

OPINION 6
ROLE OF AI IN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

WORLD 8
US EFFORT TO BRING AID TO GAZA BY SEA

MONEY 10
MARKETS SNAP FIVE DAYS RALLY; SENSEX TUMBLES

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol.17 Issue 114
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

RANCHI, SATURDAY APRIL 27, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

DELHI CAPITALS TAKE ON MI 12 SPORTS



Supreme Court rejects 100 per cent VVPAT verification plea

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court on Friday rejected all petitions seeking 100 per cent cross-verification of votes cast using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT).

A tight slap to Congress led Opposition: Modi

The order came on a day during the second phase of polling for 88 parliamentary seats in 13 States. The Supreme Court's long anticipated verdict quickly found echo in the political landscape with Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying at a rally in Araria in Bihar that it is a "tight slap" on the Congress-led Opposition which now must "apologise" for committing the "sin of creating distrust



Supreme Court on EVM-VVPAT Verification Case Photo: PTI

against electronic voting machines. Hours after the Supreme Court verdict, Modi said the decision shattered dreams of the INDIA Bloc that "sought to mislead the nation". "Every politician in the INDIA coalition sinned by trying to create doubts in the hearts of the nation's citizens," Modi said at an election rally in Araria Lok Sabha constituency in Bihar. "When the Congress, the RJD and other INDIA Bloc parties

were in power, the poor, backwards and Dalits used to be deprived of their votes through booth capture. With the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines, they are no longer able to play their old game. Hence, they committed the sin of creating distrust against EVMs," he said. Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal described the decision as "fabulous". He said the Supreme Court's ruling has exposed Opposition parties, including the Congress, which had left no opportunity to "defame" the Election Commission.

Opposition vows to continue VVPAT campaign

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

While most Opposition parties did not express their view after the Supreme Court's verdict on VVPAT, the Congress and a couple of parties like Samajwadi Party (SP) said it will continue with its campaign on greater use of VVPATs to increase the public trust in the electoral process. Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said the Opposition is not a party, directly or indirectly, to the petition on VVPATs. "We have taken note of the verdict of the two-judge bench and our political campaign on the greater use of VVPATs to increase public trust in the electoral process will continue," Ramesh said in a statement.

Estimated Poll Turnout (Phase -II) at 07:00 PM

STATES	VOTING PER CENT
Assam	70.78
Bihar	54.91
Chhattisgarh	73.05
Jammu and Kashmir	71.63
Karnataka	67.12
Kerala	65.28
Madhya Pradesh	56.60
Maharashtra	54.34
Manipur	77.18
Rajasthan	63.82
Tripura	78.63
Uttar Pradesh	54.82
West Bengal	71.84



Nearly 61 per cent voter turnout in Phase II of LS polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to young and women voters to turn out in great numbers and Opposition leaders, including Priyanka Gandhi's message for voters to vote and 'save the Constitution,' notwithstanding, saw nearly 61 per cent voting till 7 pm on Friday in the second phase of the Lok Sabha.

The 2019 polls of the second phase recorded 66 per cent voting. At 7 pm, 61 per cent voter turnout was recorded across 13 States and Union Territories. Manipur, Chhattisgarh, Bengal, Assam and Tripura recorded over 70 per cent voter turnout while Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra recorded

the lowest turnout at 52.6 per cent, 53 per cent and 53.5 per cent respectively. In 2019, NDA secured victory in 56 seats of the 89 seats while the UPA won 24 seats. In the ongoing second phase of Lok Sabha elections, Assam saw voting percentage of 70.97 per cent, Bihar 54.91 per cent, Chhattisgarh 73.19 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir 71.92 per cent, Karnataka 67.77 per cent, Kerala 65.45 per cent, Madhya Pradesh 57.55 per cent, Maharashtra 54.58 per cent, Manipur 77.18 per cent, Rajasthan 64.01 per cent, Tripura 78.82 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 54.83 per cent and West Bengal 71.84 per cent.

After Friday's phase, polling will be over in the States of Kerala, Rajasthan and Tripura. Barring a few confrontations and complaints of fake voting in Barmer-Jaisalmer, polling was peaceful in the second phase. The third phase of elections for 94 seats across 12 States and Union Territories will be held on May 7. Modi expressed his delight saying the phase two of the Lok Sabha polls has been "too good" for the BJP-led NDA, describing the support to the ruling alliance as unparalleled. "Phase Two has been too good! Gratitude to the people across India who have voted today. The

unparalleled support for NDA is going to disappoint the Opposition even more. Voters want NDA's good governance. Youth and women voters are powering the strong NDA support," Modi said on social media. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took potshots at the PM over his attack on the grand old party, saying he is scared and may even shed tears on the stage. Interestingly, Modi and Opposition leaders, including Rahul raised the pitch of the campaign by focusing on hot-button issues such as religious discrimination, inheritance taxes and affirmative action's during the second phase to polarize their vote bank.

THE PIONEER REPORTS FROM GROUND ZERO

KERALA

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The ebullient fight between the BJP-led NDA, the Congress-led UDF and the CPI(M)-led LDF for the 20 Lok Sabha seats from Kerala that went to the polls on Friday is continuing even after the polling concluded by 6pm on Friday. As hundreds of voters had queued up in front of polling stations at 6 pm, polling officials issued tickets to all so that no one needed to return home without casting their votes. By 7 pm on Friday, the State had registered 70 per cent polling according to the Election Commission of India. The final figure is likely to cross the 77.8 per cent figure which was recorded in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll from the State. Law enforcement agencies heaved a sigh of relief as the polling process was by and large peaceful and no major untoward incidents were reported from anywhere in the State. But there were allegations by the BJP and the opposition Congress party that thousands of voters cast their votes with the help of fake identity cards. "There were many instances of expatriate workers from



other States managing to cast their votes with the help of officials whose loyalty lied with the CPI(M)," said Adoor Prakash, Congress candidate from Attingal in southern Kerala. Seven persons reportedly died either after casting the votes or while waiting for their turn to vote. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who cast his vote with wife Kamala and scam tainted daughter Veena Mohammed Riyaz claimed that there was a CPI(M) wave across Kerala and the LDF would win in all the 20 constituencies. He said that the good works done by the LDF to help the poor would be reflected when results are declared on 4 June.

NORTH EAST

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Sensitive States of the North East, including Manipur and Tripura, besides Assam witnessed peaceful polling on Friday in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections. Manipur, where polling was held under high presence of security personnel, the turnout was a high 77 per cent and one incident of EVM damage was reported. The State had witnessed violence in some areas during the first phase of polls on April 19. On Friday, voting was held in the remaining parts of the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency at 857 polling stations, spanning 13 Assembly segments in eight districts, officials said. Over 4.84 lakh people are eligible to vote in this phase. Fifteen assembly segments of the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency went to the polls in the first phase on April 19 along with the whole of the Inner Manipur seat. Four candidates are in the fray in Outer Manipur — NPF's K Timothy Zimik, Congress's Alfred Kannam Arthur, and Independents S



Kho John and Alyson Abonmai. The BJP has not fielded any candidate and is backing its ally, the NPF. Security measures were significantly enhanced across all 13 assembly segments where polling was underway, with 87 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and 4,000 state police personnel deployed to ensure free and fair elections. During the first phase of elections, parts of the Outer Manipur seat, covering 15 assembly segments, and 32 assembly segments of the Inner Manipur, went to polls on April 19. In the 2019 elections, the NPF emerged victorious, defeating the BJP by a margin of 73,782 votes.

UTTAR PRADESH

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW

In the second phase of Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh, 55-60 per cent voter turnout is expected to be recorded. Uttar Pradesh's Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said here on Friday that by 5 pm 52.74 per cent voter turnout was recorded in eight Lok Sabha constituencies where polling was held on Friday. Prominent among the 91 candidates whose fate was decided in the second phase polling are actors-turned-politician Hema Malini, who is seeking a third term from Mathura, and Arun Govil, who played the role of Lord Ram in the Ramayana TV serial. He has been fielded by the BJP from his native place Meerut. The other prominent candidates are Danish Ali of Congress from Amroha, and BJP's Atul Garg from Ghaziabad and Mahesh Sharma from Gautam Buddha Nagar. The constituencies where polling was held on Friday included Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Aligarh, Mathura and Bulandshahr.



The CEO said polling was peaceful in all eight Lok Sabha constituencies and no untoward incident was reported from anywhere. He said around 150 complaints were received at the state control room and all were promptly disposed of. The CEO said complaints related to faulty electronic voting machines (EVMs), power supply breakdown, slow polling and identification documents produced by voters. He said 48 ballot units, 213 control units and 469 VVPAT machines were replaced. In one polling booth, a polling agent was asked by the police to leave the booth. Following a complaint by the political party, the agent was allowed to stay at the particular polling booth.

KARNATAKA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

The first phase of Lok Sabha polls in Karnataka on Friday comprising 14 constituencies witnessed an impressive 65 per cent voter turnout where the Congress and BJP locked horns on the electoral battleground in less than a year. According to poll officials, 65 per cent voter turnout was recorded. The turnout was however 49.37 per cent in Bengaluru South, and 50.04 per cent in Bengaluru North, amid indications of continued voter apathy in the city. Long queues were seen at polling booths, as people, especially senior citizens and morning walkers came out to vote during the early hours since the voting began at 7 am. Several prominent personalities like Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, IT industry veteran N R Narayana Murthy, his wife and nominated member of Rajya Sabha Sudha Murty, cricketing legends Rahul Dravid, Anil Kumble, and Javagal Srinath cast their

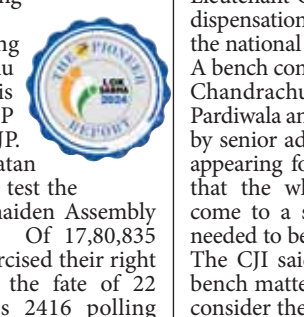


ballot. Former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, Siddaramaiah, Shivakumar, Kumaraswamy, and film personalities like Upendra, Shivarajkumar and Sudeep, also exercised their franchise. Several new couples cast their votes either before or after their marriage. Many booths saw centenarians and differently-abled people actively taking part in the democratic process. Out of 14 segments that went to polls, the highest turnout of 74.87 per cent was recorded in Mandya, followed by Udipi-Chikmagalur and Hassan at an identical 72.13 per cent, and the least 48.61 per cent in Bangalore Central.

JAMMU

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

More than 70 per cent voter turnout was recorded in the Jammu-Reasi Lok Sabha constituency in the second phase of polling amid tight security arrangements on Friday. Over 67.22 per cent polling was recorded till 5.00 pm and a large number of voters were still standing in the polling booths to cast their votes. Election Commission authorities said while sharing the Assembly-wise polling percentage. Former Minister and working president of Congress in Jammu and Kashmir Ramesh Bhalla is challenging two-time sitting MP Jugal Kishore Sharma of BJP. Ankur Sharma of Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal is also in the fray to test the political waters ahead of the maiden Assembly polls in the Union Territory. Of 17,80,835 eligible voters, 11,97,127 had exercised their right to vote till 5.00 p.m. sealing the fate of 22 candidates in the fray across 2416 polling stations spread across 4 districts of Jammu, Samba, Reasi, and Rajouri (83- Kalakote-Sunderbani).



SC to consider listing Delhi Government's plea on services row with Centre

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday told the Delhi Government that it would consider listing its plea challenging the Central Government's law establishing pre-eminence of the Lieutenant Governor over the elected dispensation in controlling services in the national Capital. A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justice J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra was urged by senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the AAP Government, that the whole administration has come to a standstill and the matter needed to be heard. The CJ said presently a nine-judge bench matter is going on and he will consider the submission. Presently, the nine-judge bench headed by the CJ is hearing petitions raising a vexed legal question whether private properties can be considered "material resources of the community" under Article 39(b) of the Constitution, which is a part of the Directive Principles of State Policy. Earlier on February 9, the Delhi Government had mentioned the plea for urgent listing before the five-judge Constitution bench. On September 27 last year, the top court had ordered that a common compilation of submissions be filed by both the parties in the petition by the Delhi Government.



Two terrorists killed in Baramulla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Amid high-voltage electioneering going on in the Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency of North Kashmir, a joint team of security forces on Friday eliminated two terrorists in the Nowpora area of Sopore. A civilian and two security personnel were also injured in the exchange of firing which continued intermittently during the night. The condition of all three personnel is stable. According to the Inspector General of Police, Kashmir range VK Birdi, "a joint operation was launched by the security forces on receipt of information about the presence of terrorists in the Nowpora area of Sopore in



Security personnel stand guard during an encounter with terrorists in Nowpora area of Sopore on Friday PTI

The intermittent firing continued during the night. The two terrorists were neutralised early Friday morning after fresh contact was established. The entire area was sanitised after the recovery of arms ammunition and other incriminating material. IG Kashmir VK Birdi said the identity of the slain terrorists is yet to be ascertained. Based on documents recovered from the encounter site one of the terrorists has been identified as Saifullah, he added. Voting is scheduled to take place during the fifth phase of polling on May 20. Peoples' Conference Chairman Sajad Lone and former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah are locked in a straight fight on the Lok Sabha seat.

Administration promises paid leave for voters on polling day, shops-malls to remain closed



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In a significant move to promote voter participation in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections 2024, Ananya Mittal, the District Election Officer, has issued a ground-breaking order granting paid leave to all voters on the day of polling. The directive, aimed at ensuring the inclusion of every eligible voter in the democratic process, extends to both government and private sector employees. According to the order, dated [Insert Date], all employees, regardless of their employment sector, will be entitled to paid leave on the polling day, scheduled for 25th May in East Singhbhum district. Importantly, the order stipulates that no

deductions will be made from the salaries of employees availing of this leave, in compliance with Section 135 (b) of the Representation of the People Act 1951. Key highlights of the order include: Universal Paid Leave: Every eligible voter, whether employed in government, private businesses, industries, malls, or any other establishments, will be granted leave on the day of polling. Non-Deduction of Wages: Employers are mandated not to deduct or reduce the wages of employees availing of this leave, ensuring that exercising their voting rights does not entail any financial repercussions. Closure of Institutions: All institutions, shops, malls, and establishments in Purbi Singhbhum

district will remain closed on 25 May 2024, in observance of the polling day for the Lok Sabha Election-2024. Inclusion of Daily Wage Workers: Even workers employed on daily wages and casual laborers are entitled to leave and wages on the polling day, ensuring their participation in the electoral process. Exceptions: The order exempts voters whose absence may pose a risk of danger or public loss in relation to their employment engagements from availing of the mandated leave. Ananya Mittal has further directed key authorities, including the Deputy Labor Commissioner, Deputy Chief Factory Inspector, Assistant Deputy Labor Commissioner, Assistant Director of

Employment Office, and all Labor Superintendents, to oversee the strict implementation of the order. Any violation of the directive will be subject to legal repercussions as per the relevant sections of the law. This proactive initiative by the District Election Officer underscores a commitment to fostering a robust democratic ethos by ensuring unfettered access to the voting process for all citizens. It serves as a commendable example of inclusive governance and underscores the importance of citizen engagement in shaping the democratic landscape. For further inquiries or clarifications, concerned individuals are being encouraged to contact the office of the District Election Officer.

Mission mode work for postal ballot in Palamu

PNS : DALTONGANJ

Preparations for the postal ballot voting are in the mission mode. Its nodal officer Anurag Kumar Tiwary who is the sub divisional magistrate Sadar here said there has been a very meticulous preparedness for it so as not to miss even a single postal ballot voting. He said he and his team are right on it. He has sought cooperation from all the stakeholders. There are 4625 Form 12. It is voters on election duty. Again there are 89 absentee voters of Form 12 D. These two Forms 12 and 12D are inter district movements. These 4625 and 89 of Form 12 and Form 12D are of inter district. The inter districts are Ramgarh, Dumka, Chatra, Koderma, Giridih, Dhanbad, Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Khunti, Lohardaga and Hazaribag. A total of 285 postal ballots are of the essential services. Poll machinery here will be visiting 315 senior voters having age 85 and plus at their dwelling. Similarly for 203 Divyangian voters poll machinery will be visiting them at their homes under the aegis of the postal ballot voting. Never in the past such effort was ever put in for the postal ballot voting as it is seen today. Anurag Kumar Tiwary is concerned about the turnout of the voters in 2024. There was a kind of apathy towards voting in the booths falling within the limits of the municipal corporation in 2019. It was out and out urban apathy. There were booths in the Daltonganj town where voting ended at 33 to 39 percent in 2019 only to close below 50 percent among 50 polling booths.

DC Bokaro emphasizes seriousness in training for sector officers

R SHARMA : BOKARO

A training session was conducted for sector officers regarding the Lok Sabha General Elections 2024 at the auditorium of Bokaro Ispat Senior Secondary School located in Sector 2-C of B.S. City. The District Election Officer (DEO) and Deputy Commissioner (DC) Vijaya Jadhav assessed the training session. Present at the occasion were Sourav Kumar Bhuvaniya, Nodal Officer of the Training Cell, Jagarnath Lohra, Nodal Officer, and Avinash Kumar, Media Coordinator among others. Notably Sector officers were being trained on Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) in various classrooms of the school. They were provided detailed information on the Control Unit (CU), Ballot Unit (BU), connecting and operating VVPAT, mock polling, paper sealing, etc. The DEO and DC, along with other team members, evaluated the training session.

DC Jadhav stated that all must read the manuals available for sector officers by the Election Commission of India thoroughly. There is no room for any kind of mistake or deviation from the manual. Notably all were briefed extensively on their duties and responsibilities during the election process. Additional Collector, Mumtaz Ansari said that any oversight or insufficient knowledge regarding the tasks performed by one can affect the voting process. Therefore, all should undergo training with utmost seriousness. If there are any



questions or doubts, clarify them with the trainers immediately. During the event distribution and receipt of Form 12 for postal voting among appointed sector officers were conducted. Vandana Shejwalkar, Nodal Officer of Postal Ballots provided detailed information on this matter. All sector officers appointed for various assembly constituencies were also present during the session.

CMPDI participates in 14th World PetroCoal Congress-2024

PNS : RANCHI

Achyut Ghatak, Director (Technical/RD&T), CMPDI, Ranchi delivered a keynote highlighting how Renewable Energy Integrated Pumped Storage Plants (PSPs) can revolutionize India's journey towards Net Zero emissions at the ongoing 14th World PetroCoal Congress-2024 (WPCC-2024) at New Delhi. Ghatak emphasizing the role of the Coal industry in repurposing abandoned mines for PSPs sparked discussions on sustainability and innovation. The keynote was lauded by both national and international delegates. WPCC-2024 was focused on "Energy, Environment, Efficiency, Equity & Entrepreneurship for a greener Planet", where more than 97 National and International speakers participated in the conference to provide the focal points for translating Knowledge into action. PetroCoal congress is the only congress on Petroleum-Gas-Coal industries with a focus on synergy of Energy.

BJP is a big liars' party, people should be careful: Champai Soren

Nervousness has gripped BJP and Modi seeing the support of INDI alliance: Mir

VINOD PRASAD : LOHARDAGA

Addressing a public meeting in Lohardaga on the occasion of nomination filing of Congress candidate Sukhdeo Bhagat, State Chief Minister Champai Soren said that the Bharatiya Janata Party has become a party of big lies. He said that the BJP led government of Narendra Modi had won the Lok Sabha elections on the issues of inflation, corruption etc, but after winning, there was a huge increase in inflation and a sudden increase in the prices of petrol and gas, which is continuing till today.

The Modi government at the Center is responsible for this. He said that BJP is a liars' party and their lies have become a jumla. This is Modi's guarantee. Modi had guaranteed employment. Guaranteed to reduce the prices of petrol, diesel and gas cylinders. Guarantee was given to provide employment to 2 crore people, after the formation of the government from Swiss Bank, Rs 15 lakh each was guaranteed to all the people, but BJP's guarantee is proving to be a mere statement till date. Terming BJP's guarantee as a 'jumla', he appealed to make India Alliance candidate Sukhdev



Bhagat of Congress victorious in the Lok Sabha elections to be held on May 13 by voting. For the nomination programme ministers of the Jharkhand government and the Chief Minister had reached Gumla. Health Minister Banna Gupta, Minister Rameshwar Oraon, Minister Satyanand Bhokta from Congress with senior leaders Subodh Kant Sahay, Rajesh Thakur, Jharkhand Pradesh Congress in-charge Ghulam Ahmed Mir, Bandhu Tirkey and many Congress party leaders and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MLA Jinga Munda, MLA Bhushan Tirkey, MLA Neha Shilpi

Tirkey participated in the programme. Addressing the public meeting, Congress party's Jharkhand state in-charge Ghulam Ahmed Mir said that BJP has become a party of slogans, their job is to tell lies and they have come to power only by telling lies. INDI Alliance will be formed to remove such a lying party from power. It has been formed and BJP and Modi are scared of India alliance because India alliance is winning in the entire country. Many leaders including member Alok Kumar Sahu gave their views and appealed to make Congress Party candidate Sukhdev

Bhagat victorious with huge votes and to make people aware of the manifesto of Congress Party. Before nomination, a meeting was organized in the Congress Party office. After this, the nomination procession toured the urban area and went to the office of the returning officer where Sukhdev Bhagat filed the nomination form. After this a public meeting was organized in the Nagar Bhawan premises. In which the Chief Minister including state ministers, MLAs and leaders and workers of Congress, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Rashtriya Janata Dal and Communist Party of India participated.

Fire Services Dept of SAIL, RSP organises a special Blood Donation and Yoga camp to mark the Fire Services Week

PNS : BOKARO

The Fire Services Department of SAIL, Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) organised a special Blood Donation camp at Ispat General Hospital on 26th April, to mark the observance of Fire Services Week. Dr. N P Sahoo, CMO (M&HS) presided over the function. Present on the occasion were Mr. J B Patnaik, GM In-charge (Fire Services), other Senior Doctors, Fire Services Personnel, nurses and staff of IGH. Working with a motto to



serve to save, 15 Fire Services personnel volunteered to donate blood. This noble effort showcases the selfless dedication of the fire personnel in contributing towards the wellbeing of the people of the nation. Similarly, a Yoga camp was also organised on 25th

April, in which more than 70 employees of the Fire services department participated. Susant Satpathy, renowned International Yoga Instructor was present to steer the camp. The camp was organised under the supervision of J B Patnaik, GM (Fire Services).



Man held with country made pistol

PNS : LOHARDAGA

Bagdu police station of the district has made a big achievement by forming a raiding team on Friday and arresting a criminal with a country-made pistol. Here, on the basis of secret information, Bagdu police station in-charge Waris Hussain conducted a raid as per the instructions of Lohardaga Superintendent of Police Haris Bin Zaman and recovered an illegal country-made pistol from a youth from Nirahu village of the police station area. Also, the young man was arrested and sent to



judicial custody on Friday. He has been identified as 32 year old Kishore Tirkey, resident of

Brahmandiha village, father of late Suresh Tirkey. Let us tell you that the accused was

in his in-laws house in Nirahu. According to the information, Bagdu police station in-charge Waris Hussain had received information about a young man roaming around with a country-made pistol. After which when the formed team reached Nirahu, the young man started running away after seeing the police. After which he was caught and brought to Bagdu police station. Here the police registered a case against the accused under Bagru police station case number 9/2024 Section US/25(1-B)/A/26 of the Arms Act and started taking further action.

No cases of Bird Flu reported in Bokaro; Dept on High Alert

PNS : BOKARO

Under the directive of the Deputy Commissioner Vijaya Jadhav, the District Animal Husbandry Department has formed district and block-level Rapid Response Teams/Quick Response Teams.

Notably following the recent incident of poultry deaths in the regional poultry zone of Hotwar, Ranchi, the District Animal Husbandry Department's team is on high alert. As of now, there have been no reported cases of bird flu in the district, but the department is closely monitoring the situation. The District Animal Husbandry Department has made preparations to address any potential situation. It has formed district and block-level Rapid Response Teams (RRT) / Quick Response Teams (QRT) comprising veterinarians and staff. Poultry farmers in the district are urged to immediately notify the district and block-level RRT and QRT if there are any sudden deaths among their poultry. The district-level RRT/QRT includes Dr. Vinay Kumar Sinha, Assistant District Animal Husbandry Officer (Tenughat), reachable at mobile number 9123494138, Dr. Pushpa Kumari at mobile number 8102771809, Dr. Ashok Kumar, Block Animal Husbandry Officer in Chaas, reachable at mobile number 9973752779, and Vinod Kumar Das, Livestock Assistant at Chaas Model Hospital, reachable at mobile number 9693440204. Poultry farmers in the district can contact these numbers for any assistance.



XITE College gets 'Autonomy Status' from UGC

PNS : GAMHARIA

XITE College, a renowned institution operated by the Jesuit Fathers, has announced its recent achievement of being granted "Autonomy status" by the University Grants Commission (UGC). In a letter dated April 24th, 2024, the UGC bestowed this prestigious status upon the college, marking a significant milestone in its academic journey. The Jesuit Fathers, esteemed for their unwavering dedication to education, oversee the management of XITE College. Notable institutions such as XLRI Jamshedpur, Xavier College in Kolkata, and Mumbai, all under Jesuit management, exemplify their commitment to excellence in education. The conferment of Autonomous status by the UGC heralds a new era of academic freedom and innovation for XITE College. The attainment of Autonomous status promises to enhance the teaching-learning process at XITE



College in several significant ways: Conducting Examinations Independently: XITE College now has the liberty to conduct its examinations, ensuring the timely completion of academic sessions. Designing Tailored Syllabi: The college has the freedom to craft robust syllabi tailored to the specific needs of students, promoting comprehensive subject comprehension. Initiating New Courses: XITE College can now introduce new courses aligned with the evolving needs of students and the contemporary landscape. The grant of autonomy by

the UGC serves as a testament to XITE College's unwavering commitment to academic excellence and its relentless pursuit of quality education. Noteworthy achievements further underscore the significance of this milestone: Providing scholarships to 100 eligible and deserving tribal students in the academic year 2024-25. Consistently securing admissions for final year students in prestigious institutions such as IIMS Ranchi, Lucknow, and Roorkee, despite being situated in a rural area. Publication of UG Students' Journal with ISSN: 2583-9632 (Online), showcasing

academic prowess and research capabilities. Annual publication of faculty-edited books, reflecting the scholarly endeavors of the college's academic community. Faculty contributions to Scopus and Web of Science-indexed journals, exemplifying research excellence and scholarly impact. Reception of DST Project from Central Govt. in 2022-23, along with sponsorships from ICSSR, NCV, and NAAC for various national conferences, demonstrating academic recognition and collaboration. XITE College expressed heartfelt gratitude to all stakeholders for their unwavering support. The institution remains steadfast in its commitment to providing academic excellence, nurturing human values, and fostering professional competence in its students. With a dedication to preparing responsible citizens capable of addressing societal challenges and contributing to nation-building, XITE College looks forward to a future marked by continued growth and success.

Nomination of two candidates cancelled after scrutiny

PNS : LOHARDAGA

Out of 17 candidates who filed nominations for 12-Lohardaga Lok Sabha constituency, nominations of two candidates were canceled on Friday during scrutiny. The candidates whose nominations were canceled include Lalit Oraon (Bahujan Mukti Party), Etwa Oraon (Independent). A total of 17 candidates had filed their nominations for Lohardaga Lok Sabha constituency till the last nomination date of 25th April. After the cancellation of nominations of two candidates, now 15 candidates are left in the election season. According to the information received by the Nomination Cell Gumla, the nomination has been canceled as per rules due to lack of information given in the filed form. The process of nomination and scrutiny for Lohardaga Lok Sabha elections has been completed. Now candidates can withdraw their nomination on 29th April. After which the final list of candidates will be published. The candidates left after scrutiny are Mahendra Oraon (CPI Party), Mani Munda (Participation Party), Stefan Kindo (Independent), Bihari Bhagat (People's Party of India), Sania Oraon (Independent), Pawan Tigga (Independent), Marianus Tigga (Bharat Adivasi Party), Sameer Oraon (BJP Party), Ramchandra Bhagat (Lokhit Adhikar Party), Chamra Linda (Independent), Girjanand Oraon (Bahujan Samaj Party), Arjun Toppo (Azad Samaj Party), Sukhdev Bhagat (Indian National Congress Party), Arpan Dev Bhagat (Independent), Ranjit Bhagat (Independent).

People tasted real democracy under Modi: Jitendra Singh

PTI ■ JAMMU

The people of the country, especially those in Jammu and Kashmir, tasted "real democracy" under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Friday.

On a day when voting is underway in 88 constituencies spread across 13 states and Union Territories in the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections, Singh said the BJP will register a "landslide" victory and form a "stable and strong" government for the third consecutive term.

"After Modi took over in 2014, the people got a feel of real democracy, especially in Jammu and Kashmir where the grassroots level democracy was strengthened



with the holding of panchayat and urban local bodies elections and implementation of the 72nd and 73rd constitutional amendments after the Congress deprived the people of these benefits," Singh told reporters here after casting his vote in Jammu Lok Sabha constituency.

The minister and his wife and children cast their ballots at a polling station in Trikuta Nagar.

"There is enthusiasm among the voters, especially the first-timers. The country has witnessed revolutionary transformation in the past 10 years under the leadership of Modi.

"In 2014, the youth of the country was disappointed and looking for opportunities to leave the country but today the situation is such that the youth working outside the

country wants to return," Singh, who is contesting the elections from Udhampur parliamentary constituency, said.

Udhampur went to polls in the first phase on April 19 and registered 68.27 per cent polling, sealing the fate of the Union minister and 11 other candidates.

He said the self-esteem of the people living outside the country has increased with startup initiatives increasing from 150 in 2014 to 1.50 lakh.

"Today, the world is looking up to India because they know that they are dealing with a prime minister who has a stable government and is going to be there for the next term and can do business with any country. They are comfortable with a strong prime minister rather than having a new prime minister

every year," he said.

Singh said the people are "enthusiastic" about giving a third term to Modi as they know that India has gained global stature under the prime minister's leadership and acknowledge his efforts to achieve a better future for the youth.

Referring to the abrogation of Article 370, he said Jammu and Kashmir has joined the mainstream and became part of the development endeavour after the Modi government's decision.

"Every section of the society, irrespective of religion and region, is going to vote for the BJP because Modi united the people of the country in a single thread post-independence," he added.

Asked about the possibility of assembly elections after the completion of Lok Sabha polls

in Jammu and Kashmir, he said the prime minister has already assured the people about it along with the restoration of statehood and "there is nothing more to add to his statement."

He also took a dig at the Congress over the controversial statement by one of its leaders on inheritance tax, saying "Inheritance tax is alien to democratic values, Indian culture and Indian civilisation. We have a family system in place which has a legacy so it is quite incompatible with our system."

"What is being said is with a certain political design to appease certain sections of the society and so it is a part of appeasement policy which congress has been following since decades," he said.

70.6 per cent turnout recorded in five LS seats in Assam till 5 pm

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

An estimated 70.6 per cent of 77.26 lakh voters exercised their franchise in five Lok Sabha seats in Assam till 5 pm on Friday, election officials said.

The turnout was expected to increase as those in queue before 5 pm would be allowed to vote, they said.

Polling began at 7 am and no untoward incident was reported so far.

Darrang-Udalguri Lok Sabha seat recorded the highest turnout of 72.9 per cent, followed by Nagaon (71.84), Karimganj (71.12), Diphu (69.62) and Silchar (53.06).

A total of 61 candidates are in the fray in the second phase. Assam Transport Minister Parimal Suklabaidya is pitted against Surya Kanta Sarkar of Congress in Silchar, while



BJP's Amarsing Tisso is contesting against Congress's Joyram Engeng in Diphu. Nagaon's sitting Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi is contesting against BJP's Suresh Bora, while Karimganj's BJP MP Kripanath Malla is pitted against Congress's Hafiz Ahmed Rashid Choudhury.

In Darrang-Udalguri, the main contest is between BJP MP Dilip Saikia and former Congress MP Madhab Rajbongshi.

Altogether 77,26,668 voters, including 38,61,559 women and 179 persons of third gender, are eligible to exercise their franchise at 9,133 polling stations.

53.03 per cent voter turnout recorded in five seats of Bihar till 5 pm

PTI ■ PATNA

A voter turnout of 53.03 per cent was recorded till 5 pm in the five Lok Sabha constituencies in Bihar where polling was underway in the second phase on Friday, officials said.

The polling started at 7 am in Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia, Bhagalpur and Banka constituencies, and would continue till 6 pm, they said.

Fifty candidates are in the fray in these five seats, and over 93 lakh people are eligible to decide their fate, they added.

Kishanganj recorded a voter turnout of 56.12 per cent, Katihar registered 55.54 per cent, Purnea recorded 55.14 per cent, Bhagalpur registered 47.26 per cent and Banka recorded 49.50 per cent till 5 pm, officials said.

Earlier in the day, speaking to reporters in Lakhisarai,



Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha said, "I urge people to exercise their franchise in large numbers. People must vote for the overall growth of the country as well as Bihar."

Meanwhile, Congress's Kishanganj MP Mohd Javed,

who is seeking re-election, filed a police complaint, alleging that his opponents issued a fake statement in his name asking voters to vote in favour of another candidate.

"It was an attempt by my opponents to mislead voters of Kishanganj. I filed a complaint against the suspects last night," he told reporters.

More than 150 companies of paramilitary forces are assisting the state police in ensuring free and fair elections in this phase, officials said.

The polling was underway amid intense heatwave conditions with the mercury shooting past the 40-degree Celsius mark in most parts of the state.

Arrangements for tents and drinking water have been made at the polling stations, officials said.

Another BJD MLA joins BJP ahead of polls in Odisha

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Weeks after resigning from the ruling BJD, Soro MLA Parshuram Dhada on Friday returned to the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha and assembly polls in Odisha. Dhada joined the saffron party at an event organised at the BJP's headquarters here in the presence of its state president Manmohan Samal, former president Samir Mohanty and other leaders.

The legislator quit the BJD on April 3 after being denied a ticket to contest the upcoming polls.

He had successfully contested the assembly polls in 2014 and 2019 from Soro constituency on a BJD ticket.

The BJP has already fielded Raju Das as its candidate from the Soro assembly segment, but the party has yet to announce candidates from Nilagiri, Balasore Sadar, Jaleswar and Basta under the Balasore Lok Sabha seat.

Earlier, BJD MLAs Arabinda Dhali, Premanda Nayak, Ramesh Chandra Sai, Simarani Nayak and two MPs Bhartruhari Mahtab and Anubhav Mohanty have resigned from the regional outfit and joined the BJP.

Dhada said, "I am happy that senior BJP leaders gave me an opportunity to return to the party after 10 years. I will take up whatever responsibility is assigned to me."

Nearly 60 per cent voter turnout recorded in Rajasthan till 5 pm

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Nearly 60 per cent voter turnout was recorded till 5 pm in 13 Lok Sabha seats of Rajasthan where polling is underway under the second phase on Friday.

Barring a few incidents of confrontation and complaints of fake voting in Barmer-Jaisalmer, the voting is being held peacefully.

According to the official data, 59.19 per cent voter turnout was recorded in 13 constituencies of Barmer-Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Jalore, Chittorgarh, Banswara, Kota-Bundi, Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Pali, Udaipur, Rajsamand, Kota and Jhalawar-Baran.

At the same time, 73.25 per cent voting took place in the bye-election for Bagidora assembly constituency of Banswara district.

The voting in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections is higher than the first phase which 12 seats went to poll on April 19. Voter turnout was 50.27 per cent by 5 pm in the first phase.



Around 2.8 crore voters are eligible to vote in the second phase of the polls.

Voting began at 7 am and was set to continue till 6 pm.

Those who reached the polling booths and standing in queue by 6 pm will be allowed to vote.

Highest voter turnout by 5 pm was recorded in Barmer-Jaisalmer, where 69.79 per cent votes were polled and in Udaipur.

Enthusiasm was seen among the people who lined up at the polling booths to cast votes.

However, in Banswara, no voter reached the Adibheet polling booth during the initial hours. The locals have certain demands regarding compensation against land acquired for a power plant and have declared to boycott the elections.

The officials said they are trying to convince the voters to exercise their franchise.

In the first two hours of the voting, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, who is contesting from Kota-Bundi, BJP state president C P Joshi contesting from Chittorgarh and Union minister and BJP candidate from Jodhpur Gajendra Singh Shekhawat cast their votes.

Assembly speaker Vasudev Devnani cast his vote in Ajmer while former chief ministers Vasundhara Raje and Ashok Gehlot exercised their franchise in Jhalawar and Jodhpur respectively.

A 108-year-old woman, Bhuri Bai, cast her vote at the Gunjara polling booth in the Kota-Bundi constituency. She was brought to the polling booth in a wheelchair by her family members.

Smooth sailing for BJP's Vishnu Sharma in MP

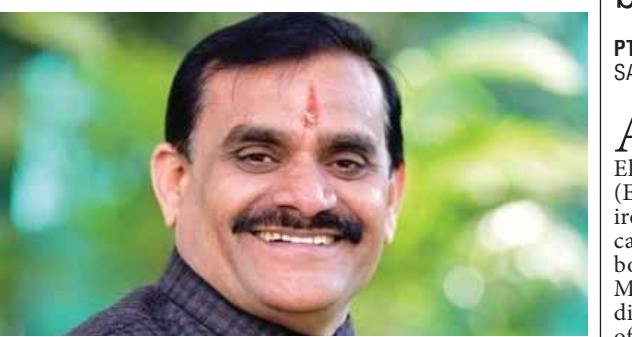
GIRISH SHARMA ■ BHOPAL

In absence of strong opposition in Khajuraho Parliamentary constituency, there is smooth sailing for Vishnu Dutt Sharma, the State president of Bharatiya Janata party (BJP).

He is sitting MP from this constituency. He won this constituency in 2019 with a huge margin of over 4.92 lakh votes by defeating Congress's Maharani Kavita Singh Natiraja.

In this election, Samajwadi Party (SP) had fielded its candidate Meera Deepak Yadav, as a joint candidate for INDI Alliance. However, at the last minute, during the scrutiny of the nomination papers, the District Returning officer found her nomination papers as invalid.

Being former MLA, Meera was a strong candidate in Khajuraho, but after her nomination was rejected, there has been no strong opposition to BJP's VD Sharma. After Meera Yadav's nomination was cancelled, the Congress and the Samajwadi Party extended their support to RB Prajapati, the All India Forward Bloc



candidate.

Both the parties did extend their supports to Prajapati, but factually in the field, both the parties were not witnessed making genuine efforts toward Prajapati's victory. On the contrary, BJP did not leave any stone unturned.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, National BJP leader JP Nadda and other prominent leaders addressed election meetings in Khajuraho.

After the nomination of Meera Yadav was rejected, Congress and SP had conducted a joint press conference in Bhopal. SP's State president Manoj Yadav had alleged that a well-planned conspiracy was

Man damages EVM at polling booth; detained

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

A 26-year-old man allegedly damaged an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) by hitting it with an iron object when he came to cast his vote at a polling booth at Rampuri in Maharashtra's Nanded district on Friday, a police official said.

The police detained the man, who told them that he wanted a pro-farmer and pro-labourer government, he said.

"The man, Bhaiyyasaheb Edke, is a local resident and a registered voter of Rampuri booth. He came to the polling booth to cast his vote, but damaged an EVM with an iron object."

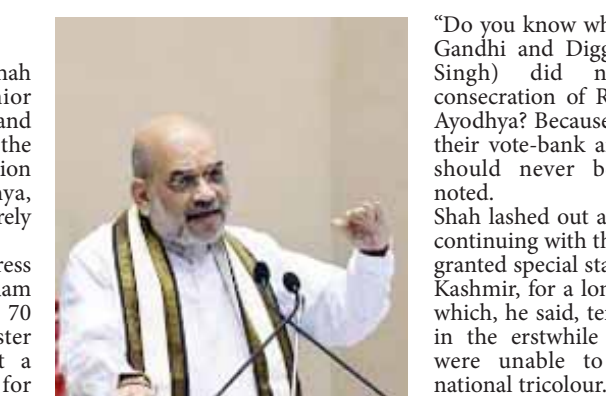
"He was immediately detained and the voting process continued soon afterwards as the broken machine was replaced with a new one," Nanded Superintendent of Police (SP) Shrikrushna Kokate told PTI. Police have launched an investigation to know the motive behind his act of damaging the EVM, he said.

Shah attacks Congress over Ram Temple

PTI ■ RAJGARH (MP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday slammed senior Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Digvijaya Singh for declining the invitation to attend the consecration of Ram Lalla's idol in Ayodhya, saying their move was guided purely by vote-bank politics.

The BJP leader said the Congress neglected the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya for nearly 70 years and it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who made it a reality and paved the way for consecration of Ram Lalla's idol on January 22. Campaigning in Khilchipur, which is part of Rajgarh Lok Sabha seat, Shah also mocked Congress candidate and former MP chief Digvijaya Singh and asked the gathering to give the latter's political career a "grand farewell".



Shah recited the Urdu couplet "aashiq ka janaaza hai, zara dhoom se nikle" (it is a lover's funeral procession, let it move ahead grandly) to take a swipe at Singh, who is up against BJP's sitting MP Rodmal Nagar.

"Do you know why shehzada Rahul Gandhi and Diggi Raja (Digvijaya Singh) did not attend the consecration of Ram Lalla's idol at Ayodhya? Because they are afraid of their vote-bank and therefore, they should never be pardoned," he noted.

Shah lashed out at the Congress for continuing with the Article 370, that granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, for a long time because of which, he said, terrorism flourished in the erstwhile state and people were unable to even hoist the national tricolour.

The Home Minister pointed out that the Modi government not only abrogated the contentious constitutional provision on August 5, 2019, but also ensured the tricolour flew high on the country's head (J&K).

Shah maintained the Modi

government ended terrorism and Nationalism by entering their den ('ghar me ghuskar') and conducting a surgical strike inside Pakistan post-Pulwama terror attack. Rahul Gandhi, on advice of Singh, included in the Congress manifesto a promise that if a party-led government came to power at the Centre, it will "introduce personal law in the country," the BJP's star campaigner claimed.

Shah asked people whether controversial practices like instant triple talaq, banned by the Modi government in 2019, should be reintroduced, and criticised Singh for linking "bhagwa" (saffron) colour with terrorism.

Hitting out at Digvijaya Singh, the Union Home Minister said, "Tell Bantadhar, we won't allow you to turn Rajgarh into a BIMARU (term used to describe socially and

economically unwell areas) district."

"Bantadhar" is a term the BJP uses for Singh to allege that his 10-year rule as CM between 1993 and 2003 was all about development works getting stalled and wrecked. "The time has come to give him a permanent farewell from politics. But I have a request. Aashiq ka janaaza hai, zara dhoom se nikle. Defeat him with a massive margin and make him sit at home," Shah told the gathering.

Shah said Singh coined terms like "bhagwa atankwaad" (saffron terror), used 'saheb' while referring to Pakistani terrorist Hafiz Saeed. Hugged Zakik Naik (Islamic television evangelist accused of brainwashing youths), opposed the hanging of Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru as well as ban on PFL Rajgarh along with eight other Lok Sabha seats will vote on May 7 in the third phase of Lok Sabha elections.

Filing of nomination for 5 Odisha LS seats, 35 Assembly segments begins

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The process of filing nomination papers for five Lok Sabha constituencies and 35 Odisha Assembly segments will be held on May 20 started on Friday with the Election Commission of India and Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) issuing the notification in this regard.

The five Lok Sabha constituencies are Bargarh, Sundergarh (ST), Bolangir, Kandhamal and Aska Lok Sabha constituencies along with 35 assembly segments under the Lok Sabha constituencies.

"As recommended by the Election Commission of India, in pursuance of sub-section (2) of Section 15 of the

Representation of the People Act, 1951 (43 of 1951), the Governor of the State of Odisha is, hereby, pleased to call upon..." the chief secretary said in a notification. As per the notifications, May 3 is the last date for making nominations while scrutiny of nominations will be done on the next day. Candidates can withdraw their nominations on or before May 6.

The Election Commission has made different schedule for voting in the 35 Assembly constituencies that come under the five Lok Sabha constituencies. The usual voting timing is 7 am to 6 pm. However, it has been revised for some areas keeping security and other points in view, sources said.



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

All is well

India shows the mirror to the US, rejects its report on rights violations in Manipur as 'deeply biased'

Soon after the US pointed the finger at India for alleged incidents of human rights violations, particularly in Manipur, India has vehemently criticised the State Department report. The Indian Government has denounced the report as "deeply biased" and asserted that it reflects a "significant misunderstanding of the ground realities". Seeking to show the mirror to the US instead, it questioned the US administration's response to the recent killing of Indian students on its soil. The MEA emphasised the "deeply biased" nature of the report, saying the report misrepresents the situation in Manipur and demonstrates a "lack of comprehension" regarding India's efforts to address human rights issues within its borders. The report, which is not limited only to Manipur, talks about other issues too that have apparently undermined Indian democracy in the recent past. One of the key points raised in the State Department's report pertains to the raids conducted by the Indian Income Tax authorities on the offices

of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), alleging that the raids extended to journalists not involved in the organisation's financial affairs. Furthermore, the US report claims that the Indian Government used emergency powers to ban the screening of a BBC-produced documentary. The report highlights the concerns of local human rights organisations, minority political parties and affected communities regarding the Government's alleged "delayed response" to violence and its failure to provide adequate humanitarian assistance in Manipur.



It also cites instances of disinformation tactics being employed against civil society organisations, religious minorities such as Sikhs and Muslims, and political opposition groups. The Indian reaction to the US report is laudable as it defends and protects the boundaries of Indian sovereignty and sends across the message that no country has any business to meddle in India's domestic affairs. The Government must also ensure that foreign powers do not get a chance to sermonise India on human rights. It is an established maxim that human rights issues transcend political boundaries. Besides, the Government should be mindful of criticism by the Indian civil society, which has been airing similar sentiments. They should not be summarily rejected and branded as anti-national and harassed, a routine thing in autocratic systems. Indeed, India's reaction to the State Department's report underscores its commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty and ensuring that international assessments accurately reflect the country's efforts to uphold human rights. India has consistently maintained that it is committed to addressing any legitimate concerns regarding human rights violations through its robust legal framework and democratic processes. In light of these developments, it is imperative for the international stakeholders to engage with India in a constructive dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding.

PICTALK



A man bathes an elephant at the Veermata Jijabai Bhosale Botanical Udyan and Zoo, in Mumbai

PTI

Robotics: Predictable and optimal surgical success

Today, India is leading globally with advancements in robotic surgery and making a difference in critical surgical procedures

Robotic surgery, also known as robot-assisted surgery, has revolutionised the field of surgical procedures by offering increased precision, flexibility and control compared to conventional techniques. Typically associated with minimally invasive surgery, robotic surgery utilises a system consisting of a camera arm and mechanical arms with surgical instruments attached, all controlled by the surgeon seated at a computer console. This setup provides high-definition, magnified, 3D views of the surgical site, enhancing the surgeon's ability to perform delicate and complex procedures. Minimally invasive surgery is now the standard of care across various surgical specialties. Introduced four decades ago, Laparoscopy changed our approach and outcome in surgical patients. Robotic surgery introduced two decades ago, was the next step in the evolution of minimally invasive surgery. Now, the time has come when a surgeon avoids leaving anything on chance. Advanced, stable and predictable robotic surgery can ensure success



in each case. The primary motivation for opting for robotic surgery is the enhanced precision, flexibility and control it offers to surgeons during operations. The precision and minimally invasive nature of robotic procedures contribute to a lower risk of infection and other complications. In India, the Da Vinci system is commonly used for robotic surgery across various specialties, including urology, gynaecology, cardiothoracic and general surgery. In urology, robotic surgery has emerged as a significant advancement, offering several advantages over open or laparoscopic procedures. These advantages include reduced blood loss, decreased patient discomfort, minimised use of painkillers, shorter hospital stays and faster healing times. Urological surgeries com-

monly performed using robotic technology include robotic prostatectomy, robotic cystectomy, robotic partial nephrectomy, robotic pyeloplasty and other procedures such as nephroureterectomy, adrenalectomy, uterine reimplantation and kidney transplantation. Even in the case of frequently performed non-cancerous gastrointestinal surgery like cholecystectomy gall bladder removal or hernia, innumerable challenges can be countered including some very serious injuries, which may result in longer hospital stays or life-threatening situations. Robotic surgery filters out the struggle happening at the surgeon's end while ensuring smooth outcomes with ultimate safety for the patients. Our understanding of robotic surgery benefits originated from cancer patients in urology and onco-surgery. Today non-cancerous surgeries deserve and demand equal precision and safety. Prevention of complications and quick recovery are the new points. Due to the sheer number, improvement of outcome in benign surgeries would translate into a large

number of healthier and happier patients. While technology remains premium, the health insurance companies do understand and approve of such advanced technology. For instance, Narayana Health offers robotic-assisted procedures for various gastrointestinal conditions. The robotic surgery program has an experienced team specialising in using the da Vinci surgical system for minimally invasive general surgeries. With the surgeon controlling robotic arms from a console while watching the operative field through a video camera, patients experience shorter recovery times, with most returning to normal activities within two to three weeks instead of the six to eight weeks typically associated with standard open surgery. Indeed, constant innovation and development in the field of robotic surgery will result in lowering the cost with wider applications.

(The writer is a consultant-general, Robotic and Renal Transplant Surgery at Narayana Hospital - RN Tagore Hospital, Mukundapur, Kolkata; views are personal)



FORQAN BABU SHAIKH

Artificial Intelligence, a game-changer in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, has revolutionised traditional campaign strategies. The era of candidates personally visiting voters' homes and engaging in conversations over tea, even after a five-year hiatus, has given way to a more technologically advanced approach. Social media played a pivotal role in the 2014 election. However, the advent of AI and the potential use of deepfake videos in India's 2024 elections could be game-changers. These videos, capable of blurring the lines between truth and falsehood, have the potential to significantly impact the trust and integrity of the electoral process.

Political parties and candidates have understood the power of AI in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. They use AI to analyse voter data, enabling them to develop effective campaign strategies. Additionally, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants have been deployed to engage with voters on social media, providing real-time responses to their queries and concerns.

The use of AI technology can help with election processes in several ways:

AI can predict election outcomes. AI chatbots and virtual assistants can communicate with virtual media.

AI can prevent election fraud and regulate political advertising campaign finance violations.

Political parties can now customise their calls to individual voters, potentially harming their opponents' reputations. In India, more than 50% of the population uses the internet, which may increase to 900 million by 2025. The upcoming election in India is expected to generate a market worth Rs 500 crore.

Political parties are using AI to reach voters via social media. Congress and BJP used AI in last year's State elections, the first time false videos and parodies were used in political campaigning. Parties like BJP, Congress, AAP, DMK and AIADMK use AI technology to engage with their supporters. For example, the BJP uses AI to translate PM Modi's speech-



es into eight regional languages. However, some campaigners misuse AI-generated videos, including deepfakes, to spread misinformation. These videos are targeted at the 18-25 age group and are being shared on platforms like WhatsApp.

Parties in India use various tools to influence voters. They share fake images and videos on social media platforms. For example, the Congress party shared a phoney photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At the same time, the BJP posted a false video of Rahul Gandhi on Instagram. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK and AIADMK parties used recordings of their deceased leaders for voter support in this election. The Communist parties have also employed AI technology in their campaigns. One video shows Asaduddin Owaisi, the leader of the AIMIM party, singing Hindu devotional songs. Regional leaders like Akhilesh Yadav, Naveen Patnaik and Mamata Banerjee also applied similar tools to influence voters.

The use of AI for malicious purposes is a significant concern. With advanced AI, it has become possible to impersonate anyone, including voters or candidates, which can lead to identity theft and manipulation of the electoral process. This underscores the



POLITICAL PARTIES ARE USING AI TO REACH VOTERS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA. THE CONGRESS AND THE BJP USED AI IN LAST YEAR'S STATE ELECTIONS

need for clear regulations to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process, making the audience more aware of the potential risks and the importance of addressing them, fostering a sense of vigilance.

The use of AI in political campaigns raises valid concerns about privacy and the potential for unfair competition and misinformation. Therefore, it's imperative that clear regulations are implemented to ensure a transparent electoral process. Governments must take the lead in regulating AI use to promote fairness.

The IT Minister has already issued warnings to social media companies, instilling confidence in the audience about the security and integrity of the electoral process. The Election Commission must issue clear guidelines to regulate AI-generated information for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. These guidelines should address ethical AI use in campaigns and voter data analysis. Strict rules are necessary to maintain the integrity of the electoral process, protect voters' rights and ensure fairness and transparency. Without these regulations, there could be doubts about the legitimacy of the election results.

While there are valid concerns about AI, it's crucial to recog-

nise its potential for positive change. Certain AI-generated technologies have the power to revolutionise how we conduct free and fair elections. As these technologies gain wider acceptance, they could pave the way for e-elections, a future where elections are conducted online, ensuring a more transparent and accountable electoral process. This potential for positive change should inspire optimism and hope, reassuring the audience about the future of elections.

During the Bihar elections, the Election Commission used an AI-powered system to ensure transparency and prevent manipulation. The system detected and flagged misinformation and hate speech cases, expediting the counting process and curbing hate speech during the election. This demonstrates how AI can be used effectively and instils confidence in the electorate.

Presidents, prime ministers, or legislators could win or lose based mainly on the success or failure of their AI campaign. Gullible voters can be fooled easily. Technological advancements can bring about significant changes and AI is no exception.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REVIVAL OF EDUCATION IN BIHAR

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Bihar's educational reforms cock a snook at private players", published on April 26, this is my response. The narrative underscores Bihar's struggle with governance failures, notably in areas like liquor laws and rural migration. However, amidst this backdrop of challenges, the Government's focus on education emerges as a beacon of hope. In a landscape where education is increasingly commodified, Bihar's commitment to public education stands out as a bold counterforce to market forces.

By prioritising education, the Government aims to address deep-rooted social and economic inequalities. The recruitment of teachers and infrastructural improvements demonstrate tangible progress. Yet, sustaining these reforms remains a concern, particularly regarding the absence of a robust mechanism. Additionally, while efforts to combat corruption and enhance accountability are commendable, ensuring the continuity of initiatives like the Mid-Day Meal program is crucial. Ultimately, Bihar's journey towards educational reform signifies a vital step towards empowering marginalised communities and challenging the dominance of private institutions driven by profit motives.

Rajiv Mishra | Lucknow

PERSPECTIVES ON CONSCIOUSNESS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "The Essence of Consciousness", published on April 26, this is my response. The journey of understanding consciousness is a profound one, intricately woven with the fabric of human existence. In the hustle of modern life, terms like consciousness often float around without genuine comprehension. Yet, beneath this veneer lies a profound truth: consciousness is the essence of our being, the awareness that shapes our reality. In a world bombarded with information, it's easy to overlook the depth of our existence. From the wisdom of Buddha to the revelations of quantum physics, consciousness permeates every aspect of our lives. Like Arjuna on the bat-

Ensure representation of the disabled



Apropos the news article, "The marginalisation of disabled in politics", published on April 26, this is my response. The stark absence of political representation for persons with disabilities in India's democratic landscape is a glaring issue. Despite a substantial population, their needs are sidelined, reflecting a systemic failure. Political parties overlook their demands, perpetuating exclusion and reinforcing stereotypes.

Physical barriers at polling stations compound their challenges, stripping away dignity and agency. Anitha's experience exemplifies this neglect. Moreover, those with lesser-known disabilities face additional hurdles, such as a lack of sign language interpreters during campaigns. The dearth of accurate data further complicates policy formulation and budget allocations. However, amidst these challenges lies an opportunity for transformation. A shift towards a rights-based approach is imperative, with persons with disabilities actively involved in policy development. Integration across governance facets is essential for true inclusivity. Respecting their fundamental rights and ensuring their participation in civil and political systems is crucial as India celebrates 75 years of independence. Only then can the nation progress towards its economic aspirations while truly embracing diversity in a democracy.

Aarav Patel | Mumbai

tlefield or King Janaka in his kingdom, we grapple with doubts and fears until a moment of awakening shifts our perception.

True consciousness is not merely being awake but being truly alive, attuned to both internal thoughts and external surroundings. It's the clarity that arises when we shed the layers of ignorance and embrace the purity of our being. In this journey towards enlightenment, let us not merely skim the surface but dive deep into the ocean of consciousness, where every wave carries the promise of a profound revelation.

Vikram Singh | Delhi

THE INDIAN PARADOX

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Why do Indians excel abroad and fail back home?", published on April 26, this is my response. India's global footprint shines brightly across diverse fields, yet a puzzling paradox persists: why do Indians thrive abroad while facing challenges at home? This conundrum demands urgent attention and a deep dive into the complexities

at play. The link between India's international success and domestic hurdles lies largely in the shortcomings of the public education system. Insightful analyses pinpoint the dire State of education as the root cause, a truth echoed by credible sources. Education stands as the linchpin connecting governance, socio-economic stability and prosperity. The nation's future hinges on the quality of primary and secondary education, a reality starkly revealed by surveys.

Moreover, the disconnect between higher education and employability exacerbates the brain drain dilemma. To reverse this trend, India must foster an environment that retains talent and promotes innovation. Embracing change is paramount. Reimagining education to nurture creativity and entrepreneurship can steer India towards global competitiveness. It's time to forge a path towards a brighter, more inclusive future.

Nandini Rao | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

WORK WITH ALLIES FOR SEMICONDUCTORS

It is time to let go of the regulatory bottlenecks to make a mark



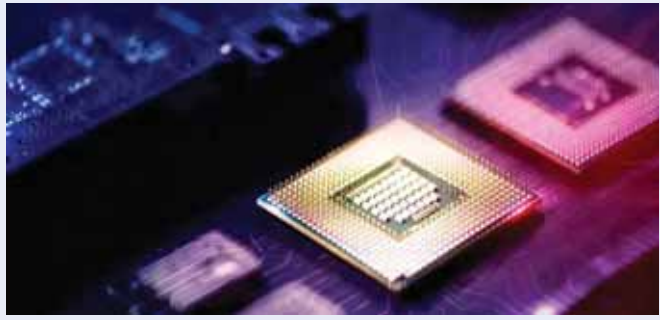
KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

One of the most common reasons cited by foreign investors, against investing in India is too complex regulatory processes and multiplicity of overlapping compliances. The latest to join the bandwagon is Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. The minister was responding to questions from a journalist on the reason for Taiwanese companies not warming up to India's constant welcome mat for attracting investments in the new age technology, building block and semiconductors space.

To be sure Taiwan is home to the largest chip manufacturing facilities in the world, a key component of the digital economy, ranging from mobile phones to satellites. Wu during his interaction with the journalist quoted "India is cumbersome in its administrative structure and it would require for Indian Government to look at that too, to streamline all kinds of laws and regulations to help semiconductor investors coming to the country". He has further in the same interview talked about the lack of skilled engineers to work in the chip-making factories, even though India doesn't fall short of chip-designing talent.

What Mr Wu highlighted, isn't something new, as it is a similar caution from many other potential investors interested in India. This author spoke with several high-ranking officials in several new and emerging technology manufacturing companies, who complained about complex time-consuming administrative processes in India and echoed that, when compared to competing economies such as Singapore, Vietnam etc.

A new department called Invest India (a public-private joint venture) was created, early on in the current Government's regime, to assist potential investors through the difficult, regulatory regime. Even for semiconductors, where, India is the preferred potential partner, a dedicated business division has been created in the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, in the form of India Semiconductor Mission (ISM).



The recent trade policy agenda 2024 released by the Biden administration highlighted "Since announcing the negotiating mandate in August 2022, the two sides have pursued an ambitious schedule of meetings to make progress as quickly as possible. In June 2023, AIT and TECRO signed the first agreement under the Initiative. This agreement includes high-standard commitments and economically meaningful outcomes in a number of trade areas, including customs administration and trade facilitation, good regulatory practices, services domestic regulation, anticorruption and small and medium-sized enterprises", underscoring the importance of the partnership between the two countries.

The US supports India's ambitions to develop into a significant player in semiconductor design and manufacturing space, as an alternative to China. India US trade relationship, which has been in limbo has been energised in the last two years after a formal Trade policy forum came into existence, which has had regular meetings on several bilateral issues. In the 2024 trade policy agenda document, US mentions, "We committed to pursue enhanced engagement leading to mutually beneficial outcomes in several areas, with a view to deepening the trade relationship for the benefit of working people. We identified certain areas, including critical minerals, customs and trade facilitation, supply chains and trade in high technology products, in which our Governments intend to develop an ambitious and forward-looking roadmap for enhanced cooperation in order to achieve economically meaningful outcomes."

Given the convergence of interests and the willingness of like-minded partners and allies to invest and support India in the race of semiconductors, the next Government could do well to include removing regulatory bottlenecks in its 100-day agenda. It would be a good start towards a Stated Vikist Bharat target.

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

Sri Lanka's Easter attack revisited

As the island nation grapples with the aftermath of the attack, the intricate web of extremism and intelligence failures continues to haunt it even five years later



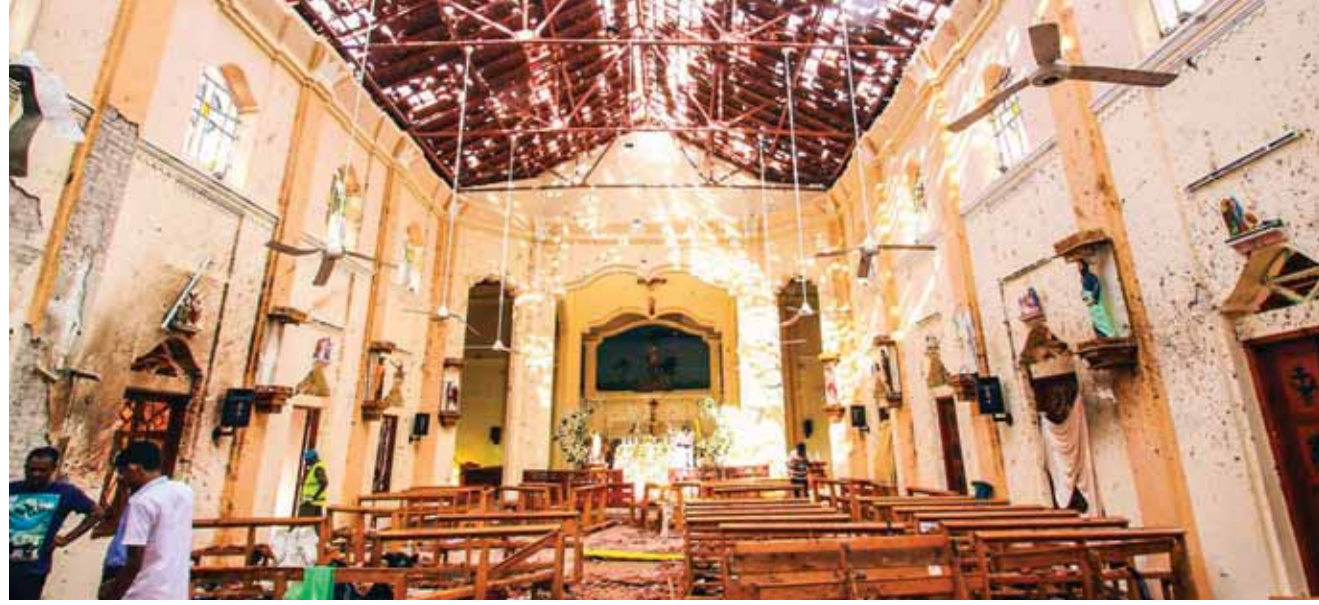
NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

When conspiracy theories gain traction and permeate the public consciousness, they inevitably taint the discourse surrounding the event in question. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in politically charged contexts. Five years ago, amidst the Easter attack on tourist hotels, two Catholic churches and a Zion church in Western and Eastern provinces, a plethora of conspiracy theories surfaced. Initially, speculation swirled suggesting the involvement of a powerful Western nation, followed by theories positing the attack as a ploy to consolidate political power. More recently, local politicians and various social groups have propagated the notion that India orchestrated the attack. Yet, none of these claims have been substantiated with credible evidence. Meanwhile, the culpability of the investigating officers' negligence, which played a role in the tragedy, has been overshadowed by these baseless allegations. Instead of being held accountable, those partially responsible have reshaped the narrative to deflect blame onto others.

However, in the aftermath of the attack, public media reports surfaced alleging that prominent politicians and Government officials were aware of the impending threat. Some even openly discussed this matter. Additionally, a leaked classified document from the police indicated forewarning of an imminent attack. What followed was not just the proliferation of various interpretations but also the dissemination of misconceptions. For instance, blame was swiftly pinned on the State Intelligence Service, the country's premier intelligence agency, extending to judicial indictments. However, a more rational examination, grounded in verifiable data, reveals a different societal reality. It uncovers a systemic failure across institutions tasked with national security and a disregard for prior warnings. Furthermore, it exposes concerted efforts to downplay this negligence for political gain. In a nation scarred by nearly four decades of internal conflict and widespread devastation, such institutional negligence sadly becomes almost unsurprising. It's crucial to highlight overlooked facts concerning the attack in question.

Leading up to the incident in question, there was a noticeable proliferation of extremist factions advocating violence across Sri Lanka. This surge wasn't limited to Muslim extremist groups but encompassed various ideological factions, each pursuing distinct political agendas. The emergence of the Islamic State in West Asia particularly bolstered the prospects of extremists across different nations, with Sri Lanka serving as a pivotal transit hub.

Investigations have revealed a significant influx of extremists from regions like Kerala, as well as countries such as the Maldives, into Sri Lanka. It's evident that intelligence agencies within the region, including those of Sri Lanka and Western nations, amassed substantial intelligence on these activities and collaborated in information sharing. Testimony from the wife of Zahran Hashim, a ringleader of the carnage, attests to the financial backing he received from a Singaporean national to establish his initial mosque. She further detailed Zahran's extensive involvement in extremist endeavours, including recruiting adherents and garnering financial and logistical support throughout the country. This revelation sheds light on the proliferation of extremism in Sri Lanka, culminat-



ing in the Easter attack and subsequent incidents like the suicidal blast at the Sainthamaruthu house, where Zahran's family last resided. Zahran and his cohorts have exhibited affiliations with extremist ideologies and have been inspired by the Islamic State. Moreover, Sri Lankan nationals who joined the organisation's ranks in Syria have been observed exerting influence on local activities. Between 2014 and 2018, a staggering 41,490 individuals from 91 nations travelled to Syria to support the Islamic State, including 32 Sri Lankans.

Exploiting this influx, organisations espousing extremist ideologies, under various guises, began proliferating throughout Sri Lanka. Additionally, individuals of Sri Lankan origin who attempted to travel to Syria via Turkey but were unsuccessful have returned home and aligned themselves with figures like Zahran. Simultaneously, the ideological backing of Mohamed Naufar, known as the "second emir" and a close relative specifically, the husband of Zahran's maternal aunt played a pivotal role. Naufar, identified by the FBI as the mastermind behind the attack, exerted significant influence on the events.

Since March 2017, there have been eleven significant incidents leading up to the Easter attack, yet none have undergone thorough investigation. This failure on the part of investigative agencies, which were supposed to act on precious intelligence passed on to them, has been perceived as a deliberate effort to conceal the underlying truth of the entire episode from society, thereby impeding the crucial lessons to be gleaned from this tragedy. The series of events began with a clash at Kattankudy Aliyar junction on March 10, 2017. Following this conflict, police attempted to arrest Zahran, but their efforts proved unsuccessful. Subsequently, on May 17, 2017, a member of National Thowheeth Jamaath was shot. This was followed by a bomb thrown at the National Front for Good Governance (NFGG) Mohammad Farzan's house on February 06, 2018 and another bomb thrown at

the NFGG Kattankudy office on February 12, 2018.

Further escalations occurred with the shooting of Palani Bawa in Kattankudy on June 08, 2018 and the detonation of a bomb by Zahran's brother Rilwan in Arayampathy on August 26, 2018, resulting in injuries and fatalities at Wavnathiv police post on November 30, 2018. The incidents continued with the vandalism of religious statues in Mawanella on December 23, 2018 and further vandalism on January 16, 2019, related to providing information about the destruction of statues and concealment of explosive materials in Vanathavilluwa of Puttalam District. The situation intensified with the discovery of material and the shooting of informant Raziq Mohammad Taslim on March 08, 2019, resulting in permanent disability. Finally, a motorcycle explosion in Thalankudah on April 16, 2019, just five days before the Easter attack, marked the culmination of these incidents. Numerous intelligence reports concerning these events have been received by the commissions tasked with investigating them, shedding light on the negligence of the officers responsible for the criminal investigation.

One of the most significant incidents out of these eleven took place in August 2018, involving Rilwan, who mishandled explosives, resulting in an accident. After the explosions in the Arayampathy area, Rilwan was taken to Colombo National Hospital and admitted under the name Zaheed on 26 August 2018. Investigations have confirmed that Zahran, conducting a training camp in the Hambantota area at the time, visited his brother in Colombo. The following day, 27 August 2018, Rilwan was admitted to the National Eye Hospital. Subsequently, he visited the clinics of the National Hospital on 27.09.2018, 04.10.2018, 11.18.26 and 15.03.2019. This incident occurred eight months prior to the attack, yet neither the training camps nor the incident itself were reported to any police or intelligence agencies.

Remarkably, the individual managed to conceal his identity from the National Hospital and Eye Hospital for several days. The doctor suspected of aiding in this matter has later fled the country.

Later, there was another incident identified as a dry run, which the State Intelligence Service formally reported to the Inspector General of Police as well as the head of CID, stating that the incident on 2019.04.18 was an explosive test. However, due to the lack of proper investigation into the incident until the Easter Sunday attack, a key opportunity to apprehend the perpetrators was missed.

Upon examination of the intelligence reports submitted to the investigative commissions regarding the attack, it becomes evident that not only did the local intelligence agency provide information, but also the Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB), India's internal security and counter-intelligence agency under the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, accurately foresaw the impending attacks. This information was disseminated not only to the then Inspector General of Police and the Secretary of the Ministry of Defense but also to the officers responsible for crime and investigation.

Their acknowledgement of receiving this crucial information is documented. Despite being forewarned, no preventive measures were taken to thwart the attack. This apparent failure to act raises serious questions about accountability and highlights a disturbing trend of negligence. That was a collective failure.

The balance sheet of five years since this tragedy is that there has been a concerted effort to obscure the truth by proliferating conspiracy theories, thereby masking this dereliction of duty. This deliberate attempt to deflect attention from institutional failures through the propagation of unfounded narratives not only undermines public trust but also obstructs the implementation of preventive mechanisms to ensure non-recurrence.

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



SINCE MARCH 2017, THERE HAVE BEEN 11 SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS LEADING UP TO THE EASTER ATTACK, YET NONE HAS UNDERGONE THOROUGH INVESTIGATION

The U-turns and contradictions in Antony's political journey

From advocating communal harmony to his stance on Hindu-Muslim relations, Antony's journey reflects his love for courting controversies

The year was 1993. The Kerala Press Academy (since renamed as Kerala Media Academy) under the ownership of the Kerala Government was having the Mathai Manjooran Memorial Day. Mathai Manjooran was a socialist party leader and was a member of the EMS Namboodiripad-led coalition Government during the 1967-69. He was also a trade union leader who never hesitated to speak his mind. It is unfortunate that he passed away in 1970 at the age of 58.

A K Antony, the quintessential Congress leader was the speaker who delivered the Manjooran Memorial speech and as a journalist, I was there to cover the event. The country was yet to come out of the impact of the demolition of the



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

disputed structure at Ayodhya and the entire secularist forces were up in arms against the Hindus for the "barbaric" act. Not a single day passed in Kerala without communal harmony meetings and all speakers were vying with one another in blaming the Sanatanis for the heinous act and praising Islam as the religion of peace. But Antony chose a different approach in his 45 minutes. He warned the minority com-

munities (read Christians and Muslims) from attacking the Hindus and reminded the two communities that they should be grateful to the Sanatanis for their magnanimity in offering the minorities more than what the Hindus themselves enjoyed. "The minorities have been given more rights and privileges to run their own educational institutions and hospitals while the Hindus were denied the same. We should always bear in mind the truth that the minorities in India enjoy unique rights and privileges that the Hindus do not have and we should be grateful to them for their broad-mindedness," said Antony, which made the next day's headlines. Antony became the chief minister of Kerala for the third

time in 2001 but he quit in 2004 for reasons best known to him, the then Congress president Sonia Gandhi and the then Muslim League boss Mohammed Shihab Ali Thangal. Eight Hindu fishermen were butchered by members of a Muslim extremist organisation at Maradu in Kozhikode district in May 2003 and there was a demand for a CBI probe into the massacre. A prominent Muslim League leader, who later on became a Union Minister in the Manmohan Singh Government played a significant role in offering shelter in a mosque to the assassins.

When the issue of the CBI probe came for consideration in the liaison committee meeting of the UDF, the Muslim League leaders warned Antony



who was the then Chief Minister against an investigation by the Central agency. The UDF had won 99 out of the 140 seats at stake and was in a comfortable position. The Muslim League ultimatum against the CBI probe angered Antony and he announced in a public meeting the next day

that political parties, especially the caste and community-based outfits, should not make the Government dance to their tunes with organised bargaining power. That turned out to be the nemesis for Antony as the Gods in Malappuram asked Sonia Gandhi to remove him from the post of chief minister. Despite Antony tendering an apology, the chieftains of the Muslim League, controlling Kerala politics from the Kudappanakkal castle in Panakkad, were not humoured and they insisted on the former's ouster. That was how Antony resigned as the Chief Minister and shifted camp to Delhi. The Sulthans of Malappuram had the last laugh.

Antony knows very well that his shirt and dhoti should be

more secular than that of the CPI(M) and other outfits to stay in the reckoning. That is why the person who wanted the minority communities to be grateful to the Hindus wants the Sanatan Dharma to be demolished. There is nothing surprising in Antony's stance as he was always against the Hindus even as the president of Kerala Students Union, the feeder organisation of the Congress. The group in the Congress party in Kerala has its roots in Antony's grievances over the status enjoyed by Hindu leaders like K Karunakaran and their clout in the High Command. The group in Congress has nothing to do with ideology and Antony's hatred towards Hindus is reflected in his cursing his son Anil Antony join-

ing the BJP. What Antony should have done is to give freedom to 38-year-old Anil to select the party of his choice and wish him all success. Instead of that what Antony has done is to demand the Nehru-Gandhi clan to field candidates for the Lok Saba election from Amethi and Rae Bareilly. He also declared that the Congress party cannot exist without the Nehru-Gandhi family. Isn't this another way of telling that India is India and India is India? Remember, this is the same Antony who ridiculed Indira Gandhi cast his lot with the CPI(M) in 1980 and formed a Government with the Marxists during 1980-1982.

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

University responses vary: Dialogue or police for pro-Palestinian protests

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The students at Columbia University who inspired pro-Palestinian demonstrations across the country dug in at their encampment for the 10th day on Friday as administrators and police at campuses from California to Massachusetts wrestled with how to address protests that have seen scuffles with police and hundreds of arrests.

Officials at Columbia and some other schools have been negotiating with student protesters who have rebuffed police and doubled down. Other schools have quickly turned to law enforcement to douse demonstrations before they can take hold.

As the death toll mounts in the war in Gaza and the humanitarian crisis worsens, protesters at universities across the country are demanding schools cut financial ties to Israel and divest from companies they say are enabling the conflict. Some Jewish students say the protests have veered into antisemitism and made them afraid to set foot on campus, partly prompting the calls for police

intervention. After a tent encampment popped up Thursday at Indiana University Bloomington, police with shields and batons shoved into protesters and arrested 33. Hours later at the University of Connecticut, police tore down tents and arrested one person. And at Ohio State University, police clashed with protesters just hours after they gathered Thursday evening. Those who refused to leave after warnings were arrested and charged with criminal trespass, said university spokesperson Benjamin Johnson, citing rules barring overnight events.

The clock is ticking as May commencement ceremonies near, putting added pressure on schools to clear demonstrations. At Columbia, protesters defiantly erected a tent encampment where many are set to graduate in front of families in just a few weeks.

Columbia officials said that negotiations were showing progress as they neared the school's deadline of early Friday to reach an agreement on dismantling the encampment.



An Israeli police officer searches an activist before she is taken away by police car after she was blocking a road along with a delegation of American and Israeli rabbis from Rabbis for Ceasefire marching towards the Erez crossing to the Gaza Strip with food aid for Gaza civilians and to call for a ceasefire, in southern Israel, on Friday. AP/PTI

US effort to bring aid to Gaza by sea moving forward but concerns remain

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The construction of a new port in Gaza and an accompanying US military-built pier offshore are underway, but the complex plan to bring more desperately-needed food to Palestinian civilians is still mired in fears over security and how the humanitarian aid will be delivered.

The Israeli-developed port, for example, has already been attacked by mortar fire, sending high-ranking UN officials scrambling for shelter this week, and there is still no solid decision on when the aid deliveries will actually begin.

While satellite photos show major port construction along the shore near Gaza City, aid groups are making it clear that they have broad concerns about their safety and reservations about how Israeli forces will handle security.

Sonali Korde, an official with the US Agency for International Development, said key agreements for security and handling the aid deliveries are still being negotiated. Those include how Israeli forces will operate in Gaza to ensure that aid workers are not harmed.

"We need to see steps implemented. And the humanitarian community and IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) continue to talk and engage and iterate and improve the system so that everyone feels safe and secure in this very difficult operating environment," Korde said.

A senior US military official said on Thursday the US is on track to begin delivering aid using the new port and pier by early May. The official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet made public, said deliveries through the sea route initially will total about 90 trucks a day and could quickly increase to about 150 trucks daily.

The senior official acknowledged, however, that the final installation of the US-built causeway onto the beach at the port will be governed by the security situation, which is assessed daily.

The Israeli Defense Forces has a brigade — thousands of soldiers — as well as ships and aircraft dedicated to protecting the deliveries, the official said.

Asked about the recent mortar attack, the military official said the US assesses that it had nothing to do with the humanitarian mission, adding that security around the port will be "far more robust" when the deliveries start.

Scottish leader cancels major speech as confidence vote in his govt looms

AP ■ LONDON

Scotland's leader cancelled a speech on Friday as he fights for his political life in the wake of his decision to pull the plug on a three-year power-sharing agreement, a move that has exposed the government to peril.

First Minister Humza Yousaf of the Scottish National Party was due to deliver a major speech on Scotland's independence from the UK, but that has been cancelled following the furor surrounding his decision to tear up the power-sharing deal with the much smaller Greens on Thursday.

Without the support of the Greens, the SNP is two seats shy of a majority of lawmakers in the Scottish Parliament, meaning it can only get legislation and its budget through with the support of other parties.

Although Scotland is part of the UK, its government has widespread powers, including

over health and education, as well as some limited powers over the raising of revenues. On Friday, Scottish Labour, which is connected to the UK's main opposition Labour Party, said it wants to lodge a vote of no confidence in the Scottish government next week.

If all opposition legislators, which now include the Greens, vote against the government, it could set off a chain of events that leads to early elections in Scotland, which are not due until 2026. Ministers in the government would be required to resign immediately and the legislature in Edinburgh would then have 28 days to see if it can create a new government with majority support. If that isn't possible, then early elections would be triggered.

"It's a matter now of when, not if, Humza Yousaf will step down as first minister," said Scottish Labour's leader Anas Sarwar. "It would be untenable for the SNP to assume it can impose another unelected first

minister on Scotland." Yousaf, who replaced long-time leader Nicola Sturgeon in March 2023, may need the vote of a former SNP lawmaker, Ash Regan, to survive. She has indicated that she would seek to extract a price from Yousaf in order to back him and the government in the no-confidence votes. Of Parliament's 129 seats, the SNP holds 63. Regan's backing would result in the government having 64 votes at least. In the event of a tie, the chamber's presiding officer — Scotland's equivalent to the speaker — would be expected to vote in favour of the status quo.

It could well be that tight. The Greens, furious at their ejection from government, have already said they will vote against Yousaf himself, along with the other main opposition parties, including the Conservatives and Labour.

It's not clear yet whether they will vote against the government as a whole or whether they will abstain.

Tate's trial on charges of rape, human trafficking might start

Bucharest (AP): A court in Romania's capital on Friday ruled that a trial can start in the case of influencer Andrew Tate, who is charged with human trafficking, rape and forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women.

The Bucharest Tribunal ruled that prosecutors' case file against Tate met the legal criteria but did not set a date for the trial to begin.

Tate's spokesperson, Mateea Petrescu, said the ruling will be appealed.

Tate, 37, was arrested in December 2022 near Bucharest along with his brother Tristan Tate and two Romanian women.

Romanian prosecutors formally indicted all four in June last year. They have denied the allegations.

'United Team Pak could defeat negative forces'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Army chief General Syed Asim Munir said on Friday that a "united team Pakistan" could defeat "negative forces", as he asserted that negative propaganda and social media trolls could not distract the nation from marching towards its development and prosperity.

Addressing the Green Pakistan Initiative conference, Gen. Munir said that the country's armed forces, with the nation's support, would defeat all the inimical forces bent on impeding Pakistan's development and prosperity, Geo News reported.

He asserted that negative propaganda and social media trolls could not distract the nation from marching towards its development and prosperity.

"Let us all reject negative forces together and focus on Pakistan's journey of development and stability," he was quoted as saying.



"We are all a united team Pakistan - InshaAllah (God willing), with the cooperation and support of the people, all efforts of those who distract and obstruct Pakistan's development journey will fail," he said.

Stressing the need for over-pressing economic challenges, Gen. Munir said that complete independence without economic stability is not possible. "In today's era, complete independence is not possible with-

London resident arrested by NIA in Indian mission attack case

London (PTI): A man who was arrested for unlawful activities by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) as part of its investigations into the attack on the High Commission of India here in March 2023 had previously been detained at the Attari border while entering India from Pakistan last year. Indrapal Singh Gaba, a resident of Hounslow in west London, was arrested in India on Thursday for committing offences under Section 13(1) of the Prevention of Insult to National Honour Act and Section 34 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), official sources here said.

There were two major violent protests in front of India House in London on March 19 and 22, 2023. On March 19, a large group of protesters were found to have attacked Indian officials, damaged the High Commission building and insulted the Indian National Flag.

On March 22, they chanted anti-India slogans, insulted the Indian National Flag again and indulged in unlawful and threatening behaviour, according to the reports logged by the NIA following the incidents.

As part of the investigation, several suspects were examined, and seizures were made after conducting searches at 31 locations in Punjab and Rajasthan. An investigation team of the NIA had also visited London, sources said.

LOC [Look Out Circular] was opened against several suspects, including Indrapal Singh Gaba. Singh was detained at the Attari border on 09.12.2023 when he entered India from Pakistan. As part of the investigation, his mobile phone was seized and data was extracted and analysed.

Investigation revealed that protests on 19.03.2023 and 22.03.2023 were part of the larger conspiracy to attack Indian missions and its officials, they said. The violent protests in March last year were repeatedly raised in the British Parliament and there has since been a very visible Metropolitan Police security presence outside the High Commission of India in London.

Trump's lawyers to grill ex-tabloid publisher

AP ■ NEW YORK

After prosecutors' lead witness painted a tawdry portrait of "catch-and-kill" tabloid schemes, defence lawyers in Donald Trump's hush money trial are poised on Friday to dig into an account of the former publisher of the National Enquirer and his efforts to protect Trump from negative stories during the 2016 election.

David Pecker will return to the witness stand for the fourth day as defence attorneys try to poke holes in his testimony after he described helping bury embarrassing stories that Trump feared could hurt his campaign.

It will cap a consequential week in the criminal cases the former president is facing as he vies to reclaim the White House in November. At the same time jurors listened to testimony in Manhattan, the Supreme Court on Thursday signalled it was likely to reject Trump's sweeping claims that he is immune from prosecution in his 2020 election inter-



ference case in Washington. But the conservative-majority high court seemed inclined to limit when former presidents could be prosecuted — a ruling that could benefit Trump by delaying that trial, potentially until after the November election. In New York — the first of Trump's four criminal cases to go to trial — the presumptive Republican presi-

dential nominee faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in connection with hush money payments meant to stifle negative stories from surfacing in the final days of the 2016 campaign. Trump denies any wrongdoing. Before entering the courtroom on Friday, he told reporters he believes Thursday's proceedings went

"very well" for the defense, adding that "the case should be over".

Prosecutors allege that Trump sought to illegally influence the 2016 race through a tabloid industry practice that involves catching a potentially damaging story by buying the rights to it and then killing it through agreements that prevent the paid person from telling the story to anyone else.

Over several days on the witness stand, Pecker has described how he and the tabloid parlayed rumour-mongering into splashy stories that smeared Trump's opponents and, just as crucially, leveraged his connections to suppress seamy stories about Trump.

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

Claims of double standards in Sydney stabbing incidents

Newcastle (Australia) (AP): Muslim groups in Australia on Friday criticized the disparity in the police response to two stabbing attacks in Sydney this month, saying it had created a perception of a double standard and further alienated the country's minority Muslim community.

The Australian National Imams Council said an attack at a Bondi Junction shopping center was "quickly deemed a mental health issue" while the stabbing of a Christian bishop at a Sydney church two days later was "classified as a terrorist act almost immediately."

"The differing treatments of two recent violent incidents are stark," the council's spokesperson, Ramia Abdo Sultan, said in a statement with the Alliance of Australian Muslims and the Australian

Muslim Advocacy Network.

"Such disparities in response create a perception of a double standard in law enforcement and judicial processes," she said.

A 16-year-old boy is accused of repeatedly stabbing Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel and a priest at the Christ the Good Shepherd Church on April 15, two days after the Bondi Junction attack, in which six people were killed and a dozen others seriously wounded by a lone assailant with a history of mental illness. The boy was charged last week with committing a terrorist act, a crime that carries a maximum penalty of life in prison. Five teenage boys aged from 14 to 17 have also been charged with terrorism offenses in connection with the church stabbings.

UK cancer patient joins trial for world's first skin cancer vaccine

PTI ■ LONDON

An international clinical trial testing a novel cancer immunotherapy, which may prevent skin cancer from recurring, has recruited its first patient in Britain this week.

The mRNA-based technology, the vaccine tech used for some COVID vaccinations, is aimed at people who have already had high-risk melanomas — the most serious form of cancer — removed.

For the trial, University College London Hospitals (UCLH) doctors are giving it alongside another drug, pembrolizumab or Keytruda, that also helps the immune system kill cancer cells. One of the first patients to sign up for the trial is British musician Steve Young, 52, from Hertfordshire, east England,

who was diagnosed with stage II melanoma, which was removed. "I feel lucky to be part of this clinical trial. Of course, I did not feel so lucky when I was diagnosed with skin cancer, in fact, it came as quite a shock, but now that I've had treatment, I'm keen to ensure it does not recur. This is my best chance at stopping the cancer in its tracks," Young said.

The personalised treatment works by instructing the body to make up to 34 proteins, each targeting "neoantigens" identified by gene sequencing and thought to be driving the cancer in that particular patient. The neoantigens are proteins found only on the cancer cells, and the individualised neoantigen therapy is designed to prime the immune system to attack the tumour cells in each patient, while Keytruda

blocks an immunological "brake" that protects the cancer. "The idea behind this immunotherapy is that, by prompting the body to make these proteins, it can prepare the immune system to quickly identify and attack any cancer cells bearing them, with the aim of preventing recurrence of melanoma," said University College London medical oncologist Heather Shaw, the national coordinating investigator of the new trial.

The new Phase 3 clinical trial, being led by UCLH, is evaluating the combination of mRNA-4157 (V940) and Keytruda (pembrolizumab) versus a current standard of care (pembrolizumab) as a risk-reducing treatment option for patients with resected high-risk, stage IIB to IV melanoma.

US probes Tesla autopilot recall on attention

AP ■ DETROIT

The US government's auto safety agency is investigating whether last year's recall of Tesla's Autopilot driving system did enough to make sure drivers pay attention to the road. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says in documents posted on its website on Friday that it has concerns about the December recall of more than 2 million vehicles, nearly all the vehicles that Tesla had sold at the time.

The agency pushed the company to do the recall after a two-year investigation into Autopilot's driver monitoring system, which measures torque on the steering wheel from a driver's hands.

The fix involves an online software update to increase warnings to drivers. But the agency said in documents



that it has found evidence of crashes after the fix, and that Tesla added updates that weren't part of the recall. "This investigation will consider why these updates were not part of the recall or otherwise determined to remedy a defect that poses an unreasonable safety risk," the agency wrote.

A message was left early Friday seeking comment from Tesla.

NHTSA said that Tesla reported 20 crashes that apparently happened after the recall remedy was sent out. The agency has required Tesla and other automakers to report crashes involving partially and fully automated driving systems. NHTSA said it will evaluate the recall, including the "prominence and scope" of Autopilot's controls to address misuse, confusion and use in environments that the system

is not designed to handle. It also said that Tesla has stated that owners can decide whether they want to opt in to parts of the recall remedy, and that it allows drivers to reverse parts of it. Safety advocates have long expressed concern that Autopilot, which can keep a vehicle in its lane and a distance from objects in front of it, was not designed to operate on roads other than limited access highways.

The Associated Press reported shortly after the recall that experts said it relied on technology that may not work. Tesla, the leading manufacturer of EVs, reluctantly agreed to the recall last year after NHTSA found that the driver monitoring system was defective and required a fix.

The system sends alerts to drivers if it fails to detect torque from hands on the steering wheel, a system that experts

describe as ineffective. Government documents filed by Tesla say the online software change will increase warnings and alerts to drivers to keep their hands on the steering wheel. It also may limit the areas where the most commonly used versions of Autopilot can be used, though that isn't entirely clear in Tesla's documents.

NHTSA began its investigation in 2021, after receiving 11 reports that Teslas that were using the partially automated system crashed into parked emergency vehicles. Since 2016, the agency has sent investigators to at least 35 crashes in which Teslas that were suspected of operating on a partially automated driving system hit parked emergency vehicles, motorcyclists or tractor trailers that crossed in the vehicles' paths, causing a total of 17 deaths.

Deloitte projects India's FY25 GDP growth at 6.6 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Deloitte India on Friday said it estimates India's GDP growth at 6.6 per cent in the current fiscal helped by consumption expenditure, exports rebound and capital flows. In its India's economic outlook report, Deloitte said the rapid growth of the middle-income class has led to rising purchasing power and even created demand for premium luxury products and services. With the expectation that the number of middle-to-high-income segments will be one in two households by 2030/31, up from one in four currently, we believe this trend will likely become further amplified, driving overall private consumer expenditure growth, it said.

Deloitte has revised India's economic growth prediction for last fiscal to a range of 7.6 to 7.8 per cent. In January, the firm had projected growth for 2023-24 fiscal in the range of 6.9-7.2 per cent. The country's GDP growth is estimated to reach around 6.6 per cent in FY 2024-25 and 6.75 per cent in the year after, as markets learn to factor in geopolitical uncertainties in their investment and consumption decisions, Deloitte said in its quarterly update to its economic outlook.



“The global economy is expected to witness a synchronous rebound in 2025 as major election uncertainties get sorted out and the central banks of the West may announce a couple of rate cuts later in 2024. India will likely see improved capital flows and a rebound in exports” said Deloitte India Economist Rumki Majumdar. Strong growth numbers over the past two years have helped the economy to catch up with the pre-COVID trends. Investment, backed

by strong government spending on infrastructure, has helped India maintain a steady recovery momentum, she added. That said, there are concerns about inflation and geopolitical uncertainties feeding into higher food and fuel prices. At the same time, the prediction of above normal monsoon will likely provide some respite by positively impacting agriculture output and easing pressure on food prices.

Inflation is expected to remain above the Reserve Bank of India's target level of 4 per cent over the forecast period due to strong economic activity, Majumdar said. Deloitte's FY25 GDP growth estimate is similar to the projections made by the World Bank. It is, however, lower than the projections by the RBI and other agencies. The RBI has projected the Indian economy growth at 7 per cent in the current fiscal. While the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Fitch Ratings have estimated growth at 7 per cent, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), S&P Global Ratings and Morgan Stanley projected a 6.8 per cent growth rate for FY25. Deloitte said even as growth in consumer spending post-pandemic has been fluctuating, there is a visible shift in consumption patterns, with demand for luxury and high-end products and services growing faster than demand for basic goods. “India is seeing a prominent shift in consumer behaviour toward aspirational spending, which is inevitable in any nation that experiences growing economic prosperity. India's spending share in the luxury and premium goods and services category (such as spending on transport, communication,

recreation, etc.) has traditionally been lower than nations such as the United States, China, Japan, and Germany. So, there is, therefore, potential for this ratio to increase further as consumer income grows,” Majumdar said. The report further said that to sustainably boost household spending amidst wealth concentration, declining savings, and rising debt levels, several corrective measures can be implemented. Increasing employment opportunities in rural and semi-urban areas could elevate savings, particularly as employment transitions from agriculture, which represents 44 per cent of employment but only about 18 per cent of GDP, to sectors like manufacturing, services, and construction. Government investments in infrastructure and initiatives such as Future Skills Prime 2021 for skill enhancement and Ayushman Bharat for health improvements are expected to enhance employability and productivity. Despite the necessity for credit growth to stimulate economic activity, the RBI will have to monitor rising household debt and encourage banks to leverage data analytics for smarter lending decisions, Deloitte said.

RBI action on Kotak Mahindra Bank may restrain credit growth: S&P



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

S&P Global Ratings on Friday said RBI's regulatory action on Kotak Mahindra Bank could restrain the lender's credit growth and profitability. The RBI on Wednesday barred Kotak Mahindra Bank from issuing fresh credit cards and onboarding new customers online. Credit cards are a higher-yielding target growth segment for Kotak Mahindra Bank. This portfolio grew at 52 per cent year-on-year as of December 31, 2023, compared with total loan growth of 19 per cent, the US-based rating agency said. “Action by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) this week could push the bank to rely more on physical branch network expansion to supplement growth thus entailing higher operating costs,” S&P said, adding that it could be a setback for credit growth and profitability. This action will not, however, materially affect our ratings on Kotak Mahindra Bank (BBB-/Stable/A-3). This is because credit cards make up a small 4 per cent of total loans as of the end of December 2023. The bank will still be able to cross-sell its other products to existing customers. “We anticipate Kotak Mahindra Bank could potentially take a year to fully address the RBI's key concerns for the bank which encompasses systems stability, patch management, and disaster recovery,” S&P said. RBI's actions on Kotak Mahindra Bank follow similar actions in recent years on

other financial institutions in India. S&P said in a similar case in 2020, when HDFC Bank was temporarily barred from sourcing new credit card customers, it took the bank more than a year to meet the RBI's requirements and have restrictions lifted. In the past 18 months, Kotak Mahindra Bank has made significant progress on technological enhancements, including the hiring of senior level executives in the chief technology officer and chief experience officer positions, S&P said. Nevertheless, it will take time for the bank to implement changes and conduct a comprehensive external audit to address the RBI's concerns. RBI's actions on Kotak Mahindra Bank follow several outages of the bank's core banking systems as well as online and digital banking channels, and deficiencies identified through the RBI's IT examinations in 2022 and 2023. This shows the regulator's commitment to strengthening the financial sector and its diminishing tolerance for operational deficiencies. Systems stability and robust disaster recovery planning have become increasingly important with the rapid scale up in digital transactions in India. “Regulators across many jurisdictions are adopting a similar playbook. The Monetary Authority of Singapore recently imposed a six-month ban on DBS Bank Ltd from making new acquisitions and closing branches or ATMs following several service disruption.

Motilal Oswal reports multi fold jump in profit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd on Friday reported an over four-fold jump in profit after tax to Rs 724.6 crore for the March 2024 quarter, driven by strong growth in the capital market as well as wealth & asset management businesses. In comparison, the company had a profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 167 crore in the year-ago period, Motilal Oswal Financial Services said in a regulatory filing. The company's total income rose to Rs 2,158.15 crore in the January-March quarter of the financial year (FY) 2023-24 from Rs 1,033.54 crore in the same quarter preceding fiscal. Reacting to the positive development, shares of the company rose as much as 8.66

per cent to a 52-week high of Rs 2,677 apiece on the BSE. The stock finally settled at Rs 2,600.65, up 5.67 per cent from the previous close. The company's asset and wealth management businesses reported strong growth with a PAT at Rs 210 crore in Q4FY24, a jump of 79 per cent year-on-year basis. Also, the capital market business grew 66 per cent to Rs 251 crore in the three months ended March 2024. Further, the company's board approved bonus shares in a ratio of 3:1, which means 3 bonus shares for 1 fully paid-up equity share. The record date for the bonus issue of shares is yet to be determined. For the full financial year 2023-24, the company posted a PAT of Rs 2,445.62 crore and a total income of Rs 7,130.52 crore.

Rupee falls 7 paise to settle at 83.35 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee declined 7 paise to close at 83.35 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday as a strengthening American currency overseas and a selloff in domestic equities weighed on the local unit. Besides, rising crude prices in the international market and risk-averse sentiment dragged the local unit down, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened strong at 83.30 and moved in the range of 83.30-83.36 during the session. The local currency finally settled at 83.35 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 7 paise from its previous close. In the previous session, the rupee closed at 83.28 against the US dollar.



“Indian Rupee declined slightly on weak domestic markets and a surge in crude oil prices. We expect the rupee to trade slightly weak on renewed geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and weakness in domestic equities. “Rising crude oil prices and FII outflows may further put pressure on the rupee. However, any intervention by the RBI may support the

rupee at lower levels. We expect USDINR to trade in the range of 83.10-83.60,” Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.38 per cent to USD 89.35 per barrel. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, increased 0.05 per cent to 105.49. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex slumped 609.28 points, or 0.82 per cent, to settle at 73,730.16, and Nifty declined 150.40 points, or 0.67 per cent, to close at 22,419.95. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,823.33 crore, according to exchange data.

Markets snap five days rally; Sensex tumbles over 600 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty wilted under selling pressure on Friday after a five-day rally as investors pared exposure to banking, financial and consumer durable stocks amid mixed trends in global markets. Rising global crude prices, a depreciating rupee and persistent foreign fund outflows further weighed on sentiment, traders said. Profit-taking also came into

play as the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 609.28 points or 0.82 per cent to settle at 73,730.16. During the day, it lost 722.79 points or 0.97 per cent to 73,616.65. The NSE Nifty declined 150.40 points or 0.67 per cent to 22,419.95. Bajaj Finance was the biggest drag on the Sensex chart, skidding nearly 8 per cent after the company's March quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. Bajaj Finserv also declined over 3 per cent. IndusInd Bank, Nestle, Kotak Mahindra Bank and



Mahindra & Mahindra were among the laggards. Meanwhile, Tech Mahindra jumped over 7 per cent after the IT services company's CEO outlined an ambitious three-year roadmap to accelerate revenue growth and lift margins. Wipro, ITC, UltraTech Cement, Titan and Axis Bank were among the gainers. “The fall was on expected lines as both the benchmark indices had rallied for five straight sessions, and profit-taking has been due for some time.

“Correction is also attributed to global factors after the Japanese Yen fell to a new 34-year low and disappointing US data pushed its benchmark yields to over 4.7 per cent, thus worsening hopes of an interest rate cut in the medium term,” said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory. European markets were trading in the green. Wall Street ended lower on

Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.31 per cent to USD 89.29 a barrel. The rupee declined 7 paise to close at 83.35 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,823.33 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark climbed 486.50 points or 0.66 per cent to settle at 74,339.44 on Thursday. The NSE Nifty advanced 167.95 points or 0.75 per cent to 22,570.35.

Five star petal ceiling fan launched

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Surya Roshni's Consumer Durable Division takes pride in announcing the launch of another 5 Star Petal Ceiling Fan. With a commitment to delivering superior cooling solutions for homes and offices nationwide, Surya upholds its legacy of quality, excellence, and environmental responsibility. The 5 Star Petal Fan sets a new benchmark in energy efficiency, performance, and design, catering to the modern consumer's preference for eco-friendly and visually appealing products. This fan while employing the traditional Induction motor technology is able to achieve 5 star labelling, which offers not only higher energy savings by consuming only 34W but also the benefits of longer product life and ease of maintenance. The aerodynamic design, complemented by wider blades for enhanced air thrust, ensures a comfortable and breezy environment, elevating the user experience.

Seminar on American Pecans organised

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With a view to educate and create awareness about the technical aspects of American Pecans, New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) conducted an engaging seminar on the benefits of American Pecans today in New Delhi. This move is a concerted effort from NMDA to popularise American Pecans in the light of the growing health consciousness amongst Indians. Eminent speakers who were present at the Seminar included Dr Richard Heerema from New Mexico State University and Serena Schaffner, Managing Director-Global Marketing and Regulatory Affairs & American Pecan Council

Promotion Board (APPB). The session was well attended by leading chefs, and well-known nutritionist Ritika Samaddar who gave useful health tips on Pecans and its health benefits. Founded in 2016, the American Pecan Council is a group of passionate growers and shellers whose life work is dedicated to growing, harvesting and processing America's only major tree nut — American Pecans. It is solely dedicated to showcase the diverse and versatile benefits, uses and remarkable history of America's native tree nut. The purpose of APPB is to strengthen the position of American Pecans in the market place, maintain and expand markets for pecans and develop new uses for pecans.

At least USD 12 trillion needed for tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030: COP28

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

At least USD 12 trillion is required to create new infrastructure over the next six years for tripling global renewable energy capacity by 2030, COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber said on Friday. Addressing the annual Petersburg Climate Dialogue, Al Jaber said the energy transition will not happen without significant investment and a level-up in climate finance. He said the four key priorities to level up climate finance are infrastructure, technology, people and the Global South. “On infrastructure, we need to invest at least USD 6 trillion over the next six years to meet our 2030 target of 11TW of renewable energy capacity. And we need to spend a similar amount to upgrade outdated or non-existent grids,” the COP28 president said. World leaders reached a historic agreement at COP28 in Dubai last year to triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030. According to the



International Energy Agency, tripling global renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency is crucial to limiting the average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a political target set in 2015 to prevent worsening of climate impacts. At the United Nations climate conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) or a new climate finance goal will be the key issue. NCQG is the new amount developed countries must mobilise every year from 2025 onwards to

support climate action in developing countries. Rich countries are expected to raise more than the USD 100 billion they promised to provide every year from 2020 but repeatedly failed. Al Jaber said artificial intelligence can be a game changer by multiplying efficiencies and helping solve intermittency and storage. “Every country must invest in its people, developing a new set of skills for a new green economy. And we must invest in the Global South. Right now, over 120 developing

countries attract less than 15 per cent of global clean tech investment. Public, private, and development finance must work in tandem in creative catalytic models that turn billions into trillions,” he said. Al Jaber said the COP troika, a collaboration between the COP hosts of 2023, 2024, and 2025, is pushing for more ambitious nationally determined contributions (NDCs or national climate plans) ahead of the UN climate conference in Brazil. “We are encouraging all governments to set out economy-wide emission reduction plans, with explicit renewable energy targets. And we are advocating for smart policies that push industries to step up... And incentivise the private sector to invest,” he said. “My message to governments is simple, think bigger... Act bolder. Send a clear message early with your next NDC that puts green infrastructure at the centre of your development plans. Be transparent about the costs and trade-offs involved.

Olectra Greentech bags order for 8,232 electric vehicles during FY 23-24

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading electric vehicles manufacturer Olectra Greentech Limited (OGL), announced its Q4 and full year consolidated financial results ending March 31, 2024. The Board of Directors, in its meeting held today, officially approved these remarkable achievements. Company has received total orders of 8,232 electric vehicles during FY 23-24 including 3,000 buses repeated order from BEST - Mumbai in Q4 FY 23-24. In Q4 FY23-24, the company has surpassed an order book milestone of 10,000 electric buses in the country. The company has delivered 1,746 electric vehicles till date including deliveries of 131 electric vehicles in Q4 FY23-24. Strong demand continues with the total number of bus orders on hand at 10,969 units. The revenue for FY23-24 was ₹1154.14 crore, up by 5.8 per cent, it said in a statement.



FEAST ON HOT SUMMER MENUS

Embark on a culinary journey through Delhi NCR's finest dining experiences, discovering the hottest summer menus in the vibrant city's gastronomic scene.

SEASONAL AND LOCAL AT OLLY, OLIVE'S ALL-DAY CAFE & BAR, GURGAON

Like a second home Olly is a peaceful escape from the city's hustle and bustle. With a cafe menu featuring classics, fresh coffee, unique beverages, and homemade cold-pressed juices, on offer is a delightful everyday experience. The summer menu is influenced by seasonal and local produce, aimed at ensuring a light and refreshing dining experience during the warmer months. Abundant with fresh salads, bowl food, and light grills, the menu promises to be both satisfying and light.



stems from a desire to cater to the most discerning palates, offering a diverse selection that caters to all tastes. Olly's offerings encompass world cuisine crafted from the finest quality ingredients. Their charming terrace provides a cool retreat, complete with live music on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday evenings.

Must Try: Baked Crispy Sweet Potato Skins, Prawn, Mango & Avocado Salad, The Forbidden Rice Salad, Asian Style Buddha Bowl & Almond Crusted Baked Sole Fish

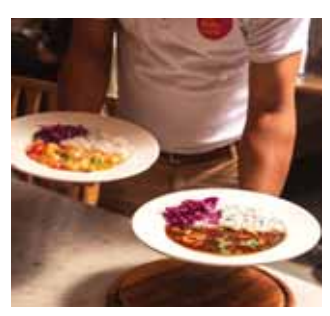
A TANTALIZING JOURNEY AT THE CHINA KITCHEN, THE HYATT REGENCY NEW DELHI

The China Kitchen offers a unique Chinese dining experience that sets it apart. Diners get to enjoy their meals right in the kitchen, giving a fresh and authentic touch to their dining experience. With a strong emphasis on using fresh, quality ingredients and expert culinary methods, The China Kitchen serves up an immersive culinary journey through Chinese cuisine. Their famous Peking duck and specially curated menu by Chef Zhang are highlights not to

be missed. Experience a tantalizing voyage through Chinese culinary delights with the new summer lunch menu. Infusing traditional flavours with a touch of innovation, each dish reflects the rich tapestry of Chinese cuisine. Meticulously chosen ingredients and expert cooking methods elevate classics like the Beijing-style chilled cucumber salad and the fragrant Sichuan fried rice. Delve into specialties such as the Southern-style lotus root fritter and the luxurious Gong bao diced chicken, celebrating diversity and authenticity. Embark on a culinary escapade that captures the essence of summer in every flavourful bite.

SUMMER IN MY HEART AT VIET-NOM, CYBER HUB, WOLDMARK & DLF SAKET

As the sun casts its golden rays to signal a new season, Viet:nom unveils a tantalizing array of seasonal delights, marrying traditional Vietnamese flavours



with a modern flair. With a steadfast commitment to authenticity and culinary mastery, it presents a menu that invites guests on a sensory journey through the symphony of tastes and textures embodied in their signature Banh Mi sandwiches. Combining tender proteins, crisp vegetables, and house-made spreads, these sandwiches redefine street food with sophistication. Complimenting this epicurean adventure are the meticulously crafted cocktails and mocktails, skillfully prepared with premium spirits, fresh herbs, and homemade cordials. From refreshing fruit-infused mocktails to innovative cocktail creations inspired by Vietnamese flavours, each sip offers a refined experience of taste and creativity. The menu is a celebration of the season's abundance and Vietnamese culinary art.

SALADS AND SAVOURY AT L'OPERA, MULTIPLE OUTLETS

At this revered French Boulangerie, Pâtisserie, and Salon de Thé, the seasonal selection

features an array of refreshing salads tailored for the summer, light and delectable meals catering to diverse palates, and a fresh assortment of summer coolers perfect for savouring on hot summer days and evenings. The new menu is artfully complemented by Lopera's renowned seasonal mango collection, presented in captivating new presentations. Adding to the culinary experience, the savoury offerings introduce enticing additions such as Alfredo Pasta in Fettuccine - a creamy fettuccine pasta bathed in a luscious Alfredo sauce and adorned with Parmesan cheese and Panzanella Salad - a lively and tangy ensemble of seasonal vegetables, fresh basil, Parmesan cheese, and crispy bread croutons, among other delightful surprises.

Must Try: Alfredo Pasta in Fettuccine, Herbed Risotto with Pesto Prawns is a harmony of flavours and textures, Panzanella Salad, a vibrant tangy salad with seasonal vegetables, fresh basil, Parmesan cheese and crunchy bread croutons.

VIBRANT ESSENCE OF SADDI DILLI AT CAFE DELHI HEIGHTS, MULTIPLE OUTLETS

Reflecting the Capital's generous spirit through its generous servings of exquisitely prepared dishes. Constantly evolving with a new outlet each month and revamped aesthetics across many locations, Café Delhi Heights has unveiled an enticing New Menu designed to tantalize the taste buds of discerning food enthusiasts.

Founder Mr. Vikrant Batra proudly champions the diverse and imaginative culinary offerings at CDH that aim to delight all five senses. Chef Ashish Singh has consistently impressed food aficionados since the brand's inception, and the latest menu is poised to continue this tradition of culinary



excellence. Featuring delectable specialties such as the healthy Italian Chicken Salad and the Miso Avocado & Tofu Bowl, the menu also showcases a range of gourmet options including savoury wraps, flavourful Mexican dishes, and tantalizing meal bowls crafted for the pleasure of the palate.

Must Try: Health-conscious patrons can savour the Protein Bowl or Poke Bowl, while dessert lovers can indulge in the luscious Red Velvet Lava and Fruit Truffle creations, adding a sweet conclusion to the culinary journey at Café Delhi Heights.

AKANKSHA DEAN is an independent food & travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at Osteria Francescana, in Modena, Italy, rated as the world's best restaurant in the World's 50 Best Restaurants, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the Best of The Best Category.

INTERNATIONAL STREET FOOD FETSIVAL

THE WORLD ON THE PLATE



Known for its versatility, dynamism and one of the best food ethos, the most loved café of Delhi - Café Delhi Heights is introducing the most dynamic food festival- International Street Food Festival. Scheduled from April 20th to May 10th, Café Delhi Heights is inviting patrons on an epicurean journey through the International Street Food Festival. Vikrant Batra, founder of Café Delhi Heights says, The idea of a food festival is to celebrate the diversity of food. Food festivals are those special occasions where we celebrate specially curated menus that are otherwise not part of our routine menu. We at CDH take our festivals seriously, and each menu is a serious attempt to do something new and exciting for our customers. We are bringing the International street festival for the first time, and this brings street delicacies from different countries on the gourmet front. Whether you're a seasoned epicurean or a curious adventurer, Café Delhi Heights' International Street Food Festival promises an unforgettable dining experience that will transport you to distant lands and leave you yearning for more. Come, indulge your senses and savor the flavors of the world at Multiple outlets of Pan India Brand, Café Delhi Heights. Drawing inspiration from

bustling food markets and vibrant street stalls around the world, Café Delhi Heights presents a carefully curated menu that showcases the rich tapestry of global cuisine. Each dish is a masterpiece, crafted with precision and passion by the café's talented chefs, ensuring an authentic and immersive dining experience for all. From the bustling streets of Bangkok to the sun-kissed shores of Greece, guests can embark on a culinary voyage like no other, sampling iconic street foods from Thailand, Greece, Japan, Latin America, Canada, Lebanon, Russia, and Spain-all within the cozy confines of Café Delhi Heights Dehradun. Savor the bold flavors of Thailand with the signature Pad Thai, an irresistible blend of stir-fried rice noodles, succulent shrimp or chicken, and crunchy peanuts. Transport yourself to the Mediterranean with Gyros,

tender grilled meat nestled in warm pita bread and topped with fresh vegetables and creamy tzatziki sauce. Japan's culinary artistry shines through in the comforting embrace of Ramen, a soul-warming noodle soup adorned with slices of grilled chicken breast, soft-boiled eggs, and fragrant green onions. Meanwhile, Latin America beckons with the savory indulgence of Empanadas, golden pastry parcels brimming with flavorful filling. Canada's beloved Poutine offers a hearty treat with its crispy fries, gooey cheese curds, and savory gravy. At the same time, the Middle Eastern delight of Shawarma promises a symphony of flavors with its tender grilled meat and creamy tahini sauce. From the heart of Russia come Pelmeni, delicate dumplings filled with savory delights, while Spain's Churros provide the perfect sweet finale-a crispy delight coated in cinnamon sugar and served with a decadent chocolate dipping sauce. "As we celebrate culinary diversity with our International Street Food Festival, we invite our guests to embark on a journey of flavors and discoveries," says Brand chef Aashish Singh of Café Delhi Heights.

Born and brought up in Mumbai, Chef Varun Totlani moved to Hyderabad to study at the Culinary Academy of India and later graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in New York. Upon returning to Mumbai, he joined the opening team at Masque and steadily rose through the ranks, becoming Sous Chef in 2021 and Head Chef in 2022. Chef Varun is passionate about showcasing the diversity of India's produce and culinary prowess, contributing to the country's ever-evolving contemporary foodscapes. For reservations please contact +91 8586972078.



At Café Delhi Heights Multiple outlets Meal for two- ₹1500 plus taxes For reservations please contact- 8800691812 Instagram page- @cafedelhiheights



About Chef VARUN TOTLANI

Born and brought up in Mumbai, Chef Varun Totlani moved to Hyderabad to study at the Culinary Academy of India and later graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in New York. Upon returning to Mumbai, he joined the opening team at Masque and steadily rose through the ranks, becoming Sous Chef in 2021 and Head Chef in 2022. Chef Varun is passionate about showcasing the diversity of India's produce and culinary prowess, contributing to the country's ever-evolving contemporary foodscapes. For reservations please contact +91 8586972078.



The Story Club at WESTIN

Gurgaon hosts a Pop Up by Masque Restaurant's Chef VARUN TOTLANI

Savour a 10-Course Tasting Menu: Traditional Flavours Meet Innovation

Embark on a culinary adventure at an exclusive 2-day pop-up at The Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi, featuring Chef Varun Totlani from Masque restaurant, India's Best Restaurant for the third consecutive year at Asia's 50 Best 2024. Guests can enjoy a 10-course Tasting Menu that showcases innovative twists on traditional Indian flavours, all thoughtfully paired with fine beverages. The menu promises a keen exploration of India's diversity, embodying Chef Varun's culinary style that harmonises technique and intuition. It blends the ever-evolving landscape of contemporary Indian cuisine, offering a range of tantalising dishes. Dive into a world of flavours with options like Purple Corn, Charred Baby Corn, and Corn Mousse. Veggie lovers can savour Puran Poli with Amti and Green Peas, while non-vegetarians can indulge in Mud Crab. Don't miss the must-tries: Jicama with Coconut Malai Momo and Passionfruit Thukpa. Barbecue enthusiasts can enjoy BBQ Sweet Potato or Pork paired with tangy Tamarind and crispy Rice. Tantalise your taste buds further with Jackfruit Pepperfry or Duck Pepperfry served with Malabar Paratha and Mustard, complemented by refreshing Green Mango, Aam Papad, and Apples. For the main course, vegetarians can relish Butternut Squash, and non-vegetarians can try Clams with Karandi Loncha and Goda Masala. Don't miss the enticing Mushroom Bhutwa or Lamb Bhutwa with Potato and

Hemp Seed. Rice lovers can savour the flavorful Ladi Poa paired with Black Garlic Pulao. Conclude your meal perfectly with Gongura with Mulberry and White Chocolate or the rich Cacao. The event is priced at INR 8250 plus taxes per person for food & beverages. It will be hosted at Story Club & Lounge, The Westin Gurgaon New Delhi, Number 1 MG Road, Sector 29, Gurugram, Haryana 122002, on April 26th & 27th, 2024, from 7:30 pm to 11:30 pm.

ABOUT MASQUE

Located in a Mumbai textile mill, Masque is an ingredient-driven restaurant founded by Aditi Dugar and Chef Varun Totlani. Since 2016, their seasonal 10-course menus have featured farm and foraged ingredients, reflecting a commitment to local produce.

For more information, please contact: PRERNA DAGA Associate Director of Marketing Prerna.Daga@westin.com +91-99990 45851

SUNAKSHI SONI Sunakshi@quirkindia.com +91-9899928231



