**OPINION 6** 

IGNORING NEIGHBOURS TO

**WORLD 8** 

SUNAK FACES RESISTANCE OVER

DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR

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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 Siliguri on Tuesday

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA** ■ KOLKATA

engal 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

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 before Muslims 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 processions," he said

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

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 allowed Tuesday celebrations of Ram Navami at the campus even as sources said "if Saraswati Puja can be organised why Ram Navami cannot be celebrated here."

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.

# Chattisgarh encounter leaves 29 Naxals dead

t least 29 Naxalites were Akilled in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district on Tuesday, police officials

Three security personnel suffered injuries in the fierce gun-battle and a large quantity of weapons was also recovered from the spot, they

The gunfight took place at around 2 pm in Hapatola forest between Binagunda and Koronar villages under Chhotebethiya 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

The search operation was still underway in the area amid intermittent firing between security personnel and Naxalites, said Sundarraj.

elections on April 26.

"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



Ranian Dimri / The Pioneer

### Congress leads in complaints to EC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

mid allegations by Amu allegations

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

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 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 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, Iharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, as they were holding charge of General Administration department also. This was to distance election related senior officers control DMs/DEOs/ROs and SPs,

from Chief Minister's offices.

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE** LUCKNOW

Tn 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 rposes, 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 Bhaiya, 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

The Department of Rural Development



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 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 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

## MNREGA workers turn into political campaigners | 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 top leaders who are in jail, including the Chief Minister as the star campaigner for the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls, in apparent push to its 'Jail ka Jawab Vote Se' campaign. AAP leader and a Ràjya

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 Punjab Kejriwal, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Raghav Chadha, Isudan Atishi, Saurabh Gadhvi.



Bharadwaj, Pankaj Gupta, Gopal Rai, Kailash Gahlot, Imran Hussain and Alpesh Kathiriya. However, names of Rajya 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.

# 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 conduced 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

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 Civil Examination 2023.

remarkable, characterised by his stint in the corporate world before pursuing civil services, reflecting resilience and dedication.

Services Hailing from Lucknow, Srivastava's journey has been

Joining Srivastava in this remarkable achievement are Animesh Pradhan from Odisha, a Bachelor of Technology degree holder in computer science from NIT

Donuru Ananya Reddy, a graduate from Delhi University's Miranda House College with a degree in geography, securing the second and third ranks respectively.

Soon after the results were announced, congratulated those who cleared the examination, emphasising their hard work, perseverance, and dedication. I congratulate all those who have successfully cleared the Civil Services Examination, 2023. Their hard work, perseverance and dedication has paid off, marking the start of a promising career in public service. Their efforts will shape the future of our

nation in the times to come.



(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 Rourkela, and Telangana My best wishes to them," the

Gandhi too joined 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

Prime Minister wrote on X

Senior Congress leader Rahul

(previously Twitter).

endeavours? the Among 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

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,

secured the fourth rank with

there are 10 women and 15 men, reflecting a diverse educational backgrounds, including humanities, engineering, 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 dīsabilities, benchmark

UPSC's

reflecting the

commitment to inclusivity.



# Jamshedpur students shine in UPSC Civil Services examination



#### Loyola School's Ritwik scores 520 rank

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

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 degree Jamshedpur Women's College. With her achievement, she is now poised to become an IAS officer, fulfilling her aspirations through

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

hard work and determination.

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 University, where he pursued a degree in Geography. With diligent preparation, Ritwik managed to crack the UPSC examination, showcasing his

determination and academic

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

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 commu-

of civil services.

#### 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, Čhief Medical



Varghese administered the oath to the first-year GNM students. Cultural programs were also presented by the students on this The event was attended by Dr. Shravan 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

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

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 Understanding (MOU) to fos-

ter 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 enhance training and placement opportunities for students. Representatives from 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

alongside their counterparts 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

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



#### **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

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 She has just maintained

herself to be 14 years old only. Police have invoked sections of the IPC and pocso 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 alle-

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 cnarges and voting is just lev 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 Praskash 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 lasttances of 3.5 km and 5 km, ing connections among parunderscores the event's com-

ticipants. 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 dismitment to physical and mental well-being, with Tata Steel Adventure providing support. Rotary President Amrita Vakharia, along Preeti Khara,

Secretary DRRC Simran Sagoo, Deepak Dokania, and Secretary Shanawaz Tasheen, are at the helm, spearheading efforts to ensure the success of District RYLA 2024. With support from RYLA Chair Krishna Kharia, Amit. Gaurav Rungta, and Rotaract Crew President Social Fahada, the event promises to be a testament to collaborative leadership and com-

#### Mobile Van Passport Service launched at Bistupur Post Office

PNS: JAMSHEDPUR

In a bid to streamline and expedite the passport issuance process van service has been inaugurated at the Passport Seva Kendra in Jamshedpur, starting from Monday. However, due to initial lack of awareness, only six applicants availed of the service on the

inaugural day.

According to the Regional
Passport Office in Ranchi, with increased awareness about the availability of the mobile van service, it is anticipated that the number of bookings will rise, and the service will be able to process passports for up to 40 applicants daily. This initiative aims to alleviate the wait time for passport issuance, providing a much-needed solution the residents of Jamshedpur. The mobile van, functioning as a miniature



passport office, has been strategically stationed at the Post Office Passport Seva Kendra in Bistupur. Equipped with necessary facilities and personnel, the van offers a convenient alternative for passport applicants to complete the application process. Applicants can schedule

an appointment for the mobile van service through the online portal and submit their passport applications at the designated time and date. With this initiative, the capacity of the Passport Ševa Kendra in Jamshedpur has been augmented from processing 100 passports to 140 passports daily, ensuring a more efficient and accessible passport issuance service for the local community.

As awareness spreads and more individuals avail of this mobile van service, it is expected to significantly contribute to reducing the backlog of passport applications and enhancing the overall efficiency of the passport issuance

#### 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 bouncing. Regarding this, a meet-



ing 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 Ajju Kachhap in the presence of Electricityrelated 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 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

Tiwari commended the

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

meeting in Bokaro witnessed a notable gathering of BJPs 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.

The Bokaro Sector 5 Power Center

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 leadup 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

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

#### Police hold flag march ahead of Ram Navmi in 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









**RANCHI I WEDNESDAY I APRIL 17, 2024** 

# Cong announces candidates for Chatra, Dhanbaad and Godda

 $BJ\bar{P}$  MP Nishikant Dubey to face Congress candidate Deepika Pandey Singh

he Congress on Tuesday announced the names of candidates for three more Sabha constituencies Godda, Chatra and Dhanbad.

Mahgama 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.

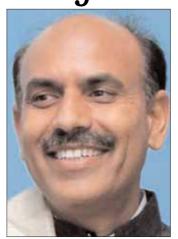
It had announced the names of three candidates - Kalicharan Munda, Sukhdeo Bhagat and Jai Prakashbhai Patel on March 27 for Khunti (ST), Lohardaga (ST)



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



verbal spats. Singh often raises questions about Dubey's educa-tional qualification, while Dubey confronts her on the issue of cor-

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 sig-

Ranchi Police are on high

alert regarding Ram Navami to prevent any untoward inci-

dent 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, Hindpiri

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

Hindpiri and Daily Market

area. Police have sent notices

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 account-

able. 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 distur-

Kotwali DySP said that the

to all eight house owners.

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

Ranchi Police on high

alert for Ram Navami

Police personnel conduct flag march

on Tuesday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

strict action will be taken

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

in the traffic system in the city

due to the immersion of Chaiti

Durga Puja and Ram Navami.

The changes made in the traf-

fic system are in effect from 4

Changes have been made

local police station.

there, he added.

ahead of Ram Navami festival in Ranchi

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 ous 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.

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 peri-

od, normal operations will be

prohibited from Kishori Yadav

Chowk to Upper Bazaar,

Bazaar,

Chowk,

Chowk towards Upper Bazaar

Mahavir Mandir Chowk due

to the Ram Navami proces-

Mahavir Mandir

Shaheed Chowk

endeavors, they have successfully uncovered more than a IEDs, thwarting potential threats and safeguarding the lives of civilians and security personnel alike.

"This latest development represents a critical blow to Naxal insurgency," emphasized the official. 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

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

Life Savers call for

**Advisory and Review** 

Hemoalobinopathies

The Life Savers has written to the Principal Secretary,

Department of Health & Family Welfare, Government

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

ment and Daycare centres has been constituted with

the objective of reviewing the program, performance

identifying operational constraints and ensuring cor-

rective operational steps to improve the work and to

make comprehensive and Holistic approach towards

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 effec-

tive 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 opera-

tional, medicines not being provided to the children

and many other issues which need immediate atten-

tion and action. An urgent meeting on this is needed

the meaningful prevention, Care and Cure for the

Sickle Cell Disease and other Hemoglobinopathy treat-

of Jharkhand to call for a meeting of the State

Advisory and Review Committee for

meeting of State

Committee for

PNS: RANCHI

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

#### **Frustrated INDI Alliance** plotting to assassinate PM: BJP BJP furious over JMM leader Nazrul Islam's statement on PM

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

Bharatiya Janata Party State

Islam in Sahibganj, showing his distorted mentality and Jihadi thinking, has threat-ened 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 provok-

ing the public Pratul said that it is very and unfortunate that Nazrul Islam has not been arrested

State BJP Spokesperson Pratul Shadeo along with Media in-charge Shiv pujan 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

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 assassina-tion, 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.

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

NITYANAND

Success knocked the door of the Garhwa, Shekhar Jamuar, on Tuesday, when his daughter Sakshi Jamuar secured 89th rank in the UPSC Civil service examination 2024. Twentyfour-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

and happiness Commissioner,

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 revisiing. 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 inspira-

tion is my father. Since childhood I have seen him working hard. He continues to inspire others with his achieve-ments." 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

# **CEO unveils various voter awareness items for LS Polls 2024**

Chowk,

towards

Mahavir

Subhash

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

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

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 elec-Also, it has been said that should build the country. In

Commission of India for this Lok Sabha election is 'Celebration of elections

film 'Ud Chali' made by

tions and each vote has been explained among the people. before building a family, one this film, emphasis has been laid on celebrating elections as a festival and participat-

ing in voting with the entire The slogan of the Election 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, name-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 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, vouth and disabled people and inspires them to partici-

pate 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

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 Office 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 incharge 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 stu-dents, 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 guiz, 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 Abhistha 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.

# BJP releases fresh list of seven more candidates for Lok Sabha polls

The BJP on Tuesday released the 12th list of seven more candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, fielding Udayanraje Bhosale, a descendant of Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji, from Satara in Maharashtra and Abhijit Das Bobby as the candidate for the Diamond Harbour con-stituency in West Bengal. The BJP dropped Union Minister Som Parkash from Hoshiarpur in Punjab but decided to field his wife Anita Som Parkash to keep the influential local leader's support intact. With the new list, the party has named its candidates for around 430 seats for the polls to 543 seats starting from April

focused on Maharashtra, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal seats. The party also released its second list of 21 candidates for the Odisha assembly polls, fielding former minister Dilip Ray from

Rourkela. The BJP has fielded Abhijit Das Bobby from Diamond Harbour Parliamentary constituency in West Bengal against Trinamool Congress candidate Abhishek Banerjee, nephew of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.Diamond Harbour has been Abhishek Banerjee's stronghold since 2014. Previously known as Hajipur, its name was changed to its name was changed to Diamond Harbour by the British. According to the 2011 census, the population of this

which is part of the South 24 Parganas district, is 2,221,470. Among these, 49.07% live in villages and 50.93% are urban dwellers. The proportion of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes among them is 20.63% and 0.18% respectively. There are seven Assembly seats under Diamond Harbour, including Falta, Satgachhia, Bishnupur, Maheshtala, Budge Budge, Metiabruz and Diamond Harbour. It is among the keenly watched match-ups with the BJP's Das squaring off against the incumbent TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee. In both the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Banerjee won with huge vote margins, proving his popularity and influence in



the seat. In 2019, he beat his nearest rival by a staggering margin of 3.20 lakh votes. Bhosale is the 17th holder of the title of Chhatrapati which was founded by the Maratha emperor Chhatrapati Shivaji on his coronation in 1674. In 2019, Bhosale was elected to the Lok Sabha from Satara on an NCP ticket.

In Uttar Pradesh, the party has

Firozabad and Shashank Mani Tripathi from Deoria, dropping its sitting MPs from the two

The party fielded Anita Som Parkash from the Hoshiarpur reserve parliamentary constituency, according to the list of candidates. Anita thanked the party leadership for entrustthe party leadership for entrusting her with the responsibility. The BJP won the seat in the 2014 and 2019 polls. The party's Vijay Sampla had won it in 2014 while Som Parkash had defeated Congress nominee Raj Kumar Chabbewal in 2019. Hoshiarpur is one of the three seats which BJP had been fighting when it was in alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal. But the saffron party is fighting the 2024 Lok Sabha polls on

face AAP nominee Raj Kumar Chabbewal in the coming polls. The Congress and the SAD are yet to name their candidates from Hoshiarpur.

As expected, the BJP fielded former IAS officer Parampal Kaur Sidhu from Bathinda parliamentary seat, currently held by SAD MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal. Sidhu is the daughter-in-law of senior Akali leader Sinkander Singh Maluka. She recently joined the BJP along with her husband Gurpreet Singh Maluka in Delhi.

Before joining the saffron party, Sidhu, a 2011-batch IAS officer, had put in her papers. She is pitted against Congress candidate Jeet Mohinder Sidhu and AAP's Gurmeet Singh Khudian. The Shiromani Akali

The Bathinda seat is considered

a SAD stronghold. Harsimrat won the Bathinda seat in 2009, 2014 and 2019. In the last Lok Sabha polls, she had defeated Congress candidate Amrinder Singh Raja Warring. The BJP fielded former MLA from Baba Bakala seat Manjit Singh Manna Mianwind from the Khadoor Sahib Lok Sabha seat. Khadoor Sahib seat is currently held by Congress MP Jasbir Singh. The AAP has fielded Laljit Singh Bhullar from this seat.

The electoral process spans from April 19 to June 1, 2024, across seven phases, with results slated for June 4, ahead of the 17th Lok Sabha's term conclusion on June 16, 2024.

## West Asia: Airlines told to make risk assessment for flights

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI** 

mid escalating tensions in Athe Middle East, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has asked airlines to carry out their own risk assessment on international flight operations. Air India, Vistara, IndiGo and various international airlines have opted for alternative flight paths to the West and are avoiding the Iranian airspace against the backdrop of tensions flaring up between Iran and Israel.

Civil Aviation Secretary Vumlunmang Vualnam on Tuesday said that airlines have been asked to make their own risk assessment with respect to their flight operations. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is handholding and interacting with the airlines, and also in touch with the external affairs ministry, he added.

The secretary was responding to a query on whether there is an advisory by the ministry or the DGCA to airlines amid the crisis in the Middle East.

Air India is operating some of its international flights on alternative flight paths to and from India, and Vistara has also made changes to flight paths for some of its flights due to the Middle East situation.



Also, Air India has temporarily suspended its flights to Tel The alternative flight paths have increased the duration of some of the international flights by around half an hour. About the Middle East crisis, Suprio Banerjee, Vice President & Sector Head, Corporate Ratings at ICRA, said commercial airlines may have to take a longer route in order to comply with no-fly regulations, leading to higher fuel expenses. "This will also impact international air travel to the directly affected and potentially affected nearby geographies during the upcoming summer holiday season if the issue persists," Banerjee said.

Manan Bajoria, Group VP Growth at travel portal ixigo, said re-routing of flights due to the current geopolitical tensions can result in longer routes and higher expenses for airlines that run flights to and from Europe, Middle East, and Southeast Asia. "Lengthy diversions will add to airline fuel costs and may lead to an increase in airfares across these routes," Bajoria said.

Banerjee also said the ongoing geopolitical developments in the Middle East region will continue to exert pressure on crude oil prices and, in turn, on ATF prices, which have been on an elevated level compared to the pre-Covid era. During the weekend, Iran

launched dozens of drones and missiles at Israel in a retaliatorv attack. On Monday, Israel said it will respond to Iran's

#### Court upheld Centre decision to dissolve Maulana Azad Education Foundation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI** 

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday upheld the Centre's decision to dissolve the Maulana Azad Education Foundation (MAEF), which was set up in 1989 for promoting education among educationally backward minorities, holding there was no impropriety or irregularity in arriving at it.

A bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Manmohan dis-missed a PIL by Syeda Saiyidain Hamed, John Daya and Daya Singh and said several welfare programmes for the minority communities are being carried out devotedly by the Ministry of Minority Affairs and it could not be said that the interest of the minority communities was being hampered due to the dissolution. Maintaining that the decision to dissolve the MAEF was "well considered" and in accordance with the legal framework, the said it cannot sit in appeal and examine the appropriateness of a policy of the government. "The decision to dissolve the

MAEF has been duly taken by the General Body of the MAEF and this court finds no impropriety or irregularity in the process adopted by the



at the said decision," the bench, also comprising Justice Mini Pushkarna, said.

'This Court finds no merit in the present petition and is not inclined to interfere in the considered decision taken by the respondents. Accordingly, the present petition is dismissed," the court said.

petitioners approached the high court against the February 7 order of the Ministry of Minority Affairs which instructed the MAEF to carry out the closure process at the earliest and submit copy of the closure certificate issued by the Registrar of Societies of the Delhi government on completion of all procedures, as per extant laws. The Centre had defended its decision in the court, saying

MAEF has become "obsolete' when there is a dedicated ministry holistically executing schemes for the benefit of the minorities.

The ministry's order was issued in reference to a proposal received from the Central Waqf Council (CWC) on January 21 to close the

The court had reserved its verdict on the PIL on March 13 after hearing both the sides. The petitioners had said in their PIL that the ministry's order not only deprived the deserving students, especially girls, from availing the benefits of the schemes of the MAEF but is also without jurisdiction, completely malafide, arbitrary and a colourable exercise by author-

#### President expresses happiness at 60 per cent IES officers in 2022, 2023 batches being women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday expressed happiness that more than 60 per cent of the Indian Economic Service (IES) officers from the 2022 and 2023 batches were women and urged them to champion initiatives that foster the holistic empowerment of women across the States while ensuring inclusive development of the country.

"Increasing participation of women will help in fulfilling the resolve of inclusive development of India," she said, calling it a significant achievement that reflects a positive trend towards greater gender diversity and inclusivity in the workforce.She was addressing a group of pro-bationers of the Indian Economic Service (2022 and 2023 batches), who had called on her at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here.

Murmu said that economic growth is an important component in the country's devel-"Macro and micro opment. economic indicators are considered useful parameters of progress. Therefore, the role of economists is important in making government policies and schemes effective and useful," she added. Murmu told officers that as India is moving towards becoming the third

largest economy in the world, they will get countless opportunities in the times to come to enhance their capabilities and utilise them to the fullest. She expressed confidence that they will make a significant contribution to the development of

the country by taking proper advantage of these opportunities. The president urged the young officers to keep in mind the interest of the poor and backward sections of the country while giving policy related suggestions or taking any decision in their workplace, a statement issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan said. Murmu said that economic ser-

vice officers are expected to provide appropriate advice for economic analysis and design of development programmes as well as for strengthening the resource distribution system and evaluating schemes.

#### Viral hepatitis second leading infectious cause of death worldwide, says WHO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

With 1.3 million deaths annually, viral hepatitis stands as the second leading infectious cause of death worldwide, trailing only tuberculosis. Hepatitis B is responsible for 83 per cent of these deaths, with hepatitis C accounting for the remaining 17 per cent, according to the World Health Organization's 2024 Global Hepatitis Report released recently.

Despite advancements in diagnostic tools and treatments, coverage rates for testing and treatment have stalled. However, achieving the WHO's elimination goal by 2030 remains feasible with urgent action, as per the report which reveals that there are 254 million people who are afflicted with hepatitis B, and 50 million with hepatitis C in 2022.

"Half of the burden is among people aged 30-54, with 12 per cent among children under 18. Men constitute 58 per cent of all cases. New infections have slightly decreased, with 2.2 million new cases in 2022, down from 2.5 million in 2019." However, what is a matter of concern is that diagnosis and treatment coverage rates are far below the global targets for both hepatitis B and C.

Data shows that only 13 per cent of people with chronic hepatitis B and 36 per cent with hepatitis C have been diagnosed. "Treatment rates are even lower, with only 3% receiving antiviral therapy for hepatitis B and 20% receiving curative treatment for hepatitis C," says the report, attributing the low rates to disparities in pricing and service delivery. The report said that many countries fail to procure affordable generic medicines, leading to pricing disparities. "Service delivery remains centralized and vertical, with out-of-pocket expenses for many affected



This report paints a troubling

picture: despite progress glob-ally in preventing hepatitis infections, deaths are rising because far too few people with hepatitis are being diagnosed and treated," said WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "WHO is committed to supporting countries to use all the tools at their disposal - at access prices - to save lives and turn this trend around."

New incidence estimates indicate a slight decrease compared to 2019, but the overall incidence of viral hepatitis remains high. In 2022, there were 2.2 million new infections, down from 2.5 million in 2019. These include 1.2 million new

hepatitis B infections and near-1 million new hepatitis C infections. More than 6000 people are getting newly infected with viral hepatitis each day. The revised estimates are derived from enhanced data from national prevalence surveys. They also indicate that prevention measures such as immunization and safe injections, along with the expansion of hepatitis C treatment, have contributed to reducing the

incidence Across all regions, only 13% of people living with chronic hepatitis B infection had been diagnosed and approximately 3% (7 million) had received antiviral therapy at the end of 2022. Regarding hepatitis C, 36% had been diagnosed and 20% (12.5 million) had received curative treatment.



piece" of evidence and it may be used as a corroborative piece of evidence in tandem with substantive evidence, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday while acquitting a man who was convicted in a 1998 murder case.

The apex court allowed an appeal filed by the man challenging the verdict of the Punjab and Haryana High Court which had affirmed the trial court's May 1999 order convicting and sentencing him to life imprisonment.

The prosecution alleged that

the appellant had in June 1998 murdered a man at a cinema involved in illicit relations with

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Sandeep Mehta noted that the prosecution's case was primarily based on the testimonies of two witnesses -- the victim's brother and another person who claimed that the accused had made a confession before him.

Referring to the evidence in the case, the bench said both these witnesses fall within the category of "wholly unreliable witnesses" and it would be unsafe to place reliance on their evi-



dence so as to affirm the guilt of the accused

Dealing with the purported extrajudicial confession made

by one of the witnesses, the bench said it was contradicted by the evidence of another prosecution witness.

confession by its very nature is It said there cannot be any a weak piece of evidence. It may doubt that the victim's brother piece of evidence in tandem with substantive evidence," the bench said.

"In wake of the discussion made above (in the judgement), we have no hesitation in holding that the prosecution failed to bring home the charge and establish the guilt of the accused appellant beyond reasonable doubt," it said.

The bench noted that the incident had taken place around 11:30 am. And the victim's brother had admitted in his cross-examination that the body was lifted from the spot

first blush that the deceased had expired as a result of a knife

"The natural reaction expected from a brother in such a situation would have been to take immediate steps for taking the victim to the hospital so as to save his life," it said, adding the victim's brother did not make any such attempt, and in this background, his presence at the crime scene was doubtful. The apex court, which quashed the verdicts of the high court and the trial court, acquitted the appellant.

## INS Talwar seizes 940 kg of contraband narcotics: Navy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ **NEW DELHI** 

**▼**ndian Naval ship INS Talwar, **⊥** mission deployed in Western Arabian Sea for Maritime Security Operations as part of Force(CTF)150 led Focussed

Operation Crimson Barracuda successfully apprehended a suspicious dhow on April 13 and seized 940 kg of contraband narcotics, navy said here on Tuesday. Giving details, officials said the

ship's specialist boarding teams and MARCOs seized 940 kgs of contraband narcotics. The drugs are being disposed off as per CMF SOPs. The seized drugs included 453

kg of methamphetamines, 416 kg of hash and 71 kg of heroin from a dhow as part of Focused Operation Crimson Barracuda. The Indian Navy joined CMF last November.

I commend the crew of INS Talwar for their efforts throughout this Focused Operation and their hard work has paid off with this seizure of 940 kg of drugs," said Royal Canadian Navy Capt. Colin

Matthews, Commander,



"This seizure, the fourth of this Focused Operation, demon-

strates the effectiveness and professionalism of CMF, and of the Indian Navy, in deterring and disrupting criminal and terrorist activities at sea." Crimson Barracuda, which concluded on April 15, focused on countering terrorist and criminal organizations' use of the high seas to conduct smuggling operations in the Western Indian Ocean region.

CTF 150 is one of five task forces under Combined Maritime Forces, the world's largest international naval partnership. CTF 150's mission is to

non-state actors to move weapons, drugs and other illicit substances in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman.

Combined Maritime Forces is a 42-nation naval partnership upholding the international rules-based order by promoting security and stability across 3.2 million square miles of water encompassing some of the world's most important shipping lanes.

Relentless efforts of Indian Navy as a CMF partner reaffirms its commitment towards ensuring a drug free neigh-

### EC bars Surjewala for 48 hours for derogatory remarks against Hema Malini

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

The Election Commission I on Tuesday barred Congress leader Randeep Surjewala from campaigning for 48 hours over his alleged derogatory remarks against BJP MP Hema Malini.

This is the first campaign ban imposed by the poll body in this Lok Sabha election cycle. The Election Commission last Tuesday issued a show-cause notice to Surjewala for his alleged "undignified, uncivilised and vulgar" remarks against Malini.

The poll body said it has carefully gone through the contents and averments made in the reply of Surjewala.

"The commission without prejudice to any order/notice issued or to be issued subsequently to him in the matter relating to MCC violations, hereby, strongly condemns the impugned statement made by him during the election campaign held in Haryana and reprimands Randeep Surjewala



watchdog said. The commission, under Article

324 of the Constitution and all other powers enabling in this behalf, bars Surjewala from holding any public meetings, public processions, public rallies, road shows and interviews, public utterances in media (electronic, print, social media) etc. In connection with ongoing elections for 48 hours from 6 pm on April 16, it said. In its notice to Surjewala, the EC had said that on careful examination, the comments were found to be "highly undignified, vulgar and uncivilised" and to be prima facie violative of the provisions of the MCC and the poll panel's advisory issued to parties last

#### **Oldest IAF pilot** dies at 103



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

ndian Air Force (IAF)'s oldest living pilot Squadron Leader Dalip Singh Majithia died at the age of 103 at his farm in Rudrapur, Uttrakhand on Monday. His wife Joan Sanders Majithia passed away in 2021 at the age of 100. The couple is survived by two daughters. Majithia was born in Shimla on

July 27, 1920 and joined the IAF volunteer reserve in 1940 during World War-II. He joined the 4th Pilot's Course at the Initial Training School (ITA) in Walton, Lahore, in August 1940 and three months later awarded the best pilot trophy. He was then posted to the No. 1 Flying Training School in Ambala to continue advanced flying training. After serving in various capacities, he retired from the IAF in 1947.

# Contribute fully in 400 seats goal: PM to Bengal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi resumed bie resumed 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

"Come June 4, and Bengal has decided to help the BJP

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 Chief 200 km away at Jalpaiguri said "let them cry hoarse for 400seats ... but they will not get more than 200 this time round," wondering "if they are so confident of getting 400

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



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

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 operations.

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

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 Laxmir 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

 $T^{\text{he Aam Aadmi Party on}}_{\text{Tuesday announced its}}$  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

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 assembly constituency in the Jalandhar district in 2012 and 2017. He lost the 2022 assembly polls to nominee Sukhwinder Kotli. He had

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

2014 Lok Sabha elections.

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

Lok Sabha seat. AAP showed its faith in Batala from the Gurdaspur seat, currently represented by BJP's

SAD are yet to announce their

candidates from the Ferozepur

Sunny Deol. Kalsi became MLA from Batala by defeating Congress' Ashwani Sekhri in the 2022

assembly polls.

Kalsi is pitted against BJP candidate Dinesh Babbu and SAD's Daljit Singh Cheema.

The Congress is yet to name its candidate from the Gurdaspur seat. From Ludhiana seat, AAP has

fielded Ludhiana Central MLA

He will face three-time MP Ravneet Singh Bittu, who is now the BJP candidate. Bittu had quit the Congress and joined the BJP. The Shiromani Akali Dal and the Congress are yet to name their candidates from Ludhiana.

AAP has already fielded five Cabinet ministers' - Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer from Sangrur, Kuldeep Dhaliwal from Amritsar, Balbir Singh from Patiala, Gurmeet Singh Khuddian from Bathinda and Laljit Bhullar from Khadoor Sahib.

It has Raj Kumar Chabbewal from Hoshiarpur and Gurpreet Singh GP from Fatehgarh

The party has also fielded Punjabi actor Karamjit Anmol from Faridkot and state unit chief spokesperson Malvinder Kang Singh from Anandpur Sahib seat.

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

Pamajwadi Party leader Harendra Singh Malik, who is contesting the Lok Sabha election from Muzaffarnagar as INDIA bloc nominee, said the RLD aligning with the BJP will not have any poll impact in the constituency. The former Rajya Sabha

member is pitted against BJP's Sanjeev Balyan, whom he described as an "accidental leader". Both Malik and Balyan belong to the influential Jat community of western Uttar Pradesh. Balyan won from Muzaffarnagar in 2014 and 2019 and served as Union minister in the Narendra Modi-led government.

In the run-up to the polls, the

Jayant Chaudhary-led 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"



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



cases have not been withdrawn till date, leading to angst in the community against the BJP. 'Maybe Jayant Chaudhary has aligned with the BJP, and it's a political situation where he

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

#### SP's Dimple files nomination from Mainpuri seat ister of Delhi to jail? Jharkhand chief minter also used the occasion to hit out at the

PTI ■ MAINPURI (UP)

Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Dimple Yadav filed her nomination papers from the Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat here on Tuesday.

The sitting Mainpuri MP was accompanied by SP chief and her husband Akhilesh Yadav, and senior party leaders

Talking to media persons later, the SP chief exuded confidence that Dimple Yadav would win from this seat by record

"Mainpuri has always made SP win by record votes and this time too it is going to make Dimple Yadav and the SP win by record votes," he said. The former Uttar Pradesh chief minis-

ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "BJP is a party which tells lies, all its promises are lies. MPs are not able to tell about their achievements," he said, adding the manner in which inflation is at its peak and there is unemployment, people are fed up of all this and are going to vote against them.

the government is wiped away," he said. When asked about the prospects of the ruling party which is claiming victory on all the 80 Lok Sabha seats, he said, "BJP faces challenge on all 80 seats. There is a contest only on one seat. On all the remaining seats, it is going to lose." Replying to a question on electoral bonds, he said it is extortion not dona-

have hiked the prices. Such corruption had never taken place earlier, the SP chief said, adding that BJP candidate from Mainpuri Jaiveer Singh has already accepted defeat.

He said that those who are talking about crossing the 400 mark are going to lose this time.

"If they were going to cross the 400 mark, what was the need to send the chief mincases and conspiracy," Yadav said.
"Why would those who are dreaming of crossing 400 send leaders to jail, would they have needed to put the Income Tax

ister was also sent to jail through false

to CBI and ED in the forefront. The public is waiting and will answer them through votes," he added.

wiped out from the entire country, including Uttar Pradesh.

Polling in Mainpuri will be held in the third round of the seven-phase Lok Sabha

elections on May 7.
Dimple Yadav won Mainpuri seat in the 2022 Lok Sabha bypoll after it was vacated following the death of SP patriarch and her father-in-law Mulayam Singh Yaday.

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

PTI ■ TUMAKURU (KARNATAKA)

 $T_{approached\ the\ Election}^{he\ JD(S)\ on\ Tuesday}$  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 conducted with 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

"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

#### 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 offi-

cial said on Tuesday.
The polling officials along with
Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable

PTI KOZHIKODE/WAYANAD (KERALA)

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

"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

Gandhi accused the BJP-led central

government of using "sophisticated"

threaten

targeted

businessmen.

level," he alleged.

businessmen.

to

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 cal said. They were arrifted in two sorties by an MI-172 chop-per 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 conducive, would be done as per requirements of respective district electoral officers (DEOs) of various districts, he said.

EVMs airlifted to four remote polling booths in Arunachal

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 head-

quarters. 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 offi-cials have to march for three days to reach their respective destinations.



PTI ■ PANAJI

 $B^{\text{haratiya Janata Party (BJP)}}_{\text{candidates Shripad Naik and}}$ Pallavi Dempo on Tuesday filed their nominations for elections to the North Goa and South Goa seats respectively.

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.

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

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 pres-ence 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 vari-ous guarantees in the party's

manifesto. 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



CBI and Income Tax people will the Mumbai airport from its previous 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. "At the electoral bond level, the threats are much more sophisticated. The ED,

owner. In other instances, such intimidatory tactics also led to the electoral bonds, he also alleged.

businessman paying the BJP in He raised the electoral bond issue by He alleged that this is how Adani got referring to a recent interview of

Later in Wayanad, Gandhi alleged that Modi "does not have the" 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.

Kozhikode district.

pandemic. Earlier in Kodiyathur, Gandhi alleged that Modi's job was also to distract people from the real issues in the country, protect the businessmen in India and "forgive their bank loans". Modi is helping "five or six of the biggest, richest businessmen" in India, he alleged.

# "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

party supporters, workers and the huge crowd that turned up for his roadshow from Kodiyathur in Goa Chief Minister Pramod

Pallavi Dempo, the executive

hundreds of supporters. The South Goa Lok Sabha seat

on May 7.

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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

he 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 prob-

abilistic 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.



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

# Ignoring neighbours to embrace the world-



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

JP 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

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 called Sri Lankan's economic hiding its strength and biding its time arriving with deep pockets, BRI, MSR and Wolf Warrior



itics regional rivalries were in full flow. Nepalese scholars were first to note change. The founding father, King Prithvi Narayan Shah had observed that Nepal is a yam between two boulders: China and India. They corrected that gospel to three boulders, adding US. Till late last year, Maldives followed India First policy, the only country to publicly proclaim the choice.

That has changed to India Out with President Muizzu demanding the 88 Indian soldiers leave before elections next month. He even hinted that Delhi tried bullying Male. Its strategic geography is pivotal in the Indian Ocean. Maldives is for now China First but India could have been more gentle with its smallest neighbour. Raking up the Kachhatheevu issue that the government admitted it was settled in 2015, was a self goal but both Modi and Jaishankar wished to politically embarrass the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu and INC. Instead it has infuriated Sri Lankan media and ordinary Lankans, especially fisherfolk among the lakhs of Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils.

US Assistance Secretary of State for South Asia and Central Asia, Donald Lu nas recovery a "comeback story" with concessional loans from India and USAID. That story 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

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 trijunction 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 Sohel 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

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 SAARČ 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 ana t founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence *Staff. Views are personal)* 

### THE EDITOR

# Reflections on class and age discrimination



always respectful even though

I was from the same region.

This was another lesson

learnt, never to be forgotten,

about the futility of status dis-

crimination.

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

**¬**he 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 lifealtering lessons a few years later as I joined Indian railway

services. 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

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 workrelated 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 supervisor. The two of us leaders who complained They pointed out that I was

We were visiting relatives a few days back. My wife's

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

I tried to assuage the hurt sen-

timents by pointing out that

the junior colleague came

from north India where it was

a common practice to use the

more affectionate tum even

while addressing parents. The

representatives were not done.

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)

#### **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 val-

ues 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

**HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS** Madam — Apropos the news article, "Unravelling the Roy family's legacy", published on April 15, this is my response. The political landscape for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections reveals not just contemporary rivalries but also echoes of Bengal's tumultuous past. Amidst accusations and justifications, the saga of Siraj-ud-Daula's downfall resurfaces, highlighting the intricate web of alliances and betrayals that shaped the region's destiny. Delving into history, one confronts the pivotal Battle of Plassey in 1757, altering

#### **Revitalising railway realms**



Apropos the news article, "Desolate railway tracks transformed into a verdant oasis", 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 con-

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

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, the trajectory of Bengal's identity. The history and innovation, woven into the

servation 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

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 senso-

ry experience. In this city, coffee isn't just a beverage; it's a cultural phenomenon. From paleofriendly 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

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#### **FIRST COLUMN STRIVE TO DEVELOP FAITH**

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



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

et 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

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



**NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA** 

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



t 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

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 seen as a matter of prior agreement of both parties rather than a threat. The truth 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

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

Economic challenges and psycho-

logical 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

Jomen 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-



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 While women's representa-

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.

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 con-

stitute 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, a milestone for women's rights,

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

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

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

# no jurors picked on first day

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

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 salacious — 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-



Trump.

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

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 sev-

eral 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

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.

yet brought into the courtroom

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 The former president and presumptive nominee for the 2024 Republican nomination is fac-

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 interfer-

ence in Georgia and with mis-

ing two charges in the case

brought by special counsel

Jack Šmith in Washington that

could be knocked out with a

favorable ruling from the nation's highest court. Next

week, the justices will hear

handling 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 tion 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 sentencings 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

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.

# Trump to return to court after Tensions rise in Aus after bishop, priest wounded in knife attack

teenager has been accused A 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 Rovel during a service on Monday night that was being streamed Police have not commented on

reports that the boy's fingers were severed by parishioners in the Orthodox Assyrian church in suburban Wakéley, but confirmed his hand injuries were Video of the attack spread

quickly on social media and an angry mob converged on the chanted "an eye for an eye" and



A police forensic officer works at a crime scene at the Christ the Good Shepherd Church in suburban Wakely 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

"bring him out." Several people including police officers required hospital treatment following the hourslong

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

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

**AP** ■ CHICAGO

Pro-Palestinian demonstra-tors 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 but barely. 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 stand still 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,

"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

Near Seattle, the Washington State Department of Transportation said a demonstration closed the main road 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 high way to protest is unlawful, dangerous, and prevents motorists from safely reaching their destinations," the agency said in a statement.

Oregon State Police said 52 protestors were 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.

numerous arrests, saying 150 protesters were initially involved in the march around 3:15 p.m., but that number

New York Police made

## **Sunak faces resistance over smoking ban plans**

 $B^{\rm ritish\ Prime\ Minister\ Rishi}_{\rm Sunak\ faces\ very\ vocal\ resis-}$ tance against his plans to effecaged 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 smokefree. We know this works," Sunak had declared at the Conservative Party conference in October last year. As there is Opposition backing for the lic.



ing 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 pub-

safe level of tobacco consumption. It is uniquely harmful, and UK Health Secretary Victoria

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

tivity," 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

The truth is that there is no raised going towards further enforcement.

"This historic legislation will that is why we are taking this consign smoking to the 'ash important action today to pro-tect the next generation," said 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 chil-

dren 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.

**PTI** ■ WASHINGTON

as he asked the community

members to unite against hate

Khanna,



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

'Substantial increase in attack on Hindus in US'

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

PTI ■ LONDON

n Indian-origin school Aprincipal, 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.

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,

"As the Governing Body is 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 crimes. Congressman Shri right to take the view that the Thanedar's remarks came durissue was whether to permit and facilitate ritual prayer Monday. 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 mation is being circulated whether it is online or otherthat her mother wished her to go there because it was known wise," Thanedar said. Thanedar and four other to be strict... Her evidence has Indian-American lawmakers focussed on her preferences and what she supposes the Krishnamoorthi, Ami Bera and Pramila Jayapal - had recently

position would be elsewhere,

#### 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",

ing a news conference held at the National Press Club here on written to the Department of "Today I am seeing in the Justice seeking an investigation United States a substantial on the recent surge in attacks increase in attacks on on Hindu temples and places of Hinduism. A lot of misinfor-

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

"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

ship," 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 enforce-

ment, he added. Thanedar said that there is a need to coordinate efforts between the local law enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Department of Justice. rising attacks on places of wor"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 intro-

duced 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

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

ash-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.

Speaking at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington, Aurangzeb said that Pakistan doesn't need too many policy prescriptions; it just needs to implement those policies, Geo News reported. The finance minister is currently in the US to attend the spring meetings of the World Bank Group and discuss a new loan package with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Responding to a question, Aurangzeb said that Pakistan was looking for a larger and longer programme from the IMF because "we need two to three years for structural reforms."

He forewarned that if Pakistan — which has entered 24 programmes with the IMF

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.

"It's time for us to actually start moving the execution of these aspects, and why we're looking for a larger and extended programme, so once we get into the execution, we will need a two to three-year time period to go through the structural reforms,"

Responding to how Pakistan could successfully rebuild its economy, Aurangzeb said, "We do not need too many policy prescriptions. We know what to do ... it's time for us to start moving".

He said that the country needed "timely decisions, timely execution" to build its economy as "no strategy works without execution." Aurangzeb also stressed the need for promoting financial inclusiveness and climate resilience when asked to comment on the ongoing debate about

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. Asserting that Pakistan needs to go end-to-end digitalisation of the tax authority to minimise human intervention he said, "It's not just about revenue, it's about transparency and client experience, which is going to bring trust and confidence back into the tax authority."He added that Pakistan needs to move towards public-private partnerships at the federal and provincial levels.

In mid-March, IMF's global team reached a staff-level agreement with the Pakistani authorities on the second and final review of Pakistan's stabilisation programme supported by the global lender's USD 3 billion standby arrangement approved in July last

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

Pakistan's former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general Lieutenant General (retd) 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

An extremist group Tehreek-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) held a siege of Islamabad in 2017, demanding the expulsion of the French ambassador due to the publication of blasphemous cartoons in that country.

Later a panel of the Supreme Court led by current chief justice Qazi Faez Isa in a verdict in 2019 ordered to investigate the protest and identify the perpetrators.

The commission was led by



Sved 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

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.

between November 6 and

November 27, 2017.

However, against what many would have expected, the probe gave a clean chit to the intelligence agencies and their top officials by saying that none of the former high-ups of provincial and federal governments accused the agencies or any other officials of extending facilitation to Tehreek-eLabbaik Pakistan (TLP) protes-

"Since no one including the former Prime Minister, former Interior Minister, former law Minister, and former Chief Minister of Punjab, accused intelligence agencies or any other official of the agency for extending facilitation to the protestors nor other evidence was brought forward, therefore, the Commission could not connect any organization or state official in supporting TLP to organise the dharna," it stat-

The commission also absolved the former ISI chief who was a major general working in the ISI as director general of counter-intelligence and had signed an agreement with TLP protestors to end the protest. He was criticised at that time on social media.

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

**AP** ■ 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. Scholz also told Xi at their meeting that the use of nuclear weapons in the 2-year-old war should not even be threatened, German media reported. Russian President Vladimir Putin warned last month that Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty or independence is threatened, his latest such threat since invading Ukraine.

Scholz told Xi that Germany's "core interests" were impacted by the war against Ukraine,

which has threatened to spread munity. Despite that, China 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.

China has refused to criticize the invasion and has maintained ties with Russia. While China says it is not sending military aid to Moscow, it has provided it with an economic lifeline to help it cope with sanctions from the West.

Beijing has also been urging peace talks between Ukraine and Russia, offering a propos-al that says nothing about the settlement of the key territorial disputes between them and which has received a tepid response from the two countries or the international com-

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.

China's official Xinhua News Agency quoted Xi as saying the two leaders discussed Ukraine other issues. "China encourages and supports all efforts that are conducive to the peaceful resolution of the crisis, and supports the timely convening of an international peace conference recognized by Russia and Ukraine, with equal participation by all parties, and fair discussion of all peace options," Xi said.

China is willing to maintain cooperation with all relevant parties, including Germany, in this regard," Xi was quoted as saying. Scholz on Monday called for

interference.

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. His visit has underscored trade-related tensions as the European Union and other nations complain that China is competing unfairly through the use of tariffs, intellectual property theft and political

The European Union is mulling tariffs to protect its producers against cheaper Chinese electrical vehicle imports, which some fear will flood the European market. Scholz began his three-day China trip on Sunday in the industrial hub of Chongqing, where he and his delegation of

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 indus-

Scholz was due to meet Premier Li Qiang later Tuesday in Beijing before returning to Berlin in the late evening.

Along with Russia, China is one of five permanent veto-wielding members of the U.N. Security Council, and a U.S. intelligence report last week found Beijing has increased equipment sales to Moscow to indirectly boost its war effort against Ukraine.

Berlin is also worried about a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan, a self-ruled island 130 kilometers (80 miles) off China's coast that Beijing claims as its own. restri Scholz told students in time.

Shanghai that borders "must not be moved by force."
"We should not be afraid of our neighbors," he said, emphasiz-

ing the importance of international institutions such as the World Trade Organization. Despite the political and trade frictions, China was Germany's top trading partner for the eighth straight year in 2023, with 254.1 billion euros (\$271 billion) in goods and services exchanged between the sides, slightly more than what Germany traded with the U.S. but a 15.5% contraction from the year before.

This is Scholz's second trip to China since he became chancellor in late 2021.

His previous visit was in November 2022 and essentially was a one-day trip because of the strict COVID restrictions still in place at the

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

**PTI** ■ 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.

The remarks by Lt Gen Jeffrey Kruse, Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency came during a Congressional hearing on China on Monday. Kruse told lawmakers that Pakistan has sought international support, including from the UN Security Council, to resolve its dispute with India about Kashmir. Separately, Islamabad and New Delhi have maintained an uneasy ceasefire along the shared Line of Control since February 2021, he said.

"Pakistan has sustained its nuclear modernisation efforts despite its economic turmoil. Terrorist violence against Pakistani security forces and civilians also rose last year, he said.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Pakistan is reported to have 170 nuclear warheads as of January 2023.

Cash-strapped Pakistan is China and Saudi Arabia for loans to tide over its economic woes. Moreover, Pakistan's finance minister

now in Washington to discuss a new loan package with the International Monetary Fund. Pakistan's contentious relationship with India continues to drive its defence policy, Kruse told top American lawmakers.

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). In October, Pakistan successfully tested its Ababeel medium-range ballistic missile," he

In 2023, militants killed approximately 400 security forces, a nine-year high, and Pakistani security forces have conducted almost daily counterterrorism operations during the past year.

Islamabad and New Delhi have a long history of strained relations, primarily due to the Kashmir issue as well as the cross-border terrorism emanating from

Pakistan. In 2019, Pakistan downgraded its diplomatic ties with New Delhi after the Indian government abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution,

revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcating the State into two Union Territories. India has been maintaining

that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan is on Islamabad to create an

economic development and good governance in the Union Territory of Jammu

## China's GDP grew by 5.3% in 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2024

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

The GDP grew 5.3 per cent year on year to 29.63 trillion yuan (about USD 4.17 trillion) in the first three months of 2024, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Tuesday. The pace overall GDP growth for 2023, appearing on course to meet the target set by the government at around five per cent. On a quarterly basis, the economy expanded by 1.6 per cent in the first three months of this year, according to the NBS. "China's high-quality devel-

opment has made new

achievements in the first quar-

ter. The national economy has

sustained recovery momen-

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. "These positive factors driving economic recovery are accumulating and strengthening, laying a good foundation for full-year growth," he said. Sheng also noted that the 5.3 per cent GDP growth was Phound in the industrial sector and an improvement in the service sector. He, however, was silent on the continued crisis in the property sector, which accounts for 20 per cent of the world's second-largest economy, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The home prices fell at a faster pace for more than 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.

The real estate industry crisis was highlighted in January when property giant Evergrande was ordered to liquidate by a court in Hong developers, like Country Garden and Shimao, have also been hit with winding up petitions in the city.

Significantly for the Chinese economy, credit ratings agency Fitch cut its outlook for China last week, citing increasing risks to the country's finances as it faces economic challenges. On Tuesday, Fitch eight years, according to the latest data. In the same period, China's state-owned banks

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 The downgrade in the ratings

outlook of China's "big six" state-owned banks, including the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), China Construction Bank (CCB), and Bank of China (BOC), "mirrored the same outlook in a report published on Tuesday, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. The better-thanexpected first-quarter growth was "fuelled by rapid growth in the services sector, as well as increased overseas demand driving export growth in the industrial sector," Ding Shuang, chief Greater China economist at Standard Chartered Bank, said.

#### More homes flooded in Kazakhstan

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. The floods sparked evacuations of thousands in the Orenburg region, located some 1,200 kilometers (745 miles), southeast of the capital of Moscow after a dam on the Ural River burst last surging waters. Local authorities have classified the deluge as an emergency of federal importance, and more than 16,500 people have been evacuated from the flooded areas, the office of the Orenburg governor said Tuesday.

In the city of Orenburg, the region's capital, some 5,500 houses remain flooded as water levels in the Ural River in the city gradually decrease,

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 Ilek Further east along the border,

floods also hit the regions of Kurgan and Tyumen after as water levels rose in local rivers. Russian emergency officials said Tuesday that over 300 homes have been In both the Kurgan and Tyumen provinces, evacuations from areas that may be flooded are underway In neighboring Kazakhstan,

massive floods have prompted the evacuation of over 113,000 people to date, Kazakh emergency officials

As of Tuesday, more than 5.700 houses remain flooded there, officials said.

#### environment that is free of terror and hostility for such an engagement. New Delhi has also asserted Muhammad Aurangzeb is that the constitutional mea-

sures taken by the Indian government to ensure socioand Kashmir are matters internal to India.

#### '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 step ping down as the leader of the government on May 15, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, who will succeed him, said on Tuesday. "There won't be many changes to the rest of the lineup for now," Wong, who would be the fourth prime would be the fourth prime minister of the economically prosperous city-state of Singapore, said. Earlier on Monday, it was announced that Lee will step down on May 15 after nearly 20 years of heading the government as part of the long-planned leadership transition. Details of the cabinet reshuffle would be announced a few days before the swearing-in ceremony on May 15, Wong told reporters a day after the leadership handover date announced. "Our system works on the basis of continuity and progressive change. It has never been the case that when there is a leadership transition, all the older min isters step down at the same time," the 51-year-old Prime

Minister-to-be said.

#### 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. The mobilisation law, published on Ukraine's Parliamentary website, is expected to take effect in a month and make it easier to identify every draft-eligible man in the country. Many have dodged conscription by avoiding contact with authorities. The law also provides soldiers with incentives, such as cash bonuses or money toward buying a house or car, which according to analysts Ukraine can't afford.Ukraine has been struggling to fend off the Russian advance.

Since the full-scale invasion began in Feb 2022, Russia has captured nearly a quarter of Ukraine, which is outnumbered, outgunned and in desperate need of more troops and ammunition, as doubt increases about Western military aid. The signed law was watered down from its original draft. It

didn't include a provision that

would rotate out troops who

had served 36 months of com-



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. Exhausted soldiers have no means of taking a break from front-line work because of the current scale and intensity of the war.Ukraine already suffers from a lack of trained soldiers capable of fighting, and demobilising soldiers on the front lines now would deprive its forces of the most capable fighters. In December Zelenskyy said Ukraine's military wanted to mobilize up to

500,000 more troops.

#### **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.

The rains began overnight, leaving massive ponds on streets as whipping winds disrupted flights at Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel and the home of the long-haul carrier Emirates. By the evening, 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

Police and emergency personnel drove slowly through the flooded streets, their emergency lights flashing across the darkened morning. Lightning flashed across the sky, occasionally touching the tip of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building. Schools across the UAE, a

federation of seven sheikhdoms, largely shut ahead of the storm and government employees were

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

trucks out into the streets and highways to pump away the water. Water poured into some homes, forcing people to bail out their houses. Rain is unusual in the UAE,

an arid, Arabian Peninsula nation, but occurs periodically during the cooler winter months. Many roads and other areas lack drainage given the lack of regular rainfall, causing flooding.

#### UK criminalises creation of 'deepfake' images without consent is then shared more widely, offenders could be

**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. Deepfake refers to images and videos made to look hyper-realistic, with the victim usually unaware and unable to give their consent. Recent years have seen the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to add the faces of celebrities or public figures - most often women - into pornographic films. Under the new offence, those who create such

sent to jail."The creation of deepfake sexual images is despicable and completely unaccept able irrespective of whether the image is shared," said Laura Farris, UK Minister for Victims and Safeguarding. "It is another example of ways in which certain people seek to degrade and dehumanise others - especially women. And it has the capacity to cause cata strophic consequences if the material is shared more widely. This government will not tolerate it. This new offence sends a crystal-clear mesimages without consent face a criminal record sage that making this material is immoral, often and an unlimited fine. If the deepfake content misogynistic, and a crime," she said.

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(2024-25) As per the notification No. HED-EDU10NOTC/1/2020-3 Edu.1/801837/2024

Dated 13/03/2024 of Punjab Government, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar is going to conduct centralized Online Counselling for Admission to Years/B.Com. LLB. Five Years/ B.Com LL.B. (Hons) Five Years and B.B.A. LL.B Five Years course for the session 2024-25 for the Sri Guru Teg Bahadur State University of Law, Tarn Taran and institutions/Colleges situated in Punjab and affiliated to Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Panjab University, Chandigarh and Punjabi University, Patiala. The Portal for online registration has been activated. For eligibility, Online filing of forms, Fee and other details, the desirous candidates must see the website http://Punjablawadmissions.andu.ac.in. The participating institutions are requesting to submit the mandatory proforma latest by 25.04.2024. For details, updates and all the requisite instructions check the admission website regularly. Coordinator

Punjab Law Admission 2024 NA/12/23067/2023/33970 Dated CHD :- 4/16/2024

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# Markets slump for third day

#### On fears of escalating tensions in Middle East; IT stocks drag

 $E_{\text{Sensex}}^{\text{quity benchmark indices}}_{\text{and Nifty}}$ Esensex and Nifty continued to slump on Tuesday dragged down by heavy selling in IT stocks amid weak global trends and fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East.

Outflow of foreign fund also dented investors' sentiment. Continuing its downtrend for the third day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 456.10 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,943.68. During the day, it slumped 714.75 points or 0.97 per cent to 72,685.03. The NSE Nifty declined 124.60 points or 0.56 per

cent to finish at 22,147.90. From the Sensex basket, Infosys, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Wipro, HCL Technologies, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, and Larsen & Toubro were the major laggards.

Titan Company, Hindustan Unilever, HDFC Bank, Maruti, ITC, Power Grid and Reliance Industries were the gainers. "The domestic sustained consolidation trend for the



third consecutive day, amid apprehensions regarding geopolitical tensions and drop in the probability of a rate cut in the short-term. Heightened concerns arose following stronger-than-anticipated US retail sales, amplifying the assumption that the US Federal Reserve might delay rate cuts, leading to a notable uptick in the dollar index and US bond vields.

"The İT sector saw the most significant decline, due primarily expectations of earnings

being affected by the weak discretionary spending in the US and muted domestic O4 results," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.57 per cent and midcap index advanced 0.05 per cent. Among the indices, IT declined 2.32 per cent, teck (2.09 per cent), bankex (0.50 per cent), metal (0.36 per cent), capital goods (0.26 per cent) and commodities per cent) and commodities (0.24 per cent). Energy, discretionary,

consumer durables, oil & gas, and power were the

Štock markets would remain closed on Wednesday for Ram Navami. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were quoting in the red. Wall Street ended in negative territory

Israel's military chief said on Monday that his country will respond to Iran's weekend attack, but he did not elaborate on when and how as world leaders urged against retaliation, trying to avoid a spiral of violence in the Middle East.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.26 per cent to USD 89.87 a barrel. Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,268 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark tanked

845.12 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at 73,399.78 on Monday. The NSE Nifty declined 246.90 points or 1.10 per cent to finish at

# Petrol sales up 7 per cent, diesel declines 9.5 per cent in April

PTI NEW DELHI

India's petrol consumption soared 7 per cent in the first half of April but diesel sales were down 9.5 per cent ahead of the onset of a harsh summer season that is set to crank up fuel demand, preliminary data of stateowned firms showed on

Tuesday. Petrol sales of three stateowned firms, which control 90 per cent of the fuel market, rose to 1.22 million tonnes during April 1 to 15 when compared to 1.14 million tonnes of consumption in the same period last year.

Diesel demand dropped 9.5 per cent to 3.14 million

While petrol sales were up mostly due to an increase in use of personal vehicles on the back of a price cut, crop harvesting season as well as the onset of summer which will increase the demand for air conditioning in cars is likely to reverse the trend in diesel demand.

Petrol and diesel prices were last month reduced by Rs 2 per litre, ending a nearly two-



year-long hiatus in rate revision.

Month-on-month petrol sales dropped 3.6 per cent when compared to 1.27 million tonnes of consumption in March 1-15. Diesel demand too was down 2.7 per cent month-on-month compared to 3.22 million tonnes in the first half of

India's most Diesel consumed fuel, accounting for almost 40 per cent of all

petroleum consumption. sector accounts for 70 per cent of all diesel sales in the

country. It is also the

predominant fuel used in

agriculture sectors, including

in harvesters and tractors. Petrol consumption has consistently shown a year-onyear rise, diesel consumption has been on a see-saw - rising in one month and falling in another.

Consumption of petrol

during the first half of April was 9.2 per cent more than in the COVID-marred April 1-15, 2022, and 56.5 per cent more than in the first half of

Diesel demand was up 4.7 per cent over April 1-15, 2022, and 27.9 per cent compared to the first half of April 2020. Jet fuel (ATF) sales rose 10.4 per cent year-on-year to 3,35,700 tonnes during April 1-15, 2024. But this was 1.2 per cent lower month-on-

Like petrol and diesel, ATF demand too is now firmly above pre-Covid levels.

ATF consumption was 34.3 per cent more than in April 1-15, 2022, and 18.4 per cent more than in the first half of April 2020.

Cooking gas LPG sales were up 8.8 per cent year-on-year at 1.2 million tonnes in April 1-15, 2024. LPG consumption was 15.3 per cent higher than in April 1-15, 2022, and 28.3 per cent more than in the first half of April 2020.

Month-on-month, demand fell 11.6 per cent against 1.36 million tonnes of

# India's unemployment rate to decline 97 basis points by 2028: ORF Report

India's unemployment rate is likely to decline by as much as 97 basis points by 2028 as the country's economy hits the USD 5 trillion mark, fuelling a rise in employment, a new report said

Unemployment rate -- the percentage of people in the labour force who are without jobs — is projected to fall from 4.47 per cent in 2024 to 3.68 per cent in 2028, the India Employment Outlook 2030 report by thinktank Observer Research Foundation (ORF) said.

"India's job market is experiencing a transformation as the country has become the world's fastest growing large economy in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic," the report

The country's young population, whose median age is 28.4 years, holds a key to fuelling economic

expansion.
"With a GDP growth rate of 7.8 per cent, India

could potentially achieve its target of becoming a USD 5-trillion economy by 2026-27, with such growth being underpinned by strong private consumption and public investment," it said.

India's gross domestic product (GDP) size is estimated at just under USD 4 trillion in 2024. An ORF press statement said the report identifies sectors that the country's 600-million-plus population of people aged 18-35 years regard as aspirational, as these sectors could act as engines of growth in the years ahead.

The report forecasts that as India approaches its USD 5 trillion goal, overall employment could rise 22 per cent, while unemployment could decline by 97 basis points by 2028," the statement

The service sector in particular is set to witness significant job creation with each unit rise in services output expected to contribute to a substantial 0.12 per cent increase in employment. The report singles out ten especially highopportunity sub-sectors in the services space.



These include digital services, financial services, and services related to health, hospitality,

consumer retail, e-commerce, and renewable energy. Other areas poised for rapid growth are global capability centres, and MSME and startup

The burgeoning service sector also offers encouraging avenues for women's employment. Hence, investing in women's skilling, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship needs to be prioritised further, argues the report.

The projections for India's manufacturing sector are less optimistic. In spite of the US' growing imports from India, India's competitive cost structures and labour resources, and the government's push for manufacturing through flagship schemes such as Make in India, employment in the sector appears to have

advances and increased Technological automation continue to cast doubts upon the country's ability to absorb its expanding

workforce," the statement said. In this context, transitioning towards industrial value chains associated with the service sector could help rejuvenate employment.

Nilanjan Ghosh, a director at ORF and one of the authors of the report said, "Policymakers and public sector schemes could partner more closely with other stakeholders to identify employability and skilling gaps. The next step would be to upgrade curricula and skills to make India's talent pool more industry ready."

Ghosh added that nurturing entrepreneurship would be crucial for improved next-gen employment. "A new class of entrepreneurs could stimulate job creation, expand India's startup ecosystem, spur innovation, and promote youth participation. But we also need to ensure that the workplaces of the future are gender-sensitive and inclusive," he said. The report concludes that a multistakeholder

approach towards employment generation and enhancement could help realise India's vision of a digitally empowered, skilled, innovative, and self-

### Heating equipment maker JNK India IPO to open on April 23

Heating equipment maker JNK India Ltd is set to open its initial public offering (IPO) on April 23.
The initial share-sale will

conclude on April 25 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on April 22, according to the red herring prospectus (RHP) filed on Tuesday.

The IPO is a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth up to Rs 300 crore and an Offer-for-Sale (OFS) of up to 84.21 lakh equity shares by promoters and an existing shareholder.

Those offloading shares in the OFS are promoters -- Goutam Rampelli, Dipak Kacharulal Bharuka, JNK Heaters Co. Ltd and Mascot Capital and Marketing Pvt Ltd. -- and a shareholder Milind Joshi.

Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used for funding working capital requirements and for general corporate purposes.

JNK specialises in process-

fired heaters, commanding a market share of about 27 per cent within the Indian heating equipment market for new order bookings during fiscal year 2023, according to F&S Report.



As of March 2023, it had an order book of about Rs 868 crore, way higher than the over Rs 143 crore order book in March 2021.

In terms of financials, the company's surged by 37.42 per cent to Rs 407.30 crore for the fiscal year 2023, from Rs 296.40 crore a

year earlier and net profit increased by 29 per cent to Rs 46.36 crore in fiscal 2023 from Rs 35.98 crore in fiscal

IIFL Securities and ICICI consolidated Securities are the bookrevenue from operations running lead managers of the public issue. The equity shares are proposed to be listed on BSE and NSE.

## **India fastest growing** economy during last three years, says Sitharaman



Jnion Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said here on Tuesday that India has been the fastest growing economy in the last three consecutive financial years and this growth can continue in the coming years as well. She said the next 25 years will be critical for India. In the financial year 2023-24, India witnessed a growth rate of eight per cent in three quarters and is expecting a similar level of growth in the fourth quarter, she said, adding it has been sustainable growth.

"India has been the fastest growing economy in the last

three consecutive financial years and this growth can continue in the coming years as well. The next 25 years will be very critical for India," Sitharaman said in a dialogue programme with industrialists and businessmen.

She said that foreign investors are coming to invest in India due to the credibility of its economy.

"Due to the economic policy, larger macroeconomic stability, stable government, stable taxation policy, transparent tenders and procurement, there has been immense credibility of India's economy abroad. So, the investors are coming here to invest," she said.

#### Gold, silver prices hit fresh peaks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Extending gains for the second day in a row, gold and silver prices hit fresh all-time high levels on Tuesday, tracking strong trends in the international markets amid fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East.

According to HDFC Securities, gold prices zoomed Rs 700 to hit its lifetime high of Po 72 750 mm 10 mm. Rs 73,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday. It had closed at Rs 73,050 per 10 grams on Monday.

Similarly, silver price jumped Rs 800 to hit a record high of Rs 86,500 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at a new record high of Rs 73,750 per 10 grams, up by Rs 700, taking positive cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,370 per ounce, up by USD 15 from the previous close. Gold rose as demand for the haven asset grew amid fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East following Iran's unprecedented attack on

#### RupeeQ aims to treble loan disbursement portfolio to ₹300 crore by 2027

**PTI** ■ NEW DELHI

cards RupeeQ aims to treble digital loan disbursements portfolio to Rs 300 crore by 2027 on the back of government's push towards high-speed internet services in semi-urban and rural areas. Talking to PTI, Neeru Puri, Managing Director and Chief Financial Officer of RupeeQ, said, "It is estimated that total value of digital lending business in India will exceed USD 1 trillion over next 5 years. At RupeeQ, we expect to treble our loan disbursement

Home-grown platform for online loans and credit

about Rs 100 crore." According to reports, India shall have 900 million active internet users by 2025, while 56 per cent of all new internet users will be from rural areas, and 65 per cent of providence. and 65 per cent of new internet users will be female. Puri opined that government's push on digitalisation and penetration of high-speed internet even in semi-urban and rural areas will help the company materialise its goal.

portfolio by 2027, while in fiscal 2023-24 we clocked

Puri said the digital lending space in India saw phenomenal growth in value from USD 270 billion in 2022 to an estimated worth of USD 350 billion by end of next year with a remarkable compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of

39.5 per cent. In the current financial year, the digital footprint of financial services consumers would increase to 75 per cent (from current 50 per cent). This is primarily due to the explosion of smartphones as well as mobile internet, Puri explained.

As per a recent Boston Consulting Group's (BCG) report, loan disbursement models in the last few years have seen frenetic activity.

There are a few fundamental drivers which are all coming together to turbo-charge this First, consumer behaviours are

changing dramatically, shaped by experiences offered by internet giants. Second, there have been some rapid technological advances, led by the ever increasing penetration of smartphones as well as the proliferation of

# Road execution to grow 5, 8 per cent in FY25: Icra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

 $\begin{array}{c} R \, {\rm oad} \, \, {\rm execution} \, \, {\rm in} \, \, {\rm India} \, \, {\rm is} \, \\ {\rm likely} \, {\rm to} \, \, {\rm grow} \, 5\text{--}8 \, {\rm per} \, {\rm cent} \, \\ {\rm to} \, \, 12\text{,}500\text{--}13\text{,}000 \, \, \, km \, \, {\rm in} \, \, {\rm the} \end{array}$ current fiscal, after recording a robust expansion of 20 per cent in 2023-24, rating agency

Icra said on Tuesday.
It added that the pace of execution in this fiscal will be supported by a healthy pipeline of projects, increased capital outlay by the government and focus on completion of projects by



Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH). Icra noted that road execution was impacted in the first half

of FY24 on account of a prolonged monsoon in certain geographies, which affected productive days. According to Icra, the ministry's project award

pipeline is healthy, at above 45,000 km as of March 2024. This is despite the awarding being significantly impacted in FY24 amid delay in approval from the Cabinet for the revised cost estimates of mode continues to be the Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase 1 (BMP), it added.

Consequently, the overall awards declined by 31 per cent to 8,551 km in FY24 from 12,375 km in FY23. Icra pointed out that a similar trend was seen in FY19 before the last general elections, when the project awarding had declined by over 67 per

cent on a year-on-year basis.

engineering, procurement,

mainstay of this process, accounting for 70-75 per cent of the awards in FY24, followed by Build, Operate, Transfer (BOT)- Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM), accounting for 25-30 per cent share. There were no awards under

BOT-Toll in FY2024," Icra said, adding that in March 2024, the ministry amended the BOT-Toll model The rating agency said the concession agreement to construction (EPC) improve its attractiveness.

#### collaboration to advance AI research PNS AMARAVATI, ANDHRA

Neuralix Inc, VIT AP University announce

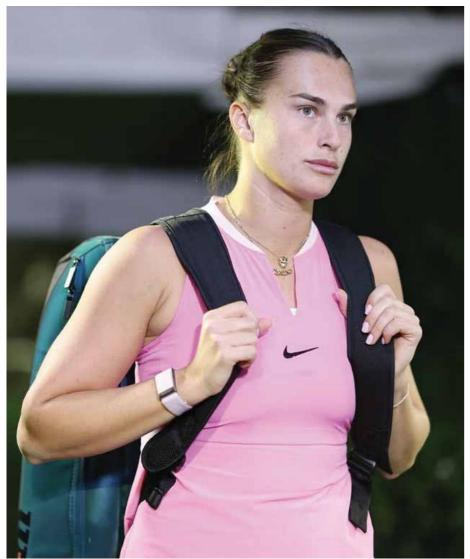
Neuralix Inc. and VIT-AP University announce strategic collaboration to advance Artificial Intelligence (AI) knowledge and research. Neuralix Inc., a leading Al startup specializing in digital transformation across various industries, and VIT-AP with University, commitment to academic excellence and technological innovation, have formalized a

aimed

collaboration



between Neuralix.ai and VIT-AP University signifies a shared commitment to exploring and advancing AI across diverse areas



# 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

The success of Kolkata's 'Big Three' —

but will also have a positive effect on the

sport in the country, said All India

Football Federation president Kalyan

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

"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

Lake Stadium here on Monday.

Chaubey on Tuesday.

court in Stuttgart. Sabalenka has finished runner-

take any of them on the center

on her last three appearances in Stuttgart, losing 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 Krejcíková 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 for a

The success of Kolkatas Big Inree — enormous ian support in view beingan, Mohammedan Sporting — will not just have a massive impact on state football Mohammedan Sporting joining the

these clubs to the newer norms of League with a round to spare and

football," Chaubey told PTI.

"The three giants of Kolkata enjoy

enormous fan support in West Bengal,

two in ISL next season, will have a

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

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-

massive impact on Indian football."

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

Gauff, Sabalenka, Swiatek and Rybakina all received firstround 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.

Four titles in seven months, success of Kolkata

Big Three will have huge impact: AIFF president

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

**AP** ■ LONDON

ole Palmer put on an Cunstoppable 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

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 35yard 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

Haaland. The result extended a depressing few days for

with Manchester City's Erling

Everton. Just hours before kickoff, the club lodged an appeal against a two-point deduction for a second breach of the Premier League financial

Everton was docked two points last week for overspending in a

PTI NEW DELHI

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

"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

The Liverpool club sits in 16th place, only two points and two places above the relegation

After running its unbeaten streak to eight, Chelsea was in ninth place, only one point



## Muddappa begins season with double victory

Multiple-time national Champion Hemanth Muddappa of Mantra Racing began the season with a double victory at the summer edition of the Valley Run 2024 at Amby Valley here on Tuesday. Bengaluru's Muddappa was also

adjudged as the fastest rider of

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

In the four stroke 851 to 1050cc Open class, Muddappa clocked 09.692s to take the second gold ahead of Riddhiish 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 Sportscraft, the organisers of this race, successfully completed the

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

"It's a remarkable year for Kolkata

football to bring home four titles this

Millions of football fans, having their

loyalties to these Big Three, have joined

in to reverberate Kolkata's legacy," he

rights," he said.

better innovative passing: Rupinder Pal Singh



Singh, who was part of the 2014 Asian Games gold-winning side, is not too concerned by the final result

"Australia's hard press can be countered, high level of coordination is required for that, defender-to-defender ball transfer, quick passes 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

are dependent on penalty corners — the Netherlands, Defences have in every match about 1-2 goals have to be scored from them," he pointed out.

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.

corners for scoring.
"...All international teams, all

Belgium, Germany, Australia. become stronger, here PC conversion is such an important tool that



He described current India captain Harmanpreet Singh as one of the best drag-flickers in he 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. a worry(Penalty "That's

conversion), corner 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 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 dragflickers who attended the training were Gurjinder Singh, VR Raghunath, and Jaspreet Kaur.

The former stars have drawn up a curriculum on the basics

drag-flicking goalkeeping 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 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.

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

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

The Green and Maroon brigade will

now aim to finish season by lifting the ISL Trophy, which would be a 'High

**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

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 tracing, contact 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

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 things outside," she said. can tailor my routines to This



said American gymnast Evita rhythmic 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 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 ioyless, affair.

"It turned into training in my basement and throwing 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. Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron the much-touted opening ceremony scheduled for the Seine River could be 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

"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 looking forward the increasingly fragmented next one," she said.

moved to the Stade de France viewing audience, the rise of if the security threat is streaming services and the streaming services and the 13-hour time difference between New York and Japan. But also: COVID-19.

"Even for those who were

back home, it wasn't the most important thing going on for us at that time," USOPC CEO Sarah Hirshland said of the renewed possibilities presented by the first COVID-19-free Games since 2018. "This is about an opportunity to really focus on this incredible thing called Olympic and Paralympic sport. It brings us together almost like nothing else."

The way things went in Tokyo took some of the luster away from what was nearly a perfect experience for indoor volleyball player Jordyn Poulter. Yes, she won a gold medal in her first Olympics, three years ago. Yes, it was a

triumph. Still, there was something missing. 'Not being able to relish in that moment with friends and family in that immediate time - it's something that I'm The Beijing Sports Bureau, looking forward to in this which was in charge of the

once-in-a-lifetime type of

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

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. 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."

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

"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 half Chinese marathon

# GUJARAT TITANS, DELHI CAPITALS SEARCH FOR CONSISTENCY

ujrat Titans will be striving for much consistency when they meet Delhi Capitals in an Indian Premier League match here on Wednesday.

Unlike the past two editions, the Titans have not been able to play like a well-oiled machine though they still have time to fix the flaws.

A last ball win over table leaders Rajasthan Royals on April 10 was just the kind of result the Titans needed to infuse fresh live to their campaign. They have only managed only two wins from their first six games but with another eight matches remaining, the Shubman Gillmatches another led team has enough time to turn things around.

The absence of Mohammad Shami has hurt them but they must best use the available resources. Umesh Yadav has taken seven wickets but has leaked more than 10 runs per over. His new ball partner

seasoned Mohit Sharma too can improve on their economy

Star spinner Rashid Khan has been at his frugal best but would like to have more wickets in his kitty. His cameo in the last game helped Titans seal a thrilling win and the team would also be expecting more out of him with the bat. Delhi Capitals, on the other hand, have struggled to assemble their playing eleven due to form and fitness issues. After four losses in five games, they got a much needed boost with the win against Lucknow Super Giants but they still have a lot to sort out if they are to push themselves for a place in the play-offs.

The presence of a fit again Kuldeep Yadav made a huge difference as he broke the backbone of the opposition with three timely strikes in Lucknow. Kuldeep, who has added more speed to his craft, seems to be at the peak of his powers and it could be difficult





especially against his googlies. In Jack Fraser-McGurk, Capitals seem to have found an able number three and will be hoping that the Australian builds on the success of his

maiden IPL game.

Anrich Nortje, who has been taken to the cleaners by the batters so far in the IPL, did not play the last game. Mukesh Kumar has conceded

10 runs per over in the five games and was also expensive in his comeback game against

The biggest positive for the team has been the batting form of skipper Rishabh Pant, who seems to be getting better with every outing. It would be fair to say that the southpaw is in prime position to make India's squad for the T20 World Cup despite stiff opposition from the likes of Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan.

Thin on Indian bating talent, the Capitals rely heavily on the likes of David Warner, who would itching to make an

much in the last three games. THE TEAMS (FROM):

Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Wriddhiman Saha, Sai Sudharsan, Shahrukh Khan, Matthew Wade, Kane Williamson, Azmatullah Omarzai, Abhinav Manohar, Rashid Khan, Vijay Shankar, Tewatia, Rahul Spencer Johnson, Kartik Tyagi, Joshua Little, Darshan Nalkande, Noor Ahmad, Ravisrinivasan S Kishore, Mohit Sharma, Jayant Yadav, Umesh Yadav, Sushant Mishra, Sandeep Warrier, Sharath BR, Manav Suthar.

**Delhi Capitals:** Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Abishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kushagra, Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Rasikh Dar Salam, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dubey, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Mitchell Marsh, Lalit

Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk.

#### We want to attack Power Play: Head says, revealing SRH batting philosophy



**PTI** ■ BENGALURU

Sunrisers Hyderabad have taken T20 batting to the next level with sustained range-hitting in the Indian Premier League, and Travis Head said maximising Power Play segment was central to their aggressive approach.

Head, whose 39-ball 100 led SRH to a record-setting 287/3 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday, underscored that approach with a fifty inside the Power Play.

It was also the second time Head completed a half-century within the first six overs. "We've definitely got a lot of

power through our top and

Royal Challengers Bengaluru all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has decid-

ed to take an indefinite "mental and physical" break from the Indian

Premier League, blaming his wretched

Maxwell's absence from RCB's match

against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on

Monday was initially attributed to a fin-

ger injury he suffered during the pre-

vious match against Mumbai Indians.

But he later admitted to dropping him-

"It was a pretty easy decision. I went to

Faf and the coaches after the last game

(vs Mumbai Indians) and said it was

probably time we tried someone else (in

his place)," Maxwell said in the post-

"It's actually a good time to give myself

a bit of a mental and physical break, get

my body right. If I'm required to get in

during the tournament, I can, hopeful-

ly, get back into a solid mental and physical space where I can make an impact," he added.

This is the second time in his career that

Maxwell has opted out of competitive

He had taken a similar break in

October 2019, stating that he felt men-

cricket in order to gather himself.

batting form for the decision.

self from the squad.

match press meet.

**PTI** ■ BENGALURU

want to play around that power that we've got, especially in power play," said Head in the post-match press conference. The Australian opener has a perfect ally at the top in an equally belligerent Abhishek Sharma, who blunts slower bowlers upfront while Head goes about destroying the pacers.

I guess Abhi and I at the top of the order try to maximise that (Power Play) as much as we can. It may be fours, it may be

"But yeah, we want to try to attack the power play with the two of us and then obviously we've got a lot of power

through that middle-order,"

Head added. It wasn't a mere tall claim as a quick check will reveal SRH's power play scores in six matches this season as 65/1, 81/1, 58/1, 78/1, 40/3 and 76/0, and none of the other nine teams have come close to those numbers.

But it was not blind hitting. Head revealed his approach in the initial six overs.

"Depending on the field positions, I try to sum up what the bowlers are trying to do. In the power play, with just two fielders out, I try to think about hitting the ball 360, around the whole ground are you only whole ground, as you only have to go over the infield or through the infielders for boundaries.

"I'd worked on a few things over the last couple of days. I did not execute the way I would have liked (in the last two matches). But today, especially in the power play, I was able to strike the ball the way I wanted," said the left-

The 30-year-old also lauded middle-order and I think we've Hyderabad bowlers, especially Cummins, for holding their nerves when RCB batters were scoring briskly.

'We knew that we probably needed three or four really good overs in the game to win it. So, it's amazing to sit here and think that when we make 280, but it's going to be one of the nights for the bowlers to hold on and I thought Pat

bowled exceptionally well. "We were able to get wickets throughout the middle of the overs which set the game up. DK (Dinesh Karthik) played an unbelievable innings. But we did really well to get them back at 125 or 130 for five," he

#### **PTI** ■ BENGALURUA

A crestfallen Royal
Challengers Bengaluru
skipper Faf du Plessis
conceded that a string of defeats had taken a toll on the team and the confidence had hit an all-time low after losing by 25 runs to Sunrisers Hyderabad in a match where a plethora of batting records were eclipsed.

SRH posted an all-time IPL record total of 287 for 3 and then restricted RCB to 262 for 7 as 38 maximums were hit across two innings. The match also entered the record books for the highest cumulative match total of 549 scored by both teams.

"It's crazy the amount of runs scored today, a world record. I wouldn't say 270 is par, Danny. It's tough (to bowl on a day like this), we tried a few things and they weren't quite working,"

#### No way to hide when your confidence is low: Faf du Plessis

Du Plessis said at the post-match presentation ceremony. Just like winning provides a lot of confidence, back-to-back defeat can also rob teams off it, feels the former Proteas

There's no way to hide when your confidence is low. The fast bowlers found it quite difficult out there. Similar to the batting perspective, we need to work on a few areas. Need to make sure the run rate doesn't go down after powerplay. The guys put up their hands and never gave up (in the run chase).' "It was good to see the fight,

30-40 runs from the bowling perspective was a bit too



much." Du Plessis admitted that the pressure is way too much and mind could explode

at any time. "It's important to go away and freshen your mind, it's such a

mental game. Sometimes you feel your mind is going to explode. When you get back to the contest you have to give full commitment," the skipper said.

Winning skipper Cummins, who was the best bowler on view among the two teams, also said in jest how he wished that he was a batter on days like

"Wish I was a batter," Cummins could afford to smile after his team emerged victorious. The SRH skipper said that when his team scored 277 a few weeks back, he never thought that total could be surpassed.

"Against Mumbai a few weeks ago, I thought it won't happen again, but it has happened again. Give me a few more years please (on whether bowlers will go extinct)! It feels like you bowl an over for seven or eight feels great."

The Chinnaswamy track seemed a bit slower in earlier games but things have indeed changed.

"I've given up trying to read the pitches," Cummins said.

#### Every game is like semifinal for us now: RCB coach Flower

**PTI** ■ BENGALURU

 $A^{\text{fter his side's sixth defeat in}}_{\text{seven matches in the}}$ League, Royal Challengers Bengaluru head coach Andy Flower confessed that each of their remaining seven matches will have to be treated like a semifinal.

In the latest setback to their playoff aspirations, RCB went down by 25 runs against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Monday.

"It is obviously knockout time and every game is like a semifinal for us now. But we will have to think that we will come back stronger," Flower said on RCB Game Day.
RCB conceded the highest-

ever IPL total - 287 for three as the Hyderabad batters went



on a merry ride against their directionless bowlers. Flower admitted that it was a

tough night for his side. "It was a really tough night in the field, of course, as they finished so powerfully that it probably took the wind out of our souls," he said.

However, Flower found shards of positives during RCB's chase such as Dinesh Karthik's superlative 83 off 35 balls and

skipper Faf Du Plessis' 28-ball The Zimbabwean wanted to

build on them in the coming "I am really proud of the way

we fought with the bat out there in the middle. We lost the game but I was really proud of the way we fought," said Flower.

The former England coach lauded Karthik for the way he took on SRH bowlers, and said it would not be surprising if the wicketkeeper batter made it to India's T20 World Cup squad. "Dinesh Karthik is really making a push for the World Cup team (of India) as well and is only getting better on the field," he added. RCB will next face Kolkata

Knight Riders at Eden Gardens on April 21.



#### RCB SRH game was one of sixes, not of batsmanship: Finch

**PTI** ■ BENGALURU

Sunrisers Hyderabad and Royal Challengers Bengaluru unleashing a barrage of sixes in their IPL match left little room for batsmanship and what mattered was who hit the most number of sixes, said Australia's T20 World Cup-winning skipper Aaron Finch.

Travis Head's maiden T20 ton and Heinrich Klaasen's pillaging 67 drove SRH to a recordbreaking 287 for three, which helped them go past their own 277/3 against Mumbai Indians at Hyderabad this March 27.

Dinesh Karthik then smashed a blazing 35-ball 83 but RCB ended up losing the match in which 38 sixes were hit all around the park.

"It was never going to be a game where you talk about batsmanship. It's a game where you talk about who hit the most sixes and that was the difference," Finch

said on Star Sports. "They (RCB) had to start at 14 (runs per over). And if you have one bad over it goes to 16." Finch said the Hyderabad side used the Powerplay segment

"They (SRH) were getting lucky in the first powerplay and they needed those sixes and Travis Head was the difference there. "He started off well, his intent to get the ball rolling and then a courageous move to keep

Klaasen at No. 3 and say we need

batting line-up and we are going to put the bowlers to the sword here," added Finch. Head's destructive hundred, crafted off 39 balls, was the

fourth fastest in the tournament,

to keep going, we have a deep

the cornerstone of SRH's 25-run Finch said IPL teams had started changing their strategies by bringing in big-hitters like Klaasen up the order as they play

fearless cricket. "A lot of times teams think that Klaasen has so much power to the back end, let's hold him back. Like (RCB's) Glenn Maxwell at times, you don't want to expose him right now because if he gets out, then we've got to rebuild. Teams don't think like that any-

"(SRH coach) Dan Vettori has talked about that, play aggressive, play fearlessly and bear the consequence if it doesn't go right. If it does go right, you don't

lose."
Dinesh Karthik once again underlined his value making a 35-ball 83 at a strike-rate of 237. Finch said the ability to strike the ball comes naturally to Karthik. given his more than two decades

of experience in the game. "Well, once you've got 20-25 years of experience behind you, and you've got that bulk of balls you've hit throughout your whole career since you were five years old, you don't lose that ability to bat.

Maxwell takes mental physical break from

tally and physically ruined at that time. The 35-year-old made his comeback a couple of months later.

In the ongoing IPL, Maxwell has been quite underwhelming with the bat in the six matches he has played this season, contributing just 32 runs at an average of 5.33 and a strike-rate of 94. Twenty eight of those 32 runs came against Kolkata Knight Riders alone, helped to a great degree by two dropped

catches. "I have been in this situation in the past where you can keep playing and get yourself deeper into a hole. We have had a pretty big deficiency after the power play, which has been my area of strength over the last couple of seasons. "I felt like I wasn't contributing with the bat, and with the results and the position we find ourselves on the table, I think it's a good time to give someone else an opportunity to show their wares, and hopefully, someone can make that spot their own," a candid Maxwell said.



The big-hitting Australian, however, still hoped to return and make an impact in the later stages of the tournament. "The management here has been outstanding. I don't think I've had a better six months in cricket leading into

"So, it's frustrating when it ends up like this. But if I can get my body and my mind right, there's no reason I can't finish the tournament well if I do get another opportunity," he said.

The sudden dip in his form was surprising, considering the hot run he had in the run-up to the IPL. Maxwell had made 552 runs from 17 T20Is from November onwards, averaging 42 and his strike-rate was an impressive 185. But the Victorian started the IPL with a first-ball duck against Chennai Super Kings in an away match, and from that point his fortunes plummeted.
"T20 cricket is a pretty fickle game.
Even if you look at the first game, I ran

one off the middle of the bat to the keeper. I picked up the length, saw a scoring opportunity, but opened the face a little bit too much. "When you are going well, that goes

wide of the (wicketkeeper's) gloves, you get a boundary. You are 4 off 1, and you are away for the tournament," he noted. Maxwell said luck was not on his side in this tournament. 'I probably just haven't got away. In the

first few games, I feel I made reasonably good decisions (for shot selection). But I was finding ways to get out.

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