper sustainable growth



UTTAM GUPTA

While the nation's GDP is poised to surge by 7.6 per cent in the current financial year, concerns loom large over the sluggish pace of private consumption



During the current financial year, the Indian economy is expected to register a growth of 7.6 per cent in real gross domestic product or GDP. Coming on top of growth of 9.1 per cent during 2021-22 and 7.2 per cent during 2022-23, India's performance is spectacular. Emboldened by this trend and Modi's commitment to pursue economic reforms with greater vigour during its third term, analysts are hoping for growth of above 7 per cent on a sustainable basis. But, there is a catch.

Private consumption which accounts for as much as 55 per cent of the Indian economy has acted as a major drag. For instance, during FY 2023-24, it is expected to grow by a meagre 3 per cent (even lower than 4.4 per cent as given in the first advance estimate). This is the slowest growth in private consumption since FY 2002-03 when growth was 2.9 per cent. It is impossible to sustain an overall GDP growth of 7-8 per cent in the years to come if the most important component (read: private consumption) is growing at less than half this rate.

What is private consumption?

Apart from essential consumption items such as food, shelter, clothing, education, health etc, it includes spending by people on a host of discretionary items such as consumer durables viz. ACs, refrigerators, washing machines, TVs, automobiles, mobiles and so on. The demand for these goods depends on the 'purchasing power' of the people at large which requires that at least all working-age persons (18 years to 60 years) have adequate incomes. This brings us to another stark reality namely the distribution of income and wealth.

Where does India stand?

According to a report 'Time to Care' by Oxfam that came ahead of the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) held in January 2020 'India's richest one per cent hold more than four times the wealth held by 953 million people who make up for the bottom 70 per cent of the population'. It also showed that there were a total of 63 Indian billionaires (billionaire is a term used to describe a person having wealth over US\$ one billion) and their combined total wealth was higher than

India's Union Budget for the FY 2018-19. Another Oxfam report, "Inequality Kills", released ahead of the WEF meeting held in early 2022, mentioned that the number of Indian billionaires grew to 102 by March 2020 and further to 142 in November 2021. During this period, their wealth increased from Rs 2300,000 crore to Rs 5300,000 crore. At the same time, the income of 84 per cent of households declined and the share of the bottom half of the population in national wealth was a mere six per cent.

Meanwhile, a report titled 'Survival of the Richest' released by Oxfam International at the 2023 annual meeting of the WEF in Davos, Switzerland, says that 'the wealthiest one per cent of individuals in India possess over 40 per cent of the nation's total wealth. Juxtapose this with the bottom half of the population getting a mere six per cent of the nation's wealth, we end up with glaring inequalities.

How does it impact demand?

Let us look at India's population of around 140 crore and nominal GDP of about Rs 300,00,000 crore. Apply Oxfam percentages to these numbers. The wealthiest one per cent or 1.4 crore individuals have 40 per cent of GDP or Rs 120,00,000 crore whereas a vast 50 per cent of the population or 70 crore individuals have a mere 6 per cent of GDP or Rs 18,00,000 crore. On per-person basis, those in the wealthiest category have annual purchasing power (PP) of Rs 85 lakh each whereas others in the bottom 50 per cent have a PP of a mere Rs 25,000 each.

Such an income distribution pattern is far from conducive to boosting demand on a sustainable basis. There are inherent limits to how much a wealthy person can buy. On the other hand, if a good portion of the money with him is

distributed among those who are not so blessed (read: the bottom 50 per cent), this would give a big boost to private consumption. We hear loud voices from various quarters including from industries and businesses asking the Government to formulate policies, reduce taxes even give direct income support. But, there isn't even a whisper of 'why inequalities in income arise in the first place. An analysis of the financials of India's largest companies—those comprising the BSE 500 index—gives us some clues.

The profits of corporations included in this index went up from Rs 480,000 crore during FY 2017-18 to more than Rs 1000,000 crore during FY 2021-22 - an increase of over 100 per cent, whereas their revenue growth was only 47 per cent during this period. This means that payments to factors of production other than the owners of capital (read: shareholders) such as to employees/workers, purchase of inputs, interest payments, etc., have been kept under a tight leash, resulting in a disproportionate boost to profits.

The aggregate dividend paid by these firms increased from Rs 176,000 crore during FY 2017-18 to Rs 302,000 crore during FY 2021-22, which is an increase of 72 per cent. In each of the last five years, they paid at least 30 per cent of aggregate net profit as dividends. Cumulatively, the companies distributed 34 per cent of profits as dividends. This is an unusually high payout ratio—even higher than 30 per cent paid by the world's largest companies included in America's S&P 500. Thus, the companies have done little to reinvest the profits for growth.

Whether profits, albeit extraordinary, to the company or high dividends to shareholders, they have been paid for or come at the cost of others. For instance, the Rs

1000,000 crore profits of firms in the BSE 500 index during FY 2021-22 came at the cost of undermining the purchasing power of millions of consumers. If even 50 per cent of this amount or Rs 500,000 crore had remained with the latter, aggregate demand would have gone up manifolds. Likewise, look at the Rs 302,000 crore dividend paid to shareholders during FY 2021-22. An overwhelming share of this went to the promoters and other minority shareholders. If, instead of filling their coffers—the money that merely adds to their cash balances or is spent on a few discretionary/luxury items—more of it were to be distributed in higher salaries to their employees, particularly at the lower rung, imagine what it would do to demand. Several businesses enjoy pricing power. For instance, those operating in metals such as copper and zinc, or in hydrocarbons like oil and gas, enjoy a natural monopoly. Leveraging this, they charge high prices, resulting in windfall gains for themselves. Enterprises in the chemical, petrochemicals, pharmaceutical and agrochemical sectors have hugely benefited from a protective policy environment. Over 60 million small and medium enterprises (SMEs) also ape large enterprises when it comes to distributing the wealth generated. Their owners spend the least on payments to workers. To conclude, all businesses are structured to result in the concentration of income in the hands of their owners or those who wield power and influence. Instead of deflecting the ball to the Government, they need to bring about a fundamental change in the way they operate. They need to shed over zealotness for profits, charge less from consumers, distribute more to workers and pay more taxes.

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

Indian political discourse plummets: Standards in free fall

Elections serve as a litmus test for the health of a nation's democracy, revealing the true character of leaders

The narrative that happens during the time of the General Election is an indicator of the quality of democracy practiced in a country. Leaders, especially the star campaigners, should set a standard for the public discourse through their speeches and interviews with the media persons. They should bear in mind that every word they utter is being recorded digitally with cameras and audio instruments. Whatever they speak is under public scrutiny and any aberrations would lead to major mishaps.

The campaign speeches in India took a new low during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister (1984-1989). Rajiv, who took over the post of Prime Minister following



the assassination of his mother Indira Gandhi, was a refreshing change from the image of conventional Congress leaders spotting the ear-to-ear smile and perverted deals. But that did not last long as the Government he headed was enmeshed in corruption charges ranging from Bofors Gun to HDW submarine deals. It was futile to expect the truncated Opposition to sit idle while the

whole world was discussing the gun contract. Rajiv Gandhi, who was upset with the charges, went to the extent of describing the opposition as political limpets. This is a term coined by a speech writer of Rajiv who always flouted his Indian Foreign Service background to play one-upmanship against old-time Congress leaders.

On seeing that Rajiv Gandhi was upset with the allegations of corruption, Ram Jethmalani, the doyen among the country's lawyers launched a fusillade of questions at the Prime Minister. "I'll ask you ten questions each day about the Bofors deal and if you claim that there is no corruption involved in it, please answer my questions," said Jethmalani. This made Rajiv furious and

he shot back saying that he would not answer barking dogs. Ram Jethmalani was a highly respected lawyer and social activist and the general public did not take the comments of the then Prime Minister lightly. Ram Nath Goenka, the founder of Indian Express, who had said in a signed front-page editorial in his newspaper that he could die peacefully with Rajiv Gandhi occupying the Prime Minister's chair had to make a retreat and wrote that the earlier Rajiv Gandhi goes the better for the country. The Congress alone was responsible for the falling standard in the national narrative during the election. When the Congress made use of public discourses with unparliamentary and uncivilized words, it was futile to expect the opposition to sit back and suffer silently.

Barring leaders like A B Vajpayee, L K Advani, Murali Manohar Joshi, George Fernandes and S Chandrasekhar, the opposition too had an array of leaders capable of spitting venom and fire at the rivals. Though many seasoned statesmen like Nani Palkhivala and J R D Tata cautioned the nation about the falling standards in the quality of debates and discussions, it did not make any impact as politicians continued their harangues with the sole purpose of scoring brownie points. The result was that the political campaigns that should have served as a source of knowledge and information got degraded into

speeches full of chosen abuses. The present-day Congress leaders are no different. Manmohan Singh, the former Prime Minister said in a media meeting on 4 January 2014 that it would be disastrous for the country to have Narendra Modi as Prime Minister. Now it is for the people of India to decide whether Narendra Modi's decade-long regime was disastrous or not.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge is no different from M M Mani, the Marxist leader of Kerala when it comes to "showering" rivals with the choicest of abuses. Being the president of the GOP, Kharge has the major responsibility to ensure the dignity of the narratives. But the kind of words he has used

and is using do not augur well for the position he holds. Politics is a profession that requires dignity, decency and decorum. One could not speak or behave in a manner that would put hooligans to shame. A politician should be able to control the language and mannerisms while he interacts with the people. The behaviour of former union minister Dayanidhi Maran (grand nephew of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin) who is in politics only because of his family connections, is reprehensible as well as condemnable.

When he was asked about K Annamalai, the state chief of Tamil Nadu BJP, Maran went to the extent of describing him as a joker and said he does not know any Annamalai. This is

the zenith of arrogance as Annamalai is the most talked about person in South India as of date. His rise in BJP was not because of his family background while his educational and professional qualifications are sufficient to make one say My My.. Maran and his ilk need sensibility to cherish the beauty of Annamalai's qualifications.

In his decade-long service as an IPS officer, Annamalai earned encomium from all his seniors while Maran was dropped from the Manmohan Singh-led Government within three years of being sworn in following corruption charges against him. This much for dynasty politics.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

Israel hails ‘success’ in blocking Iran’s unprecedented attack

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israel on Sunday hailed its air defences in the face of an unprecedented attack by Iran, saying the systems thwarted 99 per cent of the more than 300 drones and missiles launched toward its territory.

Regional tensions were high amid fears of an Israeli counter-strike that could fuel further escalation. US President Joe Biden said he would convene a meeting Sunday of the Group of Seven advanced democracies “to coordinate a united diplomatic response to Iran’s brazen attack.” The US made clear it would not participate in any offensive action against Iran.

“We don’t seek a war with Iran. We’re not looking for escalation here,” White House national security spokesman John Kirby told NBC.

Iran launched the attack in response to a strike widely blamed on Israel that hit an Iranian consular building in Syria earlier this month and killed two Iranian generals. Israel said Iran launched 170 drones, more than 30 cruise

missiles and more than 120 ballistic missiles.

By Sunday morning, Iran said the attack was over, and Israel reopened its airspace.

“We will build a regional coalition and collect the price from Iran, in the way and at the time that suits us,” said a key member of Israel’s War Cabinet, Benny Gantz. The two foes have for years been engaged in a shadow war marked by attacks such as the Damascus strike. But Sunday’s assault, which set off air-raid sirens across Israel, was the first time Iran has launched a direct military assault on Israel, despite decades of enmity dating back to the country’s 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Israel has over the years established — often with the help of the United States — a multilayered air-defence network that includes systems capable of intercepting a variety of threats, including long-range missiles, cruise missiles, drones and short-range rockets. That system, along with collaboration with the US and others, helped thwart what could have been a far more

Sunak flays Iran’s attack against Israel, deploys jets

London (PTI): Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has condemned Iran’s attack against Israel as “reckless” and pledged that the UK would stand up for security in the region after Tehran launched dozens of aerial drones and cruise missiles overnight on Saturday and into Sunday.

The UK’s Ministry of Defence (MoD) said late on Saturday that several additional Royal Air Force (RAF) fighter jets had been moved to the region to help intercept the drone attacks. The aircraft and air-fuelling tankers are being deployed as part of the UK’s ongoing Operation Shader against the Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist group in the region.



In this image provided by the White House, President Joe Biden, along with members of his national security team, receive an update on an ongoing airborne attack on Israel from Iran, as they meet in the Situation Room of the White House in Washington, on Saturday.

AP/PTI

devastating assault at a time when Israel is already bogged down in its war against Hamas in Gaza and engaged in low-level fighting on its northern border with Lebanon’s Hezbollah militia. Both Hamas

and Hezbollah are backed by Iran. Israeli and US officials praised the response to the aerial assault.

“Iran launched more than 300 threats and 99 per cent were intercepted,” said Rear

Adm. Daniel Hagari, the Israeli military spokesman. “That is a success.” Asked if Israel would respond, Hagari said the country would do what was needed to protect its citizens. Hagari said none of the drones and

Biden team pledges ‘support’ for Israel

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden and his national security team monitored Iran’s aerial attack against Israel on Saturday as US forces joined efforts to down explosive-laden drones launched by Tehran. With tensions at their highest since the Israel-Hamas war began six months ago, Biden pledged that American support for Israel’s defense against attacks by Iran and its proxies is “ironclad.” US forces shot down some Iran-launched attack drones flying toward Israel, according to a US defense official and two other US officials who spoke Saturday on the condition of anonymity to discuss the matter. The US and Israel had been bracing for an attack for days after Iran vowed to retaliate for a suspected Israeli strike this month on an Iranian consular building in Syria that killed 12 people, including two senior Iranian generals in the Revolutionary Guard’s elite Quds Force.

The US defense official said the effort to intercept Iran’s attack was continuing. Biden cut short a weekend stay at his Delaware beach house to meet with his national security team at the White House on Saturday afternoon, returning to Washington minutes before Israeli officials confirmed that they had detected drones being launched toward their territory from Iran.

He convened a principals meeting of the National Security Council in the White House Situation Room to discuss the unfolding situation, the White House said, before speaking with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu late Saturday. The attack marked the first time Iran has launched a direct military assault on Israel, risking a wider regional conflict.

The Pentagon reported that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had spoken with his Israeli counterpart “to discuss urgent regional threats ... and made clear that Israel could count on full US support to defend Israel against any attacks by Iran and its regional proxies.” National security adviser Jake Sullivan

also spoke with his counterpart to reinforce Washington’s “ironclad commitment to the security of Israel.” National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said in a Saturday statement that “Iran has begun an airborne attack against Israel.” She added: “The United States will stand with the people of Israel and support their defense against these threats from Iran.” Biden on Friday said the United States was “devoted” to defending Israel and that “Iran will not succeed.” Asked by reporters what his message was for Iran, the president’s only reply was: “Don’t.”

He ignored a question about what would trigger a direct US military response, and when asked how imminent an Iranian attack on Israel was, Biden said he did not want to get into secure information, “but my expectation is sooner than later.”

The US, along with its allies, have sent direct messages to Tehran to warn against further escalating the conflict. During the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, there have been near-daily exchanges of fire between Israeli forces and the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group along the Israel-Lebanon border. US officials have recorded more than 150 attacks by Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria on US forces at bases in those countries since war started on October 7. One attack in late January killed three US service members in Jordan. In retaliation, the US launched a massive air assault, hitting more than 85 targets at seven locations in Iraq and Syria. Meantime, on Saturday, commandos from Iran’s paramilitary Revolutionary Guard rappelled from a helicopter onto an Israeli-affiliated container ship near the Strait of Hormuz and seized the vessel. Watson, the NSC spokesperson, said the US strongly condemned the seizure and urged Iran to release the ship and crew immediately. “We will work with our partners to hold Iran to account for its actions,” she said. Also Saturday, the Israeli-occupied West Bank also saw some of the worst violence since Hamas’ attack on Israel.

Aus Police identify attacker who killed 6

AP ■ SYDNEY

Police identified Sunday the assailant who stabbed and killed six people at a busy Sydney shopping centre before a police officer fatally shot him. New South Wales Police said that Joel Cauchi, 40, was responsible for the Saturday afternoon attack at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Bondi Junction, in the city’s eastern suburbs and not far from the world-famous Bondi Beach.

NSW Assistant Police Commissioner Anthony Cooke told reporters at a media conference on Sunday that Cauchi suffered from yet unspecified mental health issues and police investigators weren’t treating the attack as terrorism-related.

“We are continuing to work through the profiling of the offender but very clearly to us at this stage, it would appear that this is related to the mental health of the individual involved,” Cooke said. “There is still, to this point... no information we have received, no evidence we have recovered,



no intelligence that we have gathered that would suggest that this was driven by any particular motivation — ideology or otherwise,” he added. The attack at the shopping mall, one of the country’s busiest and which was a hub of activity on a particularly warm fall afternoon, began around 3:10 pm and police were swiftly called. Six people — five women and one man, aged between 20 and 55 — were killed in the attack. Another 12 were injured and remain in hospital, including a 9-month-old child whose mother was killed in the attack. The male victim was a security

guard at the shopping centre and was later identified as 30-year-old Faraz Tahir from Pakistan. According to a written statement Sunday from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Australia, Faraz had been in Australia for a less than a year and was a “cherished member of our community.” Video footage taken by a witness showed many people fleeing as a knife-wielding Cauchi ran erratically through the shopping mall and lunging at people. “When I took my footage it, was about 15 seconds maybe before he was shot by the

police officer and he’d already killed a number of people at that point but we didn’t know and we had no idea what was going on,” said Rohan Anderson, who had entered the shopping center just moments before the attack. “We just saw a person on the level below us, with a knife, running around and you just sit in disbelief that this is happening in Australia, in Bondi,” he said.

Other footage showed a man confronting the attacker on an escalator in the shopping center by holding what appeared to be a metal pole. Inspector Amy Scott, who was the first emergency responder on the scene, shot and killed Cauchi.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the officer was “certainly a hero” whose actions had saved many more lives. “The wonderful inspector who ran into danger by herself and removed the threat that was there to others, without thinking about the risks to herself,” he said.

Indian student shot dead in Canada’s Vancouver

AP ■ OTTAWA

A 24-year-old Indian man who went to Canada in 2022 to pursue higher education was shot dead in his car in Vancouver city, police said on Sunday. The Vancouver Police Department in a press release said officers were called to the scene around 11 pm on April 12 after residents heard the sound of gunshots.

Chirag Antil was found deceased inside a vehicle in the area, police said. No arrests have been made and the investigation remains ongoing, it said. The incident happened within a block of the route for Saturday’s Vaisakhi parade and festival, police said. The body was found in a vehicle in the area around 11 pm Friday, according to police spokesperson Const. Tania Visintin, CBC News reported. Visintin did not say if the killing was connected to gang activity.



Chirag Antil’s family has set up a fundraiser on GoFundMe with a goal of Canadian dollars 40,000 to repatriate his body to India. “Hi, my name is Anurag Dahiya, and I’m seeking help or donations for my younger brother,” the fundraiser says. “Chirag Antil, an international student from Haryana, India, who arrived in Vancouver in 2022 for his studies, tragically lost his life due to a recent murder in the city,” it said.

Media urges Biden, Trump to commit to 2024 election debates

AP ■ NEW YORK

Twelve news organisations on Sunday urged presumptive presidential nominees Joe Biden and Donald Trump to agree to debates, saying they were a “rich tradition” that have been part of every general election campaign since 1976. While Trump, who did not participate in debates for the Republican nomination, has indicated a willingness to take on his 2020 rival, the Democratic president has not committed to debating him again. Although invitations have not been formally issued, the news organisations said it was not too early for each campaign to say publicly that it will participate in the three presidential and one vice presidential forums set by the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates.

“If there is one thing Americans can agree on during this polarised time, it is that the stakes of this election are exceptionally high,” the organisations said in a joint statement.



Former U.S. President Donald Trump greets attendees during a campaign event in Schnecksville, Pa., Saturday.

AP/PTI

“Amidst that backdrop, there is simply no substitute for the candidates debating with each other, and before the American people, their visions for the future of our nation.”

ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox, PBS, NBC, NPR and The Associated Press all signed on to the letter.

Biden and Trump debated twice in 2020. A third debate was cancelled after Trump, then president, tested positive for COVID-19 and would not debate remotely.

Asked on March 8 whether he would commit to a debate with Trump, Biden said, “it

depends on his behaviour.” The president was visibly miffed by his opponent in the freewheeling first 2020 debate, at one point saying, “will you shut up?”

Trump campaign managers Susie Wiles and Chris LaCivita said in a letter this past week

that “we have already indicated President Trump is willing to debate anytime, any place and anywhere — and the time to start these debates is now.” They cited the seven 1858 Illinois Senate debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, saying “certainly today’s America deserves as much.” The Republican National Committee voted in 2022 to no longer participate in forums sponsored by the Commission on Presidential Debates.

The Trump campaign has not indicated it would adhere to that, but did have some conditions. The campaign managers said the commission selected a “demonstrably anti-Trump moderator” in then-Fox News host Chris Wallace in 2020 and wants assurances the commission debates are fair and impartial. The Trump campaign also wants the timetable moved up, saying that many Americans will have already voted by September 16, October 1 and October 9, the dates of the three debates set by the commission. The Biden campaign

declined comment on the news organisations’ letter, pointing to the president’s earlier statement. There was no immediate response from the Trump campaign. But on Saturday, Trump held a rally in northeast Pennsylvania with two lecterns set up on the stage: one for him to give a speech, the other to symbolise what he said was Biden’s refusal to debate him. The second lectern had a placard that read, “Anytime. Anywhere. Anyplace.” Midway through his campaign speech, Trump turned to his right and pointed to the second lectern. “We have a little, look at this, it’s for him,” he said. “See the podium? I’m calling on Crooked Joe Biden to debate anytime, anywhere, any place. Right there. And we have to debate because our country is going in the wrong direction so badly and while it’s a little bit typically early we have to debate. We have to explain to the American people what the hell is going on,” Trump said. C-SPAN, NewsNation and Univision also joined the letter calling for debates.

Landslides hit Indonesia, 14 die, 3 missing

Tara Toraja (Indonesia) (AP): Torrential rains triggered landslides on Indonesia’s Sulawesi island, killing at least 14 people and leaving three others missing, officials said Sunday. Mud fell from surrounding hills onto four houses just before midnight Saturday in the Tana Toraja district of South Sulawesi province, said local police chief Gungardi Mundu. He said a family gathering was being held in one of the affected houses. Dozens of soldiers, police and volunteers joined the search in the villages of Makale and South Makale, in a remote, hilly area, Mundu said. Rescuers early Sunday managed to pull out two injured people, including an 8-year-old girl, and rushed them to a nearby hospital.

Scholz arrives in China on visit marked by trade tensions

AP ■ BEIJING

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz arrived in China on Sunday on a visit focused on the increasingly tense economic relationship between the sides and differences over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Scholz’s first destination was the industrial hub of Chongqing, where he and his delegation of ministers and business leaders were to visit a partially German-funded company and other sites in the vast city, which is a production base for China’s auto and other industries.

Scholz is also scheduled to visit the financial hub of Shanghai during his three-day visit, before travelling to the capital, Beijing, to meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang. German companies such as BMW and Volkswagen are



highly reliant on the Chinese market, but Beijing’s support for Russia creates frictions with the West.

Germany’s economy has benefited from China’s demand for investment and manufactured items from cars to chemicals, but those ties have frayed amid increasing competition from Chinese companies and tight-

ened regulations. Political interference has also been blamed for a sharp drop in foreign investment.

German companies have argued they face unfair market barriers in China and the government has pushed for a policy of “de-risking” to reduce reliance on the Chinese market and suppliers.

Despite that, China remained Germany’s top trading partner for the eighth straight year in 2023, with 254.1 billion euros (USD 271 billion) in goods and services exchanged between the sides, slightly more than what Germany traded with the US but a 15.5 per cent contraction from the year before. German exports to China totalled 97.3 billion euros (USD 104 billion), according to Germany’s Federal Statistical Office, although figures have varied depending on exchange rate fluctuations and rounding of numbers.

China state broadcaster CCTV showed Scholz descending from his plane in Chongqing and leaving in a motorcade, but did not carry any comments made to the welcoming delegation. Prior to his arrival, Scholz posted on social platform X that he

had discussed the “massive” Russian air attacks on civilian energy infrastructure with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday, and declared that Berlin will “stand unbreakably by Ukraine’s side.” China has refused to criticise Russian aggression. It has maintained trade relations with President Vladimir Putin’s government and aligned its foreign policy with Moscow in opposition to the US-led liberal political order, while touting its authoritarian one-party system as a superior alternative.

After visiting a hydrogen motor production facility run by German firm Bosch, Scholz toured the city with young architects and was to go on a boat cruise on the famed Yangtze River, one of two mighty waterways that partly surround the city perched on overlooking cliffs.

Chicago shooting kills 7-year-old girl, hurts 7

AP ■ CHICAGO

Eight people were shot including a young girl who was killed in what Chicago police believe was gang-related violence on the city’s South Side on Saturday night.

The 7-year-old girl was shot in the head and died, while a 1-year-old boy and a 7-year-old boy were each shot multiple times and listed in critical condition, Chicago Police Department Deputy Chief Don Jerome said in a news briefing at the scene on a block of 52nd Street near Damen Avenue.

Police responding to a gunfire alert around 9 p.m. applied tourniquets and chest seals to victims, who also included adults between the ages of 19

and 40, Jerome said. The victims, who were standing outside at a family gathering at the time of the shooting, were transported to area hospitals by the Chicago Fire Department. The investigation was still in the preliminary stages but witness accounts described two possible shooters on foot, Jerome said.

“This was not a random act of violence. It was likely gang-related,” Jerome said. “Regardless of the motivation for this incident, three innocent children were struck tonight and one of them tragically succumbed to her wounds. The offenders’ actions, make no mistake, are horrific and unacceptable in our city.”

Second batch of Indian Army personnel leave Maldives

PTI ■ MALE

The second batch of Indian military personnel manning a helicopter gifted by India to the Maldives has left the island nation as demanded by him, President Mohamed Muizzu has said. Muizzu, a pro-China leader, also reaffirmed that foreign ambassadors in Male will not wield authority over him emphasising that ultimate power rests with the citizens. Last month, he had alleged that his predecessor Ibrahim Mohamed Solih operated on the orders from “a foreign ambassador” without naming any country. He announced the withdrawal of the second Indian military contingent from the Maldives while speaking during a campaign event for the ruling People’s National Congress party candidates ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled for April 21. “The first team has already gone. Now, on April 9, the sol-

diers on the second platform have also been withdrawn,” Muizzu, who has been demanding the withdrawal of foreign soldiers from the Maldives during his election campaign last year, was quoted as saying by the local media on Saturday. Muizzu had set March 10 as the deadline for the withdrawal of the first group of Indian military personnel from his country. Under an agreement between Maldives and India in February, New Delhi agreed to replace the Indian military personnel stationed in Maldives to oversee the operations of the military aircraft the country has gifted with trained civilians also from India. Muizzu also said the Indian soldiers on the last aviation platform would also leave the Maldives before May 10 deadline set by him and that would mark the fulfillment of his pledge to remove Indian soldiers from the island nation.

“There is only one platform left. As the two countries have already signed, they [the remaining Indian military personnel] will also be recalled ahead of May 10. They will leave,” Muizzu was quoted as saying by Edition.mv news portal on Saturday. He did not provide details of the number of the second batch of Indian military personnel who have left the Maldives. He also did not clarify whether the soldiers had been replaced by trained Indian civilians. Neither the Maldives Defence Ministry nor India have commented on the latest withdrawal of Indian military personnel from this country. According to the Maldives government, 88 Indian soldiers were stationed in the Maldives to operate helicopters in Addu and Laamu Kaddhoo and a Dornier aircraft in Hanimaadhoo. The figure also includes doctors at the Senahiya military hospital, according to local media

reports. The first group of Indian soldiers left the Maldives on March 11. The Defence Ministry said 26 soldiers based in Addu were replaced by 26 Indian civilians. India also replaced the old helicopter in Addu with a new one. Relations between Maldives and India have deteriorated since Muizzu came to power in November last year while closer ties are maintained with China. He also travelled to China in January and met top Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping. China and the Maldives recently signed a defence cooperation agreement and several other infrastructure development projects. The Maldives is India’s key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and occupies a special place in its initiatives like ‘SAGAR’ (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the ‘Neighbourhood First Policy’ of the Indian government.

State Bank of Pakistan repays USD 1bn in Eurobonds

PTI ■ KARACHI

The State Bank of Pakistan has repaid USD 1 billion in Eurobonds as the cash-strapped country prepares for a new long-term bailout from the IMF to help manage its external financing needs and economic recovery, a media report said here on Sunday. Pakistan’s central bank announced that it met the dollar bond payment on Friday for the 10-year bond launched in 2014 maturing this month. Ahead of the April 15-20 meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in Washington DC, Pakistan government has decided to formally approach the IMF for a medium-term Extended Fund Facility (EFF) with the possibility of augmenting through climate finance. The Eurobonds repayment comes amid Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) apprehension that Pakistan’s economic outlook remains uncertain. “The SBP has successfully executed the repayment of USD 1 billion Pakistan’s International Bond on April 12, 2024 (principal plus interest). The pay-

ment was made to the agent bank for onward distribution to the bondholders,” the Bank said in a statement on Saturday. This bond has rallied by 84 per cent so far this year, The News International said on Sunday quoting the Bank statement. “In response to growing worries, the country’s assets came under pressure last year when its foreign exchange reserves dropped below USD 3 billion in February 2023 due to the delayed IMF programme. This stoked concerns about a possible bond payment default,” it said, adding that the country managed to secure a USD 3 billion IMF stand-by arrangement last summer. Now, after the general elections were held in February 2024, Islamabad is reportedly ready to begin talks with the global lender for a new loan programme, the newspaper said. Pakistan’s short-term financial prospects are cautiously optimistic. Concerns remain, nevertheless, over its capacity to pay off its long-term debt. The country has to pay back USD 4.3 billion in external debt in the last quarter of this fiscal year, the report said. “After repayment of 2024 bond, Pakistan’s total outstanding international bonds/Sukuks

are USD 6.8 billion (6.8 per cent of public external debt) with the next maturity amounting to USD 500 million in September 2025,” it said quoting Shahid Ali Habib, the CEO at Arif Habib Limited. The central bank’s foreign exchange reserves have fallen following the latest bond repayment. However, it seems likely that with the USD 1.1 billion final IMF tranche, which is expected to be released after the global lender’s board meeting later this month, FX reserves will increase to USD 8 billion, the newspaper said. “As of March 29, the SBP had USD 8.04 billion in foreign reserves. The USD 3 billion IMF stand-by arrangement ended on Thursday,” it added. On April 11, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said that Pakistan’s economic outlook remains uncertain, as political instability would remain a key risk to the sustainability of stabilisation and reform efforts. The Manila-based lending agency in its ‘Asian Development Outlook’ said if reforms are implemented, growth is forecast to restart gradually this fiscal year and improve slightly next year.

Baloch militants behind killing of 11 people

Islamabad (PTI): Baloch militants claimed responsibility for killing 11 people in separate attacks in Pakistan’s restive southwest, according to a media report on Sunday. Nine young men, hailing from the Punjab province, were killed in the Noshki area of the Balochistan province on Saturday when gunmen forced them off a bus they were travelling in and kidnapped them after verifying their Punjabi ethnicity. Later, they killed them and dumped their bodies under a nearby bridge. In a separate incident, two people were killed on the same highway when gunmen fired at their car after they tried to break through their cordon. The banned Balochistan Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the killings, the Dawn newspaper reported. The nine people from Punjab were on their way to Iran, from where they were planning to enter Europe via Turkey, according to the report. They left their towns on April 7 with visas stamped for Iran and Iraq but had no plans to stay in these countries. Quoting local people, the report said that their actual destination was Europe, which they wanted to reach via Turkey but had procured valid visas for Iraq and Iran to avoid Iranian immigration authorities.



Merrymakers take part in the second day celebrations of the Myanmar New Year water festival Sunday, April 14, outside the city hall in Yangon, Myanmar

AP/PTI

More civilians die in Ukraine

Think tank warns delays in US aid will hamper Kyiv’s forces

AP ■ KYIV

More civilians died across Ukraine Sunday as analysts warned that delays in US military assistance would see Kyiv struggle to fight off Russian offensives. One man was Sunday killed after a Russian drone hit the truck he was driving in the Sumy region, the local prosecutor’s office said. Officials in the Kharkiv region also said Sunday that they had retrieved the bodies of a 61-year-old woman and a 68-year-old man killed by a Russian strike the previous day. Ten Russian Shahed-type drones were shot down over the Kharkiv region

overnight, the Ukrainian Air Force said Sunday. Meanwhile, shelling in the Russian-occupied Kherson region killed two civilians Sunday, said Moscow-installed leader Vladimir Saldo. Ukrainian drones were also reported in Russia’s Krasnodar and Belgorod regions and over the Black Sea, the Russian Defense Ministry said. The news came as Washington-based think tank the Institute for the Study of War warned that delays in Western military assistance would increasingly hamper Ukraine’s ability to fight back Russian advances. With the war in Ukraine entering its third year and a vital US aid package for Kyiv stuck in Congress, Russia has used its edge in firepower and personnel to step up attacks across eastern Ukraine. It has increasingly used satellite-guided gliding bombs — dropped from planes from a safe distance —

to pummel Ukrainian forces beset by a shortage of troops and ammunition. In its report, the ISW said that Russian forces were prioritizing grinding, tactical gains with operational-level efforts focusing on the cities of Lyman, Chasiv Yar, and Pokrovsk. “The Russian military command likely assesses that Ukrainian forces will be unable to defend against current and future Russian offensive operations due to delays in or the permanent end of US military assistance,” the think tank said. Ukraine’s military chief, Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi, said Saturday that Ukraine’s battlefield situation in the industrial east had “significantly worsened in recent days,” as warming weather allowed Russian forces to launch a fresh push along several stretches of the more than 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) - long front line.

South African President Ramaphosa urges Muslim community members to join active politics

Johannesburg (PTI): South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has called on the members of the Muslim community, many of them of Indian origin, to join active politics like their forebears to make the country a place of equality, shared prosperity and true freedom. Ramaphosa was speaking at a huge Eid gathering in the Indian township of Laudium, near the capital Pretoria. “It is regrettable that over the years one of our once vibrant and politically active communities has retreated into the background of our national life,” he said on Thursday. “Much of our politics has come to be

defined by internal squabbles and regrettably by racial and other forms of chauvinism. This has led to some of these communities questioning their place in South Africa today,” Ramaphosa said ahead of next month’s general elections. He was indirectly referring to increasing concerns among minority communities such as the 1.6 million South Africans of Indian origin, who have increasingly been concerned about laws and policies on issues such as employment equality and quotas at educational institutions sidelining them in favour of the Black majority population.

Polish opponents of abortion march against steps to liberalise law

Warsaw (AP): Polish opponents of abortion marched in Warsaw on Sunday to protest recent steps by the new government to liberalise the predominantly Catholic nation’s strict laws and allow termination of pregnancy until the 12th week. Poland’s Catholic Church has called for Sunday to be a day of prayer “in defence of conceived life” and has supported the march, organised by an anti-abortion movement. “In the face of promotion of abortion in recent months, the march will be a rare occasion to show our support for the protection of human life from conception to natural death,” a federation of anti-abortion movements said in a statement. They were referring to an ongoing public debate surrounding the steps that the 4-month-old government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk is taking to relax the strict law brought in by its conservative predecessor. Last week, Poland’s parliament, which is dominated by the liberal and pro-European Union ruling coalition, voted to approve further detailed work on four proposals to lift the near-ban on abortions. The procedure, which could take weeks or even months, is expected to be eventually rejected by conservative President Andrzej Duda, whose term runs for another year.

Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif felicitates Sikhs on Baisakhi

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday felicitated the Sikhs on the occasion of the Baisakhi festival as about 3,000 Indian Sikhs arrived in Punjab province to participate in the celebrations. In his message, Prime Minister Sharif described Baisakhi as the “symbol of spring season and the festival of spreading love and happiness”. He said “Pakistan is a beautiful blend of different faiths and cultures” and the colour of Baisakhi further added to this beauty. Sharif said that the Government of Pakistan and its provincial governments will

provide all-out facilities to Sikh pilgrims coming from all over the world to perform Baisakhi rituals. The main event of the Sikh religious festival, Baisakhi Mela, will be held at Gurudwara Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal on Sunday. Thousands of Sikh pilgrims from all over the world, including India will participate. Minority leaders will also participate in the event. Pakistan has extended visas to 2,843 Indian Sikh pilgrims, granting them the opportunity to engage in the festivities of Baisakhi Mela and Khalsa Janam Din. The pilgrims would attend the main event of Baisakhi Mela at the Gurudwara Panja Sahib in

Punjab province on Sunday. Subsequently, on April 15, the pilgrims will travel to Nankana Sahib from Hasanabdal, where they will pay homage to Sacha Sauda (Farooqabad) during their stay. This will be followed by a visit to Gurudwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur (Narowal) on April 18. The pilgrimage will continue with a visit to Gurdwara Rori Sahib (Eminabad) on April 20, where the pilgrims will spend a day in contemplation. The culmination of the spiritual journey will see the Sikh pilgrims bidding farewell to Pakistan on April 22, marking the completion of their 10-day pilgrimage.

China detains two over tourist boat capsizing that killed 12 people

Beijing (AP): Two people have been detained following the capsizing of a tourist boat on a river in northeastern China that led to the drowning deaths of 12 visitors, state media reported on Sunday. The accident occurred Saturday afternoon outside the city of Qinhuangdao near the coast of Hebei province, a few hours’ drive from the capital Beijing. A total of 31 people were thrown into the water. The boat was made by local villagers and was unequipped with life jackets or other safety equipment, according to the Xinhua News Agency. The boat’s owner and

operator were held while an investigation into the accident was underway. China is a nation of powerful rivers and such deadly accidents used to be common before major safety improvements in recent years. China’s tourist industry, and the economy in general, has struggled to recover following the partial lifting of heavy restrictions imposed by the authoritarian Communist Party in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Rural communities have long struggled to generate jobs and revenues, spurring the working age population to migrate to cities.

Sri Lanka hopes for productive talks at IMF, WB spring meetings

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lanka is looking forward to making progress in ending the ongoing debt restructuring negotiations at the IMF and the World Bank’s spring meetings scheduled to begin from Monday in Washington. Shehan Semasinghe, the state minister for finance, will lead the government delegation along with Central Bank Governor Nandalal Weerasinghe and Treasury Secretary Mahinda Siriwardena. “Through partnership and collective efforts, Sri Lanka would be able to achieve enhanced growth,” Semasinghe said, adding that the talks would be important in securing the next tranche of

the USD 2.9 billion International Monetary Fund bailout. Semasinghe said the funds would benefit low-income families with the extended relief programme ‘Aswesuma’. Over 182,000 such families will be credited their cash handouts by the end of this week. Sri Lanka aimed to strike debt restructuring deals with private creditors and sovereign bondholders by June to meet the IMF bailout programme targets. “We expect fruitful engagements that will pave the way for unlocking the next tranche of essential funding and a speedy debt resolution which will enhance economic stability, confidence, sustain-

able growth, restore debt sustainability and ultimately, improve the welfare of every Sri Lankan citizen,” Semasinghe said in a post on X. The IMF and World Bank meetings will take place in the background of both the World Bank and the ADB warned last week that detailing all hard economic reforms in the election year could hamper the recovery. It’s been two years since Sri Lanka declared its first-ever default on sovereign debt. The negotiations for debt restructuring continue. The island nation goes for a presidential election in the last quarter of this year, while the parliamentary election is due mid-next year.

Sudan war: Aid groups warn of mass death from hunger

AP ■ CAIRO

On a clear night a year ago, a dozen heavily armed fighters broke into Omaima Farouq’s house in an upscale neighborhood in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum. At gunpoint, they whipped and slapped the woman, and terrorized her children. Then they expelled them from the fenced two-story house. “Since then, our life has been ruined,” said the 45-year-old schoolteacher. “Everything has changed in this year.” Farouq, who is a widow, and her four children now live in a small village outside the central city of Wad Madani, 136 kilometers (85 miles) southeast of Khartoum. They depend on aid from villagers and philanthropists since international aid groups can’t reach the village. Sudan has been torn by war for a year now, ever since

simmering tensions between its military and the notorious paramilitary Rapid Support Forces exploded into street clashes in the capital Khartoum in mid-April 2023. The fighting rapidly spread across the country. The conflict has been overshadowed by the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza Strip, which since October has caused a massive humanitarian crisis for Palestinians and a threat of famine in the territory. But relief workers warn Sudan is hurtling towards an even larger-scale calamity of starvation, with potential mass death in coming months. Food production and distribution networks have broken down and aid agencies are unable to reach the worst-stricken regions. At the same time, the conflict has brought widespread reports of atrocities including killings, displace-

ment and rape, particularly in the area of the capital and the western region of Darfur. Justin Brady, head of the UN humanitarian coordination office for Sudan, warned that potentially tens or even hundreds of thousands could die in coming months from malnutrition-related causes. “This is going to get very ugly very quickly unless we can overcome both the resource challenges and the access challenges,” Brady said. The world, he said, needs to take fast action to pressure the two sides for a stop in fighting and raise funds for the UN humanitarian effort. But the international community has paid little attention. The UN humanitarian campaign needs some \$2.7 billion this year to get food, health care and other supplies to 24 million people in Sudan — nearly half its population of 51 million. So

far, funders have given only \$145 million, about 5%, according to the humanitarian office, known as OCHA. The “level of international neglect is shocking,” Christos Christou, president of the medical charity Doctors Without Borders, or MSF, said in a recent statement. The situation in fighting on the ground has been deteriorating. The military, headed by Gen Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the RSF, commanded by Gen Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, have carved up Khartoum and trade indiscriminate fire at each other. RSF forces have overrun much of Darfur, while Burhan has moved the government and his headquarters to the Red Sea city of Port Sudan. The Sudanese Unit for Combating Violence Against Women, a government organization, documented at least

159 cases of rape and gang rape the past year, almost all in Khartoum and Darfur. The organization’s head, Sulima Ishaq Sharif, said this figure represents the tip of the iceberg since many victims don’t speak out for fear of reprisal or the stigma connected to rape. In 2021, Burhan and Dagalo were uneasy allies who led a military coup. They toppled an internationally recognized civilian government that was supposed to steer Sudan’s democratic transition after the 2019 military overthrow of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir amid a popular uprising. Burhan and Dagalo subsequently fell out in a struggle for power. The situation has been horrific in Darfur, where the RSF and its allies are accused of rampant sexual violence and ethnic attacks on African tribes’ areas. The International Criminal

Court said it was investigating fresh allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the region, which was the scene of genocidal war in the 2000s. A series of attacks by the RSF and allied militias on the ethnic African Masalit tribe killed between 10,000 and 15,000 people in Geneina, the capital of West Darfur near the Chad border, according to a report by United Nations experts to the Security Council earlier this year. It said Darfur is experiencing “its worst violence since 2005.” With aid groups unable to reach Darfur’s camps for displaced people, eight out of every 10 families in the camps eat only one meal a day, said Adam Rijal, the spokesman for the Coordination for Displaced Persons and Refugees in Darfur. In Kelma camp in South Darfur province, he said an

average of nearly three children die every 12 hours, most due to diseases related to malnutrition. He said the medical center in the camp receives between 14 and 18 cases of malnutrition every day, mostly children and pregnant women. Not including the Geneina killings, the war has killed at least 14,600 people across Sudan and created the world’s largest displacement crisis, according to the United Nations. More than 8 million people have been driven from their homes, fleeing either to safer areas inside Sudan or to neighboring countries. When fighting reached his street in Khartoum, Taj el-Ser and his wife and four children headed west to his relatives in Darfur in the town of Ardamata. Then the RSF and its allies overran Ardamata in November, rampaging through

the town for six days. El-Ser said they killed many Masalit and relatives of army soldiers. “Some were shot dead or burned inside their homes,” he said by phone from another town in Darfur. “I and my family survived only because I am Arab.” Both sides, the military and RSF, have committed serious violations of international law, killing civilians and destroying vital infrastructure, said Mohamed Osman, Sudan researcher at Human Rights Watch. Food production has crashed, imports stalled, movement of food around the country is hampered by fighting, and staple food prices have soared by 45% in less than a year, OCHA says. The war wrecked the country’s healthcare system, leaving only 20 to 30% of the health facilities functional across the country, according to MSF.

Finance Ministry for enhanced KYC to check fraud

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to check incidence of BoB World app scam and other such financial frauds, the finance ministry makes a case for an enhanced KYC procedure and extensive due diligence by banks and financial institutions for onboarding merchants to safeguard customers against cyber risks, sources said. "Appropriate due diligence of merchants and Business Correspondents (BCs) who offer banking services in rural and remote areas is necessary not only to check frauds but also to fortify the financial ecosystem, sources said. "According to sources, there is a need to strengthen data security and data protection at the level of merchants and BCs as chances of compromise are higher at that level.



"Therefore, sources said, RBI may advice banks and financial institutions to review the concentration of BCs in cyber fraud hotspots

and their onboarding, blocking of micro ATMs found to be involved in frauds. "This was one of the

suggestions made at an inter-ministerial meeting held recently with the objective of furthering cyber security and checking financial fraud,

sources said. "During 2023, as many as 11,28,265 cases of financial cyber fraud worth Rs 7,488.63 crore were reported, as per the data compiled by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). "To strengthen the mechanism to deal with cyber crimes in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, the central government, through the Ministry of Home Affairs, has set up the 'Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre' (I4C) to deal with all types of cyber crime in the country. "As part of its efforts to curb growing cyber fraud, the Reserve Bank is considering setting up a Digital India Trust Agency (DIGITA) to stop the mushrooming of illegal lending apps. "The proposed agency will enable verification of digital lending apps and maintain a

public register of verified apps, sources said. "Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank of India has shared a list of 442 unique digital lending apps with the IT Ministry to whitelist with Google. "Besides, Google has removed over 2,200 digital lending apps (DLAs) from its app store from September 2022 to August 2023. "The search giant has updated its policy regarding the enforcement of loan apps on the Play Store, and allowed only those apps which are published by the RBI's regulated entities (REs) or those working in partnership with REs. "This policy change by Google has happened at the request of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Department of Financial Services (DFS) under the finance ministry.

DIGI YATRA Stakeholders working to address tailgating issue

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stakeholders, including the Digi Yatra Foundation, are working on ways to address tailgating at airports through the Digi Yatra gates, an issue that has been flagged by aviation security watchdog BCAS, according to officials. "Digi Yatra, which uses Facial Recognition Technology (FRT), provides contactless and seamless entry into airports through e-gates. "Broadly, tailgating refers to an additional person getting through a gate whereas the credentials for access have been used for only one person. "As part of the routine review of various security aspects, an official in the know said the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has flagged tailgating at Digi Yatra gates and that discussions are going on to address the issue. "In a recent interview, Digi Yatra Foundation CEO Suresh Khadakhbavi told PTI that stakeholders are discussing the best way forward to address the issue of tailgating. "Currently, Digi Yatra is available at 14 airports and is expected to be rolled out at 14 more airports by the end of April. "When asked about tailgating, Khadakhbavi said it has to be ensured that there is a balance between passenger safety and security. "If someone is tailgating, then technology can be used to stop it by closing the gate



fast. However, it will be a problem if there is a genuine reason for the delay. The Digi Yatra gates are closed at an optimal speed and if it is closed fast, there could also be a chance of someone getting an injury, he noted. "According to him, people have to go in a systematic manner to enter the airport and tailgating is something being discussed with various stakeholders. "We should have a systematic process... This (tailgating) is something being discussed on the best way forward," he said. "Digi Yatra has nearly 5 million users and the foundation is also working to make the facility more user friendly. It provides for contactless and seamless movement of passengers at various check points at the airports. "In the interview, Khadakhbavi also said the foundation does not have any passengers' data.

Telecom department to seek Trai view on satcom spectrum allocation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is expected to approach Trai this month to seek the regulator's views on method and pricing for allocation of spectrum and scope of licences to be issued for satcom services, according to sources. "The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) had floated a consultation paper on 'Assignment of Spectrum for Space-based Communication Services' on April 6, 2023 but returned the reference back to DoT after announcement of new Telecommunication Act. "DoT will seek views of Trai on pricing and methodology to allocate spectrum for space based communication services. It may also look to fine-tune existing licences to bring in full clarity on the kind of services that satcom companies with administratively allocated spectrum can provide," a source, who did not wish to be named, told PTI. "Satcom or satellite communication technology enables service providers to ensure internet connectivity in remote areas or difficult terrain. "Bharti Group-backed OneWeb and Reliance Group Jio Satcom have been issued GMPCS (satellite telephony) and VSAT licence for the services. "Elon Musk-owned Starlink has also applied for the permit to start satcom services in India. "With constellation of 4,000 low earth orbit (LEO) satellites,



Starlink dominates satcom space. "OneWeb has over 600 LEO satellites. "According to the source, VSAT licence has norms that are not in sync with the provisions of new Telecommunication Act and therefore need to be fine-tuned. "Under the Telecommunications Act 2023, satellite communication companies can get spectrum without auction for point-to-point communications. "However, there are provisions that allow a VSAT service operator to provide internet services to multiple independent subscribers, which may be interpreted differently than envisioned in the Telecommunication Act 2023. "Hence, there is a need felt to fine-tune licences for satcom services. A decision will be taken based on Trai's recommendation on the permits that should be issued to satcom service providers," the source said.

India adds record 18 GW renewable energy capacity in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has added a record 18.48 GW in 2023-24, which is over 21 per cent higher than 15.27 GW a year ago, according to the latest data of the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy. "However, industry experts said there is a need to add at least 50 GW of renewable energy capacity annually for the next six years to meet the ambitious target of 500 GW of

renewables by 2030. "According to the data, India's installed renewable energy capacity is 143.64 GW as of March 31, 2024, excluding 47 GW of large hydropower capacity (each plant is more than 25 GW or above). "They pointed out that renewable energy capacity stood at around 190 GW, including large hydro projects, and therefore, India needs to add 310 GW in the next six years or at an average of 50 GW per annum.

"Union Power and Renewable Energy Minister RK Singh, in a recent interview with PTI, said, "You see, my installed capacity of RE is about 190 GW, I have 103 GW under construction, that makes it 290 GW. I have 72 GW under bids, so I am already at about 360 GW. I will reach it (target of renewable energy capacity of 500 GW by 2030) before time as I reach all my targets". "Besides, the MNRE is also targeting bidding of around 50 GW of renewable energy

projects per annum to meet the ambitious target of 500 GW. "The data showed that solar installations of 12.78GW led the renewable energy capacity addition of 15.27 GW in 2023-24, followed by 2.27 GW of wind energy. "Among the renewable energy capacity, the total solar installed capacity tops the chart at 81.81GW, followed by about 46 GW of wind energy, 9.43 GW of biomass cogeneration and 5 GW of small hydro (up to 25 MW capacity each).

Startup to connect tech professionals with global job opportunities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Technology startup SkillsCapital has launched a programme to connect technology and SAP professionals, mainly from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, with global job opportunities, a statement said on Sunday. "The NCR-based startup has introduced AI-powered Talent Cloud, which allows companies across the world to access technology talent for their projects remotely, SkillsCapital said. "The startup has created a talent pool of more than 14,000 technology and SAP professionals, which are available for various projects, it added. "SAP is a leading enterprise resource planning (ERP) software. "Talent Cloud, which uses AI-based algorithms for streamlining talent identification, evaluation and matching processes, reduces significantly the time to hire for companies, SkillsCapital said.

Impresario to add 10-15 Social outlets every year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Impresario Entertainment and Hospitality, which operates the restaurant Chain 'Social', is looking to add 10 to 15 new brand outlets annually, especially in tier-2 cities, as part of its expansion plan, said its founder and MD Riyaz Amlani. "The company, which also operates restaurant brands like Smoke House Deli and Mocha, remains bullish and optimistic about its growth in India, led by various factors, such as demographic dividend and increasing appetite for premium experiences. "In the overall food services market, quick service restaurants (QSR) and casual dining restaurants (CDR) are the strongest lever of growth. Our trailblazer brand, Social, sits at the confluence of a cafe and a bar and comes under the CDR category, with immense potential for growth in this segment," Amlani told PTI. "Impresario is planning to open 10-15 new Social outlets annually on the back of its



experience. The company has seen a double-digit revenue growth this year (FY24) compared to FY23, he noted. "We remain bullish and are optimistic about our growth in India, and will continue to expand Social to newer neighbourhoods in the coming year," Amlani said. "Impresario has a network of over 60 restaurants in over 20 Indian cities. "According to data accessed through the business intelligence platform Tofler, Impresario's total consolidated revenue was Rs 573.66 crore in FY23. "Over expansion, Amlani said the company is adopting a two-fold strategy "by growing

into new tier-2 towns and focussing on state capitals, and by going deeper into existing markets to reach more neighbourhoods". "In 2023, it opened Social outlets in newer markets like Dehradun, Kolkata and Hyderabad. "In addition to the existing cities - Mumbai, Bangalore, New Delhi, Pune, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Gurugram, Chandigarh, Indore, Dehradun, and Faridabad; we are bullish on expansion and are looking to expand to new cities this year. "We will expand into opportunities where we can offer differentiated yet

localised experiences," he said. "The company is adopting a strategy of having different formats of outlets, depending on the region, and various other factors. "Currently, we have standalone stores in key neighbourhoods, mall outlets and some of our outlets in Bangalore and Mumbai are present inside corporate parks as well. We will continue to innovate with our design and spaces to adapt to the region and neighbourhood we are entering," said Amlani. "It also operates various cloud kitchen brands like Boss Burger, Lucknowee and Aflatoon by SocialL, which mainly operates from Social premises offering a variety of culinary. "Today, a strong leg of our revenue comes from these cloud kitchen brands and is currently 10 to 12 per cent of our overall business," he said. "Besides, it also operates restaurants Slink & Bardot, a French diner and cocktail bar Bandra Borne and Prithvi Cafe in Mumbai.



LIC sees 59 per cent jump in value of investments in Adani stocks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

LIC, the state-owned insurance behemoth, has seen a 59 per cent rise in value of its investments in Adani group companies in 2023-24 fiscal year after the conglomerate made a smart recovery since being hammered by a damning short seller report. "The value of LIC's investment in seven Adani group companies has soared from ₹38,471 crore as on March 31, 2023 to ₹61,210 crore on March 31, 2024, registering an increase of ₹22,378 crore, according to stock exchange data. "Last year, the insurance giant faced intense scrutiny over its decision to invest in the Adani group amidst a political slugfest after allegations of stock manipulation fuelled by Hindenburg report. "Adani group denied any wrong doing. "Adani Group's stocks, which at lowest point took a beating of about USD 150 billion, have staged a remarkable comeback, fuelled by robust profit growth across its diverse businesses. "Facing political pressure, LIC strategically reduced its exposure to two of the group's flagship companies — Adani Ports & SEZ and Adani Enterprises — only to witness their shares surge by an impressive 83 per cent and 68.4 per cent, respectively. "Despite trimming its ownership, LIC investments saw a 59 per cent surge in value in FY24, according to stock exchange data. "While the domestic investor faced pressure, overseas investors wasted no time seizing the opportunity, with heavyweights like the Qatar Investment Authority, Abu Dhabi based IHC, French giant TotalEnergies, and US based GQG Investment, collectively pouring close to ₹45,000 crore into Adani stocks. "The value of LIC's investment in Adani Enterprise Ltd soared from ₹8,495.31 crore as on March 31, 2023 to ₹14,305.53 crore a year later, the data showed.

Godrej Locks eyes 50 per cent market share

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Locks and security solutions company Godrej Locks has said it aims to increase market share from 30 per cent to 50 per cent in three years, riding on a new range of affordable products and reduced prices of existing ones. "Shyam Motwani, business head for Godrej Locks and architectural and systems, said the company's newly-launched products are over 50 per cent affordable than the existing locks, while efforts have been undertaken to make the existing locks cheaper by 7-8 per cent. "The company will rely on new affordable range and price cuts in the existing locks to achieve the objective of having the dominant market share in around three years, Motwani told PTI. "The target is to grab 50 per cent market in the segment from the current 30 per cent, Motwani said, adding that the company sees a massive opportunity for its products in the tier-2,3, 4 cities and towns. "He further said the newly-launched locks have been designed and developed in-house, keeping in mind the needs and aspirations of "rurban" (rural-urban) population without compromising on the



products' effectiveness. "Founded in 1897, the company which has become a household name for its reliable products is looking at deepening its distribution in smaller cities. "Motwani said the "rurban" areas account for just over a fifth of the company's revenues at present, while the larger chunk comes from top eight cities of India. "The company's reach is limited to over 340 towns in tier-2, 3 and 4 cities, and plans are afoot to double it to over 700 towns or having a presence in every district, he said. "The company, a part of Godrej and Boyce, is profitable and has registered a turnover of Rs 1,200 crore in FY24, he said, adding that it has doubled in the last three years.

Share of affordable homes, priced up to ₹45 lakh, shrinks: PropTiger

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Share of affordable homes -- priced up to Rs 45 lakh each -- in total housing sales more than halved to 22 per cent during January-March across top eight cities amid strong demand for luxury flats, according to PropTiger.

"Share of affordable homes in total housing sales stood at 48 per cent in the January-March period of 2023 calendar year. "Housing brokerage firm PropTiger.Com data showed that housing sales grew by 41 per cent to 1,20,640 units during January-March 2024 across top eight cities from

85,840 units in the corresponding period of the previous year. "In the total sales of 1,20,640 units during January-March 2024 as against 23 per cent share in the corresponding period of the previous year. "There has been a remarkable shift post the pandemic towards high-end properties," PropTiger said

sales was 15 per cent. "The share of homes, priced Rs 25-45 lakh each, was 17 per cent during January-March 2024 as against 23 per cent share in the corresponding period of the previous year. "There has been a remarkable shift post the pandemic towards high-end properties," PropTiger said

in its quarterly report 'Real Insight Residential January-March 2024'. "The share of properties priced Rs 1 crore and above has increased to a significant 37 per cent in the first quarter of 2024, significantly higher than 24 per cent in the same period of 2023, the consultant observed.

Automobile exports from India dip 5.5 per cent in FY24

NEW DELHI: Automobile exports from India declined 5.5 per cent in FY24 due to the monetary crisis in various overseas markets, according to the latest data shared by industry body SIAM. "Overall exports stood at 45,00,492 units in the last fiscal compared to 47,61,299 units in FY23. "Commenting on the drop in overseas shipments last fiscal, SIAM President Vinod Aggarwal said the situation remains volatile in various overseas markets. "Some of the countries, where we are very strong with commercial vehicle and two-wheeler exports, have been facing foreign exchange-related issues," he noted.

Commercial AC market has significant growth potential

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Commercial air-conditioning (AC) market holds "significant promise" and is witnessing growth, driven by rapid urbanisation, infrastructural development and growing emphasis on comfort in commercial spaces, said Sunil Vachani, president of electronics and appliances manufacturers' body CEAMA. "The commercialC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) segment is witnessing a shift with its wide array of applications, with infrastructure growth including offices, retail spaces, healthcare facilities, hospitality establishments, and educational institutions,

said the president of Consumer Electronics and Appliances Manufacturers Association (CEAMA). "Moreover, factors such as increasing awareness of indoor air quality, sustainability mandates, and the integration of IoT (internet of things) and building automation systems are also reshaping the commercialC landscape, offering avenues for innovation and market expansion, he said. "In terms of growth potential, the commercialC segment holds significant promise, with opportunities for both traditionalC systems and emerging technologies like variable refrigerant flow (VRF) systems and chilled beams," Vachani told PTI.



"Over the market size of the commercialC segment, Vachani said it varies across regions and sub-segments but is generally substantial, reflecting the scale of commercial infrastructure and the need for effective climate control solutions. "Overall, the commercial air-

conditioning market represents a dynamic and evolving segment with considerable growth potential, driven by ongoing urbanisation trends and the imperative for energy-efficient, smart, and customisableC solutions," Vachani said. "According to reports, the IndianC industry is projected to reach a market size of approximately USD 30 billion. "When asked about the room air-conditioner segment, Vachani said he also anticipates a "steady growth" for the segment. "However, he added that this segment could face "some nuances" due to Quality Control Orders (QCOs) issued by the government.

ARCHANA JYOTI spoke to doctors about the Parkinson’s Disease that affects millions worldwide including India. Medical interventions and lifestyle adjustments, such as diet, exercise, stress management, and social engagement, are crucial for its management

PARKINSON’S WOES

Parkinson’s Disease (PD) is one of the most common movement disorders, primarily affecting individuals over the age of 60. The number of PD cases worldwide has significantly increased in the last two decades, with 0.58 million people affected in India alone. This number is expected to rise in the coming decades. PD, along with multiple sclerosis and chronic neurological illnesses, is now recognized as a disability under the recently passed Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016. Yet, misconceptions surrounding this condition persist, hindering support and understanding, said Dr. Debasish Chaudhary, Head of Department of Neurology, GB Pant Hospital, Delhi. Below are some of the myths surrounding this progressive neurological condition.

MYTH 1: PD is Untreatable
Fact: Although there is no cure, many treatments exist to manage symptoms and improve the quality of life. Medications, therapies like physical or speech therapy, and surgical options like deep brain stimulation can help. With proper management, many individuals can lead active lives.

MYTH 2: PD Affects the Elderly Only.
Fact: Although PD is commonly diagnosed in older adults, it can affect people of any age, including younger adults and children. Early-onset Parkinson’s, diagnosed before the age of 50, is significant. Recognizing this variability in the age of onset is crucial for timely diagnosis and intervention.

MYTH 3: PD is Just a Movement Disorder
Fact: While movement difficulties like tremors, stiffness, and slowness are hallmark symptoms, Parkinson’s is a complex condition with diverse symptoms. These include cognitive changes, mood swings, sleep problems, and gastrointestinal issues. Understanding this complexity is vital for providing comprehensive care.

MYTH 4: PD is Always Hereditary
Fact: While genetics can contribute, most cases are sporadic with no clear genetic link. Environmental factors like toxin exposure may also play a role. Recognizing that not all cases are hereditary, and anyone can be affected, is essential.

MYTH 5: PD is a Death Sentence
Fact: While chronic and progressive, Parkinson’s isn’t necessarily life-threatening. With proper care and lifestyle adjustments, many individuals can live decades after diagnosis. Support from healthcare professionals and caregivers is



MY PD JOURNEY Tough Fight Which Needs To Be Done Right

By Sunandita Dasgupta

It was early 2017. I was buying a bottle of perfume from a Delhi shop, when I noticed something odd. I tried to smell the ittar. But all I drew through my nostrils was a blank. “Is it very mild?” I asked the shopkeeper. “No ma’am,” he replied, surprised. “You cannot smell it at all?” I told him probably I have a blocked nose, but had niggling doubts in my head. A few months later, the junior doctor at a reputed neurological institute in Bangalore, filling up a long questionnaire, enquired, “can you smell?” I was there to confirm my diagnosis as a patient of Parkinson’s Disease, the degenerative disorder that causes tremors, rigidity of muscles and movement problems, a few of which I was already experiencing. Doctors in my workplace Delhi and hometown Kolkata had told me I fall in the category of “Early Onset” patients (as PD is common

among the elderly, but I was 39 then). They wanted me to start treatment, but I was hoping to get another opinion. “No, I cannot smell, is it related to my condition,” I asked the doctor. Yes, she said. It is a common symptom. Of course, though it explains how widespread the effect of PD is, loss of smell is only a minor part of the life-changing issues brought by the disease. Walking, sleeping, working, doing simple everyday chores – it turns simple things into a battle. Initial years were somehow manageable, but now, after seven years, I am facing a range of problems related to PD, including frequent falls, resultant fear of falling, which is damaging my confidence to go out and freezing – when you are unable to take a step for several seconds while walking. The first years were also easier in terms of keeping the disease under check with medication. But now, much of my average day witnesses “off-

periods” – when PD symptoms return due to effects of medicine wearing off. Life is increasingly becoming difficult. Though there are times of despair, I don’t want to give up hope. Yet, amidst despair, hope persists. Sound medical guidance, daily routines, and practices like yoga and meditation provide solace. Support groups offer invaluable camaraderie, despite their scarcity in India. Reports of new research fuel optimism, while options like Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) surgery loom as potential paths forward. My takeaway from life after PD? Despite the struggles, kindness abounds. From strangers to healthcare professionals, countless individuals have extended a helping hand along this journey, reminding me that even in the face of adversity, compassion prevails.

(The writer is Young Onset Parkinson’s Disease (YOPD) patient and working with a State Government)

HOPE ON THE HORIZON

IIT-M WORKS ON DBS

The Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M) is working on an indigenous prototype of deep brain stimulation (DBS), a pinhole surgery method to place an implant to control conditions (PD), an under-diagnosed disorder in India. The DBS is a modifiable and reversible procedure with a physical remote to help customize the implant according to the patient’s condition. The DBS procedure is not complicated and costs around Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh as the equipment is only available in western countries, and the implant cost is not covered by the Chief Minister’s Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme (CMCHIS). IIT-M is developing an indigenous prototype to make this therapy accessible to everyone, but the design may take five to 10 years to complete owing to elaborate safety procedures, said a statement here.

Study Uncovers Key Genes Behind Parkinson’s in Young Indians

A team of scientists has identified key genes that raise the risk of Parkinson’s disease in young Indians. The team, led by Parkinson’s Research Alliance of India (PRAI) and MedGenome, a global genomics company in South Asia, made a comprehensive analysis of rare and common genetic variations in the young Indian population, which can enhance the understanding of the genetic basis of Parkinson’s disease. This also opens the door for a first-ever genetic screening in India for the disease in high-risk individuals and affected families, said the team of scientists in the paper published in the prestigious journal, Movement Disorders. “Parkinson’s is not a single gene disease. It can occur due to multiple genetic mutations and multiple gene causes. Knowing what patients with Indian patients will have more impact on understanding and treatment of that,” Dr. Prashanth L.K., a specialist in movement disorders from PRAI said.

According to the Global Burden of Disease Study (2018), Parkinson’s has doubled across the globe over the past two decades, while India accounts for approximately 10 per cent of the global burden. This translates to nearly 0.58 million patients living with the disease in the country. The first-of-its-kind study conducted in India included 1,000 patients through a network of 10 specialty Movement Disorder Centers/Neurology clinics across India. Dr. Prashanth said the team found a high probability of non-mutation and Parkinson’s mutations are quite common in Indian patients. “We need to work on these genes further to see how these genes can be important for the occurrence of Parkinson’s disease in patients,” he said. Further, the expert noted that Indian patients carry a lot of BSN gene mutations. The BSN gene primarily affects gait and balance for people and is normally not reported in Parkinson’s.

crucial for navigating life with Parkinson’s.

YOUNG ONSET PD
Dr. Madhukar Bhardwaj, Senior Consultant and HOD, Neurology, Aakash Healthcare, talked about YOPD or Young Onset Parkinson Disease which affects individuals less than 40 years of age. He said that YOPD usually presents with symptom/symptoms such as one sided hand tremors, slowness, postural imbalance or one sided weakness involving hand and leg. It is important to detect this since it is initially usually taken as stroke or other forms of tremors and goes undetected until a full florid form appears in a few months to years. It usually responds well to dopaminergic drugs, however in my experience the dose requirements increase over a period of time. “These patients also go on to develop more drug induced adverse effects like dyskinesias and anxiety issues. Detailed history and Neuroimaging is important to rule out mimics. “In rare cases, it may be familial, and careful family tree must be established along with genetic testing (PARKIN gene) if a family member was found to have the symptoms at an early juvenile age.”

IDENTIFYING SYMPTOMS
Dr. Atampreet Singh, Director of the Department of Neurology at Fortis Hospital Greater Noida, emphasized on the importance of recognizing common symptoms associated with PD in elders. These include tremors, muscle stiffness, slowed movement, and balance and coordination difficulties, which can increase the risk of falls. Dr. Singh said that while there is no cure for Parkinson’s, symptom management is crucial. “Treatment modalities include medications to control dopamine levels, physiotherapy to improve mobility, and, in select cases, surgical interventions such as deep brain stimulation (DBS).” In fact, some neurologists said that Apomorphine is a promising rescue therapy that holds the potential rescue to significantly enhance the quality of life for people grappling with PD.

MANAGEMENT
Dr. Praween Kumar, CEO of Fortis Hospital Greater Noida, underscored the significance of combining medical interventions with positive lifestyle changes. “Individuals with PDs can lead fulfilling and active lives by incorporating consistent physical activity, a well-rounded diet, sufficient rest, stress management, and nurturing social connections. Despite the gravity of the condition, PD should not diminish life quality,” pointed out Dr. Kumar.

JOURNEY WITHIN



Addressing Feeling Cheated: CONSTRUCTIVE STEPS

If you feel cheated in a situation, it’s important to address the issue calmly and assertively. Here are some tips one can follow, ARCHANA JYOTI says, drawing from the insights provided by mindful Gurus

ASSESS THE SITUATION
Reflect on the events that transpired and try to understand why you feel cheated. Identify specific actions or circumstances that contributed to this feeling. Objectively evaluating the situation can help you gain clarity on what happened.

COMMUNICATE YOUR CONCERNS
Express your feelings and concerns to the other party involved in a clear and respectful manner. Avoid blaming or accusing language, and instead use “I” statements to convey how their actions made you feel. Focus on specific behaviors or actions that contributed to your sense of being cheated.

SEEK CLARIFICATION
If there are aspects of the situation that you’re unsure about or if you need more information, don’t hesitate to ask questions and seek clarification. Clear communication can help prevent misunderstandings and facilitate a resolution.

NEGOTIATE A RESOLUTION
Work together with the other party to find a solution that addresses your concerns. Be open to compromise and willing to listen to their perspective. Focus on finding a mutually acceptable resolution that benefits both parties involved. Document Everything: Keep records of any relevant documents, emails, messages, or conversations related to the situation. Having documentation can provide evidence and

support your case if you need to escalate the issue or seek further assistance.

SEEK MEDIATION OR ASSISTANCE
If you’re unable to resolve the issue directly with the other party, consider seeking the help of a mediator, arbitrator, or relevant authority. A neutral third party can facilitate communication and help find a resolution that satisfies both parties.

KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY:
Despite your best efforts, it’s possible that you may not be able to reach a satisfactory resolution. In such cases, it’s important to recognize when to walk away and focus your energy on moving forward positively. Continuing to dwell on the issue may only lead to further frustration and stress.

LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE
Use the situation as an opportunity for personal growth and learning. Reflect on what you can take away from the experience and how you can prevent similar situations in the future. By learning from the experience, you can empower yourself to handle similar challenges more effectively in the future. Remember to prioritize your well-being and mental health throughout the process. It’s natural to feel upset or frustrated when you feel cheated, but by taking proactive steps to address the issue, you can work towards finding a resolution and moving forward.



Mangoes ARE NATURE’S ANTIDEPRESSANTS

Poor nutrition affects not just physical health, but mental well-being too, including conditions like depression and anxiety, says RAJDEEP JOSHI as he delves into the role of nutrition in mental health, focusing particularly on the overlooked benefits of mango consumption.



Diet is the foundation of health. Poor nutrition is associated not only with depression but also with anxiety, sleep disorders, and inflammatory conditions. According to the National Institute on Mental Health, depression is caused by a combination of genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological factors. However, one of the biological factors that is not often discussed is nutritional imbalance. Nutrition plays a key role in the ability to manage psychological and emotional well-being, and deficiencies in key vitamins and minerals can compromise optimal brain function and increase stress and anxiety levels. Depression is a mental illness that causes low mood and loss of interest in interactions or activities. It can be caused by

many factors such as faulty mood regulation by the brain, genetic vulnerability, stressful life events, medications, and medical problems. It is believed that many of these forces interact to cause depression. Depression affects many people, and it can change lives for the worse. Medical treatment and counseling can often help relieve symptoms, but lifestyle measures, such as a healthy diet, can also improve a person’s well-being. When faced with a severe stressful situation, eating mango is good. Every time we consume this wonderful fruit, we feel how we are reorienting ourselves and opening ourselves up to opportunities to live a happy life aligned with our destiny.

These miraculous fruits boost our morale and heal us when we feel lonely, sad, abandoned, rejected, or forgotten, giving us great power of expression. Mangoes are also rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, and have been associated with many health benefits, including potential anticancer effects, as well as improved immunity and digestive and eye health. Along with eating fresh mangoes, you can also add mango oil for a more concentrated dose of key nutrients or use an extract. The mango tree, especially its bark, is widely used in Ayurvedic and African medicine. It is commonly used to treat hypertension, insomnia, tumor growth, arthritis, and depression. This delicious fruit contains tryptophan, which your body converts into the “happiness hormone” serotonin. If your serotonin levels are low, then you may also experience insomnia, depression, and anxiety. Mangoes are rich in minerals like potassium and magnesium, which keep your heart and blood vessels healthy. Mangoes are considered a natural antidepressant. Regular consumption of mangoes relieves nervous tension and improves mood.



MANGO MAGIC A Mood-Boosting Recipe for Mental Wellness

NUTRITIONAL MANGO SALAD

INGREDIENTS
● 1 large mango (peeled and sliced)
● 1 cup finely chopped spinach
● 1 green onion thinly sliced
● 1/4 cup pineapple chopped
● 1/2 cucumber (sliced)
● 1 small red and yellow capsicum (sliced)
● 1/2 cup fresh coriander and mint Chopped Pans
● 1 to 2 tsp chaat masala
● 2 tsp lemon juice
● 1/4 cup roasted cashew nuts
● 1 tsp olive oil
● 1 tsp Italian Mix Herbs
● Salt and pepper to taste

METHOD
In a large bowl combine all the ingredients like mango, spinach, cucumber, red and yellow capsicums, green onion, pineapple, fried cashews and chopped coriander and mint.

SEASONING THE SALAD
All you need to do is take a small bowl and mix well black pepper, chaat masala, lemon juice, salt, Italian mix herbs and olive oil and then pour this mixture into a salad bowl and mix it together. Your nutritious mango salad is ready to serve.
(The author is a Nutrition Coach)



WE NEED EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE TO BEAT RCB, SAYS SRH COACH

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori did not read too much into the travails of Royal Challengers Bengaluru and said it will require an “exceptional” effort from them to beat the hosts on Monday.

“The Royal Challengers are currently 10th on the IPL table with two points after winning just one out of six matches.

““I don’t think anyone in any team underestimates the quality of RCB. They’re a very good team. So, it’s going to take an exceptional performance from us to try and beat them. Every (IPL) game is hard and particularly when you’re playing away from home,” said Vettori during his pre-match press conference here on Sunday.

“Vettori said RCB might have learned lessons from their past defeats in this IPL and the home side could put SRH under pressure.

““RCB will obviously keep learning from what’s happened in the previous games and they’re going to



come out pretty aggressive. We’re going to be under a lot of pressure as a bowling unit for how aggressive they are going to be.

““So, we need to find ways to counter that and then keep up with our batting form which has been really good,” said Vettori.

“The former New Zealand captain said it would be naive to take a big score at the Chinnaswamy stadium for granted.

““I think most teams come here thinking that it’s going to be a high-scoring fixture. I’ve probably seen a couple of surfaces this year that have

been slightly slower,” he said.

“The former left-arm spinner, who also had a long association with RCB as a player and coach, said teams prefer to chase at Chinnaswamy because of the ease to control the backend of the innings.

““We understand the ball

travels here and the boundary sizes are small. So, I think you have to keep challenging yourself to try and take wickets because any team can score that 60-70 at the backend.

““I know no score is safe (here) and I always feel like you’re in the game, particularly when you are chasing. Most teams will come here and try to chase because they feel that it’s easier to navigate the endings,” he explained.

“Vettori had a word of praise for SRH middle-order batter Heinrich Klaasen, who has been in fine fettle in this IPL. The South African batter has made 186 runs from five matches at a frenetic strike-rate of 193.

““He’s been exceptional for a long period of time and he’s in that category of the likes of (Andre) Russell where teams really fear him in that backend and they set up their bowling plans to try and negate him. “But he’s been so good for such a long period of time that he has allowed us to either win the games or always be in the game.” he added.

RCB eye step up from under fire bowlers

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bengaluru’s IPL campaign that began in cheerfulness has melted into chaos, and their bowlers require a drastic transformation in mindset against Sunrisers Hyderabad for them to register an elusive win here on Monday.

“The Royal Challengers have players of repute and elite coaches with lofty pedigree but none of their plans have worked so far, evidenced by the team’s 10th place in the standings with a solitary win from six matches.

“The RCB’s trundling run in this IPL is directly linked to their bowlers’ ineffectiveness.

“They showed a distinct lack of willingness to adapt and upskill on conditions that needed a different thinking.

“In this IPL, the bowlers have often relied on variations like knuckle balls, slow bouncers and pace-off deliveries to counter a set of ultra-aggressive batsmen.

“However, the Bengaluru bowlers have been largely unidimensional in their approach allowing batters to tackle them with ease and the match against Mumbai Indians offers a case study.

“For once, the RCB bowlers fired collectively to take them to 196, but MI hunted down the target in just 15.3 overs at the Wankhede Stadium as the visiting bowlers were quite magnanimous in offering freebies.

“Dew, short boundaries etc cannot be counted as excuses when a team leaks above 13 runs per over. In fact, the RCB bowlers did not have the urge or imagination to blunt a batting unit full of intent.

“That’s an ominous sign against the Sunrisers, whose batting line-up is as intimidating as that of the MI.

“Two Hyderabad batters - Heinrich Klaasen (186) and Abhishek Sharma (177) - are inside the top-10 run-makers and Travis Head (133) too has been consistent.

“But more than the quantity of runs, how they made it make them more dangerous as Klaasen (193), Abhishek (208) and Head (177) have torn apart the bowling unit in the Power Play and in the middle-late overs.



“That uniform power allocation through batting ranks makes SRH a tall proposition for the opposition bowlers.

“This is not to say that SRH, currently fifth on the table with six points from five matches, do not have a weak point.

“Similar to RCB, bowling has been Hyderabad’s soft underbelly in this tournament with spinners Shahabaz Ahmed and Mayank Markande giving away more than 11 runs in an over with minimal returns.

“But the Hyderabad outfit has found a saviour in skipper Pat Cummins, their highest wicket-taker with six scalps and he has also conceded just over seven runs an over, a very respectable economy rate in this format.

“Additionally, Cummins has also shown the flexibility to operate at various junctures of a match - with the new ball in the Power Play or bowling as second-change in the middle and death overs.

“The inclusion of left-arm pacer T Natarajan (5 wickets, economy: 8.6) has given their bowling a new dimension and a bit more control in the last three matches.

“Having played on a shirtfront in Hyderabad, the SRH bowlers might not feel out of home at the Chinnaswamy, which has a pitch with similar characteristics.

“But can RCB exploit that above-mentioned minor chink in Sunrisers’ attack? “Star batter Virat Kohli is the

current holder of Orange Cap and fifties by skipper Faf du Plessis, Rajat Patidar and Dinesh Karthik against MI will certainly boost RCB’s confidence. “But the form of Glenn Maxwell (32 runs, average: 5.3) remains a massive concern.

Teams (from)
ROYAL CHALLENGERS BENGALURU
Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, “Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh, Saurav Chauhan.

“SUNRISERS HYDERABAD
Pat Cummins (c), Abdul Samad, Abhishek Sharma, Aiden Markram, Marco Jansen, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Glenn Phillips, Sanvir Singh, Heinrich Klaasen, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mayank Agarwal, T. Natarajan, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Markande, Upendra Singh Yadav, Umrans Malik, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Shahbaz Ahmed, Travis Head, Jaydev Unadkat, Akash Singh, Jhathavedh Subramanyan.

Dhawan out for at least seven to 10 days: Bangar

PTI ■ MULLANPUR

Punjab Kings skipper Shikhar Dhawan could be out for at least seven to 10 days due to a shoulder injury, the team’s head of cricket development Sanjay Bangar indicated after the narrow loss to Rajasthan Royals.

“Dhawan missed the game against Royals on Saturday night. Sam Curran led the side in his absence.

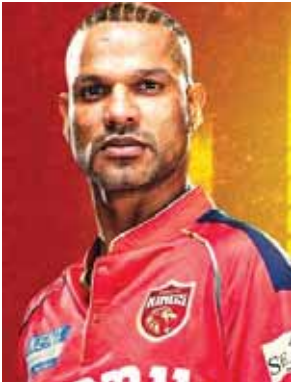
“He’s having a shoulder injury, so he is likely to be out for at least a couple of days, I would say. Having an experienced opener, somebody like Shikhar, who has experience of playing on such wickets, becomes extremely crucial (for the team).

“We have to wait and see how he responds to the treatment. At the moment, it seems that he could be out of action for at least seven-ten days,” said Bangar in the post match press conference.

“Jitesh Sharma was team’s representative at the captains’ meet at the start of the season as Dhawan, who was down with fever, stayed back in Mullanpur.

“Considering that, Curran walking out for the toss was surprising but Bangar clarified that they were always clear about the Englishman’s role in the side.

““No, no, he (Jitesh) wasn’t the designated vice-captain. The impression could have been because he attended the captains’ seminar at the start



of the IPL. “But the thought was always that ... Because Sam has led the team in the previous year as well; he was late to arrive from UK and he wanted to have a few (training) sessions, that’s the

reason we couldn’t send him to Chennai. Hence Jitesh was sent, because the directive was that a player has to attend.

“It wasn’t the case that Jitesh was the stand-in captain. We were very clear in our mind that if at all there had to be an opening, Sam Curran will be taking over and do the job as the captain,” said the former India batting coach.

“Both Dhawan and Jonny Bairstow have not been able to provide flying starts to the team which has contributed to its inconsistent run in the tournament.

“Dhawan’s replacement at the top for the Saturday’s game, Atharva Taide, too could not do much against Royals.

“Bangar agreed it was a

concern.

“Certainly is a cause for concern that the top order is not making enough runs for us. They are trying hard - I am not saying that they are not applying themselves - but it’s just not coming.

“Low-scoring games, especially at Mullanpur, the way the wicket is... that also is a factor. Because if you see, some of the scores have been pretty low.

“All the three games that we have played here, in the first six overs, with the new ball, the wicket tends to just jag a little bit, and uneven bounce as well. So maybe that is also a contributing factor because, not only us, the visiting teams and their top order are facing issues.”

OTHER SPORTS

ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Anju, Harshita reach final

PTI ■ BISHKEK (KYRGYZSTAN)

Railways wrestler Anju, who had outclassed Vinesh Phogat in the recent selection trials, and Harshita put up a dominant show to reach the gold medal bouts in their respective categories at the Asian Championships, but Sarita Mor was eliminated after a shock defeat in her opening round here Sunday.

“Competing in a highly competitive 53kg weight class category, Anju logged



back-to-back wins by technical superiority against Philippines’ Aliah Rose Gavalez and Sri Lanka’s Nethmi Ahinsa Fernando.

“She faced some resistance from China’s Chun Lei before prevailing 9-6 in the semifinal.

“In the final, Anju will face Korea’s Ji Hyang Kim.

“Harshita conceded just three points en route the final, outclassing Uzbekistan’s Ozoda Zaripboeva by technical superiority (13-3) and beating Kazakhstan’s Anastassiya Panassovich 5-0.

“She will fight it out with China’s Qian Jiang in the final.

“However, a big shock was in store for the Indian squad as 2021 World Championship medallist Sarita lost her quarterfinal bout 4-8 to Mongolia’s Gantuya Enkhbat.

“The 28-year-old was a firm medal favourite in this category. Later Enkhbat lost her semifinal, closing the repechage route for the Indian.

“Manisha Bhanwala (62kg) and Antim Kundu (65kg) will contest for bronze medals.

Akshay slips at end of Round three but Scheffler moves into sole lead

PTI ■ BISHKEK (KYRGYZSTAN)

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Gukesh beats Vidit Gujrathi to regain joint lead

PTI ■ TORONTO

India’s D Gukesh bounced back with a finely crafted game to outwit compatriot Vidit Gujrathi and regain his joint lead with Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia after the eighth round of the Candidates chess tournament here.

“On a day when R Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with Firouzja Alireza of France, Hikaru Nakamura sealed his supremacy in the all-American duel against Fabiano Caruana to come back in to reckoning for top honours.

“Overnight sole leader Nepomniachtchi faltered in the early stages to allow tail ender Nijat Abasov to get away with an easy draw in the other game of the eight-player double round-robin event.

“With six rounds still to come, Gukesh and Nepomniachtchi have 5 points apiece and they are followed by Nakamura and

Praggnanandhaa on 4.5 points each.

“Caruana is now sole fifth on four points. Gujrathi on 3.5 comes in next ahead of Alireza on three points, while Abasov is still at the rear of the tables on 2.5 points.

“Gukesh had his task cut out and went for a rare variation wherein he surprised Gujrathi as early as on move four. Gujrathi sank into a long thought and ended up losing around twenty minutes on the clock.

“In the next few moves Gukesh equalized without much ado even as Gujrathi tried to make some headways on both flanks.

“In the middle game, Gukesh seized control of the only open file and used his queen and rook for an absolute domination to penetrate. Vidit tried hard to resist but the pressure was quite unforgiving especially when he had less time.

“The die was cast when Gukesh entered the eighth



rank and it was a picturesque finish as white’s king was taken for a walk before the checkmate became inevitable. The game lasted 38 moves.

“These kind of clean games are rare at this level, in the opening he did some

inaaccuracies and his position was unpleasant, I was in control, it was a nice game,” Gukesh said when asked if he was surprised how he won as black without much counterplay.

“Praggnanadhaa could not

achieve much with his white pieces. Alireza employed the Sicilian Taimanov and the Indian went for another variation that has not been tested very regularly at the top level.

“However, for once, Alireza found the going easy

and equalized without many problems, thanks to some timely breakthroughs on the queen side.

“The players reached an equal endgame soon after the Queens got traded on the 30th move the result was never in doubt. The draw was agreed to ten move later.

“Hikaru Nakamura stole the thunder and has clearly been a nemesis for world number two Caruana in the key encounters especially when the former had white pieces.

“It had started in Norway chess tournament when Nakamura defeated Caruana in the last round to win and the trend had continued in the FIDE’s Grand Swiss where he again won in the final round as white.

“In the eighth round game, Nakamura, one point away from leaderboard, took his chances in the closed Ruy Lopez and was duly rewarded as Caruana went for some unwarranted complications

after getting a level position in the middle game.

“Caruana also ran short of time and missed out on a tactic in a difficult position. It was all over in just 35 moves.

“Abasov has not been at his best but in this round the Azerbaijani secured his first half point with the black pieces.

Nepomniachtchi transposed to an exchange French defense and the resulting position was just equal till the longest game of the day ended after 63 moves.

“In the Women’s section, Koneru Humpy scored a victory over compatriot R Vaishali out of a Queen pawn game to jump to 3.5 points.

“The course of the event changed a bit in this section as Tingjie Lei of China accounted for her Chinese team-mate Zhongyi Tan to through the event open.

Zhongyi’s domination was halted as Aleksandra Goryachkina of

Russia and Lei joined her in the lead on five points out of a possible eight.

“Russian Kateryna Lagno is within striking distance of the three leaders on 4.5 points with Humpy and Nurgyul Salimova sharing the fifth spot on 3.5 points each.

“Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine stands seventh on three points, while Vaishali is on the last spot remaining on 2.5 points.

“Vaishali might have drawn but needed high level of accuracy in an exchange down endgame against Humpy.

Known for her technical prowess, Humpy cashed-in on her chances and her pair of rooks eventually proved superior to Vaishali’s Bishop and Rook.

“The ninth round will see an all important clash from the Indian perspective as Gukesh meets Praggnanandhaa in the men’s section, while Gujrathi has to face the in-form Nakamura.