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#### **OPINION 6** ROLE OF AI IN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

#### **WORLD 8** US EFFORT TO BRING AID TO GAZA BY SEA

#### MARKETS SNAP FIVE DAYS RALLY; SENSEX TUMBLES

**MONEY 10** 

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**DELHI CAPITALS** TAKE ON MI 2 SPORTS

# Supreme Court rejects 100 per cent VVPAT verification plea

n 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).

Weighing in on the intensely debated issue that has long divided political parties, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta delivered two concurring verdicts in the matter, also rejected a demand to go back

to ballot papers in elections. 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

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

constituency in Bihar. "When the Congress, the RJD and other INDIA Bloc parties

Lok

Sabha

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

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

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



#### RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

 $P_{\text{Modi's}}^{\text{rime}} \ \, \stackrel{\text{Minister}}{\text{minister}} \ \, \, \stackrel{\text{Narendra}}{\text{voung and}}$ women voters to turn out in great numbers and Opposition leaders, including Priyanka Gandhi's message for voters to vote and Constitution, the notwithstanding, saw nearly 61 per cent voting till 7 pm on Friday in the second phase of the Lok

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 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 In 2019, NDA respectively. secured victory in 56 seats of the 89 seats while the UPA won 24

Araria

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, Mahipur 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 confrontations complaints of fake voting in

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

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 good governance. 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

Interestingly, Opposition leaders, including Rahul raised the pitch of the campaign by focusing on hotbutton issues such as religious discrimination, inheritance taxes and affirmative action's during the second phase to polarize their vote bank.

of 63.92 per cent. Similarly, the newly settled Bru voters of Tripura exercised their franchise for the 2024 general elections to the Lok Sabha. Voters in some villages of Uttar Pradesh's Mathura, Rajasthan's Banswara and Maharashtra's Parbhani boycotted polls over various issues but were persuaded by authorities to cast their franchise. Voters in some villages of Uttar Pradesh's Mathura, Rajasthan's Banswara and Maharashtra's Parbhani were boycotting the polls over various issues but were later persuaded by authorities to cast their franchise.

#### **KERALA**

other States managing to cast

their votes with the help of

officials whose loyalty lied with the CPI(M),"

Adoor Prakash, Congress candidate from Attingal in

southern Kerala. Seven

died either after

casting the votes or

while waiting for

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

He said that the good works done by the LDF to help the

poor would be reflected

when results are declared on

their turn to vote.

persons

Chief

Pinarayi

constituencies.

4 June.

reportedly

Minister

Vijayan

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN KOCHI  $T^{\text{he ebullient fight between}} \\ \text{the BJP-led NDA, the} \\ \text{Congress-led UDF and the} \\ \text{CPI(M)-led LDF for the 20} \\$ Lok Sabha seats from Kerala that went to the polls on Friday is continuing even after the polling

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

"There were many instances of expatriate workers from **NORTH EAST** 

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Sensitive States of the North East, including Manipur and Tripura, besides Assam witnessed peaceful polling on Friday in the second phase of Sabha elections. Manipur where 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 stations, polling 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 Kanngam

Arthur, and Independents S



Kho John and Alvson 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 polling where underway, with 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 covering 15 assembly segments, and 32 assembly segments of the Inner Manipur, went to polls on

In the 2019 elections, the NPF emerged victorious, defeating the BJP by a margin of 73,782 votes.

April 19.

**UTTAR PRADESH** 

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT

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 here on 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-turnedpolitician 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 incident untoward 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 **RENGALLIBIT** 

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 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 continued voter apathy in

the city. Long queues were seen at polling

booths, as people, especially senior citizens 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

indiscriminate firing on the

security personnel leading to



ballot

Former Prime Minister H D Siddaramaiah, Shivakumar, Kumaraswamy, and film personalities like Upendra, Shivarajkumar and Sudeep, also exercised franchise. Several new couples cast their votes either before or after their marriage. Many booths saw

centenarians differently-abled 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 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 Raman Bhalla is challenging two-time sitting MP Jugal Kishore Sharma of BIP. 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, 1197127 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-

### 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 justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra was urged by senior advocate Ábhishek Singhvi, appearing for the AAP Government, that the whole administration has come to a standstill and the matter needed to be heard.

The CJI said presently a nine-judge bench matter is going on and he will consider the submission.

Presently, the nine-judge bench headed by the CJI is hearing petitions



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 Earlier on February 9, the Delhi

Government had mentioned the plea for urgent listing before the five-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.

### PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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 Thursday evening". IG Kashmir said that during the presence of terrorists in the Nowpora area of Sopore in search operations, the hiding a fierce gunfight.



Two terrorists killed in Baramulla

Security personnel stand guard during an encounter with terrorists in Nowpora area the Baramulla district late terrorists

The two terrorists were neutralised early Friday morning after fresh contact was established. The entire area was sanitised

intermittent

continued during the night.

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.

# the pioneer

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



n a significant move to promote voter participa-L tion in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections 2024, Ananya Mittal, the District Election Officer, has issued a groundbreaking 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 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 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 Institutions: All institutions, shops, malls, and establishments in Purbi Singhbhum 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 rela-tion 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 Divyangjan 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 turn out 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 Kumar. Media Avinash Kumar, 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

Fire

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

Department

Services





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

Fire Services Dept of SAIL, RSP organises a

special Blood Donation and Yoga

camp to mark the Fire Services Week

serve to save, 15

teered 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.

personnel volun-

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 Sheiwalkar, 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 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 congress Petroleum-Gas-Coal industries with a focus on syner gy 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

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



ous in the Lok Sabha elections to be held on May 13 by

For the nomination programme ministers of the Jharkhand government and Gumla. 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 MLA Munda, Bhushan Tirkey, MLA Neha Shilpi Party candidate Sukhdev India participated

Tirkey participated in the programme

Addressing the public meeting, Congress party's Jharkhand state in-charge Ghilam 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 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

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 Bhavan premises. In which the Chief Minister including state ministers, MLAs and Congress, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Rashtriya Janata Dal and Communist Party of

# 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 incharge 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

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.

#### Similarly, a Yoga camp Working with a motto to was also organised on 25th No cases of Bird Flu reported in Bokaro; Dept on High Alert

PNS: BOKARO

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

den 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.



**▼** ITE College, a renowned A 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

April, in which more than 70

employees of the Fire servic-

es department participated.

Susant Satpathy, renowned

International Yoga Instructor

was present to steer the

camp. The camp was organ-

ised under the supervision of

B Patnaik, GM (Fire

Jesuit Fathers, esteemed for their unwavering dedication to education, oversee the management of XITE College. Notable institusuch Jamshedpur, Xavier College in Kolkata, and Mumbai, all under Jesuit management, exemplify their commitment to excellence in education.

conferment Autonomous status by the UGC heralds a new era of academic freedom and innovation for XITE College.

attainment

Autonomous status promises

to enhance the teaching-

learning process at XITE

College in several significant Examinations Independently: XITE College now has the liberty to conduct its examinations, ensuring the timely completion of academic ses-

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), showcas-

ing 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, NCW, 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).



**RANCHI I SATURDAY I APRIL 27, 2024** 

# Tribal organisations pledge support to INDI Alliance in LS Polls

organisations today unanimously decided that for the last 10 years, the BJP government at the Center has failed to protect the water, forest and land of the tribals and the tribal society is angry against passing anti-tribal laws. Therefore, it was decided that in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the tribal society will vote for India Alliance and make the Ranchi Lok Sabha candidate win.

A joint meeting of representatives of various tribal organizations with the representatives of INDI Alliance was held under the chairmanship of Ajay Tirkey here on Friday. The meeting was conducted by Abhaybhut

On behalf of the INDI Alliance, a joint meeting was held with the representatives of Jharkhand in-charge of Congress party Ghulam Ahmed Mir, JPCC President Rajesh Thakur, Executive President Bandhu Tirkey, former minister Subodhkant Sahay, Ranchi Lok Sabha candidate Yashaswani Sahay, Ravindra Singh and tribal organizations Central Sarna Committee (Ajay Tirkey), Adivasi Lohra Samaj, Jai Adivasi Central Council, 12 Pahda Social Upliftment Institute, All India Adivasi Development Council, Central Sarna Sangharsh Samiti, Dharti Aaba Marang Gomke Jharkhand, Jeth Jatra Committee Karam Toli, Pahan



Tribal organisation representatives along with Jharkhand Congress incharge Ghulam Ahmed Mir during a meeting in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

Pradesh, Central Sarna Committee India, National Jai Adivasi Sarna Dharma Seva Kendra, social organization Adivasi Lohra Samaj, Bharat

Jodo Abhiyan. In the meeting, Jharkhand in-charge Ghulam Ahmed Mir said that today the constitu-

tion and democracy are in

danger. BJP is working to divide the society. The demand for Sarna Dharma Code for nature-worshipping tribals was passed by the

state and sent to the BJP gov-BJP is trying to forcibly present Sarna as one and has kept the matter pending till date. Today the Congress party is going to give Panch Nyay-Twenty Five Guarantees, in which the right to reservation will be given to ST, SC, OBC by removing the 50 per cent limit through constitutional amendment. It will give legal rights to water, forest and

State President Rajesh Thakur said that during Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Jharkhand, he met the people of the tribal society and also listened to their problems. Talking about tribal justice, he said that there is a talk of share justice

Former Congress president

Sonia Gandhi, her son Rahul

Gandhi and Daughter

Priyanka Gandhi are among

the Star campaigners in

Jharkhand for Lok Sabha

polls. Mukul Wasnik of the All

Índia Congress Committee

has released the list of star

campaigners for Jharkhand

state in view of the fourth

phase of Lok Sabha elections

effect was given by the

General Secretary of the

State Congress Committee,

The information to this

to be held on 13 May 2024.

Guarantees. In share justice, our land, our rule, wherever there are the most STs, PESA law will be implemented. The State President said that the BJP people call you Vanvasis and our leader Rahul ji calls you Adivasis, because you people are the real owners of this country. Therefore, we are also going to give legal guarantee of ST, SC sub-plan, in which ST, SC population will be more, they will be given more budget, more

Working President Bandhu Tirkey said that Congress has always worked in the interest of tribals. Congress gave the country CNT-SPT Act, Forest Rights Patta, Atrocity Act, Land Acquisition Act and since the BJP government has

Sonia, Rahul, Priyanka among

inal cases have been registered. Today in Manipur, tribal women were paraded naked and tribals are being killed. In Madhya Pradesh, BJP leaders are urinating on the heads of tribals and the Modi government at the center is silent.

Ajay Tirkey, Basvin Kindo, Kundarsi Munda, Niranjana Heranj, Narayan Vantvad Shiva Kachhap, Pritam Lohra, Abhay Tirkey from the tribal organization. Ramdev Lohara, Geeta Lakra, Hema Munda, Kailash Tirkey, Soma Lakra, Gautam Vantvad, Muna Toppo, Haldhar Pahan, Sanjay Lohara, Ajay Toppo were the main participants and hundreds of workers from various organizations

# Pratul alleges land grabbing spree by JMM leaders

BJP state spokesperson Pratul Shahdeo today targeted the state government over a land grabbing spree by ruling party alliance leaders

Shahdeo addressing a press conference at BJP media centre said that on the lines of Gangs of Wasseypur, Gangs of Chhotanagpur were supporting former Chief Minister Hemant Soren and many members of the JMM in preparing fake documents to acquire land illegally.

Two months after the arrest of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren in land scam. The Enforcement Directorate few days back arrested four persons another JMM leader Antu Tirkey and three others in a land

The ED conducted raids against Tirkey, Priyaranjan Sahay, real estate trader Vipin Singh, and Irshad on Tuesday. After that, they were taken to the ED office in Ranchi late at night for questioning and then placed under arrest. Former JMM National Committee member Antu Tirkey had left the party in 2019 after failing to



**BJP State Spokesperson** Pratul Shahdev during a press conference at party media centre in Ranchi on Friday. Pix by Ratan Lal

secure an assembly election ticket. However, he returned to the JMM fold

Shahdeo alleged that the government has completely ignored Love Jihad. "Now, land jihad has also started in this government," he said and added that the prominent people who

were accused of tampering with documents in the occupation of 8.86 acres of benami land occupied by former Chief Minister Hemant Soren are Irshad, Afsar Ali, Imtiaz, Saddam, Talha, and Faivaz. Pratul wanted to know whether it was true that the members of Gangs of Wasseypur had free rein to enter the Chief Minister's residence after 8:00 pm and the CCTV cameras were also switched off at that time. He urged the agencies to call the security officer of that time and get information on this issue because, by now, these people would

have destroyed the CCTV footage. Pratul said that the Land Jihadi gang captured the valuable land of Kachnar Toli of Jagannathpur. In this, the name of Zakir, who was associated with the alliance, also came up. Along with Zakir, Mubarak Khan, Shamim Khan, Iqbal, Nasir Ikram, Abdul, Salim, Rashid, Hussain, Manjoor, and Anwar have also been accused. Pratul said that this government did not commit only land robbery during the tenure of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren. "Rather, emphasis was also placed on the

employment of youth, which is further evident from the WhatsApp chat between Vinod Singh and Hemant Soren. This is also part of the ED charge sheet. The work of selling the

dreams of the youth was done for Rs. 25-25 lakhs," he alleged.
Pratul said that after Prem Prakash, Amit Aggarwal, Pankaj Mishra, Antu Tirkey has now debuted as the new scam eagle. Antu's diary entry made it clear that the game of land plunder was going on under gov-

ernment patronage.
Pratul said that information is being received that entries of transactions with many big leaders of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha have also

been found in Antu Tirkey's diary. Pratul said that after giving the slogan of Youth First, Hemant Soren, who came to power, transformed the entire party and government into Family First. "Be it a matter of mine allotment or land allotment, everything went to his close relatives, close friends, and their family members. The common tribal residents felt cheated throughout the entire episode," he said

Amulya Neeraj Khalkho. He said that the star campaigners include Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, K.C. Venugopal, Ghulam Ahmed Mir, Rajesh Thakur, Bhupesh Baghel,

Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu, A.

The State BJP has intensi-

fied campaigning for Lok

assembly bypoll. State BJP

public meetings at Chatra

In Chatra the BJP h

Kalicharan Singh against

mer minister KN Tripathi,

Dilip Verma is contesting

against JMM heavyweight

and former chief minister

Addressing a public

meeting at Chatra, Marandi

said that said that the INDI

Alliance leaders do politics

family and money. That's

why many of these people

few INDI Alliance leaders

are convicted, too. These

people are roaming around

are in jail or out on bail. A

"They do politics for the

for themselves.

Hemant Soren wife Kalpana

while in Gandey BJP leader

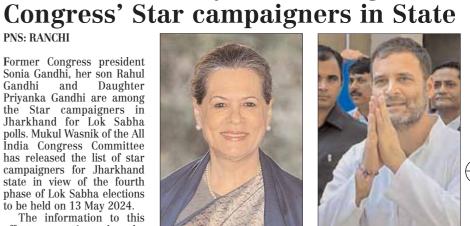
assembly segment.

fielded local leader

LOK SABHA CAMPAIGNING

Marandi seeks votes for

Revanth Reddy, Salman Khurshid, Jairam Ramesh, Tariq Anwar, Dr. Ajay Kumar, Subodhkant Sahay, Rana K. P. Singh, Alamgir Alam, Dr. Rameshwar Oraon, Badal Patralekh, Banna Gupta, Imran Pratapgarhi, Supriya Srinet, Deepika Pandey Singh, Furkan Ansari, Dr. Pradeep Kr.



Bandhu Tirkey, Sahazada Anwar, Jaleshwar Mahato, Ravindra Singh, Sanjay Lal Paswan, Jaishankar Pathak, Manas Sinha, Geetashree Gunjan Singh, Raj, Manzoor Oraon, Abhijeet Ansari, Chhvindra Karma, Riazul Ansari, Naman Bixal Kongari, Dayamani Barla are

### Ranchi Police bust vehicle thieves' gang



City SP Raj Kumar Mehta along with other police officials during a press conference in Ranchi on Friday. Pix by Ratan Lal

PNS: RANCHI

Ranchi Police have achieved checking. Police have arrested three criminals. Besides, two stolen bikes have also been recovered. The arrested criminals include the names of Sanjay Singh of Bariatu police station area, Vishal Swansi of Ratu police station area and Vicky Sao, resident of Madhukam of Sukhdevnagar police station area. All three history. criminal Addressing a press meet on Ranchi City SP Rajkumar Mehta said that a case has been registered against Vicky in Sukhdevnagar police station for murderous assault and under the Arms Act whereas a case of murder has been registered against Vishal Swansi in Namkum, Mandar and Ratu police stations. At the same time, a case has been registered against Vishal in Namkum, Sadar and Sukhdevnagar police stations of Ranchi on charges of extortion, instigation and murder4 held including 2 women carrying Ganja

PNS: RANCHI Banaras and Rs 1500 cash from the arrested accused. Ranchi Police have arrested Ranchi

four people, including two women, who were carrying ganja from Odisha to Banaras from Khadgarha bus stand of the State Capital. The arrested accused include Sumit Kumar, resident of Keshav Kunj in Ghaziabad district of Uttar Pradesh, Anjana Singhal, resident of Deep Bihar Chhapraul in Gautam Buddha Nagar district, Deep Rai, resident of Sukna in Darjeeling district of Bengal and Sushma, resident of Multani Danda Paharganj, Central Delhi.

Police have also recovered 43.60 kg of ganja, four mobile phones, Aadhaar card of three accused, Line bus ticket from Dhurwa to

added. Mehta further said that on the instructions of the SSP, Morhabadi TOP police had imposed vehicle checking on Thursday near the registry office of Morhabadi Maidan. During checking, an MT-15 bike without number plate was stopped. The number JH-01D-0270 on the bike was not clear. After checking the chassis number of the said motorcycle, it was found that its original registration was JH-01EN-1539 which was registered in the name of Rahul Kumar, resident of Patratu in Chanho police station area, he added. The City SP said

Superintendent of Police (SP), Rajkumar Mehta gave this information in a press conference. He said that a continuous checking campaign is being conducted for the recovery of narcotics in connection with the Lok Sabha

"Meanwhile, on the basis of secret information received by the SSP a team was formed under the leadership of City DySP. The team raided and arrested two youths and two women with ganja from Khadgarha bus stand premises. Police have received many inputs from the arrested smugglers. Based on the input received, the police are busy taking further action," said Mehta.

that when the police interrogated the accused Saniay Singh who was caught with the bike, he told that he had bought this bike from his landlord Vicky Kumar Sao. "Vicky Kumar was arrested by the police on the information of the accused. Accused Vicky confessed to theft of another motorcycle. On the behest of Vicky, former PLFI militant Vishal Swansi was caught. Stolen bike with number JH-01FM 8265 was recovered from Vishal. He had stolen the recovered bike from Kotwali police station area along with

#### Form-12 and 12D exchanged from **Postal Ballot Exchange Center**

Election officials from across the state reached the exchange center



Chief Electoral Officer K Ravi Kumar alongwith Additional Chief Electoral Officer Neha Arora. PNS

Form 12 and Form 12D received for postal ballot in the context of inter-district transfer for the Lok Sabha General Elections 2024 were transferred to the respective Lok Sabha constituencies today. In the exchange center set up in the Chief Electoral Office, officials related to election work from all the districts / constituencies of the state reached with Form 12 and 12D received in their respective districts and made the forms available to the other districts concerned. Representatives of political parties were also present during the exchange.

Chief Electoral Officer, Jharkhand, K Ravi Kumar said that to ensure that not a single voter is left out from the Commission of India has made arrangements for voting by postal ballot. The

exchange facility of Form 12 and 12D received for voting by postal ballot will facilitate service voters and voters of essential services to vote. Additional Chief Electoral Officer Dr. Neha Arora said that Form 12 is for service voters working on election duty. At the same time, Form 12D is for absentee voters, absentee voters with physical disabilities, absentee voters senior citizens and absentee voters essential services, who can participate in the process of voting through postal bal-The mentioned voters who have submitted their forms are being sent to another Lok Sabha constituency under the exchange facility, so that they can exercise their franchise. It is known that in the context of inter-district transfer for the Lok Sabha General Elections 2024, an

to become the destiny makers of India," he pointed Marandi said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has Election said we must make the exchange program is being country a developed India. run in relation to the transfer "This will be accomplished when the Prime Minister wins again with an overwhelming majority in 2024," he maintained.

Leader of Opposition Amar Kumar Bauri said that the Jharkhand government is anti-tribals and anti-Dalits. "Be it the Hemant government or the present government, no work was done to develop these sections during the tenure of

"On the contrary, atrocities against them have increased," he said.

"On the other hand, the Modi government has done a lot of work to develop tribals and Dalits. The budget for the development of tribals has increased significantly. Work has been done to honour Lord Birsa Munda. Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar also got full respect during the tenure of the Modi government while Congress ignored him," he said.

Addressing a public meeting in Chatra after Chatra's NDA candidate Kalicharan Singh filed his nomination, Marandi said



BJP candidate Kali Charan Singh alongwith BJP State President Babulal Marandi, Legislative party Leader Amar Bauri and others after filing his nomination papers for Lok Sabha elections, in Chatra on Friday. PNS

the INDI coalition leaders are spreading false propaganda.

He urged the electorates to cast their votes to the NDA candidate in the interest of their families and also motivate others to vote for the NDA. "No matter how sunny it is, we all should not fail to vote in this great festival of democracy," he said.

Later in the day, Marandi also addressed a rally at Led Hatiya Ground in Gandey, Giridih. Marandi said that at present India is being hailed all over the world and the country will be hailed only when Narendra Modi becomes the Prime Minister again. Prime Minister Modi said that India will be made a developed and prosperous India by 2047. The Prime Minister thinks that every person should get food. They should get better treatment when they fall ill. Prime Minister Modi has resolved to create such an India. If we look at the 10 years of Prime Minister Modi's tenure, it will be clear that till date no Prime Minister has done so much work. Prime Minister Modi also

the poor to live. The State President said that before 2014, terrorist

took care of the respect of

mothers and sisters. Toilets

were built in every house.

Gave gas connection. Prime

Minister gave residence to

the country. At that time the central government sometimes went to America and sometimes to UNO. He used to say that there has been a bomb explosion in our place. The whole world laughed at India. When Narendra Modi government was formed in 2014, he said that if even a single terrorist attacks here from outside, we will enter and kill him. When one or two incidents happened in the country, army personnel entered and killed them. After this, people of Indi alliance started asking for proof of this. These people are antinational. Are anti-development. Have to be careful

attacks used to happen on

He said that the people of Indi alliance are anti-Jharkhand and anti-development. The fight for a separate state of Jharkhand was going on since the country became independent. Congress remained in power for 50-60 years, but Jharkhand did not create a separate state. Jharkhand bought off those who were agitating for a separate state. Then sent him to jail, but did not create Jharkhand state. After the formation of the Bharatiya Janata Party government, a separate state of Jharkhand was created. Whatever BJP does, it does.

with these people.

#### M raises questions on ECI for not matching the VVPAT slip with

Ruling party in the State Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), on Friday, said that Election Commission of India (ECI) has issued notices to BJP and Prime Minister's name is not included in the notice for making objectionable speeches. JMM said that but instead of sending him a notice, ECI sent a notice in the name of BJP National President. Modi candidate from Varanasi Lok Sabha seat of Uttar Pradesh and still the notice was not sent to him. Why the Election Commission did this, it is beyond understanding, said the JMM.

ous attack. Vishal has been a

PLFI militant in the past, he

Addressing a press meet JMM Spokesperson Supriyo Bhattacharya said that the notices to two national parties for making objectionable speeches, one of them is Congress and the other party is BJP. The party questioned whether the Election Election



JMM General Secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya during a press conference on Friday. Pix by Ratan Lal

Commission has become toothless. Bhattacharya further raised the question as to why ECI has not issued any notice on the manner in which BJP leader Giriraj Singh has been giving hate speeches in Bihar and has also given during the current "The Supreme elections.

Court has given its verdict yesterday regarding EVM and VVPAT. But PM Modi has said that his party will hear this decision again. This shows that the decision of the Supreme Court is being misinterpreted. The Supreme Court has said that the defeated candidate can apply for the EVM. Its expenses will have to be borne by the candidate," he added. He also raised the question

that if irregularities are found, will the candidate get his money back? He said that the Supreme Court should give its verdict in this regard also. The party Spokesperson further said, the Prime Minister also started taking credit for the decision taken by the Supreme Court bench on electoral bonds. "The truth is that SBI was asking for more time to provide the records of electoral bonds. He was not given time, there may be a strategy behind this also. At the same time, while addressing BJP candidate from Khunti Arjun Munda, he asked him to tell what work was done on his behalf in Khunti Lok Sabha. Munda should tell which scheme of the Center has come to Khunti

apart from the scheme of the

State Government," he added Similarly, while speaking about Lohardaga, he said that here also BJP should tell which scheme of the Center

Bhattacharya said that BJP is not fighting elections on issues and we are fighting elections with substance "Injustice against tribals has increased during the tenure of BJP. Manipur is the biggest example of this. The rights of tribals, Dalits and backward people are being snatched away today. The Constitution is being changed for this. ECI should ban BJP's star campaigners who give hate speeches," he added .

Attacking at the Centre, he said. Mandal Dam was announced to provide water to Bihar. But the Center did nothing like this Jharkhand. He asked Palamu BJP candidate BD Ram that he should tell what he did for

irrigation in Palamu.

# SC terms apprehensions of petitioners on EVM misplaced

The Supreme Court cannot allow the entire process of the ongoing general elections to be called into question and upended on mere apprehension and speculation of the petitioners regarding the efficacy of EVMs, apex court judge Justice Dipankar Datta said on Friday. Justice Datta was part of the apex court bench which rejected pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using electronic vota folly when the challenges ing machines (EVMs) with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT).

Justice Datta said the petitioners have neither been able to demonstrate how the use of

tions nor have they been able to establish a fundamental right to 100 per cent VVPAT slips tallying with the votes cast. Terming the petitioners' apprehensions as "misplaced", he said reverting to the paper ballot system, rejecting inevitable march of technological advancement, and burdening the EC with the onerous task of 100 per cent VVPAT slips tallying would be

faced in conducting the polls are of such gargantuan scale. The top court delivered its verdict on a batch of petitions, including the one filed by the NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms, which return to the paper ballot system in elections.

Justice Datta noted the petitioning association has also attempted to highlight a public trust deficit with respect to the current voting system by relying on a survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies - Lokniti, which concluded that a majority of the Indian population did not trust the EVMs.

"It is a private report and I find little reason to trust such a report. Over the years, more and more voters have participated in the election process. Had the voters any doubt regarding the efficacy of the EVMs, I wonder whether the voting percentage would have



seen such increase," he said. "EVMs have stood the test of time and the increased voting percentage is sufficient reason for us to hold that the voters have reposed faith in the cur-

rent system and that the report to the contrary, which has been relied on, merits outright rejection," Justice Datta

He noted the petitioners' had

19(1)(a) vis-a-vis the electoral process have two facets -- first, a voter has a right to know that the vote is recorded as cast and secondly, that the vote as cast is counted. He said a citizen's right to 'free-

dom of speech and expression' under Article 19(1) of the Constitution is not absolute and the State by virtue of Article 19(2) can place reasonable restrictions on these rights. "There can be no doubt that the electorate has a right to be informed if the votes, as cast, are accurately recorded. The dispute, in the present writ proceedings, centres around the modality of delivering the information," he said.

present procedure, wherein the voter after pressing the 'blue button' and casting the vote can see his VVPAT slip for seven seconds through an illuminated glass window, as inadequate for the voter to verify if

"Recording of the vote cast signifying the choice of the voter and its projection on the VVPAT slip, albeit for 7 (seven) seconds, is fulfilment of the voter's right of being informed that his/her vote has been duly recorded," he noted.

the vote as cast is recorded.

He said as long as there is no allegation of statutory breach, there can be no substitution of the court's view for the view of the EC that the light in VVPAT

Justice Datta also addressed the second facet of the argument based on the right guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) - the voter's right to know that his or her vote, as recorded, has been counted.

'To deal with this contention, a question comes to my mind did this right not exist when the 'paper ballot system', which the petitioning association wishes to be reverted to, was in vogue?," he said.

Justice Datta observed there is in place a stringent system of checks and balances to prevent any possibility of a miscount of votes and for the voter to know that his or her vote has been

# SC seeks EC response on plea seeking re election if NOTA gets majority

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI** 

In a significant development amid the ongoing general elections, the Supreme Court on Friday asked for a response from the poll panel on a PIL seeking framing of rules to nullify an election and order fresh one if NOTA (none of the above) option gets majority over other candidates. The top court issued notice to the Election Commission on the PIL filed by author, activist and motivational speaker Shiv Khera. The NOTA option is provided

to the voters in the elections in pursuance of the 2013 apex court verdict. A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the submissions of senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for Khera, and issued the notice. Initially, the bench was reluctant to consider the PIL, saying it was for the "executive to decide'.

"We will issue a notice. This is about the electoral process also. Let us see what the Election Commission has to say..." the CII said.

The senior advocate said that present plea was important keeping in mind the development at Surat in Gujarat where a BIP nominee was declared

τ NOTA lection Commission of India

winner before polling as some nomination papers were rejected and few withdrew from the race. The top court, in its 2013 judgement, had held that "a provision of negative voting would be in the interest of promoting democracy as it would send clear signals to political parties and their candidates as to what the electorate thinks about them" and directed the Election Commission to provide the option of NOTA in all

"It is most respectfully prayed that this Court may be pleased to issue a writ... Directing the Election Commission to frame rules to the effect that if NOTA gets a majority, the election held in the particular constituency shall be declared null and void and a fresh election shall be conducted to the con-

The PIL also sought a direction to the poll panel to frame rules stating that the candidates who poll fewer votes than NOTA shall stand debarred from contesting all elections for a period of five years. It also sought a direction to ensure "proper and efficient reporting/pub licity of NOTA as a 'fictional candidate". The plea referred to the apex court judgement and the report of the Law Commission on the issue in its support.

Buttressing the plea for re-election if NOTA wins and barring the candidates from poll process if they poll less than NOTA, the PIL said, "since 2013, the implementation of NOTA has not fulfilled the very purpose that it was supposed

#### **Petitions challenging EVM** reliability junked on forty occasions by courts: EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

On a day the Supreme Court rejected pleas seeking a return to the ballot paper system, Election Commission officials pointed out that constitutional courts on at least 40 occasions have rejected petitions challenging the reliability of the electronic voting machines.

The functionaries also referred to the recent remarks Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar that EVMs are "100 per cent safe" and political parties know in the "heart of their hearts" that the machines are

The top court on Friday rejected pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) and said 'blindly distrusting" any aspect of the system can breed unwarranted scepticism. Maintaining that "democracy

is all about striving to build harmony and trust between all institutions", a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta delivered two concurring verdicts and dismissed all the pleas in the matter, including those seeking to go back to ballot papers in elections.

"Almost 40 times constitutional courts -- the Supreme

will finish majoritarianism

(in the country). The OBCs (Other Backward Classes)

SCs (Scheduled Castes) and STs (Scheduled Tribes) are the

majority in the country," the

Court and the high courts have rejected pleas challenging EVMs," CEC Kumar had said addressing a press conference here on March 16 while announcing the schedule for the ongoing Lok Sabha

Citing a publication of the EC, he said it shows on how many occasions ruling parties have been voted out in elections where EVMs were used. "Political parties have come into existence due to EVMs. There are many smaller parties, which in the age of ballot paper, might not have come into existence," he had

He said the EVMs are fair and political parties recognise it in the "heart of their hearts". He also described them as "100 per cent safe, 100 per cent

The apex court bench also issued two directives. Pronouncing his verdict, Justice Khanna directed the Election Commission to seal and store units used to load symbols for 45 days after the symbols have been loaded into electronic voting machines in strong rooms.

The apex court also allowed engineers of the EVM manufacturers to verify the microcontroller of the machines after the declaration of the results on the request of candidates who stood second

### Ministry asks CBSE to work out logistics for holding Board exams twice a year from 2025-26 session exams from the 2024-25 acade

The Ministry of Education has asked the CBSE to work out logistics for conducting board exams twice a year from the 2025-26 academic session while the plan for introducing a semester system has been ruled out.

Sources said the MoE and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will hold consultations with school principals next month for conducting board exams twice a year. The CBSE is currently in the process of working out the modalities of how will the academic calendar be structured to accommodate another set of board exams without impacting the undergraduate admission schedule."The ministry has asked the CBSE to work on the logistics of how will board exams be conducted twice a year. The board is working out the modalities and a consultation will be organised next month with school principals," a source said.

"The idea being explored is to conduct two editions of the board exams at the end of the year from the 2025-26 academic session but the modalities still need to be worked out. However, there is no plan to implement the semester system," the source added.

The ministry's initial plan was to introduce biannual board

exams from the 2024-25 academic session, however, it has been pushed back by a year. The new national curriculum framework (NCF), prepared by the Union governmentappointed national steering company which was led by former ISRO chairman K Kasturirangan in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, proposed a semester system for students of classes 11 and 12. The framework, which was released by the ministry in August last year, also proposed that the students be given the option to write their board exams twice a year. "The CBSE right now is brainstorming on the schedule so students can get maximum benefit and the goal of making board exams stress-free can be achieved. However, logistics is a challenge which needs to be addressed, conducting exams is tiresome so the plan has to be flawless," the source said.

attempt at reforming board exams. The Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) was introduced for Class 10 in 2009 but was revoked in 2017 and the board reverted to the old model of year-end exams. The board exams for classes 10 and 12 were also split into two terms during the Covid pandemic as a one-time measure, but the old format of year-end exams resumed this

However, this is not the first

#### **Zero tolerance of** terrorism must for prosperity of SCO nations: Aramane

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane on Friday emphasised the need to adopt a zero-tolerance approach towards terrorism in all its forms for prosperity and development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member states. Making this assertion at the SCŎ Defence Ministers' meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, he reiterated India's steadfast commitment towards maintaining peace, stability and security in the SCO region, defence ministry said here.

Aramane mentioned about India's long-standing propos-al of Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the United Nations. He also highlighted the concept of 'Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)', proposed by India for the Indo-Pacific.

During the meeting, a protocol was signed by the Defence Ministers of all SCO Member States. A Joint Communique was issued after the meeting, in which the SCO Defence Ministers agreed, amongst other initiatives, to developing the idea of 'One Erth, One Family, One Future' which is rooted in the ancient Indian philosophy of " Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.'

# Congress seeking to snatch rights of SCs, STs, OBCs to benefit Muslims, says Nadda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELH

 $B^{\text{JP president J P Nadda on}}_{\text{Friday accused the}}$ Congress of seeking to snatch the rights of SCs, STs and OBCs to benefit Muslims, alleging that it is the hidden agenda of the opposition

Continuing with the BJP's attempts to project the Congress as a party championing interests of Muslims at the cost of traditionally deprived Hindu groups, Nadda said the Opposition party has long been making the grounds for the minority community to be declared as SCs and give them reservation.

He issued a video statement as the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls got underway. Nadda cited the then Prime

Minister Manmohan Singh's 2006 statement of minorities, especially Muslims, having the first rights on the country's resources and added that he made similar comments in April 2009.

The Congress has accused the BJP of selectively quoting Singh and claimed that the ruling party has resorted to spreading falsehoods and communal division for polarisation during the elections due to a lack of public support to it in the ongoing polls. Nadda, however, noted that

the Congress has in some states tried to provide reservation to Muslims, including in Karnataka where the BJP government, he said, had ended the quota but it was brought back by the Siddaramaiah government.

It had attempted to give reservations to Muslims in Andhra Pradesh too but could not due to the Supreme Court's orders, he said.

He said the Congress in its 2009 election manifesto had promised reservation for



tutions and jobs through a sub-quota in the Other Backward Classes category.

The BJP president claimed that the Congress' stand against majoritarianism in its 2024 poll manifesto underscores its "hate" for the SCs, STs and the OBCs as they make up for a majority in the society. "False claims were made through the Sachar committee report and it was said that Muslims are worse off than Dalits. It means that the Congress had been making the ground for Muslims to be declared as SCs so that they can given the reservation

due to Dalits," Nadda said. The party has this old habit of robbing the SCs, STs and OBCs of their rights, he said, citing B R Ambedkar's criticism of Jawahar Lal Nehru for not speaking about the welfare of Dalits in speeches. Nehru was always in support of Muslims, he claimed.

Nadda said he never wanted that Muslims to be neglected but that they should not get undue benefits at the cost of other communities.

Those who need more protection should get these benefits, he said, accusing the opposition party of giving the impression that there are Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister said. The Congress has committed the "sin of doing social injustice" with the country's Dalits, backwards and adivasis by "depriving" them of their rights for 70 years, he alleged and asserted that the grand-

that the minority communi-

ty gets the SC quota benefits.

shared a clip of Manmohan

Singh's remarks at a press

conference in April 2009 in

which he reiterated that

minorities, especially poor

Muslims, should get priority

when it comes to the nation's

The BJP claimed, "He cate-

gorically stated that he stood

Muslims should have first

right when it comes to

resources." It demolishes the

Congress' canards and clari-

fications on his previous state-

ment, the party said. Senior BJP leader Keshav

Prasad Maurya alleged the

Congress has "conspired" to

snatch the rights of OBCs,

SCs and STs, who are in

"majority" in the country, and

The Congress' "dangerous thinking" of taking away the rights of Dalits, the back-

wards and adivasis (tribals)

and hand them over to "infil-

trators" is clear from its Lok

Sabha poll manifesto, Maurya

told a press conference at the

They (the Congress) have

clearly said in their manifesto

that if given a chance, they

BJP headquarters here.

give these to Muslims.

y his earlier assertion that

The BJP on its X handle also

old party will be punished in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections for this. Maurya said the Congress has "conspired to snatch the rights of OBCs, SCs and STs, and give these to Muslims". The Congress and the INDIA bloc are "robbing" SCs, STs, OBCs of their rights, he said OBCs of their rights, he said.

This will not be tolerated at any cost, the BJP leader said. '(Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi has said that a caste census will be conducted. You are talking about doing an X-ray while the country's OBCs, SCs and STs are doing an MRI of your conspiracy, he said. Maurya alleged that the Congress' history is filled with "petty and disgusting' politics of appeasement.

The Congress' "hidden agenda" of the Lok Sabha polls is to grab power "anyhow" and handover the rights of OBCs, SCs and STs to Muslims so that its vote-bank becomes strong "forever", he alleged on day when voting is underway in 88 constituencies spread across 13 states and Union Territories, including Uttar Pradesh, in the second phase of the elections.

Maurya also said Congress leaders are abusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi and using derogatory words for him as he comes from a poor family, belongs to an OBC community and has worked for the welfare and upliftment of every section of society.

# Children from hills in India more likely to have stunted growth: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Children living in India's hills and mountains, especially at higher altitudes, are more likely to experience stunted growth, according to a recent research analyzing data from over 165,000 children under five years old in the country.

The study found that stunting was more common among third-born children and those with smaller sizes at birth. The prevalence of stunting was 36 per cent, with higher rates among older children. Living at altitudes above 2000 meters increased the risk by 40 per cent, as per research published in the open access journal BMJ Nutrition Prevention

& Health. GPS data were used to categorise altitude level while the World Health Organization (WHO) standard was used to define stunting.

Most, i.e. 98 per cent (164,874) of the children lived less than 1000 m above sea level while 1.4 per cent (2346) lived between 1000 and 1999m above sea level; and 0.2 per cent (335) lived at or above 2000m. Seven out of 10 lived in rural

The overall prevalence of stunting among these children was 36 per cent, with a higher prevalence among children aged 18-59 months (41 per cent) than among those under 18 months of age (27 per cent). Stunting was more common among children of third or higher birth order (44 per cent) than it was among first-borns (30 per cent). And stunting rates were even higher among those children who had been small or very small (45 per cent) at birth.

Mother's education emerged as an influential factor: stunting

prevalence fell as maternal educational attainment rose. The proportion of children whose mothers had had no schooling was more than double that of children whose mothers had had a higher education.

Other protective factors included elements of antenatal care, such as clinic visits, tetanus vaccination, and iron and folic acid supplements; proximity to health facilities; and not belonging to a particular caste or indigenous tribe. This is an observational study that captured a snapshot of the population at a specific point in time, making it difficult to confirm altitude as a cause of stunting, acknowledged the researchers.

But there are plausible explanations for their findings, they suggested. For example, chronic exposure to high altitude can reduce appetite, restrict oxygen delivery to tissues, and limit nutrient absorption.

Food insecurity also tends to be greater at higher elevations where crop yields are lower and the climate is harsher. Similarly, healthcare provision, including implementing nutritional programmes, and healthcare access are also more challenging, they suggest. "In summary, concerted efforts

are needed across health and nutrition sectors to address stunting, tailored to focus on higher-risk children in vulnerable areas," said the researchers.

### More Indian youths are enrolling to learn Korean language, Taekwondo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI** 

Extending beyond the world of K-Drama and K-Beauty, Indian youth interest towards Korean culture is expanding to also include learning the Korean language and Taekwondo, a great tradition of Korean martial arts. In the domain of martial arts, the demand for learning Taekwondo has experienced a remarkable surge. Drawing a comparison with the previous year, the statistics paint a compelling picture: in 2023, a total of 1,530 students were enrolled in Taekwondo classes across 31 schools. This figure has more than doubled in the current year, with an impressive 3,536 students now enrolled across 47 local schools in Delhi alone.

This surge in interest has been facilitated through strategic partnerships between the KCCI and local associations such as the Delhi Taekwondo Association, underscoring the collaborative efforts to meet the growing demand for Taekwondo instruction, said an official from the KCCI.

Likewise, the appeal of learning the Korean language has experienced a meteoric rise. The numbers speak volumes: from 1,535 students enrolled in Korean language classes across 20 schools last year, the figure has surged to 2,572 students across 32 schools this year. This exponential increase underscores the growing fascination with Korean culture and the eagerness of Indian youth to delve deeper into its linguistic

nuances. Hwang Il Yong, Director of KCCI said, "Korean is one of the fastest-growing foreign languages in India, and the

demand to study the language has constantly been on the rise. Both Taekwondo and Korean language classes in Indian schools will further expand opportunities for students to experience Korean culture and will become a

starting point for achieving

their dreams.

In line with this trend, the KCCI has taken measures to support and nurture this growing interest. For instance, the Centre has spearheaded initiatives to distribute 2,000 newly designed Korean language textbooks, meticulously crafted in collaboration with the National Institute of Korean Language.

These textbooks, adorned with illustrations featuring quintessential Indian elements such as 'Naan', 'Samosa', and 'Mojari', serve as a testament to the harmonious fusion of cultures and the inclusive nature of language learning.

In fact, learning language demand surprised everyone when the 93rd Korean Language Proficiency Test was organised. KCCI simultaneously organized the test in threefor pg 2 regions in India - Delhi, Chennai and Imphal, Manipur and the centre had to announce that the Korean Language Proficiency Test will be conducted one more time this year in

# People tasted real democracy under Modi: Jitendra Singh

 $T^{\text{he people of the country,}}_{\text{especially those in Jammu}}$  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 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 grassroots 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

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

"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

Singh, who is contesting the elections from Udhampur parliamentary constituency,

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. 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

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 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 thread independence," he added. Asked about the possibility of

assembly elections after the completion of Lok Sabha polls

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 controversial statement by one of its leaders on inheritance tax, "Inheritance tax is alien to democratic values, Indian culture and 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

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).

À 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



contesting against Congress's Joyram Engleng in Diphu. Nagaon's sitting Congress MP Bordoloi BJP's contesting against Bora, while Karimganj's Kripanath Malla is pitted against Congress's Hafiz against Congress's Haf Ahmed Rashid Choudhury.

BJP's Amarsing Tisso is In Darrang-Udalguri, the main contest is between BIP MP Dilip Saikia and former Congress 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

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

Avoter 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, Congress's

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-degrees Celsius mark in most parts of the state.

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

# Another BJD MLA joins BJP ahead of polls in Odisha

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

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, Balasorre 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

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

Tearly 60 per cent voter 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 recorded 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 byelection 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 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 the voting percentage was 68.71 in Banswara-Dungarpur.

turnout of 51.75 per cent till 5 pm, according to official data. Voting percentage in other constituencies till 5 pm stood at 52.38 in Ajmer, 54.67 in

61.81 Bhilwara, Chittorgarh, 57.75 in Jalore, 65.23 in Jhalawar-Baran, 58.35 in Jodhpur, 65.38 in Kota, 52.17 in Rajsamand, in Tonk Sawai-Madhopur and 59.54 in Udaipur.

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

voter reached the Adibheet polling booth during the 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 Aimer while former chief ministers Vasundhara Raje and Ashok Gehlot exercised their franchise in Ihalawar 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

absence of strong **L**opposition in Khajuraho Parliamentary constituency, there is smooth sailing for 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' Maharani Kavita

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, their support to RB Prajapati, had alleged that a well-the All India Forward Bloc planned conspiracy" was



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 IP Nadda and other prominent leaders addressed meetings election 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

behind the rejecting of party candidate Meera nomination.

The only reason behind rejection Yadav's of nomination was that her signature was absent at a required spot on the form and non-submission of the official voter list as per the 2023 State Assembly Elections.

Madhya Pradesh BJP media in-charge Ashish Agrawal told *The Pioneer* that his party president is winning the election with huge margin.
Congress and Samajwadi party (SP) were nowhere in the contest.

Even when there was no strong opposition in the constituency, the BJP fought the election like elections are contested," Agrawal added.

#### Man damages EVM at polling booth; detained

PTI CHHATRAPATI

A 26-year-old man allegedly damaged an (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.

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

The police detained the man,

EVM with an iron object. immediately was detained and the voting process continued soon afterwards as the broken machine was replaced with a one," Nanded Superintendent of Police Shrikrushna Kokate PTI. Police have told launched an investigation to know the motive behind his

act of damaging the EVM, he

# 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

"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

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).

Naxalism 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.

government ended terrorism and

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 Shah maintained the Modi 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 PFI. 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 I nomination papers for five Lok Sabha constituencies and 35 Odisha Assembly segments to 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 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.

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

# All is well

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

oon 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 BBCproduced 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.



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

obotic surgery, also known as robot-assist-

Red surgery, has revolutionised the field of surgical

procedures by offering

increased precision, flexibil-

ity and control compared to

conventional techniques.

Typically associated with minimally invasive surgery,

robotic surgery utilises a sys-

tem consisting of a camera

arm and mechanical arms

with surgical instruments

attached, all controlled by

the surgeon seated at a com-

puter console. This setup pro-

vides high-definition, magni-

fied, 3D views of the surgical

site, enhancing the surgeon's

ability to perform delicate

across various surgical spe-

decades ago, Laparoscopy

outcome in surgical patients.

next step in the evolution of

minimally invasive surgery.

Now, the time has come when

a surgeon avoids leaving any-

stable and predictable robot-

ic surgery can ensure success

and complex procedures.

# Role of AI in Lok Sabha elections



From personalised voter outreach to the menacing potential of deepfake videos, Artificial Intelligence's influence is palpable, promising both innovation and ethical dilemmas

rtificial 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

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

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. arties like BJP, Congress, AAP, DMK and AIADMK use AI technology to engage with their supporters. For example, the BJP uses manipulation of the electoral AI to translate PM Modi's speech- process. This underscores the

FORQAN BABU **SHAIKH** 

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 ers or candidates, which can lead to identity theft and



**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 Élection 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 exception.

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

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 Al is no

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

"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.

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

#### **Ensure representation of the disabled**



propos 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.

icy formulation and budget allocations. However, amidst these challenges lies an opportunity for transformation. A shift towards a rightsbased approach is imperative, with persons with disabilities actively involved in policy development. Integration across governance facets is essential

Aarav Patel | Mumbai

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

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 revela-

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 attenaspect of our lives. Like Arjuna on the bat- tion 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 sur-

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 inclu-

Nandini Rao | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneér@gmail.com

# Robotics: Predictable and optimal surgical success Today, India is leading globally with advancements in robotic surgery

and making a difference in critical surgical procedures

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 robot-Minimally invasive surgery is ic surgery across various spenow the standard of care cialities, including urology, gynaecology, cardiothoracic cialities. Introduced four and general surgery. In urology, robotic surgery has changed our approach and emerged as a significant advancement, offering several advantages over open or Robotic surgery introduced laparoscopic procedures. two decades ago, was the These advantages include reduced blood loss, decreased patient discomfort, minimised use of painkillers, thing on chance. Advanced, 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, ureteric 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 urosurgery 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 outcomes 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 consultantgeneral, Robotic and Renal Transplant Surgery at Narayana Hospital - RN Tagore Hospital, Mukundapur, Kolkata; views are personal)

#### **REVIVAL OF EDUCATION IN BIHAR**

Madam — Apropos the news article,

Rajiv Mishra | Lucknow

physics, consciousness permeates every

#### Physical barriers at polling stations compound their challenges, stripping away dignity and



**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR** 

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.

agency. Anitha's experience exemplifies this

neglect. Moreover, those with lesser-known dis-

abilities face additional hurdles, such as a lack of sign language interpreters during campaigns. The

dearth of accurate data further complicates pol-

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# **FIRST COLUMN**

### **WORK WITH ALLIES** FOR SEMICONDUCTORS

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



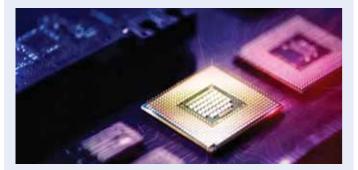
KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

ne 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 timeconsuming 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



**ILANGAMUWA** 

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

hen 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 HAS LINDEDGOME 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-



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 auntplayed a pivotal role. Naufar, identified by the FBI as the mastermind behind the attack, exerted significant influence on the events.

uals from 91 nations travelled to

Syria to support the Islamic State,

including 32 Sri Lankans.

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 Jama'ath 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

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 investiga tion.

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 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 ⊣he year was 1993. The munities (read Christians and time in 2001 but he quit in that political parties, especialmore secular than that of the ing the BJP. What Antony

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

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 min-

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 warned the minority com- ister of Kerala for the third League leaders warned Antony

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

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 his shirt and dhoti should be ing his son Anil Antony join-

ly the caste and communitybased 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

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 curs-

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 Bareli. He also declared that the Congress party cannot exist without the Nehru-Gandhi family. Isn't this another way of telling that India is Indira and Indira 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**

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

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

enforcement to douse demon-

strations before they can take

After a tent encampment popped 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

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



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

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

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 secu-rity and handling the aid deliv-eries 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 acknowl edged, 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 pro-

tecting the deliveries, the official said. Asked about the recent mortar attack, the miliary 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

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 par-

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

over health and education, as minister on Scotland." Yousaf, 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

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

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.

presiding officer — Scotland's

equivalent to the speaker -

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.

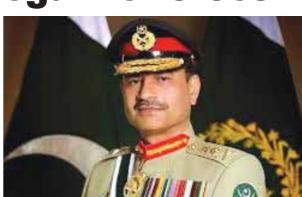
Romanian prosecutors formally indicted all four in June last year. They have denied the allega-

# **'United Team Pak could** defeat negative forces'

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 develop-ment 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

Stressing the need for overpowering economic challenges, Gen. Munir said that complete independence without economic stability is not possible. "In today's era, complete independence is not possible without economic stability," he said, warning that "no instability will be tolerated" in the country's journey towards prosperity and development. Last month, the Army chief

assured the unwavering resolve of the Army to support the new Pakistan government's initiatives aimed at the cashstrapped country's economic recovery. He made the remarks during a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

#### 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.Inderpal Singh Gaba, a resident of Hounslow in west London, was arrested in India on Thursday for committing offences under Section 13(1) of UA (P) Act, Section 2 of the Prevention of Insult of 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

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 examafter conducting searches at 31 locations in Punjab and Rajasthan. An investigation

LOC [Look Out Circular] was opened against several suspects, including Inderpal 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 cials, they said. The violent protests in March last year

describe as ineffective. Government documents filed

by Tesla say the online soft-

ware 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.

# Trump's lawyers to grill ex-tabloid publisher

**AP** ■ NEW YORK

fter prosecutors' lead witschemes, 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 elec-

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-



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 pre-sumptive 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 Prosecutors allege that Trump Pecker on his recollection of

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

"very well" for the defense, During the cross-examination that began Thursday, defence attorney Emil Bove grilled He appeared to be laying further groundwork for the defense's argument that any dealings Trump had Pecker were intended to protect himself, his reputation and his family - not his campaign. Pecker recalled how an editor told him that Daniels' representative was trying to sell her story and that the tabloid could acquire it for USD 120,000. Pecker said he put his foot down, noting that the tabloid was already USD 180,000 in the hole for Trumprelated catch-and-kill transac

But, Pecker said, he told Cohen to buy the story himself to prevent Daniels from going public with her claim. said to Michael, my suggestion to you is that you should buy the story, and you should take it off the market because if you don't and it gets out, I believe the boss will be very angry with you."

# 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

US probes Tesla autopilot recall on attention

edy was sent out. The agency

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

environments that the system

misuse, confusion and use in

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 wouded 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 stab-

# team of the NIA had also visited London, sources said.

protests on 19.03.2023 and 22.03.2023 were part of the larger conspiracy to attack Indian missions and its offiwere 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

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

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 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 oncol ogist 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.

decade earlier. Trump has

denied the encounter ever

happened.

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 from a driver's hands.

two-year investigation into Autopilot's driver monitoring system, which measures torque on the steering wheel The fix involves an online software update to increase



crashes after the fix, and that Tesla added updates that weren't part of the recall.

warnings to drivers. But the agency said in documents

# that it has found evidence of NHTSA said that Tesla reported 20 crashes that apparently happened after the recall rem-

This investigation will conhas required Tesla and other automakers to report crashes

sider why these updates were not part of the recall or otherwise determined to remedy a defect that poses an unreasonable safety risk," the agency

A message was left early Friday seeking comment from 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 report-

ed shortly after the recall that experts said it relied on technology that may not work. Tesla, the leading manufactur-

er of EVs, reluctantly agreed to the recall last year after NHTSA found that the driver monitoring system was defective and required a fix.

wheel, a system that experts

The system sends alerts to drivers if it fails to detect torque from hands on the steering

NHTSA began its investiga tion 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.

# Blinken meets Xi as US, China spar over bilateral and global issues

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Friday with Chinese President Xi Jinping and senior Chinese officials stressing the importance of "responsibly managing" the differences between the United States and China as the two sides butted heads over a number of contentious bilateral. regional and global issues. Talks between the two sides

have increased in recent months, even as differences have grown.

Blinken said he raised concerns with Xi about China's support for Russia and its invasion of Ukraine, as well as other issues including Taiwan and the South China Sea, human rights and the production and export of synthetic opioid precursors. Blinken sounded a positive note on recent progress made in bilateral cooperation, including in military communications, counternarcotics and artificial intelligence

"We are committed to maintaining and strengthening lines of communication to advance that agenda, and again deal responsibly with our differences so we avoid any miscommunications, any misperceptions, any miscalculations," he

But he said he made clear to Xi ongoing concerns about Beijing's supply of materials, including machine tools and micro electronics, to Moscow that President Vladimir Putin is using to boost Russia's defences and its war on Ukraine. "Russia would struggle to sustain its assault on Ukraine without China's support," Blinken told reporters after his meeting with Xi.

"Fueling Russia's defense industrial base not only threatens Ukrainian security, it threatens European security," he added. "As we've told China for some time, ensuring transatlantic security is a core US interest. In our discussions today. I made clear that China does not address this problem? Blinken also said he urged

China to use its influence "to discourage Iran and its proxies from expanding the conflict in the Middle East" and convince North Korea "to end its dangerous behaviour and engage in



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People, on Friday

dialogue." Blinken also discussed with Xi China's maritime maneuvers in the disputed South China Sea, and reiterated "ironclad" American support for the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia. Xi stressed that China and the

US must seek common ground "rather than engage in vicious competition.

"China is happy to see a confident, open, prosperous and thriving United States," the Chinese leader said. "We hope the US can also look at China's development in a positive light. This is a fundamental issue that must be addressed.

Earlier, Blinken held lengthy talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Public Security, Minister W Security Minister Wang Xiaohong. He and Wang underscored the importance of keeping lines of communication open as they lamented persistent and deepening divisions that threaten global security. Those divisions were highlighted earlier this week when US President Joe Biden signed a massive foreign aid bill that contains several elements that the Chinese see as problematic. "Overall, the China-US relationship is beginning to sta-bilise," Wang told Blinken at the start of about 5 1/2 hours of talks, "But at the same time, the negative factors in the relationship are still increasing and building and the relationship is facing all kinds of disruptions." Should China and the United States keep to the right direction of moving forward with stability or return to a downward spiral?" he asked. "This is a major question before our two countries and tests our sincerity and ability.

Wang also outlined, without being specific, well-known Chinese complaints about US policies and positions on the South China Sea, Taiwan, human rights and China's right to conduct relations with countries it deems fit.

"China's legitimate development rights have been unreasonably suppressed and our core interests are facing challenges," he said. "China's concerns are consistent. We have always called for respect of each other's core interests and urge the United States not to interfere in China's internal affairs, not to hold China's development back, and not to step on China's red lines on China's sovereignty, security, and development interests. Blinken responded by saying

that the Biden administration places a premium on US-China dialogue even on issues of dispute. He noted there had been some progress in the past year but suggested that talks would continue to be difficult. The State Department said

later that Blinken and Wang had "in-depth, substantive, and

constructive discussions about areas of difference as well as areas of cooperation" and made clear that Blinken had stood his ground on US concerns.

Blinken "emphasised that the US will continue to stand up for our interests and values and those of our allies and partners, including on human rights and economic issues," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement. Blinken arrived in China on Wednesday, visiting Shanghai shortly before Biden signed the USD 95 billion foreign aid package that has several elements likely to anger Beijing, including USD 8 billion to counter China's growing aggressiveness toward Taiwan and in the South China Sea. It also seeks to force TikTok's China-based parent company to sell the social media platform. China and the United States are the major players in the Indo-Pacific. Washington has become increasingly alarmed by Beijing's growing aggressiveness in recent years toward Taiwan and its smaller Southeast Asian neighbours with which it has significant territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea. China has railed against US assistance to Taiwan and immediately condemned the aid as a dangerous provocation. It also strongly opposes efforts to force TikTok's sale.

# Chinese marine research ship back in Maldives' waters

A<sup>4,500</sup>-tonne high-tech Chinese research ship is back in the Maldivian waters, two months after it spent a week docked at different ports in this archipelago nation. Xiang Yang Hong 03 was docked at the Thilafushi industrial island's harbour on Thursday morning, news portal Adhadhu.com reported on Friday. However, "the government has not disclosed the reason for its return. But the government previously confirmed permission for the ship to dock before its first visit," it said, days after President Mohamed Muizzu, a pro-China leader-led People's National Congress won the general election, securing 66 out of the 93-member People's Majlis. Muizzu rode to power last year

The ship has now come back after skirting the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Therefore, Xiang Yang Hong 03 has been active inside or near Maldives territory since Ianuary," it said.

The ship had earlier docked on February 23 at the same Thilafushi port, about 7.5 km to the west of Male. The hi-tech ship reached Maldivian waters on February 22 after spending about a month near the boundary of the Maldives' EEZ. About six days later, the ship went back to the EEZ boundary

In February, the Maldivian Foreign Ministry had said the Xiang Yang Hong 3 was here to "make a port call, for the rotation of its personnel and replenishment" after a diplomatic request was made by the government of China to the government of Maldives. The vessel would not be con-

ducting any research while in the Maldivian waters," the on an 'India Out' promise and Foreign Ministry said on January 23. The Maldives' proxwith a super majority win in parliamentary polls on April 21, he has further consolidated his imity to India, barely 70 nautical miles from the island of Minicoy in Lakshadweep and 300 nautical miles from the

mainland's western coast, and its location at the hub of commercial sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) gives it significant

strategic importance. Meanwhile, local media reports in February provided details about the type of vessel Xiang Yang Hong 03: The 100-metrelong vessel was added to the fleet of China's State Oceanic Administration (SOA) in 2016. This is the only 4,500-tonne vessel currently in China. Since 2019, China has also been using the vessel to conduct 'distant water' and 'deep sea' surveys at China's Pilot Ocean Laboratory.

The vessel can also be used for studies on salinity, microbial genetic studies, underwater mineral exploration, and underwater life and environmental studies, it said. It has data buoys that can measure ocean currents, waves, and important environmental information. These buoys will provide real-time satellite information to the Chinese government, the report then said.

#### **Head of Vietnam** parl resigns amid corruption probe

Hanoi (AP): Vietnamese state media outlet VN Express reports that the head of Vietnam's Parliament, Vuong Dinh Hue, has resigned. He is the latest member of senior government to leave office amid an ongoing anti-corruption campaign. Hue's resignation takes place four days after his assistant Pham Thai Ha was arrested on charges of abusing his position and power for personal gain, according to state media.

Vietnam's Communist Party accepted what called Hue's voluntary resignation, according to VŃ Express, while noting that investigators found that Hue had "violated Party regulations, and his violations have affected the reputation of the Party, the State and himself." Hue, 67, had been the chair man of Vietnam's national assembly for over three years. The chairman of the national assembly is the fourth most important politician in Vietnam, along with the President, the Prime Minister and the head of the Communist Party.

### South Korean police raid office of incoming doctors' group head would ultimately undermine

South Korean police said on Friday they searched the office of the hard-line incoming leader of an association of doctors and confiscated his mobile phone as he faces accusations that he incited the protracted walkouts by thousands of medical interns and residents. The development could further dim prospects for an early end to the

The office of Lim Hyuntaek, who is to be inaugurated as head of the Korean Medical Association next week, called the raid politically motivated and questioned whether the government is sincere about its offer for dialogue to end the

Police said they sent officers to Lim's office in Seoul and residence in the southern city of Asan on Friday to confiscate his mobile phone and other unspecified materials. Lim is

one of five former or incumbent lic calls to find a compromise to Korean Medical Association officials who have been under police investigation for allegedy inciting and abetting the strikes. In mid-April, two of them had their medical licenses suspended by health authorities. Lim's office said in a statement that the police raid was "a clear retaliation and political suppression" of Lim. It said the government should have not orchestrated the raid if it truly

More than 10,000 interns and residents at major university hospitals walked off the job in February in protest at the government's plan to increase the country's medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 starting next year, from the current cap of 3,058. Their walkouts have caused numerous cancellations and delays of surgeries and other medical treatment at

wants talks.

their hospitals. In the face of growing pubend the strikes, the government said last week it could adjust its plan by allowing universities to determine whether to lower planned admissions by up to 50 per cent next year. This means the number of

newly recruited medical students next year could be as low as 1,000. But Lim said doctors want the government to completely scrap the enrollment hike plan, saying they won't allow any increase in the number of students. He also urged the government to fire top officials involved in the formulation of the admissions plan.

Officials say the plan is aimed at adding more doctors because South Korea has one of the world's fastest aging populations and its doctor-to-population ratio is one of the lowest in the developed world.

Doctors say schools aren't ready to handle an abrupt increase in students and that it

They say the government plan would also result in doctors in greater competition performing unnecessary treatments. But critics say those aren't the real reasons behind their protests and that they simply worry the supply of more doctors would lead to lower income for them in the future. South Korea's current medical student enrollment cap has been unchanged since 2006, with doctors thwarting previous government attempts with vehement protests. Deepening worries about the medical impasse senior doctors at the university hospitals where the striking junior doctors worked have threatened to resign in support of the strikes. Their associations recently decided to let senior doctors take a day off every week, citing the overwork caused by the departures of their

the country's medical services.

# kraine pulls Abrams tanks from front lines Ukraine's farm minister is

Tkraine has sidelined USbattle tanks for now in its fight against Russia, in part because Russian drone warfare has made it too difficult for them to operate without detection or coming under attack, two US military officials told The Associated Press.

The US agreed to send 31 Abrams to Ukraine in January 2023 after an aggressive monthslong campaign by Kyiv arguing that the tanks, which cost about USD 10 million apiece, were vital to its ability to breach Russian lines

But the battlefield has changed substantially since then, notably by the ubiquitous use of Russian surveillance drones and hunter-killer drones. Those weapons have made it more difficult for Ukraine to protect the tanks when they are quickly detected and hunted by Russian drones or rounds.

Five of the 31 tanks have already been lost to Russian attacks. The proliferation of drones on the Ukrainian battletold reporters on Thursday. The official spoke on the con-

dition of anonymity to provide an update on US weapons support for Ukraine before Friday's Ukraine Defence Contact Group meeting. For now, the tanks have been

moved from the front lines, and the US will work with the Ukrainians to reset tactics, said Joint Chiefs of Staff Vice Chairman Admiral Christopher Grady and a third defence official who confirmed the move on the condition of anonymity.

"When you think about the way the fight has evolved, massed armour in an environment where unmanned aerial systems are ubiquitous can be at risk," Grady told the AP in an interview this week, adding that tanks are still important. 'Now, there is a way to do it," he said. "We will work with our Ukrainian partners, and other partners on the ground, to help them think through how

field means "there is not open ground that you can just drive kind of changed environment capabilities, including .50-cal- Ukrainians how to use them in across without fear of detec- now, where everything is seen

News of the sidelined tanks comes as the US marks the two-year anniversary of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, a coalition of about 50 countries that meets monthly to assess Ukraine's battlefield needs and identify where to find needed ammunition. weapons or maintenance to Ukraine's troops equipped. Recent aid packages, including the USD 1 billion military assistance package signed by US President Joe Biden on Wednesday, also reflect a wider reset for Ukrainian forces in the evolving fight. The US is expected to announce on Friday that it also will provide about USD 6 billion in long-term military aid to Ukraine, officials said, adding that it will include much sought after munitions for Patriot air defence systems. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet made public. The USD 1 billion package

additional air defences and ammunition, and a host of alternative, and cheaper, vehicles, including Humvees, Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles. The US also confirmed for the first time that it is providing long-range ballistic missiles known as ATACMs, which allow Ukraine to strike deep into Russian-occupied areas without having to advance and be further exposed to either drone detection or fortified Russian defences.

While drones are a significant threat, the Ukrainians also have not adopted tactics that could have made the tanks more effective, one of the US defence officials said.

After announcing it would provide Ukraine the Abrams tanks in January 2023, the US began training Ukrainians at the Grafenwoehr Army base in Germany that spring on how to maintain and operate them.

ibre rounds specifically modi- combined arms warfare part of a system of advancing armoured forces, coordinating movements with overhead offensive fires, infantry troops and air assets. As the spring progressed and Ukraine's highly-anticipated counteroffensive stalled, shifting from tank training in Germany to getting Abrams on the battlefield was seen as an imperative to breach fortified Russian lines. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced on his Telegram channel in September that the Abrams had arrived in Ukraine. Since then, however, Ukraine has only employed them in a limited fashion and has not made combined arms warfare part of its operations, the defence official said. During its recent withdrawal from Avdiivka, a city in eastern Ukraine that was the focus of intense fighting for months, several tanks were lost to Russian attacks, the official

# **latest corruption suspect**

AP KYIV

Ukrainian court on Friday Aordered the detention of the country's farm minister in the latest high-profile corruption investigation, while Kyiv security officials assessed how they can recover lost battlefield momentum in the war against Russia.

Ukraine's High Anti-Corruption Court ruled that Agriculture Minister Oleksandr Solskyi should be held in custody for 60 days, but he was released after paying bail of 75 million Hryvnias (USD 1.77 million), a statement said.

Ukraine's National Anti Corruption Bureau suspects Solskyi headed an organized crime group that between 2017 and 2021 unlawfully obtained land worth 291 million Hrvvnias (USD 6.85 million) and attempted to obtain other land worth 190 million Hryvnias (USD 4.47 million). Ukraine is trying to root out

corruption that has long dogged the country. A dragnet over the past two years has seen Ukraine's defense minister, top prosecutor, intelligence chief and other senior officials lose their jobs. That has caused embarrassment and unease as Ukraine receives tens of billions of dollars in foreign aid to help fight Russia's army, and the European Union and NATO have demanded widespread anti-graft measures before Kyiv can realize its ambition of joining the blocs.

Ukrainian Meanwhile, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was due to hold online talks Friday with the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which has been the key international organization coordinating the delivery of weapons and other aid to Ukraine. Zelenskyy said late Thursday that the meeting would discuss how to turn around Ukraine's fortunes on the battlefield. The Kremlin's forces have gained an edge

over Kyiv's army in recent months as Ukraine grappled with a shortage of ammunition and troops.

Russia, despite sustaining high losses, has been taking control of small settlements as part of its effort to drive deeper into eastern Ukraine after capturing the city of Avdiivka in February the defense ministry said Friday. It's been slow going for the Kremlin's troops in eastern Ukraine and is likely to stay that way, according to the Institute for the Study of War. However, the key hilltop town of Chasiv Yar is vulnerable to the Russian onslaught, which is using glide bombs — powerful Soviet-era weapons that were originally unguided but have been retrofitted with a navigational targeting system — that obliterate targets. "Russian forces do pose a credible threat of seizing Chasiv Yar, although they may not be able to do so rapidly," the Washington-based think tank said late Thursday

# Indian-origin man shot in US as police attempt to arrest him

said in a statement to PTI.

New York (PTI): A 42-year-old Indian-origin man was shot and killed by police in San Antonio after he struck two officers with his vehicle as they were trying to apprehend him in connection with an aggravated assault case. Sachin Sahoo was pronounced deceased at the scene after police officer Tyler Turner shot at him on April 21.

Sahoo originally hailed from Uttar Pradesh. Sources said he could have been a naturalised US citizen. According to a preliminary investigation, just before 6:30 pm on April 21, officers were dispatched to a home in Cheviot Heights in San Antonio for a report about Aggravated Assault with a Deadly Weapon, the San Antonio Police Department

Upon arrival, officers found a 51-year-old female who had been intentionally struck by a vehicle. The suspect, Sahoo, had fled the location. The victim was transported to a local hospital in critical condition. San Antonio Police Detectives issued a felony arrest warrant for Sahoo in that incident. Several hours later, neighbours

called the police to inform them that Sahoo had returned to the original location. Officers arrived and attempted to contact him when he struck two officers with his vehicle. One officer fired his weapon, striking Sahoo, who was "pronounced deceased on scene. One officer was transported to a local hospital for treatment of his injuries and the other offi-

cer was treated for his injuries on scene. Nobody else was injured during the incident. This investigation remains ongoing, police said.

Police Chief Bill McManus said that Sahoo had run over the woman, who was his roommate, with his vehicle. The woman was undergoing several surgeries and was in critical condition

The police had issued an arrest warrant for Sahoo and a couple of officers had gone to his known location on April 21 to see if they could find him and arrest him. "They did find him and he jumped in his car. He pulled out of his driveway" where the police officers

blocked him with their vehicles

but he was able to squeeze

through them.

### Two men charged in **UK** with spying for **China granted bail** or contact members of the

London (AP): A former researcher working in the UK Parliament and another man charged with spying for China were granted bail Friday after an initial court appearance in London. Christopher Cash, 29, and Christopher Berry, 32, were charged with violating the Official Secrets Act by providing information or documents that could be "useful to an enemy" — China — and "prejudicial to the safety or interests' of the UK between late 2021 and February 2023. Cash, a parliamentary

researcher who worked with

senior lawmakers from the

governing Conservatives, was

ordered not to enter Parliament

House of Commons. Cash's colleagues included Alicia Kearns, who now heads the powerful Foreign Affairs Committee, and her predecessor in that role, Tom Tugendhat, who is now security minister. Berry is reportedan academic based in Oxfordshire. The two didn't enter pleas during a short hearing in Westminster Magistrates' Court. The defendants were also ordered not to to travel outside the UK or contact each other. They were ordered to appear May 10 at the Central Criminal Court known as the Old Bailey for a preliminary

#### Philippine police kill Abu Sayyaf militant implicated in beheadings Manila (AP): Philippine forces attacks. It has been consider-

killed an Abu Sayyaf militant, who had been implicated in past beheadings, including of 10 Filipino marines and two kidnapped Vietnamese, in a clash in the south, police officials said on Friday.

Philippine police, backed by military intelligence agents, killed Nawapi Abdulsaid in a brief gunbattle Wednesday night in the remote coastal town of Hadji Mohammad Ajul on Basilan island after weeks of surveillance, security officials said. Abu Sayyaf is a small but violent armed Muslim group, which has been blacklisted by the United States and the Philippines as a terrorist organisation for ransom kidnappings, beheadings, bombings and other bloody

ably weakened by battle setbacks, surrenders and infighting, but remains a security threat particularly in the southern Philippines, home to minority Muslims in the predominantly Roman Catholic nation.

Abdulsaid, who used the nom de guerre Khatan, was one of several Abu Sayyaf militants who aligned themselves with the Islamic State group. A confidential police report said that Abdulsaid had been implicated in at least 15 beheadings in Basilan, including of 10 Philippine marines in Al-Barka town in 2007 and two of six kidnapped Vietnamese sailors near Sumisip town in 2016. The Vietnamese were seized from a passing cargo ship. He was also involved in attacks against government forces in 2022 and a bombing in November that killed two progovernment militiamen and wounded two others in Basilan, the report said.

Abdulsaid was placed under surveillance in February, but police forces couldn't immediately move to make a arrest because of the "hostile nature" of the area where he was eventually gunned down, according to the report On Monday, Philippine troops killed the leader of another

Muslim rebel group and 11 of his men blamed for past bombings and extortion in a separate clash in a marshy hinterland in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town in southern Maguindanao del Sur province, the military said.

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

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-highincome 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

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



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 momentum, she added. steady recovery

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

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.

economy growth at 7 per cent in the

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 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

boost household sustainably amidst spending 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 employment but only about 18 per cent of GDP, to sectors like services, manufacturing,

investments Government 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

construction.

# **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 onboarding customers online.

Credit cards are a higheryielding 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. 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.

anticipate Bank Mahindra could potentially take a year to fully address the RBI's key concerns the bank encompasses systems stability, patch management, disaster recovery," S&P said. RBI's actions on Kotak Mahindra Bank follow similar actions in recent years on

other financial institutions in

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

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 similar playbook. Monetary Authority of Singapore recently imposed a six-month ban on DBS Bank Ltd from making new acquisitions and branches or ATMs following several service disruption.

### Motilal Oswal reports multi fold jump in profit PTI MUMBAI

reported an over four-fold management businesses.

had a profit after tax (PAT) of

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 company's asset and 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 paidup equity share. The record date for the bonus issue of shares is vet 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.

play as the 30-share BSE

Sensex tanked 609.28 points cent to se

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

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

also declined over 3 per cent.

IndusInd Bank, Nestle, Kotak

Bank

to 22 419 95

Mahindra

The rupee declined 7 paise to close at 83.35 close (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday as a strengthening American currency overseas and a selloff in domestic equities weighed on the local unit.

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

against the dollar, registering a fall of 7 paise from its previous close.

rupee closed at 83.28 against



"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

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 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. in stitution alForeign investors (FIIs) were net

sellers in the capital markets Thursday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,823.33 crore, according to exchange data.

to global factors after the Global oil benchmark Brent USD 89.29 a barrel.

The rupee declined 7 paise to close at 83.35 (provisional) against the US dollar on US data pushed its benchmark yields to over 4.7 per cent, 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.

#### PTI ■ NEW DELHI Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd on Friday the previous close.

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 In comparison, the company

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

Market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty wilted under selling pressure on

Friday after a five-day rally as

investors pared exposure to

consumer durable stocks amid mixed trends in global

Rising global crude prices, a

depreciating rupee and persistent foreign fund

outflows further weighed on

Profit-taking also came into

sentiment, traders said.

financial

PTI MUMBAI

banking,

markets

persistent

#### Rupee falls 7 paise to settle at 83.35 against US dollar rupee at lower levels. We

Besides, rising crude prices in the international market

and moved in the range of 83.30-83.36 during the session. The local currency finally settled at 83.35 (provisional)

In the previous session, the

rivatives on BS

equities.

"Rising crude oil prices and FII outflows may further put pressure on the rupee. However, any intervention by

# Markets snap five days rally; Sensex tumbles over 600 Mahindra & Mahindra were "Correction is also attributed Thursday.

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 profittaking has been due for some

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

year low and disappointing

territory. European

markets were trading in the green. Wall Street ended lower on

#### 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 efficiency, performance, and design, catering to the modern consumer's preference for ecofriendly 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 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 Mexican Department of (NMDA) Agriculture 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 wellknown 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.

# 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 Petersberg 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



At least USD 12 trillion needed for tripling

tripling global renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency is crucial to limiting average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a political but repeatedly failed. Al Jaber said artificial intelligence can be a game changer by multiplying efficiencies and helping solve target set in 2015 to prevent worsening of climate impacts. At the United Nations climate conference (COP29) in Baku, intermittency and storage. 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

developing countries. Rich countries are expected to raise more than the USD 100 billion they promised to provide every year from 2020

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 year from 2025 onwards to 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

Al Jaber said the COP troika, a collaboration between the COP hosts of 2023, 2024, and 2025, is pushing for more nationally ambitious determined contributions (NDCs or national climate plans) ahead of the UN climate conference in Brazil.

'We are encouraging all governments to 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. transparent about the costs and trade-offs involved.

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

PNS NEW DELHI

eading electric vehicles Lmanufacturer Olectra Greentech Limited (OGL), announced its Q4 and full year consolidated financial results ending March 31, 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

# the pioneer

# FEAST ONHOT 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.

#### BY AKANKSHA DEAN

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

ike 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



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

# 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

missed. Experience 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 Southernstyle 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. Must Try: Southern Style Lotus Root Fritter, Sizzling Sliced Lamb, Gong Bao Diced Chicken Clay Pot, Braised Tofu is a Hearty vegetarian option with tofu, vegetables, and aromatic sauces. And the Wok-Fried String Beans, stir-fried with chili and garlic chip, make for a savoury and spicy side

#### 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





modern With a steadfast commitment 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, skilfully prepared with premium spirits, fresh herbs, and homemade cordials. From

refreshing fruit-infused mocktails to innovative cocktail creations inspired Vietnamese flavours, each sip offers a refined experience of taste and creativity. The menu is celebration of the season's abundance and

Vietnamese culinary art. Must Try: From crisp salads brimming with seasonal produce to delicate summer rolls bursting with succulent fillings and fragrant herbs, each dish is a harmonious blend of tradition and

### SALADS AND SAVOURY AT L'OPÉRA, MULTIPLE OUTLETS

At this revered French

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 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

# VIBRANT ESSENCE OF SADDI DILLI AT CAFÉ 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

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

food

impressed aficionados since the brand's inception, and the Boulangerie, Pâtisserie, and Salon latest menu is poised to continue de Thé, the seasonal selection 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

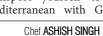


nown for its versatility, dynamism and one of the best food ethos, the most loved café of Delhi - Café Delhi Heights is introducing the most dynamic food festival- International Street Food Festival. Scheduled from April 20th to May 10th, Café Delhi Heights is inviting patrons on an epicurean through the journey 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 ensuring an authentic and 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, and crunchy peanuts. indulge your senses and savor Transport yourself to the the flavors of the world at

Multiple outlets of Pan India

Drawing inspiration from

Brand, Café Delhi Heights.







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, 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, Mediterranean with Gyros,

Chef **ASHISH SINGH** Corporate Chef





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 soulwarming 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 brimming with parcels golden 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.

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 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 foodscape. For reservations please contact +918586972078.

### 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

mbark on a culinary Hemp Seed. Rice **⊣** adventure at an lovers can savour ✓exclusive 2-day popthe flavorful Ladi Poa paired with Black up at The Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi, featuring Chef Garlic Pulao. Conclude Varun Totlani from your meal perfectly with Gongura with Mulberry and White Chocolate or the rich Masque restaurant, India's Best Restaurant for the third consecutive Cacao. year at Asia's 50 The event is priced at INR 8250

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 relish Butternut can Squash, and non-

Located in a Mumbai textile mill, Masque is an ingredient-driven restaurant founded by Aditi Dugar and Chef Varun Totlani. Since 2016, their seasonal

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

plus taxes per person for food &

beverages. It will be hosted at Story Club & Lounge, The Westin Gurgan New Delhi,

Number 1 MG Road, Sector 29,

Gurugram, Haryana 122002, on

April 26th & 27th, 2024, from 7:30

10-course menus have featured

farm and foraged ingredients,

reflecting a commitment to local

pm to 11:30 pm.

**ABOUT MASOUE** 

SUNAKSHI SONI Sunakshi@quirkindia.com +91-9899928231



# Upbeat Delhi Capitals take on struggling MI as playoff race intensifies

Bolstered by Rishabh Pant's brilliant batting form and inspiring leadership, the resurrected Delhi Capitals will aim to continue their upward march in the IPL points table when they take on an inconsistent Mumbai Indians here on Saturday

The Capitals have endured a rollercoaster season so far, showing flashes of brilliance while also succumbing to embarrassing defeats.

But three wins in the last four matches have helped them climb to the sixth spot and a win against MI will strengthen their claim to a play off spot. On the other hand, after a familiar poor start, MI bounced back with three wins

in their next four matches but a comprehensive nine-wicket thrashing by Rajasthan Royals put an end to their resurgence. They are tottering on the eighth place on the points table and can ill-afford to lose.

DC's biggest positive has undoubtedly been skipper Rishabh Pant's form, which appears to be improving with each game.

He has looked sharp behind the stumps and seems to be batting with freedom. He was at his belligerent best during a match-winning unbeaten knock against Gujarat Titans on Wednesday.

It would be fair to say that the southpaw is in prime position to make India's squad for the T20 World Cup despite stiff opposition from the likes of Sanju Samson, Dinesh Karthik

In Jack Fraser-McGurk, DC have found an able top-order batter who can exploit the powerplay but more is expected of opener Prithvi Shaw, given that his only responsibility is to bat as he is used as an Impact Substitute. David Warner missed out the previous game, making way for Shai Hope, who couldn't capitalise on the opportunity, and the veteran Australian might be brought back in the playing XI.

Tristan Stubbs has time and again proved he can be brutal with the bat while Axar Patel also showcased his batting prowess when he was elevated up the order in the four-run win against GT.

While the spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar have bowled



bowling unit needs to step up. Pace spearhead Anrich Nortje is having a forgettable season and has leaked runs at 13.36 which has been a major problem for Delhi.

The likes of Khaleel Ahmed, Mukesh Kumar and Ishant Sharma have been plagued by injuries leading to inconsistent

They were taken to the cleaners by MI batters, who piled on 234/5 earlier in the season. And DC would be wary of a similar performance. MI's resurgence this season began with a win against DC and the five-time champions would hope for an encore in the crucial clash.

For Mumbai, Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav and Tilak Varma have got runs but all of

them have found form in patches. It's time for the likes of Tim David, Ishan Kishan and skipper Hardik Pandya to contribute a big way and take some pressure off the top trio. While the batting department has occasionally looked good, the bowling remains a massive cause of concern.

Jasprit Bumrah has expectedly been MI's standout bowler. He has led the attack with 13 wickets at an economy rate of

However, new addition Gerald Coetzee has been inconsistent in his maiden IPL. Though he has an economy of 10.10, the South African pacer has accounted for 12 wickets in eight games.

But barring the two seamers, Mumbai's bowling has disappointed.

#### **PTI** ■ HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori feels that after mastering the art of setting totals, it's time his team brushes up on its chasing abilities as the business end of the Indian Premier League approaches. SRH are currently third in the leaderboard with five wins from eight games. Of the five victories, four have come

batting first. "We have been successful setting totals and now we have to look at how well we are in chasing," Vettori said after the 35-run loss against Royal Challengers Bengaluru here on Thursday night.

RCB posted a challenging 206 for 7 after opting to bat and then restricted SRH to 171 for

For a team that has breached the 250-run mark thrice this season, the target was easily

gettable but a rare failure of the top and middle-order cost the hosts dearly.

"Obviously, disappointing one where we have come from in the last four games; we played some really good cricket and even though we lost, you could see if we had some wickets at the back end, we could have still chased it down," Vettori said at the post-match press conference. Those early wickets broke everything. We were everything. We were confident for the scores we were being able to put up. We though that 206 was a good score, we probably let a few runs in the field. But there was confidence in the group because of past performances. "We also knew it was being set up by the openers and how

good they have played, and



today they had an off day and that's cricket," he said.

The former New Zealand cricketer said there are no easy games in IPL.

"Unfortunately, we didn't get the support through the middle stages. It's a tough loss but we understand every team in the IPL can beat every team. There are no easy games at all," Vettori said. The coach was of the view that the role of an anchor has no significance in high-scoring

"I think the wicket was still pretty good. The guys who

matches.

came off said that it is a surface where you can score on. Anchor role when you are chasing 207 it is hard to come, you obviously need to be aggressive. For some to sit along and play anchor role is a little bit tricky."

RCB all-rounder Swapnil Singh, meanwhile, was relieved after his side snapped its six-match losing streak.

"Experience was good but we won the game that was more important. When you win a game, the tempo in the team changes. It feels good. Last two games we missed by small difference but still long way to go," he said.

Swapnil said they felt the target was enough on this wicket despite SRH boasting of a super-aggressive batting

# Now time to polish chasing abilities: SRH coach Vettori | RR look to maintain winning run

PTI LUCKNOW

 $H_{\text{Royals will}}^{\text{igh-flying}}$ Rajasthan look to continue their winning momentum and consolidate their position at the top when they take on a resurgent Lucknow Super Giants, who would be gunning for revenge at home in an IPL match here on Saturday. Former champions RR have

looked in ominous form this season with seven wins from eight games, and they could be a tough nut to crack for LSG. LSG, meanwhile, too have played some good cricket and are placed fourth with five wins from eight games.

But going into Saturday's match, RR would certainly be the favourites as they have registered a hat-trick of victories after a rare blip against Gujarat Titans.

Assam batter Riyan Parag has been the flavour of the season for RR in the batting department. The youngster reinvented himself and has been the team's highest scorer with 318 runs from eight games.

The return to form of Yashasvi Jaiswal, who was struggling a bit this season, has further strengthened RR's batting. While chasing a 180-run target in the last game against Mumbai Indians, Jaiswal smashed an unbeaten 104 off comfortable nine-wicket win. Jaiswal's return to form is

something RR's opponents should really be worried about given the devastation the youngster and Jos Buttler can wreak at the top of the order.



RR's batting typically revolves around skipper Sanju Samson, who has scored 314 runs so far, and with West Indian Shimron Hetymer capable of hitting top gear, the 2008 IPL champions have a potent lineup. The likes of Rovman Powell and Dhruv Jurel, though, need to contribute more. RR also boast of a potent bowling attack comprising the experienced Trent Boult, Avesh Khan and Sandeep Sharma, whose 5 for 18 against Mumbai Indians has really fired up the side.

The team's spin department is also in the safe hands of the experienced duo of Yuzvendra Chahal and R. Ashwin, although the latter has struggled this season.

Chahal, however, is RR's best bowler with 13 wickets from eight games. LSG, on the other hand, would be seeking revenge after having lost the first tie to RR by 20 runs this season.Besides revenge, LSG in the leaderboard. KL Rahul's side is also on a high after two successive win, but the India player knows the shortcomings in the top order. When Rahul and his opening partner Quinton de Kock are on fire, LSG's batting looks ominous. The problem arises when the opening duo has an off day. That area was, however, covered by Marcus Stoinis in

Chennai Super Kings, where the Australian scored an unbeaten century.

Despite losing Rahul and de Kock early in the chase of

their last game against

210/4, Stoinis played one of the best knocks in this IPL, remaining unbeaten on 124 off 63 balls to hand LSG a sixwicket win. Stoinis' return to form augurs

well for LSG middle-order, where the likes of Devdutt Padikkal, Nicholas Pooran and Deepak Hooda need to take up

Twenty Six Lakhs Fifty

Rs. 13,10,000/

Lakhs Ten

Thousand

#### PTI ■ NEW DELHI

 $F^{ormer\ India\ star\ Yuvraj}_{Singh\ has\ identified\ the}$  swashbuckling Suryakumar Yadav and pace ace Jasprit Bumrah as key to the team's prospects in the upcoming T20 World Cup owing to their ability to "change the complexion of a game" in a

Yuvraj, who was pivotal to India's title triumph in the inaugural edition of the tournament back in 2007, said a good outing for the team to win the cup for the second time while also suggesting that Bumrah needs to be at his "Suryakumar Yadav (is India's

key player)," Yuvraj was

# Yuvraj identifies Surya, Bumrah as key to India's prospects in T20 World Cup



quoted as saying by ICC. He added, "Because the way he plays, he can change the complexion of a game in 15 balls. And he is definitely a surety... for India to win this T20 World Cup, Surya is going to be the key.

I think Jasprit Bumrah is also would like to see a leg-spinner in the squad as well, like Yuzvendra Chahal as he has

been bowling really well.

"But being a batter, I would say Suryakumar Yadav (is the

While dissecting the options of who should be India's first-choice wicket-keeper, Yuvraj expressed satisfaction with veteran Dinesh Karthik's form in the IPL but said if he is not part of the playing XI, there is no point picking the 38-yearold in the squad as the younger Rishabh Pant and Śanju Samson have been playing extremely well. "DK (Karthik) has (Karthik) has been

batting well, but the thing with DK is that the last time (2022) they picked him and the T20 WC was on he didn't get to play," Yuvraj noted.
"If DK is not in your XI I don't

think there is any point in picking him. There is Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson and both guys are in great form and obviously they are younger.

### केनरा बैंक Canara Bank

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#### **OTHER SPORTS**

# Man City beats Brighton 4-0 to stay on course for another Premier League title. Phil Foden scores 2

**AP** ■ BRIGHTON (ENGLAND)

Manchester City chalked up another big win in its pursuit of an unprecedented fourth straight Premier League title, with Phil Foden continuing his career-best scoring season with two goals in a 4-0 thrashing of Brighton on Thursday. Foden's first-half double came between goals by Kevin De Bruyne and Julian Alvarez as City extended its

unbeaten run in the league to 18 games and trimmed the gap to leader Arsenal to one point. Liverpool is two points further back in third after its title chances were damaged by a 2-0 loss at Everton on Wednesday.

City has five games remaining - one more than Arsenal and Liverpool and, on current form, is showing no sign of slipping up in the final stretch that still contains trips to Nottingham Forest, Fulham and Tottenham as well home matches against

Wolverhampton and West Ham. Win all five of those games and City is the champion again. No team has ever won four successive top-flight titles in the history of English soccer.

"I trust my team," De Bruyne said. "All respect to Arsenal and Liverpool, they are amazing ... But we need to do our



"We just need to keep going, not get ahead of ourselves, be humble and work hard?

Since a 0-0 draw with Arsenal at home on March 31, City has won four straight league games and scored 17

goals in the process. Pep Guardiola's team kept up that hot streak without the injured Erling Haaland — the league's joint-top scorer with 20 goals — and that allowed Foden to potentially join the

race for the Golden Boot. It's 16 goals for the campaign and 24 in 48 games in all club competitions this season for Foden, who delivered another clinical display in front of England coach Gareth Southgate at Amex Stadium - seven weeks out from the start of the European Championship.

### World Cup: Deepika ousts Korean rival to make semis; archers confirm four medals

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

Continuing her spirited progress post motherhood, former world number one Deepika Kumari eliminated Korean Jeon Hunyoung to storm into the semifinal, while compound archers continued to shine to assure India a fourth medal in the World Cup Stage 1 here on

Deepika, the three-time Olympian, who has slipped to world No. 142 and qualified as 30th seed in the rankings round, overcame a 1-3 deficit to defeat Jeon 6-4 (27-28, 27-27, 29-28, 29-27, 28-28) in the women's recurve individual quarterfinal.

Having started off with an eight, Deepika lost the first set 27-28, but the 29-year-old continued to improve and levelled the second at 27-all, before taking the third (29-28) by dropping just one point.

From three-all, there was no stopping Deepika who went on to drill in four 10s including two X (closer to centre) from six arrows to make the semis. Deepika, who embraced motherhood in December 2022 and returned to win the Asia Cup gold in Baghdad in

February this year, may have to

overcome two more Korean rivals in

her bid to win a first World Cup

individual gold medal since the Paris

Stage 3 in June 2021. Korean teenager

Nam Suhyeon, who qualified as the



seventh seed, stands in Deepika's way in the semifinal The other half will feature top seed

and 20-year-old world No. 2 Korean Lim Sihyeon taking on Li Jiaman of

JYOTHI, VERMA CONFIRM FOURTH MEDAL: The day began with Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Abhishek Verma advancing into the compound mixed team final. The world No. 2 Indians dropped just

five points to prevail over their Mexican opponents Andrea Becerra and Lot Maximo Mendez Ortiz 155-151. They will face lower-ranked Estonia in the gold-medal clash on Saturday. Jyothi is also a member of the women's compound team, which had entered the final on Wednesday. With Jyothi also securing a semi-final spot in the individual section on Thursday, the World No. 3 and Asian Games gold medallist is in the hunt for a hat-trick of top podium finishes. Overall, Indian archers have qualified in four finals, all in the team events, and are in the hunt for two medals in compound individual events where Jyothi and Priyansh have made the semifinals. The four events where Indian teams

have made the gold-medal round are compound men's, women's, mixed categories and men's recurve.

Having got an opening round bye, the second-seeded Indian pair of Jyothi and Verma started off by producing a flawless 160 out of 160 to knock out the lower-ranked Australian pair of Geogina Graham and Brandon Hawes by eight points.

Next up, 10th ranked Luxembourg's Mariya Shkolna and Gilles Seywert were also no match for the Indian pair, whch dropped just five points from 16 arrows to storm into the semi-finals with a 155-151 win. In the semi-final, the Indians started

on a back-foot after Andrea and Mendez Ortiz capped three 10s and one nine to take the opening end 39-38. But the Mexicans slipped in the next set of arrows as Jyothi and Verma snatched the lead by dropping one point. The Indians then extended their lead by three points in the penultimate round after another slip up by the Mexicans.

Jyothi and Verma sealed the issue with a perfect 40 in the fourth end.

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