

Congress to hike quota above 50 percent cap: Rahul Gandhi

STAFF REPORTER ■
BILASPUR

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday vowed to hike the reservations in jobs and admissions by removing the 50 percent cap if the I.N.D.I.A. alliance was voted to power in the Lok Sabha elections.

Gandhi was addressing the "Samajik Nyay Sammelan" at Chhattisgarh's Sakri in the Bilaspur parliamentary constituency in support of Congress candidate Devendra Yadav.

Asserting that the Lok Sabha elections now underway was a fight between two ideologies, he reiterated that the BJP and the saffron brigade were attacking democracy, the constitution and the policy



of reservation. "By introducing and promoting contractual jobs like Agniveer and privatizing public sector units (PSUs), it is ending reservations," he said. "The constitution provided the Dalits, tribals and OBCs reservation in government jobs and admissions to academic institutions. It also empowered them to vote to elect representatives for legislatures and it gave the public sector units for them as well," he said. "The Congress is fighting for social justice by saving the constitution and democracy," he added. Congress candidate Yadav is a MLA from Bhilai and is pitted against BJP's Tokhan Sahu in Bilaspur, which will go to the polls in the third phase of the general elections on May 7.

Nine killed in road accident

STAFF REPORTER ■
BEMETARA

Six women and three children were killed and 23 persons including the driver were injured when a goods vehicle they were in collided with a truck in Bemetara district in Chhattisgarh, police said on Monday.

The accident took place Sunday night near Kathia village when the people of Patharra village were returning from a family function in Tiraiyya village, Bemetara Sub-Divisional Officer of Police Manoj Tirkey told The Pioneer.

The goods pick-up vehicle collided with the mini truck stationed on the roadside.

Eight people identified as Bhuri Nishad (50), Neera Sahu (55), Geeta Sahu (60), Agniya Sahu (60), Khushbu Sahu (39), Madhu Sahu (5), Rikesh Nishad (6) and Twinkle Nishad (6) were killed on the spot. One of the injured, Ratna



Sahu (45), died while being shifted to Raipur for treatment. Three of the critically injured persons were admitted in the higher medical centers at Raipur. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai expressed profound grief over the incident.

HNLU inks MoU with NACIN for institutional collaboration

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

The Hidayatullah National Law University (HNLU) on Monday inked a MoU with the National Academy of Indirect Taxes and Customs (NACIN) on Monday to strengthen institutional collaborations.

A press communiqué from the university said the partnership aims to foster mutual growth and development in the field of indirect taxation and customs laws.

The MoU will facilitate joint organization of symposia, conferences, workshops and other educational events.

Exchange of information on developments in teaching methodologies, trainee development and research activities would also be done.

The MoU also aims at co-sharing of training



resources on legal and procedural topics, development of collaborative research and training programmes, mutual utilization of each other's facilities and resources for educational purposes.

Prof. Vivekanandan, Vice Chancellor of HNLU, said: "This MoU will mutually benefit HNLU and NACIN in the areas of capacity building, research and advocacy."

Shailender Kumar, Additional Director of NACIN, stated that it was a significant partnership for NACIN to get expertise on various legal processes from the premier University of HNLU.

The MoU was signed by Shailendra Kumar, Additional Director of NACIN, and in charge Registrar of HNLU, Dr Vipin Kumar.

Seven women among 23 Maoists surrender

STAFF REPORTER ■
DANTEWADA

As many as 23 Naxalites including seven women surrendered on Monday in Dantewada in Chhattisgarh.

Of these, Sonu Madvi (40) was the Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangthan (DAKMS) vice president while Paro Madvi (38) was a Krantikari Mahila Adivasi Sangthan (KAMS) vice president, Dantewada Superintendent of Police Gaurav Rai said.

And Parvati Barsa (33) was the head of the financial team, he said.

"They laid down arms in front of security personnel. They were part of Bhairamgarh Area Committee of the Maoists group," Rai said. "These



cadres were tasked with digging roads, felling trees to block roads and putting up posters and banners during shutdowns called by the Naxalites," added the officer. With this, 761 Naxalites, including 177 of them carrying cash rewards on their heads, have joined the mainstream in the district since June 2020.



As part of the SVEEP programme, volunteers in Chhattisgarh's Bhilai took out a 50-km cycle rally from Kala Mandir to the Deobaloda Shiva temple to inspire people to vote in the May 7 Lok Sabha elections.

Amity University opens a 5-day IDE boot camp

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Amity University kicked off Chhattisgarh's first five-day Innovation, Design and Entrepreneurship boot camp in Raipur on Monday.

The first day of the expo involved participants presenting their innovations.

Virtually addressing the event, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) Chairman Professor T.G. Sitaram highlighted the unique endeavours of the government and stressed the need to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

The Chhattisgarh Swami Vivekananda Technical University's Vice Chancellor Professor M.K. Verma said talent was not constrained by location or circumstances.

People from rural areas demonstrate their innovative capabilities by naturally thinking creatively about the



fundamental issues in their lives. Amity University Vice Chancellor Professor Piyush Kant Pandey said the bootcamp was adding a new chapter to the development of Chhattisgarh. In the coming days, participants will be taken on a tour to gain knowledge, establish connections and find inspiration to develop their entrepreneurial approach.

EC resolves 777 complaints of MCC violations



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

The Election Commission in Chhattisgarh has addressed 777 complaints of Model Code of Conduct breaches submitted through the cVigil app, an official communication said on Monday.

The authorities have removed a total of 4,32,310 pieces of illegal political propaganda as well.

Citizens can complain about violations such as illegal political promotional materials through the application by taking a photo or making a two-minute video or audio recording.

Court extends Anil Tuteja's ED remand



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

A special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) Court in Raipur on Monday extended the Enforcement Directorate (ED) custodial remand of retired IAS officer Anil Tuteja in the alleged liquor scam linked money laundering case in Chhattisgarh.

Special judge Atul Kumar

extended his custodial remand till May 4.

Tuteja was presented before the court after expiry of his five days ED custody.

Tuteja, a 2003 batch IAS officer, retired last year.

The ED filed a fresh money laundering case in the alleged liquor scam after the Supreme Court quashed its earlier FIR based on an Income Tax Department complaint.

Cash, goods of Rs 51Cr seized in Chhattisgarh



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Authorities in Chhattisgarh have confiscated cash and other goods worth Rs 51.66 crore since the Model Code of Conduct came into effect on March 16, an official communiqué said on Monday.

The seizures include Rs 12.70 crore in cash, 52,196 liters of illicit liquor valued at Rs 1.37 crore, 3,174 kg of narcotics valued at Rs 6.15 crore, 87.46 kg of precious metal worth Rs 2.14 crore and other goods worth Rs 29.30 crore.

The actions were taken as part of their campaign to ensure free and fair Lok Sabha elections.

Maoist killed in Sukma



STAFF REPORTER ■
SUKMA

A Maoist was gunned down on Monday morning in a gun battle with security personnel in Sukma district in Chhattisgarh.

The gunfight took place around 7 am in a forest near Peselpad village, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said.

The operation was launched by

the District Reserve Guard, Bastar Fighters and the commando unit of the CRPF on Sunday based on the inputs about the presence of Maoist cadres in the area.

After the skirmish ended, the body of a Maoist and a weapon were recovered from the spot.

With this incident, 81 Maoists have been gunned down this year by security forces in Bastar division, according to the police.

FIRST COLUMN

THE POWER OF THE HUMAN MIND

Settle your mind and clear accumulated dust, only then it gets purged



RAVI VALLURI

AEONS ago lived, Suddhodana, chieftain of the Sakyan republics. He was captivated with the thought of perpetuating the dynasty. However, his battle fatigued son Siddhartha, was not ensnared by the Mara of trappings of power, carnal pleasures and a family life. Siddhartha eschewed violence, cast away royal clothing and adorned ochre robes in search of the quintessential truth and was to become Buddha after intense tapas. Upon attaining enlightenment, the Compassionate One dissected the bewildering characteristics of the human mind. He was soon to quantify in a plain sailing manner, "We are what we think and our thoughts shape our lives."

The human mind is not resplendent with ennobling thoughts if the prana levels are low. The prana level increases (through yoga, pranayama, meditation and Sudarshan Kriya) and at that moment an individual realises the magnetic potential of the human mind.

Once there was a Good Samaritan, Sudhakar. He happened to read the maiden effort of a civil servant called the Magic of the Mind. This gentleman, with trepidation, became a 'Facebook friend' of the mandarin and persuaded him to be interviewed by a few T.V. channels. However, the thought process of the public functionary- who was a recovered alcoholic- doubted the sincerity of the Facebook friend. In disgust, he 'blocked' and then 'unblocked' the gentleman, perhaps more to quell the pangs of his own conscience. Finally in sheer vexation he gave in to the entreaties of the 'Facebook friend'. Soon an amazing pattern emerged and the administrator was invited by several media houses and estimable institutions to deliver lectures as to how he combated and conquered the battle against the bottle. Only much later did he realise that Sudhakar had lost some close relatives to the perils of alcoholism.



The autarchic mind of the bureaucrat was ossified and looking at life through the prism of tunnel vision. One day, after a series of interviews, the functionary received a distress call from a lady, who had happened to listen to one of his interviews and was also reading the book penned by the bureaucrat, which captured his triumph over alcoholism. On receiving the call, he could empathise with the woman's husband who was fighting a grim battle against alcoholism. There was a sudden transmutation in the mind of the public servant and went on to guide the husband on how to attain sobriety.

Realisation and awareness are two iconic qualities that shine the light on the amazing power of the human mind. Several centuries ago, Gautama Buddha was travelling with a group of disciples. The Compassionate One felt thirsty and desired some water to quench his thirst. He asked a disciple to fetch some water from a nearby lake. The enthusiastic disciple rushed to the lake but was horrified to find the water turbid as a farmer had just crossed the lake on his bullock cart. He returned back remorsefully as he could not fulfil the wish of the holy Master. Buddha sent the disciple a couple of times to fetch water to quench his thirst. But to the dismay of the tutee on each occasion the water remained dirty and turbid. While the devotees were fidgety and distraught, Buddha remained patient. Eventually, the devotee animatedly brought fresh water from the lake and offered it.

Buddha smiled and drank the water. He was to say, "You did nothing. The mud settled down and the water was purged of the impurities. Let your mind settle all the dust accumulated over a period of time." This is the amazing power of the human mind. Just let it settle down.

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

Challenges loom ahead of July Union Budget



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The incoming Government would face the uphill task of navigating through a myriad of fiscal hurdles to foster sustainable growth



DESPITE it being too early to discuss the union budget to be presented in July, it is certain whichever combination comes back to power it would have to majorly review the February interim budget given the debates generated during elections. The election is veering around more on economic issues than the religion or Ram temple, though in certain regions these remain a potent issue and so the brands Narendra Modi and Yogi Adityanath. A larger section is concerned with the core economy, unemployment, farmers' issues, irrationally high prices, medical and health care costs, school and university fees, shooting costs of houses, high toll-jacked inflation and similar other issues.

Even showcasing of Indian economy as the fifth largest economy is not being accepted by a large section as reality. The farmers and citizens wonder while cars and tractors are allowed to run for 40 years like aircraft across the world, why a pro-people Government should be in a hurry to send these to junkyards in India, particularly when household debts are skyrocketing. The rural wisdom calls it weird and tries to locate the linkages of Government functionaries with the car makers.

Questions are also raised on the Rs 16.87 lakh crore debt repayment in the 2024-25 budget. This effectively cuts the actual budget of Rs 47.65 lakh crore to about Rs 31 lakh crore. The repayment burden in 2025 is slated to be higher. The opposition's sharp angling on core economic issues is being rebutted by the ruling combine by charging that if the opposition gets to power it would sell "mangalsutras" and delve into divisive politics. The Election Commission has issued warnings to the ruling party for its wry comments.

Low voting in 190 constituencies in major States like UP, Bihar and Maharashtra raises concern among all parties. The voter is apathetic despite



THE NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO TAKE DRASTIC STEPS TO BRING DOWN THE PRICES OF EDIBLE OIL, FOOD GRAINS, VEGETABLES, POTATOES AND ONIONS, AS WELL AS SCHOOL FEES AND EXPENSIVE HEALTH CARE, MILK AND OTHER COMMODITIES

many moves by the Election Commission. Is that a reflection on governance? This has not put the issues on the back burner. According to RBI, inflation rises at 5.5 per cent a year and has shot beyond 55 per cent in compounded terms causing a huge rise in prices. Nobody has got such a raise in their salaries, not even Government employees.

The new Government would have to take drastic steps to bring down the prices of edible oil, food grains, vegetables, potatoes and onions as well as school fees and expensive health care, milk and other commodities. People are unwilling to buy the argument that inflation is built into the system. They rather equate it with corporate electoral bond doles to parties. The Government accepts the petrol prices are high, cut it by Rs 2 just before the polls. It has no impact on the voters' psyche.

The voter is not happy with the so-called demonstrative developments like demolition and construction of large office buildings, rail stations and rampant construction of roads or metro. Constructions devastate the hills of Himachal, Kashmir, Uttarakhand and the North East. Kisans who became millionaires overnight with the acquisition of their land for roads are not happy about losing their livelihood. Most villagers rue the roads that divide their habitats and relationships for a road they can't use without paying a toll. It is a serious issue because the Kisan also pays Rs 30 per litre petrol cess toll introduced with the promise of ending the toll. All these benefit bulk profiteers and the least of jobs.

A new Government has to initiate drastic changes and reorient policies. The major reason for joblessness is attributed to ad hoc decisions. Such constructions erode Government finance and build little assets. Southeast Asia tried it in the late 1990s and got into trouble in 1997. It would be wise on the part of the new Government to revive PSUs and ask the private sector to compete with them. It would create jobs, add to the national economy and create a fair playground.

People question the rationale of parting a part of Indian Oil to a private giant or giving out ports to private players. At least one such port has become notorious for being a smugglers' den. The universities, IITs and Government institutions have been given a mandate to raise tuition fees every year. The private ones hike far more. Schools and universities need financing from the Government and education costs must be cut down. Congress promises apprenticeship to every graduate. Looks good but it is not practical. The scheme has failed several times. India's overall exports fell by 8.1 per cent and exports to its free trade partners shrank by 18 per cent in the first half of 2023. The country's trade deficit ballooned to \$78.2 billion in the last financial year. India's export values across all commodities declined to \$351 billion during April-January from \$366 billion a year ago, underlining the impact of the global economic slowdown and tightening of interest rates in Western countries. These numbers have emerged amid India's push to sign free trade deals with the UK and the European Union. The International Monetary Fund

says that the global slowdown is on. However India projects its march to a \$5 trillion economy and it is not easy. The West has become more protectionist and keen on imposing a carbon tax. The West needs to protect its bread.

Lower productivity can result in reduced job creation within the manufacturing sector, leading to unemployment or underemployment. The International Labour Organisation finds low pay and wages as serious challenges. When productivity declines, the incentives for firms to invest in research and development or adopt new technologies diminish, leading to a slower pace in the manufacturing sector. However, the challenge of rising household debt and falling savings could weigh on long-term growth sustainability.

The FDI flow is low at \$17.96 billion. Despite a supposed buzzing market, it has not risen much. The new Government also has the challenge to cut personal income-tax rates from 39 per cent to 22 per cent in tune with the corporate tax. High taxation hits the purchasing capacity and concomitant market problems.

In short, the new Government has to stress issues regarding taxes, education, health, livelihood, low tolls and better deal with farmers. Both manifestos of the BJP and Congress speak of too many doles and caste-related benefits. If the Government can address the basic issues and make it one of the most affordable economies, India's journey will be smooth. It is a dream, if comes true it will be the most liveable country.

(The author is a senior journalist; views are personal)

Celebrating the universal language of dance

From traditional Indian classical dance forms to contemporary global dance phenomena, dance continues to inspire, heal and unite communities

ON April 14 last year, history was made in Assam, India, as a Guinness World Record was set for the largest gathering of Bihu dancers. Over 11,000 dancers from different communities and backgrounds came together to perform the traditional dance of Assam, watched live by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It was a spectacular display of cultural diversity and unity. This event was a shining example of how cultural diversity can bring people together and foster a sense of emotional bonding and appreciation of one another's culture and traditions.

More recently as part of the 'Raag Seva' in a breathtaking display of timeless grace and unwavering passion, the 90-year-old actor-dancer and



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Padma Vibhushan awardee Vyjayanthimala Bali, enchanted spectators with her ethereal Bharatanatyam performance in Ayodhya. In this rich mosaic of human expression, dance emerges as a timeless gem, casting its spell across generations and captivating hearts through the ages. Beyond mere movement, it embodies a symphony of creativity, infusing the soul with unbridled joy. A graceful interplay of rhythm

and emotion, it offers solace from the burdens of modern life, intertwining threads of happiness into the fabric of existence.

Welcome to the rhythm of life, as we celebrate the 'International Dance Day' on April 29th every year, since 1982. Dance helps to change lives. The 'Navras', which is used to express joy, sadness, love, anger and many other emotions, is a way of celebrating life and creating a sense of community.

This Day serves as a platform aimed at fostering awareness regarding the intrinsic value of dance and facilitating the widespread promotion of the dance community's endeavours. Central to its mission is the aspiration that Governments and influential figures will

recognize the significance of dance and extend support towards its cultivation. We are all aware of Yo-Yo Ma's 'Silk Road Ensemble', a musical group founded by the cellist Yo-Yo Ma, where musicians from China, Iran, India and Spain come together and use their music to create a bridge between cultures and promote understanding between people from different backgrounds. Through cultural collaboration, this is a forum for the exchange of ideas, tradition and innovation across borders.

Also, the 'OneBeat' initiative, which brings together musicians from around the world to collaborate and create new music - was funded by the U.S. Department of State - aims to promote cultural exchange

and create a global community of musicians. 'OneBeat' has brought together musicians from countries such as Syria, Russia and Cuba, to name a few, not only providing a platform for musicians to share their music but also creating new collaborations that transcend cultural and linguistic barriers.

Dance also helps in promoting intercultural dialogue. Dance companies worldwide come together to create new works that reflect their cultural traditions and explore common themes. One such example is the 'Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater', which has been promoting diversity and inclusion through dance for over 60 years. The company's performances celebrate the African-American cultural

experience and explore universal themes such as love, loss and identity.

Not only this, the 'National Ballet of Cuba' is a dance company that promotes intercultural dialogue through its performances. Founded in 1948 by Alicia Alonso, one of the most famous ballerinas of the 20th century, it is known for its unique style that combines elements of classical ballet with Afro-Cuban and Spanish dance traditions.

Back in India, 'The Kalakshetra Foundation', - of the many foundations and institutions that exist to popularize Indian classical dance forms - Chennai-based dance school, founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale in 1936, sought to revive and promote Indian classical dance forms and is

today a leading institution that trains students in various forms of Indian classical dance, including Bharatanatyam, Kathakali and Kuchipudi. Similarly, the 'Nrityagram Dance Village', near Bangalore, which was founded in 1990 by Protima Gauri, a renowned Indian classical dancer, is a unique institution that offers a holistic approach to dance training, focusing not only on dance techniques, but also on aspects such as yoga, meditation and Indian mythology. The institute has gained global recognition and has collaborated with many international dance companies to create new works that blend Indian classical dance with contemporary dance forms. We cannot miss Bollywood dance, which has become a

global phenomenon and has created a platform for people from different backgrounds to come together and celebrate India's vibrant culture. Using different dance styles from Indian classical forms to ballet; to cabaret; to hip-hop, break dance and so on - each step encompasses a unique rhythm and style involving different generations tap to the beats.

As we celebrate the universal language of dance and its ability to unite people, it is also important to acknowledge the Guru-Shishya Parampara and celebrate the beauty of dance and its ability to create a better world for all.

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

'Israel must boost more humanitarian aid for Gaza'

AP ■ WARSA

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday that Israel must still do more to increase the flow of humanitarian aid into the besieged Gaza Strip and that he would use his current Middle East trip — his seventh to the region since the Israel-Hamas war started in October — to press that case with Israeli leaders.

Speaking to Gulf Cooperation Council foreign ministers in Riyadh, Blinken said best way to ease the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza would be to conclude an elusive cease-fire agreement that would release hostages held by Hamas. But, in the meantime, he said it was critical to improve conditions now. "The most effective way to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, to alleviate the suffering of children, women and men, and to create space for a more just and durable solution is to get a cease-fire and the hostages out," he said. "But we're also not waiting on a cease-fire to take the necessary steps to meet the needs of civilians in Gaza," Blinken said. He said that because President Joe Biden has been insisting that Israel do more, including in his phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday, there had been improvements, although not nearly enough. "We have seen measurable progress in the last few weeks, including the opening of new crossings and increased volume of aid delivery to Gaza and within Gaza, and the building of the US maritime corridor, which will open in the coming weeks. But it is not enough. We still need to get more aid in and around Gaza," he said. "We need to improve deconfliction with humanitarian assistance workers. And we have to find greater efficiency and greater safety and



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is welcomed by Saudi Foreign Ministry Director of Protocol Affairs Mohammed Al-Ghamdi as he arrives in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia Monday. AP/PTI

deconfliction is at the heart of that. And, finally we have to make sure that we're focusing not just on inputs, but on impact."

Scores of relief workers have been killed since the conflict began, and a deadly Israeli attack on a World Central Kitchen aid convoy in Gaza this month only highlighted the dangers and difficulties of protecting them. Israel has said the strike was a mistake and has disciplined officials involved.

World Central Kitchen says it would resume operations in Gaza on Monday after a four-week suspension.

The war has ground on since Hamas' deadly Oct 7 attacks on Israel with little end in sight: more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed, hundreds of thousands more are displaced and a humanitarian crisis in Gaza is worsening.

The conflict has fuelled mass protests around the world that have spread to American college campuses. US support for Israel, particularly arms transfers, has come under particular criticism, something the administration is keenly aware poses potential problems for Biden in an election year.

Blinken's trip comes amid renewed concerns about the conflict spreading in the Middle East and with once-promising prospects for Israeli-Saudi rapprochement effectively on hold as Israel refuses to consider one of the Saudis' main conditions for normalised relations: the creation of a Palestinian state. Meanwhile, the Biden administration has been warning Israel against a major military operation on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians have fled to escape fighting further north. Israel has not yet launched such an offensive, but Netanyahu has repeatedly said that one will take place, asserting that it is the only way to wipe out Hamas. Both topics were discussed during the Biden-Netanyahu phone call on Sunday, according to the White House and US officials. During his trip, Blinken said he would also underscore the absolute importance of not allowing the Israel-Hamas conflict to engulf the region.

The danger of conflagration was underscored this month when a suspected Israeli attack on an Iranian consular building in Syria prompted an unprecedented direct missile and drone response by Iran against Israel. An apparent retaliatory Israeli strike on Iran followed.

Although the tit-for-tat cycle appears to have ended for now, deep concerns remain that Iran or its proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria or Yemen could act in such a way as to provoke a greater response from Israel or that Israel might take action that Iran feels it must retaliate for.

UK's new laws to keep smart devices secure over internet

PTI ■ LONDON

Their smart devices are protected from cyber criminals, as we introduce world first laws that will make sure their personal privacy, data and finances are safe," said UK Minister for Cyber Viscount Camrose, Jonathan Berry. The UK's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology said under the new legal requirement, manufacturers must protect consumers from hackers and cyber criminals from accessing devices with internet or network connectivity — from smartphones to games consoles and connected fridges. It said the new laws are part of the British government's GBP 2.6-billion National Cyber Strategy to protect and promote Britain online. "Our pledge to establish the UK as the global standard for online safety takes a big step forward with these regulations, moving us closer to our goal of a digitally secure future," said UK Data and Digital Infrastructure Minister Julia Lopez.

Yousaf resigns as Scottish First Minister

PTI ■ LONDON

Humza Yousaf, the Pakistani-origin Scottish National Party leader who heads the devolved government in Scotland, announced his resignation on Monday, after days of political turmoil for the devolved SNP-led government.

Yousaf, 39, took over as Scotland's first Muslim and also the region's youngest First Minister in March last year.

Last week, he ended a power-sharing agreement with the Scottish Green Party amid growing policy differences and plunged his leadership of a minority government into crisis. His former Green Party allies then teamed up with the Opposition Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties to back two non-confidence motions — one in Yousaf's leadership of Scotland and the second regarding the Scottish government as a whole.

"While a route through this week's motion of no confidence was absolutely possible, I am not willing to trade my values and principles or do deals with whomever simply for retaining power," said Yousaf.

"Therefore, after spending the weekend reflecting on what is best for my party, for the government and for the country I lead I have concluded that repairing our relationship across the political divide can only be done with someone else at the helm," he said. In his speech delivered at Bute House in Edinburgh, he noted on an emotional note: "I am sad that my time as First Minister is ending, but I am so grateful, I am so blessed, for having the opportunity that are afforded to so few to lead my country and who could ask for a better country to lead than Scotland." Yousaf, of Pakistani and Kenyan heritage, paid tribute to the UK's diversity and also referenced Rishi Sunak as Britain's first Hindu prime minister in his resignation speech.

He added: "People who looked like me were not in positions of political influence, let alone leading governments, when I was younger. We now live in a UK that has a British Hindu Prime Minister (Sunak), a Muslim Mayor of London (Sadiq Khan), a black Welsh First Minister (Vaughan Gething), and for a little while longer a Scottish Asian First Minister of this country." "So for those who decry that multiculturalism has failed across the UK, I would suggest that the evidence is quite to the contrary and that is something we should all celebrate." Yousaf will remain in his post until a replacement First Minister is chosen in the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood. It marks a time of upheaval for the pro-independence SNP even though the outgoing leader claimed Scottish independence "feels frustratingly close." "The last few miles of the marathon are always the hardest and we have run this race as a team and will now prepare to pass the baton to a successor who I am absolutely certain will lead us over the finish line," he said.

The Opposition parties welcomed his resignation, with the Scottish Tories saying Yousaf had averted a "humiliating defeat" at a vote of no confidence later this week and the Labour Party demanding a UK-wide general election soon for a "fresh start" across the country.



Israeli officials concerned over ICC arrest warrants

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli officials on Monday appeared to be increasingly concerned that the International Criminal Court may issue arrest warrants against the country's leaders, as international pressure mounts over its war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, Israeli airstrikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight and into Monday killed at least 22 people, including six women and five children, one of whom was just 5 days old, according to hospital records and an Associated Press reporter.

The ICC launched a probe three years ago into possible war crimes committed by Israel and Palestinian militants going back to the 2014 Israel-Hamas war, but it has given no indication such warrants are imminent. There was no comment from the court on Monday.

Israel's Foreign Ministry said late Sunday that it had informed Israeli missions of "rumours" that warrants might be issued against senior political and military officials. It was not clear what sparked the Israeli concerns. "We expect the court to prevent the issuance of arrest warrants against senior Israeli officials," Foreign Minister Israel Katz said, adding that such warrants would "provide a morale boost" to Hamas and other militant groups.

A series of Israeli announcements in recent days about allowing more humanitarian aid into Gaza meanwhile appears to be aimed in part at heading off possible ICC action. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday that Israel "will never accept any attempt by the ICC to undermine its inherent right of self-defence." "The threat to seize the soldiers and officials of the Middle East's only democracy and the world's only Jewish state is outrageous. We will not bow to it," he posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. It was not clear what prompted the post. The ICC investigation covers allegations going back to the 2014 war in Gaza as well as Israel's construction of Jewish settlements in occupied territory that the Palestinians want for a future state.

Truce: Biden, Netanyahu hold talks

Tel Aviv (AP): The White House on Sunday said US President Joe Biden had again spoken with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as pressure builds on Israel and Hamas to reach a deal that would free some Israeli hostages and bring a cease-fire in the nearly seven-month-long war in Gaza.

The White House said that Biden reiterated his "clear position" as Israel plans to invade Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah despite global concern for more than 1 million Palestinians sheltering there.

The US opposes the invasion on humanitarian grounds, straining relations between the allies. Israel is among the countries U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit as he returns to the Middle East on Monday.

Biden also stressed that progress in delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza be "sustained and enhanced," according to the statement.

The call lasted just under an hour, and they agreed the onus remains on Hamas to accept the latest offer in negotiations, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the official wasn't authorized to comment publicly.

There was no comment from Netanyahu's office. A senior official from key intermediary Qatar, meanwhile, urged Israel and Hamas to show "more commitment and more seriousness" in negotiations.

Qatar, which hosts Hamas' headquarters in Doha, was instrumental along with the US and Egypt in helping negotiate a brief halt to the fighting in November that led to the release of dozens of hostages.

But in a sign of frustration, Qatar this month said that it was reassessing its role.

Spain's PM Sánchez to continue in office

AP ■ MADRID

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez on Monday ended days of speculation about his future by saying he will continue in office "with even more strength."

Sánchez shocked his country last Wednesday by taking five days off to think about his future, following the decision by a court to open preliminary proceedings against his wife on corruption allegations. "I have decided to continue on with even more strength at the helm of the government of Spain," he said in a televised speech after informing King Felipe VI of the decision earlier Monday.

His resignation would have deprived Europe of a prominent Socialist prime minister ahead of European elections in June and at a time when the center right increasingly holds sway. "It is a decision that does not mean a return to the status quo,

At least 40 die in Kenya after dam collapses

AP ■ NAIROBI

A dam collapsed in western Kenya early Monday, killing at least 40 people after a wall of water swept through houses and cut off a major road, police said.

The Old Kijabe Dam, located in the Mai Mahiu area of the Great Rift Valley region that is prone to flash floods, collapsed and water spilled downstream, carrying with it mud, rocks and uprooted trees, police official Stephen Kirui told The Associated Press.

Vehicles were entangled in the debris on one of Kenya's busiest highways and paramedics treated the injured as waters submerged large areas. Ongoing rains in Kenya have caused flooding that has already killed nearly 100 people and postponed the opening of schools. Heavy rains have been pounding the country since mid-March and the Meteorology Department has warned of more rainfall.

Kenya's Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki ordered the inspection of all public and private dams and water reservoirs within 24 hours starting Monday afternoon to avert future incidents. The ministry said recommendations for evacuations and resettlement would be done after the inspection.

The Kenya National Highways Authority issued an alert warning motorists to brace for heavy traffic and debris that blocked the roads around Naivasha and Narok, west of the capital, Nairobi.

The wider East African region is experiencing flooding due to the heavy rains, and 155 people have reportedly died in Tanzania while more than 200,000 people affected in neighbouring Burundi.



Top Chinese scientist expelled over corruption allegations

AP ■ BEIJING

China's top scientist, who developed the first inactivated COVID-19 vaccine at the height of the pandemic in the country in 2020, has been dismissed from Parliament for alleged corruption.

Yang Xiaoming, the chairman of China National Pharmaceutical Group's vaccine subsidiary China National Biotec Group (CNBG), has been stripped of his membership in the National People's Congress (NPC) due to serious discipline and law violations, official media reported here on Monday.

The charge of serious discipline and law violations is a common euphemism for corruption under the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) disciplinary practice. Yang, 62, is a veteran researcher who headed the CNBG - a vaccine subsidiary of state-owned Sinopharm - and led a team that developed Sinopharm's BBIBP-CorV vaccine, China's first coronavirus shot approved for general use.

Coronavirus first surfaced in the Chinese city of Wuhan in March 2020 and later spread to the world, becoming the pandemic of the century and claiming millions of lives. According to a statement by NPC, Yang is already being investigated by the party disciplinary body — the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection.

The Sinopharm shot and Sinovac Biotech's CoronaVac were the most widely used in China and the leading COVID-19 vaccines exported by the country. Yang's dismissal comes amid the biggest crackdown on China's healthcare system, expanding a sweeping anti-corruption drive launched by President Xi Jinping in the last few years.

The crackdown aims to root out widespread corruption in a system plagued by kickbacks. It targets hospitals, drug companies and insurance funds, with dozens of hospital chiefs detained since last year, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

Another former Sinopharm senior executive, Zhou Bin, who once served as the company's deputy general manager, was placed under investigation by the CCDI in January.

Solomon Islands pro-Beijing PM won't keep his job following polls

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Solomon Islands pro-Beijing Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare on Monday withdrew from the contest to remain head of the strategically important South Pacific island nation's government following general elections two weeks ago that are central to the US-China rivalry in the region.

Sogavare has been re-elected to the parliament. But he told a press conference in the capital Honiara on Monday he would not be nominated as a candidate when the 50 newly elected lawmakers vote on Thursday for the prime minister, Australian Broadcasting Corp reported. Sogavare had hoped to become the first party's candidate to become prime minister will be Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele.

A prime minister needs the support of at least 26 lawmakers in the 50-seat chamber. Observers expect China to have secretly backed more candidates than Sogavare at the election in a bid to ensure the government change does not diminish Beijing's influence. Sogavare could again return to power during the current four-year term. He was elected prime minister after the last election in 2019.

But he has served as prime minister three times before 2019 because his predecessors had quit or were ousted by fellow lawmakers in a precarious political system.



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, right, reacts after receiving a ceremonial talwar as a special gift from the Ontario Sikhs and Gurudwara Council after speaking during Khalsa day celebrations at City Hall in Toronto, Sunday. AP/PTI

BSE shares tank nearly 19 per cent

After Sebi directive on regulatory fee

Shares of BSE tanked nearly 19 per cent on Monday as the exchange is expected to shell out more regulatory fee after markets watchdog Sebi asked it to pay the fee based on the "notional value" of its options contracts rather than on the premium value.



Since the introduction of derivative contracts, BSE has been paying the regulatory fee on "annual turnover" to the regulator considering premium value for option contracts, instead of the notional value.

entails a higher fee outlay. In a disclosure on Sunday, BSE said it is currently evaluating the validity of the claim as per Sebi communication.

India Inc revenue growth weakest since September 2021: Crisil Report

India Inc is likely to log 4-6 per cent revenue growth in the January-March quarter of 2023-24, marking the slowest quarterly growth since recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic which began in September 2021, said a Crisil report.



monitored by CRISIL, only 12 are expected to have clocked an improvement in revenue growth both sequentially and on-year for the quarter."

products and services are expected to have led the show in the January-March quarter. Among discretionary products, the automobiles sector was steered by healthy growth in passenger vehicles on the back of higher volumes and price hikes in the past year.

weddings and rebound in corporate travel. On the other hand, it said, revenue from construction-linked sectors is expected to have grown at a tepid pace, essentially on account of a high base of the fourth quarter of fiscal 2023 that saw construction companies achieving their highest quarterly revenue.

Increasing global uncertainties may impact demand, India's exports: FIEO

The escalating geopolitical tension may have implications for the country's exports in the first quarter of 2024-25 as it is likely to impact global demand, apex exporters body FIEO said.



demand slowdown," he said, adding certain advanced economies like Europe may witness more slowdown. He also said that India's domestic currency depreciated only about 1.3 per cent during 2023-24 as against Chinese Yuan's 4.8 per cent; Thai Baht 6.3 per cent and Malaysian Ringgit's 7 per cent.

stated that the demand for goods that are going to the UAE and then to Iran has come down. Jewellery demand may also come down, he said.

funds for longer period. Exporters also need interest subvention support," Sahai said. He asked for continuation of interest equalisation scheme.

Indegene Ltd, a healthcare tech firm focused on the global life sciences industry, on Monday said it has fixed the price band at Rs 430 to Rs 452 per share for its Rs 1,842-crore initial share-sale offer that opens for public subscription on May 6.

Dish TV launches service for customers in Delhi to access TV, OTT content

Direct-to-home service provider Dish TV on Monday said its existing as well as new customers in Delhi can now access TV and OTT content from popular apps without paying an additional cost.

"We are giving a facility to customers whereby they can switch to different apps with the same subscription without paying anything extra," Dish TV India Ltd CEO Manoj Dobhal told PTI.

Good growth, cloud migration, GenAI gaining traction: HCLTech CEO

HCL Technologies' FY25 guidance of 3-5 per cent represents a "good growth" in current environment, CEO C Vijayakumar said, adding cloud migration and GenAI projects are gaining traction but financial services vertical could face 'headwinds'.

environment "continues to be under pressure" and the situation in FY25 appears "similar" to FY24. The deal pipeline looks "very good" and the company expects to convert some large opportunities soon, which will "definitely help in delivering the growth this year."



Rs 15,702 crore. The company posted Rs 1,09,913 crore in revenue in FY24, up 8.3 per cent from the previous fiscal.

data, cloud migration to hyperscalers and building private AI stacks, all catalysed by GenAI are showing a good traction.

because we've had a stellar growth for two years in financial services, significantly ahead of industry. So there will be some headwinds like some deals will transition to an offshore model.

headcount is growing. And coming to FY25, of course, a lot will depend on how the year shapes up. At this point, we've planned at least 10,000 freshers to be hired during this year," he said.

platform called HCLTech AI Force. The platform helps end-to-end lifecycle of the software development and product engineering. So I think we're very well positioned," he said.

Rupee falls 10 paise to settle at 83.48 against US dollar

The rupee declined 10 paise to close at 83.48 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as investors remained cautious ahead of the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy decision.



On Friday, the rupee had declined 10 paise to close at 83.38 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.26 per cent to 105.53.

macroeconomic numbers to be released this week. The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting will begin on Tuesday and the interest rate decision is expected to be announced on May 1.

Choudhary said, adding, "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 83.70." Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.53 per cent to USD 89.03 per barrel.

Urja Arpan conclave organised



Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL), a leading power utility supplying electricity to a populace of 7 million in North Delhi, hosted the second edition of Urja Arpan Conclave on April 24, 2024, to commemorate the World Earth Day.

Infant food formulation done on global basis, racial stereotype charges unfortunate: Nestle

Nestle India Chairman & Managing Director Suresh Narayanan on Monday asserted that the company's infant food formulation for children below 18 months is done on a global basis and the allegation that "it is racially stereotyped is unfortunate" and untrue.



he said a majority of sugars present in the product are natural sugars. As per the Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the permissible level of added sugar is 13.6 grams per 100 grams of feed.

International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), Nestle sold baby products with higher sugar content in less developed South Asian countries including India, and in African and Latin American nations as compared to its markets in Europe.

THOMAS CUP



India seal quarterfinal berth with 5-0 win over England

PTI ■ CHENGDU (CHINA)

Defending champions India sailed to the knockout stage of the Thomas Cup with a 5-0 rout of England in a Group C contest here on Monday.

for us. So it's important to finish off the matches clinically," Prannoy said after his match. The star pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty was stretched to three games by Ben Lane and Sean Vandy in the first doubles fixtures before 2022 world champions bronze medallist picked up a 21-17 19-21 21-15 win in one hour five minutes.

from now we will face better opponents and I have to be my best," Srikanth said. On his recent form, Srikanth said "I'm playing well but not able to pull off the matches. Obviously people will compare how I was playing from 2021-2022. I was in my 20s then."

Arsenal and Man City both win to keep it tight at top in race for Premier League title

AP ■ LONDON

Arsenal survived a late scare at Tottenham to stay narrowly ahead in the race for the Premier League title.

A 3-2 win at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium ensured Mikel Arteta's team remained at the top of the standings, ahead of defending champion Manchester City, which won 2-0 at Nottingham Forest.

But Arsenal had to endure a nervous finish despite powering to 3-0 lead in a London derby that was supposed to be one of its biggest tests in the title chase. "The last 20 minutes wasn't nice, but it was worth it," Arsenal forward Bukayo Saka said afterward.

An own-goal from Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg and further strikes from Saka and Kai Havertz put Arsenal into a commanding position at the break. But in the face of a potential rout, Tottenham responded in the second half through Cristian Romero and a penalty from Son Heung-min in the 87th minute.



further diminishing after dropping five points in two games this week, it is down to Arsenal to challenge City's domestic dominance. Having collapsed late on in last season's title race, Arteta's players look more capable of going the distance this time around.

Among those in the crowd to watch were his father, Alf-Inge, and rock star Noel Gallagher. The goal saw Haaland move clear of Cole Palmer as the league's top scorer with 21 goals. "It's an important win, it does not matter how we do it, and it is good to be back," Haaland said.

Paris Saint-Germain has won the French league in Kylian Mbappé's last season at the club after Monaco lost 3-2 at Lyon. PSG has an unassailable 12-point lead over second-place Monaco, which has three games left.



PSG wins record extending 12th French league title

AP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain has won the French league in Kylian Mbappé's last season at the club after Monaco lost 3-2 at Lyon. PSG has an unassailable 12-point lead over second-place Monaco, which has three games left.

AP ■ MADRID

Carlos Alcaraz continues to make a successful return from injury at the Madrid Open. The two-time defending champion cruised past Thiago Seyboth Wild in the third round on Sunday to earn another comfortable win.

Alcaraz won 6-3, 6-3 for his second straight victory in his first tournament after skipping Monte Carlo and Barcelona because of an arm injury. "I think I played at a really good level," Alcaraz said.

Alcaraz had been scheduled to play at the Monte Carlo Masters and he also missed Barcelona to try to fully recover ahead of the French Open next month. "I think I'm in a good shape right now. I'm not feeling anything in the forearm, and I played good tennis," the 20-year-old Alcaraz said.

Alcaraz earns another comfortable win in Madrid



hitting the forehand as much relaxed as I can. I'm really happy to be competitive without pain." No. 3-ranked Alcaraz is trying to become the first player to win three straight Madrid Open titles. He will next face Jan-Lennard Struff, his opponent in last year's final in Madrid.

6-7 (5), 6-4. Sabalenka is trying to become the second woman to win three Madrid titles after triumphing in the Spanish capital in 2021 and 2023. Petra Kvitova won the Madrid Open in 2011, 15 and '18.

that was quite a contrast with the past couple of seasons. Last season, PSG supporters were booing Lionel Messi even though the soccer great was the player who helped the club clinch an 11th league title by scoring in a 1-1 draw with Strasbourg.



Archer Deepika Kumari reinducted into TOPS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former world number one archer Deepika Kumari, who won a silver medal at the just-concluded World Cup in Shanghai, has been re-inducted into the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) core group ahead of the Paris Games, the Sports Ministry announced on Monday.

Another archer, Mrinal Chauhan, has been added to the TOPS Development group, while Pravin Jadhav has been moved from Development to Core group and para-powerlifter Ashok has been inducted in TOPS Core group, the sports ministry said in a statement.

Bayern, Dortmund seek Champions League glory

AP ■ MUNICH

It's shaping up to be quite the few weeks for German soccer. The country is preparing to stage the European Championship over June and July, with Germany's national team taking a nicely timed upturn in form.

Before that, Germany might yet be celebrating having a European champion once again, with Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund making up half of the lineup for the Champions League semifinals beginning this week. The last time Bayern and Dortmund both reached the Champions League semifinals was in 2013 and they went on to meet in the title match at Wembley Stadium, with Bayern winning 2-1.

Germany didn't have a single semifinalist in each of the last three seasons. In the 2019-20 competition, it had two - Bayern and Leipzig - and Bayern was the eventual champion. This season, Bayern and Dortmund have mounted impressive European campaigns while underperforming on the domestic front.

BOTH CLUBS KICK OFF BIG SUMMER OF SOCCER FOR GERMANY



2012. Dortmund, meanwhile, is in fifth place in the league so its deep run in Europe has come as something of a surprise. Here's a closer look at the two games: BAYERN MUNICH vs. REAL MADRID (TUESDAY): Madrid should arrive well rested after the Spanish league moved its game at Real Sociedad to Friday.

and are expected to be back in the starting lineup against Bayern. Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel is leaving at the end of the season, and the Champions League - which he won with Chelsea in 2021 - offers him the chance to go out on a high.

said Friday when asked about a fan petition begging the club to keep him. "Even if in this case it is a pleasant issue for me." The injuries that have plagued Bayern this season are easing off, too.

The club is already planning for life without its superstar striker, who is set to walk away as a free agent, with players like Randal Kolo Muani, Ousmane Dembele and Goncalo Ramos expected to help fill the void in his absence. But Mbappe could still have a big say in the Champions League and he scored two goals in PSG's 4-1 comeback win against Barcelona in the quarterfinals.

