

OPINION 6  
IGNORING NEIGHBOURS TO  
EMBRACE THE WORLD

WORLD 8  
SUNAK FACES RESISTANCE OVER  
SMOKING BAN PLANS

MONEY 10  
MARKETS SLUMP  
FOR THIRD DAY

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## Modi, Mamata faceoff in Bengal



(Left to right): Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP candidate Sukanta Majumdar during a public meeting ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Balurghat and West Bengal on Tuesday; Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign rally ahead of Lok Sabha polls, at Hill Cart road in Siiliguri on Tuesday

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA**  
Bengal witnessed a virtual duel between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee even as the former accused the Bengal Government of stopping Ram Navami celebrations and honouring those who throw stones at Ram Navami processions while the latter asked the people, particularly the minorities not to walk into the trap of the BJP which is trying to trigger communal riots in Bengal. The Prime Minister, who was addressing election rallies at Balurghat and Raiganj in North Bengal, alleged how the Bengal administration has

been doing everything to spike the Ram Navami celebrations. "Tomorrow the entire nation goes to celebrate the Ram Navami ... but here the Trinamool Congress has always tried to stop it from taking place in Bengal ... they tried many conspiracies. And we were forced to get permission from the High Court and tomorrow, with devotion and faith, we will celebrate Ram Navami," the Prime Minister said. "It has always been that the TMC stops such religious programmes and promotes and honours those people who throw stones at these processions," he said.

However, the Chief Minister hit back from a rally at Moinaguri in Jalpaiguri district asking people to remain alert against the "evil designs of the BJP to trigger riots in the name of festivals." In a statement that most Opposition parties, including the BJP read as a bid to act the messiah of the Muslims before elections, Mamata said, "Bengal is for every religion but here are some people who are trying to play communal politics by triggering riots I ask the people, particularly my minority brothers and

sisters to keep your cool and do not walk into the trap laid by them ... some people are spreading fake videos ... some may raise slogans ... but if you hear such slogans keep your cool and pray to Allah so that things pass off without fuss ... because Ram Navami is a festival of mutual respect and honour." The BJP sends NIA in Bengal to disturb and victimise the innocent people, she said. Earlier the High Court had allowed Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Anjani Putra Sena to take out processions,

but under certain conditions, the maximum participants should not be more than 200 and that there would be no play of arms or DJs. Tuesday's development came against the backdrop of weeks' long riots at Howrah, Serampore and Dalkhola in the days following Ram Navami. The Modi-Mamata spar came at a time when in a major development the Jadavpur University authorities on Tuesday allowed the celebrations of Ram Navami at the campus even as sources said "if Saraswati Puja can be organised why Ram Navami cannot be celebrated here." This is the first time that such

celebrations would be allowed inside the campus. Elsewhere in North Bengal the Chief Minister warned the people against the Citizenship Amendment Act, comparing it with the head of a big fish which has a tail in the National Register of Citizens. "If it is a big fish then the CAA is the head and NRC is the tail and the Uniform Civil Code is its torso," Mamata said accusing the BJP government of playing "dirty politics of polarisation." Attacking the Centre for "defaming Bengal with allegations of corruption," she demanded a white paper to be released on the issue.

## Chhattisgarh encounter leaves 29 Naxals dead

PTI ■ KANKER

At least 29 Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district on Tuesday, police officials said. Three security personnel suffered injuries in the fierce gun-battle and a large quantity of weapons was also recovered from the spot, they said. The gunfight took place at around 2 pm in Hapatola forest between Binagunda and Koronar villages under Chhotethiya police station limits, when a joint team of the Border Security Force (BSF) and the state police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said. The operation was launched based on inputs about the presence of senior cadres of north Bastar division of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) Shankar, Lalita, Raju and others, he said. During patrolling in the area, a fierce gun-battle broke out between the two sides, the senior IPS officer said. "Bodies of 29 Maoists along with a huge cache of weapons, including AK-47, SLR, Insas and .303 rifles, were recovered from the spot," the IG said. Polling in the Naxalite-hit



Bastar Lok Sabha seat will take place on April 19 in the first phase, while the Kanker constituency, part of the Bastar region, will vote in the second round of general elections on April 26. The search operation was still underway in the area amid intermittent firing between security personnel and Naxalites, said Sundarraj. "Three security personnel sustained injuries in the gunfight and their condition was stated to be out of danger," he said, adding they were referred to hospital for treatment. After the latest encounter, 79 Naxalites have been killed in separate gun-battles with security forces in the Bastar region, comprising seven districts, including Kanker, so far this year. On April 2, as many as 13 Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Bijapur district.

## MNREGA workers turn into political campaigners

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In an unexpected turn during the Uttar Pradesh (UP) election season, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) workers are witnessing heightened demand, not for their traditional manual labour, but as foot soldiers for political campaigns. This trend has ignited a discourse on the exploitation of these workers for political purposes, not by a particular party but by parties of all hues. Typically earning around ₹250 per day for their labour, MGNREGA workers are now being tempted into election rallies and canvassing with promises of ₹300 wages, supplemented with three meals a day and even evening liquor. The surge in pay, coupled with additional perks, has resulted in a scarcity of MGNREGA workers willing to partake in their usual tasks, such as pond digging or rural development work, across various regions of UP. Raja Bhayya, head of the Vidya Dham Samiti NGO in Banda, UP, noted that in the Bundelkhand region, these workers are engaged in election campaigns for as low as ₹200-250 per day. "They are attracted by the promise of three meals a day and evening liquor. And this is sufficient incentive for them to work at lower rates," he told The Pioneer, adding "these workers are doubling up as political karyakarta". Sukhai Ram, a MGNREGA job card holder, was assigned to work on a pond and culvert construction project in Gram Sabha Karonda, Barabanki, but has declined, citing the allure of higher wages and "shaam ki diwai," referring to alcohol. The Department of Rural Development



in Lucknow has received complaints from several districts regarding the disruption of MGNREGA work due to elections. "Labour shortages are common during elections. Diversion is inevitable, and the Government has limited control over it," a senior official informed. These workers are tasked with carrying election materials, waving flags at rallies, and participating in roadshows. The exploitation of MGNREGA workers for political ends has drawn condemnation from various quarters, raising concerns about the moral implications of such practices. Political analyst Dr Rajesh Sharma remarked, "The exploitation of MGNREGA workers for election purposes raises serious ethical questions. These vulnerable workers are being lured with temporary benefits to serve political interests, undermining the essence of the employment guarantee scheme." This issue has reignited debates about

the efficacy of MGNREGA in combating rural unemployment and poverty, with some arguing that the scheme's objectives are being compromised for short-term political gains. The ramifications of this trend are evident on the ground, as rural development projects suffer from labour shortages, impacting the pace and quality of work in various UP regions. In response to criticism, political parties have defended their actions, citing the need for manpower during election campaigns and asserting that they are providing job opportunities to MGNREGA workers. "With soaring temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius, people prefer staying indoors. We require foot soldiers and have recruited some from villages," stated Rupesh Kumar, a BJP leader, although he claimed ignorance about whether these recruits are MGNREGA workers.

## Jailed Kejriwal, Sisodia and Jain: AAP's Star Campaigners

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

On a day the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) took a cue from a Bollywood movie and pronounced "My name is Arvind Kejriwal and I am not a terrorist", it has named top leaders who are in jail, including the Chief Minister as the star campaigners for the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls, in apparent push to its 'Jail ka Jawab Vote Se' campaign. AAP leader and a Rājya Sabha member Sanjay Singh said the AAP convener has shared his message "...Kejriwal...not a terrorist..." from Tihar Jail and slammed the BJP for the treatment being meted out to him in custody. The AAP on Tuesday announced a list of 40 star campaigners in Gujarat which also mentioned the names of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain all of whom are imprisoned, as the party's star campaigner in Gujarat ahead of the Lok Sabha elections 2024. The list includes names of Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Raghav Chadha, Isudan Gadhvi, Atishi, Saurabh



Bharadwaj, Pankaj Gupta, Gopal Rai, Kailash Gahlot, Imran Hussain and Alpesh Kathiriya. However, names of Rājya Sabha MPs Harbhajan Singh who is also an ace cricketer and Swati Maliwal are missing from the list. Meanwhile, the Delhi BJP targeted the AAP over the inclusion of Sunita Kejriwal's name in the list of its star campaigners. "Along with corruption, nepotism is also welcome in the AAP," said Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva. Notably, Harbhajan Singh is currently busy in IPL 2024. On Tuesday, the party kicked off a mega campaign called Jail ka Jawab vote se Sankalp Sabha.

## Congress leads in complaints to EC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid allegations by Opposition parties that the Government is misusing probe agencies to target its leaders, the Election Commission on Tuesday shared a data saying around 200 complaints have been filed by various political parties and candidates across States. The Congress is the top in the list of filing complaints to the EC, followed by the BJP for violation of Model Code of Conduct. According to the EC, the BJP has filed 51 complaints, of them, action has been taken in 38 cases while the Congress filed 59 and action taken on 51 cases. Several political parties from the INDIA Bloc had approached the poll panel seeking its intervention in the alleged misuse of probe agencies by the Government to target their leaders over graft.

Following the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise scam, the Opposition parties had mounted renewed attack on the Government for its alleged bid to silence their leaders ahead of parliamentary elections. According to the EC, suo motu removal of officers holding dual charges as Principal Secretaries to Chief Ministers in six States namely Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, as they were holding charge of Home/ General Administration department also. This was to distance election related senior officers with control over, DMs/DEOs/ROs and SPs, from Chief Minister's offices.

## Aditya tops UPSC exams, Animesh second, Donuru third

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The announcement of civil services results 2023 on Tuesday stirred up more excitement than usual. Social media platforms were agog with compliments, best wishes, filmy dialogues, gyan and pravachan on the mother of all examinations conducted by Public Services Commission (UPSC). Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his entire Council of Ministers, BJP contestants in the Lok Sabha, other political figures from ruling and Opposition sides were first time on the same page wishing the toppers and successful candidates who cleared the exams held last year.

In fact the UPSC results were trending on various media platforms. Aditya Srivastava, originally selected for the Indian Police Services (IPS) last year, added another feather to his cap as he secured the top rank in the UPSC Civil Services Examination 2023. Hailing from Lucknow, Srivastava's journey has been remarkable, characterised by his stint in the corporate world before pursuing civil services, reflecting his resilience and dedication. Joining Srivastava in this remarkable achievement are Animesh Pradhan from Odisha, a Bachelor of Technology degree holder in computer science from NIT Rourkela, and Telangana



(Left to right): Aditya Srivastava (All India Rank (AIR) 1), Uttar Pradesh; Animesh Pradhan (AIR 2), Odisha's and Donuru Ananya Reddy (AIR 3), Telangana

Prime Minister wrote on X (previously Twitter). Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi too joined in congratulating the candidates, "Congratulations to all the candidates who have successfully cleared this year's UPSC Civil Services Examination. With dedication and commitment, you are now entrusted with the responsibility of serving our great country. My best wishes for your future endeavours." Among the 1,016 recommended candidates, comprising 664 men and 352 women, the top five positions are evenly distributed, with three men and two women. An IPS trainee from Kerala PK Sidharth Ramkumar

secured the fourth rank with anthropology as his optional subject, while a Gurugram resident Ruhani secured the fifth rank with economics as her optional subject. Among the top 25 candidates, there are 10 women and 15 men, reflecting a diverse range of educational backgrounds, including engineering, humanities, science, commerce, business administration, architecture, and law from premier institutions such as IIT, IIM, NIT, University of Delhi, and National Law University. The selected candidates also include 30 people with benchmark disabilities, reflecting the UPSC's commitment to inclusivity.

# Jamshedpur students shine in UPSC Civil Services examination

## Loyola School's Ritwik scores 520 rank

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR



The youth of Jamshedpur have once again demonstrated their academic prowess on the national stage, making headlines with remarkable achievements in the country's prestigious UPSC Civil Services Examination. Several students from the city have secured notable ranks, showcasing their dedication and perseverance.

Swati Sharma, a student of Tagore Academy and a resident of Jamshedpur, has secured an impressive 17th rank in the UPSC examination. Hailing from a family

with a background in the armed forces, Swati Sharma's journey to success saw her excel academically from her schooling days at Army Secondary School to pursuing her MA degree at Jamshedpur Women's College. With her achievement, she is now poised to become an IAS officer, fulfilling her aspirations through hard work and determination.

Another notable achiever is Harshit Verma, the eldest son of Tata Steel employee Samar Kumar, who secured the 272nd rank in the UPSC examination. Harshit, hailing from Kadma, Jamshedpur, pursued his engineering

degree from B.I.T Mesra before venturing into the field of engineering in Bangalore. His success in the UPSC examination opens the doors for him to serve as an IPS officer, marking a significant milestone in his career path.

Adding to the list of achievers is Ritwik Verma, a student of Loyola School, Jamshedpur, who secured the 520th rank in the UPSC examination. Ritwik's educational journey took him from Jamshedpur to Delhi University, where he pursued a degree in Geography. With diligent preparation, Ritwik managed to crack the UPSC examination, showcasing his

determination and academic acumen.

The remarkable achievements of Swati Sharma, Harshit Verma, and Ritwik Verma underscore the academic excellence and determination prevalent among the youth of Jamshedpur. Their success serves as an inspiration for aspiring students and highlights the city's contribution to the national landscape of civil services.

As these bright young minds embark on their journey towards serving the nation, they carry with them the spirit of Jamshedpur's vibrant and resilient community.

# Inauguration ceremony held for first-year general nursing and midwifery Students

PNS : BOKARO



Bokaro General Hospital organized an oath-taking ceremony for first-year students of General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) on April 15th. The event commenced with the lighting of the lamp by Dr. B.B. Karunamay, Chief Medical Officer and In-charge of Bokaro General Hospital, in a traditional manner. Following the lamp lighting, Neelima Kumari, Principal, School of Nursing, and Nursing Superintendent Lizi Varghese administered the oath to the first-year GNM students. Cultural programs were also presented by the students on this occasion.

The event was attended by Dr. Shruvan Kumar, Dr. Indraneel Chaudhary, Dr. Varsha Ghanekar, and Dr. Sofia Ahmad, along with other senior doctors and staff nurses from the School of Nursing. Overall, the oath-taking ceremony at Bokaro General Hospital was not just a formal event; it was a momentous occasion that marked the beginning of a noble journey for the first-year GNM students.

# Bajaj Allianz Life Enhances Customer Experience

PNS : RANCHI

BAJAJ Life has enhanced customer experience by simplifying Premium Payments with Digital Transactions on WhatsApp. It provides ease of transaction with diverse payment modes including Net banking, Credit card, UPI, and more, all seamlessly integrated within the WhatsApp interface. Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance, one of India's leading private life insurers, has introduced premium payment options on WhatsApp through a partnership with Meta. Connecting millions of Indian consumers, WhatsApp stands out as the go-to app for communication and service. To leverage this popularity and offer ultimate convenience, Bajaj Allianz Life has upgraded its premium payment services via WhatsApp, enabling customers to seamlessly manage their policies and payments all in one place. Customers can effortlessly pay their premiums through various payment modes like Net banking, Credit card, UPI directly within the WhatsApp interface.

# Sona Devi University and Waikato Hospital, Hamilton, sign MoU

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In a significant moment in the realms of education and healthcare as Sona Devi University, Ghatshila, and Waikato Hospital, Hamilton, New Zealand, formalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to foster collaboration in education, knowledge exchange, and the advancement of medicine and science.

The MOU, signed on this day, facilitates a robust partnership between the two institutions, aiming to enhance training and place-

ment opportunities for students. Representatives from both centers, alongside Midland Regional Forensic Services, were present to commemorate the occasion.

Senior psychiatrists from New Zealand expressed optimism regarding the implications of this agreement, labeling it as a milestone in educational cooperation. With the MOU now in effect, students from Sona Devi University will have the opportunity to pursue studies, training, internships, and placements at Waikato Hospital, New Zealand,

alongside their counterparts and faculty members. Conversely, faculty members from Waikato Hospital will have the chance to engage in teaching activities in India, thereby fostering cross-cultural learning experiences and employment opportunities for students from both nations.

This partnership is poised to unlock new avenues of collaboration, enriching the educational landscape and nurturing a generation of healthcare professionals equipped with global perspectives and expertise.



# FIR against BJP man for attacking minor girl sexually in Palamu

PNS : DALTONGANJ

An FIR has been lodged against the BJP block president of Manatu Satender Yadav on charges of his making sexual assault on a girl.

The FIR was lodged on April 15. The accused BJP block president has gone into hiding. Police are making raids and searches to fish him out.

Officer in charge of the Manatu police station Nirmal Oraon said the victim girl has given her complaint in writing against Satender Yadav.

She has just named him and no other else. The victim girl is also a Yadav, added the police officer. About the age of the victim girl, the police officer said "There is no aadhar card of the victim girl nor has she any certificate of birth."

She has just maintained herself to be 14 years old only. Police have invoked sections of the IPC and poeco act too, added the police officer Nirmal Oraon.

Palamu district president of the BJP Amit Tiwary has meanwhile stripped Satender Yadav of his post of the Manatu block president with immediate effect till he comes out clean of the serious allegation.

Manatu block comes under the Chatra lok sabha constituency where the voting is due on May 20.

The BJP here is in thick mess in the wake of this incident where its block president is facing sexual assault charges and voting is just few weeks ahead only.

# Rotary Club to host RYLA, UDAAN 24, over 400 students to participate

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR



For the first time, students of schools and colleges will join hands to participate in District Rotary RYLA Udaan 24, a flagship event slated to unfold on April 20 and 21, 2024. Collaborating with the Rotaract Club of Netaji Subhas University Social Crew, this event promises to be an immersive experience for all participants. Over 400 students from various schools of Jamshedpur and other parts of Jharkhand and Bihar will participate in it.

Gracing the occasion as the Chief Guest will be Rotary District Governor Shiv Prakash Bagania. President Amrita Vakharia expressed her enthusiasm, highlighting the lineup of eminent speakers from various fields within and beyond Jamshedpur. With the presence of upcoming DG 25-26 Anu Narang, AI expert Akshay Agarwal, and renowned figure Dr. Shrikant Nair, attendees can anticipate insightful discussions on leadership, community service, and professional growth.

At its core, the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) seek to nurture leadership skills, foster personal development, and forge lasting connections among participants. President Vakharia emphasized the importance of empowering youth to become catalysts for positive change and global citizenship. The event will also shed light on the Rotary youth exchange program, reigniting opportunities within District 3250.

Secretary Preeti Khara outlined the event's agenda, which spans two days at the prestigious Motilal Nehru Public School. From Talent Hunt competitions to engaging sessions like Nukkad Natak and a thought-provoking Quiz, attendees can expect a holistic and enriching experience. The inclusion of a Runathon, featuring dis-

development, and forge lasting connections among participants. President Vakharia emphasized the importance of empowering youth to become catalysts for positive change and global citizenship. The event will also shed light on the Rotary youth exchange program, reigniting opportunities within District 3250.

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# PDJ holds meeting regarding the special Lok Adalat

PNS : LOHARDAGA

A special Lok Adalat will be organized on April 27 regarding the matter related to electricity and check bouncing. Regarding this, a meeting was held in the office room of Principal District and Sessions Judge cum Dalsa President Arvind Kumar Pandey along with Electricity Executive Engineer Deepak Khalko and Sub-Divisional Officer Aju Kachhap in the presence of Electricity-related Special Court Akhilesh Kumar Tiwari and Dalsa Secretary Rajesh Kumar. In this, PDJ cum Dalsa President instructed Executive Engineer Electricity Department Deepak Khalko to submit the letter issued by the General Manager for the National Lok Adalat. In this light, cases should be resolved in Special Lok Adalat. Under which, in case of theft of domestic electricity up to 5 kilo watts, the fine amount has been fixed at Rs 4 thousand. Whereas in case of commercial electricity theft, the amount of fine has been fixed at Rs 10 thousand and in case of electricity theft in the industrial sector, the amount of fine has been fixed at Rs 20 thousand. Let us tell you that while giving information about the special Lok Adalat to be organized on 27th April, Dalsa Secretary Rajesh Kumar said that on that day.



# BSL Fire Services Department Welcomes New Fire Tenders

PNS : BOKARO

In an effort to bolster fire safety measures for national infrastructure development, the BSL Fire Services Department observed Fire Service Week from April 14th to 20th. Under the guidance of Birendra Kumar Tiwari, new DIC of BSL, the main Fire Department of Bokaro Steel Plant formally introduced 10 new water and foam tenders.

During the program, attended by key officials such as P.K. Baisakhia (Chief of Protection), B.K. Sartape (Chief of Security and Fire Services), Harsh Nigam (Chief of Material Management), V.K. Singh (Chief of Mechanical), and Commandant Nitin Tyagi from the Central Industrial



Security Force, Tiwari highlighted the significance of these new additions. He emphasized that the inclusion of these tenders not only strengthens the fire safety capacity of Bokaro Steel Plant but also enhances the fire preparedness of Bokaro Steel City.

Tiwari commended the Fire Branch of the Central

Industrial Security Force for their vigilance and urged them to remain alert, especially with the onset of warmer weather. The program was efficiently conducted by Kumar Rajnish, Assistant General Manager (Fire Services), and Manoj Chauhan, Assistant Commandant (Central Industrial Security Force).

# Bokaro's hosts high-stakes political summit with Dhanbad lok sabha contender

PNS : BOKARO

The Bokaro Sector 5 Power Center meeting in Bokaro witnessed a notable gathering of BJP's political figures, highlighting a significant convergence of political interests in the region. Dhanbad Lok Sabha contender, Dhullu Mahato, emerged as a central figure in this gathering, reflecting the growing importance of his candidacy in the upcoming elections. Alongside Mahato, prominent figures included Bokaro MLA Biranchi Narayan, former Pradesh Adhyaksh Deepak Prakash, Bokaro District President Jaydev Rai and Parinda Singh were mainly present, underscoring the diverse representation within the political landscape. Notably particular note was the presence of opposition leader Amar Bauri, whose participation



added significance and gravitas to the event. Bauri's presence hinted at potential alliances or opposition dynamics shaping up in the lead-up to the elections.

Also the presence of BJP esteemed activists in fact ground level workers further underscored the party's involvement and influence in the meeting. This gathering served as a platform for discussions on various political agendas and strategies, as well as fostering collaboration among key stakeholders within the political sphere.

Overall, the Sector 5 Power Center meeting at Bokaro served as a testament to the vibrant political landscape in Bokaro, where stakeholders from different backgrounds come together to discuss and strategize for the upcoming election.

# Police hold flag march ahead of Ram Navmi in Bokaro



R SHARMA : BOKARO

In anticipation of the forthcoming Ram Navami festival in 2024, the law enforcement authorities in Bokaro have taken proactive measures to ensure safety and security across the region. Under the directive of the Police Superintendent Pujya Prakash, officials from the sub-division and district levels, along with deputy superintendents and

station house officers, conducted extensive area patrols and organized a flag march in their respective jurisdictions. The flag march, a symbol of vigilance and preparedness, saw the participation of dedicated police personnel who marched through the streets, displaying the national flag and spreading awareness about safety protocols. This proactive initiative aims to reassure the local community and demonstrate the police force's commitment to maintaining peace and order during the festive season. Speaking about the importance of such initiatives, the Police Superintendent Pujya Prakash emphasized the significance of proactive policing in ensuring a safe and harmonious celebration of religious festivals. He highlighted the collaborative efforts between the police and the community in upholding law

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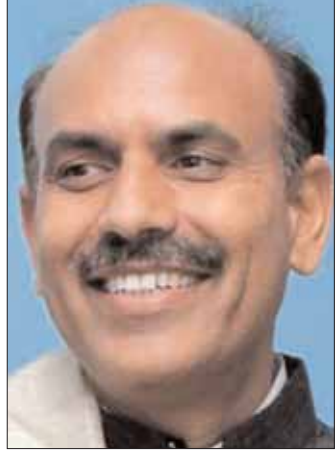
Cong announces candidates for Chatra, Dhanbaad and Godda
BJP MP Nishikant Dubey to face Congress candidate Deepika Pandey Singh

PNS : RANCHI

The Congress on Tuesday announced the names of candidates for three more Lok Sabha constituencies - Godda, Chatra and Dhanbad. Mahagama Legislator Deepika Pandey Singh, former Minister Krishna Nand Tripathi and Anupama Singh will contest the polls in Godda, Chatra and Dhanbad, respectively, AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said. It had announced the names of three candidates - Kalicharan Munda, Sukhdeo Bhagat and Jai Prakashbhai Patel on March 27 for Khunti (ST), Lohardaga (ST)



and Hazaribagh constituencies, respectively. Mahagama MLA, Deepika Pandey Singh will contest against sitting BJP MP Nishikant Dubey, while Anupama Singh, the wife of Bermo MLA Kumar Jaimangal Singh, will fight BJP's Baghmara legislator Dulu Mahto. In Dhanbad, the saffron party had dropped sitting MP Pashupati Nath Singh, who has represented the seat since 2009, and fielded Mahato, against whom about two dozen criminal cases are lodged. Mahato, who joined the BJP in 2014, had become an MLA in 2009 on the ticket of Jharkhand Vikash Morcha (JVM) of former



chief minister Babulal Marandi. Tripathi will be contesting against BJP candidate Kalicharan Singh from the Chatra seat, the Congress said. Notably, Deepika Pandey Singh of Congress will face BJP's vocal leader Nishikant Dubey on Godda Lok Sabha seat. Dubey has won Godda three times consecutively from 2009 to 2019. In Dhanbad, BJP's Dhullu Mahato will face Anupama Singh, while in Chatra Lok Sabha seat, former Minister KN Tripathi will have a direct contest with BJP's Kalicharan Singh. The contest in Godda is likely to be very interesting as Deepika Pandey Singh and



Nishikant Dubey often indulge in verbal spats. Singh often raises questions about Dubey's educational qualification, while Dubey confronts her on the issue of corruption. Anupama Singh is the daughter-in-law of former MLA Rajendra Singh and wife of Bermo MLA Anup Singh. She is very popular among the women supporters of Congress in Dhanbad. Notably, there was a tussle over the names of the candidates for the three seats for a long time. The opposition BJP has been taking a dig at INDI Alliance that it was unable to find candidates for the seats.

IED-making unit unearthed in West Singhbhum



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In a major breakthrough, the police and paramilitary forces unearthed a hideout where Naxals set up an IED-making unit for carrying out subversive activities in the forest cover of West Singhbhum district. The discovery of the IED-making unit marks a significant triumph for law

enforcement agencies battling insurgency in the region. Situated in the dense forests of Hushipi under the Tonto thana area, which falls within the Kolhan forest division, the hideout was uncovered during a meticulously executed search operation conducted by the police and paramilitary forces on Monday evening. "A substantial cache of

explosives and materials was seized from the hideout, underscoring the nefarious intentions of the Naxals," said a police official. "Among the items confiscated were large quantities of ammonia nitrate, sulfur powder, and gunpowder, along with plastic and aluminum pipes of various sizes," he added. Additionally, authorities discovered cans, petrol, a grinder machine, and 21 arrows intended for the creation of arrow bombs. "The revelation of this clandestine IED-making facility sheds light on the massive presence of Naxal insurgents in the Kolhan forest division," he remarked. "Despite the challenges posed by the rugged terrain and the insurgents' cunning tactics, the police and paramilitary forces have displayed remarkable courage and determination in their operations," he added. Over the course of their

endeavors, they have successfully uncovered more than a hundred IEDs, thwarting potential threats and safeguarding the lives of civilians and security personnel alike. "This latest development represents a critical blow to the Naxal insurgency," emphasized the official. "It serves as a testament to the unwavering commitment of the authorities in their ongoing efforts to combat extremism and restore peace and stability to the region," he concluded. A substantial cache of explosives and materials was seized from the hideout, underscoring the nefarious intentions of the Naxals. Among the items confiscated were large quantities of ammonia nitrate, sulfur powder, and gunpowder, along with plastic and aluminum pipes of various sizes. Additionally, the authorities discovered cans, petrol, a

grinder machine, and 21 arrows intended for the creation of arrow bombs. The revelation of this clandestine IED-making facility sheds light on the massive presence of Naxal insurgents in the Kolhan forest division. Following their expulsion from the neighboring Saranda forest in early 2023, a significant number of CPI-Maoist rebels infiltrated the Kolhan region, prompting a concerted effort by law enforcement to eradicate their influence. Despite the challenges posed by the rugged terrain and the insurgents' cunning tactics, the police and paramilitary forces have displayed remarkable courage and determination in their operations. Over the course of their endeavors, they have successfully uncovered more than a hundred IEDs, thwarting potential threats and safeguarding the lives of civilians and security personnel alike.

Frustrated INDI Alliance plotting to assassinate PM: BJP

BJP furious over JMM leader Nazrul Islam's statement on PM

PNS : RANCHI

Bharatiya Janata Party State spokesperson Pratul Shahdev, while addressing a press conference at the media center on Harmu Road today, accused the INDI Alliance of conspiring to carry out a deadly attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Pratul said that JMM Central Committee member Nazrul Islam in Sahibganj, showing his distorted mentality and Jihadi thinking, has threatened to bury PM Modi 400 feet under the ground. Pratul said that even after 24 hours of this statement becoming public, the police have not taken any action yet. It is clearly visible that the government is promoting such Jihadi elements. Earlier, an RJD leader in Koderma had talked about shooting Modi ji in the skull. This sequence clearly shows that the leaders of the Indian alliance are conspiring to carry out some major incident against Modi and are provoking the public. Pratul said that it is very and unfortunate that Nazrul Islam has not been arrested



State BJP Spokesperson Pratul Shahdeo along with Media in-charge Shivpujan Pathak and Co in-charge Yogendra Pratap Singh during a press conference at Media Centre in Ranchi on Tuesday. PNS

yet by Jharkhand Police. This Jihadi person has directly talked about killing the Prime Minister. But still Chief Minister Chaupai Soren and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha are silent. Pratul said that this entire matter should be investigated at a high level because it is a matter directly related to the security of the Prime Minister of the country. The country's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a symbol of the country's identity and pride. By talking about his assassination, the opposition is clearly

showing that it has no faith in the democratic process. Pratul said that the state government wants an atmosphere of anarchy in the entire state. On one hand, RJD and JMM leaders are talking about killing Modi. On the other hand, tribal woman MP Geeta Koda is being held hostage by armed supporters of JMM. Pratul said that the Union Home Ministry should take immediate cognizance because talking about attack and assassination of the country's Prime Minister comes under the category of treason.

Ranchi Police on high alert for Ram Navami

PNS : RANCHI

Ranchi Police are on high alert regarding Ram Navami to prevent any untoward incident to take place on Wednesday in the State Capital. The police inspected the route through which the procession will take out on the day of Ram Navami on Wednesday in the city. Kotwali DySP Prakash Soy carried out drone surveillance in the Main Road, Hindpuri and Daily Market areas of the State Capital. During this time it was revealed that stones were kept on the roofs of eight houses located in Hindpuri and Daily Market area. Police have sent notices to all eight house owners. Kotwali DySP said that the landlords have been asked to remove the stones from the roof as soon as possible. If there is any dispute during the procession, the person on whose roof the stones were found will be held accountable. Ranchi SSP, Chandan Sinha has ordered the City SP and Rural SP to roam around the entire area and identify sensitive places and deploy soldiers there. If any disturbance occurs in any area,



Police personnel conduct flag march ahead of Ram Navami festival in Ranchi on Tuesday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

strict action will be taken against the station in-charge there, he added. At the same time the policemen sitting in the city control room have been ordered to keep a close watch on the activities of the people in the entire city. If you get any information from any area, immediately inform the local police station. Changes have been made in the traffic system in the city due to the immersion of Chaithi Durga Puja and Ram Navami. The changes made in the traffic system are in effect from 4 am on Tuesday. Entry of

heavy vehicles in the urban area will be prohibited from 4 am on April 16 to 6 am on April 17. All types of heavy goods vehicles will reach their destination via Ring Road in the State Capital on the day of Ramnavami. During this period, normal operations will be prohibited from Kishori Yadav Chowk to Upper Bazaar, Mahavir Mandir Chowk, Shaheed Chowk towards Upper Bazaar, Mahavir Mandir Chowk, Subhash Chowk towards Upper Bazaar, Mahavir Chowk due to the Ram Navami procession.

Life Savers call for meeting of State Advisory and Review Committee for Hemoglobinopathies

PNS : RANCHI

The Life Savers has written to the Principal Secretary, Department of Health & Family Welfare, Government of Jharkhand to call for a meeting of the State Advisory and Review Committee for Haemoglobinopathies.

In a letter written to the Principal Secretary Atul Gera of Life Savers has written that a State Advisory and Review Committee for Haemophilia Thalassemia Sickle Cell Disease and other Hemoglobinopathy treatment and Daycare centres has been constituted with the objective of reviewing the program, performance identifying operational constraints and ensuring corrective operational steps to improve the work and to make comprehensive and Holistic approach towards the meaningful prevention, Care and Cure for the patients suffering from these diseases. This committee was formed on 3.12.18 but unfortunately not a single meeting has taken place to make the program effective and meaningful. He further writes, "Request you to kindly take appropriate action on the same as there are many issues which have not been attended to, a lot of daycare even after coming up not being operational, medicines not being provided to the children and many other issues which need immediate attention and action. An urgent meeting on this is needed of the Hour."

Garhwa DC's daughter Sakshi Jamuar grabs 89th Rank in UPSC Exams

NITYANAND DUBEY : GARHWA

Success and happiness knocked the door of the Deputy Commissioner, Garhwa, Shekhar Jamuar, on Tuesday, when his daughter Sakshi Jamuar secured 89th rank in the UPSC Civil service examination 2024. Twenty-four-year-old Sakshi has secured 89th rank in the prestigious civil services exams 2024, conducted by the Union Public Service Commission or UPSC. Talking to The Pioneer Sakshi said, "It is indeed a proud moment for me. I used to study eight hours a day. Many of my friends were giving the UPSC exam and they also cleared the exam." Graduate from the National Law University from Ranchi, Sakshi cracked the UPSC exam in her third attempt at a young age of 24 years. She was Expecting that she will be selected in the



UPSC exam but Getting the rank AIR 89th is unbelievable for her. For the Preparation of UPSC exam she has given lots of efforts. All her efforts are converted into productivity. The journey towards Civil Service Examination is over and she has devoted her days and nights at a very young age. In her message to future UPSC aspirants Sakshi said, "For success you should be attached with syllabus and keep revising, revising and revising. She Started Her Preparation when she was in 11th Standard. Her mother said that you should go for

humanity instead of science. Her grooming started in Class 11th and she took arts. Sakshi said, "My inspiration is my father. Since childhood I have seen him working hard. He continues to inspire others with his achievements." Father of Sakshi, Shekhar Jamuar said she was very dedicated towards her UPSC Examinations and all the strategy of studies was well planned. He also added that he supported her a lot in every aspect of her studies. "We played the good role of parents in her complete preparation of UPSC," he said.

CEO unveils various voter awareness items for LS Polls 2024

Short film with message of family voting 'Ud Chali..' launched

PNS : RANCHI

This time, voting arrangements have been made throughout the day in the state. The voting period is from 7.00 am to 5.00 pm. Any voter who remains in queue at his polling station before 5.00 pm will be able to exercise his franchise. For a large section of voters who are associated with essential services and remain on duty on the polling day, arrangements have been made to exercise their franchise through postal ballot. Such services have been notified as 'essential services', said Chief Electoral Officer, Jharkhand K Ravi Kumar while addressing media representatives at the launch program of various awareness materials for Lok Sabha elections from Nirvachan Sadan Auditorium. He said that the Election Commission has also made arrangements for home voting through postal ballot for voters with more than 40 per cent disability and those voters above 85 years of age

who are not able to go to the polling booth. He said that the Election Commission is working with the aim that no voter is left out. Awareness materials are being released so that the importance of elections reaches every section of Jharkhand, people become aware and participate actively in voting. On this occasion, a short film 'Ud Chali' made by regional artists for voter awareness was released by the Chief Electoral Officer, which has been directed by Saikat Chatterjee of Jharkhand. Through this film, the importance of elections and each vote has been explained among the people. Also, it has been said that before building a family, one should build the country. In this film, emphasis has been laid on celebrating elections as a festival and participating in voting with the entire family. The slogan of the Election Commission of India for this Lok Sabha election is 'Celebration of elections, pride of the country'. This



CEO K Ravi Kumar along with Additional CEO Dr Neha Arora addresses media persons at his office in Ranchi on Tuesday. PNS

slogan has been converted into poster banner in 8 languages of Jharkhand, namely, Nagpuri, Kudukh, Ho, Khadiya, Kudmali, Khortha, Mundari and Santali. It is to be disseminated among the people of the respective linguistic area through this medium so that this message of the Election Commission of India can reach the voters speaking those regional languages also. Nagpuri language video song "Chunav Kar Parab, Des Kar Garb" produced by local artists was also released. This song tells

the importance of elections to every section of people including farmers, elders, youth and disabled people and inspires them to participate enthusiastically in it. On this occasion, a song from the short film 'Ud Chali' has been taken for election awareness. In which the message has been given to voters of all categories to vote together with their entire family, and this time, voting throughout the day from 7 am to 5 pm reaches the people. Photographs of the artworks made by the artists in the art festival organized by the District Election Office at Audrey House have been made in the form of a coffee table book. This time in Jharkhand, voters will be able to exercise their franchise from 7 am to 5 pm. With the aim of spreading this message to the masses, the Chief Electoral Officer also launched the slogan "This time, voting throughout the day, from seven in the morning to five in the

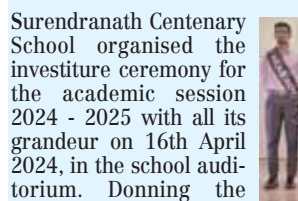
evening". In the video series through I-Bhai, which gives detailed information to the people about all the procedures related to elections, the people above 85 years of age or with more than 40 percent disability who are unable to come to the polling station, how to vote from home. Information was also given about how the media representatives who will be on duty on the voting day should use the postal ballot. The inauguration program was conducted by Assistant Chief Electoral Officer-cum-Sweep in-charge Dev Das Dutta. On this occasion, Additional Chief Electoral Officer Dr. Neha Arora, OSD Geeta Choubey, Joint Chief Electoral Officer Subodh Kumar, Deputy Director Public Relations Anand, Deputy Electoral Officer Headquarters Sanjay Kumar, Ud Chali short film director Saikat Chatterjee, Nagpuri Geet. Lyricist and singer Sunil Kumar and his entire team were present.

Ram Navami Celebration at SBPS



To inculcate the virtues and principles of Indian culture among the students, Sarala Birla Public School, Ranchi organised Ramnavami celebration. Students conducted a special assembly on the occasion in which students presented a devotional song. A narrative speech, along with a quiz, was presented on the life of Sri Ram. The students dressed themselves traditionally as the mythological characters from the Ramayana and presented a tableau. Students were infused with joy and excitement while performing the characters. Principal Paramjit Kaur, addressed the students and wished everyone on the occasion. She said that students must imbibe the qualities of justice, patience, calmness, strength, bravery and righteousness and dharma over adharma (evil).

Investiture ceremony at SCS



Surendranath Centenary School organised the investiture ceremony for the academic session 2024 - 2025 with all its grandeur on 16th April 2024, in the school auditorium. Donning the mantle of commitment and strength, the members of the Student Council vowed to discharge their duties to the best of their knowledge and skills in the presence of their parents who were warmly invited by the institution. The Head Boy Aditya Raj, Head Girl Abhishta Anand with the Deputy Head Boy Hrishu Ghosh, Deputy Head Girl Prachi Kumari, Sports Captain Raj Lakshmi, Vice Captain Priyesh Ranjan, Students' Representatives, House Captains and Prefects were honoured with badges by the Principal, Vice Principals, the four House Moderators and Co-moderators.





# Contribute fully in 400 seats goal: PM to Bengal

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi resumed his electoral campaign in North Bengal once again giving out a 400-seat-call so as to enable him translate his "trailer" of a performance into a full-fledged act of making India the third largest economic power in the world.  
"All these years you have seen introducing a whole lot of schemes for the people but that was all a trailer ... this time if you vote me to power the whole picture will unfold before you," the Prime Minister said from twin rallies of Balurghat and Raiganj in North Bengal adding the people of Bengal had made up their minds to help the BJP go beyond 400 seats this time round. Early this month the Prime Minister had told a rally at Cooch Behar about his resolve to make India the third largest economy in the world.  
"Come June 4, and Bengal has decided to help the BJP

breach the 400-seat mark ... this large gathering conveys this message to me that the people of Bengal will definitely bless us to achieve that feat," of 400 seats, the Prime Minister said.  
However, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who was holding a rally barely 200 km away at Jalpaiguri said "let them cry hoarse for 400-seats ... but they will not get more than 200 this time round," wondering "if they are so confident of getting 400 seats then why are they sending agencies and sending opposition leaders to jail."  
An unrelenting Prime Minister on the other hand continued to fire salvos at the Trinamool Congress for turning Bengal into a "free zone of the corrupt and criminals." Asking the people to shun the party that was committed to change the demography of Bengal, the Prime Minister said "the TMC Government has been playing an open game of corruption which we have seen in the every strata of the



administration ... the corruption in the primary school teachers' recruitment is a big example." Saying that every raid by the central agencies in the houses of ministers and TMC leaders yielded crores of rupees the Prime Minister said how "even the investigating agencies are not spared by the Trinamool Congress goons who attack and injure them when they come in search of operations."  
Saying that the Mamata Banerjee Government had given a freedom to the criminals Modi said how "the TMC has given Bengal in lease" to the anti-social elements and infiltrators. Though he would not talk about a steady rise in the minority vote share the Prime Minister slammed the TMC for playing a role in changing the demography of the State. "In order to indulge in its vote-bank politics the TMC Government is allowing infiltration and changing the demography of Bengal," he said.  
The TMC Government was stoking infiltration and thwarting the Citizenship Amendment Act which was made to provide citizenship to genuine people the Prime Minister said, "they are misleading the people on CAA and promoting infiltrators" which would ruin the future of the people of Bengal. In an apparent bid to wean back the women voters that had of late been siding with the TMC, thanks to the women-centric schemes like Kanyashree and Laxmi Bhandar the Prime Minister Sandeshkhali and reminded how the women of this State were being oppressed and dishonored. "Whatever happened at Sandeshkhali sent shivers down the entire nation," the Prime Minister said adding how the TMC leaders grabbed people's lands and sexually exploited their women.  
The Prime Minister was campaigning for BJP State president Sukanta Majumdar who is contesting from Balurghat.

## AAP announces final list of four more candidates in Punjab

**PTI ■ CHANDIGARH**  
The Aam Aadmi Party on Tuesday announced its final list of four more candidates in Punjab for the Lok Sabha polls, fielding three legislators and a turncoat.  
With this announcement, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has declared its candidates for all 13 parliamentary seats in Punjab.  
The announcement regarding the names of candidates was made by the party's national general secretary Sandeep Pathak in a post on X.  
From Jalandhar (reserve) constituency, AAP named former Akali MLA Pawan Kumar Tinu, who joined the party a few days back. Tinu will be facing Congress candidate and former chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi and BJP's Sushil Rinku. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) is yet to name its candidate from Jalandhar.  
Tinu, a Dalit leader, was elected as MLA from the Adampur assembly constituency in the Jalandhar district in 2012 and 2017. He lost the 2022 assembly polls to Congress nominee Sukhwinder Kotli. He had unsuccessfully contested the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat is currently represented by Sushil Rinku, who won it on AAP ticket in the 2023 bypoll. Rinku was named the AAP candidate from the seat but he quit the party and joined the BJP.  
Besides Tinu, AAP named



three party MLAs - ?Jagdeep Singh Kaka Brar from the Ferozepur Lok Sabha seat, Amansher Singh Kalsi from Gurdaspur and Ashok Parashar Pappi from the Ludhiana parliamentary seat. Brar is an MLA from Muktsar. He had defeated SAD nominee Kanwaljit Singh in the 2022 assembly polls. Brar had unsuccessfully contested the 2017 assembly polls. The Ferozepur seat is currently represented by SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal who has already announced not to contest the Lok Sabha polls. The Congress, the BJP and SAD are yet to announce their candidates from the Ferozepur Lok Sabha seat.  
AAP showed its faith in Batala MLA Kalsi by fielding him from the Gurdaspur seat, currently represented by BJP's Sunny Deol.  
Kalsi became MLA from Batala by defeating Congress' Ashwani Sekhri in the 2022 assembly polls.  
Kalsi is pitted against BJP candidate Dinesh Babu and SAD's Daljit Singh Cheema.

## RLD joining BJP will not impact Muzaffarnagar Lok Sabha elections: INDIA Bloc candidate

**PTI ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP)**  
Samajwadi Party leader Jayant Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) switched sides to leave the INDIA bloc and align with the BJP. The move left many in the region surprised. In the 2019 polls, Balyan had defeated Chaudhary's father and former RLD chief Ajit Singh by a close margin of around 5,000 votes.  
On how he saw this political realignment, Malik said the RLD can do whatever it wishes as it does not have any candidate in Muzaffarnagar. "So that (RLD) is no factor here... The BJP will not get any benefit from this (RLD's support)," the Jat leader told PTI at his home here.  
Malik recalled "political FIRs" that were lodged by

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Malik recalled "political FIRs" that were lodged by



Muzaffarnagar police during the 2019 elections, including one related to an attack on the convoy of Jayant Chaudhary's wife Charu Chaudhary. He said the villagers who protected the convoy were

may align with anyone he wants to. Now even Farooq Abdullah is praising the BJP. But the truth is that supporters of Chaudhary Charan Singh are with us," Malik claimed.  
On the influence of farmers groups in the elections in the region, he said the farmer organisations are apolitical but have an influence which cannot be denied.  
"If they speak in favour of anyone, it is definitely going to have an effect on the poll outcomes," Malik said.  
On the issues he is taking up in this election, Malik said the biggest among them is 'sammaan' (respect) and claimed that the people have been "insulted" in the last 10 years.

## JD(S) seeks EC action over alleged security lapse at meet attended by Deve Gowda

**PTI ■ TUMAKURU (KARNATAKA)**  
The JD(S) on Tuesday approached the Election Commission over the alleged security lapse at an event presided by former Prime Minister and party patriarch H D Deve Gowda here and sought the suspension of police officials responsible for it.  
In a letter to the Returning Officer of Tumakuru, the party said, on April 15 at Kunchitiga Samudaya Bhavana here, a leaders' meeting was conducted with due permission from the poll panel by BJP and JD(S) under the leadership of Deve Gowda in support of V Somanna (BJP). Somanna is contesting from the Tumakuru constituency in the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls.  
"Police officials who were present at the meeting venue did not take any security measures and let women supporting the Congress inside the hall. The women managed to reach the stage where Deve Gowda was present without being questioned or checked as police failed to do their job," the party alleged.  
The JD(S) alleged that Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress chief D K Shivakumar and Minister Rajanna were behind the incident.

## EVMs airlifted to four remote polling booths in Arunachal

**PTI ■ ITANAGAR**  
The first batch of 40 election officials including police personnel were airlifted to four remote polling stations in Arunachal Pradesh's Kra Daadi district to conduct polling for the simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the north-eastern state on April 19, an official said on Tuesday.  
The polling officials along with Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable

Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) were airlifted on Monday to the polling stations located at Pip-Sorang Circle in the remote district bordering China, the official said. "They were airlifted in two sorties by an MI-172 chopper operated in the state by Skyone airways," Toko Babu, officer on special duty (OSD) to the state's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), said on Tuesday.  
Airlifting of more polling teams to remote polling stations where road communication is not con-

ductive, would be done as per requirements of respective district electoral officers (DEOs) of various districts, he said. "The polling teams airlifted on Monday will be stationed at Tali, the ADC headquarters in the district, from where they will undertake a foot march to reach Pip-Sorang circle," Babu said. Tali assembly constituency which falls under Arunachal West Parliamentary seat, is one among the 10 assembly seats won unopposed. Jike Takku of

BJP had won the seat uncontested this time. Each polling team consists of 10 persons on an average including, a presiding officer, two polling officers, one polling attendant besides, security personnel, the official said, and added that the four polling stations in the Pip-Sorang circle include, Tedung, Pip-Sorang, Kharsang and Korapu. The OSD added that remaining polling stations in the state, which require the polling teams to undertake a foot march, will

start leaving for their respective polling booths on April 17 from the respective district headquarters.  
There are altogether 228 polling stations in the state out of the total 2,226, which could be reached only through foot march. Out of these, to reach 61 polling stations it requires two days of foot-march, while in seven other booths, polling officials have to march for three days to reach their respective destinations.



## BJP candidates in North and South Goa seats file nomination

**PTI ■ PANAJI**  
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidates Shripad Naik and Pallavi Dempo on Tuesday filed their nominations for elections to the North Goa and South Goa seats respectively.  
Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, who accompanied Naik and Dempo during the filing of their nominations, expressed confidence that the BJP will win both the seats in the coastal state by huge margins.  
Pallavi Dempo, the executive director of Dempo Industries, filed her nomination before the returning officer at the Mathany Saldanha complex (administrative building) at Margao in South Goa. She was accompanied by CM Sawant, state BJP president Sadanand Shet Tanavade and hundreds of supporters.  
The South Goa Lok Sabha seat is currently held by Congress' Francisco Sardinha.

Dempo is pitted against Viriato Fernandes of the Congress. North Goa MP Shripad Naik filed his papers at the collectorate in state capital Panaji in the presence of CM Sawant and Tanavade. Naik said he is getting an overwhelming response from voters and has completed one round of campaigning. The parliamentarian is pitted against Congress candidate Ramakant Khalap. Sawant said in Panaji that the BJP will win both the seats in Goa. "We will win by a margin of one lakh votes in North Goa and by 60,000 votes in South Goa," he said.  
Sawant said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given various guarantees in the party's manifesto. "The people of Goa have also given the guarantee that they will elect both the BJP candidates," he said. The Lok Sabha polls in Goa will be held in a single phase on May 7.

## Rahul attacks Modi

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of helping a few rich businessmen in the country. Gandhi also attacked Modi over the electoral bond issue, terming it as a form of extortion where the intimidatory tactics are "much more sophisticated" as central agencies like the CBI, ED and Income Tax Department are deployed against the targeted businessmen.  
"There are some people in every small town or village who extort money on the streets by threatening physical harm. In malayalam you call this extortion 'kolla adikkal' (loot), but Modi calls it electoral bonds. What a common thief is doing on the streets, the PM is doing at an international level," he alleged.  
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CBI and Income Tax people will come, they will interrogate and at the end of it, they will say why don't you give this (their business) to Adani," the sitting Congress MP from Wayanad LS constituency alleged.  
He alleged that this is how Adani got the Mumbai airport from its previous owner. In other instances, such intimidatory tactics also led to the businessman paying the BJP in electoral bonds, he also alleged. He raised the electoral bond issue by referring to a recent interview of Modi.  
"In his interview, he was trying to defend the biggest corruption scandal on the planet — the electoral bond scheme through which the BJP got thousands of crores of rupees by extorting India's businessmen," Gandhi alleged while speaking to party supporters, workers and the huge crowd that turned up for his roadshow from Kodyiyathur in Kozhikode district.  
Earlier in Wayanad, Gandhi alleged that Modi "does not have the understanding to run the country". While speaking to the public in Wayanad, the Congress leader also mocked the PM for his statements asking people to bang steel utensils and switch on their mobile phone lights during the COVID-19 pandemic.  
Earlier in Kodyiyathur, Gandhi alleged that Modi's job was also to distract people from the real issues in the country, protect the richest businessmen in India and "forgive their bank loans". Modi is helping "five or six of the biggest, richest businessmen" in India, he alleged.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Shower of blessings

For the first time in a decade, IMD predicts above-normal rainfall across the nation

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has marked a significant milestone by releasing its long-term forecast. For the first time in a decade, the IMD has predicted above-average rainfall across almost the entire expanse of the country. This forecast carries profound implications for various sectors, ranging from agriculture to water resource management and beyond. Policymakers and farmers will welcome this news, although ordinary individuals may find themselves contending with a more pronounced monsoon season than usual. It would indeed be a sigh of relief for all farmers. The agricultural sector, which forms the backbone of India's economy, is heavily reliant on timely and adequate rainfall. Adequate precipitation is essential for the cultivation of crops and the sustenance of agricultural activities. With an anticipated surplus in rainfall, farmers can expect better soil moisture levels, leading to improved crop yields. Additionally, the forecast offers them an opportunity to plan their cropping patterns and maximise agricultural output. Besides, India's water resources are intricately linked to the monsoon patterns. Above-normal rainfall augurs well for the replenishment of reservoirs, lakes and groundwater aquifers. It provides the much-needed boost to water levels, especially in regions grappling with water scarcity. Adequate rainfall can alleviate the stress on water resources, ensuring better availability for domestic, industrial and agricultural purposes. A bountiful monsoon also facilitates the generation of hydroelectric power, thus contributing to the energy sector.



However, it may be too early to celebrate a normal or above-normal monsoon. Weather forecasts are probabilistic in nature; even a good monsoon across the country is a rare occurrence. While above-normal rainfall brings several benefits, it also presents certain challenges. Excessive precipitation can lead to flooding, particularly in low-lying areas and regions prone to inundation. Flooding not only causes damage to property and infrastructure but also poses risks to human life. Therefore, authorities must undertake pre-emptive measures such as strengthening infrastructure, improving drainage systems and implementing effective flood management strategies. Heavy rainfall increases the risk of soil erosion and landslides, particularly in hilly terrains. Adequate soil conservation measures and afforestation efforts are essential to mitigate these risks and safeguard vulnerable ecosystems. Also, authorities need to ensure efficient water management practices to prevent wastage and optimise the utilisation of water resources. The IMD's forecast heralds promising prospects for farmers to enhance productivity and for authorities to address water scarcity concerns. By adopting a comprehensive approach that combines preparedness, conservation and sustainable practices, India can harness the benefits of abundant rainfall while minimising associated risks, paving the way for socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.

### PICTALK



Devotees stand in a queue to offer prayers at Dakshineswar Kali Temple on Bengali New Year, in Kolkata

## Reflections on class and age discrimination

From a childhood encounter at a political rally to navigating workplace dynamics, an individual's journey unveils lessons in equality and empathy

The then Prime Minister was to address a public rally in Ghaziabad. My father, posted as the head of the electricity department in the city, was responsible for the electrical arrangements at the venue. He took us to listen to her speech from a vantage point. I do not remember the speech. What I do remember is that my father came back immediately after the event ended and rushed us from the venue. He kept looking back surreptitiously, asking us to walk faster. I was to learn that a supervisor working under my father and wanting to make a good impression, was also pursuing us to introduce his family. Much later, at a more mature age, I could understand that this was an incidence of class discrimination prevalent in our society. I was to learn quite a few life-altering lessons a few years later as I joined Indian railway services.



SANJAY CHANDRA

During my first posting in Calcutta, I was asked to study an old machine and propose measures to improve its productivity, taking the assistance of an experienced supervisor. The two of us spent innumerable hours studying the machine. I became an apprentice to a more knowledgeable person, even though he was lower in the hierarchy. Then and even later in my subsequent postings, or even after I quit an active professional life, I learnt a lot about handling work-related issues and even man management, from my junior colleagues, by not dwelling on the so-called finer nuances of a superior status. I also learnt empathy for others. In yet another posting, as a branch head, I was approached by irate union leaders who complained

always respectful even though I was from the same region. This was another lesson learnt, never to be forgotten, about the futility of status discrimination. We were visiting relatives a few days back. My wife's uncle, now nearing 80, narrated a recent experience. He had gone to some office for work, where a much younger person jumped the queue. The uncle objected which was rudely brushed aside by the young man, "How is it material? Have I pointed a gun at you?" This was a status discrimination of another kind - a perceived superiority of the youth against old age. Or was it the gun power? We ought to remember what Nelson Mandela said, "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

about the rude language by a junior colleague. His fault was that he had used the term 'tum' to address a worker rather than the more respectable 'aap'. This was Bengal, where everyone is expected to use a respectful salutation when talking to another person, whatever the status. I tried to assuage the hurt sentiments by pointing out that the junior colleague came from north India where it was a common practice to use the more affectionate 'tu' even while addressing parents. The representatives were not done. They pointed out that I was

# Ignoring neighbours to embrace the world



ASHOK K MEHTA

The BJP Government has put Neighbourhood First Policy on backburner, leaving it underperforming amid rising anti-India sentiments in the region

BJP government has made foreign policy a key election issue: Prime Minister Modi has stated, 'Neighbour first and Act East second'. Foreign Minister S Jaishankar is campaigning how G20 has enhanced India's image and influence as a global player. Quest for High Table has shifted focus from Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP). S Jaishankar explained that politics can go up and down in neighbourhood but people generally have good feelings for India. That is certainly not the ground reality today when in almost every country, anti-India feeling is prevalent. NFP which was formally launched in 2008, has not performed optimally due to internal and external factors. Act East appended later has also failed to take off. Followed several add-ons: *sab ka saath sab ka vikas*; SAGAR; Vishva Mitra; First Security Responder and so on.



Former Minister Jaswant Singh in his book *Defending India*, has noted that India is strategically confined by Macmahon Line, Durand Line, LAC and LoC. Still it was once the regional hegemon having promulgated the Indira Doctrine and employed military force in national interest. India's geography and asymmetry with neighbours are both asset and liability. Congenital problems with Pakistan and later China have made it the least connected South Asian region. NFP was designed to shape the neighbourhood, especially the periphery, extending the neighbourhood to Mauritius and Iran in the West and Myanmar in the East. Curating friendly regimes, winning the goodwill of people through economic linkages and connectivity, creating strategic assets, minimising liabilities and most of all, being sensitive to genuine concerns of neighbours were some objectives of NFP. Rubbing neighbours the wrong way was not, nor meshing domestic politics with diplomacy. That an aspirational India would create glitches for NFP was not envisioned. China, gate-crashed after hiding its strength and biding its time arriving with deep pockets, BRI, MSR and Wolf Warrior

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MOST, IF NOT ALL, REGIONAL COUNTRIES WANT SAARC TO BE REVIVED, BUT INDIA'S IRON-CLAD POLICY OF NOT DEALING WITH PAKISTAN UNTIL TERRORISM FROM ITS SOIL STOPS HAS BEEN AGGRAVATED BY THE REMOVAL OF ARTICLE 370

will suffer a setback lead to revival of anti-India sentiment and further tilt towards China to whom Lanka owes USD 10 bn. In Bangladesh BNP has started an India Out campaign. China is heavily invested in projects including constructing a submarine port near Cox's Bazar adequate for 8 to 10 submarines. Bhutan was within a whisker of a land swap with China by the previous government. Otherwise Doklam could have been lost to the Chinese which would have endangered Siliguri Corridor, the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction dispute. The new Lotay Tshering government might delay the Doklam swap. In Myanmar, the military is rapidly losing ground in the civil war with Ethnic Armed Organisations and NUG. It has lost border control with China, Bangladesh, India and Thailand to EAOs. Most critical for India is Sittwe Port vital for the multi-modal Kaladan project and also the trilateral highway to Thailand. Reuters reported that junta troops nearby have fled and an attack on Sittwe is imminent. But Sohail Kazan, executive director, Bharat Freight, said last week that Sittwe will be safe following a deal between junta and Rakhine state government. If true, that is good news. Kaladan project was contracted in 2008 and is nowhere near completion dislocating India's two signature Act East pro-

jects.. Delhi has to rethink its relations with the junta. Most if not all regional countries want SAARC to be revived. But India's iron clad policy of not dealing with Pakistan till terrorism from its soil stops has been aggravated by removal of Article 370. Trade potential according to World Bank between Pakistan and India is between USD 15 and 20 bn. India's NFP has not worked because its global ambitions have diluted its zeal for the neighbourhood. Further, it has been unable to compete with China despite geography being on its side. Under NFP and Act East, India has concentrated mainly in the maritime domain resulting in neglect of inland connectivity. The Government brags about North East shining (Manipur is a shame) but little progress is seen over connectivity of BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan India Nepal) or South East Asia. The Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM) is also dead. India's focus on neighbourhood has wavered, failing to secure the periphery. Some diplomats have advocated India setting red lines? Winning over neighbours is now a huge challenge. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY**  
Madam — Apropos the news article, "Constitutional Morality: The Pillar of India's Democracy", published on April 15, this is my response. India's electoral fervour every four years embodies the essence of democracy, echoing the aspirations of its constituent assembly. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of constitutional morality as the cornerstone of governance rings true today. It's a conscious cultivation, not merely a natural sentiment, vital for a vibrant democracy. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud aptly emphasises the judiciary's role in upholding constitutional values like dignity and equality. This jurisprudence, evolving alongside societal dynamics, ensures the Constitution remains a living document. Recent landmark judgments, from LGBTQ+ rights to adultery laws, highlight the judiciary's commitment to constitutional morality over popular sentiment. Yet, navigating societal and religious intersections, as seen in the Sabarimala case, poses ongoing challenges. The court's role in reconciling evolving beliefs, evident in decisions on euthanasia and abortion rights, underscores its pivotal position in shaping India's moral landscape. As we navigate these complexities, constitutional morality stands as a beacon, guiding our journey towards a more just and equitable society.  
Sunandna Sharma | Hisar

**Revitalising railway realms**  
Apropos the news article, "Desolate railway tracks transformed into a vibrant botanical sanctuary", published on April 15, this is my response. The transformation of a once-ignored stretch of land into the lush oasis of 'Evergreen Nursery' is a testament to human innovation and environmental stewardship. This verdant haven, nestled amidst the bustling railway tracks, not only rejuvenates the landscape but also symbolises a paradigm shift in urban conservation efforts. The metamorphosis from a crime-ridden wasteland to a vibrant botanical sanctuary reflects the power of collaborative endeavours between public and private entities. The partnership between the Delhi Division of Northern Railway and Evergreen Nursery exemplifies a shared commitment to sustainable development and beautification. Moreover, the altruistic purpose behind the nursery, where plants are nurtured not for profit but for communal enrichment, resonates deeply with the ethos of community service. It serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness between humanity and nature, where each leaf and bloom embodies a story of renewal and hope. As we traverse through these green corridors, we are reminded not only of the beauty of flora but also of our collective responsibility to safeguard our planet for future generations.  
Neeraj Shah | Delhi

clash between Bengali and Islamic cultures, symbolised by Siraj-ud-Daula's reign, echoes through the ages. The triumph of Clive and the merchant princes ushered in a new era, fostering a renaissance that birthed luminaries like Tagore and Bose. The revelation from Atlee underscores the lesser-known role of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, a beacon of resistance against British rule. His legacy, intertwined with Bengal's ethos, stands as a testament to the region's indomitable spirit, shaping not just India's past, but its future. In this electoral battleground, as parties jostle for power, Bengal's historical tapestry reminds us of the enduring struggle for identity and freedom.  
Roshan Kumar | Bhubaneswar

**CAFFEINE CHRONICLES**  
Madam — Apropos the news article, "Exploring the world of single origins, flat whites and beyond!", published on April 14, this is my response. Melbourne's caffeinated landscape is a saga of passion, history and innovation, woven into the city's very fabric. With an abundance of cafes that surpass a thousand, each sip of espresso unveils a narrative steeped in Italian heritage and modern-day craftsmanship. Monique Bayer's guided tour offers a portal into this world, where every alleyway hides a treasure trove of coffee delights. From the legacy of Pellegrini Espresso Bar to the emergence of artisanal roasters like Industry Beans, Melbourne's coffee evolution is palpable. Monique's curated journey delves deep, introducing nuances like filter coffee and cold drip variants, enriching the sensory experience. In this city, coffee isn't just a beverage; it's a cultural phenomenon. From paleo-friendly butter coffee to innovative frozen concoctions, Melbourne's cafes cater to every palate. With terms like cupping and AeroPress echoing through the streets, it's evident that coffee here is more than a drink—it's a way of life.  
Kundan JM | Bhopal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN STRIVE TO DEVELOP FAITH

The pursuit of guidance from the Divine holds the promise of revelation



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let me start with why we often don't endeavour to develop faith, as is commonly observed. Lord Krishna has aptly stated, "Out of thousands of men, hardly anyone strives for perfection" (The Bhagavad Gita 7.3). The essence of a perfect life lies in becoming a devotee of God, for He is the ultimate controller of the entire world. There exist numerous reasons, or perhaps excuses, for this reluctance. Beginning with a straightforward argument: who has truly seen Him? If God holds such significance, why does He not present Himself so that we may behold Him? In this age of the internet, one might argue that He could easily make His presence felt. Some may argue that God is unmanifest, yet we lack any tangible experience of such an entity. If God is indeed a reality without whom we cannot thrive, then why do some ideologies, such as communism, appear to manage so well, especially in certain countries? Why is there pervasive poverty and suffering in the world? If God possesses omnipotence as described, why does He not rectify these injustices? We encounter many ascetics on the streets, leading some to conclude that only those who have failed turn to God, while they believe they can manage without divine intervention. Perhaps they might consider turning to God later if the need arises. These excuses, however, varied, ultimately lead us to a sense of emptiness. In reality, it is often our ego that serves as the primary hindrance. We struggle to accept an entity so vast and incomprehensible, leaving us feeling insignificant and powerless. Another significant barrier lies in the acceptance of spiritual practices, which may seem unfamiliar and daunting. Yet, all these excuses only serve to deepen our sense of emptiness. Why not begin by praying for what we deeply desire? Even a child can pray and often does. If our prayers are sincere and aligned with righteousness, God may consider them.



The next step involves seeking guidance from God, who is eager to provide it. Given His omniscience, God communicates in various ways; to advanced devotees, He may impart intuition or even speak directly, while beginners may receive guidance through mediums such as family members, friends, or even seemingly random occurrences like messages in newspapers. It should be evident that following God's instructions is a wise course of action, yielding manifold benefits. Let us now explore some basic practices that are both accessible and highly rewarding. My personal favourite is 'darshan' — simply gazing upon an image or idol of God.

Observing God's benevolent countenance, we can feel His attraction towards us. However, it's crucial to remember that adherence to righteousness, or 'dharma,' is of paramount importance to God. While deity forms or images serve as focal points, God's presence transcends physical limitations, permeating all existence. Another simple yet profound practice is offering 'namaskar' — paying homage to God with folded hands. This act serves to humble our egos, which often obstruct our connection with the divine and hinder our interactions with fellow beings. As we persist in these practices, we will gradually experience God's responses, not necessarily through miraculous events, but through subtle yet discernible manifestations. We can liken this experience to connecting to the internet—where there is a network, there is connectivity. Similarly, God, omnipresent as He is, can be experienced in various ways. God's subtle presence is accessible to all. He eagerly awaits our approach, desiring nothing but our well-being. Let us cast aside our doubts and excuses and wholeheartedly commit to forging a deeper connection with the divine.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

# Iran strikes threaten regional stability

The assault, though primarily symbolic in nature, highlights the mounting tensions in the region. However, the US endeavours to uphold a balance of power

NILANTHA  
ILANGAMUWA

REUTERS

At a time when people in several countries in South Asia and East Asia were celebrating the traditional New Year, Iran, the second-largest country in West Asia, launched a series of missile attacks targeting its arch-enemy Israel. Jordan and Saudi Arabia supported Israel and intercepted most of the missiles fired by Iran. The attack appears to be symbolic, aimed at boosting the morale of organisations such as Hamas in Palestine, Yemen's Houthis, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon, all of which have declared war against Israel in West Asia, as well as countries like Lebanon and Syria, rather than engaging in an official war against Israel. This attack serves as a morale booster. Shortly after the attack, Hamas rejected the Cairo agreement, a result of discussions between top intelligence agencies, the CIA and Mossad, together with other stakeholders mediated by Egypt, concerning Israeli hostages.

However, many encouraged Israel to respond quickly. However, United States President Biden stated that he would not yield if attacks were made against Iran. It is seen as a matter of prior agreement by both parties rather than a threat. The truth is, that the US administration cannot afford to assist Israel in another war at this point. At a time when the country's reputation has been tarnished at the international level and when Biden's political power is extremely weak if the United States makes such an unwise decision, it will have to face unprecedented consequences shortly, similar to how the United States has caused irreversible damage to world peace and order. Elon Musk's recent statement that the possibility of the United States becoming the victim of a September 11-style surprise attack is very high seems to hold deep truth. The consequences of these conflicts may not only affect Washington or New York but also American military bases around the world. The likelihood of an attack similar to the one on Pearl Harbor is high. The United States cannot always continue to create military conflicts in other countries for its war trade and keep its superpower status as it desires. The superpower, as history has proven, will inevitably crumble at any



THE ATTACK BY IRAN WAS RETALIATION. IT IS A RESPONSE TO THE ISRAELI PROVOCATION AT THE IRANIAN CONSULATE IN SYRIA, A GROSS VIOLATION OF THE VIENNA CONVENTION, WHICH CLAIMED THE LIVES OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS

given point. Compared to its lifespan, the United States is a relatively young superpower in the grand scheme of civilisation, considering the collapse of great empires. Throughout history, mighty empires have risen and fallen, leaving lasting legacies. The Roman Empire, spanning from 27 BC to AD 476, peaked in the 2nd century AD, but internal strife, economic instability and external invasions, such as by the Visigoths and Vandals, led to its fragmentation. The Ottoman Empire, dominant in the 16th and 17th centuries across the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and Western Asia, declined due to internal conflicts and challenges from European powers like Russia and Austria. The Mongol Empire, founded by Genghis Khan in the 13th century, stretched from Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean, but internal divisions and the death of key leaders led to its fragmentation by the late 14th century. Lastly, the British Empire, spanning from the 16th to the 20th century, faced economic strain and nationalist movements, ultimately dissolving due to internal weakness and external pressures. These collapses, driven by political, military and socioeconomic factors, reshaped the world, underscoring the transient nature of power and the enduring impact of history on modern geopolitics and civilisation.

However, the deep state of the United States has certainly studied and comprehended global history better than many other countries. That is why the basic strategy of the United States has been to create new wars while talking about peace and turn those wars into long-term tragedies to keep uncertainties. This strategy can weaken its rivals and maintain its power continuously. These issues become clear when many conflicts are understood in their political and economic context. The ideology that Israel has contin-

uously pursued against Iran in national and international forums is not a single opinion or rivalry of Israel, but it is a long-term propagation through carefully selected facts and objectives together with the United States. On one hand, the West fuels wars against hostile countries. On the other, it manufactures internal crises in those nations by imposing international sanctions. This remains a persistent behaviour of the West.

The thing that should not be forgotten here is that the attack by Iran was a retaliation. It is a response to the Israeli provocation on the Iranian consulate in Syria, a gross violation of the Vienna Convention, which claimed the lives of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Iran's calculation, as some analysts pointed out, was that if it did not respond, Israel would seek to push back and degrade the axis of resistance across the region. However, it is unreasonable to think that Israel miscalculated its attack on the Iranian diplomatic site in Syria as Israel continues to keep deep intelligence penetration of IRGC and Hezbollah networks in Syria, making those networks highly vulnerable to Israeli attacks. Iran must uphold its reputation among its allies and address internal political crises effectively. Therefore, prioritising attacks conducted through proxies is advisable, while occasional skirmishes from both sides should be acknowledged.

Moreover, it is very important to consider the government's domestic policies and openly mention Iran's inherent weaknesses amid escalating tensions among some politicians and officials in Iran. They highlighted the many crises facing the Iranian government and warned against engaging in direct conflict with Israel without first addressing these pressing issues, which they argued would only worsen the situation. They emphasised the impor-

ance of prudent governance and effective crisis management and the need to mitigate ongoing crises to prevent system collapse.

Economic challenges and psychological instability in society are urgent issues that need to be addressed as they are now breeding grounds for enemy penetrations. They advocated the adoption of conciliatory policies to reduce tensions and promote harmony and empathy in Iranian society. The regime's repressive domestic policies, particularly regarding the mandatory hijab enforcement campaign, have fuelled widespread discontent and delegitimised the government. Recent anti-Israel actions, like seizing a cargo ship, have caused Iran's markets to react negatively. The national currency's value has hit a record low. President Ibrahim Raisi faces criticism and calls for a cabinet reshuffle to address economic hardships affecting many Iranians.

Over the years, Israel has demonstrated its capability in targeting Iranian nuclear scientists and infrastructure. Notably, the Stuxnet cyber-attack, jointly orchestrated by the United States and Israel, delivered a significant blow to Iran's nuclear ambitions. This proves that national interests are never compromised for domestic political issues, except for former President Trump. Stuxnet marked a pivotal moment, ushering in the era of cyberwarfare, where lines of code wielded the power to reshape geopolitical landscapes. Its impact reverberated globally, highlighting the evolving nature of warfare and the formidable role of technology in modern conflicts. In this situation, Iran cannot continue to be silent. It must prove its power numerically. Therefore, the recent attack was more a reputational-preservation move than a declaration of war.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan Journalist. Views are personal)

# Uttarakhand women: Agents of change in State politics

From leading environmental crusades to confronting social injustices head-on, they embody the spirit of the region, epitomising resilience and fortitude

Women in Uttarakhand are renowned for their extraordinary resilience and hard work, characteristics deeply rooted in their Himalayan heritage. Despite grappling with the challenges of life in this rugged terrain, Uttarakhand's women have consistently been at the forefront of social and environmental movements, epitomized by figures like Gaura Devi of the Chipko movement and Tinchari Mai (Deepa Nautiyal), who spearheaded the Anti-Liquor movement. These women have fearlessly confronted injustice, embodying the spirit of Uttarakhand. This article seeks to underscore the political engagement of women in Uttarakhand, shedding light on their role in bol-



SHEETAL ARYA

stering democracy.

The political participation of women in Uttarakhand can be delineated into two primary spheres: first, women assuming leadership positions within the political domain and second, women exercising their electoral rights as voters. Since the inception of the state, the representation of women in the legislative assembly has seen a significant

albeit gradual rise. From four women members in the first assembly, the number has increased by 50% in the 2022 elections, marking a commendable stride. However, despite this progress, women remain a minority in the assembly, constituting a mere fraction of the total members. Presently, the legislative assembly boasts eight women members, including three Dalit women, the highest number in Uttarakhand's history. Notably, Smt. Ritu Khanduri serves as the speaker, while Smt. Rekha Arya is the lone female minister in the cabinet. Despite these advancements, the disparity in political representation persists, underscoring the challenges women face in accessing political power. While women's representa-

tion in the parliamentary arena remains scant, with only two female MPs out of eight, the discrepancy between the female population (49%) and their political representation is stark. Despite their active participation in grassroots movements, women's presence in formal politics remains disproportionately low. Women in Uttarakhand constitute the backbone of the rural economy, grappling with issues like migration, environmental degradation and inadequate healthcare services. However, societal norms and economic constraints often deter their political involvement. Moreover, political parties' reluctance to field female candidates exacerbates this disparity. For instance, in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha



elections, the Congress has not nominated any female candidates, while the BJP has nominated only one, Mrs. Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah. Nevertheless, women voters in Uttarakhand have emerged as a formidable force, outnumbering men in recent elections. Their increasing political awareness, fueled by issues directly affecting their lives,

coupled with higher literacy rates and government initiatives like reservation quotas, has galvanized their participation. Policies such as 30% horizontal reservation in government jobs and 50% reservation in Panchayats have bolstered women's political agency, enabling them to assume leadership roles at the grassroots level. In the run-up to the 2024 Parliamentary elections, both major parties are vying for women's support, employing diverse strategies. Congress has pledged financial assistance and job reservations for women, emphasizing women's security and justice. Conversely, the BJP highlights its implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) as a milestone for women's rights,

coupled with grassroots mobilization efforts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal among women voters, attributed to his grassroots connect and initiatives like the Women Reservation Bill, further consolidates BJP's electoral prospects. The "Modi factor" has resonated with Uttarakhand's women, contributing to BJP's continued dominance since 2017. To bolster women's empowerment, the state government has allocated a substantial gender budget for 2024-25, earmarked for bridging gender disparities and promoting equality. Additionally, measures like deploying women employees to oversee polling booths and facilitating pregnant women's access to voting booths underscore the commitment to

inclusive governance. In conclusion, Dr Ambedkar's assertion that a community's progress is contingent upon women's advancement holds for Uttarakhand. While women have historically been instrumental in social movements, their underrepresentation in formal politics remains a pressing concern. Addressing these challenges is imperative for ensuring women's political representation and expediting the state's development. As Uttarakhand gears up for the upcoming Chunav Kauthig, with women comprising 48.1 per cent of the electorate, their increased participation promises to be a harbinger of democracy's triumph in the state.

(The writer is a research scholar; views are personal)

# Trump to return to court after no jurors picked on first day

AP ■ NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump will return to a New York courtroom Tuesday as a judge works to find a panel of jurors who will decide whether the former president is guilty of criminal charges alleging he falsified business records to cover up a sex scandal during the 2016 campaign.

The first day of Trump's history-making hush money trial in Manhattan ended with no one yet chosen to be on the panel of 12 jurors and six alternates. Dozens of people were dismissed after saying they didn't believe they could be fair, though dozens of other prospective jurors have yet to be questioned.

It's the first of Trump's four criminal cases to go to trial and may be the only one that could reach a verdict before voters decide in November whether the presumptive Republican presidential nominee should return to the White House. It puts Trump's legal problems at the center of the closely contested race against President Joe Biden, with Trump painting himself as the victim of a politically motivated justice system working to deprive him of another term.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records as part of an alleged effort to keep sacrosanct — and, he says, bogus — stories about his sex life from emerging during his 2016 campaign. On Monday, Trump called the case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg a "scam" and "witch hunt."

The charges center on \$130,000 in payments that Trump's company made to his then-lawyer, Michael Cohen. He paid that sum on Trump's behalf to keep porn actor Stormy Daniels from going public with her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier. Trump has denied the sexual encounter ever happened.

Prosecutors say the payments to Cohen were falsely logged as legal fees. Prosecutors have described it as part of a scheme to bury damaging stories Trump feared could help his opponent in the 2016 race, par-



ticularly as Trump's reputation was suffering at the time from comments he had made about women.

Trump has acknowledged reimbursing Cohen for the payment and that it was designed to stop Daniels from going public about the alleged encounter. But Trump has previously said it had nothing to do with the campaign.

Jury selection could take several more days — or even weeks — in the heavily Democratic city where Trump grew up and catapulted to celebrity status decades before winning the White House. Only about a third of the 96 people in the first panel of potential jurors brought into the courtroom on Monday remained after the judge excused some members. More than half of the group was excused after telling the judge they could not be fair and impartial and several others were dismissed for other reasons that were not disclosed.

Another group of more than 100 potential jurors sent to the courthouse Monday was not yet brought into the courtroom for questioning.

Meanwhile, Supreme Court on Tuesday is taking up the first of two cases that could affect the criminal prosecution of former President Donald Trump for his efforts to overturn his election loss in 2020. Hundreds of charges stemming from the Capitol riot also are at stake.

The justices are hearing arguments over the charge of obstruction of an official proceeding. That charge, stemming from a law passed in the aftermath of the Enron finan-

cial scandal more than two decades ago, has been brought against 330 people, according to the Justice Department. The court will consider whether it can be used against those who disrupted Congress' certification of Joe Biden's 2020 presidential election victory over Trump.

The former president and presumptive nominee for the 2024 Republican nomination is facing two charges in the case brought by special counsel Jack Smith in Washington that could be knocked out with a favorable ruling from the nation's highest court. Next week, the justices will hear arguments over whether Trump has "absolute immunity" from prosecution in the case, a proposition that has so far been rejected by two lower courts.

The first former U.S. president under indictment, Trump is on trial on hush money charges in New York and also has been charged with election interference in Georgia and with mishandling classified documents in Florida.

In Tuesday's case, the court is hearing an appeal from Joseph Fischer, a former Pennsylvania police officer who has been indicted on seven counts, including obstruction, for his actions on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol in a bid to keep Biden, a Democrat, from taking the White House. Lawyers for Fischer argue that the charge doesn't cover his conduct.

The obstruction charge, which carries up to 20 years behind bars, is among the most widely used felony charges brought

in the massive federal prosecution following the deadly insurrection.

Roughly 170 Jan. 6 defendants have been convicted of obstructing or conspiring to obstruct the Jan. 6 joint session of Congress, including the leaders of two far-right extremist groups, the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers. A number of defendants have had their sentences delayed until after the justices rule on the matter. Some rioters have even won early release from prison while the appeal is pending over concerns that they might end up serving longer than they should have if the Supreme Court rules against the Justice Department. That includes Kevin Seefried, a Delaware man who threatened a Black police officer with a pole attached to a Confederate battle flag as he stormed the Capitol. Seefried was sentenced last year to three years behind bars, but a judge recently ordered that he be released one year into his prison term while awaiting the Supreme Court's ruling.

The high court case focuses on whether the anti-obstruction provision of a law that was enacted in 2002 in response to the financial scandal that brought down Enron Corp. can be used against Jan. 6 defendants.

Fischer's lawyers argue that the provision was meant to close a loophole in criminal law and discourage the destruction of records in response to an investigation. Until the Capitol riot, they told the court, every criminal case using the provision had involved allegations of destroying or otherwise manipulating records.

But the administration says the other side is reading the law too narrowly, arguing it serves "as a catchall offense designed to ensure complete coverage of all forms of corrupt obstruction of an official proceeding," including Fischer's "alleged conduct in joining a violent riot to disrupt the joint session of Congress certifying the presidential election results."

Smith has argued separately in the immunity case that the obstruction charges against Trump are valid, no matter the outcome of Fischer's case.

# Tensions rise in Aus after bishop, priest wounded in knife attack

AP ■ SYDNEY

A teenager has been accused of wounding a Christian bishop and a priest during a church service in the second high-profile knife attack to rock Sydney in recent days, leaving communities on edge, leaders calling for calm and a besieged church urging against retaliation. The 16-year-old was overpowered by the shocked congregation at Christ the Good Shepherd Church after he allegedly stabbed Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel and the Rev. Isaac Royel during a service on Monday night that was being streamed online.

Police have not commented on reports that the boy's fingers were severed by parishioners in the Orthodox Assyrian church in suburban Wakeley, but confirmed his hand injuries were "severe."

Video of the attack spread quickly on social media and an angry mob converged on the



A police forensic officer works at a crime scene at the Christ the Good Shepherd Church in suburban Wakeley in western Sydney, Australia on Tuesday.

church demanding vengeance. They hurled bricks, bottles and fence boards at police, who temporarily barricaded the boy inside the church for his own safety. Many in the crowd chanted "an eye for an eye" and

"bring him out." Several people including police officers required hospital treatment following the hours-long riot. The church said in a statement on Tuesday it "denounced

retaliation of any kind." Police stood guard around mosques in parts of Sydney on Tuesday after reports that text messages were circulating urging the Assyrian Christian community to retaliate against Muslims.

Sydney's Lakemba Mosque, Australia's largest, has hired additional private security for the next week after receiving fire bomb threats on Monday night.

Police and community leaders said public anxiety had been heightened by a lone assailant's knife attack in a Sydney shopping mall on Saturday that killed five women and a male security guard who attempted to intervene. The 40-year-old assailant, Joel Cauchi, had a history of mental illness and trouble with women and a fascination with knives. He was shot dead by police.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese urged the public not to take the law into their own hands.

# Pro-Palestinian demonstrators shut down airport, Chicago key bridges

AP ■ CHICAGO

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators blocked roadways in Illinois, California, New York and the Pacific Northwest on Monday, temporarily shutting down travel into some of the nation's most heavily used airports, onto the Golden Gate and Brooklyn bridges and on a busy West Coast highway.

In Chicago, protesters linked arms and blocked lanes of Interstate 190 leading into O'Hare International Airport around 7 am in a demonstration they said was part of a global "economic blockade to free Palestine," according to Rifqa Falaneh, one of the organizers.

Traffic in the San Francisco Bay Area was snarled for hours as demonstrators shut down all vehicle, pedestrian and bike traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge and chained themselves to 55-gallon drums filled with cement

across Interstate 880 in Oakland. Protesters marching into Brooklyn blocked Manhattan-bound traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge. In Eugene, Oregon, protesters blocked Interstate 5, shutting down traffic on the major highway for about 45 minutes. O'Hare warned travelers on the social platform X to take alternative forms of transportation with car travel "substantially delayed this morning due to protest activity." Some travelers stuck in standstill traffic left their cars and walked the final leg to the airport along the freeway, trailing their luggage behind them. Among them was Madeline Hannan from suburban Chicago. She was headed to O'Hare for a work trip to Florida when her and her husband's car ended up stalled for 20 minutes. She got out and "both ran and speed walked" more than a mile (1.6 kilometers). She said she made it to the gate on time,

but barely. "This was an inconvenience," she said in a telephone interview from Florida. "But in the grand scheme of things going on overseas, it's a minor inconvenience." While individual travelers may have been affected, operations at the airport appeared near normal with delays of under 15 minutes, according to the Chicago Department of Aviation. Inbound traffic toward O'Hare resumed around 9 a.m. Near Seattle, the Washington State Department of Transportation said a demonstration closed the main road to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. Social media posts showed people holding a banner and waving Palestinian flags while standing on the highway. State authorities urged people to use light rail instead. About 20 protesters were arrested at the Golden Gate

Bridge demonstration and traffic resumed shortly after noon, according to the California Highway Patrol. The agency said officers were making arrests at two points on the interstate, including one spot where roughly 300 protesters refused orders to disperse. "Attempting to block or shut down a freeway or state highway to protest is unlawful, dangerous, and prevents motorists from safely reaching their destinations," the agency said in a statement.

Oregon State Police said 52 protesters were arrested for disorderly conduct following the Interstate 5 protest in Eugene, Oregon, about 110 miles (177 kilometers) south of Portland. Six vehicles were towed from the scene. New York Police made numerous arrests, saying 150 protesters were initially involved in the march around 3:15 p.m., but that number quickly grew.

# Sunak faces resistance over smoking ban plans

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faces very vocal resistance against his plans to effectively ban smoking for anyone aged 15 and younger as a new bill comes up for a vote in the House of Commons on Tuesday. The British Indian leader proposed the Tobacco and Vapes Bill last year and declared his vision for creating a "smokefree generation" by making it an offence to sell tobacco products to anyone born after January 1, 2009, which covers children aged 15. Once it clears its parliamentary journey, the new legislation will introduce some of the world's strictest anti-smoking laws in the country.

"I propose that in future we raise the smoking age by one year, every year. That means a 14-year-old today will never legally be sold a cigarette and that they — and their generation — can grow up smoke-free. We know this works," Sunak had declared at the Conservative Party conference in October last year. As there is Opposition backing for the



bill in Parliament and governing Conservative MPs have a free vote on the bill, any Tory votes against the bill will not be seen as a full-blown rebellion against the Prime Minister.

But two of Sunak's immediate predecessors, Liz Truss and Boris Johnson, have been leading a very vocal group of Tories who plan to vote against the bill as "un-Conservative" and taking away choice from the public.

"The truth is that there is no safe level of tobacco consumption. It is uniquely harmful, and that is why we are taking this important action today to protect the next generation," said UK Health Secretary Victoria Atkins.

"This Bill will save thousands of lives, ease the strain on our NHS [National Health Service], and improve the UK's productivity," she said.

Under the new law, smoking itself would not be criminalised, and anyone who can legally buy tobacco will not be prevented from doing so.

The ban aims to stop people from smoking even before they start as the government pointed to its highly addictive nature, with four in five smokers picking it up before the age of 20, remaining addicted for life. If passed, the bill will progress to the next stage, bringing the UK closer to creating the first smoke-free generation, the government says. Under the plans, trading standards officers would get new powers to issue on-the-spot 100-pound fines to shops selling tobacco or vapes to children, with all the money

raised going towards further enforcement.

"This historic legislation will consign smoking to the 'ash heap of history,'" said Deborah Arnott, head of the charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). The Tobacco and Vapes Bill would also give the government new powers to tackle youth vaping by restricting flavours and regulating the way that vapes are sold and packaged to make them less appealing to children.

The UK's Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said while vaping can play a useful role in helping adult smokers to quit, non-smokers and children should never vape.

The long-term health impacts of vaping are unknown, and the nicotine contained within them can be highly addictive, it warned. According to official figures, responsible for around 80,000 deaths annually, smoking is the UK's single biggest preventable killer and costs the NHS and economy an estimated GBP 17 billion a year — more than the GBP 10 billion annual revenue from tobacco taxation.



President Joe Biden, right, meets with Prime Minister Petr Fiala of the Czech Republic in the Oval Office at the White House, Monday.

# Indian-origin principal wins legal challenge over school prayer ban

PTI ■ LONDON

An Indian-origin school principal, often referred to as "Britain's strictest headmistress", on Tuesday welcomed a UK High Court ruling that upheld her ban on prayer rituals after a Muslim pupil sought to legally challenge it as discriminatory. Katherine Birbalsingh, of Indo-Guyanese heritage, had told the court that Michaela School — a "secular" secondary school for boys and girls in Wembley, north London — did not allow religious prayers in keeping with its ethos of promoting an "inclusive environment".

While half of the pupils at the school are Muslims, it also has large numbers of Sikh, Hindu and Christian pupils.

"As the Governing Body is aware, the School does not provide a prayer room for use by pupils, for various reasons. These reasons include that a prayer room would foster division amongst pupils, contrary to the School's ethos, lack of available space and available staff to supervise pupils and that pupils would miss important School activities, including during the lunch break if they were to spend time in a prayer room," Birbalsingh told the court. "Unacceptable segregation or division, contrary to the whole ethos of the school, was taking place as a result of permitting prayer. An intimidatory atmosphere was developing. Our strict disciplinary policies, on which the ethos and great success of (the) School is based,

were at risk of being undermined," she said.

Justice Thomas Linden, in an 80-page judgment following a hearing in January, ruled in the school's favour.

"In my judgment, the starting point is that the School was right to take the view that the issue was whether to permit and facilitate ritual prayer indoors: in effect, to reverse its longstanding policy of not providing a prayer room," it reads. "She (the unnamed pupil) knew that the School is secular, and her own evidence is that her mother wished her to go there because it was known to be strict... Her evidence has focussed on her preferences and what she supposes the position would be elsewhere," it notes.

# 'Substantial increase in attack on Hindus in US'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Observing that there is a substantial increase in attacks against Hindus in the US, an Indian-American Congressman has said that this was just the "beginning of a coordinated anti-Hindu attack", as he asked the community members to unite against hate crimes. Congressman Shri Thanedar's remarks came during a news conference held at the National Press Club here on Monday.

"Today I am seeing in the United States a substantial increase in attacks on Hinduism. A lot of misinformation is being circulated whether it is online or otherwise," Thanedar said.

Thanedar and four other Indian-American lawmakers — Ro Khanna, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ami Bera and Pramila Jayapal — had recently



written to the Department of Justice seeking an investigation on the recent surge in attacks on Hindu temples and places of worship.

At the press conference organised by HinduAction, a non-profit body, Thanedar complained that no action has been taken against those responsible for the attacks and no arrests have been made either.

"We have experienced substantially more events of this kind in recent months. I have a feeling that this is just the beginning of a very coordinated attempt against this community and the community must stand together. The time has come and I will stand with you," Thanedar said.

"Having practised Hinduism, having grown up as a Hindu in a Hindu household, I know what Hinduism is. It is a very peaceful religion," he said, adding that it is not a religion that attacks others.

However, this community continues to be misrepresented, misunderstood, sometimes deliberately, he said.

"I recently joined four of my Indian-American colleagues to write to the Department of Justice. You know, one of the concerns that we had was the rising attacks on places of worship," Thanedar said.

"We've seen those happening in California, we have seen those happening all the way in New York and all across America. It appears to be a very coordinated effort to attack these places of worship, which has created a lot of fear in the community," he said.

Thanedar alleged that often local law enforcement enters into these investigations which go nowhere.

He said it leaves the community feeling like they have nobody who cares about them. That means that the community continues to live in fear. The community continues to live in an adverse situation with essentially no help from law enforcement, he added.

Thanedar said that there is a need to coordinate efforts between the local law enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Department of Justice.

"A higher priority needs to be assigned to such hate crimes against this peaceful community," he said.

"That is what we have asked the Justice Department to do and it is time for the whole community to come together and make sure that we demand equality, that we demand justice. We will not tolerate such hate against Hinduism. Thanedar said he has introduced a resolution in the United States Congress on "anti-Hindu attacks".

"Through the resolution and the letter that we wrote to the Department of Justice, we continue to put pressure on this administration to ensure that the Hindu community has a right to live in peace," he said.

Utsav Chakrabarti from HinduAction described it as a historic resolution in the fight against "anti-Hindu crimes" in the US.



# 'Pak needs years to implement IMF-advised structural reforms'

WASHINGTON — Cash-strapped Pakistan would need two or three years to implement structural reforms prescribed by the IMF, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said, warning that the country would be looking for another bailout programme if it fails to go through these measures.

— doesn't go through the structural reforms, the country would still be looking for another programme, the report said. "We have known the what and why not for years but for decades," he was quoted as saying in the report.

reforming the Bretton Woods twins — the IMF and the World Bank. "We are dealing with adaptation and financing and to the extent that these institutions come in to help countries like Pakistan from inclusive growth perspective and climate change perspective. Our interests are going to be very well aligned," he said.

# Inquiry commission gives clean chit to ex-ISI chief Gen Hamid

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general Lieutenant General (ret'd) Faiz Hamid has been exonerated by the inquiry commission established to investigate the 2017 sit-in by a hardline religious group here and Rawalpindi, it emerged on Tuesday.



Syed Akhtar Ali Shah, a former civil servant, who also served as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's police chief and included Tahir Alam Khan, a former Islamabad police chief and Khushal Khan, an additional secretary at the Ministry of Interior. It was tasked to identify those

who planned, financed, and supported the protest and also recommended legal action against its planners and executors which disrupted life in Rawalpindi and Islamabad between November 6 and November 27, 2017. The commission in the report of 149 pages, 57 annexures & sub-annexures and one appendix claimed to have examined all relevant evidence but described it to be an elaborate case study on the style of governance in Pakistan.

# 'Russia's invasion of Ukraine threatens global security'

BEIJING — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told Chinese leader Xi Jinping who hosted him in Beijing on Tuesday that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine threatens global security, in an apparent call for China to apply greater pressure on its neighbor and close strategic partner to resolve the conflict.

which has threatened to spread into a regional conflict and has disrupted energy and global food supplies and other trade. Russia's actions "violate a principle of the United Nations Charter and the principle of the inviolability of national borders," Scholz was quoted as saying by German media.

community. Despite that, China continues to insist that the United Nations charter should prevail in international affairs and that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations be respected, in apparent contradiction with Russia's military agenda.

as saying. Scholz on Monday called for fair competition in trade relations while warning about dumping and overproduction during a talk to college students in the financial hub of Shanghai, where German companies have major investments.

ministers and business executives visited a partially German-funded company and other sites in the vast city, which is a production base for China's auto and other industries.

Shanghai that borders "must not be moved by force." "We should not be afraid of our neighbors," he said, emphasizing the importance of international institutions such as the World Trade Organization.

# 'Pak sustained its N-programme despite economic turmoil'

WASHINGTON — Pakistan sustained its nuclear modernisation efforts last year despite its economic turmoil as its contentious relationship with India continues to drive its defence policy, the top US intelligence official has told Congress.

However, cross-border violence between the countries has decreased since their February 2021 recommitment to a ceasefire, he said. "Islamabad is modernising its nuclear arsenal and improving the security of its nuclear materials and nuclear C2 (command and control)."

# China's GDP grew by 5.3% in 1st quarter of 2024

BEIJING — China's economy grew at 5.3 per cent in the first quarter, making a stronger-than-expected start to the year even as the downturn of its property market continued while the domestic demand remained subdued.

tum and got off to a good start," Sheng Laiyun, Deputy Head of the NBS, said at a press conference. Sheng mentioned positive factors during this period, such as rising production demand, stable employment and prices, and growing market confidence.

property investment fell 9.5 per cent, highlighting the challenges faced by China's real estate firms. "You cannot manufacture growth forever, so we really need to see households come to the party if China wants to hit that around five per cent growth target," Harry Murphy Cruise from Moody's Analytics told the BBC.

from stable to negative a week after it cut its projection for the country's sovereign credit rating, reflecting pessimism in the world's second-largest economy and concerns over Beijing's capacity to support its biggest lenders.

# More homes flooded in Kazakhstan

MOSCOW — Nearly 14,500 homes have been flooded in a Russian region bordering Kazakhstan after water levels spiked in a local river, local authorities said Tuesday.

according to officials. The situation is more dire in the southwest of the region near the Kazakh border, where authorities said the river there has risen to a dangerous level in the town of Ileik.

# 'Singapore PM Lee to continue to be part of govt after stepping down next month'

SINGAPORE (PTI) — Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will stay in the Cabinet as Senior Minister after stepping down as the leader of the government on May 15, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, who will succeed him, said on Tuesday.

# Ukrainian pres signs law to boost conscription to fend off Russia's aggression

KYIV (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a controversial law Tuesday, days after it was passed by parliament, potentially helping Kyiv to boost conscription to replenish depleted forces to fend off Russia's continued aggression.



bat. Authorities said a separate bill on demobilisation and rotation would be prepared in the coming months. But the delay caused public outrage among Ukrainians whose relatives have been fighting without breaks for two years.

# Heavy rains lash UAE, death toll in Oman flooding rises to 18

DUBAI (AP) — Heavy rains lashed the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, flooding out portions of major highways and leaving vehicles abandoned on roadways across Dubai. Meanwhile, the death toll in separate heavy flooding in neighboring Oman rose to 18 with others still missing as the sultanate prepared for the storm.

over 120 millimeters (4.75 inches) of rainfall had soaked the city-state — the typical average for a year in the desert nation — with more expected in the coming hours.

largely working remotely if able. Many workers stayed home as well, though some ventured out, with the unfortunate stalling out their vehicles in deeper-than-expected water covering some roads.

# UK criminalises creation of 'deepfake' images without consent

LONDON (PTI) — Despicable people who create sexually explicit "deepfakes" will face prosecution under a new law going through its parliamentary journey, the British government said on Tuesday.

is then shared more widely, offenders could be sent to jail. "The creation of deepfake sexual images is despicable and completely unacceptable irrespective of whether the image is shared," said Laura Farris, UK Minister for Victims and Safeguarding.

UK criminalises creation of 'deepfake' images without consent. London (PTI) — Despicable people who create sexually explicit "deepfakes" will face prosecution under a new law going through its parliamentary journey, the British government said on Tuesday.

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### SABALENKA TO FACE GOOD FRIEND BADOSA IN STUTTGART OPENER

AP ■ STUTTGART, GERMANY  
Paula Badosa battled past Diana Shnaider 6-3, 6-4 to set up a match with friend and world No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka at the Porsche Grand Prix. Shnaider fended off four match points before former No. 2 Badosa took her fifth opportunity at the clay-court tournament on Monday. Badosa's 10 double faults allowed Shnaider eight break point opportunities. The 20-year-old Russian was unable to

take any of them on the center court in Stuttgart. Sabalenka has finished runner-up on her last three appearances in Stuttgart, losing the final to former No. 1 Ashleigh Barty in 2021 and current No. 1 Iga Swiatek in 2022 and 2023. Sachia Vickery of the United States defeated Aliaksandra Sasnovich of Belarus 7-6 (2), 7-5 and will next face compatriot Coco Gauff, the world No. 3. Veronika Kudermetova of Russia outlasted Barbora Krejicková 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 for a

second-round meeting with No. 4 Elena Rybakina. Kudermetova was a break down in the deciding set but fought back and took her first match point to prevail after 3 hours, 6 minutes - one of the longest ever matches in Stuttgart. Gauff, Sabalenka, Swiatek and Rybakina all received first-round byes. Eight of the top 10 women are at the tournament. Swiatek is bidding to become the first three-time champion in Stuttgart since Maria Sharapova won from 2012-14.

# Goal Palmer scores four in 6-0 demolition of dismal Everton

AP ■ LONDON  
Cole Palmer put on an unstoppable display with a perfect first-half hat trick and a fourth in the second half as Chelsea demolished Everton 6-0 in the English Premier League. Palmer scored with his left foot, head and right foot in the 13th, 19th and 29th minutes on Monday to become the first Chelsea player to score in seven successive home games. "It all happens so fast," Palmer told Sky Sports. "We started well and I scored another hat trick - buzzing. First one was my favorite, my right foot was a bit of a swinger." The Manchester City reject

stroked home a superb first from just outside the box and nodded in the second from close range after Jordan Pickford could only parry Nicolas Jackson's shot. His third was a wonderful 35-yard lob after Pickford needlessly gifted him possession. Nicolas Jackson added a fourth a minute before halftime, and Palmer made it 5-0 from the penalty spot in the 64th. Substitute Alfie Gilchrist's first goal for the club made it six in injury time. Palmer's goals took his season tally to 20 in the league, tied with Manchester City's Erling Haaland. The result extended a depressing few days for



Everton. Just hours before kickoff, the club lodged an appeal against a two-point deduction for a second breach of the Premier League financial rules. Everton was docked two points last week for overspending in a

three-year spell up to the end of the 2022-23 season. It was a second deduction this season for Everton, which had six points removed - reduced from 10 following an appeal - for breaching spending limits from 2019-20 to the 2021-22

season. "We've already agreed that's gone, we have to get on with it," Everton manager Sean Dyche said. "(The points deduction) is out of our control." Dyche described Monday as a "collective down day" and said his team was miles off the pace. "We can't perform like that at a place like this. The key moments when they got chances, finding the back of the net, we haven't done that all season." The Liverpool club sits in 16th place, only two points and two places above the relegation zone. After running its unbeaten streak to eight, Chelsea was in ninth place, only one point behind West Ham.



### Muddappa begins season with double victory

PTI ■ PUNE  
Multiple-time national champion Hemant Muddappa of Mantra Racing began the season with a double victory at the summer edition of the Valley Run 2024 at Ambay Valley here on Tuesday. Bengaluru's Muddappa was also adjudged as the fastest rider of the day. Muddappa, the 12-time national champion, punched above his weight as he won the unrestricted class with a 1000cc bike, the BMW S1000RRR, and managed to set a national record of 09.480 seconds for this category. He edged past seasoned rider Mohammed Riyaz from

Hyderabad. In the four stroke 851 to 1050cc Open class, Muddappa clocked 09.692s to take the second gold ahead of Riddhihi Patil of Mumbai but had to be content with a second place in the third category he took part. Astride a Dayatona, Riyaz won the 4-stroke 551 up to 850cc Open class in 10.421 seconds, pushing Muddappa's Kawasaki Ninja 6R to second place. The FMSCI event was scheduled to run concurrently with the first round of the Nationals, but since the MMSC event was postponed, Elite Octane and Sportcraft, the organisers of this race, successfully completed the 2024 edition.

### Australian aggression can be countered with better innovative passing: Rupinder Pal Singh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI  
The recent 0-5 drubbing notwithstanding, former drag-flick specialist Rupinder Pal Singh feels the Olympic-bound Indian men's hockey team can counter Australia's aggressive style of play with better defensive coordination and some innovative passing. India were blanked in the five-Test series in Perth some days ago, a disappointing outing for the team, which did reasonably well in the FIH Pro League before that and is expected to better or match its bronze from Tokyo Olympics at the Paris Games in July-August. Singh, who was part of the 2014 Asian Games gold-winning side, is not too concerned by the final result as he felt the team kept improving with every game. "We lost the first match 5-1, after that the team improved and the score-lines were close, we missed some chances, some work needs to be done prior to the Olympics. The series was a preparation for Paris Olympics, as new variations and players were tried out," he told PTI Videos. Asked how should the team counter Australia's attacking style of play, he said innovative passing could do the trick. "Australia's hard press can be countered, high level of coordination is required for that, defender-to-defender ball transfer, quick passes from defenders to the mid-field, overhead passes would be useful in countering such a style of play," the 33-year-old suggested. He sees no fault in India's reliance on penalty corners for scoring. "...All international teams, all are dependent on penalty corners - the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Australia. Defences have become stronger, here PC conversion is such an important tool that in every match about 1-2 goals have to be scored from them," he pointed out.



He described current India captain Harmanpreet Singh as one of the best drag-flickers in the world. He was, however, concerned about the penalty corner conversion rate of the women's team, which is seeking to rebuild itself after its stunning failure to qualify for the Olympics. "That's a worry (Penalty corner conversion), its penalty corner is an important tool in today's hockey we need to work on that," he said. Singh was speaking on the sidelines of a three-day training program organised by Hockey India. It was also attended by former India goalkeeper Yogita Bali, along with India goalkeepers Adrian D'Souza, Bharat Chetri, Helen Mary, Dipika Murty, Akash Chikte, and PT Rao. Apart from Singh, the other eminent former India drag-flickers who attended the training were Gurjinder Singh, VR Raghunath, and Jaspreet Kaur. The former stars have drawn up a curriculum on the basics

of drag-flicking and goalkeeper which would be implemented across all academies and centres in the country. **FUTURE BRIGHT FOR WOMEN'S HOCKEY:** Despite the Olympic heartbreak, women's hockey will do well, according to Bali, who picked Manipur's Bichu Devi Kharibam as the successor for long-serving goalkeeper Savita Punia. "In Bengaluru, we trained with top six goalkeepers of India, and I found Bichhu to be the best in India after Savita. She could be India's number one after Savita," Bali said. Bali said Indian women's hockey has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years. "Compared to when I started playing, there are a lot more facilities, now there are scientific advisors, nutrition experts to help the development of the players. "Earlier Indian Railways was the prominent employment provider for hockey players, now several departments are offering jobs, so things are going well," she said.

### Four titles in seven months, success of Kolkata Big Three will have huge impact: AIFF president

PTI ■ KOLKATA  
The success of Kolkata's 'Big Three' - Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting - will not just have a massive impact on state football but will also have a positive effect on the sport in the country, said All India Football Federation president Kalyan Chaubey on Tuesday. Seven months, four titles, and the 'Mecca of Indian football' was celebrating after Mohun Bagan's maiden League Winners Shield triumph following their 2-1 win over Mumbai City FC at the packed Salt Lake Stadium here on Monday. "Bringing home the ISL Shield, I-League Trophy, Super Cup and Durand Cup to West Bengal is a sign of new-age football in the state, and adaptability of these clubs to the newer norms of

football," Chaubey told PTI. "The three giants of Kolkata enjoy enormous fan support in West Bengal, India and globally. I'm sure the success of MB and EB, along with Mohammedan Sporting joining the two in ISL next season, will have a massive impact on Indian football." It all began with Mohun Bagan starting the season with their first Durand Cup title in 23 years, defeating arch-rivals East Bengal 1-0 on September 3 last year. East Bengal made amends to win the Super Cup, beating Odisha FC 3-2 in Bhubaneswar on January 29. It marked the end of their 12-year trophy drought. Having faced multiple relegation, Mohammedan Sporting came back from oblivion to defeat Shillong Lajong FC 2-1 earlier this month to win the I-League with a round to spare and



confirm their promotion to ISL. Mohun Bagan then went on to lift the ISL Shield in front of a record 61,000-plus home crowd at the Salt Lake Stadium. The Green and Maroon brigade will now aim to finish season by lifting the ISL Trophy, which would be a 'High

Five' for the Maidan 'Big Three'. Mohun Bagan is the oldest club in India, having been established in 1889, while Mohammedan Sporting came into existence two years later in 1891. East Bengal (established in 1920) also recently celebrated their centenary year. "They are the 'Big Three' of Kolkata football. With historic milestones and to have ruled Indian football for decades, the three have centuries-old football culture and I'm just glad that they have all come around once again to help the city earn the bragging rights," he said. "It's a remarkable year for Kolkata football to bring home four titles this season." "Millions of football fans, having their loyalties to these Big Three, have joined in to reverberate Kolkata's legacy," he added.

# Paris bound Olympians look forward to a post COVID Games with fans in stands

AP ■ NEW YORK  
The biggest races, routines and games for many of this generation's Olympic athletes were contested in front of mostly empty stands, largely devoid of coaches to help them out or friends and family to cheer them on. That was three years ago at the COVID-19 Summer Olympics and two years ago at the COVID-19 Winter Olympics. Now that they're preparing for the Paris Olympics that begin in July - and a return to something that feels normal - the Americans heading back to the Games know they can never take for granted the screaming fans and a hug from Mom or Dad. "I think it's super important to be able to share these massive moments with people you care about," said BMX rider Alise Willoughby, who has been to the last three Olympics. Willoughby and about 100 other U.S. Athletes are doing interviews and photo shoots this week at the Team USA media summit at a hotel in

Times Square - an event that itself was made impossible in the lead-up to the Tokyo Games in 2021 amid the coronavirus pandemic. One topic of conversation this week is how grateful the bikers, rowers, gymnasts and the rest are to be past the days of contact tracing, quarantines and daily swabbing or spitting for COVID-19 tests inside the so-called Olympic bubble. In Paris, there will be celebrations with relatives and one-on-one contact with coaches, most of whom were not allowed into the venues three years ago. The USA House - a traditional stop for athletes to wind down and kick back, especially after they're done competing - will be doing brisk business once again. Mostly, athletes are looking forward to the chance to soak in the feeling from the crowd, an element sorely missing in the cavernous and largely unfilled venues in Tokyo. "I'll be able to see the audience's emotions. I want to build that with them and I can tailor my routines to



that," said American rhythmic gymnast Evita Griskenas, who plans French music to accompany one routine and "All-American" number for another, all with the goal of getting fans caught up in the moment. Griskenas said she already feels a different vibe. Preparing for the Olympics in Tokyo - Games that were initially delayed by a year, then held in an atmosphere nobody quite recognized - became a largely solitary, and joyless, affair. "It turned into training in my basement and throwing things outside," she said. This year, a different

experience awaits, and some athletes are even looking forward to a crowd rooting against them because, hey, at least it's a crowd. "The boys have been saying, 'We want to play France in, like, the semifinals,'" rugby player Perry Baker said. "You just visualize how big that can be, and how fun that can be. Their crowd. Our crowd. We live for those moments." With crowds, naturally, come other issues that were mostly set on the sideline in 2021. On Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron said the much-touted opening ceremony scheduled for the Seine River could be

moved to the Stade de France if the security threat is deemed too high. Asked what she thought of that possibility, Nicole Deal, the chief of security for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, said other than her main goal - athlete safety - she wants to provide the best experience for the athletes. "Security is an underpinning and a foundation. We're not the main show," Deal said. With two of the next five Olympics set to come to the U.S. - Los Angeles hosts in 2028 and Salt Lake City is a virtual lock for the Winter Games in 2034 - Olympic leaders know there's a lot riding on Paris. This return to "normal," they hope, will bring more Americans back to watching the Olympics in person, online and on TV. Prime-time ratings in Tokyo were 42% lower than the previous Summer Games, in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, and 50% below the Games before that, in London in 2012. There were a number of reasons for that - including the increasingly fragmented

### Beijing half marathon results under investigation after runners appear to hand win to Chinese star

AP ■ BANGKOK  
Organisers are investigating a half marathon race in Beijing after three African runners appeared to let China's top long-distance runner move ahead of them shortly before the finish line and sprint to victory, sparking public speculation that the result was rigged. There was a flood of public reaction online expressing suspicion about the race after video from the final moments of Sunday's Mengniu Beijing Half Marathon circulated online. On Monday, organizers of the race issued a statement saying they would investigate the results. "The organising committee attaches great importance to the issue raised by netizens about the results of the (race)," organisers said. "A special investigation team has been set up to conduct an investigation, and the results of the investigation will be released to the public in a timely fashion." The Beijing Sports Bureau, which was in charge of the race, did not respond to a

request for comment. He Jie, who won the marathon at the Asian Games and holds the Chinese national record in the event, was trailing behind three runners from Kenya and Ethiopia as they approached the finish line. One of the runners then seems to gesture for the others to slow down as He moves in front and sprints to the finish line. One of the other runners, Willy Mnangat of Kenya, told BBC Sport Africa that they allowed He to win but that they had been hired to serve as pacemakers and were not competing to win the race. However, all three had entered the race as official competitors rather than as pacemakers. "I was not there to compete," Mnangat was quoted as saying. "My job was to set the pace and help the guy win but unfortunately, he did not achieve the target, which was to break the national record." He finished with a time of 1 hour, 3 minutes, 44 seconds, which was more than a minute slower than the Chinese half marathon record.

