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LSG EYE A WIN IN
DHONI'S BASTION
12 SPORTS

BJP, Opposition lock horns over Modi remark EC's task force to tackle low poll turnout



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid concerns over rising temperature given the forecast of above normal maximum temperatures and heatwaves in certain parts of the country, the Election Commission on Monday decided to set up a task force comprising officials from concerned agencies that will review the impact of heatwave and humidity, five days before each polling phase for any concerning developments and mitigatory measures, if necessary.

This comes after the India Meteorological Department (IMD) told the Election Commission that there is "no major concern" regarding heatwave for the second phase of Lok Sabha polls to be held on April 26. Director General, IMD, Mrutunjay Mohapatra also told the poll panel that the weather forecast is "normal" for the 13 States and Union Territories going to polls in phase two, according to an official statement. The Commission on Monday held a meeting with the agencies concerned involving Additional Secretary Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Head of Department, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and DG Meteorology, India Meteorological Department (IMD) to understand the developing weather situation and discuss measures to mitigate any risk due to hot weather conditions during



Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu addresses the media in New Delhi on Monday

the period of Lok Sabha polls ending on June 1. The meeting also comes amid concerns that heatwave could affect voter turnout. Notably, low turnout during the first phase of polling on April 19, is attributed to hot weather or heatwave conditions in especially Hindi belt regions — Bihar, Western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh. The EC's data showed 65.5 per cent voter turnout for the first phase as compared to over 69 per cent in 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The officials said that it is difficult to identify sections of the voters turned low this time. Low voting percentage in the Hindi belt Western Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand has become a cause of concern for the political parties. The Opposition claimed that BJP core voters did come to cast their vote while some section of BJP supporters say people did not come to vote as it was clear that Modi is coming to power for the third time. "The Commission directed MoHFW to issue necessary instructions to health authorities in states to prepare for and extend assistance in case of heatwave conditions affecting election operations. The Commission will hold a separate review with State CEOs to ensure adequate arrangements at polling stations including shamiyana, drinking water, fans, and other assured minimum facilities, etc. as per its existing advisory dated March 16, 2024. IEC (Information, Education and Communication) activities shall be carried out amongst the public for precautionary measures (Do's & Don'ts) to mitigate the heat wave impact in polling station areas," the EC said in a statement.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP and Opposition leaders on Monday engaged in a war of words over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comments on 'redistribution of country's wealth by Congress favouring Muslims' made at an elections rally in Rajasthan a day earlier, with Opposition terming the remarks as communally divisive and also complained to the Election Commission of India while BJP saying the PM has called a spade and has echoed people's sentiments. While addressing a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara, Modi on Sunday suggested that if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute wealth to Muslims. Modi alleged that the Congress plans to give people's hard-earned money and valuables to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children."

Targeting Modi, the Congress on Monday accused him of attempting to create communal polarisation for electoral gains. AICC general secretary in-charge of organisation K C Venugopal said the prime minister was quoting something that wasn't there in the Congress manifesto and that he was attempting to create "communal polarisation" in the country for electoral gains. BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said that the opposition is in pain as Modi has shown them the mirror about its past. His remarks have resonated with people as for the opposition INDIA Bloc those who have illegally entered the country are more important than citizens if they happen to be Muslims, he alleged. Addressing a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara, Modi alleged that the Congress

plans to give people's hard-earned money and valuables to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children". In his remarks in Rajasthan, Modi had said, "Earlier, when their (Congress) government was in power, they had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's assets. This means to whom will this property be distributed? It will be distributed among those who have more children". Congress urged the Election Commission to take action against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his 'redistribution of wealth' remarks made at a poll rally in Rajasthan, alleging they were 'divisive', 'malicious' and targeted a particular religious community. They alleged that Modi was using religion to ask voters to refrain from voting for it and

was making false and defamatory statements against the Opposition party and its leaders. Congress accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of speaking in a "poisonous language" and said that he has several new tactics for diverting attention from real issues but the end of "business of lies" is near. Sharing the Congress' latest advertisement that focuses on rising prices and unemployment on Monday, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said, "Unemployment and inflation are at their peak in the country and Narendra Modi says 'everything is fine.' "He (Modi) has several new techniques to 'divert from the issues', But the end of the business of lies is near," Rahul Gandhi said in a social media

post. While CPIM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury said while the prime minister's remarks are atrocious, the silence of the Election Commission is worse, the Trinamool Congress leader Saket Gokhale also appealed to the people to write to the Election Commission over Modi's remarks. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut termed as "disheartening" the comments of Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggesting that if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute wealth of people to Muslims. "He even talked about mangalsutra (sacred thread worn around the neck by women). It means he is completely disillusioned and is going to lose this election," the Rajya Sabha member claimed.



IMD advisory aids farmers amid climate threats

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

From mitigating water stagnation in the rain-hit Northeastern States like Arunachal Pradesh and Karnataka and Goa to protecting fruit orchards from hail damage in Telangana and ensuring light, frequent irrigation to mitigate heat stress in Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, East Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued tailored warnings to farmers of different regions in the country. The IMD advisory is for the next five days to help farmers mitigate as well as combat the adverse effects of weather conditions on their crops and maximise agricultural productivity. Climate change induced erratic weather threat looms large on the country's agriculture and its allied sectors which is the largest source of livelihood in India. Low yields can hit the rural

economy and push inflation in urban areas as well, say experts. Farmers in Telangana have been suggested to install hail nets or hail caps in fruit orchards to prevent mechanical damage. "Provide mechanical support to horticultural crops and stake vegetables," said the IMD circular issued on Monday. Light to moderate rains or thundershowers will be experienced in the next three days till April 24, post which the dry weather will prevail in the State. IMD has issued yellow alerts for various districts of Telangana, predicting thunderstorms accompanied with lightning and gusty winds of around 30-40 kmph in these places. Similarly, farmers in North Eastern States (e.g., Arunachal Pradesh) have been asked to drain out excess water from crop fields to prevent water stagnation.

Setback for Mamata in WB

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In a major blow to the Trinamool Congress in the midst of general elections the Calcutta High Court on Monday ordered the cancellation of appointments of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff made through the recruitment process of State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal Government-sponsored and aided schools, declaring the selection process as "null and void". The court directed the "illegal recruits" to return their emoluments drawn in the past several years within four weeks. As the order came barely a couple of days after Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari presaged a "massive explosion that will shake the foundations of the TMC," Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee immediately called the court order "illegal" and vowed to move the Supreme Court for justice. "Now you can see the relationship between what he (Adhikari) said about a possible explosion and the order that has come today... this is an illegal order... I am not talking about the Judges but the order... we do not accept this order dictated by the BJP... We do not accept this order that will throw 26,000 people out of their jobs affecting 1.5 lakh or even more people directly... we will go to the higher court," Banerjee said at an election rally in North Dinajpur. Bengal SSC Chairman



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign meeting for Lok Sabha polls, in North Dinajpur district

Siddharth Majumdar said that the SSC would move the Apex Court. "We will go through the 300-page order... discuss and understand the legal aspects," he said. Incidentally Adhikari had a couple of days ago said that "a big explosion is coming in the next week that will shake the very foundation of this corrupt and anti-people Government," leading Banerjee to tell the people in a different rally that the BJP was out to assassinate her and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee who is also the general secretary of the party. In the devastating order which is unprecedented in the history of Bengal and

probably rare in the Indian judicial history the Bench of Justice Debangshu Basak and Justice Shabbir Rashidi, the Court not only directed the entire panel of 25,750 teachers and non-teaching staff appointed through a School Level Selection Test in 2016 and asked the CBI to undertake further investigation on the appointment process, and submit a report within three months. The Bench also directed the CBI to investigate into the government proposal to regularize the services of allegedly illegally appointed teachers by creating supernumerary posts.



Court rejects Kejriwal's plea for daily doctor consultation

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Rejecting Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea seeking daily consultations with his doctor through video conferencing, Special Judge Kaveri Baweja on Monday directed Director, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to constitute a medical board of a Senior Endocrinologist/ Diabetologist which will decide whether he needs insulin or not. Special Judge for CBI and ED cases Kaveri Baweja passed the order while declining Kejriwal's plea for video consultation with his doctor in the presence of his wife. The Court in its order said home-cooked food can be provided to Kejriwal but it must strictly adhere to the diet chart given by his doctor on April 1. The board will decide whether he should be administered insulin and also take a call on the diet and exercise plan he needs to follow, the court said. It said there shall be no deviations from the diet plan prescribed by the medical board. "The said Medical Board is further requested to prescribe a diet and exercise plan, if required, for the Applicant considering his medical requirements and relevant data regarding his vital statistics.



BJP leader Mukesh Dalal receives the 'certificate of election' after he was elected unopposed from Surat Lok Sabha seat, in Surat, on Monday

BJP seals first election win as its Surat candidate elected unopposed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SURAT/NEW DELHI

In a sort of 'opening' its electoral account in the ensuing general elections, BJP candidate Mukesh Dalal was on Monday elected unopposed from Surat Lok Sabha constituency in Gujarat after all other nominees withdrew from the fray. "I declare that Mukeshkumar Chandrakant Dalal, sponsored by the BJP, has been duly elected to fill the seat in the House from Surat parliamentary constituency," District Collector cum election officer Saurabh Pardhi told media persons as he handed over the certificate of election to Dalal. Reacting to the development, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh claimed that democracy is under threat. The candidature of Congress' Nilesh Kumbhani from Surat seat was rejected on Sunday after the district returning officer prima facie found discrepancies in the signature of the proposers. The nomination form of Suresh Padsala, the Congress' substitute candidate from Surat, was also invalidated. Voting for all 26 constituencies in Gujarat is scheduled for May 7, but with the result of Surat seat already out, polling will be held on 25 seats. Except for Dalal, all 8 candidates in the fray from Surat-4 Independents, 3 from smaller parties and Pyarelal Bharti of Bahujan Samaj Party

withdrew their nomination papers on the last day, as per the Surat district election office. Congress on Sunday alleged that Kumbhani's nomination form was rejected at the behest of the BJP and said it would challenge the rejection in the High Court. "Surat has presented the first Lotus to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. I congratulate our candidate for Surat Lok Sabha seat Mukesh Dalal for getting elected unopposed," Gujarat unit BJP president C R Paatil posted on social media. In the 2019 polls, BJP won all 26 constituencies in Gujarat, the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Congress claimed the BJP was frightened by the anger of MSME owners and the business community and attempted "match-fixing" even in the Surat Lok Sabha seat which the ruling party has been winning since 1984. "Aap chronology samajhiye" (Understand the chronology): Surat District Election Officer rejects the Congress' candidate for Surat Lok Sabha Nilesh Kumbhani's nomination for 'discrepancies in the verification of signatures of three proposers'. On similar grounds, officials reject the nomination of Suresh Padsala, the INC's substitute candidate from Surat.



Teenage chess prodigy Gukesh makes history

PTI ■ TORONTO

India's 17-year-old Grandmaster D Gukesh scripted history by winning the Candidates Chess Tournament here to become the youngest ever challenger to the world title, bettering a record created by the legendary Garry Kasparov 40 years ago. Gukesh played out an easy draw with American Hikaru Nakamura in the 14th and final round to finish with nine out of a possible 14 points in the tournament that is held to decide the

challenger to the world champion. The triumph entitles Gukesh a clash against reigning world champion Ding Liren of China in the last quarter of the year. The Chennai-based teen bettered Kasparov's record by quite a distance as the Russian great was 22 when he qualified in 1984 to clash with compatriot Anatoly Karpov. "So relieved and so happy. I was following this crazy game (between Fabio Caruana and Ian Nepomniachtch), and



then I went for a walk with my second (Gregorz Gawezyk), I think that helped," Gukesh said after winning. Gukesh also won a cash award of 88,500 Euros (approx ₹78.5 lakh). The total prize fund of the Candidates was 5,00,000 Euros. He became only the second Indian after the great Viswanathan Anand to win the prestigious tournament. Five-time world champion Anand's triumph came in 2014. "Congratulations to @DGukesh for becoming the

youngest challenger. The @WacaChess family is so proud of what you have done. I'm personally very proud of how you played and handled tough situations. Enjoy the moment," Anand posted on "X" to congratulate the youngster, who like him, also hails from Chennai. Needing at least a draw, Gukesh gave nothing away to Nakamura, a clear signal that the teenager is ready for the big stage and is going to be the next biggest star in the chess world.

BJP's Geeta Koda files nomination for Singhbhum seat

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Geeta Koda, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate, has officially filed her nomination for the Singhbhum parliamentary seat, marking the onset of an energetic electoral campaign in the region. The nomination process, accompanied by a spirited rally, showcased the fervent support garnered by Koda as she seeks to represent the constituency.

Amidst a sea of enthusiastic supporters, Geeta Koda submitted her nomination papers before the District Returning Officer at 1:40 pm, signifying the formal commencement of her electoral journey. Prior to the nomination filing, a vibrant rally, starting from Gandhi Maidan and culminating at



Khuntakati, captivated the attention of locals and party members alike. Notably, the event saw the esteemed pres-

ence of Babul Marandi, State BJP President, who lent his support to Koda's candidacy. The atmosphere at

Gandhi Maidan was electric as supporters eagerly awaited the arrival of Geeta Koda. A sizable crowd had gathered to

express their solidarity with the BJP candidate. Embarking on a procession from Gandhi Maidan to Khuntakati, BJP leaders and supporters showcased their unwavering commitment to Koda's candidacy.

Upon reaching the District Electoral Officer's office, Geeta Koda, accompanied by Babul Marandi and other party dignitaries, completed the formalities of filing her nomination. Notably, Koda submitted her nomination papers in two sets, underscoring the meticulousness of her candidacy. Among the notable figures present during the nomination filing were state BJP president Babul Marandi, Lok Sabha convenor Geeta Balmuchu, state spokesperson JB Tubid, and Geeta Koda's legal representative, Ankur Roychoudhary.

Their presence underscored the unified support extended towards Koda's electoral endeavors. Before proceeding to the returning officer's office, Geeta Koda paid homage at Desauli in Gitilipi, offering prayers for success in her electoral journey. The rally, spanning approximately 3.5 kilometers, served as a testament to the overwhelming support garnered by Koda and the BJP in the region.

With the filing of her nomination, Geeta Koda embarks on a journey to represent the aspirations and concerns of the people of Singhbhum. The vibrant rally and overwhelming support witnessed during the nomination filing ceremony underscore the momentum behind Koda's candidacy as she vies to serve the constituency with dedication and integrity.

3 youths attack cook, police step up to arrest culprits

PNS : DALITONGANJ

One of the three youths attacked a cook at one stone mine at Asehar last night under the Panki police station limits. Asehar has 2 stone mines. The cook identified as Suraj Chandravanshi has multiple injuries on limbs but not on head. He was given treatment. None of the injuries were grievous or life threatening. The injuries were inflicted with a desi chopper.

IPS probationer doing mandatory officer in charge ship of the Panki police station Gaurav Goswami said the attack was the fall out of a tiff with the victim by the three in the Sunday Haat of Asehar. The three again reached the mine where this cook was busy preparing food at night and with a desi chopper attacked the cook and fled from the scene.

The three belong to the minority community. One of the three is an addict. He wears the name Mithun, probably he has a penchant for dancing.

At the core of this episode is an illicit love which the cook has with a married woman of the minority community.

The tiff at the Asehar Haat on Sunday evening was in reaction to the cook's persistent illicit love with the married woman which was opposed and resisted by one of the three who attacked the cook.

Gaurav Goswami said police would soon arrest the three. A criminal case has been lodged against the three.

MTMC hosts Oncology Colloquium and Alumni Reunion

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Manipal Tata Medical College (MTMC), a constituent unit of Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) and an Institute of Eminence, recently organized a Colloquium on Oncology and MAHE Alumni Meet, which received resounding success and appreciation from participants.

The "Colloquium on Oncology," was chaired by Dr. G Pradeep Kumar, Dean of MTMC. The academic session featured an esteemed panel of Manipal Alumni, including renowned professionals such as Dr. Sandeep Ganguly from Apollo Hospitals, Kolkata, Dr. Satish Sharma from HCG Cancer Hospital, Ranchi, Dr. Sneha Jha from Paras HMRI Hospital, Patna, Dr. Namrata Agarwal Mahensaria from Rinchi Trust Hospital, Ranchi, Dr. Bijan Saha from Tata Main Hospital, Jamshedpur, along with Dr. Hiralal Murmu and Dr. Debarshi Saha from



MTMC. Guest speakers included Dr. Unnikrishnan B from KMC Mangalore, Dr. Anand Venugopal, COO of Manipal teaching hospitals, and Dr. Saraswathy Sreeram from KMC Mangalore.

The event attracted approximately 220 students, who actively participated in an interactive lecture on the present and future of oncology, followed by a multispecialty panel discussion focusing on breast cancer. The success of the academic program was evident, with attendees inspired to contribute further to the educa-

tion of medical students in the field of oncology and to aid cancer patients.

Encouraged by the positive outcome, MTMC Alumni Cell has decided to host similar academic talks involving Manipal Alumni regularly, aiming to benefit both students and patients.

In the evening, the Office of Alumni Relations organized the Manipal Alumni Meet - 2024. Dr. Anjaneyulu Konuri, Dr. Anshuman Pattnaik, Dr. Satish Sharma, and Dr. Chinmaya Dash spearheaded the organizing team for the event. The cam-

pus was adorned with vibrant lights to welcome Manipal Alumni from various regions, including Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, and Bihar.

Approximately 50 alumni, now established professionals in their respective fields, gathered to reminisce about their impactful education and experiences at Manipal. Dr. Unnikrishnan B eloquently highlighted the reciprocal relationship between alma mater and alumni, while Dr. G Pradeep Kumar shared amusing anecdotes, leaving the audience in laughter.

MTMC students added to the festivities with a fusion dance performance, and the college band enthralled the audience with popular songs, paying tribute to their Manipal seniors. The evening concluded with a delightful dinner for all attendees, leaving behind smiles and a sense of camaraderie, symbolizing the resounding success of the event.

Lohardaga DC reviews allocated work of all cells

PNS : LOHARDAGA

On Monday, under the chairmanship of District Election Officer cum Deputy Commissioner Dr. Waghmare Prasad Krishna, a meeting of all the cells constituted for the Lok Sabha general elections was held in the Collectorate Auditorium. Senior officers, nodal officers and in-charge officers of all the cells participated in the meeting. The Deputy Commissioner reviewed the allotted work of all the cells and gave necessary instructions. Personnel Cell, General Election Cell, Material Cell, Law and Order Cell, Vehicle Cell, Media Cell and other cells were reviewed by the Deputy Commissioner. In the meeting, the work related to physical inspection of all the blocks of the district till April 18 was also reviewed, which was done by the senior inspection officials.

Deputy Development Commissioner Dilip Pratap Singh Shekhawat, Sub-Divisional Officer Amit Kumar and senior, nodal.

CII YI to host Safety Training Programme

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

CII Young Indians, in collaboration with ASIA, is set to host a comprehensive safety training program on April 24th, 2024. The event will take place at Asia Hall, Adityapur, from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

This certificate program, facilitated by trainers from EMRI GVK Group, aims to equip participants with essential skills to effectively respond to adverse situations. Attendees will receive training on handling accidents, fires, heart attacks, and controlling excessive bleeding, enabling them to provide immediate assistance and potentially save lives. The program encompasses a range of topics, including CPR training for heart attacks, first aid for accidents, and fire safety protocols. Through



hands-on exercises and expert guidance, participants will gain practical insights into emergency response procedures. This initiative underscores CII Young Indians' commitment to promoting safety awareness and preparedness among individuals and organizations. By part-

nering with ASIA and leveraging the expertise of EMRI GVK Group trainers, the program aims to empower attendees with life-saving skills and enhance community resilience. For further information on the training program please feel free to contact us on 9204550315.

DAV Bokaro Sector 4 students hold bicycle Rally on Earth Day

R SHARMA : BOKARO

In a remarkable initiative to ignite environmental consciousness, students from D.A.V. Sector-IV Bokaro took charge to advocate for a greener planet through a unique "cycling campaign." Spearheaded by the school's new Principal, Sarbendu Sekhar Kar, the event served as an unprecedented awakening call to action for the city.

On the occasion of Earth Day, the school set a new standard for mass sensitization through an extraordinary global awareness program. The day began with a vibrant "cycle show" featuring illuminating slogans and distributing informative pamphlets, starting from the school campus in the morning. Notably cycling rally for the first time in Bokaro by any School traversed through key areas of the city including B.R. Ambedkar Chowk, B.G.H., Gandhi Marg, Bokaro Mall, and Sector-IV petrol pump, engaging citizens along the way.

The culmination of the event witnessed a spirited slogan and painting competition at the school, with students



from grades VI to XII showcasing their enthusiasm and creativity. Through their artwork, they conveyed a powerful message of environmental preservation. Principal SS Kar lauded the efforts of the students, emphasizing the importance of restoring our planet to its former glory through judicious resource usage. He highlighted initiatives such as tree planting and promoting recyclable materials as crucial steps towards effecting positive change.

Furthermore, Principal Kar stressed the urgent need for collective action to restore ecosystems,

protect biodiversity, and combat climate change. The event resonated well with the theme of Earth Day this year - "Planet Vs. Plastics," underscoring the pressing need to address the global plastic crisis. The event's resounding success not only showcased the proactive efforts of D.A.V. Sector-IV students but also underscored the importance of collaborative action in safeguarding the future of our planet. Also special appreciation was extended to Sector 4 Police Station and the press media for their invaluable support and contribution to the success of this endeavour.

Family Welfare day organized at Bokaro general hospital

PNS : BOKARO

Bokaro General Hospital's Obstetrics and Gynecology department hosted a Family Welfare Day event on April 22nd within its premises, under the guidance of Dr. Varsha Ghanekar. Dr. Ghanekar announced that Family Welfare Day would be observed on the 21st of every month to ensure maximum participation and benefit for attendees.

During the program, Dr. Jaya Agrawal, the Family Planning Coordinator at Bokaro General Hospital, provided comprehensive information about all the resources available for family planning. She highlighted various contraceptive methods, counseling services, and other family planning tools to empower individuals and families to make informed decisions about their reproductive health.

The event was overseen by Dr. Anima Kerketta, the head of the Obstetrics and Gynecology department, who emphasized the importance of family planning in promoting healthy and happy lives for every family. Dr. Kerketta reiterated that family planning makes it easier for women and children in smaller families to be cared for adequately, contributing to the overall well-being and prosperity of the entire family.

Throughout the day, attendees had the opportunity to engage in discussions, ask questions, and access various educational materials related to family planning and reproductive health.



Earth Day celebrated at DPS Ranchi

PNS : RANCHI



In a spirited celebration of Earth Day, DPS Ranchi demonstrated its commitment to environmental conservation and sustainability. The event, held on the school premises, was marked by various activities aimed at raising awareness about the importance of preserving our planet. Dr. Ram Singh, the esteemed Principal of DPS Ranchi, set the tone for the

event by donning a badge adorned with symbols representing Earth Day. Adding a personal touch to the occasion, students enthusiastically affixed the badge to his shirt, symbolizing their shared dedication to environmental stewardship. A highlight of the day was the vibrant cycle rally organized by the school, drawing participation from students, teachers, and staff alike. With colourful banners advocating for Earth conser-

vation fluttering in the breeze, participants pedalled through the streets surrounding the school, spreading the message of environmental responsibility and the urgent need to curb pollution. Furthermore, recognizing the pivotal role of trees in maintaining ecological balance, DPS Ranchi organized a plantation drive. Students actively participated in this initiative, planting saplings across the school campus. The plantation drive served as a tangible reminder of the school's commitment to fostering a greener, more sustainable future.

In a heartfelt message to the school community, Principal Dr. Ram Singh emphasized the significance of Earth Day and the collective responsibility to protect our planet. He urged students to become ambassadors for environmental conservation, encouraging them to adopt eco-friendly practices in their daily lives.

Roy hurls questions on Dhullu Mahto, JD(U) supports BJP

PNAKAJ : DHANBAD

East Singhbhum MLA Saryu Roy yet another time has thrown a salvo of questions against Dhanbad BJP candidate for Lok Sabha and has asked from BJP leaders are words mentioned in declaration made by BJP via news paper publication, as per Election commission norms are really true.

Talking to media here Roy said, the BJP mentioned in its declaration that Dhullu Mahto happens to be the best choice among available party workers despite having several criminal cases pending against him in different police stations and court.

Roy said as per publication made by BJP minimum 22 different sections under which case have been filed happen to be of grievous nature and if in any case Mahto is convicted would have to resign and

Dhanbad would have to undergo a midterm election. And if a person of this nature has been given a ticket is surprising.

He also met families whose land allegedly had been grabbed in Katras area by Dhullu Mahto. Rai said he had received phone calls from victims whose land had been allegedly grabbed by the Baghmara MLA.

Meanwhile, in another move, state Janta Dal U has decided to support NDA candidates across Jharkhand.

Talking to the media, national council member Sushil Kumar Singh said that as directed by national president Nitish Kumar, the party stands by the NDA candidates.

Replying to a query Singh said, Dhullu Mahto happens to be a champion of poor sections of society.

RP Ravi Firing Case: Akhilesh Singh acquitted due to lack of evidence



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Notorious criminal Akhilesh Singh has been acquitted by the court due to a lack of evidence in the firing incident on former judge RP Ravi in the Sakchi police station area.

The decision was rendered by the court of ADJ 4, Anand Mani Tripathi. However, a separate case against the accused Manoranjan Singh Lallu, Bunty Jaiswal, and Ritesh Rai is still ongoing.

The incident, which occurred on March 20, 2008, saw RP Ravi being shot by unidentified assailants while he was near the Excise

Department office in the Sakchi police station area. The former judge sustained injuries and was subsequently treated at TMH. Following the incident, a case was registered by the police based on the statement provided by Ravi's wife, Beera Prasad. Akhilesh Singh and others were implicated as accused in the case.

According to Beera Prasad's account to the police, RP Ravi was returning home with fruits when the assailants, riding a bike, initiated firing as they crossed the road near the Excise Department. The attack

resulted in RP Ravi sustaining injuries.

The court's decision to acquit Akhilesh Singh was reportedly based on the insufficiency of evidence linking him to the crime. While this verdict brings closure for Singh, the legal proceedings against Manoranjan Singh Lallu, Bunty Jaiswal, and Ritesh Rai are ongoing, underscoring the continued pursuit of justice in the matter.

The RP Ravi firing case has been closely watched by the public, given its implications on the safety of individuals in positions of authority. The acquittal of Akhilesh Singh highlights the complexities involved in establishing culpability in criminal cases and underscores the importance of thorough investigation and evidence gathering.

As the legal proceedings progress, the verdict serves as a reminder of the critical role played by the judiciary in upholding the principles of justice and ensuring accountability. The outcome of the ongoing case against the remaining accused will be awaited with keen interest by all concerned parties.

PAS BOKARO MARKS EARTH DAY 2024

PNS : BOKARO

The Pentecostal Assembly School Bokaro commemorated Earth Day 2024 on April 22nd, reaffirming its enduring dedication to sustainability and environmental conservation. Embracing the theme of "Planet Versus Plastic," the school orchestrated a series of impactful assemblies, involving students from all grades in activities aimed at deepening their understanding of their role in preserving Mother Earth.

Tailored assemblies for each grade level provided students with unique opportunities to engage with environmental issues. From Pre-Nursery to Grade V, young minds explored color and creativity through coloring and poster-making competitions. Meanwhile, students from Grades 6 to 8 participated in slogan writing contests, advocating for a greener future.



Grades 9 to 12 delved into artistic expression through face painting and canvas competitions, fueling their imagination and passion for environmental advocacy.

Principal Dr. Karuna Prasad, addressed each assembly with words of encouragement and wisdom. "As we celebrate Earth Day

today, let us reaffirm our pledge to protect and preserve it," remarked Dr. Prasad.

The day's festivities concluded with students receiving certificates for their outstanding contributions to various Earth Day competitions held throughout the preceding week.

CEO fiat to run awareness campaigns among voters on polling stations

Urban voters should get information about their polling stations by matching their voter ID cards

PNS : RANCHI

All polling stations in the Lok Sabha elections 2024 have been developed as model polling stations. Officials should develop these model polling centers as theme based polling centers to attract voters to vote. Encourage voters to get information about their polling centers so that they do not face any problem in finding their polling centers on the day of voting, said Chief Electoral Officer, Jharkhand, K Ravi Kumar on Monday.

The CEO along with the district election officials of the districts of Dhanbad, Bokaro, Ranchi and East Singhbhum, which have low

voting percentage in the urban areas, reviewed the work being done and the action plans prepared to increase the voting percentage in the respective districts through video conferencing from the Election House.

The CEO said that this time the work has to be done with the aim that no voter should be left out in the voting. He directed to provide information about polling day through miking and spread awareness about the importance of voting to bring the voters associated with polling booths to the polling booths due to low voting percentage due to shifted voters of Jharia and Belgarhia of Dhanbad



Chief Electoral Officer K Ravi Kumar, Additional Chief Electoral Officer Dr. Neha Arora, Joint Chief Electoral Officer Subodh Singh, Assistant Chief Electoral Officer Devdas Dutta and other officials during a meeting in Ranchi on Monday. PNS

district. He said that they should meet the members of Voter Awareness Forum formed in non-government organizations and register 100 percent voters in their institutions. Also, inform them about paid leave on the day of voting and motivate them to utilize it properly.

Ravi Kumar said that the SVEEP program should motivate all the people to vote through innovative efforts. Along with this, target those polling stations where the voting percentage was low and work to increase the voting percentage by removing the related reasons. He said that societies built in urban areas should be targeted and

motivated to vote there. Along with this, at the time of sweep programs organized in institutions to make young voters aware about voting, it should also be confirmed that 100 per cent voter ID cards of the eligible voters who have qualified in those institutions have been made.

During the summer holidays, he should make a democracy room for the children and get the project from them in the format given by the Election Commission of India. He said that to make voters aware, sweep works should be conducted on a large scale and the polling stations with low voting percentage should be reviewed

and the reasons should be spread in a targeted manner. He directed all the District Election Officers to personally conduct a physical review of the polling stations having minimum voting percentage in their area.

On this occasion, District Election Officers of Ranchi, Dhanbad, Bokaro and East Singhbhum districts told about the work being done to make voters aware about voting in their districts. Also gave information about the prepared action plans.

On this occasion, Additional Chief Electoral Officer Dr. Neha Arora, Joint Chief Electoral Officer Subodh Singh, Assistant Chief Electoral Officer Devdas Dutta were present.

Ulgulan Rally shows winds of change blowing in nation: JMM



JMM General Secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya during a press conference in Ranchi on Monday. PNS

PNS : RANCHI

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha today described the 'NyayUlgulan Rally' organised at the Jagannath Maidan (Prabhat Tara) in Dhurwa as a huge success. JMM General Secretary cum Spokesperson Supriyo Bhattacharya expressed his gratitude to the constituents of INDI Alliance and thanked the people for this. Addressing a press conference here on Monday Bhattacharya said that the crowd of people in Prabhat Tara Maidan shows that now the wind of change has been created in the country.

And, people want change. People want freedom from BJP rule. It has now become clear in Ulgulan Nyay Maharally as to what is the mood of Jharkhand. We felt that there is anger among the people regarding the injustice done to public leader Hemant Soren. BJP should understand what the people want and publicly apologize to Bayanveer.

"The incident of assault that took place was unexpected. We think it was sponsored by BJP. BJP has done this out of frustration and disappointment. The incident of fighting was targeted,

FIR lodged in clash during Ulgulan Rally

PNS : RANCHI

On Sunday, during the Ulgulan Nyaya rally held at Prabhat Tara Maidan in Ranchi, Congress candidate from Palamu KN Tripathi and RJD supporters clashed with each other. There was a fierce fight between the two and chairs were thrown. KN Tripathi's brother was injured in this fight. Tejashwi Yadav was also present on the stage when the fight took place. In the assault case, KN Tripathi's brother Nandagopal Tripathi has lodged an FIR against RJD

supporter Prabhu Dayal and others in Dhurva police station.

When the Ulgulan rally started, in front of the stage, RJD supporters who had come from Chatra started raising slogans from the Congress and RJD leadership and demanding that if Chatra is to be won, then the candidate will have to be changed. They were holding placards in their hands and started shouting slogans. KN Tripathi supporters standing nearby, including his brother, started snatching the placards.

After this the matter escalated and fighting started from both sides. When this incident was happening, Bihar's Leader of Opposition and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav were also present there. RJD supporters in Chatra wanted that an RJD leader should be made the candidate and not an outside leader from Palamu. KN Tripathi had come from Palamu to contest Chatra elections, hence they started creating ruckus demanding to make a local candidate in his place and the matter reached the level of fighting.

which is a ritual of BJP," said Bhattacharya.

Ulgulan Nyaya Maharally was organized under the leadership of JMM on 21 April. The entire responsibility of this program was handed over to JMM. But, in such a big program of the INDI alliance, the absence of Girdih MLA Sudivya Kumar Sonu and former CM Hemant Soren's younger brother Basant Soren in the pro-

gramme remained a topic of discussion. Giving clarification on this, the party's Central General Secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya said that the Girdih MLA was busy with Gandey bypoll. And, Basant Soren's health had deteriorated. And time was divided keeping in mind the heat. Due to which both these people could not attend the program. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is

also to participate in this Nyaya Maharally organized by the INDI Alliance. There was a chair named after him on the stage but Rahul Gandhi could not attend. When the program was nearing its end, Congress National President Mallika Arjun Kharge reached the venue. During his speech he said that Rahul Gandhi is not well but we all have reached here with his message.

Ulgulan rally meant to strengthen one family: BJP

CM Champai Soren sidelined, Kalpana Soren promoted: Pratul Shahdev

PNS : RANCHI

State BJP Spokesperson Pratul Shahdev today described the 'Nyay Ulgulan Rally' as a means of strengthening the family system. He said that during the entire rally, an attempt was made to project Kalpana Soren as the next leader by keeping her at the center. She remained sitting right in the center, while Chief Minister Champai Soren did not get a proper place on the stage as per his position. When the Chief Minister was given a chance to speak, no slogans were raised in his support and by that time the crowd had left the venue of the meeting. When Champai Soren's speech started, many big leaders came down from the stage and left. This is tantamount to insulting a tribal Chief Minister.

Pratul said that the people of INDI alliance, who talk about saving the Constitution, should tell why emergency was imposed in 1975 and why an attempt was made to tamper with the basic nature of the Constitution through the 42nd amendment in 1976? Through the 42nd Amendment, the powers of the High Court, Supreme Court and states were also taken away and given to the PMO. Later, the Supreme Court rejected its controversial issues. Pratul said that on Sunday a bloody clash took place between hundreds of supporters of the alliance



BJP State Spokespersons Pratul Shahdev addresses a press conference at party media centre in Ranchi on Monday. Pix by Ratan Lal

party at the rally of people talking about saving democracy. Dozens of heads were injured. Many had to be admitted to hospital. Pratul said that now the disappointed JMM and Congress are accusing BJP of creating ruckus. Whereas it is clear from the video footage that leaders and workers of Congress and RJD were beating each other. He said that Basant Soren was seen inspecting Prabhat Tara ground a day before the rally, but remained completely missing on the day of the rally. It was reported in the media that only Kalpana Soren was to be projected from this rally. No other member of the Soren family was to be allowed to speak. Probably, for this reason he did not come and JMM was seen lying on this issue.

On Sunday evening, JMM's spokesperson said that he was serving food to the workers, who had come from Dumka at his house. On Monday afternoon another spokesperson said that he was dehydrated. Pratul also showed the video of both the spokespersons. Pratul said that slogans of Shibu Soren, Hemant Soren, Kalpana Soren Zindabad were raised in the rally. But Jharkhand Mukti Morcha completely forgot Late Vinod Bihari Bihari, Late Nimrod Mahato and Late Durga Soren, who were among its founders, in the party. Pratul said that whatever happened in the rally, be it the incident of fighting or the insult of Chief Minister Champai Soren, it shows the truth of the Parivaar Vaadi INDI alliance.

Congress and JMM are brothers of corruption: Marandi

Calls for victory of Geeta Koda with huge margin of votes

PNS : RANCHI

State BJP President and former Chief Minister Babul Marandi said that this time the NDA alliance has to win 14 seats. "I have come to request that Prime Minister Narendra Modi take over the reins of the country for the third time by taking 400 seats," he said while addressing people in Chaibasa on Monday. Marandi reached Chaibasa on the occasion of nomination of MP candidate Geeta Koda. He said that BJP has done a lot of work for the country and Jharkhand in the last 10 years. The party has given the slogan of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas and Sabka Vishwas. During this period he worked for all sections of society. No previous government did so much work during its tenure. Whatever BJP says, it does. The separate



Former Jharkhand Chief Minister Babul Marandi alongwith BJP candidate from Chaibasa constituency Geeta Koda show victory sign after she filed her nomination papers for the Lok Sabha elections, in West Singhbhum district on Monday. PNS

state of Jharkhand is also the contribution of BJP. The battle of Jharkhand was being fought for years, but the Congress party did not respect the sentiments of the

people of this state. The leaders here kept playing and feeding Jaipal Singh and Shibu Soren, but Jharkhand did not become a state. BJP had promised that after com-

ing to power, Jharkhand will be made a separate state. With the formation of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government at the Centre, a separate state of Jharkhand was formed on November 15, 2000.

Marandi said that Congress and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha are brothers of corruption. He said that earlier there was no electricity in the village. People lived with the help of lanterns and lamps. The previous government never worried about providing electricity to the villages. BJP government is formed at the centre, electricity reached every village.

Marandi said that the people in power in Jharkhand have looted the state in last 4 years and made it hollow. They are propagating among the people that Hemant Soren has been put in jail by BJP. He has no fault, but after

reading the charge sheet filed by ED in the court, it will be known what the misdeeds of Hemant Soren are. Hemant Soren was posing as the leader of thieves. Coal and stone were being smuggled. Army and government land were sold by making fake documents. ED will definitely put those who do this in jail. He said that the Jharkhand government is also trying to deceive the unemployed people of the state. She takes the money and arranges the appointment. The question paper is getting leaked even before the exam. He said that BJP considers the Constitution as a religious text. Previous governments have done the work of changing the Constitution. NDA candidate Geeta Koda said that the opponent has neither policy nor determination.

Saryu Roy's party to contest election from Dhanbad

PNS : RANCHI

After days of speculation Jharkhand East legislator Saryu Roy today announced that his party -- Bharatiya Jantantira Morcha -- will contest elections from the Dhanbad Lok Sabha seat. Roy said that the name of the candidate will be announced in the next 24 hours.

Addressing media persons in a press conference in Dhanbad Roy said that a five-member panel of his party will decide the candidate for Dhanbad Lok Sabha constituency. He said that he or his party has not supported Congress candidate Anupama Singh. He admitted that



currently 19 cases are pending against Dhullu Mahato and he has been convicted in two cases only. But, in the year 2022, Dhanbad SP had given a report in the Jharkhand High Court. According to this report, there are many more FIRs registered against Dhullu Mahato. Roy said that the BJP candidate has been convicted in 4 cases. He said that in the remaining cases, they are much more serious. In some of these cases, Dhullu Mahato could be sentenced to up to 10 years. Roy said that he himself wants to be the candidate from his party from the Dhanbad Lok Sabha seat, but the five-member panel will take a final decision.



Congress candidate Yashaswini Sahay along with her father former Union Minister Subodh Kant Sahay after she got a ticket from the Ranchi constituency for the Lok Sabha elections. PNS

MAKE MODI PM FOR THE THIRD TIME TO SEE INDIA RULE THE NEXT CENTURY: MUNDA

PNS : RANCHI

Union Minister Arjun Munda today said that the coming century should belong to India. For this, it is necessary to make Narendra Modi Prime Minister for the third time and this is possible only if you vote for BJP in the Lok Sabha elections. The occasion was the election public meeting organized in Lapa and Udikel villages of Karra block. Munda is also the BJP candidate from Khunti parliamentary seat.

Munda said that those who ruled the country for 60 years blocked the development of villages. For development we have to take tradition and change together. For a developed India, we have to bring dynamism in development. On one hand we talk



Union Minister-cum BJP candidate from Khunti constituency Arjun Munda during an election campaign rally at a village in Khunti on Monday. PNS

about organic food and are moving away from cow dung. There should be time bound work for development. Time does not stop when the clock stops.

Attacking the state government, Arjun Munda said that those who have grabbed Bhuihari's land will neither

develop the tribals nor protect them. This government also tried to change the CNT Act in order to hand over the tribal land to brokers. The file regarding amendment in CNT is still lying with the then minister Mathura Mahato. The minister said that the BJP government has given a

lot of respect to the tribals, especially Khunti. Before Prime Minister Narendra Modi, no Prime Minister had visited Ulihatu, the birthplace of Lord Birsa Munda. Draupadi Murmu is the first President, who went to Ulihatu and paid obeisance to the Mother Earth.

Munda called upon the people to cooperate in making Narendra Modi the Prime Minister by voting in favour of BJP in the Lok Sabha elections to be held on May 13. BJP leader Brajendra Hamerom welcomed the guests.

During the welcome pro-

gram organized in Udikel village, Arjun Munda was greatly impressed by the talent of Surdas Munda, a blind mandr player from the same village. He shook hands with Surdas and went along holding his hand for some distance.

On this occasion, Shivshankar Mishra, Dilip Sharma, Torpa Assembly in-charge Arun Chandra Gupta, Vishnu Soni, Rajen Munda, Zilla Parishad member Jorong Aind, Mandal President Ramdhyan Singh, Sudhir Singh, Mohanlal Pathak, Ashwini Sharma, Bittu Sharma, Manoj Mishra, Jagannath Sahu. A large number of BJP workers and villagers including Krishna Hemrom, Mahadev Gop, Ravana Gope, Mahavir Gop, Seema Devi, Preeti Devi were present.

Opposition resorting to appeasement politics: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP alleged on Monday that the Opposition has resorted to blatant appeasement politics, anti-Hindu agenda and joining hands with anti-India forces in desperation, as it is becoming clear that the ruling NDA will reach its target of winning over 400 seats in the Lok Sabha polls.



of them has been arrested and that the CBI should probe the case.

"Her father is himself saying that he has lost faith in the police but Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is shielding the accused," the BJP spokesperson alleged.

While BJP president J P Nadda met the victim's family members, no senior Congress leader such as Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra or the chief minister met them, he said. The BJP spokesperson claimed

that some people who raised 'the Jai Shri Ram' slogan during a Ram Navami procession were beaten up and said that there is a "jungle raj" in Karnataka.

Bhatia alleged that the Congress manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls seems to be inspired by Pakistan's founder M A Jinnah as it speaks of strengthening personal laws. Will the practice of triple talaq, which was banned and made a criminal offence by the Modi government, be brought back, he asked and also attacked the Congress for its leader P Chidambaram's assertion that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act will be repealed if the INDIA bloc comes to power. As the BJP's graph rises during the polls and it becomes clear that the ruling National Democratic Alliance will reach its target of over 400 seats, the opposition, especially the Congress, is turning desperate, Bhatia claimed.

Rajnath reviews military preparedness in Siachen

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday visited Siachen, the world's highest battlefield, and reviewed India's overall military preparedness in the region.

Singh's visit to Siachen came over a week after the Indian Army marked the 40th year of its presence in the strategically key region.

The defence minister, accompanied by Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande, reviewed the overall security situation in the region, officials said.

"Visited a forward post in Siachen. Had a wonderful interaction with the brave Army personnel who are guarding our nation in extremely challenging conditions," Singh said on 'X'.

"I laud their courage and professionalism in the line of duty," he said.

Singh also interacted with the soldiers deployed in Siachen. The Siachen glacier at the height of around 20,000 feet in the Karakoram range is known as the highest militarised zone in the world



where soldiers have to battle frostbite and high winds.

In his address to the soldiers, Singh lauded them for walking on the virtuous path of protecting the "motherland with valour and determination in extreme conditions." He emphasised that the nation will remain forever indebted to the armed forces personnel, as due to their sacrifices, every citizen feels

safe. "We are leading a peaceful life as we have an assurance that our brave soldiers stand steadfast at the borders. In the times to come, when the history of national security is written, the acts of bravery and iron-clad will of our soldiers in the icy cold glacier will be remembered with pride," he said. "It will forever be an inspiration for future generations,"

he said.

The defence minister described Siachen as not an ordinary land, but a symbol of India's sovereignty and determination.

He stated that just as Delhi is India's national capital, Mumbai is the financial capital and Bengaluru is the technology capital; Siachen is the capital of courage, grit and determination.

The nation recently celebrated the 40th anniversary of the success of Operation Meghdoot.

Singh termed the operation, which was launched by the Indian Army in Siachen on April 13, 1984, as a golden chapter of the country's military history. "The success of Operation Meghdoot is a matter of pride for all of us," he said.

The defence minister also laid a wreath at the Siachen War Memorial, as a mark of solemn tribute to the bravehearts who have made the supreme sacrifice in service of the country.

Under its 'Operation Meghdoot' the Indian Army established its full control over the Siachen Glacier on April, 1984.

The Indian Army strengthened its presence in Siachen over the last few years.

In January last year, Captain Shiva Chauhan from the Army's Corps of Engineers was posted at a frontline post in Siachen Glacier, in the first such operational deployment of a woman Army officer at the key battlefield.

NSDC, ISKCON to provide vocational training to underprivileged youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a groundbreaking collaboration aimed at empowering marginalized communities, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is all set to provide vocational training to tribal and underprivileged youth across multiple states.

The strategic partnership will initially focus on skilling youth from tribal and marginalized communities in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh, with plans to expand to other regions in the future. Through jointly conducted short-term courses, participants will receive industry-recognized certifications via the Skill India Digital Hub platform, enhancing their employability prospects.

Upon successful completion of the training programmes, the skilled youth will have



access to employment opportunities within India. Furthermore, they will be eligible for international job placements facilitated by NSDC International, a subsidiary of NSDC specializing in global mobility and placement arrangements.

As part of the collaboration, ISKCON will establish a Culinary School to empower tribal youth from regions such

as Palghar and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, as well as neighboring states like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. Notably, the trained individuals will have the opportunity to be employed at the upcoming Maha Kumbh Kitchen in Prayagraj in 2025, with provisions for international mobility facilitated in partnership with NSDC International.

The primary objective of this collaboration is to bolster local economies through the establishment of ECO villages and training centers, with a keen focus on providing skill development opportunities to tribal youth, women, and other marginalized communities.

Two additional projects will be implemented under the partnership, each designed to empower local youth and foster sustainable development. The first project aims to replicate the success of the Govardhan Eco Village (GEV) in Palghar, Maharashtra, by setting up similar self-sufficient and sustainable establishments in regions such as Nandurbar (Maharashtra), Jaipur Rural (Rajasthan), and Mandla and Balaghat (Madhya Pradesh), including areas surrounding the Kanha National Park.

The second project will focus on skill development to support the local economy, particularly in sectors such as Hospitality, Retail, and Logistics. By establishing Skill India Centers in

partnership with ISKCON, this initiative will equip local youth, including women, with the necessary skills for employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

NSDC's Skill India Centers have a proven track record of providing resources and support to empower youth in various sectors, facilitating their entry into the workforce and exploring international mobility opportunities. Through pre-incubation and entrepreneurship development training, budding entrepreneurs will receive crucial support in areas such as prototype development, accessing credit, mentorship, and establishing market linkages.

The collaboration between NSDC and ISKCON marks a significant stride towards fostering sustainable development through skill enhancement, ensuring that marginalized communities gain access to opportunities that lead to economic prosperity and overall social inclusion.

Indian universities demonstrate highest performance amongst G20 nations this year

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian universities demonstrated the highest performance improvement among all the G20 nations this year, a significant 14 per cent year-on-year improvement in their average ranking, according to QS president Nunzio Quacquarelli.

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was identified as the highest-ranked university in India in the coveted rankings announced by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the London-based higher education analytics firm. The university was ranked at 20th position globally for development studies.

The QS World University Rankings by Subject were announced earlier this month in which IIM-Ahmedabad figured among the top 25 institutions globally for business



and management studies while IIM-Bangalore and IIM-Calcutta were among the top 50.

"This year, Indian universities demonstrated the highest performance improvement among all G20 nations (a significant 14 per cent year-on-year improvement in their average ranking). In terms of research output, India has become one of the world's most rapidly expanding research centres," it said.

From 2017 to 2022, India's research output surged by an impressive 54 per cent, making it the world's fourth-largest producer of research, the QS president said. "India now ranks prominently across in 44 out of the 55 QS Subject Rankings. Standout performances were noted in Computer Science, Chemistry, Biological Sciences, Business Studies and Physics, among others.

More than 2,000 criminal cases against MPs, MLAs decided in 2023: SC told

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Special courts for trial of criminal cases related to Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly decided more than 2,000 cases in 2023, the Supreme Court has been informed.

In an affidavit filed by senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, who has been appointed amicus curiae in a PIL seeking expeditious disposal of criminal cases against MPs/MLAs, said that more directions are needed for speedy adjudication of pending trials and their investigation under strict monitoring by the respective high courts, as there are around 501 candidates with criminal cases who are contesting the Lok Sabha elections in



the first two phases.

Referring to a report of NGO 'Association of Democratic Reforms for the Lok Sabha elections 2024 Phase I and Phase II', Hansaria, assisted by advocate Sneha Kalita, said that out of 2,810 candidates (Phase I - 1618 candidates and Phase II - 1192 candidates), 501 (18 per cent) candidates have criminal cases against them, out of which, 327 (12 per cent) are serious criminal cases (punishable with

imprisonment of 5 years and more).

"The same was the position in 2019 Lok Sabha elections in which out of 7928 candidates, 1500 candidates (19%) had criminal cases, out of which 1070 candidates (13%) were serious criminal cases. However, out of 514 elected members of 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024), 225 members (44%) had criminal cases against them.

"Thus, the candidates with criminal cases have won more seats than candidates without criminal cases. In this context, it is necessary that this court may pass further orders for expeditious disposal of pending trials and investigation under strict monitoring by the respective high courts," the affidavit said.

Shoe insole technology to prevent diabetic foot ulcers unveiled

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A team of researchers has unveiled a novel shoe insole technology aimed at reducing the risk of diabetic foot ulcers, a serious complication that can result in hospitalization and even leg, foot or toe amputation.

Muthu BJ Wijesundara, principal research scientist at The University of Texas at Arlington Research Institute (UTARI), explained that the innovation targets a major cause of these ulcers: skin and soft tissue breakdown due to repetitive stress during walking. Diabetes often damages the small blood vessels supplying nerves, leading to poor circulation and foot ulcers, affecting approximately one-third of individuals with the condition. Despite numerous attempts with shoe insoles to



address this issue, their effectiveness in preventing ulcers has been limited, as per Wijesundara

In an article in the peer-reviewed International Journal of Lower Extremity Wounds, Wijesundara and UTA colleagues Veyssel Erel, Aida Nasirian and Yixin Gu, along

with Larry Lavery of UT Southwestern Medical Center, described their innovative insole technology. After this successful pilot project, the next step for the research team will be refining the technology to make it more accessible for users with varying weights and shoe sizes.

In India as in the world, the burden of diabetes-related amputations is a serious issue.

According to a study by the Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism, the prevalence of diabetic foot ulcers in India is estimated to be between 15-25 per cent among people with diabetes. Yet another study, 'Lower limb amputation rehabilitation status in India: A review,' by Dr Raktim Swarnakar, Dr Shiv Lal Yadav, Dr Darshana Surendran from Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, AIIMS, Delhi, talks about the psychological impact of amputation which is profound, leading to a high prevalence of psychiatric disorders among amputees, ranging from 32%-84 per cent.

"Rates of depression vary from 10.4%-63.0%, while post-trau-

matic stress disorder rates range from 3.3%-56.3% compared to the general population's rates of 10%-15%. Amputation can have adverse psychological effects, including a decrease in self-confidence, a sense of inadequacy, the development of a negative self-concept, and a distorted perception of body image, ultimately affecting the overall quality of life," said the doctors. The study appeared in the World Journal of Clinical Cases. Diabetic foot is a leading cause of disability worldwide, and amputations in patients with diabetes account for a significant portion of all amputations, with an average percentage of 68.6 per cent. The age group most affected by amputations was the 20s and 30s, which represents the productive population of the country, as per the Indian study.

India is fourth largest military spender in world

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India is the fourth largest military spender in the world with its military expenditure 83.6 billion dollars in year 2023. This is 4.2 per cent higher than in 2022, said the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in its annual report released on Monday. The biggest spender is USA and other three nations are China, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Total global military expenditure reached \$2443 billion in 2023, an increase of 6.8 per cent in real terms from 2022. This was the steepest year-on-year increase since 2009. The 10 largest spenders in 2023—led by the United States, China and Russia—all increased their military spending, according to SIPRI.

World military expenditure rose for the ninth consecutive year to an all-time high of

\$2443 billion. For the first time since 2009, military expenditure went up in all five of the geographical regions defined by SIPRI, with particularly large increases recorded in Europe, Asia and Oceania and the Middle East.

"The unprecedented rise in military spending is a direct response to the global deterioration in peace and security," said Nan Tian, Senior Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme. "States are prioritizing military strength but they risk an action-reaction spiral in the increasingly volatile geopolitical and security landscape."

Russia's military spending increased by 24 per cent to an estimated \$109 billion in 2023, marking a 57 per cent rise since 2014, the year that Russia annexed Crimea. In 2023 Russia's military spending made up 16 per cent of total government spending and its

military burden (military spending as a share of gross domestic product, GDP) was 5.9 per cent.

Ukraine was the eighth largest spender in 2023, after a spending surge of 51 per cent to reach \$64.8 billion. This gave Ukraine a military burden of 37 per cent and represented 58 per cent of total government spending. Ukraine's military spending in 2023 was 59 per cent the size of Russia's. However, Ukraine also received at least \$35 billion in military aid during the year, including \$25.4 billion from the USA. Combined, this aid and Ukraine's own military spending were equivalent to about 91 per cent of Russian spending.

In 2023, the 31 NATO members accounted for \$1341 billion, equal to 55 per cent of the world's military expenditure. Military spending by the USA rose by 2.3 per cent to reach \$916 billion in 2023, representing 68 per cent of total NATO military spending. In

2023, most European NATO members increased their military expenditure. Their combined share of the NATO total was 28 per cent, the highest in a decade. The remaining 4 per cent came from Canada and Türkiye.

"For European NATO states, the past two years of war in Ukraine have fundamentally changed the security outlook," said Lorenzo Scarazzato, Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme. "This shift in threat perceptions is reflected in growing shares of GDP being directed towards military spending, with the NATO target of 2 per cent increasingly being seen as a baseline rather than a threshold to reach."

China, the world's second largest military spender, allocated an estimated \$296 billion to the military in 2023, an increase of 6.0 per cent from 2022. This was the 29th con-

secutive year-on-year rise in China's military expenditure. China accounted for half of total military spending across the Asia and Oceania region. Several of China's neighbours have linked their own spending increases to China's rising military expenditure.

Japan allocated \$50.2 billion to its military in 2023, which was 11 per cent more than in 2022. Taiwan's military expenditure also grew by 11 per cent in 2023, reaching \$16.6 billion. "China is directing much of its growing military budget to boost the combat readiness of the People's Liberation Army," said Xiao Liang, Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme. "This has prompted the governments of Japan, Taiwan and others to significantly build up their military capabilities, a trend that will accelerate further in the coming years." Estimated military expendi-

ture in the Middle East increased by 9.0 per cent to \$200 billion in 2023. This was the highest annual growth rate in the region seen in the past decade.

Israel's military spending—the second largest in the region after Saudi Arabia—grew by 24 per cent to reach \$27.5 billion in 2023. The spending increase was mainly driven by Israel's large-scale offensive in Gaza in response to the attack on southern Israel by Hamas in October 2023.

"The large increase in military spending in the Middle East in 2023 reflected the rapidly shifting situation in the region—from the warming of diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab countries in recent years to the outbreak of a major war in Gaza and fears of a region-wide conflict," said Diego Lopes da Silva, Senior Researcher with SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme.

AFMS collaborates with IIT Delhi to develop medical devices

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Armed Forces Medical Services and IIT-Delhi on Monday joined hands to undertake collaborative research to develop novel medical devices and focus on solving health issues specific to serving soldiers in varied terrains.

AFMS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for collaborative research and training with the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi. "The scope of this MoU includes undertaking research and innovation to develop novel medical devices and focus on solving health issues specific to serving soldiers in varied terrains," the defence ministry said in a statement. The MoU was signed by Director General, Armed

Forces Medical Services, Lt Gen Daljit Singh and Director, IIT-Delhi, Prof. Rangan Banerjee.

IIT-Delhi has a robust biomedical research ecosystem which is ideal for providing the technical expertise required for research in the diverse medical challenges faced in the armed forces, including rehabilitation of amputees, officials said. Under the ambit of this agreement, faculty exchange programmes, joint academic activities and development of joint PhD programmes will also be planned, they said. On this occasion, Lt Gen Singh said AFMS is dedicated to providing the highest level of medical care to soldiers and collaboration with institutes of national importance like IITs is a significant step towards this commitment.



Modi Government has eliminated terrorism: Shah

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has eliminated terrorism from the country while Naxalism is on the verge of ending. Addressing an election rally in Chhattisgarh's Kanker town, Shah also asked Naxalites to surrender, or else they would be rooted out from the state in two years. He asked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi that four generations of his family were in power in the country, but what they have done for the poor people in Chhattisgarh. "The Congress says the minority (community) has the first right over the country's resources of the country, but we (BJP) say the poor, adivasis, Dalits and backwards have the first right over resources of the country," Shah said. He also said that Congress leaders did not attend the consecration ceremony of



Lord Ram's idol at the Ayodhya temple in lure of their vote bank. The Union minister hailed PM Modi, saying he has a "track record of 10 years and agenda for 25 years." "Narendra Modi ji has

previous Congress rule and the alleged involvement of the former chief minister in the Mahadev betting app scam). After the formation of the BJP government in Chhattisgarh, Vishnu Deo Sai was elected as the chief minister and Vijay Sharma as the state home minister. In the last four months, 90 Naxalites were neutralised under the BJP government, Shah said. While 123 Naxalites were arrested, 250 surrendered (during this period), he added. Under PM Modi's leadership, Naxalism has been eliminated from all over the country, including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, Shah said. "Elect Modi ji for the third term, the menace (of Naxalism) will be rooted out from Chhattisgarh in two years," he added. Shah appealed to the people to vote for BJP's Kanker Lok Sabha seat candidate Bhojraj Nag.

eliminated terrorism from the country while Naxalism is on the verge of an ending. Mahadev app brand Bhupesh Baghel government did not take action against Naxalites," Shah said. He was referring to the

Rahul will come and try to create division, do not fall for it: Irani to people in Amethi



PTI ■ AMETHI (UP)

Union minister and local MP Smriti Irani on Monday alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will come to Amethi after April 26 and divide the people in the name of casteism and visit one temple after the other. Addressing roadside meetings during her election campaign in Bhetua and Bhadar areas here, Irani said, "After the voting in Wayanad on April 26, Rahul Gandhi will come here to tell everyone that Amethi is his family and stoke the fire of casteism in the society here."

She added, "Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party rejected the invitation for the consecration ceremony of Lord Shri Ram in Ayodhya but he will be seen roaming around the temples in Amethi. So there is a need to be careful and alert." In a major upset for the Congress in 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Irani wrested Amethi from Rahul Gandhi, who had held the constituency for 15 years. The Congress has not yet declared its candidate from the seat but local party workers are rooting for Rahul Gandhi to contest again. The Union minister also

alleged that Rahul Gandhi never raised issues of Amethi in the Parliament and was often missing from the House. She alleged that despite Rahul Gandhi being an MP for 15 years, 10 of them while there was UPA at the helm at Centre and UP under his ally (SP), still people in Amethi could not even get drinking water. People in Amethi could get drinking water supplied to their house only after Narendra Modi came to power, she claimed. It is the fifth day in Amethi of Irani, who is seeking a second term from the constituency on a BJP ticket.

Geeta Kora files nomination as BJP candidate for Singhbhum

PTI ■ CHAIBASA (JHARKHAND)

Geeta Kora on Monday filed her nomination papers as the BJP candidate for the Singhbhum (ST) Lok Sabha constituency in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district. Jharkhand BJP president Babul Marandi, senior party leaders and hundreds of party workers accompanied Kora as she submitted her nomination papers before the returning officer. Exuding confidence about her victory, Kora told reporters that the enthusiasm of party workers "showed that BJP would achieve 400 seat target." "Lots of work has been done for women by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He has a mission for development of women, tribals and others. I will take forward his mission of development in my constituency," Kora said. JMM has fielded former state minister Joba Manjhi in the Singhbhum Lok Sabha seat against Geeta Kora, who is the wife of former chief minister Madhu Kora.

BJP releases Odia version of party Lok Sabha manifesto

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha BJP unit on Monday released the Odia version of the party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections. Senior BJP leaders including election in-charge Vijaypal Singh Tomar, state president Manmohan Samal, former union minister Jual Oram and former state president Samir Mohanty were present during the release of the Odia version of the party's manifesto. Centre's free ration scheme will be extended by another five years, three crore 'Lakshpati didi' will be created, the PM Awas Yojana will be expanded and drinking water supply will be taken to every home, said Tomar. "If BJP forms a government in Odisha, we will implement all the promises made in the central manifesto in the state. The present government has not implemented the



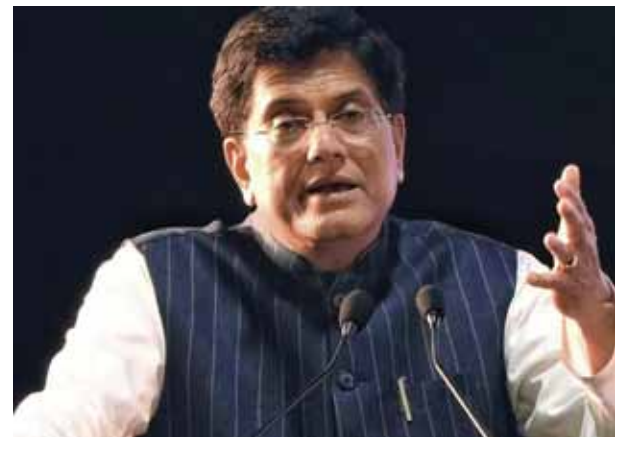
Ayushman Bharat Yojana in Odisha for which migrant workers are facing hardship," he said. The Modi government is totally dedicated to women, youths and farmers. The Modi government has fulfilled all promises made in the poll manifesto in 2014 and 2019, Samal claimed. The BJP will reach out to every household with the Odia version of the manifesto, the state party president said.

Congress synonymous with corruption, family rule, appeasement politics: Piyush Goyal

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress is synonymous with corruption, family rule and appeasement politics, Union Minister and senior BJP leader Piyush Goyal alleged on Monday. Congress had made promises since the era of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to eliminate poverty in the country, but it did not happen, he said. He was addressing a rally in support of the BJP's Lok Sabha candidate from Telangana's Zaheerabad B B Patil. Patil, who is a current MP, was with

the BRS and defected to the BJP on March 1, just 15 days before the Model Code of Conduct came into force. Goyal, who highlighted the Narendra Modi Government's pro-poor schemes and welfare measures including Ayushman Bharat, scheme aiming to provide free houses for four crore people, Jal Jeevan Mission and goal of constructing 11 crore toilets, alleged that the Congress only makes hollow promises. "Modi cares for the poor and the marginalised sections of society. Rahul Gandhi's



grandmother (Indira Gandhi) promised to people that she will eliminate poverty. But, they did not work for the poor," he further claimed. "Rajiv Gandhi told the country that he sends Rs 100 from Delhi and that only Rs 15 reaches the poor with 85 per cent being eaten away by middlemen and corruption," he said, "Vut, the problem remained unresolved." He further attacked the Congress, saying, "Congress means corruption, Congress means family rule, Congress means appeasement politics." In Telangana, the corrupt

BRS government" was voted out, but the new government in the state has not taken steps to check corruption, he claimed. Stating that Modi has resolved to make the country a developed one, he said the nation would become developed only when it is free of corruption, when appeasement politics end and when all get equal justice. BJP never divides the society but unites, he claimed. Polling in Telangana for the Lok Sabha elections would be held on May 13.

12 members of royal families contesting Assembly, Lok Sabha polls in Odisha

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Twelve members of different royal families in Odisha are contesting the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections seeking votes of commoners. Elections to the 21 Lok Sabha constituencies in Odisha and 147 Assembly segments will be held simultaneously in the state from May 13 to June 1. The ruling Biju Janata Dal had fielded eight members from royal families followed by BJP three and Congress one. Ten members of the royal families are contesting Odisha Assembly elections while two are in the fray for Lok Sabha polls. The BJD has fielded 28-year-old Sulakshana Geetanjali Devi, granddaughter of veteran leader late A N Singhdeo of Dharakote as its candidate for the Sanakhemundi assembly constituency. A law degree-holder, Geetanjali is the fifth member of the Dharakote royal family to contest assembly election. Her grandfather A N Singhdeo was elected from the Surada constituency four times - 1967, 1971, 1977 and 1985 - as an MLA and in 1989 as the MP of Aska Lok Sabha constituency. Her grandmother Shanti Devi and father Kishor Chandra Singhdeo had also been elected from the seat in the 1990 and 2004 elections respectively. Her mother Nandini Devi had won from Sanakhemundi

seat in 2014. This time, Geetanjali will contest against Congress's sitting MLA Ramesh Chandra Jena in the May 20 election. "I have been inspired by my grandfather, mother and father to join in the politics to serve the people. I thanked the chief minister for giving me the opportunity to serve the people of the constituency," said Geetanjali, who is the chairperson of the panchayat samiti of Dharakote. The BJD has also fielded Chinmayananda Sriurup Deb, son of Usha Devi, royal scion of Chikiti to contest from Chikiti Assembly segment. Srirup Deb, son of Usha Devi, Urban development minister, is the third member of the Chikiti royal family to make electoral debut from his mother's seat Chikiti. His grandfather Sachidananda Deo was elected in the seat in 1971, while his mother Usha Devi won five times in a row since 2000. Deb who worked in a multinational IT company for over two decades and then started his own business after quitting the job. "I have also been working with my mother in politics since 2018", said 48-year-old Deb. To provide service to the people and to make Chikiti a model constituency is his aim to enter politics," he added. The BJD has re-nominated its MP Sangeeta Kumari Singh Deo from the Bolangir Lok Sabha seat. She hails from the Bolangir royal family.

BJP candidate says no truth in video; to approach EC SHOOTING ARROW CASE

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Alleging the Congress and AIMIM have a tacit understanding, BJP's candidate for Hyderabad Lok Sabha seat K Madhavi Latha on Monday said she will approach the Election Commission over the FIR against her by the city police. An FIR was registered against Madhavi Latha following a complaint that she hurt the sentiments of the Muslim community by gesturing to shoot an arrow towards a place of worship, police said on Sunday. A purported video of the incident was widely circulated on social media last week. She also said police should have verified the truth before booking an FIR against her. "Police also should have some wisdom before booking an FIR. Why did they do so? They should have found out the truth before filing the FIR. Where is the truth in the video? This is how Congress and these people (AIMIM) are hand in glove...We are approaching the EC to find out the truth," she told PTI videos. Similar cases have been



booked against Muslims also when some social activists came to find out facts about Wafk properties, she said without elaborating. She alleged that her opponents are keen to build their vote-banks in whichever way it is possible and it does not make any difference for them even if youth are deprived of jobs. In the complaint, it is alleged Madhavi Latha made a gesture of drawing an arrow and shooting it towards the place of worship during a Ram Navami procession on April 17, hurting the sentiments of the Muslim community, police said. The case was registered on

April 20 under Section 295-A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs) of the Indian Penal Code, they said. After the clip went viral, Madhavi Latha said in a post on X that it had come to her notice that an incomplete video of her was being circulated to create negativity. "I would like to clarify that it's an incomplete video and even because of such video if any one's sentiments are hurt then I would like to apologise as I respect all individuals," she had said.

LS elections: NCP releases manifesto

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Ajit Pawar on Monday released his party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections, highlighting that it will support the demand for a caste-based census, an issue its ally BJP has been side-stepping. Addressing a gathering here, the deputy chief minister said the NCP will also demand the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award, for the late former Maharashtra chief minister and defence minister Yashwantrao Chavan. "Our party believes in the right to live as a human irrespective of caste, creed and religion. It believes in equality and unity. The NCP has faith in social reformer Sane Guruji's quote, 'The true religion is to offer love to the world? We must bring the deprived and backward sections of society into the mainstream. We will demand for a caste-based census,' the manifesto stated. Pawar said once the party is voted to power, it will demand a caste-based census. The NCP's former ally, Congress, has been demanding a nationwide caste-based census, while the BJP has been finding ways to counter it.

Congress guarantees amount to inducing voters, claims JD(S)

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Janata Dal (Secular) on Monday urged the Election Commission to restrain the Congress from disseminating and distributing guarantee cards which it alleged was aimed at promoting electoral bribery and inducing voters for the coming Lok Sabha polls. In a letter to the poll panel, JD(S) State President and former Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy noted the Congress has published and released a manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections — Nyay Patra — which focus on five Nyays — justice with 25 guarantees covering the youth, women, farmers, workers and social justice. "Under the above categorisation, Congress has tried to reach out to various groups in society by announcing various promises and assurances which amount to allurement and inducements resulting not only in non-implementation of related promises but also causing heavy burden on exchequers of State and Central governments," it alleged.

The party also alleged that six of those 25 guarantees have a direct impact and consequences on the minds of voters and these amount to "corrupt electoral malpractice" and "inducement of voters." The regional party also alleged that the Congress has gone one step ahead as the guarantee cards that are being distributed to households across India bear the promissory signatures of prominent Congress leaders — Rahul Gandhi and M Mallikarjun Kharge and official endorsement purportedly containing QR code and also application form. "These allurements and inducements to voters are in clear violation of Model Code of Conduct and violation of various provisions under the Representation of People's Act 1951," the JD(S) alleged. It urged the EC to take swift and strong action to restrain the Congress party from distributing the guarantee cards to households to ensure conduct of free and fair elections.

Kerala CM poses questions to Rahul over CAA

PTI ■ KANNUR (KERALA)

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday continued to accuse the Congress of not being part of anti-CAA agitations in the country and sought to know from senior leader Rahul Gandhi whether the national leadership had barred its state unit from participating in the protests. He alleged that the party's top brass had asked the state unit to withdraw from the anti-CAA agitations. "This is just our guess. It may be right or wrong. If we are wrong, they (Congress) can tell that. Rahul Gandhi is touring

Kerala...He can tell what you (CM) have said is not fact," Vijayan said. Gandhi was not saying anything against it, as it is a fact, the chief minister alleged. As Lok Sabha polls are just four days away in the state, Vijayan was addressing an election meeting in Mattannur, in this northern district. Targeting Gandhi, the Left veteran further said the Congress leader was carrying out a tour across the country when the CAA came out. Though he had reacted to all the problems being faced by the country and the world, he did not respond to the contentious law, Vijayan

alleged. The CM also claimed that Gandhi could not raise his voice on such issues because of the presence of leaders with a Sangh-Parivar mindset with him. Lashing out at the BJP government at the Centre, he

said no civilised nation in the world has made religion the basis of citizenship. He alleged that when everyone came forward protesting against the CAA and to safeguard secularism, the Congress did not raise any significant protests against the



BJP government's move. "No civilised nation has decided citizenship on the basis of religion. No country divides refugees on the lines of their religion," Vijayan said. India is making religion the basis for deciding citizenship. It is destroying secular values, he charged. While several national leaders, including those from Communist parties, were arrested for protesting against the CAA in New Delhi years ago, no Congress leaders were among them, Vijayan alleged. The CM accused the 18 Congress-led UDF MPs from the state of attending a feast hosted by the party president

on the day when the national capital witnessed the fiercest agitation against the CAA. Vijayan further asked why the Congress, which is claimed to be a secular party, cannot oppose the RSS agenda being implemented in the country. The LDF government in the state has been adopting a strong stand against dividing people on the lines of religion, he said. The Marxist veteran also claimed that the southern state is witnessing a pro-LDF wave during the election campaign and that the ruling front would achieve a remarkable success in the Lok Sabha elections to be held on April 26.



FIRST COLUMN

A TALE OF HIDDEN WEALTH, REGRET AND LIBERATION

These poignant stories have wisdom of the ages and lessons for all



RAVI VALLURI

Once upon a time there lived a woman. She was struck with an unexpected tragedy as her husband passed away untimely. The lady was now left with only one son and precious jewellery. Since she was hounded by creditors to repay the debts accrued by her husband, she conjured a trick to hide the wealth. In sheer desperation to keep the jewellery safe from creditors, the lady wrapped the precious wealth in a piece of cloth and hid it under a tree. The mother and son lived in an impoverished State. Her mind was always disturbed by the fact that she did not share this piece of vital information with her only son. As it turned out, she carried this secret to the grave.

Consequently, the son inherited plenty of debt, a barren hut and a cot. The son had to work hard for sustenance and to repay the ever-rising liabilities. He toiled hard to survive and regretted his misfortune. 'Property is not the sacred right. When a rich man becomes poor it is a misfortune, it is not a moral evil. When a poor man becomes destitute, it is a moral evil, teeming with consequences and is injurious to society and morality,' opined Lord Acton. Indeed, the impoverishment of the poor is heart-wrenching.

One day while cutting the branches of a tree, he stumbled upon the jewellery. Dumbfounded and stupefied, the strapping youngster hid the bijouterie in a pit he dug in the hut, petrified that the creditors would appropriate the wealth. He too committed the cardinal mistake of not sharing the secret with his wife and carried it to his grave. The mother and son were not mindful and wakeful enough to be in the Present Moment and remained prisoners of their past and future.



Two Buddhist monks were once discussing a flag flapping in the wind. While one felt it was the wind moving, the other conjectured it was the flag fluttering. The imbroglia could not be resolved and they sought the intervention of a Zen Master. The master impassively said, 'It is the MIND that moves, neither the flag nor the wind.'

Humans need freedom from their past and future to be in the present. And being in the NOW or present is true enlightenment and mindfulness. The past is full of sorrows and regrets while the future brims with anxieties and worries and humans are caged in that mindset, thereby postponing their happiness quotient. To appreciate true happiness and joy, the human mind should not vacillate between the past and the future but remain in the present.

A young monk was once travelling in pursuit of happiness and truth. During his travels, he encountered a massive river that he could not cross. A short while later, he saw a senior monk on the other side of the river. He hailed him and sought assistance to cross the river to reach the other side. The senior monk pondered and replied, 'You are already on the other side'. This fact can be appreciated only when the mind is centred. Breathing techniques such as Sudarshan Kriya, Pranayama, Yoga, Meditation and Vipassana all help in dissolving the mind so that it becomes centred.

'True happiness is not possible without freedom. We have to learn the habit of being free. We do not allow our past, the future, our projects, or our fear to get hold of us. We are free. Every step is free. Every step is nourishment. Every step is healing. Every step is joy,' says Thich Nhat Hanh.

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

The timeless allure of bookstores



MIKE DOWNEY

In a world of fleeting attachments and transient experiences, one traveller finds solace and sustenance in the enduring sanctuaries of literature



I don't normally do nostalgia. The present is a place where I live and thrive and although thoughts of the past serve as a pleasant escape from reality, I tend to be very much permanently in the here and now in former times. I used to be convinced that if the psyche tends to dwell on past and romanticise it then could it be that the present isn't our current happy place and I want the future to continue to excite me. Complicated. I know.

Theatres, galleries and cinemas have come and gone in my life and as a rule, I have formed no specific sentimental attachment to them, even though much of my professional grown-up existence has been centred on these cultural havens. The one exception to that rule is the venerable bookshop. Of all these great edifices crucial to the health of our society the bookshop is the altar at which I worship — and which holds a timeless allure for me which occasionally translates into a wistful homesickness for the best that I have known in my life.

Having lived mostly a life of exile, first from my native Ireland and with more years in adulthood outside my native land than in it, from Belgrade to Munich and Paris to Istria and add to that the peripatetic life of the international film producer spending six months here in Prague, three months there in Iceland, Brazil and even India — sourcing quality English language literature outside of the Anglosphere has become a lifelong passion and quest. My global peregrinations, whether as a writer, theatre director or film producer have allowed me to cultivate relationships with some of the most amazing bookshops across the earth - I don't mean the Blackwells, the Shakespeare and Co's, the Dussmann's, the Strand's and the Foyle's of this world. I'm talking about havens much more intimate, personal and off the beaten track. Here are just a few of them as



INDIA'S EVER-POPULAR BOOK MARKETS REVEAL A PROFOUND NATIONAL LOVE FOR LITERATURE, FROM THE BOI-PARA IN COLLEGE STREET IN KOLKATA TO MOORE MARKET IN CHENNAI AND FLORA FOUNTAIN IN MUMBAI

a taster: How I long for The Book Exchange, Amsterdam. This a canal-side, Dickensian warren on Kloveniers-burghal in the Venice of the North's red-light district, presided over by the idiosyncratic Jeff Stone who took it over in 2005, having been founded in 1978. Its four long, thin, deep floors are home to an extraordinary collection of over 80,000 second-hand English language books sold at bargain prices, in a studios atmosphere marked by a chaotic Bohemian that is the antithesis of the Amazons of this world. The whiff of reefer as it wafts over from the Plug 3 coffeeshop improves greatly the William Burroughs and Paul Bowles sales, so I'm told. Moving on from Paul Bowles and his palace in the Casbah, we arrive at the Luxor Book Palace, Prague. Last week, while prepping my new movie about Franz Kafka I took time out to visit this old friend on the famed Wenceslas Square I have been buying books here for the last 25 years and am always amazed by the laid-back atmosphere, the super helpful and smiling staff and the extraordinary selection of new books often at prices less than in the UK or New York. I don't know how they do it, but the self-styled Palace, which runs over 4 massive floors, manages to feel like a small privately run enterprise, full of nooks, crannies and all manner of Kafka-esque dead ends. I once ended up in the storeroom, looking for the young adult section. I was escorted back to where I belonged. In the foreign adult section. Speaking of being found, The Lost Bookstore, Chiang Mai

is very easy to find in a highly prominent position on the Ratchamanka Road. I came across it when receiving a planned adaptation of an early Anthony Burgess novel and was shocked to come across such a richly sourced treasure trove for book lovers and a selection of 60,000 books, from old to new, from every genre imaginable. It was here found a dog-eared copy of John Griesemer's Nobody Thinks of Greenland, an anti-war novel set in the Arctic which I eventually adapted into a feature film with American Pie's Jason Biggs in the lead.

In addition to these beauties, there are a few others around the globe that once visited always gave me the unique Proustian involuntary memory moments on my return. They are in no particular order: Book and Bed, Kyoto; sleeping inside a bookshelf is all part of the experience at this bookstore/ hostel and it rushes me back to the Japan distribution of my film Deathwatch and a jacket I did there with Jamie Bell (Billy Elliot); the superb El Ateneo Grand Splendid, Buenos Aires, was an oasis of high culture at the end of a two-month research odyssey from Valparaiso in Chile around the coast of Patagonia in Darwin's reverse footsteps; Notting Hill Travel, London. I used to live around the corner from that lovely bookshop on Bleinheim Crescent. We all know the scene from the eponymous film in which Julia Roberts slowly pursues Hugh Grant between the shelves, followed by his infamous eye-turn and blushed slew of book recom-

mendations. But it is to India that I return. A five-year-long relationship with a Kerala Malayali, many many years ago, brought me into contact with the wonderful and varied book stalls of Thiruvananthapuram way back in the eighties.

I feel a deep nostalgia now as I write this for the timeless allure of the amazing book emporia of Palayam, next to the State Central Library, which at that time boasted 50-odd book stalls of all shapes sizes, creeds and colours. I could spend hours just sifting through the mazes of books just for the pleasure of discovering something, unique, precious and inspiring - something that no marketing campaign or advertising or critic's review could ever find for me.

It is the iconic book markets from all over India that bear witness to the extraordinarily diverse literary culture and heritage of the nation. India's ever-popular book markets reveal a profound national love for literature from the Boi-Para in College Street in Kolkata to Moore Market in Chennai and Flora Fountain in Mumbai.

Let's hear it for these affordable, yet rich havens for book lovers and seekers of literary gems and bargains. In the context of our theme of nostalgia and sentimentality - the huge success of the online book business may signal their death knell and they may not be with us for much longer.

(The writer is Chair of the European Film Academy and President of the LUX Prize of the European Parliament; view are personal)

Ladakh's path to autonomy: Overcoming adversity

Against the backdrop of historical marginalisation and neglect, Ladakh's journey towards autonomy has been marked by struggle, negotiation and triumph

The accession of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir to India on October 26, 1947, inflicted significant socio-economic and political setbacks on the Buddhist-dominated Leh district in the strategic Trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, renowned as "the roof of the world" and "the land of the Lamas". Likewise, the predominantly Buddhist Zaskar tehsil in the Karil district of Ladakh bore the brunt of these consequences, enduring even greater hardships than its counterpart, Leh.

The genesis of the Muslim-majority Kargil district in 1979 under Sheikh Abdullah's leadership aimed at fostering discord between



HARI OM

his co-religionists and the Buddhists, aiming to thwart the latter's aspirations for autonomy and union territory status for Ladakh. This move exacerbated the plight of the Buddhists, imperilling their religion, culture, societal fabric and demographic integrity due to two primary factors. Firstly, successive Kashmiri-dominated administrations viewed Ladakh as an

appendage to Kashmir, disregarding the political and economic aspirations of its Buddhist populace. Ladakh, akin to Jammu province, was seen as a colony by Kashmiri rulers, perpetuating a sense of marginalisation among the Buddhists. Secondly, the pernicious influence of the Kashmiri elite over New Delhi's corridors of power further marginalised the Buddhists' voices, with central authorities consistently favouring Kashmiri interests and dismissing Ladakh's concerns. In response to this systemic neglect, under the astute leadership of Head Lama Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, the Buddhists initiated protests in 1952, demanding meaningful political repre-

sentation and autonomy. Despite their fervent appeals and warnings, both Srinagar and New Delhi brushed aside their grievances, exacerbating disillusionment among the Buddhist populace. The culmination of discontent erupted in October 1989, with widespread protests and clashes between Buddhists and authorities. The resultant Tripartite Agreement of October 29, 1989, brokered by the central Government, temporarily assuaged tensions by establishing the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) at Leh. However, this resolution faced vehement opposition from Kashmiri leaders,



including Farooq Abdullah, who viewed it as a threat to Kashmiri hegemony. Despite the establishment of LAHDC Leh in 1995, the Buddhists remained dissat-

isfied due to continued interference from Kashmir-centric authorities, rendering the council ineffectual. Consequently, they intensified their agitation, advocat-

ing for Ladakh's Union Territory status and other demands, citing central rule as the sole recourse to address their grievances. The turning point came after June 19, 2018, when the central Government assumed direct control of Jammu and Kashmir, embarking on a series of measures to appease the Buddhist community. These included the establishment of the University of Ladakh, granting divisional status to Ladakh and ultimately, separating Ladakh from Jammu and Kashmir to fulfil the long-standing demand for Union Territory status. Additionally, substantial budgetary allocations were made to bolster Ladakh's development.

These initiatives underscored the efficacy of central rule in addressing the aspirations of the marginalised Buddhist population. Rather than pursuing Statehood, the Buddhists are urged to strengthen LAHDC Leh and collaborate with the Modi Government to safeguard their cultural heritage and counter demographic challenges. The period between 2018 and 2023 epitomises a transformative phase for Ladakh, wherein central intervention proved instrumental in redressing historical injustices and empowering its Buddhist populace.

(The writer is former Dean of Jammu University's Faculty of Social Science; views are personal)

Israeli Military Intelligence Chief resigns

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's Military Intelligence chief Major General Aharon Haliva resigned on Monday, taking responsibility for his unit's failures during the unprecedented October 7 Hamas attacks on the Jewish state. Haliva is the first General of the Israeli army's general staff to leave his position due to the failures that led to the massive attack by the Palestinian militant organisation Hamas and the subsequent war in Gaza. In his resignation letter written in Hebrew, Haliva said, "The Intelligence Division did not live up to the task we were entrusted with. Throughout my duties, I knew that alongside authority comes heavy responsibility." The General said he would like to "take responsibility" for what happened on October 7 and promised to do his best to complete as many of the war's goals as possible. Haliva also called for the establishment of a state investigative committee, "that can probe and find out in a thorough, in-depth, comprehensive and precise manner all the fac-



A photojournalist looks at part of the intercepted ballistic missile that fell near the Dead Sea in Israel, Sunday. The suspected Israeli killing of Iranian generals at an Iranian diplomatic compound in Syria on April 1 prompted Iran's retaliatory barrage last weekend of more than 300 missiles and drones that the U.S., Israel and regional and international partners helped bat down without significant damage in Israel. And then came Friday's ads apparent Israel. AP/PTI

tors and circumstances that led to the difficult events". At the same time, Haliva in the letter expressed his high appreciation for the performance of the Military Intelligence Directorate's personnel in the war. Confirming Haliva's resignation, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in a statement said, "In a decision with the Chief of Staff and with the approval of the Minister of Defence, Major General Aharon Haliva will conclude his role and retire from the IDF after appointing a successor through an orderly and professional process." "The Chief of Staff thanked Major General Aharon Haliva for his service over 38 years in the IDF, during which he contributed significantly as a fighter and commander for the security of the state," it said. Meanwhile, reacting to the MI Chief's resignation, Opposition Yesh Atid Party member, Vladimir Beliak, in a post on X demanded the immediate resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "The IDF Intelligence Directorate head was wise to resign.

First illegal migrants' flight to take off for Rwanda in 10-12 weeks: Sunak

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Monday announced that the first flight with illegal migrants will take off for Rwanda in 10 to 12 weeks "come what may" and claimed that all the preparation has been made for the process once the long-delayed legislation passes through Parliament. Stressing that he would not be giving out "sensitive operational detail" during a Downing Street briefing, the British Indian leader revealed that chartered commercial flights have been booked, an airfield has been identified and hundreds of escort officials trained to fly out the first set of migrants to Kigali while their asylum claims are processed. The press conference came as the government said Parliament will be sitting overnight on Monday for as long as it takes for the controversial Safety of Rwanda Bill to pass through all its stages to become law. The bill, which seeks to prevent legal

challenges by declaring Rwanda a safe country in law, has faced hurdles due to the House of Lords demanding amendments - something Sunak blamed on the Opposition Labour Party. "No ifs, no buts, these flights are going to Rwanda," Sunak told reporters. "The first flight will leave in 10 to 12 weeks. Of course, that is later than we wanted but we have always been clear that processing will take time and if Labour peers had not spent weeks holding up the Bill in the House of Lords to try to block these flights altogether we would have begun this process weeks ago," he said. "I can confirm that we have put an airfield on standby, booked commercial charter planes for specific slots and we have 500 highly trained individuals ready to escort illegal migrants all the way to Rwanda with 300 more trained in the coming weeks. We are ready. Plans are in place. And these flights will go come what may. No foreign court will stop us

from getting flights off," Sunak added. After the first flight takes off, Sunak said he expects a "steady rhythm" of such journeys over the course of the following months to meet his pledge for the policy to act as a deterrent and "stop the boats" of illegal migrants landing on the country's shores. "The priority is being able to deliver a regular rhythm, a drum beat of multiple flights a month over the summer and beyond because that is how you build a systematic deterrent and that is how you stop the boats," said Sunak. Asked if the UK would consider leaving the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) if the European court attempts to block such flights, Sunak did not rule out the possibility: "Now is the time for the flights to go and I am not going to let a foreign court, given all of that, block us from getting flights up and this deterrent up and running."

Muizzu's party secures 'super majority' in parliamentary polls

PTI ■ MALE

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's party won 71 seats and secured a "super majority" in parliamentary elections, preliminary results suggested on Monday, a victory seen as a strong endorsement of his pro-Beijing foreign policy, as both India and China closely watched the outcome of the polls in the archipelago nation. Muizzu-led People's National Congress (PNC) won 68 out of 93 seats in Sunday's polls and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively, which is more than two-thirds of the Parliament, landing the party an easy supermajority with the power to amend the Constitution. Local media, which has described his party's win as a "supermajority", said the PNC is set to celebrate its landslide victory here on an artificial beach on Monday night. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by former

president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who is seen as a pro-India leader, held 65 seats in the previous parliament but won only 15 seats this time, Mihaaru, a news website, reported. Muizzu, 45, known for his pro-China leanings, has said that he wants to reduce India's influence in his country. In the 2019 elections, the then-ruling MDP won a super majority in Parliament, with 64 seats while the then-opposition PPM-PNC coalition won just eight. The Democrats, as well as Adhaalath Party, failed to win any seats at all. A total of 368 candidates were in the fray, including 130 independent candidates, 10 candidates from Jumhoory Party (JP), 39 from The Democrats, Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) 4, Adhaalath Party (AP) 4, and Maldives National Party (MNP) 2 nominees in the parliamentary election in Maldives, which has a strategic location in the Indian Ocean. About 40 in numbers - 10.76 per cent - of the candidates

were women. Provisional results have shown that only three women candidates secured seats out of the 93 constituencies in the 20th People's Majlis. Fathimath Saudha from the ruling PNC won the Faafu Nilandhoo constituency, Asma Raasheed from the PNC won the Maafannu Medhu constituency, and Anara Naem, an independent candidate, won the Kaafu Huraa constituency. Saudha is a family member of Muizzu. Asma and Anara have previously served as MPs in the 18th People's Majlis. With about 75 per cent of the eligible voters casting their ballots, Sunday's election saw a record-low voter turnout, provisional results suggested. A total of 284,663 people were eligible to vote, but only 215,860 exercised their franchise. The turnout was 81.32 per cent in the 2019 parliamentary elections, with 215,053 out of 264,446 eligible voters coming to vote. PNC Chairperson and Special Advisor to the President Abdul Raheem Abdulla said the

results showed that Maldivians did not want the country to be driven into political unrest again. Raheem said the reason for PNC's super majority in Parliament was the solid policies put forth by Muizzu. Raheem, who won the Fonadhoo constituency seat, said his win showed that Maldivians had paved the path for Muizzu to fulfil the targets of his presidency. "The people have proved that they will not leave the country forever at the mercy of political squabbles, and challenges," he said. Raheem said Maldivians had learned over the past five months that President Muizzu is a leader who will not forget the pledges he makes. "The people have immense trust in President Muizzu," he said. Regarding MDP's loss, Raheem said the party failed to show tangible results despite winning the presidency twice. Meanwhile, main opposition MDP in a statement said despite their loss in Sunday's parliamentary election, they

will remain steadfast in their role of holding the government accountable and ensuring that democratic principles are upheld. Congratulating the winning candidates, the party called on them to uphold democratic values and work for the people's benefit. "As one of the key responsibilities of parliamentarians is to hold the government accountable, this party is confident that all who won [yesterday's] election will work to do so without hesitation," the statement read. Fayyaz Ismail, the opposition MDP Chairperson, congratulated the PNC for Sunday's success in parliamentary elections in a post on X: "Whilst today's result is disappointing this is a moment to reaffirm our commitment and work even closer with our communities." "MDP's MPs will be ready to work with the government for the betterment of our democratic values and to hold it accountable as a responsible opposition," the former economic minister said. MDP President and former foreign minister Abdulla Shahid said

the party's MPs "will uphold the responsibility entrusted to you with utmost determination." "We may not win every time. But today we can hold our heads high, and be proud of the work we did," Shahid added. The ruling coalition - PNC and Progressive Party of Maldives - said it will invite all Maldivian citizens to the ceremony it will host here on the Henveiru Artificial Beach on Monday to celebrate their indisputable win in the parliamentary election. The PNC said a special event named "Welcome - to the People's Nation's Majlis" will be held on Monday night for the people to commemorate and express their gratitude for the win. The election in the Maldives also came amidst deteriorating ties between the archipelago nation and India since Muizzu, 45, assumed power in November last year. During last year's presidential election, he had maintained a strident anti-India stand. While India was forced to withdraw most of its military

personnel manning three aviation platforms in the country, Muizzu travelled to China in January and met top Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping. China and the Maldives also signed a defence cooperation agreement and several other infrastructure development projects. The Maldives, India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), occupies a special place in its initiatives like 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' of the Indian government. On the other hand, China is expanding its footprints in IOR through its 'debt trap' diplomacy and 'String of Pearls' approach, a strategic initiative to create a network of military and commercial establishments in countries falling on the Indian Ocean. In 2013, Maldives joined China's "Belt and Road" initiative to build ports and highways to expand trade - and China's influence - across Asia, Africa and Europe.

China hails Muizzu's victory

Beijing (PTI): China on Monday congratulated Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's People's National Congress (PNC) which has secured an absolute majority in Sunday's Parliament polls and expressed its willingness to deepen the "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" between the two countries. Muizzu-led PNC won 68 out of 93 seats in Sunday's polls and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively, which is more than two-thirds of the Parliament, landing the party an easy supermajority with the power to amend the Constitution. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by former president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who is seen as a pro-India leader, won only 15 seats this time. The parliamentary majority by the PNC would give Muizzu the legislative backing to shape the foreign policy of the strategically placed archipelagic state in the Indian Ocean geographically located close to India's southern coast. Commenting on the PNC's victory, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here that Beijing wants to congratulate the Maldives on the successful parliament election and respect the choice made by the people. "China stands ready to work with the Maldives to carry forward traditional friendship, expand exchanges and cooperation in various fields, deepen China-Maldives comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership and speed up the building of a China-Maldives community with a shared future to deliver greater benefits to our two peoples," he said. Ever since his election as President in October last year, Muizzu, who defeated the pro-India incumbent Solih, moved closer to China signing what the two countries term as a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" besides 20 agreements to assist Maldives infrastructure after meeting with President Xi Jinping here in January. China also announced a USD 130 million grant besides promising to send more Chinese tourists to the tourism-dependent Maldives.

European nations with Patriots hesitate to give their missile systems to Ukraine

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union countries possessing Patriot air defence systems appeared hesitant on Monday to give any to Ukraine, which is desperately seeking at least seven of the missile batteries to help fend off Russian air attacks. Russia's air force is vastly more powerful than Ukraine's, but sophisticated missile systems provided by Kyiv's Western partners can pose a major threat to Russian aviation as the Kremlin's forces slowly push forward along the roughly 1,000-km (620-mile) front line in the war. Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot said the Netherlands is "looking at every kind of possibility at the moment" and is offering financial support to a German initiative to help Ukraine bolster its air defences and to buy more drones. Asked at a meeting of European Union foreign and defense ministers why the Netherlands is reluctant to send some of its

Patriot systems, Slot said: "We are looking again if we can deplete our store of what we still have, but that will be difficult." Last week, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the military organisation "has mapped out existing capabilities across the alliance and there are systems that can be made available to Ukraine". He did not name the countries that possess Patriots. The Patriot is a guided missile system that can target aircraft, cruise missiles and shorter-range ballistic missiles. Each battery consists of a truck-mounted launching system with eight launchers that can hold up to four missile interceptors each, a ground radar, a control station and a generator. A key advantage of the US-made systems, apart from their effectiveness, is that Ukrainian troops are already trained to use them. But Patriots take a long time to make - as long as two years, some estimates suggest - so countries are reluctant to give

them up and leave themselves exposed. Germany had 12, but it is supplying three to Ukraine. Poland, which borders Ukraine, has two and needs them for its own defenses. Asked whether his country would provide any, Swedish Defence Minister Pål Jonson said: "I don't exclude that possibility, but right now we're focused on financial contributions." He said Sweden would send other systems that could "relieve some of the pressure" on the need for Patriots. Jonson also noted that more US deliveries of air defence systems might come, after the US House of Representatives passed a package over the weekend of \$61 billion in support, including \$13.8 billion for Ukraine to buy weapons. Questioned about whether Spain might step up with Patriots, Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said that his country "will make its decisions based on the power it has in its hands to support Ukraine."

Prosecutors will make history with opening statements in Trump's hush money trial

AP ■ NEW YORK

For the first time in history, prosecutors will present a criminal case against a former American president to a jury Monday as they accuse Donald Trump of a hush money scheme aimed at preventing damaging stories about his personal life from becoming public. A 12-person jury in Manhattan is set to hear opening statements from prosecutors and defense lawyers in the first of four criminal cases against the presumptive Republican presidential nominee to reach trial. The statements are expected to give jurors and the voting public the clearest view yet of the allegations at the heart of the case, as well as insight into Trump's expected defense. Attorneys will also introduce a colourful cast of characters who are expected to testify about the made-for-tabloids saga, including a porn actor

who says she had a sexual encounter with Trump and the lawyer who prosecutors say paid her to keep quiet about it. Trump arrived at the courthouse shortly before 9 am, minutes after castigating the case in capital letters on social media as "election interference" and a "witch hunt". He faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records - a charge punishable by up to four years in prison - though it's not clear if the judge would seek to put him behind bars. A conviction would not preclude Trump from becoming president again, but because it is a state case, he would not be able to attempt to pardon himself if found guilty. He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing. Unfolding as Trump vies to reclaim the White House, the trial will require him to spend his days in a courtroom rather than on the campaign trail, a reality he complained about

Monday morning when he posted on Truth Social about being "stuck" at his trial. He will have to listen as witnesses recount salacious and potentially unflattering details about his private life. Trump has nonetheless sought to turn his criminal defendant status into an asset for his campaign, fundraising off his legal jeopardy and repeatedly railing against a justice system that he has for years claimed is weaponized against him. Hearing the case is a jury that includes, among others, multiple lawyers, a sales professional, an investment banker and an English teacher. The case will test jurors' ability to set aside any bias but also Trump's ability to abide by the court's restrictions, such as a gag order that bars him from attacking witnesses. Prosecutors are seeking fines against him for alleged violations of that order. The case brought by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg

revisits a chapter from Trump's history when his celebrity past collided with his political ambitions and, prosecutors say, he sought to prevent potentially damaging stories from surfacing through hush money payments. One such payment was a USD 130,000 sum that Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer, gave to porn actor Stormy Daniels to prevent her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump from emerging into public shortly before the 2016 election. Prosecutors say Trump obscured the true nature of the payments in internal records when his company reimbursed Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal charges in 2018 and is expected to be a star witness for the prosecution. Trump has denied having a sexual encounter with Daniels, and his lawyers argue that the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses.

Japan's anti-monopoly body orders Google to fix ad search limits affecting Yahoo

Tokyo (AP): Japan's antitrust watchdog said Monday that US search giant Google must fix its advertising search restrictions affecting Yahoo in Japan. The Japan Fair Trade Commission said in a statement that its recent study of Google's practices showed it was undermining fair competition in the advertising market. Yahoo Japan Corp., which has since merged with the Japanese social media platform Line, began keyword-targeted search advertising services using Google's technology after the two companies formed a tie-up in 2010. The FTC alleges that Google had imposed restrictions in its search advertising agreement with Yahoo Japan

that for more than seven years hindered its ability to compete in targeted search ads. An FTC investigation into whether that violated the Anti-Monopoly Law led Google to drop the restrictions. Google said in an emailed statement that it has cooperated fully with the commission's probe, and stressed the commission has not found it had outright violated anti-monopoly laws. It promised to carry out the commission's directives to offer "valuable" search functions to Japanese users and advertisers. Line Yahoo declined comment. Google will be under review for the next three years, to ensure it carries out needed changes, the commission said.



Britain's Queen Camilla poses for a group photograph with The Royal Lancers, in Caterick, England. Queen Camilla undertakes her first visit to the Regiment since being appointed as their Colonel-in-Chief. AP/PTI

Wet wipes containing plastic to be banned for sale in UK

PTI ■ LONDON

Wet wipes containing plastic will be banned from being sold in the UK following legislation to be tabled in Parliament soon, the British government announced on Monday, as the world marked as Earth Day. UK Environment Secretary Steve Barclay said the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) will table the legislation for England before Parliament's summer recess in July. The devolved regions of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are expected to follow on with their legislation later in the year to make it a UK-wide ban as part of an aligned approach. "Wet wipes containing plastic are polluting our waterways and causing microplastics to

enter the environment," said Barclay. "Defra will introduce legislation before the summer recess to crack down on this unnecessary source of pollution, following our successful single-use carrier bag charge and ban on microbeads in personal care products... Plastic-free wet wipes are readily available, and several retailers have already stopped selling wet wipes containing plastic," he said. The minister said it was part of a "step change" needed to protect the country's waterways from pollution. "The ban builds on a raft of actions already taken to protect our waterways and hold water companies accountable - including accelerating investment, putting water company fines back into the environment

and quadrupling the number of inspections of water company sites," he added. According to DEFRA's Beach Litter Monitoring Data for 2015-2020, an average of 20 wet wipes were found per 100 metres of beach surveyed across the UK. Once in the water environment, wet wipes containing plastic can accumulate biological and chemical pollutants, increasing the risk of harm to the animals and humans who encounter them. Banning them is expected to reduce plastic and microplastic pollution and reduce the volume of microplastics entering wastewater treatment sites when wrongly flushed. The ban follows a public consultation on the issue, which showed overwhelming support for such a move.

Raisi, Sharif agree on joint efforts to eradicate terror

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and Iran on Monday agreed on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held talks with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and discussed ways to promote bilateral ties at political, economic, trade and cultural levels, months after the two neighbours carried out tit-for-tat air strikes against alleged terrorist hideouts on rival lands. Raisi, the first head of state of any country to visit Pakistan after the February 8 general elections, was welcomed by Sharif at the Prime Minister House where the Iranian leader inspected the Guard of Honour. During their talks, President Raisi and Prime Minister Sharif agreed on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism, state-run Radio Pakistan reported. It added that the two leaders also held discussions to increase trade and communication links between their countries.



In this photo released by Prime Minister Office, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, left, walks with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during a welcome ceremony in the prime minister house in Islamabad, on Pakistan

“Pakistan and Iran can prosper and our borders can see progress,” Sharif said, expressing hope that the shared border can adapt for trade and business. He expressed hope for the relationship between the neighbours to be “firm and stable”, noting that today was an opportunity to “make this friendship a happy and prosperous one”. During the joint press conference, Sharif raked up the Kashmir issue and thanked Iran for its stance. However, President Raisi refrained from mentioning Kashmir and instead talked about Iran’s support for those fighting against oppression especially in Palestine. Prime Minister Sharif and President Raisi planted a tree on the lawn of the Prime Minister House as the world marked Earth Day on Monday.

The two countries signed an MoU for establishment of a special economic zone whilst another was signed for film exchanges and cooperation between the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and Organization of Cinema and audio visual affairs of Iran. The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Ministry of Cooperatives, labours and social welfare of Iran as well as Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority and National Standards Organization of Iran also signed MoUs of cooperation. An MoU was also signed on legal cooperation. Raisi, who arrived in Pakistan on a three-day official visit to promote cooperation, was accorded a warm welcome at the Islamabad Airport and was received by Housing Minister Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada and Pakistan’s Ambassador to Iran Mudassar Tipu, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted on social media platform X. Raisi, the first Iranian president to visit Pakistan in eight years, is accompanied by his spouse

and a high-level delegation comprising the foreign minister and other members of the Cabinet and senior officials. Separately, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar called on the Iranian President in Islamabad, where they discussed bilateral relations as well as regional and global developments, Radio Pakistan reported. Raisi and Dar “emphasised the importance of enhanced efforts to further consolidate bilateral relations in diverse fields”, it said, adding that they also “affirmed commitment to peace and constructive dialogue for resolving regional challenges”. President Raisi has an extensive programme in Pakistan and is scheduled to meet President Asif Ali Zardari, Senate Chairman Yusuf Raza Gilani and Speaker of the National Assembly Ayaz Sadiq. He will also visit Lahore and Karachi and meet with the provincial leadership, the Foreign Office said. “The two sides will have a wide-ranging agenda to further strengthen Pakistan-Iran ties and enhance cooperation in diverse fields including trade, connectivity, energy, agriculture, and people-to-people contacts,” according to the FO statement.

The talks will focus on regional and global developments and bilateral cooperation to combat the common threat of terrorism. Pakistan and Iran enjoy strong bilateral ties anchored in history, culture and religion. This visit provides an important opportunity to further strengthen Pakistan-Iran relations, according to the Foreign Office. Raisi is visiting Pakistan months after the cordial ties between the two neighbours suffered a setback when Tehran shocked Islamabad by carrying out airstrikes against alleged militant hideouts in the restive Balochistan province in January. Pakistan swiftly responded by using killer drones and rockets to carry out “precision military strikes”

Imran urges Pak’s top judge to intervene to safeguard rule of law, Constitution

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has urged Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa to intervene to safeguard the rule of law and supremacy of the Constitution in the country as he highlighted multiple issues including alleged rigging during the February 8 general elections. Khan, 71, in a letter dated April 20 highlighted seven key issues faced by the country, including the anti-corruption watchdog giving a clean chit to former premier Nawaz Sharif in the Toshakhana case and alleged rigging in the February general elections. Khan reminded the chief justice that the entire nation was looking at him and quoted the words of one of the greatest and most influential scientists of all time, Albert Einstein: “The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.” He stated that the rule of law and supremacy of the Constitution has fallen to a

new low in Pakistan under his watch, saying it has caused the gradual emergence of the “law of the jungle and the enactment of the primitive doctrine that might is right.” “I have no doubt that if our superior judiciary, with your good self at its helm, would not meaningfully intervene as the custodian of the Constitution and the ultimate arbiter of justice, and if the foregoing situation were to prevail,” Khan said, adding that “it would be fatal to any civilized order in the world.” Among the seven issues, Khan urged the chief justice to take notice of the National Accountability Bureau’s sudden decision to exonerate former premier Nawaz Sharif, saying the case was pursued for years and has now been dropped. Also, Khan called for an inquiry against NAB Chairman Nazir Ahmed Butt and sought his removal from office. Secondly, he urged the top judge to look into the Bahawalnagar incident, involving the alleged thrashing of

police by army soldiers, saying it should serve as an eye opener on the lop-sided state of uniformed vigilante justice in Pakistan. Thirdly, Khan asked for action on the letter written by six judges of the Islamabad High Court, complaining about being subjected to blackmail, harassment and coercion by “members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies.” Fourthly, he stated that 90 per cent of the people incarcerated and facing trial in connection with the May 9 incidents “did not indulge in any violence whatsoever”. The state, however, is acting as judge, jury, and executioner in all these trials, he said. Khan said a constitutional petition on the issue has been pending in the Supreme Court since May 25, 2023, and urged that “this case must be fixed and decided upon on a priority basis.” Khan also referred to a press conference of the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division on February 17, 2024,

regarding the alleged manipulation of election results on February 8, urging the top judge to look into the commissioner’s subsequent retraction. He asked the chief justice to look into a series of petitions, including one filed by his party, pressing that, contrary to constitutional stipulations, the general election of February 8, 2024, was “not conducted honestly, justly, fairly and under law, and that corrupt practices were not guarded against therein”. Lastly, he urged the chief judge to look into the issue of allocation of reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies, urging that the pending petitions on this subject must also be fixed. Khan during his tenure had tried to remove Justice Isa from his post as judge of the Supreme Court, and surprisingly he referred to the issue by stating that the chief justice had faced the wrath of the state in the form of a reference against him and urged him to take action to save “majority of populace” from the “wrath of the state”.

Zardari has immunity against prosecution: Court told

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s anti-corruption watchdog informed an accountability court on Monday that President Asif Ali Zardari has immunity under law against prosecution in any case. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) submitted a report to the court which was hearing the Thatta water supply corruption case. The watchdog stated that the incumbent president enjoyed immunity under Article 248 of the Constitution. President Zardari’s counsel Arshad Tabriz informed the court that a plea regarding the immunity was filed earlier and the NAB was supposed to respond. The counsel main-

tained that his client enjoyed presidential immunity, therefore, proceedings against him could not be carried out. Later, the court adjourned the hearing on the case till May 21. The case pertains to the special initiative department allegedly illegally awarding the Thatta water supply contract to a private contractor. Other accused in the case include former secretary Ejaz Ahmed Khan, Ali Akbar, Ejaz Memon, Ali Akbar Abro, Khawaja Abdul Ghani Majeed, Manahat Majeed, Abdul Nadeem Bhutto, and others. Zardari had earlier also invoked presidential immunity in the Park Lane case in

which he was accused of influencing relevant authorities during his tenure as the president from 2008 to 2013 to obtain loans for his front companies. Zardari allegedly received a loan of Rs 1.5 billion released for Parthenon Private Limited “with ill intention”, and the money was allegedly later transferred for his personal use through fake bank accounts. According to the NAB, Zardari’s action caused a loss of Rs 3.77 billion to the national exchequer. Zardari, 68, became president last month for five years. It is the second time that he was elected as the president after serving from 2008 to 2013 in his first term.

Nawaz Sharif to ‘undergo health check-up’ in China: Report

Islamabad (PTI): Three-time former Pakistan premier Nawaz Sharif will embark on Monday on a five-day personal visit to China, where he will undergo a medical checkup, according to a media report. This will be 74-year-old Sharif’s first international visit after he returned to Pakistan in October last year following a four-year self-imposed exile in the UK. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo will be accompanied by Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on his “personal visit”, Geo News reported on Monday. Sharif’s visit is personal and during the trip, he will undergo a medical checkup, the report said, quoting party sources.

US, Philippine forces launch combat drills in disputed SCS

AP ■ MANILA

American and Filipino forces launched their largest combat exercises in years Monday in a show of allied firepower near the disputed South China Sea that has alarmed Beijing. The annual exercises by the longtime treaty allies will run until May 10 and involve more than 16,000 of their military personnel, along with more than 250 French and Australian forces. While the Philippine military maintains that the Balikatan — Tagalog for “shoulder-to-shoulder” — trainings are not directed at a particular country, some of their main conflict scenarios are set in or near the disputed South China Sea, where Chinese and Philippine coast guard and accompanying ships have figured in a series of increasingly tense territorial faceoffs since last year. In encounters in disputed areas, Chinese coast guard vessels have resorting to water cannons, blocking and other dangerous maneuvers that

have caused injuries to Philippine navy personnel and damaged supply boats. The Philippine military said a key focus of this year’s drills is territorial defence. “We’re dead serious about protecting our territory — that’s why we do these Balikatan exercises,” Col. Michael Logico, who speaks for the Philippine military on the combat drills, told The Associated Press. As the disputes between China and the Philippines have escalated, President Joe Biden and his administration has repeatedly warned that the United States is obligated to defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if it is attacked. US Marine Lt. Gen. William Jurney said in the ceremony that the large-scale military exercises will demonstrate that the 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty between the US and the Philippines “is no mere piece of paper.” Washington lays no claim to the contested waters but has declared that freedom of navigation and overflight and the peaceful resolution of the dis-

putes are in its national interest. Philippine military chief of staff Gen. Romeo Brawner, who opened the exercises in a ceremony, said that as Pacific coastal nations, the United States and the Philippines “understand the importance of maritime cooperation in addressing the complex challenges that threaten peace and security in our region.” China strongly criticised the exercises, saying the Philippines was “ganging up” with countries from outside Asia in an obvious reference to the United States and its security partners, and warned that the drills could instigate confrontation and undermine regional stability. The combat drills will include a joint sail by the US, Philippine and French navies in and near disputed waters off the western Philippine province of Palawan, the sinking of a mock enemy ship by combined US and Philippine firepower, and the retaking of an occupied island off the northwestern Philippines, according to the Philippine military.

UK prosecutors charge two men with spying for China

AP ■ LONDON

Two men, including one who was reported to be a parliamentary researcher, were charged with spying for China, British prosecutors said on Monday. Police said Christopher Berry, 32, and Christopher Cash, 29, were charged with “providing prejudicial information to a foreign state, China.” They will appear at Westminster Magistrates’ Court on Friday. Police allege the two men collected, recorded or communicated information “prejudicial to the safety or interests of the state” and violated the Official Secrets Act between late 2021 and February 2023. “This has been an extremely complex investigation into what are very serious allegations,” said Dominic Murphy, head of the Metropolitan Police counterterrorism command. Authorities did not release details about the two men. But Berry is reportedly an academic based in Oxfordshire, and The Sunday Times reported last year that Cash was a parliamentary researcher who held a pass

that allows full access to the Parliament buildings, issued to lawmakers, staff and journalists after security vetting. The report said Cash worked with senior lawmakers from the governing Conservatives, including Alicia Kearns, who now heads the powerful Foreign Affairs Committee, and her predecessor in that role, Tom Tugendhat, who is now security minister. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said last year that he raised the issue with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, saying he raised “very strong concerns” about interference in British democracy. At the time, Cash issued a statement through his lawyers maintaining his innocence. The Chinese Embassy issued a statement calling the allegations fabricated. Also on Monday, three people were arrested in Germany on suspicion of spying for China and arranging to transfer information on technology with potential military uses. British intelligence authorities have ratcheted up their warnings about Beijing’s covert activities in recent years.

Kurdish separatists, water issues loom large in Erdogan Iraq visit

AP ■ BAGHDAD

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was set to make his first official visit to Iraq in more than a decade on Monday as his country seeks greater cooperation from Baghdad in its fight against a Kurdish militant group that has a foothold in northern Iraq. Other issues also loom large between the two countries, including water supply issues and exports of oil and gas from northern Iraq to Turkey, which have been halted for more than a year. Erdogan’s last visit to Iraq was in 2011, when he was Turkey’s prime minister. Iraqi government spokesperson Bassem al-Awadi said in a statement that Erdogan’s visit will be a “major starting point in Iraqi-Turkish relations” and will include the signing of a deal on a “joint approach to security challenges” and a “strategic agreement on the water file”, among other issues. Erdogan has said his country plans to launch a major operation against the Kurdistan

Workers’ Party, or PKK, a Kurdish separatist movement banned in Turkey and with operations in Iraq, during the summer, with the aim of “permanently” eradicating the threat it poses. Turkey has carried out numerous ground offensives against the group in northern Iraq in the past while Kurdish jets frequently target suspected PKK targets in the region. Ankara now aims to create a 30- to 40-kilometer (19 to 25-mile) deep security corridor along the joint border with Iraq, Turkish Defence Minister Yasar Guler told journalists last month. The group, whose fight for an autonomous Kurdish state in southeast Turkey has claimed tens of thousands of lives since the 1980s, is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey and its Western allies. Baghdad has complained in the past that Turkish operations against the PKK violate its sovereignty, but appears to be coming closer to Ankara’s stance. In March, after a meeting between the Iraqi and Turkish foreign ministers, Baghdad announced

that the Iraqi National Security Council had issued a ban on the PKK, although it stopped short of designating it as a terrorist organisation. The two countries issued a joint statement in which they said the group represents a “security threat to both Turkey and Iraq” and that its presence on Iraqi territory was a “violation of the Iraqi Constitution”. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani told journalists during a visit to Washington last week that Iraq and Turkey have “true interests with one another and common projects”. He noted that the PKK has long had a presence in northern Iraq, “but we are not allowing any armed group to be on Iraqi territory and using it as a launch pad for attacks”. Ankara has argued that the presence of PKK bases poses a threat to the planned construction of a major trade route, the Iraq Development Road, that would connect the port of Grand Faw in Basra, southern Iraq, to Turkey and Europe through a network of rail lines and highways.

North Korea fired missile into ocean, South says

Seoul (AP): North Korea fired a ballistic missile toward its eastern waters on Monday, South Korea’s military said, the latest in a recent series of weapons launches by the North. South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said the launch occurred on Monday but gave no further details, such as how far the missile flew. North Korea in recent months has been maintaining an accelerated pace in weapons testing as it continues to expand its military capabilities amid stalemated diplomacy with the United States and South Korea. North Korea announced Saturday that it tested a “super-large” cruise missile warhead and a new anti-aircraft missile in a western coastal area on Friday. South Korea’s military said that it has detected evidence that North Korea is preparing for its second spy satellite launch but there are no signs that a launch is imminent.

Chinese general takes a harsh line on Taiwan

AP ■ QINGDAO (CHINA)

INTERNATIONAL NAVAL GATHERING

One of China’s top military leaders took a harsh line on regional territorial disputes, telling an international naval gathering in north-eastern China on Monday that the country would strike back with force if its interests came under threat. The 19th biennial meeting of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium opened in the port city of Qingdao, where China’s northern naval force is based, providing a vivid backdrop to China’s massive military expansion over the past two decades that has seen it build or refurbish three aircraft carriers. The four-day meeting has drawn representatives from partners and competitors including Australia, Cambodia, Chile, France, India and the US and comes amid heightened tensions over China’s assertive actions in the

Taiwan Strait and the East and South China seas, and as China’s navy has grown into the world’s largest by number of hulls. Zhang Youxia, the vice chairman of the ruling Communist Party’s Central Military Commission, which controls the armed forces, spoke of “common development” and said “decoupling, friction and confrontation will only divide the world into isolated islands guarding against each other with suspicion”. However, he then turned to China’s territorial claims, which have not been recognised under international law and in some cases have been denied. Beijing has ignored rulings not in its favour, particularly in the South China Sea, where it is in dispute with five other parties over islands, waterways and undersea

resources. Japan continues to defend its control over the uninhabited Senkaku island chain, called Diaoyu by China, in the East China Sea, against incursions by the Chinese coast guard. Taiwan last week reinforced its foothold in the disputed South China Sea by establishing satellite communications between the main island and its garrison on Taiping Island, also known as Itu Aba, the largest land feature in the highly contested Spratly Island chain. China has created seven artificial islands in the area by piling sand and cement on top of coral reefs and then equipping them with airstrips and other military infrastructure. Zhang said China’s territorial sovereignty “brooks no infringement” and its core interests cannot be challenged. We do not provoke trouble, but we

will never flinch in face of provocation. The Chinese military will resolutely defend the reunification and interest of the motherland”. Zhang has spoken in the past of Beijing’s determination to take control of the self-governing island republic of Taiwan, which it claims as its own territory, using force if necessary. With its crucial high-tech economy, Taiwan has been building up its defences on its own and with help from the US, where Congress this weekend approved USD 8 billion in military aid for Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific. Taiwan is also building its own submarines and trainer aircraft and waiting on the delivery of upgraded versions of F-16 fighters, battle tanks and other hardware from the US. Zhang appeared to press

China’s unilateralist approach to foreign relations and military conflicts as espoused by Xi Jinping, the top military commander, Communist Party leader and head-of-state for life, who has eliminated all dissenting views. China “remains committed to resolving maritime disputes with directly concerned countries through friendly consultations, but we will not allow our good faith to be abused”, Zhang said. “Particularly over the self-governing island republic of Taiwan that Beijing threatens to use force to bring under its control. We will take justified actions to defend our rights in accordance with the law.” Zhang’s comments follow a major shakeup of the Chinese military in recent months that has seen the still-unexplained disappearance of former Defence Minister Li Shangfu and several top officers in the missile corps.

Mexico’s presidential candidate stopped by masked men who ask for help in stemming violence

Tapachula (AP): Masked men stopped a vehicle carrying Mexico’s leading presidential candidate while she was travelling between campaign stops Sunday to ask that she address the violence in the southern state of Chiapas if she wins the June 2 election. Former Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum, the governing Morena party’s candidate, remained in the front passenger seat of the vehicle listening calmly with her window down. Masked men filmed the interaction on their cell phones and one shook her hand before letting her move on. The men, who identified themselves as local residents, said they felt “powerless” because the government has not done enough to provide security. They asked her to take action as president so that their township, Motozintla, along Mexico’s southern border with

Guatemala, does not become a “disaster” like other communities in the region. During her campaign swing through Chiapas, Sheinbaum was escorted by the army and national guard. The border area of Chiapas has been plagued by violence as the rival Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation cartels battle for territory. Thousands of people have been displaced as the cartels work to control migrant, drug and weapons smuggling routes and forcibly recruit locals. Later Sunday, Sheinbaum confirmed the incident had occurred, but downplayed it and said she did not believe the men were part of an organized crime group. She described the encounter as “very strange” because she said a media outlet critical of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s administration first published it.

Sustained growth of 7 per cent feasible for India: RBI MPC member

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Sustaining the economic growth momentum of 7 per cent in 2024-25 and beyond is feasible on the back of favorable monsoon, higher farm productivity and improved global trade, RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) member Shashanka Bhide said on Monday. During 2023-24, the economy is likely to record a growth rate of near 8 per cent on account of good performance of manufacturing and infrastructure sectors. "India's economic growth in the current year is likely to be supported by agriculture with a favourable monsoon and improved global trade. Sustaining the growth momentum of 7 per cent seems feasible," he told PTI. Bhide further said that in the long-term, the need for

productivity improvements will remain the key factor to achieve food price stability. He said that some of the headwinds he is wary of, Bhide said one area of concern is the global environment. "The slow pace of recovery in global demand on one hand and supply chain disruptions on the other hand... If the ongoing geopolitical conflicts are not resolved quickly, (it will) pose significant challenge in terms of demand as well as input prices. "We should also be prepared for minimising the adverse impact of extreme weather events on output," he said. Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) raised India's growth projection to 6.8 per cent for 2024 from its January forecast of 6.5 per cent citing bullish domestic demand conditions and a rising working-age



population. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) also raised India's GDP growth forecast for the current fiscal to 7 per cent from 6.7 per cent earlier, saying the robust growth will be driven by public and private sector investment demand and gradual improvement in consumer demand. Asked what is the long-term solution for high food prices, Bhide noted that one aspect of high food inflation in the recent years has been the impact of weather conditions on the perishable commodities such as vegetables. According to him, although such price spikes may be short-term, their impact is significant. As many have pointed out, Bhide said processing and preservation of commodities that help in their storage would be a part of the solution

in the longer term, just as the supply-side measures that help raise crop resistance to adverse weather. While noting that the investments in market infrastructure, modernisation of markets for agricultural commodities to help improve supply response to changing demand conditions would also reduce the excessive price spikes, he said. "In the long-term, the need for productivity improvements will remain the key factor to achieve food price stability." The eminent economist observed that inflation has remained above the policy target for several countries. "There are also differences in the growth conditions, with some countries experiencing significant slowdown while some experiencing reasonable positive momentum," he said,

adding that the priority towards bringing down inflation rate to the target appears to be keeping the monetary policies restrictive. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has recently said the baseline projections show inflation moderating to 4.5 per cent in 2024-25 from 5.4 per cent in 2023-24 and 6.7 per cent in 2022-23. Responding to a question on slowing down of foreign direct investment in India, Bhide said the FDI inflows have been strong in the past few years in response to the various policy reforms along with the attraction of a fast growing economy. "One reason for the slowdown now may also be the slow pace of global demand recovery," he observed. While India's economy has grown rapidly, Bhide explained a weak global

demand may not broaden the scope or scale of opportunities for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Asked whether India has been able to leverage China-plus one strategy, Bhide said India's strategies to support investments in new opportunities in terms of technology and energy have attracted attention. Domestic demand plus global demand appear to have gained attention, he added. FDI inflows to China have fallen dramatically from a share of 12.5 per cent in the first nine months of 2022 to only 1.7 per cent in the same period of 2023. Various other countries like the US, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Poland and Germany have witnessed significant gains in the global market share, following the decline of FDI flows to China.

Sensex climbs over 560 points



PTI ■ MUMBAI
Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty climbed nearly 1 per cent each on Monday amid a rally in Asian and European markets, decline in Brent crude oil prices and buying by foreign investors. Extending its previous day's rebound, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 560.29 points or 0.77 per cent to settle at 73,648.62. During the day, it advanced 679.47 points or 0.92 per cent to 73,767.80. The NSE Nifty went up by 189.40 points or 0.86 per cent to 22,336.40. From the Sensex basket, Larsen & Toubro, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, UltraTech Cement, Wipro, ICICI Bank, Infosys, HCL Technologies and Asian Paints were the major gainers. NTPC, JSW Steel and HDFC Bank were the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul,

Tokyo, and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading with gains. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.80 per cent to USD 86.59 a barrel. "The Indian market extended last Friday's relief rally as Middle East tension saw some respite, though the situation remains fluid. The recovery was broad-based across sectors, with renewed interest in mid and smallcaps," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Oil prices showed some relief but are still at elevated levels, he added. Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Friday and they bought equities worth Rs 129.39 crore, according to exchange data.

Rupee rises seven paise against \$ in early trade

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee rises by 7 paise to close at 83.37 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday on positive domestic markets and a soft American currency. Forex traders said a decline in crude oil prices also supported the local unit. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.40 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.32 and a low of 83.45 against the

greenback. The domestic unit finally settled at 83.37 (provisional) against the dollar, 7 paise higher from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee appreciated by 8 paise to close at 83.44 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias amid easing of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East which improved global risk sentiments. Retreating US Dollar and crude oil prices may also support the rupee. "However, any fresh



aggressions in the Middle East may cap sharp upside. Investors may remain cautious ahead of PMI and inflation data from the US this week. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.10 to Rs 83.60," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.02 per cent higher at 106.17. US Dollar eased as the

tensions between Israel and Iran seem contained over the weekend. The Dollar still managed to stay above the 106 mark on a hawkish US Federal Reserve, Choudhary added. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.69 per cent to USD 86.69 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 560.29 points, or 0.77 per cent, to settle at 73,648.62 points. The Nifty rose 189.40 points, or 0.86 per cent, to close at 22,336.40 points.

Representation of women apprentices in manufacturing sector to touch 40 per cent by year end: TeamLease

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
There has been a significant increase in demand for women apprentices in the manufacturing sector, as factories are increasingly adopting gender-agnostic recruitment practices, a sharp departure from traditional hiring norms and underscore the industry's commitment to fostering inclusive work environments. According to staffing company TeamLease, in the past 8-10 months, there has been a remarkable five-fold surge in demand for young women who have completed class 10/12 to be appointed as apprentices, reflecting a

shifting landscape in India's workforce dynamics. The surge in demand for women apprentices is primarily driven by the booming sectors of auto, Electric Vehicle (EV), electronics, and phone manufacturing. "This surge is anticipated to lead to a significant increase in the representation of women apprentices, reaching up to 40 per cent by the end of the year," said Sumit Kumar, Chief strategy officer at TeamLease Degree

(NEP) in a bid to further revolutionise India's education and vocational training landscape. According to Kumar, harmonising with the existing National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF), would enable seamless transitions for student trainees across different programs and levels of education, a move that will streamline the apprenticeship experience and foster a more inclusive and efficient apprenticeship network. "These reforms not only promise to address the current talent shortage but also significantly contribute to India's journey towards becoming a global skill

capital," Kumar said. Embracing these changes sets a precedent for a future where skill development and apprenticeship programs are more accessible, agile, and aligned with the evolving demands of the global workforce, ensuring a skilled workforce ready to meet the dynamic challenges of the global economy, Kumar noted. Notably, companies in electronics and auto manufacturing have become entirely gender-agnostic in their recruitment processes for assembly line workers, actively seeking to engage rural women in the workforce.

Corporate funding in global solar industry decline, says Mercom

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Corporate funding into the solar sector declined 4 per cent to USD 8.1 billion globally during January-March period due to factors like high input cost and supply chain issues, according to Mercom Capital. The sector had attracted USD 8.4 billion investments in the first quarter or Q1 in 2023, the US-based research firm said in a report on Monday. However, on a quarter-on-quarter (Q-o-Q) basis, the funding was 47 per cent over USD 5.5 billion raised in October-December or Q4 period of 2023, the report said. "The solar sector is experiencing peak uncertainty and a challenging investment climate. The sector is grappling with multiple hurdles,

including the likelihood of prolonged high-interest rates, higher labour and construction costs due to inflation, and supply chain issues, coupled with trade disputes and tariffs," Raj Prabhu, CEO of Mercom Capital Group, said. In India, Ecofy secured an investment of USD 10.83 million, InSolare raised USD 8 million in a growth funding round, and Metafin secured USD 5 million equity funding through venture capital (VC) funding route. In the domestic debt financing segment, ReNew refinanced non-convertible debentures worth USD 288.3 million, AmpIn Energy Transition secured an investment totalling USD 26.9 million, and Husk Power Systems secured USD 20 million.

Competition Commission to conduct detailed study on AI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Fair trade watchdog CCI on Monday invited request for proposals from entities to carry out a detailed market study on artificial intelligence and its impact on competition that will cover various aspects, including the ways AI-driven personalised recommendations, services and pricing influence consumer choices. The proposed market study on 'Artificial Intelligence and Competition' also comes at a time when the growing use of AI across industries has given rise to novel questions around its implications for competitive dynamics in markets. Issuing the Request for Proposal (RFP) document to engage an agency/institution for conducting the study, the CCI said the transformative capabilities of AI have significant pro-competitive potential, both on the supply and the demand side, and at



the same time, there may be concerns with regard to potential competition risks stemming from the use of AI. The last date for submitting the bids is June 3 and after technical presentations by the entities, the deadline for the financial bids is June 28.

Among the various aspects, the study will look at whether and in what manner can AI facilitate and/or implement anti-competitive strategies as well as the novel strategies aided by AI that can lead to anti-competitive outcomes.

The new forms of collusion prompted by the use of AI such as self-learning algorithms and whether bias in AI algorithms can impact competition will also be examined during the study. Other elements that will be covered include "how do AI-driven personalised recommendations, services and pricing influence consumer welfare and choice", "what are the synergies and risks that may stem from M&As involving firms with AI capabilities" and "what are the specific factors/parameters that need to be considered in assessing competitive effects of such M&As". Through the study, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) will also seek to understand the main sources of competitive advantage and disadvantage for AI adopters and non-adopters, and how AI technologies influence the entry and exit barriers, market concentration, innovation

incentives, and market power of firms. Further, it will look to "understand trends and patterns of AI and to ascertain enforcement and advocacy priorities of the Commission with respect to AI and its application in markets," as per the document. Among others, the study will look at the existing and evolving regulatory/legal frameworks governing AI systems and applications in India and other major jurisdictions and also reach out to the relevant stakeholders. In a recent interview to PTI, CCI Chairperson Ravneet Kaur said that AI and machine learning can drive efficiency and innovation but also raise concerns related to market concentration and potential anti-competitive behaviour. The CCI has the mandate to promote competition and curb anti-competitive practices in the marketplace.

Zomato hikes platform fee to ₹5 per order

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Zomato has hiked its platform fee by 25 per cent to Rs 5 per order from Rs 4 in select markets, citing it as a part of business calls taken by the food tech giant. According to the company's app, it has also paused its intercity food delivery service 'Intercity Legends'. This comes days before it is slated to announce the results for the quarter that ended in March. When reached out for a comment, a Zomato spokesperson told PTI, "These are business calls which we take basis various factors from time to time". Notably, the food delivery platform has received various tax demand orders aggregating to Rs 227.85 crore since March 15, separate regulatory filings showed.



In February, Zomato reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 138 crore for the December quarter. The company is expected to announce the fourth (January-March) quarter results next month. According to company sources, the hike in platform fees applies to major cities like Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Mumbai and Hyderabad, among others. The company introduced a

platform fee last August, starting with Rs 2 per order, which has been increased gradually. Its main rival, Swiggy, already charges a platform fee of Rs 5 per order. When searching for its intercity delivery service 'Intercity Legends', the company on its app says, "Enhancements are underway! Please stay tuned as we will be back to serve you soon".

Internet users dissatisfied with data speeds, connectivity; wish to change service providers: Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Despite India's low-cost and expanding internet accessibility, a recent survey found that over half of internet users are dissatisfied with data speeds and experience connection issues. An overwhelming 70 per cent of these users expressed the desire to switch service providers, the survey said. According to the annual broadband survey by LocalCircles, 86 per cent of users in India primarily



connect to the internet at home via fiber, broadband, DSL, or fixed-line

connection. However, more than half of these users — 56 per cent — reported

connection disruption or lower speeds than what they were promised or paying for. The survey, which gathered insights from over 7,000 broadband and fiber consumers across 286 Indian districts, revealed that 39 per cent of respondents said the "speed received is much lower than what we are paying for", while 47 per cent claimed that it took over 24 hours for their service provider to resolve their complaints. As per the survey, "70 per

cent among users, coupled with operators offering complimentary voice minutes within bundled plans, is driving the decline in average revenue per user (ARPU) of fixed voice operators in India," it said. LocalCircles said it plans to share the results with relevant government bodies such as the telecom regulator TRAI, the Ministry of Telecom, and the Department of Consumer Affairs to address the issues faced by consumers.

Vodafone Idea FPO subscribed 3.3 times, retail lags

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Debt-saddled telecom operator Vodafone Idea Ltd's Rs 18,000 crore follow-on offering (FPO) on Monday was subscribed more than 3.3 times, as institutional investors poured in money but the retail segment lagged. On the last day of the offering, as many as 4,212.56 crore shares were sought against the issue size

of 1,260 crore at 14.30 hrs, according to information on stock exchanges. The final numbers will be known when the issue closes on Monday evening. Qualified institutional buyers sought 8.71 times of their 360 crore shares reserved for them, while non-institutional investors bid for 2.7 times of the 270 crore shares earmarked for them.

Man United escapes with shootout win in FA Cup semifinal

AP ■ LONDON

It was nearly a comeback for the ages for Coventry. Instead, it ended in another gut-wrenching penalty shootout loss at Wembley for the second-tier team as Manchester United limped into another FA Cup final. Coventry pulled off one of the most unexpected fightbacks in FA Cup history by rallying from three goals down against United to force extra time after a 3-3 draw in Sunday's semifinal game, only to falter at the end and let Erik ten Hag's team escape with a 4-2 win in the shootout.

"It hurts a lot, especially coming back from 3-0 down and having the potential to win in extra time," Coventry striker Ellis Simms said. "To lose on penalties is gutting. ... We were unlucky but it just wasn't our day to get it."

Rasmus Hojlund scored the decisive penalty kick to save United from another embarrassing collapse after Callum O'Hare and Ben Sheaf had missed their spot kicks for Coventry.

"It was an incredible game, a strange game too," Ten Hag said. "We had total control for so long and then gave it away in the last part of the game."

It was another heartbreaking ending at Wembley for Coventry, which also lost on penalties to Luton in last year's Championship playoff final to miss out on promotion to the Premier League.

United's narrow escape sets up a second straight Manchester derby in the final against defending champion Manchester City, which beat Chelsea on Saturday. But it should never have been this close.

United looked to be cruising toward the final after Bruno Fernandes' deflected shot put them 3-0 up in the 58th minute against a Championship side that had defied the odds just to make the semifinals.

But Coventry is no stranger to comebacks, having scored twice in injury time to beat Wolverhampton in the quarterfinals, and staged an even greater one this time to set off wild celebrations in the sky-blue half of Wembley.

Simms gave Coventry a glimmer of hope by sweeping home a cross from Fabio Tavares in the 71st, O'Hare netted the second with the help of a lucky deflection in the 79th and Haji Wright equalized from the penalty spot in the fifth minute of injury time after a handball by



Aaron Wan-Bissaka. United had taken the lead in the 23rd through Scott McTominay and Harry Maguire then headed in the second from a corner. That lead soon looked insurmountable after Fernandes' shot took a deflection to sneak inside the near post for United's third. But no lead seems safe for this

United side.

This was a second late collapse in a matter of weeks after United gave up two injury-time goals in a 4-3 Premier League loss to Chelsea this month, when Ten Hag called on his team to learn how to close out games. They showed no signs of having learned that lesson, and Coventry came the closest to netting the winner in extra time against a shell-shocked United.

Simms first hit the crossbar with a stinging strike and Victor Torp then thought he had scored the winner in the 120th minute - setting off more wild celebrations by the Coventry players and fans - but it was ruled out by VAR for a narrow offside to set up the penalty shootout.

"We were 20 seconds away and a toenaill offside, it's ridiculous," said Coventry manager Mark Robins, the former Manchester United player who scored a crucial FA Cup goal in 1990 that helped Alex Ferguson win his first trophy at the club.

"Disappointed but we have to be really proud. Once the dust settles a lot of people will talk about that game for a long time."

Casemiro missed United's first penalty by shooting straight at goalkeeper Bradley Collins but Andre Onana saved O'Hare's spot kick before Sheaf sent his well over the crossbar.

The win gives United a chance to salvage what has been a disappointing season. United only has an outside chance of qualifying for the Champions League next season and an FA Cup trophy - at rival City's expense - could be the only thing that will convince new minority owner Jim Ratcliffe to keep Ten Hag in charge for next season.

The 71-year-old Ratcliffe was in the stands after running the London Marathon earlier in the day. Watching the last hour of United's performance may have been just as exhausting as the last part of that marathon.

United's players hardly even celebrated when Hojlund's decisive penalty went in, with only Christian Eriksen running over to celebrate with his fellow Dane. Most of the players remained by the halfway line, almost sheepishly shaking hands with the Coventry players - knowing how close they had come to one of the club's most embarrassing defeats.

Ten Hag, though, insisted that fans should look on the bright side after reaching back-to-back FA Cup finals.

Ruud beats Tsitsipas to win Barcelona Open

AP ■ BARCELONA

Casper Ruud took his revenge against Stefanos Tsitsipas by winning the Barcelona Open final in straight sets for his biggest career title, a week after losing to the Greek in the Monte Carlo Masters final.

Ruud won 7-5, 6-3 for his first title of the season after losing the three other finals he played this year.

"Honestly, this has been worth the wait," Ruud said after the triumph in Barcelona. "A lot of finals that I've lost have been tough, a bit disappointing, of course. Any time you reach a final, it's nonetheless a good week, so you can't be too hard on yourself, but this one has been a long time coming."

Seventh-ranked Tsitsipas had comfortably won in straight sets in Monte Carlo but this time Ruud prevailed, converting three of the six break points he earned.

"I'm super happy to do it here in Barcelona in front of a packed stadium and on Rafa Nadal Court," the sixth-ranked Ruud said. "It's special to me because I looked up to him (Nadal) all my childhood, came here myself as a 13-year-old boy to watch him and the others play here. It's a great feeling."

Ruud is eyeing next month's French Open after finishing runner-up at Roland Garros last year, one of three Grand Slam finals he has lost.

The 25-year-old Norwegian snapped a 10-match winning streak for Tsitsipas, who was 10-0 on clay this season and was seeking his 12th career title. Tsitsipas had lost all three of his previous Barcelona finals - in 2018, 2021 and 2023.

It was the 11th career title for Ruud, and the 10th on clay.

AP ■ LONDON

Liverpool stayed in the hunt for the Premier League title and moved level on points with leader Arsenal with a 3-1 victory over Fulham that was illuminated by a brilliant free kick by Trent Alexander-Arnold.

Liverpool bounced back from Thursday's exit to Atalanta in the Europa League quarterfinals and last weekend's home loss to Crystal Palace by winning at Craven Cottage after Jurgen Klopp dropped Mohamed Salah and Alexis Mac Allister to the bench.

Alexander-Arnold's curling free-kick in the 32nd was canceled out by Timothy Castagne's first goal for Fulham in first-half stoppage time.

Ryan Gravenberch and Diogo Jota scored in the second half

Liverpool stays in hunt for Premier League title with 3-1 win at Fulham

AP ■ LONDON

as Liverpool joined Arsenal on 74 points - one more than defending champion Manchester City, which has a game in hand.

Fulham academy graduate Harvey Elliott, who swapped London for Merseyside in 2019, was galvanized by jeers from the home fans as he helped his side create the first chance of the match.

The attacking midfielder player instinctively picked out Alexander-Arnold, whose cross could not be directed in by Luis Diaz's glancing header as the ball narrowly missed the inside of the post.

Alexander-Arnold then showed off his elite ball-



striking ability. First, he received the ball centrally and he delivered a first-time side-footed pass in behind Fulham full-back Antonee Robinson before Diaz's low cross to Jota was struck wide of the right-hand post.

Then, after Joao Palhinha brought down Jota on the counterattack, Alexander-Arnold stood over the set-

piece in an almost central position near the edge of the area and whipped the ball over the wall into the top left-hand corner.

The Cottagers had been quiet all half but they came alive in added time to equalize.

Rodrigo Muniz's blocked header off Alex Iwobi's cross fell kindly to the unmarked Castagne, who slammed his effort home from close range.

Parity did not last long as, in the 53rd minute, Liverpool punished a series of errors to retake the lead. Iwobi's wayward pass found Elliott in a dangerous position and he opted to lay the ball off to Gravenberch, whose first-time curled effort flew past Bernd Leno to make it 2-1.

Liverpool wrapped up the win in the 72nd after Cody Gakpo's pass split the defense and Jota finished with a strike into the bottom right-hand corner.



Bhavesh, Simranpreet win second 25m Pistol Olympic Selection Trials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bhavesh Shekhawat and Simranpreet Kaur Brar emerged winners in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol (RFP) and women's 25m pistol OST T2 trials respectively at the first-ever Olympic Selection Trials (OST) for Rifle and Pistol at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting ranges here on Monday.

Bhavesh shot 34 in the RFP final, comfortably holding off OST T1 winner Anish Bhanwala (29), to extend his good form in the trials.

Vijayveer Sidhu was third with 22-hits.

Adarsh Singh (17) and Ankur Goel (13) finished fourth and fifth.

In the women's pistol, Simranpreet continued her good run in the trials, firing 37-hits in the 10 series of five-shots each, to emerge triumphant. She too held off OST T1 winner and Olympian Manu Bhaker who signed-off with 35-hits on the day.

Esha Singh with 30-hits took third and the final podium points available.

Rhythm Sangwan (24), the second quota holder in the event, finished fourth while Abhidnya Patil (16) was fifth.

Nottingham Forest cries foul play in inflammatory social media post

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Its 39 million views and counting for an inflammatory social-media post that might be unlike anything ever seen in English soccer.

The final whistle had just been blown on Nottingham Forest's 2-0 defeat at Everton in the Premier League on Sunday when a post on X, formerly Twitter, was published by the frustrated losing club.

It went beyond criticizing match officials for perceived incompetence for the failure to award three penalties for what Forest said were a trio of clear fouls in the area during the game.

It pointed to potential foul play by questioning the integrity of the VAR - Stuart Attwell - who, the club said, is a fan of a team, Luton, battling with Forest to

avoid relegation.

Signing off, the post said Forest will "consider its options" about how to proceed. This matter, it seems, is far from over, not least because the Premier League is likely to come down hard on Forest in the coming days for its insinuations.

Indeed, Forest - a two-time European champion - has rarely been out of the news since returning to the Premier League last season, after an absence of 24 years, under the stewardship of larger-than-life owner Evangelos Marinakis.

Signing a record 21 players at a cost of around USD 160 million in the first transfer window after promotion showed this was a club which would be doing things differently.

Forest has been made to pay for that wild spree, with the

club recently having been docked four points for breaching the league's financial rules. It is appealing against that sanction.

This season, with the team again under the threat of relegation and currently in fourth-to-last place, Forest has adopted an us-against-the-world mentality for what it perceives to be a series of poor refereeing decisions hurting the team. It has even hired a former Premier League referee, Mark Clattenburg, as a consultant this season.

Clattenburg has been scrutinizing the decisions of match officials and is answerable to Marinakis, a combustible Greek shipping magnate and media baron who - as the owner of Olympiakos, Greece's largest club - has been known for frequent public outbursts

against refereeing calls and run-ins with the Greek Football Federation.

In his column for the British newspaper *The Daily Mail*, Clattenburg wrote on Monday that Forest has had to "endure some egregious refereeing" this season and that the decisions at Everton made it "as grim a game as they have encountered since returning to the Premier League."

"It was a hat trick of howlers from the refereeing team and, unfortunately for Forest, a continuation of an unjust trend that has hampered their survival fight," Clattenburg wrote.

A previous incident that angered Forest - and led to Marinakis going down to the touchline to express his unhappiness and later approach referee Paul Tierney - came in the team's 1-0 home loss to Liverpool in

March.

The winning goal arrived in the ninth minute of stoppage time - just eight minutes had been allotted - and only after a controversial call by the referee, with Forest not getting the ball back when play was stopped after Liverpool defender Ibrahima Konate sustained a knock to the head at a Forest corner before the goal.

Tierney blew his whistle with Forest in possession on the edge of Liverpool's area. After Konate quickly recovered, the referee dropped the ball to Liverpool goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher, who then started the attack that eventually led to the goal.

Clattenburg pointed out that the ball should have gone back to the team that had possession when the game was stopped.

That appears to be a clear

refereeing error, like the one made in Liverpool's loss at Tottenham in October when there was a mix-up in communication between the on-field referee and the VAR.

After that mistake, Liverpool said it would "explore the range of options available, given the clear need for escalation and resolution."

Tensions are running high and the finances at stake in the lucrative Premier League are leading to clubs - and their fans on social media - getting bolder and more vocal with their complaints, especially about the use of a video review system that is not proving to be the solution that was promised.

Forest went too far, though, according to Jamie Carragher, a former Liverpool and England defender, who is now a leading pundit on British broadcaster Sky Sports.

Nelly Korda ties LPGA Tour record with 5th straight victory

AP ■ THE WOODLANDS (US)

Nelly Korda couldn't have imagined the incredible run she's put together this season while at home recovering from a blood clot that required surgery in 2022.

"Because obviously then I was just more scared for my health," she said. "Competing was kind of on the back seat. I was not thinking about competing at all. But I think all of the sad times and the health scares that I have gone through have made me who I am today."

Fully healthy now, Korda is seemingly unstoppable. The world's No. 1 player hasn't lost a tournament since January, and now she's a two-time major champion.

Korda etched her name in the LPGA Tour record books Sunday, winning her record-tying fifth straight tournament with a two-stroke victory in the Chevron Championship.

Korda joins Nancy Lopez (1978) and Annika Sorenstam (2004-05) as the only players to win five consecutive LPGA events. Her previous major victory was in 2021 at the Women's PGA Championship.

"It's been an amazing feeling these past couple weeks knowing that I can go on this stretch and that if I stay in my bubble and I keep golf in a sense simple and let it flow, then I can have so, so much fun out here," she said.

Korda shot a 3-under 69 in the final to outlast Maja Stark of Sweden, who birdied her final two holes to shoot 69 and pull within one. Korda stayed

aggressive on the par-5 18th, easily clearing the lake in front of the green and setting up an easy up-and-down birdie for a two-shot victory.

She had a four-day total of 13-under 275 at Carlton Woods.

Korda nearly aced the par-3 17th, with her tee shot hitting the hole and hopping in the air before settling within 10 feet. She settled for par to maintain her two-shot lead.

Korda wowed the large crowd, which followed her throughout the day, by chipping into the wind for birdie on the par-4 10th hole to take a four-stroke lead. The 25-year-old raised her club above her head with one hand and pumped her fist after the ball rolled into the hole.

Her parents - former Australian Open tennis champion Petr Korda and Regina Rajchrtova - beamed as she was presented with the trophy.

"She had a difficult '22 and '23 in certain ways," Petr Korda said. "She did not win a tournament in '23 and some things probably made her humble and (she) put a lot of work into where she is right now. Without the work and commitment, she would not be here. So seeing that, I'm very happy."

Korda's older sister, Jessica, is a six-time LPGA winner who's taking a break from golf after giving birth to her first child.

Korda took home \$1.2 million from a purse of \$7.9 million, a significant increase from last year's purse of \$5.2 million. That brings her season earnings to \$2,424,216 and her career earnings to \$11,361,489. Winners had been jumping into Poppie's Pond off the 18th green at Mission Hills since 1988, and



Korda became the second to do it in Texas by doing a cannonball off a small dock into brown-tinged water. World No. 2 Lilia Vu was first to jump into the pond here after her win last season. Vu withdrew from this year's tournament before the first round after experiencing "severe discomfort" in her back during warmups.

While still shivering from her post-win plunge Sunday, Korda confirmed she'll be competing in the JM Eagle LA Championship next week in Los Angeles. She was then asked about the possibility of becoming the first to ever win six straight LPGA tournaments.



"I'm going to enjoy this right now and then I'll think about that," she said. "But yeah, it's been an amazing time. Hopefully keep the streak alive. But I've been so grateful to compete week in and week out and get the five in a row, too."

Masters champion Scottie Scheffler is on a similar tear, on his way to a fourth victory in five starts until rain interrupted the final round of the RBC Heritage. He couldn't help but check in on Korda.

"I actually was checking the scores this afternoon when we were in the rain delay," he said. "I'm extremely happy for her and proud of her. That's some pretty special stuff. It's been a treat to watch."

Korda entered the last round one shot off the lead after completing the last seven holes of the weather-delayed third round early Sunday morning on a windy and unseasonably cool day. She was wiped out after her big win because she'd been up since 4 a.m. To prepare for the end of the third round.

She birdied two of her first four holes to take the lead. Lauren Coughlin birdied Nos. 13 and 14 to get within two strokes, but bogeys on the 16th and 17th holes put her four behind. She shot a final-round 68 to finish tied for third with Brooke Henderson.

Coughlin got emotional when discussing her best finish in a major.

"It's really cool to see all of the work that I've put in, especially with my putting and my short game, and putting specifically showed off this week, as well," she said. Henderson was tied with Korda for second to start the last round after she shot a 64 in the third round to set a scoring record for the tournament since its move from Mission Hills, California, to Texas last year. But the Canadian, who has 13 LPGA wins with two majors, also faltered early in the final round, with a bogey and a double bogey in the first four holes.

Haeran Ryu of South Korea shot a bogey-free 67 to enter the final round leading Korda by one. But the 2023 Rookie of the Year bogeyed the first two holes of the fourth round. She closed with a 74 and finished fifth.

Eighteen-year-old amateur Jasmine Koo provided an unlikely highlight on the 18th hole. Her second shot bounced off the advertising board in the water and back into play.



REVENGE ON CSK MIND AS LSG EYE A WIN IN DHONI BASTION

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Revenge will be on defending champions Chennai Super Kings' minds when they host an unpredictable Lucknow Super Giants here in their reverse IPL fixture on Tuesday with both the teams desperate to break out of the mid-table logjam. The last time the two teams faced off in Lucknow last week, KL Rahul and Quinton de Kock put up a record opening partnership which proved to be the difference as LSG joined CSK at eight points in the IPL standing. The Super Kings have been a force to be reckoned with at home and they will look to set the record straight this time. Following the away loss, CSK will be eager to redeem themselves in the three consecutive home ties to march towards the playoffs. For CSK, skipper Rituraj Gaikwad and Shivam Dube have done bulk of the scoring and their failure against LSG meant they didn't get a flying start and also struggled in the middle overs. While opener Rachin Ravindra's form is a concern,

CSK also promoted Ajinkya Rahane as the opener and as a result, Gaikwad pushed himself a spot down to three. Having scored three 50-plus scores as an opener so far, it would once again be a tricky call for Gaikwad to whether stick to the latest shuffle or promote himself back to the top. While Ravindra Jadeja stepped up with a composed fifty, which allowed Moeen Ali and MS Dhoni to produce the late fireworks and give the team a fighting total, CSK would hope their top-order gets their act together before they face LSG again. CSK's bowling unit was at their wits end against the rampaging duo of Rahul and Quinton the other day. Young Matheesha Pathirana was their best bowler but the onus will be on pacers Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande and Mustafizur Rahman to produce a better show when they face the same opposition again. Left-arm spinner Jadeja too struggled and will need to step up on their home turf, having done so in the past. For LSG, batting has been an



issue but they have shown how devastating they can be if their top-order fires. Rahul and Quinton were on a roll and they will once again have to do the heavy lifting at Chepauk. Also Nicholas Pooran has hit top gear when needed and LSG will bank on him a lot. In bowling, LSG will hope for the return of young pace sensation Mayank Yadav, who had to sit out of two games after suffering lower abdominal strain. Pacer Mohsin Khan and Yash Thakur did well to restrict CSK initially but found themselves in the firing line of Dhoni in the final overs, something they need to work on before they walk into his den. Matt Henry had a wicketless debut for LSG and he too will be eager to prove himself. In the spin department, Krunal Pandya's two wickets made a lot of difference in the middle-overs and he will have to take the lead again against CSK, while young Ravi Bishnoi will have to get over the thrashing that he received from Ali to find his mojo back. The visitors would be fancying their chances but LSG would

need consistency to pull off another win at CSK's fortress.

SQUADS:
Chennai Super Kings: Rachin Ravindra, Rituraj Gaikwad (c), Ajinkya Rahane, Daryl Mitchell, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Sameer Rizvi, MS Dhoni (wk), Shardul Thakur, Tushar Deshpande, Mustafizur Rahman, Matheesha Pathirana, Nishant Sindhu, Moeen Ali, Mitchell Santner, Shaik Rasheed, Aravelly Avanish, Maheesh Theekshana, RS Hangargekar, Simarjeet Singh, Mukesh Choudhary, Prashant Solanki, Ajay Jadav Mandal, Richard Gleeson and Deepak Chahar.
Lucknow Super Giants: Quinton de Kock, KL Rahul (c & wk), Deepak Hooda, Ayush Badoni, Marcus Stoinis, Nicholas Pooran, Krunal Pandya, Ravi Bishnoi, Mohsin Khan, Shamar Joseph, Yash Thakur, Manimaran Siddharth, Prerak Mankad, Arshad Khan, Krishnappa Gowtham, Amit Mishra, Kyle Mayers, Ashton Turner, Matt Henry, Naveen-ul-Haq, Devdutt Padikkal, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Mayank Yadav and Arshin Kulkarni.



Conversation with Virat Kohli really helped me during bad phase: Riyan Parag

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

When Riyan Parag first arrived on the scene, he was known more for his unabashed expression of opinions on social media than for his batting. But then came a "good 10-15 minutes" of advice from the great Virat Kohli, and things changed for the better. From facing criticism for speaking his mind instead of delivering drab cliches in media interaction or on social media, the 22-year-old player from Assam is now staking a claim for India selection with stellar performances this IPL season. On asking Kohli for advice, Parag told JioCinema, "In my second year, I was having a bad phase in the IPL. I was discussing with him on how to get out of that phase and how he used to handle similar situations, so I can learn from his experience as well. "He gave me a good 10-15 minutes of his time and shared a few things with me, I think that really helped me." Rajasthan Royals' Parag has been in top form this season, and is currently third in the list of highest run-scorers with 318 runs in seven

matches. Besides Kohli, Parag has also learned a lot from another cricket legend Rahul Dravid, who was previously associated with the RR franchise. "I learnt a lot. Cricket-wise, we know he's one of the best in the business, one of the greatest cricketers of our time. "Outside cricket, how we should conduct ourselves, get involved with the crowd, social media, and how to generally present ourselves outside of cricket, is something I learnt a lot about, from him." Speaking about his maiden season in the IPL in 2019, Parag said the feeling was surreal when he first went out to bat, in a match against Chennai Super Kings with the legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni standing a few feet from the newcomer. "It was a surreal feeling. I don't really remember how I was exactly feeling but I was nervous for sure. Playing against CSK, going in to bat, with Dhoni behind the wicket, was a surreal moment for sure, I'll never forget that. I was more excited than nervous and enjoyed every bit of it."

Starc is a superstar, do not think of him from investment standpoint: KKR CEO Mysore

+PTI ■ KOLKATA

Under scrutiny for his poor show in the ongoing season, IPL's costliest buy Mitchell Starc on Monday received the backing of Kolkata Knight Riders' managing director and CEO Venky Mysore, who said they don't think of him from an "investment standpoint". KKR had bought Starc for a record Rs 24.75 crore but it always came with a caveat as the Aussie left-arm quick had limited experience in the shortest format and was making a comeback to IPL after nine years. "He's a superstar and he's a quality player," Mysore said on the sideline of Knight Golf event at RCGC here.

"We don't think of it from an investment standpoint, because you go to the auction and things happen in the auction, which is not in the hands of anybody else. "We just felt that an addition to the team like Mitchell Starc would add a lot of value, which it has. I mean, his presence itself in the lineup adds a different dynamic to the team, and there were specific skills that the support staff were looking for. So, we think we had that." Starc's rustiness in the T20 format came to fore as he conceded 100 runs without taking any wicket from his eight overs in the first two matches. It turned from bad to worse on Sunday when he leaked 54



runs from 16 balls at Eden Gardens, and in the final over, RCB No 9 Karn Sharma with little batting pedigree smashed him for three sixes in four balls. Starc, however, managed to salvage some pride taking a low return catch to dismiss Karn that eventually sealed a dramatic one-run victory.

"There are times when games are up and down. Everybody gets taken to the cleaners at times, and there are other times they come and just do their thing and win games for the team. So we're super happy having him in the setup," Mysore said. With five wins from seven

matches at the halfway mark, the second placed KKR look a transformed side under mentor and two-time title winning former captain Gautam Gambhir. Gambhir, who last represented the side in 2017, returned to his former franchise as a team mentor, relinquishing the same position at Lucknow Super Giants this season. Mysore said Gambhir has added a lot of "weight" to the side. "I think the consistency that is shown, I think we look like a more balanced and settled side this year. Needless to say, Gautam (Gambhir) coming in adds a lot of weight purely from the intensity that he brings, the experience that he brings.



Du Plessis, Curran fined for IPL Code of Conduct breaches

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Faf du Plessis has copped a Rs 12 lakh fine, while Punjab Kings captain has been penalised 50 per cent of his match fees for their respective offences, the IPL announced on Monday. Du Plessis was fined for maintaining a slow over rate during RCB's thrilling one-run loss, their seventh of the ongoing season, to Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens on Sunday. "Mr Faf du Plessis, Captain, Royal Challengers Bengaluru has been fined after his team maintained a slow over-rate during Match 36 of the TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens, Kolkata on April 21, 2024," an IPL statement read. It was RCB's first over-rate offence of the season. Curran, on the other hand, was fined for his match fees for a Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct which refers to "showing dissent at an umpire's decision" during PBKS' three-wicket loss to Gujarat Titans in Mullanpur on Sunday. "Curran committed a Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. He admitted to the offence and accepted the Match Referee's sanction. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding," an IPL media release stated. The loss against GT was Punjab's fourth on the trot, they are now languishing on the ninth place in the points table.

PTI ■ MULLANPUR

Punjab Kings' bowling coach Charl Langeveldt has urged his middle-order batters to step up and "get more runs on the board" following their three-wicket loss to Gujarat Titans in the IPL here. Punjab Kings made brisk start to reach 45 for no loss in five overs but their innings went downhill thereafter as they lost 7 for 47 runs to all out for 142. GT overhauled the target in 19.1 overs. It was their sixth loss in eight games. "Disappointing. Players are hurt as well as the staff and the fans. We showed a lot of character with the ball. We had a good powerplay with the bat for the first time in three games but in the middle period, their spinners were too quality for our batters and we struggled. "We just need middle order upfront to get more runs. We were probably 20 runs short on that wicket," Langeveldt said at the post-match press conference. While Gujarat Titans used their spinners well with the trio of Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan and Noor Ahmad battling the opposition with

We need middle order to get more runs: PBKS bowling coach Charl Langeveldt

their guile, PBKS picked Harpreet Singh Bhatia as their Impact Player due to the batting collapse even as Rahul Chahar stayed on the bench. "It was the idea, we could have another spinner [Rahul] Chahar to play in but obviously when you're batting and you've had a collapse like that, it's better to get the runs on board," Langeveldt said. "That's something we want to improve, get more runs on the board. We are going to travel now and we are going to play on better batting wickets and that would give the batters a bit more confidence going into the last few games. We take every game like a semi-final, final but yeah, it's one of those things. "The batters are definitely going to be happy about the next venue (Eden Gardens, Kolkata). The bowlers need to



step up as well when we play at different venues, higher scoring grounds. Hopefully our batters will come good for us."

While PBKS are languishing on the second last position on the points table, Langeveldt tried to look at the positives. "We still have to have that belief. We are a positive side, the boys showed a lot of character in the field. There's a lot to play for, we just need to win." Rahul Tewatia played an unbeaten 18-ball 36-run innings and scored the winning runs for GT and fast bowler, Mohit Sharma was lavish in his praise for the dashing finisher. "For the past three years, he (Rahul Tewatia) has been with the GT team. He's done it several times before (finishing games for his team). All credit goes to him," Mohit Sharma said. "He practices the same scenarios at the nets. It is also a challenge for us when we bowl to him. He played a crucial innings, which was undoubtedly the turning point in the game for us."

We may have got away with Kohli wicket: Phil Salt

PTI ■ KOLKATA

It was a rub of the green call that Virat Kohli was dismissed off a high full toss and Kolkata Knight Riders managed to eke out a narrow one-run win in their high-scoring IPL match against RCB on Sunday, says stumper-batter Phil Salt. The new Hawk-Eye technology to determine no-balls for height was used when TV umpire Michael Gough deemed a waist-high delivery from KKR's Harshit Rana fair. Kohli was in full flow, scoring a brisk 18 runs off just seven balls, before Rana took a return catch to dismiss the star batter, as it became a pivotal moment

in RCB's narrow one-run loss while chasing a challenging target of 223 at Eden Gardens. "It's split opinion, we know that. From our point of view, we feel like we may have got away with one there. It's the rub of the greens, one of those calls," said the world No 2 T20I batter at the Knight Golf event here. The Englishman further said leveraging technology in this manner is ultimately beneficial for the game as he hinted at the possibility of a future review to assess the effectiveness of these technological advancements. "They brought that data in, the no-ball data, for exactly that purpose. I feel like in 12



months' time maybe there'll be some sort of review. Is it working? Is it not working? Is it a new thing to the game? "But personally, from a player's

point of view, any time you're using data and technology to be more precise and get the right decisions, that's a good thing for the game," Salt added. Salt and Sunil Narine, the two KKR openers, have scored the bulk of runs (535 runs from seven innings) for the team who have won five from their seven matches to be in the forefront of a playoff spot. "It's great batting with Sunil, he is a very, very low-key chill guy. He's got a very different sort of skill set when he's opening the batting, as opposed to, up and down the order. "I suppose one of the good things for me is he takes the pressure off, and I don't have to

strike at a rate of 200 in my first 10 balls. Some games I might, but I don't have to. "Normally, one of us gets the strike. So, if we get a good start, we get a couple of boundaries away. You know, we can produce really big power plays, which is something that we've done." They have went about their ways with a meticulous approach, picking the right bowler to attack and relied on match-ups, Salt said. "Our conversations are mainly, who's going to take what ball, you know, who likes to match up, left arm spin, right arm pace, all that sort of a things.

"Normally one of us who wants to put their hand up and take that arm. We keep it very, very simple." Narine has been a revelation with the bat at the top of the order as the KKR spinner who was known as a pinch-hitter, has batted this time with poise and patience. Narine struck his maiden T20 century, scoring 109 against Rajasthan Royals the other day. **GAUTI INSPIRES CONFIDENCE IN NARINE:** TENDO: KKR fielding coach Ryan Ten Doeschate, a member of their 2014 IPL title winning team under Gautam Gambhir, credited Narine's transformation to the former skipper who is now the mentor

of the side. "To be dead honest, I think Gauti did convince Sunil to open the batting and that also comes from the chemistry they have. They've worked together. Sunil played under him. I think it was a pretty easy.

Patanjali Ayurved fully respects the dignity of the Hon'ble Supreme Court. We sincerely apologize for the mistake of publishing advertisements and holding a press conference even after our advocates made a statement in the apex court. We are committed to not let such a mistake be repeated ever in the future. We reassure you that we shall remain committed to uphold the constitution and the dignity of the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

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