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Torrid summer kills 71, mostly in Bihar

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Severe heatwave sweeping Northwest and Central India is increasingly becoming a public health crisis in India with around 71 people succumbing to heat-related illness especially sunstroke since March 1 till date even as Uttarakhand and Jammu region reported forest fires adding complexity to the ongoing situation on Friday.



Smoke rises from a forest fire in Uttarakashi district

File Photo: PTI

The reports of deaths and illness cases due to heatwaves continue to surface every day. Tragically, on Friday, as several pockets of Northwest and Central India turned into a baking pan with temperatures soaring as high as 45 degrees Celsius, it proved fatal particularly to the polling personnel.

The Jammu and Kashmir Disaster Management Authority (JKDMA) which is mobilising resources, including drones, to combat the fires has issued an extreme forest fire risk warning for the coming week as temperatures soar and the dry conditions persist.

Fourteen people, including 10 polling personnel lost their lives to heatwave in the last 24 hours in Bihar alone, while four persons succumbed to sunstroke in Jharkhand.

In the eastern State 1,326 people were hospitalised due to the health risks posed by the intense heatwave. Uttar Pradesh's authorities also reported the death of 13 poll personnel in poll-bound Mirzapur district following fever, high BP. However, Principal of Maa Vindhya Vasini Autonomous State Medical College Raj Bahadur Kamal said the exact reason is yet to be ascertained.

The deceased include seven Home Guard jawans, three sanitation workers, one clerk posted at the Chief Medical Officer's office, one chakbandi adhikaari

(consolidation officer), and one peon in the Home Guard team, according to PTI reports. Meanwhile, the situation in Uttarakhand too is alarming as it has started battling another series of forest fires after a brief lull, affecting over 1,300 hectares and causing significant environmental damage.

Since November 2023, there have been 1,167 forest fire incidents in the State, claiming six lives and injuring five people, as per the officials.

On Thursday, at least 24 people died of suspected heatstroke in India's eastern States of Bihar and Odisha, and the heatwave in the region is expected to continue until Saturday, authorities said. Delhi, which recorded a temperature of 45.4 degrees Celsius on Friday afternoon, reported its first heat-related death this week and is also facing an acute water shortage.

Experts, however, cautioned that death and heat-related illness data might represent only a fraction of the actual impact, highlighting the severe health consequences of humid heat in Northwest

and Central regions. As the intense heatwave wreaks havoc in Bihar, where temperatures soared to 47.1 degrees Celsius in Buxar, the State Government has shut down schools and educational institutions until June 8 and has initiated ex-gratia payments to the families of the deceased.

Till mid-May, the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) had reported 32 confirmed and 28 suspected heatstroke deaths, emphasising the severe health risks posed by the extreme temperatures.

On May 22, two individuals succumbed to suspected heatstroke in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan's Kota, adding to the staggering 16,344 suspected heat stroke cases reported since March 1, with 486 cases documented on that single day.

In the absence of correct data, the number of deaths and cases of illness due to the extreme heat events are not known. For instance, the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences has reported 6,751 heatwave deaths between 2009 and 2022. In contrast,

the NDMA recorded 11,090 deaths in the same period. India has been experiencing a blisteringly hot summer, and a part of Delhi recorded the country's highest ever temperature at 52.9 degrees Celsius this week, though that may be revised with the weather department checking the sensors of the weather station that registered the reading.

While temperatures in Northwestern and Central India are expected to fall in the coming days, the prevailing heatwave over East India is likely to continue for two days, said the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The deaths of 10 people were also reported in the Government hospital in Odisha's Rourkela region on the same day, authorities said, prompting the State Government to suggest residents against outdoor activities between 11 am and 3 pm when temperatures peak.

In Rajasthan, the Government on Thursday announced that five people had died from heatstroke and added that reports about a

Last-phase elections in State today



6 LS & 42 Assembly constituencies to go to polls

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Six Parliamentary constituencies and 42 Assembly segments under them in nine police districts of Mayurbhanj, Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Cuttack Rural, Jagatsinghpur, Puri and Cuttack along with 110 booths

of Niali and Salipur Assembly segments will go to polls in fourth and final phase of the 2024 elections in Odisha on Saturday.

The voting will be conducted in 10,882 booths at over 8,000 different locations. Out of the total booths, 21 per cent are sensitive. Adequate security arrangements have been made for the conduct of the polls in a free and fair manner.

Senior officials of the

Odisha Police on Friday informed that around 36,000 manpower, including 126 companies of CAPF, 86 platoons of Odisha Armed Police and 20,500 civil police personnel, would be deployed during the polling. One to half a section CAPF would be deployed in all sensitive booths.

As per the arrangement, there would be 100-per cent utilisation of CAPF in booth duty-related works. The

CAPF personnel would be deployed in 2,280 critical/vulnerable booths, senior officials said.

Apart from this, there is one Police Observer of the ECI for each Parliament constituency. Besides, there is a Special Police Observer for the State.

EVM Strong Rooms at 13 locations have been established and are being guarded round-the-clock by CAPF and SAP in a two-tier security arrangement.

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EVM toppling case: Jagdev's bail plea rejected

PNS ■ KHORDHA
The Khordha Additional District Sessions Judge-II on Friday rejected the bail plea of Chilika MLA and Khordha BJP MLA



the High Court.

candidate Prashant Jagdev, who is arrested on the charge of toppling an EVM during the third phase of polling in the State.

Jagdev's bail plea was rejected during the second hearing. Jagdev's lawyer Pitambar Acharya and 40 other lawyers advocated for the saffron party leader. Now, Jagdev may move

Acharya levelled some serious allegations against police by saying that Jagdev was treated like a criminal follow-

ing his arrest. Jagdev was ill-treated and tortured by police following his arrest. He was even made to sit on the floor at the police station and was not served with food and water.

Acharya further alleged that police flouted all the rules and regulations and made sure that Jagdev would not visit other districts for election campaigns.

"Prashant Jagdev is fully innocent. The way police chased and arrested him like a criminal without any FIR is highly condemnable. Police

had no substantial evidence when he was arrested," said Acharya.

"The Presiding Officer was pressurised to lodge the FIR. Jagdev was forwarded to court at 12.30 am. As per the provision in the Supreme Court and the CrPC, police are bound to comply with Section 41 (2) if the punishment is likely to be less than seven years. He was to be given bail from the police station itself. The drama which was created amid the ongoing elections is meant to affect the polling in other districts," he added.

4th phase of polls in State 125 CAPF companies to be deployed

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A total of 125 companies of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) would be deployed to ensure smooth and peaceful voting during the fourth and final phase of Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the State on Saturday (June 1).

Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Nikunj Bihari Dhal in a Press meet here on Thursday said the highest

number of 22 CAPF companies would be deployed in Baleswar district followed by 20 in Jajpur.

He said that over 99.61 lakh voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in the fourth phase of the elections.

Among them, over 50.88 lakh are male while the number of women voters is around 48.72 lakh and the number of third-gender

voters is 6,087.

The CEO said six Parliamentary constituencies of Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Mayurbhanj and Jagatsinghpur and 42 Assembly segments under these Parliamentary seats will go to polls in the last phase of the elections in the State.

Elaborate arrangements have been made for smooth voting to be held in 10,882

polling centres while 14 booths will be entirely managed by women, he said.

More than 70,000 polling staffs will participate in the election work in this phase.

A total of 460 candidates are in the fray in the last round of elections. Among them, 394 candidates are contesting the Assembly polls and 66 are in the fray in the six Lok Sabha constituencies.

Puri cracker blast: 2 more die; toll rises to 6

PNS ■ PURI

The death toll in the cracker explosion during Chandan Yatra in Puri rose to six after two more persons succumbed to their injuries on Friday.

The office of the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) said that the Puri Collector has taken steps for payment of Rs 4 lakh each towards ex-gratia assistance to the next of kin of each deceased person.

At present, 24 patients are undergoing treatment in different hospitals of the State and the State Government is

monitoring the situation, the SRC office said in a release.

Several devotees had sustained burn injuries after crackers exploded during 'Chapa Khela' of the Holy Trinity in Narendra Pokhari as part of Chandan Yatra in Puri on May 29.

The incident occurred when sparkles from exploded crackers fell on a pile of live crackers on the Devi Ghat side of the pond. Scores of devotees had gathered there to watch the water sports in the holy pond. Many devotees jumped into the pond to save their lives.

'Tobacco takes a toll of 8 million per yr globally'

Strategy needed to save youths from its use: Experts

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Tobacco use is a leading cause of 14 types of cancer and other severe health impacts, claiming 8 million lives globally each year. Young people are particularly vulnerable to tobacco's harmful effects due to peer pressure, said experts at a recent webinar titled "Protecting Children from Tobacco Health Harms," orga-

nized by the People's Cultural Centre (PECUC). They also highlighted the critical need for joint efforts to combat tobacco use.

The event, held on the occasion of the World No Tobacco Day, brought together civil society representatives, youth ambassadors and health professionals to discuss strategies for reducing tobacco-related health risks. Secretary, PECUC, Ranjan Kumar Mohanty, giving the welcome address, said there is a need to formulate a strategy to protect the children and youth from

the clutch of tobacco use.

Radiation Oncologist at Panda Clinic in Cuttack Dr Ranjit Kar stated that tobacco contains 60,000 ingredients capable of causing cancer, lung infections, low birth weight in babies, gangrene, and skin problems. He emphasized that cancer particularly affects young people who use tobacco or related products. Dr Kar stressed the importance of educating children and young people about its health risks. He also called for a ban on the branding of tobacco products.

Chairperson, OSCPCR,

Mandakini Kar participated in the webinar and emphasized that mass awareness drives in schools, colleges, and communities, along with a ban on tobacco advertising at sell point, would be effective measures in addressing tobacco use and its associated health risks.

State president, Ecosavers youth network, Stuti Ranjan Pradhan emphasized the need for focused action against tobacco use and called for joint efforts to prevent its health hazards. Cancer survivor Sachikanta Das urged the youths to avoid tobacco.

In city 11 members of pipe theft gang held

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Commissionerate police have arrested 11 members of an inter-State gang, which was involved in stealing iron pipes from the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.

According to police, the gang used to steal pipes from rural areas in Khordha, Rayagada, Ganjam, Kandhamal and Cuttack districts where the water pipeline work of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Department was going on.

They were transporting the stolen pipes in trucks to places outside the State where pipe melting work is done. They used fake challans for the purpose. As of now, they have sold

pipes worth about Rs 1 crore. "During investigation, we found that there are 15 members of the gang. We have arrested 11 and the rest members will be nabbed soon," city DCP Prateek Singh said.

He said the main accused Sudhir Behera is a resident of Chandaka. He was identifying the spots where pipeline works were going on and theft could be done easily. He then arranged transport and workers to cut the pipes. "Every member had a different role. Some forged the documents while others arranged the labour. Two transporters, Ramesh Chandra Sahu and Sandeep Agarwal, also worked with them and helped in transportation," the DCP added.

UCCIL to hold 'Resurgent Odisha-24' from Aug 30

Industry experts, investors, producers, processors, retails, policy makers to join

SUGYAN CHOUDHURY ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Utkal Chamber of Commerce and Industry Limited (UCCIL) will organise a three-day programme entitled "Resurgent Odisha-2024", from August 30 to September 1 here.

The event to be held in co-operation with the Government of Odisha and associations like FICCI, CII, ICC and a few others will be a gateway to India's growing sectors like metal, minerals, critical minerals and mining, defence and aviation, agriculture and food processing, fishery and animal husbandry, automobiles and petroleum, power and energy, IT and AI, pharma and medi-



cal, plastic and petrochemicals, apparels and textiles, banking and insurance, blue economy and marine business, containers and closures, education and training, engineering, handicrafts, infrastructure, real estate, transport and logistics, hospitality, tourism and many other segments.

Industry experts, investors, producers, processors, retails and policy makers will join and interact on the occasion, said UCCI president Bramhananda Mishra. The UCCIL has in-

ited several countries, their embassies, delegates and a few of their business establishments to be country collaborators and to showcase the products, technologies etc. to a target audience on a vibrant platform. They will showcase their products and participate in various panel discussions, CEOs round tables, buyer-seller meets, sideline meetings such as B2B, B2G, B2C etc. They will also make sectoral presentations and join knowledge sessions, seminars, and

cultural shows etc. Countries like the Netherlands, UK, Indonesia, Vietnam have conformed to lend their presence on the grand occasion. Negotiations are going on for inviting USA, Germany, China, Japan and Brazil, informed president Mishra. Prominent among others present in the Press meet were Prabodh Mishra, Tareni Mohanty, Sapna Swain, Dr Sanjeev Mahapatra, Ashok Sharda, Narayan Kumar, Srihari and LC Pattnaik.

On city outskirts Bar dancer found dead in pool of blood

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A girl was found dead under mysterious circumstances at Shivsakti Nagar under the Pahala police station on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar on Friday.

The deceased was identified as Ruchi (name changed), who hailed from Chandigarh in Punjab.

She was working at a dance bar in Cuttack Road. Her body was recovered when it was lying in a pool of blood by a police team. Some other girls had informed the caretaker of

the building as Ruchi did not open the door for long in the morning. The caretaker had informed police about the incident.

As per initial reports, around 25 girls were staying in the building at Shivshakti Nagar. Prima-facie, it appeared to be a case of suicide as Ruchi's room was locked from inside.

Police said the chats, mobile call records and other social media accounts of the deceased would be examined. Besides, after availing the postmortem report, the reason behind the girl's death would be cleared.

Attack on State BJYM chief Demo held before Brahmapur SP office



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The Ganjam district Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) on Friday staged a demonstration in front of the Brahmapur SP's office against the attack on BJYM State president Abhilash Panda allegedly by BJD supporters at Ghanteswari Mandal of the Chandbali constituency in Bhadrak district.

The agitators alleged that despite assurances by police, no significant action has been taken. A day has passed since the attack on the BJYM president; yet the main accused and two others are still at large, leading to suspicions of political pressure influencing police responsiveness.

They alleged that the ruling party is attempting to disrupt peaceful elections through intimidation, transforming the State into a hub of political violence akin to Bihar and West Bengal. This unrest is seen as a substantial threat to the State's peace.

The BJYM warned that if the administration continues to ignore these issues, they would intensify their movement in the coming days.

Among others, Ganjam BJYM president Siba Shankar Nayak, State secretary Tutun Patra, district general secretary Ratnagarbha Saraswati, Mahila Morcha general secretary Rina Vidusmita and Ganjam district BJP president Subash Sahu were present.

SRC confirms 5 sunstroke deaths in State

Issues advisory amid heat wave forecast for 5 more days

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Amid the prevail heat wave conditions in Odisha, Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Satyabrata Sahu on Friday issued an advisory while confirming five deaths due to sunstroke in the State. While one death each has been confirmed in Baleswar, Dhenkanal, Mayurbhanj, Subarnapur and Balangir districts, the SRC also mentioned about 12 suspected heatstroke deaths in Sundargarh and another six in Jharsuguda. "Postmortem is being conducted to ascertain the exact cause of these deaths," he added.



Advisory:

- Heat is a major health concern for general public exposed to it and vulnerable people – infant, elderly, pregnant women and sick people.
- People should take precautionary measures for hot weather while going outside during peak hours of the day from 11 am to 3 pm.
- Avoid prolonged heat exposure.
- Wear light-weight, light-coloured, loose, cotton clothes.
- Cover your head, use a wet cloth, hat or umbrella while going out during peak hours.



- Drink sufficient water even if not feeling thirsty to avoid dehydration.
- Use ORS, homemade drinks like lassi, torani (rice water), sugarcane juice, lemon water, buttermilk, to re-hydrate the body.
- Caution workers to avoid direct sunlight during the peak hours.
- Schedule strenuous jobs to cooler times of the day.
- Increase the frequency and length of rest breaks for

- outdoor activities.
- Pregnant workers and workers with a medical condition should be given additional attention.
- Please do miking advising people on heat wave precautions. Keep hospitals in readiness. Advise no work during 11 am-3 pm.
- Ask all buses to carry drinking water, ORS and ice cubes with them. >>Ask people to use shoes, chappals and umbrella and carry water.

Early detection of blood cancer key to 'fight disease'



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Early detection of blood cancer is a key to fight the disease as treatment in the form of stem cell transplant has significantly improved the survival rate, an expert said at a programme organised at the Institute of Medical Sciences and SUM Hospital here on Wednesday.

India ranks third in the world in terms of reported cases of blood cancer after the United States and China with around 1 lakh people getting diagnosed with a form of the disease like leukemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma every year, Prof (Dr) Priyanka

Samal, Head of the department of Hematology, Hemato Oncology and Bone Marrow Transplant at the hospital, said.

The programme was organised ahead of the World Blood Cancer Day observed globally on May 28.

Prof (Dr) Samal said the various types of blood cancer had divergent subtypes, symptoms and causes requiring different treatments with Leukemia being India's most common type of blood cancer accounting for over half of all cases.

The IMS and SUM Hospital, she said, was equipped with state-of-the-art technology for the diagnosis and

management of all types of blood cancer, she said, adding it offered a wide range of diagnostic services including advanced imaging and laboratory tests to accurately identify the stage of the disease.

"The treatment options available in the hospital were tailored to the individual patient's needs which included chemotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted therapy and stem cell transplant," she said.

She said that the hospital had been conducting bone marrow transplantation since 2019 and 50 patients had undergone autologous and allo-

genic transplantation. Prof (Dr) Ashok Kumar Mahapatra, eminent neurosurgeon and SOA University's Principal Advisor (Health Sciences), Prof (Dr) Lalit Kumar Meher, senior professor in the medicine department and Prof (Dr) Rachita Sarangi, Additional Dean (Examination Cell) also addressed the event attended by many blood cancer patients.

Prof (Dr) Mahapatra said around 15 lakh people worldwide were diagnosed with the disease every year. In India, a blood cancer patient was diagnosed every five minutes, he said.

In Sundargarh 16 persons die of suspected heatstroke in 24 hrs

Victims include daily wage earners, truck drivers

NALINI SAHU
■ BHUBANESWAR

As many as 16 people have died and many others have fallen sick after they suffered from suspected heatstroke in Sundargarh district since Thursday afternoon.

While 14 people died on Thursday, two more succumbed to the excessive heat conditions on Friday, reports

from Sundargarh said.

Twenty-three persons were undergoing treatment at the Rourkela Government Hospital, informed Sundargarh ADM Ashutosh Kulkarni.

Yet another 10 patients have been referred to the Hi-Tech Medical College and Hospital in Bhubaneswar for better treatment after their conditions worsened.

"Through the night, there were two deaths. As of morning, the death tally rose to four. At least eight people were brought dead on Thursday. Steps are being taken to conduct their autopsy in the presence of po-

lice. We will ascertain the reason of the deaths after postmortem," said the ADM.

"Not all the patients are from the labour class. Some of them were at home; yet they experienced drowsiness and vomiting. Yes, we will adhere to strict rules of not doing labour work in the restricted hours," he said.

Unofficial sources from Jharsuguda said a few truck drivers in the district died due to heatstroke. Police have sent the bodies for postmortem.

In Odisha, the temperature is hovering around 47 degrees Celsius at many places.

B'pur Mayor campaigned in Baleswar



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

Brahmapur Mayor and Ganjam District BJD Women Cell president Sanghamitra Dalai proceeded to Baleswar along with BJD Zonal Women Wing president Mamata Bisoi for campaigning for the party candidates ahead of the June 1 elections. They appealed to vote for BJD candidate for Baleswar Assem-

bley seat Swarup Das and Lekhasri Samantsinghar for the Lok Sabha seat, by visiting people door to door.

On the occasion, Dalai created awareness among voters of Baleswar about various welfare projects of Nabinbabu as stated in election manifesto, including free electricity up to 100 units, inclusions of middle class citizens in Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana and pension for

the Mission Shakti women after 60 years.

Chairman, Baleswar Municipality Sabita Kumari Sahu, Councillor Ward No. 4 Salima Bibi, Sagarika Das wife of MLA candidate, Manaswini Bisoi, Suresh Tripathy accompanied Dalai in the campaigning. They urged the voters to make Naveen Patnaik Chief Minister of Odisha for the record sixth time.

INBRIEF

BRAHMAPUR LIONS CLUB HOLDS DIABETES CAMP
Brahmapur: The Lions Club of Brahmapur organised a free diabetic neuropathic detection camp at Park Street here on Thursday in which 28 patients, mostly senior citizens, checked their blood sugar levels by noted surgeon Dr E Padmanabha Rao. The patients were happy to receive an array of helpful inputs to control diabetes. Noted social worker Lion P Dharma Rao and Lion S Das coordinated the programme. Ananda Rao of Zyds Medica drew the blood samples. Locals expressed their gratitude to the Lions Club for such humanitarian activities.

B'PUR VARSITY: TRIPATHY NEW PG COUNCIL CHAIRMAN
Brahmapur: The Berhampur University Vice-Chancellor has appointed Physics Professor Sukanta Kumar Tripathy as the Chairman of Post Graduate (PG) Council of the university for a period of two years with effect from June 1 in addition to his own duties. Prof Tripathy would take charge from his predecessor Prof SK Baral.

TPSODL A 'GREAT PLACE TO WORK'
Brahmapur: TP Southern Odisha Distribution Limited (TPSODL) has been certified as a 'Great Place to Work'. This prestigious certification is valid from May 2024 to May 2025. The Great Place to Work certification is awarded following a comprehensive assessment of workplace culture, employee satisfaction and trust.

TPSODL SAFETY AWARENESS WITH NUKKAD NATAKS
Brahmapur: TP Southern Odisha Distribution Limited (TPSODL) has planned more than 140 Nukkad Nataks during this financial year across its entire licensed area of operations. The

Social worker provides water to cattle

PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI

A social activist has started an initiative to protect stray cattle during the severe heat wave by setting up water troughs in different places so that the cows can have access to drinking water.

The ponds have dried up due to the intense heat. The cows which used to depend on the ponds for drinking water are facing a great difficulty. Wherever there is little water, it is contaminated and not fit for consumption. Animals that drink it suffer from various diseases.

To avoid this situation, social worker Niranjan Biswal of Kanchana under Khallikote block in Ganjam district has



taken his innovative initiative with the help of students of the Government Advanced High School. Biswal, a science teacher, bought some water wells with his own salary and placed them at different places in the village to provide drinking water for the cattle.

Many animals and birds are benefited by Biswal's initiative. His work has been highly appreciated by locals.

Farm house, tree felling in reserve forest NGT asks N'garh DM to form panel for spot visit

RAJESH BEHERA
■ BHUBANESWAR

The National Green Tribunal (NGT), Eastern Zone Bench, Kolkata, on Thursday issued a notice to the State Government, besides the Collector, Nayagarh, to form a committee comprising the Collector himself, the DFO, Khurda and a senior scientist of Odisha State Pollution Control Board for a spot visit to the Ranapur reserve forest on a complaint of massive felling of trees and submit a re-

port.

Notably, the direction was made by the NGT following environmentalist, Srikant Dash of Odhagaon moved the green tribunal alleging that one, Swaraj Mohanty and his spouse, Rangeen Mohanty, denuded abundant trees under Ranapur reserve forest in Nayagarh and constructed a farm house along with digging a pond for fish farming and poultry farm that affected the environment and natural diversity. He lodged complaints in this regard at NGT against 12 respondents, stated Akhand, the lawyer of com-

plainant Dash.

Dash alleged that as per Forest (Conservation) Act, no non-forestry activities or construction work can be carried out on a forest land. But here, the accused by violating the Forest (Conservation) Act, constructed the Swastik farm-house, dug a pond for fish farming and also carried out a poultry farm by denuding trees at Akhuapadar revenue village under Ranapur tehsil. The forest land encroacher allegedly bungled lakhs of rupees in the form of financial assistance from the Government under various schemes, including

poultry farm and fish farming.

He urged the NGT to take steps in this regard as the matter pertains to violation of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and also involves other environmental issues.

Acting on the matter, the NGT put on notice the State Environment Forest and Climate Change (MOEF&CC) Department, Union Environment Ministry, Secretary, Revenue Department, SPCB, DM and SP, Nayagarh and Tehsildar, Ranapur along with the duo encroachers, Swaraj Mohanty and his spouse, Rangeen.



company has successfully hosted a series of 61 Nukkad Nataks from January to May, reaching around 25,000 individuals across 61 villages and panchayats. This initiative, which commenced last year, aims to enhance safety awareness among the people of Odisha.

'IDFC FIRST BANK A CLASS APART'
Bhubaneswar: A path-breaking new research benchmarks reasonableness of service charges levied by banks across India. The study, authored by Dr Ashish Das, Professor, Department of Mathematics, from the Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay, was commissioned by MoneyLife Foundation. According to Dr Das, this report is a holistic assessment of banks. "We are proud to share that the report says IDFC FIRST Bank comes out as a class apart vis-à-vis other banks in the private sector," he said.

CAMBRIDGE RELEASES MARCH 2024 EXAM RESULTS
Bhubaneswar: The International Education group at Cambridge University Press & Assessment (Cambridge) has recently announced the results of its March 2024 exam series in India. More than 15,000 students from 400 schools across the country have received Cambridge IGCSE and International AS & A Level results, making it the largest ever March series held by Cambridge in India.

Abu Dhabi Odia Samaj organises 'Utkarsha'

SUDHIR MISHRA ■ BALANGIR

Utkarsha, a vibrant Odia cultural programme organised by the Odia Samaj in Abu Dhabi, was held on May 26. Organised by the Odia community to connect to Odisha's culture and to introduce Odia children abroad to the rich heritage and traditions of Odisha. The event showcased a blend of traditional and modern arts, reflecting the cultural diversity of Odisha.

Sanjay Sudhir, Indian Ambassador to the UAE, was the chief guest who inaugurated the event by lighting the ceremonial lamp and offering flowers to Lord Jagannath. He emphasized the importance of Odisha's art and culture in his speech.

Over 400 Odias from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and other parts of the UAE attended the event. President of the Odia Samaj Abu Dhabi, Manas Udghata, expressed his happiness at pre-

serving and promoting Odia culture and heritage outside Odisha.

General secretary Kartik Singh thanked all Odias for their enthusiastic participation. Cultural secretary Jitendra Mishra thanked all participants for their support, and vice-president Ravi Dash hoped that such entertaining programmes would continue in future also.

On the occasion, "The Prabasi Utkarsha", a magazine containing short stories, poems and essays by local children and writers, besides drawings by young artists, was unveiled.

A special attraction was the fashion show, which featured traditional, modern, and tribal attire from Odisha, coordinated by in house mentor and famous fashion designer Ramakrishna Pattnaik. Another highlight was the serving of traditional Odia cuisine.

On this occasion, traditional folk dance "Goti Pua" was presented while singers Deepti Rekha and Satyajit gave their soulful performances.

'Many couldn't vote as their names missed from list'



NIMAIN CHARAN SAHU
■ SAMBALPUR

After four days of elections in Sambalpur, the district BJP revealed how senior BJP leader Dr Pramod Rath, his entire family and the neighbours

could not vote in the general election, as their names were absent in the voter list.

BJP spokesperson Manas Baxy said in a Press conference, "The old voters didn't find their names in the list. These people had already voted 5-6 times in previous elections but had to return from the polling booth."

The process before elections, in which the Booth Level Officers reach out to the families and

include new voters or delete deceased voters from the voter's list, was not maintained. He wanted to know through which process did they remove the long-time voters.

"In the summer months, when the temperature of the city is above 45 degrees, after elections Tata Power resorts to its old habit of cutting power without informing the citizens. In the daytime, the power cut frequency is increasing, during

nights too, they are cutting powers. People are suffering from heatwaves and this power cut. The Government is showing its true skin after the election in the constituency," Baxy said. There were poor arrangements in the booths, people were standing in scorching sunlight, and there was no proper lighting system in the polling booth. One can't even see the symbols on EVM machines, he added.

In Paralakhemundi Cash, gold looted by armed miscreants

PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI

A group of miscreants barged into the residence of one Shyam Sundar Patnaik on Thursday in Biswanath Nagar in Paralakhemundi town and decamped with cash and gold ornaments in broad daylight.

Reports said four men entered into the residence of Patnaik when he had gone to office. They terrorised his wife and minor son by brandishing sharp weapons and fled from the spot with Rs 3 lakh in cash and gold ornaments

worth lakhs.

Getting information, the Adarsh Nagar police rushed to the spot with a sniffer dog and began an investigation. The police have lodged a case and detained two persons for questioning.

Of late, such incidents have surged in the Biswanath Nagar area. Earlier, some looters had broken the side-box of a scooter and looted Rs 80,000.

Birthday today Dillip Dashsharma: Man dedicated to social service

GOBINDA CHANDRA SUBUDHI

The Utkal Sammilani Mancheswar Industrial Estate Branch was established in 2006 on Utkal Divas. Since its inception, Dillip Dashsharma has been the president, and I have had the honour of serving as the secretary. Dillipbabu was also the founder-president of the branch. A man of determination, what he sets his mind to, he accomplishes. On March 28, 2002, he became a member of Utkal Sammilani. At that time, the Utkal Sammilani Central Office and the Bhubaneswar branch were working in Bhubaneswar.

After joining, Dillipbabu faced his first election for the

Utkal Sammilani Bhubaneswar Branch on August 25, 2003, where senior advocate Gangadhar Panigrahi was elected president for a three-year term. Although Dillipbabu was eager to participate actively, the Bhubaneswar branch was not very active. Central Utkal Sammilani president, S. Basanta Kumar Panigrahi, and general secretary, Er Amarendra Das, supported him in forming a new unit of Utkal Sammilani at Bhubaneswar, named Utkal Sammilani Mancheswar Industrial Estate Branch. This branch was inaugurated by Biswabhusana Harichandan, the then Minister of Odisha and the current Governor of Chhattisgarh.

During the planning phase of the Mancheswar Branch,

Dillipbabu once expressed his concern about the lack of respect for statues of eminent personalities in Bhubaneswar. He noted that on Utkal Divas, birthdays, and death anniversaries, these statues were often neglected. I suggested we demand action from the Government, but he insisted that we should first take initiative ourselves. Consequently, we began garlanding these statues on significant occasions, a practice that has now been adopted by the Odisha Government's Culture Department.

Under Dillipbabu's leadership, our branch has undertaken numerous activities, including organising the Odia Olympiad Examination and publishing



various books such as "Utkal Prabhata," "Voice of Red Cross," "Voluntary Blood Donation" and "Bande Utkal Janani." We also regularly publish the "Utkal Sammilani Samachara Patrika." Dillipbabu is very firm in his views on State border security and the State anthem. I have known Dillipbabu for 34 years, and

together, we have been active members of several organisations, including the Utkal Sammilani, the Odisha State Bar Council, the High Court Bar Association, the Bhubaneswar Bar Association, the Indian Red Cross Society, and the Odisha Voluntary Blood Donors' and Motivators' Association.

Dillipbabu holds several key positions; he is the founder president of Utkal Sammilani Mancheswar Industrial Estate Branch and the Odisha Voluntary Blood Donors' and Motivators' Association, vice president of Bhubaneswar Bhasani Samiti and VSS Nagar Durga Pujya Samiti, and general secretary of the Utkal Sammilani Central Development Committee and

Gangadhar Meher Jayanti Committee. Additionally, he serves on the Executive Committee of the Indian Red Cross Society, Police Commissionerate Branch, Bhubaneswar, and the Harischandra Baxsipatra Jayanti Committee. During his time as a PG student, he was the seminar secretary of the Commerce Department at Dhenkanal College, and later, he served as a national service volunteer in Nehru Yuva Kendra, Dhenkanal.

Among Dillipbabu's many success stories, his contributions to voluntary blood donation stand out. In 1999, he joined the Indian Red Cross Society, Odisha State Branch as Life Member and noticed the low rate of voluntary blood donation, which was only 10%

at the time in our State. Determined to improve this, he founded the Odisha Voluntary Blood Donors' and Motivators' Association in 2002 with the support of the Indian Red Cross Society, Odisha State Branch and the State Blood Transfusion Council, Odisha. Through his efforts, the organisation established branches in all districts, significantly increasing the rate of voluntary blood donation. Now the voluntary blood donation in our State is nearly 70%.

In 2005, under his leadership, a mega blood donation camp was organised on Utkal Divas, collecting 2002 units of blood in one day. Dillipbabu was the Chairman of the mega camp. Personally, he has donated blood more than

100 times. When asked about the number of times he has donated blood, he humbly says he has no record. When questioned why, he often responds with an analogy: "Can you tell me how many coconuts and bananas you have offered for worship? Can a Christian remember how many candles they have burned before the Lord, or a Muslim recall how many chadars they have placed on a Dargah? If they do not keep count, why should I?"

Today, on the occasion of Dillipbabu's birthday, I salute and congratulate him for his dedication and selfless service to humanity.

(Secretary, Utkal Sammilani, Mancheswar Industrial Estate Branch, Bhubaneswar; Ph. No-9438672311)

Lok Sabha Secretariat prepares to welcome members of 18th LS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha Secretariat is ready to welcome Members of the eighteen Lok Sabha. Several measures have been taken to welcome the members and ensure their seamless registration. Secretary — General, Lok Sabha, Utpal Kumar Singh, conducted an inspection of the preparations today and is monitoring the arrangements on day to day basis. With a view to reducing the paper work and making the registration formalities of Members seamless, the regis-

tration process of the newly elected Members shall be done through an online integrated software application. Members would not be required to sign multiple physical forms with various branches. This would save a substantial amount of time of Members. The integrated software application not only captures bio profile data of MP but also includes solution for issuance of Parliament Identity Card based on Facial and Biometric Capturing and solution for issuance of CGHS card to Members & Spouses. With a view to minimize

complications arising out of the multi-desks approach of the past, all formalities relating to the registration, nominations, transit accommodation and a host of other matters are proposed to be got completed with minimum movement of Members. The Secretariat has made arrangements from 2 p.m. on 04.06.2024 and the process will remain operational from 8 am to 8 pm on 5th to 14th June, 2024 including on Saturdays and Sundays. Earlier, the registration of newly elected Members used to take place in the old Parliament House building

(now Samvidhan Sadan). This time, the Secretariat has made such arrangements in the Parliament House Annex. As many as 20 digital registration counters with as many computers, 10 each in Banquet Hall and Private Dining Room (PDR), have been set up in the Parliament House Annex. These counters have been set up for end-to-end registration process. Each counter has been equipped with desktop with double sided screen, printer cum scanner, biometric, and a tab for getting signature. There are separate counters for clicking photographs and

for facial recognition. Additionally, arrangements have also been made for simultaneous opening of SBI bank account, issuing of permanent Identity Card, Central Government Health Scheme Card to the newly elected Members on the spot. While welcoming the Members, the Secretariat will provide each Member with a set of publications relating to the Constitution of India, Rules, Directions and some other useful publications in hard copies. Besides, a few other publications will be provided to Members in soft version.

A waiting area has been provided for family members and guests of the MPs at the Banquet Hall in the Extension to Parliament House Annex. In case of more number of guests arriving, the spillover will be seated in a nearby Committee Rooms. A total 70 Officers/Officials have been trained to man the registration Counter in shifts. The Liaison Officers (Los) have also been imparted training to make data entry through the Tabs while the MPs are waiting in the designated waiting area (Banquet Hall in EPHA building). The intent is to minimize the

registration time for Hon'ble MPs while they are in Parliament Complex for the purpose of registration. Videos on Foundation stone laying ceremony of Parliament Building, Inauguration of Parliament Building, Multimedia Devices, have been kept ready for playing in Banquet Hall, Committee Room 1 & 2 EPHA for the Members. A team has been assigned the task to keep close tab on Election Commission website on the day of declaration of results and to enter the contact details of successful candidates in near real time.

The team using a software application would be able to check whether the successful candidate is a new MP or re-elected MP. The same information would be shared with Liaison Officers (Los) through software application to make further data entry of their tour programs. The dashboard would be available for the stakeholders to get updated information in near real time. An endeavor has been made to deploy LOS from the same region/language to facilitate members and ensure faster communication.

INDIA Bloc going to get clear mandate on June 4, claims Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday said it is due to its positive campaign, the nyay guarantees and giving priority to protecting the Constitution that the INDIA Bloc is going to get a "clear and decisive" mandate on June 4. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh, party's media and publicity department head Pawan Khera and AICC social media department head Supriya Shrinete released a compilation of 272 questions the party asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the last 72 days titled '72 Days, 272 Questions, 0 Jawab? Bhaag Modi Bhaag'. Addressing a press conference along with Khera and Shrinete, Ramesh said the Congress' campaign was positive and result of the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra. He recalled that on January 23 this year in Guwahati, Rahul Gandhi for the first time announced the five nyays - Yuva Nyay, Nari Nyay, Kisaan Nyay, Shramik Nyay and Hissadaari Nyay. In Ranchi on February 5, Gandhi talked about 'hissedari nyay' and the party's guarantees under it, Ramesh said. On February 23 in Ambikapur, Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge announced the guarantees



under 'kisaan nyay'. He pointed out on March 7 in Banswara, Kharge and Gandhi released the 'yuva nyay' guarantees. On March 13 in Dhule, Gandhi announced 'nari nyay', while Kharge announced the 'shramik nyay' guarantees in Bengaluru, he said. Ramesh also recalled that Rahul Gandhi carried the copy of the Constitution to public meetings and stressed the Congress' guarantee to protect social justice, get a caste census done and remove the 50 per cent cap on reservation. "We believe that due to our campaign, 'paach nyay pachchees guarantee' and the priority we gave on protection of the Constitution as stressed by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and

Priyanka Gandhi, we are going to get a clear and decisive mandate on June 4," Ramesh said. During the news conference, Ramesh also said the Congress made several complaints of model code violations by the BJP, including 14 against the PM, to the Election Commission of India. "We respect the EC but sadly impartiality was not seen during the course of the campaign," he said. Khera said the Congress campaign derailed Modi's "propaganda" and he did not tell the country what his government achieved. Shrinete said the BJP campaign on social media was old and repetitive with no traction among the youth, while the Congress social media campaign worked in a big way among the youth.



RSS chief Bhagwat pays tributes to Ahilyabai Holkar on birth anniversary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Friday remembered queen Ahilyabai Holkar on her 300th birth anniversary and said she was an ideal ruler who provided good governance and worked for the welfare of every section of society. In a video statement, Bhagwat said she lived a simple life despite being a queen and cared for the weak and backward. "This year marks the tercentenary of Punyashlok Devi Ahilyabai Holkar," he said and added that the 'Punyashlok' title is given to rulers who free their subjects from all kinds of deprivations and sorrows. "She was widowed. Despite

being a single woman, she did not only manage her big kingdom but also made it bigger and provided good governance," the chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) said. She was, in fact, one of the ideal rulers of her time, he said and added that she was a symbol of women's capabilities. Bhagwat said Holkar built industries so that her subjects could get employment. "She built them (industries) so well that Maheshwar's textile industry is still running today. It provides employment to many people," he added. The RSS chief said Holkar cared for the weak and backward sections and had also eased the tax system. "She cared for farmers. Her kingdom was a good kingdom in every way," he said.

"Today we talk about the empowerment of women. Devi Ahilyabai has set before us an ideal example worth emulating. Despite being a queen she lived a simple life," he said. Bhagwat said the work she did was special in many ways. She ran the state efficiently and had friendly relations with all the rulers of that time, he said. She was known for her strategies that prevented attacks on her kingdom. At its Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha held in Nagpur in March, the RSS had announced it would organise programmes to mark the 300th birth anniversary of Holkar. "Throughout this year, efforts will be made everywhere to remember her. This is a matter of great joy. I wish all the best to such an effort," Bhagwat said.

Associate of fugitive gangster detained in US



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

An alleged associate of fugitive gangster Himanshu Bhu is understood to have been detained by agencies in the United States, officials said on Friday. The agencies are trying to ascertain the identity of the detained man before any move for his return to India is initiated, they added. It is suspected that Sahil Kumar, who allegedly runs an extortion racket with Bhu from abroad and is wanted by the Haryana Police in a number of cases, has been detained by the US authorities, the officials said. Once the identity of the detained man is established, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), as

Interpol India, will coordinate with the US authorities to seek his return, which would be possible after an order from the courts of that country, they said. Kumar is facing an Interpol Red Notice that requests the law-enforcement agencies of all the 196-member countries to detain a fugitive if spotted in their jurisdiction. The information is then passed on to the member country that had sought the issuance of the notice. This process is followed by a move to get the accused extradited or deported after the legal formalities. Kumar allegedly used passports with a fake identity and address to flee India. Cases related to extortion and threats are registered in Haryana against Kumar and Bhu, the officials said.

LS polls 2024: Political rivals mock each other via medley of barbs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

'Vish guru', 'anubhavi chor', 'do shehzade'. As Election 2024 hurtles towards result day in a medley of 'mangalsutra, mujra, mutton, machli' and other barbs, these may sound like character names from Hindi comics of yore. Instead, these are the mocking, sometimes vicious monikers given by political rivals to each other. Here is a sampler from the just concluded Lok Sabha campaign that got progressively more heated, quite like the summer sun scorching large swathes of India, with leaders from across the spectrum using political speak to sharpen their verbal knives with epithets, sarcasm and more: **'Puppet king' of 'tempo billionaires': Rahul attacks Modi** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi called Prime Minister Narendra Modi a 'puppet king' of 'tempo billionaires' over his remarks on the Congress receiving 'cash loaded in tempos' from 'Adani and Ambani'. **'Do shehzade': Modi's jibe at Rahul, Akhilesh** 'Do shehzade' (two princes) have come together for the politics of appeasement Modi said at a poll rally in Uttar Pradesh. He didn't take any names but it was an apparent attack on Congress' Rahul Gandhi and SP president Akhilesh Yadav,

'Modi the 'vish guru' Congress leader Jairam Ramesh lashed out at Modi over his speeches at election rallies, saying the language he used suggests he is not a 'vishwa guru' but a 'vish guru'. 'Vishwa guru' refers to a world leader. 'Vish' means poison. **'Mandi me bhav': Supriya Shrinete targets Kanganana Ranaut** Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete posted a picture of actor Kanganana Ranaut, the BJP's candidate from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh and captioned it "Mandi me bhav kya chal raha hai". The post faced massive backlash for being derogatory, prompting Shrinete to remove it from all her social media accounts. **'Modi 'sva-ghoshit bhagwan'** Rahul Gandhi mocked Modi over his not "born biologically" remark by saying an ordinary person would have been taken to a psychiatrist had he/she uttered the statement. His colleague Jairam Ramesh went on to dub the prime minister 'sva-ghoshit bhagwan' (self-declared god) while attacking the BJP over the Agnipath scheme. **'Modi's 'anubhavi chor' barb at Arvind Kejriwal** In a veiled dig at the Delhi chief minister during a TV interview, Modi said an 'anubhavi chor' knows how to clear his tracks. This was in response to a question on the absence of a cash trail

in the alleged liquor policy scam in Delhi. **'INDIA bloc performing 'mujra' for its vote bank** Modi accused the INDIA bloc of "enslavement" and performing "mujra" for the Muslim vote bank and vowed to thwart alleged attempts to rob Dalits and backward classes of reservations by the opposition grouping. **'The four Ms, 'mujra, mangalsutra, machli, mutton'** A video of RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav eating fish and Rahul Gandhi and Lalu Prasad consuming mutton allegedly during the month of Sawan was splashed in a big way by the BJP. Modi said opposition parties were displaying their Mughal mindset and teasing the majority community by sharing the videos to consolidate their vote banks. He also accused the INDIA bloc of performing 'mujra' for the Muslim vote bank. At a rally in Rajasthan, the prime minister claimed the Congress' election manifesto promises to snatch away Hindu women's 'mangalsutra' and redistribute it to 'infiltrators' and 'those who have more children' - alluding to Muslims. The issue was seized by opposition leaders, including Congress chief Kharge and RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, slamming Modi for the remarks.



'Modi's 'buffalo' jibe against Congress At an election rally in Gujarat, Modi attacked the Congress over the issue of inheritance tax, saying if someone has two buffaloes, the opposition party will take away one if it wins the Lok Sabha polls. Hitting back at the PM, Lalu Prasad of the RJD - a constituent of the INDIA bloc - said Modi will be given a camel. **'Jhoothon ka sardar' Modi** Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, speaking in Haryana, sought the BJP's response on its promise of two crore jobs each year, Rs 15 lakh in everyone's bank account, and doubling of farmers' income. He then called the

PM 'jhoothon ka sardar' or the king of liars. **'Amul babies' Rahul and Priyanka** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma labelled Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi 'Amul babies', saying people in the state would rather see 'tigers and rhinos in Kaziranga' than watch the siblings at their election campaign events. **'Bhagwant Mann 'kagazi CM'** Addressing a rally in Punjab, Modi called AAP leader and Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann a 'kagazi CM' - chief minister only on paper. **'Bada pappu', 'chhota pappu': Kanganana Ranaut mocks Rahul Gandhi, Vikramaditya Singh**

The actor referred to Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Vikramaditya Singh, who is also her rival in Mandi, as 'bada pappu' and 'chhota pappu'. She also called the Congress "a disease" and "termite" left by Britishers. **'INDIA bloc 'congregation of scamsters'** Modi said at Bihar rally that the INDIA bloc was a "congregation of scamsters" and its leaders stood for corruption, appeasement politics and a "perverted anti-Sananan mindset". **'Job-eater' BJP** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee dubbed the BJP "job-eater" after the Calcutta High Court scrapped the recruitment of nearly 26,000 teachers in the state. Banerjee accused the BJP of "conspiring" to stall the TMC government's decision. **'Congress: 'mureed' of Pakistan** Modi called the Congress a 'mureed' (disciple) of Pakistan and said Islamabad was rooting for Rahul Gandhi as India's next PM. **'Samapt party' and 'kaun Congress' - Rajnath's dig at SP-Congress** Addressing a rally in Uttar Pradesh, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the SP and the Congress will be known as 'Samapt Party' and 'Kaun Congress' after the results are announced. **'Shehzada' insulted maharajas: PM**

on Rahul Gandhi At a public meeting in Karnataka, Modi accused 'shehzada' Rahul Gandhi of insulting India's rajahs and maharajas but remaining silent on atrocities committed by the nawabs, nizams, sultans, and badshahs for the sake of appeasement politics. **'Low-level citizen' Rahul Gandhi** PV Anwar, an independent MLA supported by the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in Kerala, stirred a controversy after he called Rahul Gandhi a "low-level citizen" and suggested he should undergo a "DNA test". **'Tribal-hater' Modi** Arvind Kejriwal alleged at a Jharkhand rally that "PM Modi hates tribals" as he had put the country's 'tallest tribal leader', former CM Hemant Soren, behind bars. **'Completely immature' Rahul Gandhi** Miffed by Rahul Gandhi's remarks wondering why Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan was not jailed by the BJP government at the Centre, unlike two other CMs of opposition-ruled states, the veteran Marxist called the Congress leader 'completely immature'. He also said Rahul Gandhi "should not go back to his old name" - referring to former CM V S Achuthanandan's remarks a decade ago calling the Congress leader an 'Amul Baby'.

Centre asks States to be vigilant about unusual bird deaths

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Centre has asked all States to be vigilant for any unusual deaths amongst the domestic birds and poultry, and share the information with the Animal Husbandry Department immediately so that public health action can be initiated as per the national action plan for Avian influenza. A joint advisory issued on May 25 by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying stated that in 2024, four states -- Andhra Pradesh (Nellore), Maharashtra (Nagpur), Kerala (Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Pathanamthitta districts), and Jharkhand (Ranchi) -- have already reported outbreaks of Avian influenza in poultry.



"Given that Avian Influenza (H5N1) infection is highly pathogenic and has the potential to be transmitted to humans, it is imperative to take all necessary measures to minimize and prevent the spread of this infection," the joint advisory said.

The Avian Influenza virus (bird flu virus) is normally maintained in circulation in nature among mainly migratory birds and is known to cause outbreaks among domesticated poultry birds probably due to spill over events when migratory birds come in con-

tact with poultry, it said. The H5N1 is the main Avian influenza virus that has caused multiple outbreaks among poultry globally. Both types of viruses (HPAI and LPAI) may occasionally affect other mammalian species, including humans. Human infections are primarily acquired through direct contact with infected poultry or contaminated environments, the joint advisory said. Although there have been sporadic reports in humans and outbreaks among domestic and wild birds, since March 2024, there is a global concern over Avian influenza outbreaks in cattle from multiple states in the US that have resulted in one reported human case of H5N1, the joint advisory stated. Avian influenza outbreaks from India in poultry have been reported since 2006 and have

been jointly investigated by the Animal Husbandry and Health Departments (IDSP, NCDC). The states and Union Territories have been advised to orient all the health care workers/private practitioners on case definitions, signs and symptoms of Avian influenza. The states have been asked to enhance information, education and communication tools among the general public regarding preventive measures such as minimizing the handling of dead or sick birds with bare hands and without adequate respiratory protection and following food safety measures while consuming products of animal origin. Besides, they have been asked to be prepared for all preventive measures like stockpiling of an adequate number of antiviral drugs (Oseltamivir), PPE, masks etc.

CWC paints troubling picture of India's water reservoir capacity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Amid sweltering heat, the Central Water Commission (CWC) on Friday painted a troubling picture of India's water reservoirs, indicating a significant decline in water levels in India's 150 main reservoirs plummeting to concerning depths. Currently, these reservoirs stand at a mere 23 per cent capacity, a staggering 77 per cent decrease from last year's levels at this time. The total live storage available is reported at 41.705 billion cubic meters, a significant drop from the previous year's 53.832 BCM and below the normal storage level of 44.511

BCM. The situation is particularly dire in regions like the heat-stricken northern states of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Rajasthan, where reservoir levels have plummeted to 30 per cent of total capacity, down from 38 per cent last year. These parts of the country are witnessing severe heat wave conditions with some pockets even crossing 45 degree Celsius. Similarly, in the eastern region, comprising states like Assam, Jharkhand, Bihar, reservoirs are at a mere 28 per cent of capacity, compared to 25 per cent last year. The western region, including Gujarat and Maharashtra, has seen a decrease to 24 per cent of capacity, while the south-

ern region, encompassing Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu, is experiencing a severe shortage at just 14 per cent of capacity, significantly lower than both last year's 24 per cent and the normal storage of 19 per cent. Despite some reservoirs maintaining near-normal levels, deficiencies are reported in others. Basins such as Ganga, Indus, Brahmaputra, and Narmada have better-than-normal storage levels. However, deficiencies are noted in basins like Krishna, east flowing rivers between Pennar and Kanyakumari, and the Cauvery basin. Highly deficient storage is observed in the east flowing rivers between Mahanadi and Pennar basins.

TMC tries to defend its citadel in last phase of LS polls

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

An uncanny lull prevailed in the air as Bengal prepared to go for the seventh and final phase of elections to nine parliamentary constituencies considered a stronghold of the Trinamool Congress which presently holds all the seats up for grabs.

Elections will be held to Basirhat, Barasat, Dum Dum, Mathurapur, Jaynagar, Diamond Harbour and Jadavpur in North and South 24 Parganas in that order and Kolkata North and South constituencies.

"No one is talking ... there is a strange silence ... Allah knows what will happen," says Moinuddin from Falta Diamond Harbour while Rabi Santra from Jadavpur says "some netas are talking communal but the questions is whether the people are taking it." Albeit, silence is often most piercing to the politicians' ears, more so to those in power, say pundits.

True perhaps 2024 is different from 2019 or 2021. While much of the sharp communal polarisation that

had been the hallmark of 2019 and 2021 (Assembly) elections has been blunted to a reasonable extent — save in some pockets — with corruption and women-emotive Sandeshkhali issues taking the center stage what tends to keep all sides particularly the TMC and Opposition BJP on the tenterhooks is the re-emergence of the Left as a reasonable force with a frightful capability of springing some surprises — or in the least slicing away big chunk of votes — in at least three or four seats, local experts say.

A total of 1.63 crore voters - 83.19 lakh men, 80.20 lakh women, and 538 belonging to the third gender are likely to exercise their franchise in 17,470 polling stations to be manned by 960 companies of central forces and a large posse of state police.

Some of more famous names out of the 124 contestants contesting in the seventh phase are TMC's Diamond Harbour nominee and sitting MP Abhishek Banerjee who besides being the party's general secretary and a future Chief Ministerial candidate is also the

nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

The two-time TMC MP who is pitted in a tri-cornered contest against CPI (M)'s students' leader and son of the soil Pratik Ur Rahaman and BJP's Abhijit Das hopes to win the seat by 3 lakh margin on account of his creating Diamond Harbour a "model constituency" a narrative often rejected by the Left that calls it "a model laboratory of violence and cold horror."

Besides him TMC leader in Lok Sabha is Sudip Bandopadhyay is contesting from Kolkata North seat against BJP nominee Tapas Roy a former minister who quit the party to join the saffron outfit just before the polls started and Congress veteran and sitting Rajya Sabha member Pradip Bhattacharya.

A third such seat is Dum Dum where the TMC veteran and three-time MP Saugato Roy is contesting in a fierce battle against CPI(M) stalwart Sujan Chakrabarty and BJP's Silbhadra Dutta, once a Mukul Roy protégé.

Kolkata South that sent Mamata Banerjee to Parliament for six



TMC supporters during a roadshow of party candidate from South Kolkata constituency Mala Roy for the last phase of Lok Sabha elections in Kolkata PTI

times before she became the Chief Minister too presents a keen contest between sitting TMC NP Mala Roy and BJP's Debashri Chowdhury a former Union Minister and Raiganj MP --- who according to her own party men has been given a punishment posting a la Dilip Ghosh.

Though both of them are confident of winning CPI(M) is putting its money on its dark horse Saira Shah Halim a niece of actor

Naseeruddin Shah and daughter of a former Army Lt General besides being the daughter in law of longest serving Bengal Assembly speaker HA Halim. Though a traditional TMC stronghold which has the history of sending Shyama Prasad Mukherjee to Parliament too, Kolkata South has a good presence of minority voters that might be a source of encouragement for Marxists.

All eyes could also be set on the Basirhat seat which has a good 45 percent minority votes. But more importantly Basirhat catches attention on account of Sandeshkhali being its one of the seven Assembly segments.

Considered a microcosm of the broader electoral battle this time round drawing national attention due to allegations of atrocities on women and land grabs by local TMC leaders Basirhat could present a tricky picture this time round.

The BJP which led the Sandeshkhali battle and iced the cake by nominating Rekha Patra, a local victim-turned-protestor the TMC has fielded a former MP Haji Nurul Islam once black-listed by his own party for fanning communal violence. The Left on the other hand has fielded Nirapada Sardar a former three-time MLA from Sandeshkhali.

Basirhat also gains importance because the BJP considers it to be a prestige seat with Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally speaking to Patra over phone inspiring her for the upcoming fight. Basirhat is also important for

State Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari because Patra is his hand-picked candidate and her victory or defeat could make or break much of Adhikari's importance in State politics.

While from the adjoining Barasat seat TMC's sitting MP Kakoli Ghoshdastidar is locked in a tri-cornered contest against BJP and Forward Bloc, down South from Jadavpur an elite constituency CPI(M)'s young Turk Srijan Bhattacharya is contesting against TMC's Sayani Ghosh and BJP's Dr Anirban Ganguli. A traditional Left stronghold Ghosh who replaced sitting TMC MP Mimi Chakrabarty is getting strong challenge from her opponents.

The Jadavpur seat is historically significant for the TMC, as it was from here that a young Mamata Banerjee first made her mark by defeating CPI (M) veteran Somnath Chatterjee in 1984. It is also important because former Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee lost his last electoral battle from Jadavpur Assembly seat in 2011 before bidding politics a goodbye.

Eight seats in Bihar to go to polls in last phase, 134 candidates in fray

PTI ■ PATNA

More than 1.6 crore voters will decide the fate of 134 candidates in the final phase of Lok Sabha elections in Bihar on Saturday when eight seats will go to the polls.

Several high profile candidates are in the fray for the eight seats — Patna Sahib, which covers the state capital, Patliputra that comprises the rural outskirts, Arrah, Karakat, Jehanabad, Buxar, Nalanda and Jehanabad.

Stakes are particularly high for the BJP in the final phase as it seeks to retain five of these seats, which made up for more than a quarter of its state-wide tally of 17.

Union minister RK Singh is aiming at a hat-trick from Arrah, where his principal challenger is Sudama Prasad, a sitting MLA of the CPI(M) Liberation which has expanded its footprints in the state rapidly ever since it allied with the RJD and the Congress ahead of assembly polls and came up with best ever performance of 12 seats.

Arrah Lok Sabha seat comprises six assembly segments, including Agiaon, a reserved seat, where by-poll will also be held simultaneously. The by-election has been necessitated by disqualification of CPI(M) MLA Manoj Manzil following conviction in a murder case by a local court.

The Left party's candidate in the assembly by-poll is Shiv Prakash Ranjan, a former student leader, while the NDA has fielded Prabhunath Prasad of JD(U), the runner up of 2020 Vidhan Sabha polls, when he lost to Manzil by a margin of over 48,000 votes.

In Patna Sahib, veteran BJP parliamentarian Ravi Shankar Prasad is aiming at a second consecutive Lok Sabha term. The ex-Union minister's principal challenger is Congress spokesperson Anshul Avijit, whose mother Meera Kumar is a former Lok Sabha speaker and late maternal grandfather Jagjivan Ram had been a deputy PM.

In Patliputra, RJD president Lalu Prasad's eldest daughter Misa Bharti is trying her luck for the third time. The BJP MP Ram Kripal Yadav, a former close aide of Prasad and ex-Union minister, is aiming at a hat-trick. The BJP also hopes that AIMIM



Poll officials collect election material for the last phase of Lok Sabha polls in Patna on Thursday PTI

candidate Mohd Farooq Raza, for whom party chief and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi has also canvassed, would cut into RJD votes.

In Nalanda, the home district of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who heads the JD(U), sitting MP Kaushlendra Kumar hopes to retain the seat for the party for a record fourth term. The principal challenger is Sandeep Saurav, a sitting CPI(M) MLA and former JNU students' union leader.

Karakat is witnessing a multi-cornered fight which is being most talked about because of Bhojpuri superstar Pawan Singh, who is contesting as an Independent.

Singh entered the fray after having earlier turned down a BJP ticket from Asansol in West Bengal. The move has led to his expulsion from the party.

Upendra Kushwaha, a former Union minister who heads the Rashtriya Lok Morcha, had won the seat in 2014 but lost it five years later upon quitting NDA. He is hopeful of wresting the seat back following return to the BJP-led coalition.

The CPI(M), which has a strong presence in the area, has fielded Raja Ram Kushwaha, a former MLA and farmer leader. The pitch has been queered further with the AIMIM fielding Priyanka Chaudhary, a zila parishad member.

In Sasaram, the BJP has dropped two-term MP Chhedi Paswan to field Shivesh Ram,

Fate of 62 poll candidates in Himachal to be sealed

PTI ■ SHIMLA

After a two-month-long campaign, the fate of 37 candidates for four Lok Sabha seats and 25 nominees in six Assembly bypolls in Himachal Pradesh would be sealed in voting machines on June 1.

The high-pitched campaign in the hill state, filled with rancour and insinuations, ended with two rallies of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at Badsar and Mandi and a roadshow of Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra at Solan on Thursday. Leaders and workers of political parties swarmed across the state for door-to-door canvassing in a last-ditch attempt to woo the voters.

Besides the elections to the four Lok Sabha seats of Hamirpur, Mandi, Kangra and Shimla, bypolls are being held in six Assembly segments — Sujanpur, Dharamshala, Lahaul and Spiti, Barsar, Gagret and Kutlehar.

The six Assembly seats fell vacant following the disqualification of Congress rebels for defying a party whip to vote in favour of the government during the budget. These legislators voted for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Rajya Sabha polls on February 29, later joined the saffron party and are contesting the bypolls on BJP tickets from their respective Assembly segments.

Targeting the rebels, Chief Minister Sukhvir Singh Sukhu dubbed them as "bikau" (sold out) and "kale naag" (snakes) and called upon the voters to punish them.

Besides holding big rallies, leaders of political parties also held "nukkar" (corner) meetings, especially in the constituencies where Assembly bypolls are being held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha election.

Due to the Assembly bypolls, local issues dominated the campaigning.

BJP's Lok Sabha candidate from Mandi and Bollywood actor Kangna Ranaut and Congress candidate and state Public Works Minister Vikramaditya Singh hogged the limelight due to controversial and pungent remarks made against each other.

Sukhu attacked the BJP throughout the campaign for allegedly hatching a conspiracy to topple the democratically-elected government in Himachal Pradesh through money power and asserted that the Congress will defeat the saffron party with the power of people.



Polling officials leave with EVMs and other election materials for their respective polling booths on the eve of the seventh and last phase of Lok Sabha elections in Shimla PTI

The BJP made the yet-to-be implemented promises of the Congress government in the state, "Modi teesri bar" (Narendra Modi as the prime minister for a third time) and the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya its poll planks. It also dubbed the Congress as "anti-Ram" for refusing the invitation for the consecration ceremony of the temple.

The Congress hit out at the Agniveer scheme for short-term military recruitment, alleged a threat to democracy and horse-trading by the BJP during its campaign. It also talked about unemployment and inflation in the country.

Apple was another issue that was raised from different perspectives by both the Congress and the BJP.

The Congress has included the demands of apple growers for 100 per cent import duty on their produce, abolition of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on farm inputs and equipment, loan waiver and subsidies on fertilisers and pesticides in its manifesto, while the BJP maintain that it has introduced several schemes and initiatives for the apple farmers, such as Kisan Samman Nidhi and solar fencing.

Three seats in Jharkhand's Santhal Pargana all set to vote

PTI ■ RANCHI

Over 53.23 lakh voters will decide the fate of 52 candidates in three Lok Sabha seats in the Santhal Pargana region of Jharkhand, where polling will be held in the last phase on Saturday, officials said.

Tight security arrangements have been made for conducting the elections to Dumka, Rajmahal and Godda seats in the fourth phase of Lok Sabha polls in the state.

Nineteen candidates each are in the fray in Dumka and Godda, while Rajmahal has 14 contestants. Over 26.23 lakh women and 33 persons belonging to the third gender are among the candidates eligible to exercise their franchise.

Over 2 lakh electors are first-time voters in the age group of 18-19, while 439 electors are aged over 100 years.

Jharkhand Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), K Ravi Kumar told PTI, "All preparations have been made to hold free and fair elections to the three Lok Sabha constituencies. In view of hot weather conditions, instructions have been issued to officials concerned to ensure basic facilities at all polling stations."

He said that voting will start at 7 am at 6,258 polling stations and will continue till 5 pm on Saturday.

Critical booths have been identified where central forces would be deployed, besides other areas. Polling parties have been dispatched to their respective locations, he said.

Of the total polling stations, 241 will be managed by women and seven by persons with disabilities (PwD). Webcasting facilities will be available in all polling stations, he said.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP bagged Dumka and Godda seats while the JMM secured the Rajmahal seat.

In Dumka, BJP candidate Sita Soren, sister-in-law of jailed former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren, has locked horns with INDIA bloc's Nalin Soren, who is Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MLA from Shikaripara assembly seat.

Sita Soren, a three-term JMM legislator, joined the BJP in New Delhi on March 20, citing "isolation" and "neglect" by the JMM since the death of her husband Durga Soren in 2009.

The Rajmahal Lok Seat is likely to witness a triangular fight as JMM's Borio legislator Lobin Hembrom is contesting the seat as an Independent candidate against sitting JMM MP Vijay Hansdak.

As per the seat-sharing agreement in the ruling alliance in Jharkhand, the Rajmahal seat went to JMM, which has fielded its sitting MP Hansdak. The BJP has pitched its former state president Tala Marandi from the seat. The Godda seat is set for a direct fight between the BJP's three-time MP Nishikant Dubey and Congress's Pradip Yadav as the INDIA bloc candidate.

Section of voters in Ara demand inclusion of Bhojpuri language in Eighth Schedule

PTI ■ ARA (BIHAR)

A section of voters in the Ara Lok Sabha seat in Bihar are nursing a hope that after the elections, efforts will be made by the new dispensation to include Bhojpuri language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

Bhojpuri is spoken in several parts of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Ara, the headquarters of Bhojpur district, is a historic city and culturally-rich region, and Bhojpuri the dominant language of this region earlier known as Shahabad, which includes current districts of Buxar, Rohtas, Kaimur and neighbouring areas.

Flavours of Bhojpuri could be heard in election campaigning too in this key constituency, where sitting MP from BJP and Union minister R K Singh is seeking a hat-trick of win.

CPI(M) Liberation candidate Sudama Prasad is fronting the fight for INDIA bloc in Ara.

On the last day of the campaigning on Thursday, an e-rickshaw carrying BJP flags



and a poster bearing images of Singh and Prime Minister Narendra Modi went around in the streets of Ara, playing two campaign songs in Bhojpuri.

One song has a refrain 'R K Singh sahab rachhe, Ara mey itihaas' (R K Singh has scripted history in Ara), while the other one has the jingle -- 'R K Singh ji sahib ji ke phir se jitaib ji, bhari bahumat se inka vijayi banayib ji' (Will make R K Singh win again, make him emerge victorious with huge mandate).

Inclusion of Bhojpuri in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution has been a long-standing demand of the population speaking this old language.

Om Prakash Rai, who ran one

of these campaign rickshaws in sweltering heat of Ara in the last few weeks, when asked about this demand and his expectations from the next government, says in chaste Bhojpuri, "Bahut biswas ba ki pura hoi...R K Singh se bhi ummed ba' (I am very positive that it will happen, have expectations from R K Singh too)."

The demand for inclusion of Bhojpuri in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution is so prevalent here that whether one speaks to people at Ara Junction or in streets near the famous Ramna Maidan, they all want it to happen, sooner than later.

"Aathwin Anusuchi mey hamka aapan bhasa chahin' (We want our language in the Eight Schedule)," is a common refrain from one hears from local people.

Patna-based author and film critic Prashant Ranjan, who hails from East Champaran, says, inclusion of Bhojpuri on the Eighth Schedule will be a welcome step and also have a positive impact on its entertainment industry where sleaze has tainted its traditional image as a beautiful language.

Stage set for polling in 13 LS seats of Punjab

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Polling for 13 Lok Sabha constituencies in Punjab and the lone Chandigarh seat will be held on Saturday, with INDIA bloc allies Congress and AAP contesting separately and the SAD and BJP also deciding to test the poll waters alone.

Prominent candidates in the fray are four-time MP Preet Kaur, former chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi, three-time MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal and Ravneth Singh Bittu.

The BJP and Shiromani Akali Dal are contesting the Lok Sabha polls on their own for the first time since 1996 while two INDIA bloc parties - the Congress and AAP have fielded their own candidates. The Sukhbir Badal-led party walked out of the NDA in 2020 over the now-repealed farm laws. Besides the Congress, AAP, SAD and the BJP, two other parties — Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) and the Bahujan Samaj Party have also fielded their candidates.

Among the prominent faces, BJP nominee and four-time MP Preet Kaur is seeking re-election from the Patiala parliamentary constituency.

Three-time MP and SAD's Harsimrat Kaur Badal and BJP's Parampal Kaur Sidhu, a former IAS officer, are trying their luck from Bathinda while former CM and Congress candidate Channi and BJP nominee Sushil Rinku are in the fray from Jalandhar reserve constituency.

Former deputy chief minister Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa and BJP candidate Dinesh Babbu are fighting from Gurdaspur.



Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring is contesting against BJP's Ravneth Singh Bittu from Ludhiana.

Radical Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh, who is lodged in Assam's Dibrugarh jail under the National Security Act, is fighting from Khadoor Sahib while former diplomat and BJP nominee Taranjit Singh Sandhu and Congress candidate Gurjeet Singh Aujla are contesting from Amritsar.

Among its candidates, the AAP has fielded five Cabinet ministers — Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal (Amritsar), Laljit Singh Bhullar (Khadoor Sahib), Gurmeet Singh Khuddian (Bathinda), Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer (Sangrur) and Balbir Singh (Patiala).

Congress candidate Sukhpal Khaira is contesting from Sangrur while AAP and BJP candidates Karamjit Singh Anmol and Hans Raj Hans are in the fray from Faridkot seat respectively.

Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) chief Simranjit Singh Mann is contesting from Sangrur seat and Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa, who is the son of Beant Singh, one of the two assassins of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, is contesting from the Faridkot reserve constituency.



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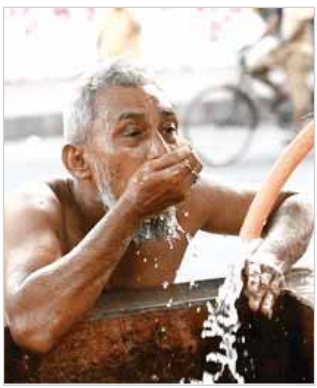
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PAPER WITH PASSION

High and dry

The Delhi Govt is out to fine people wasting water. But is it doing enough at its own end?

Summers in Delhi are particularly harsh due to the combination of extremely high temperatures, hovering around 50 degrees Celsius, and frequent heatwaves that exacerbate the already intense heat. Compounding these problems is the deficiency in civic services, which leaves the residents high and dry. The city's urban heat island effect, where concrete retains and radiates heat, makes the environment significantly hotter. The rural areas in the hinterland, particularly those towards the west, bear the brunt of hot westerlies coming in from the Rajasthan desert. During this season, water shortage becomes a critical issue as demand peaks while supply dwindles, making it difficult for the residents to stay hydrated. Additionally, the high demand for electricity to run air conditioners, coolers and fans often overwhelms the power grid, resulting in frequent power cuts, thus increasing health risks. Summer also brings poor air quality due to dust storms and increased vehicular emissions which, when combined with the



heat, can lead to respiratory problems and other health issues. There are several reasons for Delhi's woes. Though nothing much can be done about the fire raining from the skies, the management of resources such as electricity and water can be done in a better manner. Every year, the Delhi Government blames Haryana for not releasing its share of water, but no one wants to find a long-term solution. Besides, many parts of Delhi, especially East Delhi, lack sufficient green spaces, which are essential for providing shade and cooling the environment. It is a sad commentary on Delhi Government that more than 22 per cent water bodies of Delhi have been stolen.

Earlier records suggest that Delhi had over 1,000 water bodies which served as buffers and provided water and coolness. To address this issue, the Delhi Government has announced a fine of Rs 2,000 on those found guilty of wasting water. So, in a way, the city Government is putting the onus for water scarcity only on its people. Home to over 20 million people, Delhi is experiencing unprecedented water shortages. The rising temperatures have led to increased water consumption, putting immense pressure on the already strained water supply system. Residents are facing erratic water supplies, with many neighbourhoods receiving water only a few hours each day. The fine targets a range of activities considered wasteful, including washing cars with hosepipes, watering gardens excessively and leaving taps open. While the intention is commendable, several factors question its practicality and effectiveness. How will the Government find the culprits and who will define water wastage? Besides, the Government is being harsh on people who are already braving the heat despite electricity and water scarcity. Instead, the Government could have issued a warning for wasting water and arranged for water tankers in areas badly hit by water scarcity. For now, only the weather gods can save the Capital.

PICTALK



Children of a school offer prayers during a 'havan' for relief from the heatwave, in Jammu

India and Bangladesh: A tale of two books



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Two recently published books provide in-depth examinations of pivotal South Asian political landscapes

I have just finished a book pertaining to election-related data in India and another to Bangladesh and its ties with this country. Chambers Book on Indian Election: Facts (Hachette, India) authored by Kingshuk Chatterjee and Surbek Biswas, an academic and a senior journalist respectively, goes beyond statistics. Figures are integrated into a narrative that encompasses the country's political and electoral journey since the time of the British Raj and the elections held during it. Post-Independence, it dwells on the functioning of institutions like the Parliament, State legislatures and the judiciary, placing figures in context of an unfolding account of electoral battles, their results and the underlying political currents running throughout the country. It is a heaven-sent for not only scribes but political party functionaries, activists, poll-forecasters, to name a few, who scramble for data with the advent of elections, and, of course, scholars and researchers, hunting for information at all times for doctoral theses or other projects. Interspersed with the narrative are interesting pieces of not generally remembered information, such as Gian Singh Rarewala being the first non-Congress chief minister of any state in India. He became chief minister of Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU) at the head of a United Front Government on April 22, 1952. It is a book worth keeping on the shelf.

Transformation, Emergence of Bangladesh and Evolution of India-Bangladesh Ties (Knowledge World and Indian Council of World Affairs), is by a distinguished former officer of the Indian Foreign Service, Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty. It traverses a long time-span from the pre-historic period to the present. While providing an illuminating account of the historical circumstances shaping Bangladesh's emergence and cultural, religious, social and political ethos, the narrative contains several avoidable errors. For example, Chakravarty says that Siraj-U-Doula (the last independent nawab of Bengal) was tortured and brutally killed in prison by



Mir Madan, Mir Jafar's son. Siraj was killed on July 2, 1757, under orders from Mir Miran, Mir Jafar's son. Mir Madan fought loyally for Siraj in the battle of Palashi and died in combat.

Again, Chakravarty writes, "The Hindu College in Calcutta came up in 1817 CE and the Serampore College in 1819 CE. The Serampore missionaries also introduced Bengali periodicals and newspapers like 'Deek Darshan' and 'Samachar Darpan', which were vehicles for campaigning against 'Sati'. The Bengali 'Bhadralok' class was created with such activities."

The emergence of the Bhadralok was a much more complex phenomenon. In Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal, J.H. Broomfield has described the Bhadralok as "A socially privileged and consciously superior group, economically dependent on landed rents and professional and clerical employment." The factors contributing most to their rise were the Permanent Settlement (1793), which created a class of zamindars and rentiers, the spread of English education, the expansion of British administration which created opportunities for Indians in the bureaucracy and the establishment of a judicial system, networks of medical administration and engi-



ITS STUMBLES NOTWITHSTANDING, THE BOOK PROVIDES MUCH USEFUL INFORMATION AND INSIGHTS INTO THE EMERGENCE OF BANGLADESH AND THE EVOLUTION OF INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS WITH THEIR STORMY AND SUNNY INTERLUDES

neering services, which led to the rise of the professions. All this deserves mention because Muslim Bhadralok, emerging in the wake of their Hindu predecessors, played an important role in Bangladesh's liberation struggle and its post-independence politics. While the two leading political parties, Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), are led by Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia, both Bhadramahilas (women Bhadralok), the leaders of the organisational layers below them are mainly Muslim Bhadralok. Its stumbles notwithstanding, the book provides much useful information and insights into the emergence of Bangladesh and the evolution of India-Bangladesh relations with their stormy and sunny interludes. It also provides an exhaustive account of Bangladesh's increasingly contentious internal politics. The book's narrative ends before elections to the country's National Parliament on January 7, 2024, which were boycotted by the BNP and which the AL won securing 224 out of the 300 seats in contest. Sheikh Hasina, however, has to grapple with the adverse economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine War and the increasing spread

of fundamentalist Islam in Bangladesh. The first has led to discontent against her Government. The second, which threatens the secularism embedded in Bangladesh's constitution, led to the rise of terrorist outfits resorting to violent acts, the most outrageous of which was the attack on the Holy Artisan Bakery, a restaurant in a posh Dhaka neighbourhood, in which 20 persons, including an Indian, were killed, on July 1, 2016. Sheikh Hasina has squelched the terrorist outfits but has to deal with kid gloves organisations like Hefajat-e-Islam preaching fundamentalist Islam. Her ascent to power for the second time as prime minister in 2009, initiated a continuing friendly chapter in India-Bangladesh relations. Nevertheless, pressures on both countries are many and neither can take things for granted. Chakravarty's narrative is enriched by his ringside view of events both as India's Deputy High Commissioner (1999-2002) and High Commissioner (2007-09) to Bangladesh. His book needs to be read, over and over again, by all those interested in India-Bangladesh ties which, in turn, have an important bearing on South Asian geo-politics. (The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRAGIC BUS ACCIDENT IN JAMMU

Madam — Apropos the news story "21 killed, 47 injured as bus falls into gorge in Jammu," published on May 30, this is my response. Reading about the tragic bus accident in Jammu, where 21 lives were lost and 47 people were injured, is truly heartbreaking. The accident occurred when a bus carrying pilgrims skidded off the road and plunged into a gorge, highlighting once again the perils of road travel in treacherous terrains. The grief expressed by Jammu and Kashmir's Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha resonates with the deep sorrow felt by all. The details are chilling: a failed negotiation of a blind curve, an oncoming speeding car and a catastrophic fall of 150 feet into the gorge. The prompt response by the rescue teams and the efforts to provide immediate medical assistance to the injured are commendable, yet the loss remains profound. This incident underscores the urgent need for enhanced road safety measures and stricter regulations to prevent such heartbreaking occurrences in the future. My thoughts and prayers go out to the affected families.

Arjun Desai | Chandigarh

RBI DIVIDEND BOOSTS GDP

Madam — Apropos the news story "Record RBI dividend at 0.6 per cent of GDP may not be sustained Fitch," published on May 28, this is my response. The above alluring cum enticing and burning news from the stable of RBI that the same has declared record-high super-normal dividend growth by the central bank is simply a win-win situation for both duo viz. Apex Bank of India and the Government of India. Furthermore, the same news by the US (United States) credit rating agency cum giant Fitch Ratings Inc. will give a nitro boost to the economic growth GDP (gross domestic product) of our country. Furthermore, the above-mentioned spectacular news is a source of pride for the RBI, a bourse country Government and its citizens.

Delhi's water crisis worsens



Apropos the news story "Mad scramble for water in several areas as Delhi grapples with a severe shortage," published on May 30, this is my response. The water crisis in Delhi has reached alarming levels, with residents in areas like Chanakyaपुरi struggling to secure necessities. Despite Government measures to curb water use, such as banning potable water

for car washing, the situation remains dire. The sight of people scrambling with empty buckets and climbing atop water tankers underscores the desperation. Deepak Srivastava and Janki, long-term residents, express frustration over the lack of consistent water supply, blaming political parties for neglecting basic needs in favour of electoral gains. The severe heatwave exacerbates the issue, with temperatures nearing 50 degrees Celsius. The Delhi Government's emergency actions, including inspections at car service centres, offer some hope, but the fundamental problem persists. Videos of the crisis shared on social media highlight the stark reality: in 2024, in India's capital, access to water will remain a daily battle for many. This calls for urgent, sustainable solutions from both local and national authorities.

Vihaan Verma | Jaipur

Additionally, the above awesome cum uber-cool news has become a burning topic among both the masses and classes. Moreover, from now on, after enjoying the windfall dividend of the central bank, the Government of India will keep a close tab on RBI stock. Additionally, after giving oh-so-uber cum oh-so-uber supernormal dividend growth, the RBI will again work day and night to deliver more and more windfall dividends to the Government of India. Additionally, the above news has received a red-carpet welcome from both print media and electronic media.

Harminder | Lucknow

PRAGGNANANDHAA'S TRIUMPH

Madam — Apropos the news story "Norway chess: Pragganandhaa claims maiden classical win over Carlsen, takes sole lead," published on May 30, this is my response. Reading about Indian Grandmaster R Pragganandhaa's remarkable victory over world number one Magnus Carlsen in the Classical format is truly thrilling.

This win is particularly significant because it marks the first time Pragganandhaa has defeated Carlsen in this format, after several previous encounters in faster game versions. At just 18 years old, his achievement underscores his incredible talent and positions him as a leading contender in the Norway chess tournament, ahead of seasoned players like Fabiano Caruana and reigning world champion Ding Liren. Pragganandhaa's strategic play, especially using the less-favoured Sicilian Kann opening, demonstrates his deep understanding and innovative approach to the game. Meanwhile, the women's section also showcases the prowess of Pragganandhaa's sister, R Vaishali, who leads her group. This family of chess prodigies is making significant waves in the chess world, promising an exciting future for Indian chess.

Arnav Patel | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Economic growth raises sustainability concerns

As Indians embrace a culture of 'wants' over 'needs,' there's a growing urgency to address the unsustainable patterns of consumption

Over time, India has shown remarkable progress in GDP growth rates. It currently ranks fifth surpassing the United Kingdom in 2022 and with its promising performance, is expected to overtake Japan by 2025.



Amidst the celebration of becoming the fourth largest economy, a worrisome aspect is the rising consumption level of the huge population and its alarming impact on sustainability. Consumption is the driving force behind prospering economic growth. It has a multiplier effect as investors respond to positive consumption by increasing production and hiring more workers, who in turn, spend more, further boosting economic activity. Consumerism is dominating the world and India is no exception indeed. The estimates of average Monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE) according to the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, 2022-23 reveal a 33.5 per cent increase by urban households since 2011-12, reaching ₹3,510, while rural India's MPCE increased by 40.42

per cent to ₹2,008. India's consumption story reminds us of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow (1943), wherein there is a transition from psychological needs comprising necessities to security to esteem and self-actualisation needs. A noteworthy phenomenon of this shift from 'needs to wants' is the unlimited nature of the latter and the subsequent and alarming wastage of resources. High consumption can have alarming repercussions on sustainability and long-term economic and social welfare. Foremost, it leads to resource depletion, which may be non-renewable and therefore irreversible, causing scarcity, higher costs and potential financial instability. Environmental degradation is another externality of excessive consumption which includes pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss and waste production. According to the Central Pollution Control Board, 2020-21 Annual Report, the total quantity of Solid waste generated in the country is 160038.9 tonnes per day (TPD), out of which 79956.3 TPD (50 per cent) of waste is treated and 29427.2 (18.4 per cent) TPD is landfilled. 50655.4 TPD which is 31.7 per cent of the total waste generated remains ironically unaccounted for. Besides, high consumption also leads to increasing use of fossil fuels and products with large carbon footprints, significantly contributing to climate change.

Given large income disparities in India, even the benefits of high consumption are not evenly distributed. While some people and regions may experience significant economic growth, others may be left behind, exacerbating further economic inequality. While at one end consumption is essential for economic growth, at the same time it is threatening long-term sustainability. To ensure that high consumption contributes to sustainable eco-

nomical growth, we need to encourage consumption patterns that are environmentally friendly and socially responsible. This can be achieved through rampant education, incentives and regulations. We need to radically work towards investing in renewable resources to reduce the environmental impact of high consumption. The Government needs to implement policies and regulations that encourage sustainable practices and mitigate the negative impacts of high consumption. This includes environmental regulations, carbon pricing and incentives for green technologies. We also need to develop diverse economic activities that do not solely rely on high consumption levels.

By sensibly managing consumption and prioritizing sustainability, it is possible to achieve economic growth that benefits society while preserving the environment for future generations.

(The author is assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)



KAJLEEN KAUR



FIRST COLUMN

WITNESSING THE DIVINE PRESENCE

There are multiple instances where the Supreme manifests itself



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

I was watching 'pran pratistha' of Lord Rama's Deity in the new temple constructed at the birthplace of the Lord. As the ceremony progressed, I began to notice subtle changes in the Lord's expression; He was coming alive. I was amazed, but I couldn't fail to notice the change as it happened. My experience was corroborated by the sculptor, who made this idol. He admitted that what he had sculpted was a lot different, meaning that the expression he had given was quite sober. By the way, pran pratistha is a transformative act of bringing the idol to life. This manifestation is nothing amazing. God appears even in person. The following five true life stories will exemplify this. The first one chosen is when Lord Krishna appeared as Draupadi was being attempted to be disrobed in the royal court of Dhrtarashtra. Draupadi in desperation prayed for help by chanting — "Krishna, Krishna, Krishna". The Lord appeared and provided endless sarees to save Draupadi from humiliation. The second incident chosen is when Surdasa falls into a ditch, him being blind. He attempted to get out but failed. He called for help, but no one came. The place was deserted. His worshipable Lord knew that His true devotee needed help. He came and saw Surdasa sitting down and singing bhajan completely oblivious of the sorry situation he was in. Lord asked him, "Why are you not trying to get out?" Surdasa replied, "I did and failed. I realised that only you could help me." The Lord gave Surdasa His hand and helped him to come out. There is a famous bhajan when Surdasa implores the Lord not to leave him.



The third incident happened a few years back. A close relative of mine was sitting in a temple near her home deeply engrossed in thought. A babaji appeared in front of her. He spoke to her, "You are greatly troubled by the behaviour of your in-laws. Don't worry. You will suffer a certain disease, he named it, due to the stress caused by it. But it will be cured; will not make you suffer much. Before this relative could react, this person had gone away. That disease did trouble her but came under control soon. This relative is a sincere devotee of God. The fourth example is related to a friend of mine. He is a staunch devotee of God. Over the last five decades, he has made enormous spiritual progress. He is in his late nineties and still going strong. His wife passed away recently after a brief illness. He tried to prevent it by chanting a mantra. He also hoped that she would get an excellent birth next time. As he was overdoing it, God arranged for an aged lady to come to his house. She informed him that his wife would pass away on the fifteenth day. He was shocked. By the time he gathered his wits, she was gone. Was she God Himself or a person chosen by God? The last example is of an American. He had become very rich, but he was neither peaceful nor happy. Intrigued, he had to find the reason. Was material wealth not the solution to all our problems and he had plenty of it? He started visiting various churches but got no satisfactory answer. Disappointed, he decided to come to India - the spiritual capital of the world. Same result here also with bogus gurus trying to manipulate him. Highly frustrated, he was sitting down on a bench on the bank of the Ganges in Haridwar. He was in deep thought when someone tapped him on his shoulder. He opened his eyes and saw a saintly person standing in front of him. He said, "Don't be so sad. Take shelter of God. And the best way is to follow God's instructions as detailed in the bona fide scriptures. Buy a copy of the Bhagavad-Geeta." When he opened his eyes, the saintly person was not to be seen. Can we have similar experiences with God? Yes, we can. God is always quite forthcoming. We just have to qualify for it. How do you do that? It is simpler than what you can imagine. Do spiritual practices, which suit your nature. For example, I do 'darshan' and 'naman', chanting, thanking and praying regularly. Once a certain amount of spiritual credits has been accumulated, God gets active in our lives. (The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

Recycle nutrients to mitigate fertiliser crisis



NANDULA RAGHURAM

Many elements crucial for life on Earth are depleting rapidly due to disrupted biogeochemical cycles caused by human activities

If you think carbon is bad enough, other essential elements that sustain life on Earth are also crossing the planetary boundaries of sustainability, as their natural 'biogeochemical' cycles are broken by human activities. For about ten thousand years before the 'green' revolution, farmers grew crops without fertilisers by combining legume-based crop rotations and livestock farming. Legume crops and some soil microbes fixed atmospheric nitrogen, while livestock manure and urine enriched the soil with nutrients such as compounds of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), potassium (K), sulfur (S), carbon (C) and even micronutrients. But modern cropping in India shifted away from legume-based crop rotations and relies heavily on NPK fertilisers rather than manures, costing the Indian govt over Rs. 2 lakh crores per year in subsidy. As livestock farming moved away from crops and intensified as peri-urban dairies, manure and urine mostly find their way to our ground and surface water bodies. The release of untreated dairy or domestic and other wastes has reduced the Sahibi River in New Delhi to a wastewater drain (Nazafgarh drain), which along with the Shahdara drain heavily pollutes the river Yamuna, apart from releasing noxious gases into the air.

The nutrient cycles have thus become cascades causing nutrient pollution, but the good news is that some pollutants are nutrients in the wrong place and can be brought back. Unfortunately, less than 30 per cent of the fertiliser nutrients supplied as fertilisers are harvested as crop yield and the remaining add to the growing pollution. In water bodies, the accumulation of these nutrients supports unwanted algal growth causing eutrophication and death of fish and other useful aquatic and marine species. This destroys the ecosystem and the livelihoods of people who depend on fishing, tourism and other ecosystem services. In our coastal areas, algal eutrophication progressively causes green tides, brown and eventually red tides and even the accumulation of poisonous species. The reversal of these trends can rebuild water economies and support the livelihoods of millions. Nitrogenous compounds from fertilisers, manures, urine and sewage also cause air pollution as ammonia or nitrous oxide. Ammonia contributes heavily to particulate matter pollution (PM2.5 and PM5) by combining with NOx gases (nitrogen dioxide and nitric oxide) emitted from fuel or residue burning for power, transport industry, or waste disposal. Over a million deaths per year are attributed to PM2.5 alone in India, while some attribute up to 7 per cent of all deaths to PM2.5, as India has the largest number of the world's most polluted cities in terms of PM2.5. These figures call for drastic measures to control air pollution in general and PM2.5 in particular, but it needs not only curbing pollution from fuel burning but also restoring the nutrient cycles in agriculture and waste management.

While a fraction of livestock manure is recycled for cropping in India, urine recycling is nearly nonexistent. If we recycled all the 15 kg per animal per day of manure produced by 200 million cattle, its 5 per cent NPK nutrients amount to 1,50,000 metric tons. This is much more than our average daily fertiliser consumption, which is about 1,37,000 metric tons. Add to this about 3 per cent of nutrients lost from 15-20 litres of cattle urine per animal per day totalling



WE ALREADY KNOW THAT AT LEAST HALF OF THE CURRENTLY RECOMMENDED FERTILISER DOSES CAN BE REPLACED WITH FARMYARD MANURE WITHOUT ANY LOSS OF CROP YIELD

1,20,000 metric tons. Technologies and best practices are available from Europe and elsewhere to maximise nutrient retention and recycling from manure and urine. We already know that at least half of the currently recommended fertiliser doses can be replaced with farmyard manure without any loss of crop yield. It not only saves a lakh crores but also reduces the environmental footprint of fertilisers, manures and agriculture itself. Similarly, over 55,000 metric tonnes of nutrients equivalent to 40 per cent of our fertiliser consumption are lost daily from over 150 billion litres of wastewater produced per day in India. This is because of our abysmally low wastewater treatment capacity of about 27 per cent. Most sewage treatment plants (STPs) exist only in the cities and only a few of them work. Fortunately, some metropolitan cities like Delhi and Hyderabad are rapidly expanding their STP capacity to become 100 per cent wastewater treatment capable in a year or two and some other big cities in India are following suit. However, they vary in their efficiency of nutrient removal, which must be addressed immediately to ensure that the purpose of treatment is fully realised and that the treatment plants become resource plants by selling the recovered nutrients. There is a growing emphasis worldwide on preventing the wastage of nutrients and recycling them. The most notable among them is Target 7 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity at its 15th Conference of Parties in 2022: It seeks to "Reduce pollution risks and the negative impact of pollution from all sources by 2030, to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services considering cumulative effects, including (a) by reducing excess nutrients lost to the environment by at least half, including through more efficient nutrient cycling and use". In Europe, where extensive recycling

of livestock manure and urine is already in practice, the new buzzword is the so-called RENURE (recovery of nitrogen from manure) policy of the European Commission (2024). As such proposals are debated to ensure that they contribute to overall sustainability objectives in the European context, it is important to note the policy attention that the recovery and recycling of nutrients has garnered. In the meantime, a Swedish fertiliser company, Ragn-Sells, has patented a process to recover nutrients from wastewater and convert them into industry-grade fertilisers and spun off a company easymining.se to launch it in Europe within a year. If India can set up such units attached to our STPs, they can hugely reduce the economic and environmental costs of earlier fertiliser technologies, generate green jobs. Delhi alone produces about 3330 Million Litres per Day (MLD) of wastewater, far over the installed and operational treatment capacities of the city's 38 STPs (CPCB, 2021). The Delhi Government has set its target to achieve 100 per cent wastewater treatment by 2025 and increase the reuse of treated wastewater from 12.5 per cent to 60 per cent with the proposed utilisation of 197 MGD, 112 MGD and 10 MGD treated sewage for drinking purposes, irrigation and rejuvenation of water bodies respectively (CPCB, 2021). We conducted some studies on the wastewater nutrients and their recovery/recycling potential in several STPs of the national capital, aided by the University's memorandum of understanding with the Delhi Jal Board. They were funded by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) under the Global Wastewater Initiative and the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management. Our studies found that the current level of removal of phosphatic nutrients in various STPs of Delhi varies between 35-74 per cent and 14-93 per cent for nitrogenous nutrients. Except for the Akshardham STP, which oper-

ated at the higher end of the range, most of the other STPs we studied were closer to the lower end of the range, indicating the huge scope to improve nutrient recovery. A similar study will be undertaken in Hyderabad soon, in association with agricultural scientists who will also test the crop performance and estimate the amount of commercial fertiliser that can be saved by recycling nutrients recovered from wastewater. Such efforts will hugely improve the quality of treated water for various uses and also relieve the water crisis looming over India's metropolitan cities. In Delhi, the nutrient-depleted water is also critical to expediting the rejuvenation of the water bodies of Delhi, as the quality of treated water currently used is not good enough to revive the heavily eutrophicated water bodies. As for the recycling of nutrients removed from wastewater, currently, there are huge piles of nutrient-rich sludge in the backyard of every working STP. They need to be developed and marketed as alternatives to fertiliser by building necessary market linkages and supply chains as needed. This is already happening to some extent in Hyderabad but needs to be scaled up further to clear the inventory. An important task is to find ways to pre-process the sludge to minimise the heavy metals, plastics and other undesirables we found coexisting with nutrients in the sludge in Delhi. Overall, on a national scale, if we recover and recycle the 84 per cent of nutrients lost in wastewater for agriculture, up to forty per cent of our national fertiliser consumption can be saved. In economic terms, these savings are equivalent to the entire R&D budget of the Government of India. (The writer is a Professor and Head of, the Centre for Sustainable Nitrogen and Nutrient Management School of Biotechnology, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi; views are personal)

Haryana is driving towards progress and prosperity

Haryana is emerging as a beacon of economic prosperity and social development, embodying the vision of 'Viksit Haryana for Viksit Bharat'

Haryana embodies courage and strength. Modi, who has savoured Haryana's spirit, has led with vigour for ten years. Seeing Rafale jets soar in Ambala skies today is a proud moment for all of us, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently said at the major rallies in Ambala and Sonapat, highlighting the opposition's deceitful intentions and reaffirming the BJP's dedication to Haryana's development. In his second mega rally in Sonapat, Modi shed light on the Congress party's past misdeeds and their desperate attempts to regain power. In another incident earlier this month, Haryana stood on the cusp of an emotional milestone. In a display of unprecedented support and



KIRIT P SOLANKI

enthusiasm, former Chief Minister of Haryana, Manohar Lal Khattar, led a mega rally at Ganaur, Sonapat, endorsing Lok Sabha candidate Mohan Lal Badoli. The event, attended by over 15,000 fervent supporters, marked a significant moment in Haryana's political landscape. Manohar, renowned for his progressive policies and transformative governance, was warmly received by the crowd,

underscoring the deep-rooted admiration and trust he commands among the populace. His rally served as a testament to the enduring popularity of Manohar's leadership and the impactful strides taken by the 'double engine Government' in the State. The Modi-Manohar effect has been instrumental in spearheading numerous initiatives aimed at propelling Haryana towards economic prosperity and social development. Under their stewardship, Haryana has emerged as a magnet for investments and a hub of opportunities, embodying the vision of 'Viksit Haryana for Viksit Bharat'. The rally, infused with patriotic fervour and untiring support, emphasised the staunch resolve of

Haryana's electorate to chart a path towards progress and prosperity. As the political landscape evolves, Manohar's rally stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of visionary leadership and the collective determination to realise a brighter future for Haryana and the nation at large. From bolstering transparency in Government job recruitments to empowering the youth through the Haryana Kaushal Rozgar Nigam, the State has witnessed a paradigm shift under the astute leadership of Manohar Lal Khattar. The establishment of all-women police stations, initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and a surge in infrastructure projects underscore the Government's untiring commitment to holistic

development. Haryana's rise as an investment destination is nothing short of spectacular, with exports soaring and MSMEs mushrooming across the State. In the textile and apparel sector, Haryana's prowess shines through, with a significant contribution to India's exports. With over 35 per cent of carpets and 20 per cent of garments manufactured in the State, Haryana is cementing its position as a textile powerhouse. The strategic alignment with national initiatives like the PM Gati Shakti Yojana and the establishment of industrial parks exemplify Haryana's proactive approach towards economic prosperity. The State's healthcare infrastructure has received a significant boost, with the establishment

of medical universities and skill development centres catering to the evolving needs of the populace. The number of medical colleges has surged from 6 in 2014 to 15 and the number of MBBS seats has increased from 700 to 2185. Moreover, the number of PG seats in medical colleges has grown from 289 to 1006. The State has further enhanced nutritional outcomes for children, adolescents, pregnant women and lactating mothers through the POSHAN Abhiyan. In agriculture, schemes like PM-KISAN and PM Fasal Bima Yojana have provided a safety net for farmers, ensuring their livelihood security. Today, PM-KISAN has benefited over 20 lakh farmers in

the State with assistance of over Rs. 5,000 crore. Haryana plays a pivotal role in India's journey towards becoming a global nutrition hub. There are ambitious plans that include promoting the State's coarse grains like jowar and millet on the international stage, the implementation of the world's largest warehouse project and the creation of specialised clusters over the next 5 years. Also, there are plans for a revolutionary drone initiative in farming, empowering mothers and sisters with drone pilot training to harness the latest technology in agriculture. Cultural preservation and promotion have been integral to Haryana's development narrative, with initiatives like the PM Vishwakarma Yojana

fostering artisanal traditions and 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' fostering cultural exchange. The State's rich heritage is being showcased through initiatives like the Anubhav Kendra Jyotisar and the development of archaeological sites like Rakhi Garhi. The 'double engine Government' has proven instrumental in leveraging resources for comprehensive growth, be it in agriculture, infrastructure, or education. Prime Minister Modi emphasised, The dawn of a new era, led by visionary leadership and fueled by the aspirations of its people, promises a brighter tomorrow for the State and the nation at large. (The writer is a Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha; views are personal)

Trump first ex-prez convicted of felony

HUSH MONEY TRIAL



AP ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump has been found guilty of all 34 charges of falsifying business records by a grand jury in New York, an unprecedented and historic verdict that makes him the first former president in American history to be convicted of a felony, as he makes a bid to return to the White House in November. In a landmark verdict, a panel of 12 Manhattan jurors on Thursday said they unanimously agreed that Trump, 77, falsified business records to conceal a USD 130,000 hush money payment to adult film star Stormy Daniels to influence the 2016 presidential election. It will ultimately be up to voters on November 5 to decide the significance of the guilty verdict delivered by 12 ordinary New Yorkers, which, on a legal basis, does not prevent him from being elected president again. Over a six-week trial, the court heard from 22 witnesses, including Daniels, whose alleged sexual encounter with the former president was at the centre of the case. As the verdicts were read, Trump remained silent and still. But the former president spoke to reporters outside the courtroom, calling the trial a "rigged, disgraceful trial" and saying that the "real verdict" will be rendered on Election Day. Prosecutors had argued that, by approving a scheme to disguise the money as legal expenses,

Trump broke election law. Trump's sentencing is scheduled for July 11, four days before the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he will be formally nominated as the party's presidential candidate against incumbent Joe Biden, an 81-year-old Democrat, in the elections. For now, Trump has been released without having to pay bail. "This was a disgrace. This was a rigged trial by a conflicted judge who was corrupt. It's a rigged trial, a disgrace. They wouldn't give us a venue change. We were at 5 per cent or 6 per cent in this district, in this area. This was a rigged, disgraceful trial," said Trump shortly after the verdict was read. "The real verdict is going to be November 5th by the people. And they know what happened here, and everybody knows what happened here. You have a Soros-backed DA, and the whole thing, we didn't do a thing wrong. I'm a very innocent man, and it's okay, I'm fighting for our country. I'm fighting for our Constitution. Our whole country is being rigged right now," Trump said. Trump alleged that this was done by the Biden administration to wound or hurt a political opponent. No former president or presumptive party nominee in the US has ever faced a felony conviction. During the trial, the prosecution

set out to prove that Trump had falsified records when he repaid his former lawyer Michael Cohen for a hush-money payment to Daniels. They said he had recorded the reimbursements as legal expenses to circumvent campaign finance laws. Todd Blanche, Trump's lead lawyer, told Justice Juan Merchan that the court should not allow the verdict, arguing that Cohen committed perjury on the stand. The Trump team's motion to acquit, however, was denied by Justice Merchan. The Biden Harris campaign welcomed the jury's verdict. "In New York today, we saw that no one is above the law," said Biden-Harris 2024 Communications Director Michael Tyler. "Donald Trump has always mistakenly believed he would never face consequences for breaking the law for his gain. But today's verdict does not change the fact that the American people face a simple reality. There is still only one way to keep Donald Trump out of the Oval Office: at the ballot box. Convicted felon or not, Trump will be the Republican nominee for president," he said. University of California, Los Angeles law professor Richard L. Hasen - one of the country's leading experts on election law - has consistently said that nothing in the US Constitution bars a convicted criminal from running for the nation's highest office.

Republicans rally behind Trump to his defence after felony verdict

Washington (PTI): Republicans rallied behind former US president Donald Trump who on Thursday was convicted of a felony as a grand jury in New York found him guilty on 34 counts of falsifying business records. This made him the first former president to be convicted of a felony. The jury found that the 77-year-old presumptive Republican presidential candidate, falsified the records in a scheme to influence his 2016 presidential election through hush money payments to a porn actor who had said she had sex with Trump. Cutting across internal party divisions, the Republicans rallied around Trump as the jurors unanimously reached a verdict in the hush money criminal case. "This will backfire," said Indian-American Vivek Ramaswamy, who over the past few months has emerged as a close aide and confidant of Trump. "The prosecutor is a politician who promised to nail Trump. The judge's daughter is a Democrat operative who literally *raised dollars from the trial* while her father presided over it. The jury instructions said they didn't have to agree on the crime to convict," he said. "Dems could have saved a lot of time by announcing the verdict first, and then having the trial," said former Indian-American Governor Bobby Jindal from Louisiana. "Pretty neat trick that the same Dem DA who makes violent felonies disappear conjured up these felonies," he said. House Speaker Mike Johnson described it as a shameful day in American history.

"Democrats cheered as they convicted the leader of the opposing party on ridiculous charges, predicated on the testimony of a disgraced, convicted felon," he said. "This was a purely political exercise, not a legal one. The weaponisation of our justice system has been a hallmark of the Biden administration, and the decision today is further evidence that Democrats will stop at nothing to silence dissent and crush their political opponents," Johnson said. House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said extremist Democrats have undermined democracy by weaponising the courts to operate like a banana republic that targets their political opponents. "Today's verdict is a defeat for Americans who believe in the critical legal tenet that justice is blind. It was clear from the start that Biden teamed up with heavily biased DA Alvin Bragg to go after his political opponent regardless of wrongdoing - while hardened criminals are set free in New York to commit more violent crimes against innocent citizens," he said. He alleged that this is nothing more than an attempt to interfere with the 2024 election. "The radical Democrats behind this abuse of our justice system will not prevail. The voters will settle this on November 5th," he said. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said the verdict represents the culmination of a legal process that has been bent to the political will of the actors involved: a leftist prosecutor, a partisan judge and a jury reflective of one of the most liberal enclaves in America - all in an effort to 'get' Donald Trump.

16 killed, 35 wounded in joint US-British airstrikes

AP ■ DUBAI

Joint British-US airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels killed at least 16 people and wounded 35 others, the rebels said Friday, the highest publicly acknowledged death toll by the rebels from the multiple rounds of strikes carried out over their attacks on shipping. Three US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to describe a then-ongoing attack, described the strikes Thursday as hitting a wide range of underground facilities, missile launchers, command and control sites, a Houthi vessel and other facilities. They called it a response to a recent surge in attacks by the Iran-backed militia group on ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden over the Israel-Hamas war. The US F/A-18 fighter jets involved in the strikes launched from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier in the Red Sea, officials said. Other US warships in the region also participated. But the Houthis focused Friday morning on just one of the strikes, which they said struck a building housing Hodeida Radio and civilian homes in the port city on the Red Sea. Their Al Masirah satellite news chan-

nel aired images of one bloodied man being carried down stairs and others in the hospital, receiving aid. The Houthis described all those killed and hurt in Hodeida as civilians, something The Associated Press could not immediately confirm. The rebel force that's held Yemen's capital, Sanaa, since 2014 includes fighters who often are not in uniform. Other strikes hit outside of Sanaa near its airport and communication equipment in Taiz, the broadcaster said. Little other information was released on those sites - likely signaling that Houthi military sites had been struck. "We confirm this brutal aggression against Yemen as punishment for its position in support of Gaza, in support of Israel to continue its crimes of genocide against the wounded, besieged and steadfast Gaza Strip," Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam wrote on the social media platform X. In the United Kingdom, the country's Defense Ministry said Royal Air Force Typhoon FGR4s conducted strikes on both Hodeida and further south in Ghulayfiqah. It described its targets as "buildings identified as housing drone ground control facilities

and providing storage for very long range drones, as well as surface-to-air weapons." "The strikes were taken in self-defense in the face of an ongoing threat that the Houthis pose," British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said. "There's an ongoing threat that the Houthis pose." The Houthis have stepped up attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, demanding that Israel end the war in Gaza, which has killed more than 36,000 Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on October 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking around 250 hostages. The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, killed three sailors, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the US Maritime Administration. This week, they attacked a ship carrying grain to Iran, the rebels' main beneficiary. On Wednesday, another US MQ-9 Reaper drone apparently crashed in Yemen, with the Houthis claiming they fired a surface-to-air missile at it. The US Air Force didn't report any aircraft missing, leading to suspicion that the drone may have been piloted by the CIA.

Cop dies in ambush shooting that killed two others in US

Minneapolis (AP): A Minneapolis police officer who was killed Thursday had responded to a shooting call and was providing medical attention to a man when he was ambushed in a shooting that killed two other people including the suspected gunman, authorities said. Minneapolis Officer Jamal Mitchell was trying to help an injured man when the man shot him, Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension Superintendent Drew Evans said. The Minneapolis Police Department said the public was not in danger but encouraged people to stay away from the scene at a Minneapolis apartment complex in the south Minneapolis neighborhood of Whittier. The Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association said a second officer was injured

while they were responding to the call. Police were holding a late evening news conference to address the shooting. News footage showed a large police presence at both the apartment complex and the hospital. Melvin Carter, the mayor of neighboring St. Paul, said the city was sending police and other first responders to Minneapolis to provide support, including having officers help with security at the NBA playoff game between the Minnesota Timberwolves and the Dallas Mavericks. Agents from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives had responded to "an active shooting situation," said Ashlee Sherrill, a spokeswoman for the local field division. ATF agents were "there to help expedite the firearms investigation piece of it," she said.

S Africa heading for 'coalition country' As partial election results have ANC falling under 50%

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africa was heading closer to the reality of a national coalition government for the first time Friday as partial election results put the ruling African National Congress well short of a majority. With more than half of votes counted across the country's nine provinces, the ANC had received just under 42% of the national vote, according to the early results as counting continued. That represented a huge drop from the 57.5% it received in the last national election in 2019, although the final results from Wednesday's election have not yet been declared. The commission that runs the election said those would be announced by Sunday, although they could come sooner. The count from more than 12,000 of the 23,000 polling

stations raised the strong possibility that the ANC would need a coalition partner to form a government and reelect President Cyril Ramaphosa for a second and final term. The frenzied negotiations were likely set to start behind closed doors. The ANC was still leading the count and had the most votes by some way, as expected, with the main opposition Democratic Alliance on around 24%. The ANC is widely expected to still be the biggest party and to have the most seats in Parliament. The ANC has had a clear majority for all 30 years of South Africa's democracy since the party swept to power in a 1994 election which officially ended the apartheid system of white minority rule, leading Nelson Mandela to become the country's first Black president. It has been the dominant political force and its slipping below

50% would be a momentous change for Africa's most advanced economy. The ANC's support has steadily declined from a high of nearly 70% of the vote 20 years ago as South Africa grapples with deep socioeconomic problems, including widespread poverty and now one of the worst unemployment rates in the world at 32%. Poverty and unemployment disproportionately affect South Africa's Black majority that make up 80% of the population and were the core of the ANC's support over the years. While the inequalities of apartheid were always going to be hard to solve, the ANC has also been blamed by many for failures in basic government services, numerous government corruption scandals and most recently an electricity crisis that led to rolling blackouts across the country of 62 million. This election is shap-

ing up to be the tipping point when more South Africans choose another party. A projection from a government agency and SABC, based on vote returns, was estimating on Friday that the ANC would end up with just over 40%, a drop of around 17 percentage points, which would be a stunning result in the context of South Africa. The ANC has said little on its possible coalition partners despite the issue dominating South Africa's political analysis for months ahead of the election. The various parties - South Africa has at least four that could be considered major parties - may now "be faced with a reality that they have to work together" to deal with the country's major challenges, said Joleen Steyn-Kotze, a senior research specialist on democracy at South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council.

Top US, Chinese defense officials seek to restore communications as tensions rise in Indo-Pacific

AP ■ SINGAPORE

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with his Chinese counterpart for more than an hour Friday, as the two countries seek to repair lines of communications between their militaries that could be critical as tensions continue to rise between the two in the Indo-Pacific region. The meeting behind closed doors with Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun was the first in person for the top defense officials since contacts between the American and Chinese militaries broke down in 2022 after then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, infuriating Beijing. It took place on the sidelines of the Shangri-La defense forum, Asia's premier security conference, which features defense officials, government leaders and diplomats from around the world. The week-

end talks are being held as wars rage in Gaza and Ukraine, and at a time of increasing tensions and competition for influence between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region. Beijing in recent years has been rapidly expanding its navy and is becoming increasingly assertive in pressing its claim to virtually the entire South China Sea, which has led to an increasing number of direct conflicts with other countries in the region, most notably the Philippines and Vietnam. The US, meanwhile, has been ramping up military exercises in the region with its allies to underscore its "free and open Indo-Pacific" concept, meant to emphasize freedom of navigation through the contested waters, including the Taiwan Strait. China also claims the democratic self-governing island of Taiwan and has said it will not rule out using force to take it.

Austin, who is due to address the conference on Saturday, reiterated the American position to Dong during their talks, according to Pentagon spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder. "The secretary made clear that the United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate - safely and responsibly - wherever international law allows," Ryder said. "He underscored the importance of respect for high seas freedom of navigation guaranteed under international law, especially in the South China Sea." Since territorial hostilities with China surged last year in the South China Sea, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s administration has taken steps to forge new security alliances with a number of Asian and Western countries and allowed a US military presence in more Philippine bases under a 2014 defense pact.

In his talks with Austin, Dong accused the US of inflaming regional security by deploying medium-range missiles in the Philippines for the first time recently, and said the Philippines was being provocative toward China by pressing its own South China Sea claims, Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson Wu Qian told reporters after the meeting. Marcos opens this year's conference, hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, with a keynote address Friday. This week, Marcos already expressed concerns over a new law issued by China giving its coast guard license to seize foreign ships "that illegally enter China's territorial waters" and to detain foreign crews for up to 60 days. The same law also made new reference to 2021 legislation that says China's coast guard can fire upon foreign ships if necessary.

Indian-American seventh-grader wins Spelling Bee title

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Bruhat Soma, a 12-year-old Indian-American seventh-grade student from Florida, has won the Scripps National Spelling Bee after he spelt 29 words correctly in the tiebreaker, maintaining the dominance of the children from the small ethnic community in the prestigious competition. Bruhat emerged victorious in the Scripps National Spelling Bee on Thursday, earning more than USD 50,000 in cash and other prizes. This year's contest came down to a tiebreaker in which Bruhat spelt 29 words correctly in 90 seconds, beating Faizan Zaki, who managed to correctly spell 20 words in the lightning round. His championship word was "abseil", which is defined as "descent in mountaineering by means of a rope looped over a projection above." Organisers calling for a spell-off to determine a winner following 14 rounds over three days at the national champi-

onships. Bruhat went first in the tiebreaker, and after he got through 30 words, it appeared he would be impossible to beat. Faizan's pace was more uneven at the outset. He attempted 25 words but flubbed four of them. "Bruhat Soma rules the word! The Champion of the 2024 Scripps National Spelling Bee! The boy with the unbelievable memory doesn't miss a word all week and takes home the Scripps Cup!" the organisers said. "Bruhat Soma correctly spelt 29 out of 30 words attempted to earn the coveted champion title and beat the standing spell-off record set by Harini Logan in 2022. Logan spelt 22 out of 26 words correctly during the competition's first-ever spell-off," the organisers said. "As the competition progressed, it was clear that Faizan and Bruhat - our final two spellers - showed up tonight ready to take down the dictionary," said Corrie Loeffler, executive director of the Bee.



"Together, they were a powerful match. Bee officials activated the spell-off in the competition's closing minutes, giving

these stellar spellers an opportunity to show even more of what they can do," Loeffler said. The two final spellers each had

90 seconds to spell as many words as they could from a predetermined list of words while the other speller was sequestered. He spelt every word thrown his way correctly over the 90-second duration: brouette, adelantado, hypochreme, bisellium, mycter, endecha, sericin, myctalopia, ascham, wenzel, cebell, heautophany, kwazoku, panetiere, sagaie, nachschlage, exorhason, giclee, ashwagandha, pusza, asarotum, scintillante, myrabalanus, sciniph, voussour, caizinha, ramoneur, aposiopsis and abseil. The 31th word was posology, but time is called before he can finish spelling it. He only spelt porphyrio incorrectly. While competing, his forehead was marked with the vermilion tika, a Hindu symbol of power and purity. His parents said that Bruhat memorised about 80 per cent of the sacred Hindu texts, the Bhagavad Gita. "My heart was pumping so fast when I realised I won," Bruhat said. "I had a good feeling I would win because I did pret-

ty good, but yeah, you never know. I still couldn't absorb the moment yet." Adam Symson, president and CEO of The E W Scripps Company, presented Bruhat with the championship trophy. "At just 12 years old, Bruhat impressed with his display of knowledge and composure," Symson said. Bruhat's father Srinivas Soma is originally from Nalgonda in Telangana. This was Bruhat's third time participating in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. He tied for 74th in 2023 and tied for 163rd in 2022. Zaki of Allen, Texas, received USD 25,000. Shrey Parikh of Rancho Cucamonga, California, tied for third place in the competition and received USD 12,500. Coached by 16-year-old former speller Sam Evans, Bruhat previously competed in 2022 (tied for 163rd place) and 2023 (tied for 74th place).

'Kim Jong Un supervised drills simulating preemptive attacks on South Korea'

Seoul (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised drills involving the firing of nuclear-capable multiple rocket launchers to show the country's ability to carry out a preemptive attack on rival South Korea, state media reported Friday. North Korea has simulated nuclear strikes on South Korea numerous times, but the latest drills came after animosities on the Korean Peninsula rose over North Korea's recent failed spy satellite launch. The North's official Korean Central News Agency reported that the rocket firing drills were meant to demonstrate North Korea's resolve not to hesitate in launching a preemptive strike on South Korea if threatened. It cited Kim as saying that the drills "will serve as an occasion in clearly showing what consequences our rivals will face if they provoke

us." Photos showed Kim watching from a distance as at least 18 projectiles were launched. KCNA suggested the drills came as response to a South Korean aerial exercise performed hours before North Korea's failed attempt to place its second spy satellite into orbit on Monday night. The launch attempt drew strong condemnation from South Korea, the U.S. and others because the U.N. bans any satellite launches by North Korea, viewing them as covers for testing missile technologies. North Korea reacted angrily, arguing that it has the sovereign right to launch satellites. Also this week, North Korea flew hundreds of huge balloons into South Korea carrying manure and other trash, and allegedly jammed GPS navigation signals in the South. There were no reports of any substantial damage.

Biden eases ban on Ukraine using US arms for strikes in Russia

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden has given Ukraine the go-ahead to use American weaponry to strike inside Russia for the limited purpose of defending Kharkiv, according to three US officials familiar with the matter.

The officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter, underscored that the US policy calling on Ukraine not to use American-provided ATACMS or long-range missiles and other munitions to strike offensively inside Russia has not changed.

Biden's directive allows for US-supplied weapons to be used for "counterfire purposes in the Kharkiv region so Ukraine can hit back against Russian forces that are attacking them or preparing to attack them", one official said.

The move comes as Ukrainian officials have stepped up calls on the US administration to allow their forces to defend themselves against attacks originating from Russian territory. Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, is just 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the Russian border.

Biden's decision was first reported by Politico. Ukrainian officials, most

notably Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, have been increasingly vocal in arguing that the restriction was putting Ukrainian forces in an untenable situation as Russia intensified attacks around the northeast Kharkiv region.

The advances came with Russia exploiting a lengthy delay in replenishment of US military aid and as Western Europe's inadequate military production has slowed crucial deliveries to the battlefield for Ukraine. During Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Kyiv two weeks ago, Zelenskyy made his case for using American weapons to strike back at positions in Russia that were launching attacks into north and northeast Ukraine. Blinken was convinced and brought that message back to Washington, but it was ultimately Biden's decision to make, according to three US officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal administration deliberations.

Since the start of the Russian invasion in February 2022, Biden has been steadfast in his opposition to Ukraine's offensive use of American-made weaponry, concerned that the action could be seen as

provocative and lead to Moscow widening the war. Blinken said in Moldova on Wednesday that US policy on how Ukraine deploys American weapons is constantly evolving, hinting that Washington may alter its unwritten prohibition on Ukraine's use of them for attacks on Russian territory. On Thursday, Blinken joined NATO foreign ministers for a meeting in Prague, where during a tour of a Czech military base he saw armored vehicles that are being sent to Kyiv. Although US officials insist there is no formal arms ban, they have long made clear that they believe the use of American weapons to attack targets inside Russia could provoke an escalatory response from Moscow, something that Russian President Vladimir Putin has promised. That position, Blinken noted, was a "hallmark" of the Biden administration's stance on Ukraine to "adapt and adjust" as needed.

"As the conditions have changed, as the battlefield has changed, as what Russia does has changed in terms of how it's pursuing its aggression, escalation, we've adapted and adjusted, too, and I'm confident we'll continue to do that,"

Blinken said at a news conference in Moldova. "We're always listening, we're always learning, and we're always making determinations about what's necessary to make sure that Ukraine can effectively continue to defend itself, and we'll continue to do that," he said.

Calls for a change in policy have been mounting. Earlier this week, French President Emmanuel Macron and NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said that Western countries should not object if Ukraine needs to strike inside Russia to defend itself. Stoltenberg reaffirmed that position on Thursday. "I believe that time has come to (re)consider some of these restrictions to enable the Ukrainians to really defend themselves," he said. "We need to remember what it is. This is a war of aggression launched by choice by Moscow against Ukraine."

The right to self-defence, he said, "includes also striking legitimate military targets outside Ukraine". Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky said at a NATO-related event on Thursday in Prague that Ukraine needs resources to counter Russia's relentless assault.

Berlin lets Ukraine use German weapons against targets in Russia

Kyiv (AP): The German government said Friday that Ukraine can use German-supplied weapons against Russian attacks from positions just over their joint border, in a significant policy change that came a day after US President Joe Biden gave Kyiv a green light to strike back with American weapons at Russian military assets targeting the country's second-largest city.

A German government statement noted that, in recent weeks, Russia has prepared, coordinated and carried out attacks on Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region in particular from areas just over the border in Russia.

"Together we are convinced that Ukraine has the right under international law to defend itself against these attacks," the statement said. "For this, it can also use the weapons delivered for that purpose in accordance with its international legal commitments, including the ones delivered by us," it added, without elaborating on what Berlin called confidential agreements

with Kyiv.

A Russian onslaught this month in the northeastern Kharkiv region, including a Russian aerial bomb attack on a large construction supplies store that killed 18 people on May 25, has forced the evacuation of thousands of people and has stretched Ukraine's depleted forces in what is proving to be a critical period in the war, which is now in its third year. That appears to have prompted the change in policy among Western leaders.

The Kremlin's bigger and better-equipped army is exploiting Ukrainian shortages in troops and ammunition after a lengthy delay in US military aid. Western Europe's inadequate military production has also slowed crucial deliveries of military aid to Ukraine. Biden's decision allows for US-supplied weapons to be used for "counterfire purposes in the Kharkiv region so Ukraine can hit back against Russian forces that are attacking them or preparing to attack them," one Washington official told The Associated Press.

But the officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter, stressed that the US policy calling on Ukraine not to use American-provided ATACMS or long-range missiles and other munitions to strike offensively inside Russia has not changed.

The German announcement came hours after Russian ballistic missiles slammed into an apartment block in Kharkiv and killed at least four people in a nighttime attack.

Russia launched five S-300/S-400 ballistic missiles at Kharkiv overnight, Ukraine's air force said. One of them struck a residential building close to midnight and was followed by another missile 25 minutes later that hit first responders, according to regional Governor Oleh Syniehubov. At least 25 people were injured, he said.

Ukrainian officials have previously accused Russia of targeting rescue workers by hitting residential buildings with two consecutive missiles — the first one to draw emergency crews to the scene and the second one to wound or kill them.

Orban pushes back on NATO proposals to further assist Ukraine

Budapest (AP): Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Friday pushed back against some NATO proposals that would allow Ukraine to use Western weapons to strike targets within Russia, saying that such plans have Europe "inching closer to destruction."

The nationalist leader has long opposed Western countries supplying Ukraine with military aid, and threatened to derail European Union financial support to Kyiv and the passing of sanctions against Moscow.

He has also maintained close ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin despite his full-scale invasion of Ukraine, while ramping up energy deals with Moscow at a time when most EU countries have sought to limit the use of Russian fossil fuel.

During a Friday interview on state radio, Orban said that French President Emmanuel Macron's stance that he would not rule out sending troops to Ukraine, as well as a NATO proposal that would allow Kyiv to strike military bases inside Russia with sophisticated long-range weapons provided by Western partners, risked escalating the war in Ukraine into a global conflict.

"War is a monster that is constantly hungry, it must be fed, and it must be fed with money. And I see that the Americans and the Democratic government of the United States, and the leaders of the European Union, are ready to feed it," he said.

Orban is campaigning for the European Parliament election, which will be held in Hungary on June 9. He has cast the election as an existential struggle between war and peace, and focused his campaign on fears that Western support for Ukraine could cause an escalation of Russia's war.

He has portrayed his party as unique in calling for an immediate end to the fighting in Ukraine. But critics say his proposals amount to capitulation to Moscow, which would allow Russia to retain territories it has occupied in Ukraine and embolden it further.

Russian missiles kill 4 in Kharkiv

Kyiv (AP): Russian ballistic missiles slammed into an apartment block in Kharkiv and killed at least four people in a night-time attack, Ukrainian officials said Friday, a day after US President Joe Biden gave Kyiv a green light to strike back with American weapons at Russian military assets targeting the country's second-largest city.

Russia launched five S-300/S-400 ballistic missiles at Kharkiv overnight, Ukraine's air force said. One of them struck a residential building close to midnight and was followed by another missile 25 minutes later that hit first responders, according to regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov. At least 25 people were injured, he said.

Ukrainian officials have previously accused Russia of targeting rescue workers by hitting residential buildings with two consecutive missiles — the first one to draw emergency crews to the scene and the second one to wound or kill them. The tactic is called a "double tap" in military jargon. Russia used the same method in Syria's civil war.

A Russian onslaught this month in the northeastern Kharkiv region, including a Russian aerial bomb attack on a large construction supplies store that killed 18 people on May 25, has forced the evacuation of thousands of people and has stretched Ukraine's depleted forces in what is proving to be a critical period in the war, which is now in its third year.

Apart from Kharkiv, Moscow's troops are pressing in the Donetsk region further south and are assembling a force for an expected attack in the Sumy region further north, according to Ukrainian officials. The Kremlin's bigger and better-equipped army is exploiting Ukrainian shortages in troops and ammunition after a lengthy delay in U.S. military aid. Western Europe's inadequate military production has slowed crucial deliveries of military aid to Ukraine.

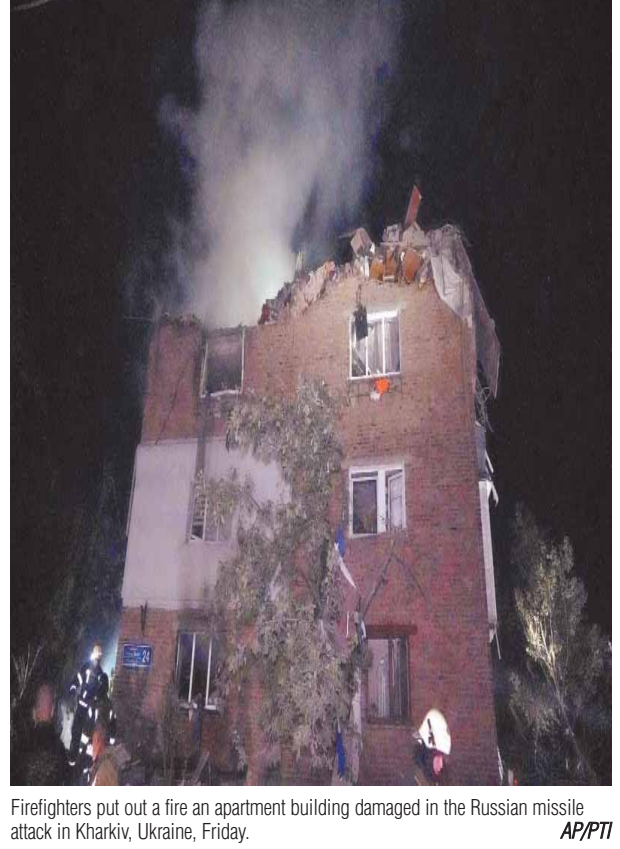
Biden's decision allows for U.S.-supplied weapons to be used for "counterfire purposes in the Kharkiv region so Ukraine can hit back against Russian forces that are attacking them or preparing to

attack them," one Washington official told The Associated Press.

But the officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter, stressed that the U.S. policy calling on Ukraine not to use American-provided ATACMS or long-range missiles and other munitions to strike offensively inside Russia has not changed. That restriction has frustrated Ukrainian officials as the military is unable to order hits on Russian troops massing across the border — Kharkiv city is only 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Russia — or Russian bases used to launch missile attacks. The question of whether to allow Ukraine to hit targets on Russian soil with Western-supplied weaponry has been a delicate issue since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022. Western leaders have hesitated to take the step because it runs the risk of provoking Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has repeatedly warned that the West's direct involvement could put the world on a path to nuclear conflict.



From left, Icelandic Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, Finnish President Alexander Stubb and Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, re pose for a family photo on the occasion of a Nordic summit, in Stockholm, AP/PTI



Firefighters put out a fire an apartment building damaged in the Russian missile attack in Kharkiv, Ukraine, Friday. AP/PTI

Paks Defence Minister asks Imran to keep mum

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Friday asked Imran Khan to keep his "mouth shut" if he wants to ease the political tension in the country, days after a controversy arose over a social media post by the former prime minister. A post attributed to Khan, the incarcerated founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, on May 26 on X said: "Every Pakistani should study the Hamood ur Rahman Commission Report and get to know who was the true traitor, General Yahya Khan or Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

The post also had a video attached that showed black and white clippings from the 1970s.

The Hamood ur Rahman Commission Report was a report by the official commission of inquiry into the reasons for Pakistan's defeat in the 1971 war that led to the cre-

ation of Bangladesh out of what was then East Pakistan. Khan's May 26 post garnered a lot of traction over the days with hundreds of RTs (retweets) and thousands of 'Likes' and was shared by multiple handles of the party and its followers. On Friday, Defence Minister Asif commented: "I think the founder of PTI wants to increase tension."

Asif also asked Khan to keep his "mouth shut" if he wanted political tension in the country to lessen. Asif told Geo News that the former prime minister, who remains incarcerated at the Adiala jail since August 2023, is trying again to create a situation like that on May 9. Last year, after Khan was arrested, hundreds and thousands of his followers and party workers vandalised a dozen military installations, including the Jinnah House (Lahore Corps Commander House), Mianwali Airbase and the ISI building in Faisalabad.

The Army headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi too was attacked by the mob for the first time on May 9.

The minister said attempts are being made to retract the tweet related to the former Bangladesh president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. "Barrister Gauhar (Khan) clarified that the social media team did not seek permission before tweeting," said the minister, adding that this was the first time that the party had to retract a post on their social media account. The tweets were, however, neither retracted nor deleted.

Asif said he has a different stand on the history of the Bangladeshi politicians and the tragedy of East Pakistan and added, "By exaggerating the tragedy of East Pakistan today, you want to increase the tension." Geo News said that the minister further alleged that whether it was in politics or sports, the former premier had stung everyone who had done good to him and, com-

menting on Khan's relationship dynamics with the former military men when he was in power, claimed: "General (Qamar Javed) Bajwa's father, General Faiz (Hamid) was his uncle, now (he is) dumping all the debris at them." Two days ago, PTI's Barrister Gohar Khan said that Khan's post had nothing to do with him as the former prime minister did not see the text of the posts that were uploaded to his account, Geo News said. Gohar also defended the tweet and said it was taken out of context as he said: "The context and comparison that we drew with 1971 was in a political context and not otherwise — nothing about the army."

Meanwhile, a Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) cybercrime team on Thursday decided to initiate action against Khan over his controversial tweet on social media and reached Adiala jail where Khan has been incarcerated since last year.

Pak PM to visit China next week to plan bilateral growth, launch CPEC phase

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/ BEIJING

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will embark on a five-day visit to China on Tuesday during which he will hold talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping and "jointly draw a blueprint" to strengthen bilateral ties further, as the all-weather allies seek to upgrade cooperation under the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, as the two sides look forward to launching the project's second phase. The CPEC was launched a decade ago, and several energy and infrastructure projects had already been completed. During his visit to China, Prime Minister Sharif will hold talks with President Xi and "jointly draw a blueprint" for the growth of China-Pakistan relations, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said in Beijing.

This will be Sharif's first visit to China after he took over as prime minister for the second term after his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party-led coalition government came to power in March. During his visit, Sharif will also hold in-depth exchanges with Premier Li Qiang and other officials on China-Pakistan relations and issues of mutual interest, Mao

told a media briefing. "China and Pakistan are all-weather strategic cooperative partners and iron-clad friends. Our friendship stood the test of time and remains rock solid, steady as Mount Tai," she said.

Mt Taishan, also known as Mt Tai, is a famous mountain in China's Shandong province. In addition to Beijing, Sharif, 72, will visit Guangdong and Shaanxi provinces.

Mao said the two countries had close high-level exchanges in recent years and steadily advanced practical cooperation conducted fruitful and "high-quality cooperation" of CPEC. The two sides also have maintained sound communication and coordination in international and regional affairs, she said.

India firmly opposes the CPEC, which will link Xinjiang in China and the Gwadar port in Pakistan, because it passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of China's ambitious multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is seen as an attempt by China to further its influence abroad with infrastructure projects funded by Chinese investments across the world. "China stands ready to work with Pakistan through this visit to make greater progress in our all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and take new steps to build an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era," Mao said.

Ex-Iranian parl speaker Ali Larijani registers as presidential candidate

AP ■ DUBAI

A former speaker of Iran's parliament registered on Friday as a possible candidate in the Islamic Republic's June 28 presidential election to replace the late Ebrahim Raisi, who was killed in a helicopter crash earlier this month with seven others.

Ali Larijani is the first high-profile candidate to register for the contest. He and other serious contenders against Raisi had been barred from running in the 2021 election.

Larijani, 66, is viewed as a conservative within Iran's narrow political scene. However, he has increasingly allied himself with former President Hassan Rouhani, whose administration

reached a 2015 nuclear deal with a group of world powers. Larijani had positioned himself as a pragmatic candidate in the 2021 vote in which hard-liner Raisi, a protégé of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was elected.

Larijani had posted online and made comments in recent days all but confirming he would be a candidate. The Larijani family has long been powerful in Iran's Shiite theocracy.

"Solving the issue of sanctions for an economic opening will be among the priorities of diplomacy" for Iran, Larijani told journalists.

All candidates must be approved by Iran's 12-member Guardian Council, a panel of clerics and jurists ultimately



overseen by Khamenei. That panel has never accepted a woman or anyone calling for radical change within the country's governance.

Who will run — and potentially be accepted — remains in question. The country's acting president, Mohammad Mokhber, a previously behind-the-scenes bureaucrat, could be a front runner because he has

already been seen meeting with Khamenei. Also discussed as possible aspirants are former hard-line President Mohammad Ahmadinejad and former reformist President Mohammad Khatami, but whether they would be allowed to run is another question.

The five-day registration period will close on Tuesday. The Guardian Council is then expected to issue its final list of candidates within 10 days. That will allow for a shortened two-week campaign before the vote in late June.

The new president will take office while the country is enriching uranium at nearly weapons-grade levels and is hampering international inspections. Iran has armed

Russia in its war on Ukraine and launched a drone and missile attack on Israel during the war in Gaza. It also has continued arming proxy groups in the Middle East such as Yemen's Houthi rebels and Lebanon's Hezbollah militia.

Meanwhile, Iran's economy has faced years of hardship over its collapsing rial currency. Widespread protests have swept the country, most recently over the death of Mahsa Amini, who died in police custody in September 2022 after being detained for allegedly violating Iran's mandatory headscarf law. A UN panel said the Iranian government is responsible for the "physical violence" that led to Amini's death. (A

Over ₹10 lakh crore bad loans recovered in 10 years, says FM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said the Modi government has turned around the banking sector through various reforms and improved governance which has led to banks recovering more than Rs 10 lakh crore from bad loans between 2014 and 2023. She said the Enforcement Directorate has investigated around 1,105 bank fraud cases, which resulted in the attachment of Rs 64,920 crore worth of proceeds of crime. As of December 2023, assets amounting to Rs 15,183 crore have been restituted to the Public Sector Banks (PSBs). "Recently, India's banking sector achieved a significant milestone by recording its highest-ever net profit, crossing Rs 3 lakh crore. The banking sector turned around due to PM Shri @narendramodis strong and decisive leadership. Our government atoned for the UPA's sins in the banking sector through comprehensive and long-term reforms," Sitharaman said in a post on X. She said there has been no leniency in recovering bad loans, especially from large defaulters, under the Modi government and the process is ongoing. This is in stark contrast to the



situation before 2014 when @INCIndia led UPA government turned the banking sector into a cesspool of bad loans, vested interests, corruption and mismanagement. "It's a pity that opposition leaders are still unable to distinguish between write-offs and waivers. After the 'write-offs' as per RBI's guidelines, banks actively pursue the recovery of bad loans. And, there has been no 'waiver' of loans for any industrialist. Between 2014 and 2023, banks recovered more than Rs 10 lakh crore from bad loans." Sitharaman said the Modi

UPA's tenure for mismanaging the sector she said the 'seeds' of the NPA crisis were sown during the @INCIndia-led UPA era through 'Phone Banking' when loans were given to undeserving businesses under pressure from UPA leaders and party functionaries. "Under the UPA, obtaining loans from banks often depended on powerful connections rather than a solid business proposition. Banks were forced to neglect proper due diligence and risk assessment before sanctioning these loans," she said. Sitharaman said the Modi

government implemented a comprehensive 4R's strategy of Recognising NPAs transparently, Resolution and Recovery, Recapitalising PSBs, and Reforms after coming to power in 2014. "Our reforms addressed credit discipline, recognition and resolution of stress, responsible lending and improved governance. We replaced political interference in banks with professional integrity and independence," she said. The minister said the Modi government will continue to take decisive measures to strengthen and stabilise our banking system, ensuring banks support India's growth path to Viksit Bharat by 2047. "The UPA Alliance, dominated by dynastic parties, used banks for their own 'Parivar Kalyan' (family welfare). In contrast, our government has leveraged banks for 'Jan Kalyan' (public welfare)," she said. Efforts to expand banking in India faltered for decades due to Congress's limited actions beyond bank nationalisation, which benefited mainly the educated and elite. Before 2014, banking access was largely restricted to cities, she said. "We remain committed to further driving financial inclusion and empowering the underprivileged," Sitharaman said.

5G adoption on a roll in India, yet tariff upside may be minimal: Ind-Ra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's 5G subscriber count is seen rising several notches to 20-25 per cent of the overall base in one year, but though telcos are in a "better position" to execute tariff increase, actual visibility on a "meaningful" increase remains uncertain, Ind-Ra said. According to India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra), this is because globally too 5G has not yielded any major tariff premium over 4G rates. The use cases of 5G in India are still limited to applications such as video streaming and multi-person video calls. The Fitch Group company, in its telecom outlook FY25 has maintained a neutral outlook on the sector for the current fiscal. It expects the subscriber base to reach 20-25 per cent over the next one year from about 17 per cent currently, in line with global experience. Average Revenue Per User (ARPU), it said, may continue to exhibit organic growth albeit the growth rates, per se, have tapered somewhat. Ind-Ra believes Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel have an opportunity to capture a higher proportion of premium subscribers of Vodafone Idea, who are keen to experience 5G. Accordingly, it has predicted another round of market share shifts. The agency said the current fiscal would be an inflection



year for telecom companies in terms of investments peaking out (5G capex, spectrum renewal) and the tariff environment remaining subdued. According to its assessment, the investments have likely reached their peak in FY24, given that the execution of industry-wide 5G capex of around USD20 billion was almost in the last leg by end-FY24. From here on, the investments will whittle down from their peak highs although spends will continue given the ensuing spectrum auctions (scheduled to begin next week) and ongoing re-fiberisation initiatives. "Visibility on meaningful tariff hikes remains uncertain, since globally also 5G has not yielded any major tariff premium over 4G tariffs," Priyanka Bansal, Associate Director of Ind-Ra said. That said, currently, telcos are in a much better position to execute tariff hikes, given the improvement in service offerings (higher data quantum, higher speed, other

auxiliary offerings, 5G speed etc) since the last tariff hikes seen in late 2021. Overall, Ind-Ra expects the margin structure of telcos to improve in FY25, owing to revenue growth supported by operating leverage. However, return ratios (ROCE) and free cash flow will see a sharp improvement only in FY26, when capex subsidies and potential tariff hikes help improve revenues, it said. The growth rate of APRU, in the last few quarters, has been organic, but those growth rates too have moderated from the previous levels. "Reliance Jio Infocomm and Bharti Airtel may continue to acquire market share from Vodafone Idea Limited (VIL), especially in the high-ARPU (average revenue per user) customer base," it said. The outlook for telecom equipment manufacturers is neutral for FY25, given the strong demand drivers (domestic and exports) and supportive regulatory environment (Production-linked Incentives).

Sebi slaps ₹2.5 crore fine on TIL, former officials over fictitious transactions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has imposed a penalty of Rs 2.5 crore on TIL Ltd and three former officials for indulging in fictitious purchase and sales leading to overstatement of sales and revenue for 2019-20 and 2020-21. The fine needs to be paid within 45 days, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in its order. Individually, the regulator has levied a fine of Rs 1 crore each on TIL and Sumit Mazumder, who was the chairman and managing director at the time of the violation. He is also one of the promoters of the company. Besides, a penalty of Rs 25 lakh each has been imposed on then CEO Ramesh Aggarwal and former CFO Shibaditya Ghosh. In its order, Sebi noted that the modus operandi followed by TIL was that it had issued fictitious invoices in the past financial years, which were subsequently cancelled in the next financial years by the issuance of credit notes and re-invoiced on the same day without proper documents to increase the sales turnover or trade receivables so as to maintain the credit facilities availed from the banks. This had resulted in the overstatement of sales or trade receivables in the financial years 2019-20 and 2020-21, it added.

India's GDP expands 7.8 per cent in Q4, 8.2 per cent in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's economy growth slowed to a four-quarter low of 7.8 per cent in the January-March period, but pushed the annual growth rate for FY24 to 8.2 per cent, mainly on account of good showing by manufacturing, official data showed on Friday. The growth propelled the Indian economy to USD 3.5 trillion and set the stage for achieving the USD 5-trillion target in the next few years. In the previous 2022-23 fiscal year, the economy grew 7 per cent. China has registered an economic growth of 5.3 per cent in the first three months of 2024. The economic expansion was recorded at 7.8 per cent during the January-March 2024, while it was 8.6 per cent in October-December 2023 and 8.1 per cent in July-September 2023. The growth was 8.2 per cent in April-June 2023, as per data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO). The GDP grew 6.2 per cent in the January-March quarter of 2022-23. The NSO, in its second advance estimate released in February, had projected the GDP growth for 2022-23 at 7.7 per cent. According to the NSO data, real GDP, or GDP at constant prices, is estimated to attain a level of Rs 173.82 lakh crore in 2023-24, against the first

revised estimates (FRE) of GDP for 2022-23 of Rs 160.71 lakh crore. "The growth rate in real GDP during 2023-24 is estimated at 8.2 per cent as compared to 7.0 per cent in 2022-23," it stated. Nominal GDP or GDP at current prices is estimated to attain a level of Rs 295.36 lakh crore in 2023-24, against Rs 269.50 lakh crore in 2022-23, showing a growth rate of 9.6 per cent, it added. The real GDP in the March quarter of 2023-24 is estimated at Rs 47.24 lakh crore, against Rs 43.84 lakh crore a year earlier, showing a growth rate of 7.8 per cent. Nominal GDP, or GDP at current prices in the March quarter of 2023-24, is estimated at Rs 78.28 lakh crore, against Rs 71.23 lakh crore in the year-ago period, showing a growth rate of 9.9 per cent. The real GVA (gross value added) is estimated at Rs 158.74 lakh crore in 2023-24, against the FRE for 2022-23 of Rs 148.05 lakh crore, registering a growth rate of 7.2 per cent as compared to 6.7 per cent in 2022-23. The GVA growth in the manufacturing sector accelerated to 8.9 per cent in the March quarter against 0.9 per cent a year ago. GVA growth in mining was 4.3 per cent in the fourth quarter compared to 2.9 per cent in the same quarter of the previous fiscal.

S&P to watch Government policies for next two years before taking call on India's rating upgrade

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

S&P Global Ratings on Friday said it will watch the fiscal numbers for the next 1-2 years, besides pro-growth policies of the new government, before deciding on India's sovereign rating upgrade. S&P, which earlier this week upgraded India's outlook to positive while retaining the sovereign rating at BBB-, expects the new government to continue with pro-growth policies, infrastructure investment and commitment to fiscal consolidation. "Within the next 2 years we will be closely observing whether the government's depiction of fiscal consolidation path will carry on... We will be observing for the next 1-2 years to see how this fiscal numbers will come to pass and if so, this will lead to a rating upgrade," S&P Global Ratings Analyst YeeFarn Phua said in a webinar. BBB- is the lowest investment grade rating. As per the consolidation roadmap, the fiscal deficit, which is the difference between government's expenditure and revenue, will come down to 4.5 per cent of GDP by March 2026, from an estimated 5.1 per cent at the end of March 2025. Phua said once the impact of high infrastructure investment is realised and bottlenecks are removed,



India's long-term growth potential could be 8 per cent. He said India has enjoyed a consistently high GDP growth rate despite being governed by different parties and coalitions since the economic liberalisation in 1991. "This reflects national consensus on key economic policies. We do believe that post election this pro-growth policy will continue and political commitment of fiscal consolidation will carry on as well for coming years. No matter who the incoming government is, the pro-growth policies, sustained infrastructure investments, the drive to reduce fiscal deficit — these things have produced very good outcomes and we believe that this will continue in the coming years no matter who is in charge," he said.

Results of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections will be announced on June 4. Phua said he expects the general government (Centre + states) deficit to reduce to 6.8 per cent of GDP by 2028, from 7.9 per cent currently. S&P Director (Asia Pacific Sovereign Ratings) Andrew Wood said India's fiscal performance remains relatively weak compared to some emerging market peers. Fiscal deficit of BBB rated sovereigns — Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam — would be below 4 per cent this year, compared to 7.9 per cent in case of India. However, in deciding India's sovereign rating, S&P also took into account change in net general government debt, as well as dynamics like health of economy, associated growth

attractiveness of the debt that the government is selling and ability to finance deficits. "We see that India's growth performance has been very strong over recent years and we expect it to be very strong in the near future. The quality of expenditure programme of India has improved remarkably over the past few years and that gives us more confidence that growth is going to be sustained at a higher rate in the future," Wood said. While S&P sees India's fiscal deficit as high, it also anticipates more room for improvement going forward and that would be reflected in the rating, Wood added. With regard to growth prospects, Phua said S&P expects India to grow at 6.8 per cent this fiscal but in next 2-3 years it is expecting around 7 per cent growth. "We expect India's medium term growth potential to be around 7 per cent or so... Once the infrastructure investments are in and connectivity improves, for India to grow at 8 per cent over the longer term is something that is quite possible," he said. The above average growth has given India better economic assessment compared to peers of similar income levels, Phua said, adding S&P believes growth prospect remains strong and India's growth is sustainable at 7 per cent.



Stock markets snap five days losing streak on value buying

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets snapped the five-day losing run on Friday with benchmark Sensex closing higher by 75 points on value-buying and investors turning their focus on exit polls to be released after the close of the last phase of elections on June 1. The 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 75.71 points or 0.10 per cent to settle at 73,961.31. During the session, it hit a high of 74,478.89 points and a low of 73,765.15 points. Halting its five-day losing streak, the 50-share NSE Nifty rose by 42.05 or 0.19 per cent to end at 22,530.70. Nifty and Sensex tanked more than 2 per cent in the five days to Thursday amid high volatility ahead of the results of the Lok Sabha polls. "The pre-election trading strategy has come to an end, and all eyes will be on the release of the

exit poll for further action. Regional diversions, marginally low voter turnout and strong resistance at current range are prompting investors to adopt a cautious stance," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said. From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, Power Grid, IndusInd Bank, Larsen & Toubro, ICICI Bank were among the gainers. Nestle India, Tata Consultancy Services Maruti Suzuki India, Infosys, Axis Bank, Hindustan Unilever were the laggards. The BSE midcap gauge ended flat, while smallcap index gained 0.76 per cent. Among the indices, utilities climbed 2.10 per cent, Realty 2.02 per cent, Power 1.80 per cent, Services 1.60 per cent, metal rose 1.28 per cent, Telecommunication 1.18 per cent.

Raj comics brings super commando Dhruva, Doga to life

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Raj Comics, the venerated publishing house that has long been synonymous with Indian comic book superheroes, announces the launch of the live-action short film series, "The Alliance: Project Metamorphosis Chapter 1" released today. This ambitious project reintroduces beloved characters such as Super Commando Dhruva and Doga, reigniting the enchantment of Indian comics for a new generation. The inaugural installment of the film will be available on the 'Raj Comics By Sanjay Gupta' YouTube channel, bringing the excitement directly to fans' screens. In the 1990s, Raj Comics captured the imaginations of millions with its diverse roster of superheroes, featuring the indomitable Nagraj, and others.

Adopting global standard, risk based regulation to help India improve quality of goods for exports: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Steps such as adoption of international standards, using risk-based regulations, and modern infrastructure development will help further improve quality of goods manufactured and exported from India, economic think tank GTRI said on Friday. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) also recommended support to small and medium enterprises, avoiding quality control orders becoming non-tariff barriers, regulatory impact assessment, developing globally acceptable standards and inking mutual recognition pacts with trading partners to strengthen India's quality systems. These suggestions come at a time when India is on the fast track to issue Quality Control Orders (QCOs) and Compulsory Registration

Orders (CROs) with a view to curb imports of sub-standard goods from countries like China, boost domestic manufacturing and push exports of high-quality goods from the country. GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said that to fully capitalize on these initiatives, it is crucial to comprehensively strengthen India's quality infrastructure as this will ensure that small firms are not overburdened, quality imports are not unfairly penalized, and adequate field infrastructure, such as testing labs, are in place. According to the GTRI report, since introduction of the BIS Act in October 2017, over 140 QCOs have been issued for more than 550 products, compared to just 14 QCOs covering 106 products till 2014. QCOs and CROs are regulatory measures used



globally to ensure that products meet specific quality, safety, and performance standards before they are marketed and sold. By enforcing strict adherence to quality criteria, they help mitigate risks associated with substandard products, enhance consumer trust, and facilitate international trade by aligning domestic products with global expectations. "Issuance of over 140 QCOs

covering over 550 products in the past 7 years have created challenges for the firms and the government agencies alike. This calls for an urgent need to upgrade India's quality infrastructure and a matter of fact study to understand how the QCOs have performed on ground and if there is need for any course correction," Srivastava said. To further improve quality systems in India, "India should adopt and align its standards with international ones to enhance export competitiveness and seek international accreditation for BIS certifications to avoid additional costs for manufacturers," the report said. It added that regulations should focus on essential health, safety, and environmental parameters and use a risk-based approach to balance enforcement with

industry capacity. Additionally, support for SMEs should include gradual implementation of QCOs and CROs, financial assistance, technical guidance, and phased implementation to help small firms comply, it said. It also said that developing comprehensive quality infrastructure is essential for expertise, conformity assessment systems, and market surveillance. "Standards and regulations should not act as non-tariff barriers, and regulatory impact assessments should be conducted to ensure regulations are effective and not burdensome. Creating high-quality, globally acceptable standards for products like Ayurveda and working towards global acceptance of Indian certifications will further improve quality systems," Srivastava said.

The report suggested the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) to adopt international standards wherever possible, such as those for electrical safety and toys as this will reduce transaction costs for companies and enhance export competitiveness. "BIS and other Indian standards bodies should systematically align Indian standards with international ones by participating in organizations like ISO (International Organization for Standardization), IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission), ITU (International Telecommunication Union), Codex Alimentarius, World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPCC)," the report suggested.

POWERGRID acquires Khavda IV-E2 Power Transmission Limited



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) — a Maharatna CPSU under Ministry of Power has recently acquired a Project Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) viz Khavda IV-E2 Power Transmission Limited on May 31 for the "Transmission System Project for Evacuation of Power from Potential Renewable Energy Zone in Khavda Area of Gujarat under Phase-IV (7GW) Part E2" after competing with various private sector players and emerging as successful bidder in Tariff Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) process.



NISHANT DEV BOOKS PARIS OLYMPICS TICKET

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Nishant Dev (71kg) became the first Indian male pugilist to secure a Paris Games quota when he reached the semifinals of the Boxing Olympic qualifiers here on Friday. The world championships bronze medalist, who had narrowly missed on an Olympic berth in the previous qualifiers, earned the quota after defeating Vasile Cebotari of Moldova 5-0 in the quarterfinal which was a battle of the southpaws. It is India's fourth quota place with women boxers Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preet Pawar (54kg) and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) having already secured their passage to Paris. The 71kg weight class had five quotas on offer.

Dev, who has been dominant all tournament, was off to a flyer, landing sharp, accurate punches. The Indian was more composed and used his punches judiciously. In the second round, Cebotari landed a couple of blows and Dev looked a bit out of breath but the Indian continued to hit accurate shots. In the last three minutes, both boxers looked spent but Dev continued to land punches at will. Cebotari earned a point deduction for his punch to Dev when the Indian was down on the canvas. Earlier, India's quest for booking a quota in the women's 60kg ended with Ankushita Boro 2-3 defeat against Agnes Alexiusson of Sweden in the quarterfinals. The 23-year-old Boro fought hard but her Swedish opponent, a former European

Games bronze medalist, dug into her reservoir of experience to pip the Indian. Boro, a former youth world champion, was slow off the blocks, but managed to adapt toward the end of the first round, using straight jabs effectively. It was enough to convince one judge. Down 1-4, Boro made a blistering start, using the combination of left jab and right cross. The Indian was electric and the 28-year Alexiusson was unable to keep up. The two entered the third round on equal footing and Boro was able to make early gains but Alexiusson ended the bout stronger taking the split decision win. Later in the day, Arundhati Choudhary (66kg) and Amit Panghal (51kg) will be in

Ministry approves Neeraj Chopra's two months training stint in Europe with coach, physio

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Sports Ministry on Thursday approved reigning Olympic and world champion Neeraj Chopra's plan to train in Europe for 60 days along with coach Klaus Bartonietz and physio Ishaan Marwaha as preparation for the upcoming Paris Games. The ministry's Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) also agreed to Asian Games gold medalist Vinesh Phogat's proposal to include strength and conditioning coach Wayne Patrick Lombard for the international training camp in Hungary from June 10 to 21. Chopra, who created history by becoming the first Indian to win a track and field medal at the Olympics in Tokyo three years ago, will be training at different venues in Europe May 29 to July 28. The financial assistance under TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme) will be covering the airfare, accommodation, meals,

medical insurance, local transport expenses apart from out-of-pocket allowance as per Sports Authority of India (SAI) norms. Vinesh, who will be competing in 50kg division in Paris, had requested for assistance towards Lombard's airfare, visa fees, board and lodging and local transport in Hungary. She will also be competing in the United World Wrestling 2nd Ranking Series - Polyák Imre & Varga János Memorial from June 6 to 9 in Budapest. The MOC also cleared the TOPS wrestler's proposal for support to compete in Grand Prix of Spain from July 5 to 7 in Madrid. Her support team will include physiotherapist Ashwini Jeevan Patil, sparring partner Arvind and coach Woller Akos. **LONG JUMPER, SHUTTLERS' PROPOSAL TOO APPROVED:** Long jumper Shaili Singh's proposal to extend her training camp in Europe to June 23 was also approved by the MOC. Shaili



will be training in Lisbon, Paris, Athens and Geneva along with coach Bobby George. The MOC also cleared the request from shotgun shooters Rajeshwari Kumari and Maheshwari Chauhan to take their personal coaches to the training camp in Italy in June. Rajeshwari's personal coach David Kostecky will accompany the trap shooter to Italy from June 1 to 14. She will be competing in the ISSF World Cup, Lonato during the same period. Maheshwari's personal coach Riccardo Fillipelli will be

training her from May 31 to June 11. Maheshwari, who became the first Indian skeet shooter to win a quota for Paris Olympics, will also be in the Lonato World Cup from June 12 to 19. The MOC also okayed a request from 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games Badminton bronze medalist HS Prannoy for financial assistance to engage trainer Rohan George Mathews on a full-time basis from June 20 to July 22 in Hyderabad apart from availing the services of a centre that provides recovery products including Hyperbaric Oxygen

therapy and Red Light therapy. Hyperbaric oxygen therapy involves exposing the body to 100 percent oxygen at a pressure that is greater than normal. Among other things, it hastens wound healing. Red light therapy is a therapeutic technique that uses low level wavelengths of red light to help treat various skin conditions. Mainsam Meiraba and Anupama Upadhyay's proposal for support to compete in international tournaments has secured the approval. Recurve archer Atanu Das's request for monetary support towards two-month training at Army Sports Institute, Pune, from June 1 to August 5 along with coach Mim Gurung was also cleared. The request of sailor Vishnu Sarvanan to engage physio Sarath Lal for 40 days during his training camp in Marseille and Para powerlifter Ashok's request to secure a wheelchair also got a green signal from the MOC.

AP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti may not have such a tough decision to make after all when it comes to picking a goalkeeper for the Champions League final. Much of the pre-game talk has centered around whether Ancelotti will go with Andriy Lunin - who has played for most of the season and led the team to the final - or Thibaut Courtois, the veteran who has recently returned from a long-term knee injury. Now Lunin is reportedly sick with the flu and said in a post on social media late Thursday that he won't "be able to prepare" for the final against Borussia Dortmund. "I am very sad to say that I won't be able to prepare for the most important game of the season and the most important game of my life with my team," Lunin wrote on Instagram. "Many thanks for the messages of support and encouragement!" Coach Ancelotti said on Monday that Lunin was running a fever and was unable to practice with his teammates. Lunin stayed in the Spanish capital while Madrid's team flew to London on

With Lunin ill, Courtois could be set to start Champions League final for Real Madrid



Friday. The club said that he would join the team on Saturday, hours before the game at Wembley Stadium. Neither the player nor the club have publicly ruled out the possibility of him

playing, but his illness could provide an opportunity for Courtois to end his season on a remarkable high after being sidelined for most of the campaign.

Courtois ruptured a left-knee ligament in August, just two days before the start of the season. The 32-year-old Belgian then damaged the meniscus in his right knee in March, when he was close to making a comeback. He was sidelined until the beginning of this month, when he started in a 3-0 win over Cadiz, a victory that secured Madrid's 36th Spanish league title. Courtois has proven experience in finals. He won the 2022 Champions League with Madrid, the FA Cup with Chelsea, the Europa League with Atletico Madrid, and two Copa del Rey titles (one for Madrid, one for Atletico), among other titles. Lunin was back starting when Madrid beat Bayern Munich in the Champions League semifinals. He previously saved two penalties in the decisive shootout win over Manchester City in the quarterfinals.

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)

Vaishali outwits Cramling, Praggnanandhaa loses to Nakamura

Indian Grandmaster R Vaishali continued her dream run to defeat veteran GM Pia Cramling of Sweden, while her brother R Praggnanandhaa went down fighting against Hikaru Nakamura of USA in the fourth round of the Norway chess tournament here. Vaishali stretched her lead to 2.5 points following her second win under classical time control. The Indian now has 8.5 points in her kitty and is followed by women's world champion Wenjun Ju of China and Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine. Muzychuk defeated Koneru Humpy for her first win in the tournament while Wenjun got through her compatriot Tingjie Lei in the Armageddon. With six rounds still remaining in the six-player double round-robin tournament, Lei stands fourth on five points, two points clear of Humpy and Cramling. In the men's section, world number one Magnus Carlsen grinded down arch-rival Fabiano Caruana of United States on a day that witnessed all decisive games under classical time control.

In the other game of the day, Firouzja Alireza of France put it across reigning world champion Ding Liren of China. The USD 1,61,000 prize money tournament has many more critical games to come but at the end of fourth round Nakamura has nosed ahead on seven points, enjoying a half point lead over Alireza. Carlsen is third with six points to his credit while Praggnanandhaa slipped to fourth position on 5.5 points. Caruana is a close fifth at this stage with five points while Liren is a distant last on just 2.5 points thus far. Vaishali won thanks to her perseverance out of a drawn rook and pawns endgame. Playing the black side of a Grünfeld defense, the Chennai-based GM had little trouble equalising and the players arrived at a heavy piece endgame in almost no time. Cramling had to solve her pawn structure problem a bit and this is where Vaishali



thought she had a chance. The game was still within the boundaries of a draw when Cramling blundered and found herself staring at a lost rook and pawns endgame. The game lasted 54 moves. Humpy lost to Muzychuk in what was a similar story. The rook and pawns endgame should have been a draw but a blunder by Humpy towards the

end sealed the fate of the game in Muzychuk's favour. This was Muzychuk's first victory in Classical chess in almost seven months. In the men's section, Nakamura capitalised on some unforced errors from Praggnanandhaa. The Nimzo Indian defense by the Indian resulted in a dynamic balance but Praggnanandhaa got too

optimistic in the resulting middle game and sacrificed a knight. The compensation, however, was not enough and Nakamura converted his extra material into a full point after 86 moves. Carlsen defeated Caruana out of a Queen and pawns endgame. Outplaying his opponent from a balanced position has long been a hallmark of Carlsen and this day was no different as he won thanks to a blunder by Caruana in the final part of the game. **RESULTS ROUND 4:** Men: Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 7) beat R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 5.5) 3-0; Fabiano Caruana (USA, 5) lost to Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 6) 0-3; Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 6.5) beat Ding Liren (Chn, 2.5) 3-0. Women: Pia Cramling (Swe, 3) lost to R Vaishali (Ind, 8.5); Tingjie Lei (Chn, 5) lost to Wenjun Ju (Chn, 6); Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 6) beat Koneru Humpy (Ind, 3).

India parts ways with IBA, joins World Boxing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on Friday parted ways with the suspended IBA and joined the breakout World Boxing in a bid to counter the threat to the sport's Olympic future. The move comes months after the International Olympic Committee reiterated its threat to leave boxing out of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics if national federations continued to align themselves with the International Boxing Association (IBA). "It is absolutely vital to the sustainability of boxing that it retains its Olympics status, so we are delighted to join World Boxing," BFI president Ajay Singh said in a press release. Singh said he looks forward to working closely with the WB Executive Board to "shape the future development of the sport and deliver a brighter future for boxers across the world." World Boxing, whose president is former IBA presidential candidate Boris van der Vorst, was launched in April 2023 and



aims to ensure that boxing remains at the heart of the Olympic movement. The membership application was approved by the BFI's General Assembly and will be ratified by World Boxing's Executive Board. "India is a very important country in international boxing and we look forward to welcoming the BFI into the growing World Boxing family. This is a very exciting development which will significantly increase our presence in Asia and I look forward to working closely with the BFI in delivering our common goals," Van der Vorst said. On May 7, WB held its first for-

mal meeting with the IOC which signalled the start of a formal collaboration between the two organisations aimed at establishing a pathway for boxing to remain in the Olympic Games. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) had de-recognised the IBA in 2019 over long-standing financial, sports integrity, and governance issues. Boxing at the 2024 Paris Olympics is set to be overseen by the IOC. It will be the second successive time, after the Tokyo Olympics, that the IBA will have no involvement in bouts at the mega-event.

Peyton leads unseeded players pulling off upsets on a long day at French Open

AP ■ PARIS

Good thing the French tennis federation installed artificial lights on every court at Roland Garros in 2021, because they sure did come in handy Thursday, allowing match after match to stretch deep into the night, including one particular result that stood out: unseeded American Peyton Stearns' elimination of No. 10 Daria Kasatkina. All of the waiting around all day to get on court did not disrupt Stearns one bit, and the 22-year-old from Cincinnati, who won an NCAA singles title at the University of Texas, used 17 forehand winners through the cold, damp and slow conditions to defeat Kasatkina 7-5, 6-2 in a match that didn't start until after 9 p.m. And didn't finish until after 10:30 p.m. "You just kind of don't know what to expect," the 62nd-ranked Stearns said about waiting to get on court as showers created a start-stop-start scheduling fiasco all around the

grounds. "You have to accept that." How did she prepare to finally get started? "I had a single espresso before I went out there," she said with a smile. "So it was like morning for me." Kasatkina had a harder time with the situation. "Mentally, it's tough to face the day when it's a long wait," said Kasatkina, a 2022 semifinalist at the French Open. "You have to be calm, but at the same time, you have to be ready to jump on the court. And you don't know when." The last of the long day's 55 matches didn't wrap up until just about 1 a.m., when 17-year-old Russian Mirra Andreeva finally got through a 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 win against No. 19 seed Victoria Azarenka, a two-time Australian Open champion who is 34. Andreeva next faces Stearns, with the winner reaching the fourth round in Paris for the first time. Other seeded women sent home included No. 9 Jelena Ostapenko,

the 2017 champion in Paris, who lost to Denmark's Clara Tauson 7-6 (4), 4-6, 6-3; No. 11 Danielle Collins, defeated by Serbian qualifier Olga Danilovic 6-7 (3), 7-5, 6-4; No. 18 Marta Kostyuk, who was beaten 7-5, 6-4 by Donna Vekic; and No. 23 Anna Kalinskaya, eliminated 1-6, 7-5, 6-3 by oft-injured 2019 U.S. Open champion Bianca Andreescu. Men's seeds who bowed out included No. 25 Frances Tiafoe and No. 31 Mariano Navone. A frosty handshake came when Tiafoe and Denis Shapovalov - who are friends - met at the net after Shapovalov's 6-7 (4), 6-4, 6-2, 6-4 win. That's because Tiafoe sent a tennis ball off the side of Shapovalov's head with one on-the-run shot. "I wasn't happy with it. But it's tennis, so you can do what you want," said Shapovalov, who joined Felix Auger-Aliassime to give Canada two men in the third round at Roland Garros for the first time in the Open era, which began in 1968. "Look, I'm sure we'll be fine in



a couple days. Obviously, (in the) heat of the moment, it's not fun. But we'll get through it." Auger-Aliassime and Shapovalov

are among the players who originally were supposed to complete their second-rounders Wednesday. Because they didn't get

done until Thursday, on account of the weather, they need to get back on court Friday for the third round, losing the usual day off at a Grand Slam. There were victories for several top men Thursday: No. 1 Novak Djokovic, who seeks his fourth French Open championship and 25th from all Grand Slam tournaments, No. 4 Alexander Zverev, No. 8 Hubert Hurkacz and two-time runner-up Casper Ruud. No. 5 Daniil Medvedev and No. 15 Ben Shelton both advanced when their opponents stopped because of injury. Women moving on included No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka, No. 4 Elena Rybakina, No. 14 Madison Keys and No. 15 Elina Svitolina. This is the fourth tournament for Stearns since she began working with Tom Hill, who used to coach two-time Grand Slam semifinalist Maria Sakkari. Last week, Stearns claimed her first career WTA title, in an event on clay at Rabat, Morocco, celebrating by posing for

photos while doing a handstand. That skills is from her days in gymnastics, a sport her mother, Denise, used to do. Mom - who Stearns said good-naturedly offered some critiques of her form in the pictures - came to Paris with plans to watch just daughter's first-round match, then fly home to Ohio. But a win that day prompted a new flight booking. Now after the win against Kasatkina, Stearns said her mother is sticking around for the third round, too. "I was like, Look, just stay. Please," Stearns said with a laugh. "We've got to keep this going." Nothing too onerous about getting to stay in France while watching your kid win tennis matches, right? Ah, but Stearns said she put Denise to work. "She's running me through my warmups and cool downs. And before my matches, we have a ritual where she'll fill up my three water bottles and add electrolytes. Keeping her busy," Stearns said. "She jokes, You're not paying me.

ROHIT SHARMA HOPES FOR QUICK ACCLIMATISATION OF NY PITCH AHEAD OF T20 WC

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Marvelling at the newly-constructed Nassau County International Cricket Stadium here, India skipper Rohit Sharma underlined the need for his team to get acclimatised to the pitch and conditions quickly ahead of their T20 World Cup opener against Ireland on June 5.

However, Rohit and company will get a chance to check the nature of the pitch and overall conditions when they face Bangladesh in a warm-up match here on Saturday. It's also India's lone training game ahead of the ICC marquee event.

The warm-up match is important from India's perspective because their matches will start at 10.30 AM local time and the players need to get used to day-time matches after playing under lights in the IPL for the last two months.

"We're looking to understand the conditions more importantly (before the tournament proper) as we haven't been here before," Rohit told ICC.

The Mumbaier emphasised the need for his side to get into a "rhythm" before the real action starts, and he wanted to use this side game as a



springboard. "We will try and make the most of the conditions, get used to what it's going to be like on June 5 when we play our first game," he added.

The challenge for the Indians will be to adapt to the drop-in turf here, something they don't come across very often in international cricket. "It's just about getting into that

rhythm of getting the feel of the ground, pitch and stuff like that," he said.

Rohit was part of the first batch of India cricketers to arrive here on May 26, along with Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel. Moving beyond the match

routines, Rohit also found time to take in the beauty of the venue. "It looks beautiful. It's quite an open ground. When we come here and play our first game, I just can't wait to feel the atmosphere in the stadium," he said.

"It's a decent capacity as well. Hopefully it's gonna be a good one." Rohit hoped that fans will

through the venue for their matches. "People in New York will be very interested in coming and watching the World Cup, as it is happening for the first time here.

"I'm pretty sure all the fans across various teams are quite excited and looking forward to this tournament. And also as players (we) can't wait to get

started," he noted.

WORRY FOR BANGLADESH: Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto too appreciated the excellent construction here, but he would not have forgotten Bangladesh's shocking series defeat against the USA a few days back.

The United States, largely constituted by expat players, scored a stunning 2-1 win over Bangladesh in a three-match T20I series at home last week, signalling that they are no mere pushovers.

Hence, Shanto might be hoping for a quick turnaround against formidable India, even though it's a warm-up match at this scenic stadium.

"To be very honest I wasn't expecting anything like this but we all followed on social media how the wicket looks like, how the ground would be, and we are very excited as to what is going to happen here," said Shanto.

The 25-year-old top-order batter then gushed over the venue.

"It's unbelievable. I think it's crazy. I mean we all saw on the internet there was nothing (three months ago). Now, it looks like a proper stadium and feels great," he said.

The Eastern grandstand (in particular), I didn't expect it to be like this," he added.



India eye redemption as big ticket cricket touches base in America

PTI ■ NEW YORK

There will be the usual favourites, the mavericks, the chokers and also the unpredictable minnows — the script is familiar for a World Cup but the scale would be unprecedented when the T20 showpiece, featuring a record 20 teams, spearheads cricket's audacious charge into the American market starting here on Saturday.

While India would be eager to shed the baggage of near-misses, Australia would like to add another chapter to their tale of domination. For the likes of Pakistan and West Indies, the primary target would be to keep in check their tendency to implode at the most inopportune time.

Defending champions England and South Africa too will be a force to reckon with, especially the latter. Given the presence of match-winners like Heinrich Klaasen, David Miller, Quinton de Kock and Kagiso Rabada, the Proteas seem primed to get rid of the chokers' tag.

It will be a ground-breaking event not just because of the sheer size of the draw but also for the fact that it officially marks cricket's big-ticket entry into the USA, which will host 16 of the 55 matches to be played across 29 days.

The remaining 39 games will be held in the West Indies, including the Super 8 stage, the semifinals and the final on June 29.

Besides the obvious favourites on paper, the likes of Afghanistan can also never be counted out to upset the apple cart at the most unexpected time.

There are plots within plots that will unfold in the course of next one month. And perhaps one of the most intriguing would be the one involving India, a team that looks so

destined for an ICC trophy but has somehow managed to fall short after the 2013 Champions Trophy triumph.

Rohit Sharma's reputation as captain will definitely be on the line this time. Considering the unparalleled resources and depth that the sport's powerhouse has, most experts find it difficult to pinpoint India's trophy drought at the word stage over the past decade.

Rohit's predecessor Virat Kohli ended his tenure as the most successful Test captain but a global trophy eluded him.

Now Rohit is carrying that baggage of not winning a world title with India finishing runner-up in two ICC events over the past 12 months, including the juggernaut-ending loss to Australia in the ODI World Cup final at home.

Their outdated approach in the previous two T20 World Cups cost them dearly but they are unlikely to repeat those mistakes in the Americas.

The recently-concluded IPL showed how the batters are pushing boundaries and India's high-profile line-up needs to follow that risky path.

India may not have the same batting firepower as compared to some of the rival teams but as pitches in the Caribbean are expected to be spin-friendly, they surely have all bases covered.

Rohit and Co. Are scheduled to play three games at the makeshift facility here including the blockbuster clash against Pakistan on June 9.

Drop-in pitches will be used at the brand new facility with all teams entering unfamiliar territory.

India, however, will have the advantage of playing a warm-up game against Bangladesh at the same venue on June 1 before they take on Ireland in their opening league game on June 5.

Pooran, Powell make fifties as WI hammer nine-man Australia by 35 runs

PTI ■ PORT OF SPAIN (TRINIDAD)

Fifties by Nicholas Pooran and Rovman Powell helped West Indies outpunch a nine-man Australia by 35 runs in their warm-up match ahead of the T20 World Cup here.

As it happened in their first training match against Namibia, the Aussies fielded only nine players against the Windies. Selector George Bailey and head coach Andrew McDonald filled the remaining two spots while fielding.

Batting first, West Indies rode on fifties by Pooran (75, 25b, 5x4, 8x6), skipper Powell (52, 25b, 4x4, 4x6) and an unbeaten 47 off 18 balls by Sherfane Rutherford (4x4, 4x6) to raise 257 for 4 in 20 overs.

In reply, Josh Inglis (55, 30b, 3x4, 4x6) led Australia's reply and there were a

39 (22b, 4x4, 2x6) by Ellis and numerous 20s as Australia finished at 222 for seven.

Earlier, Australia had Tim David, Josh Hazlewood, Adam Zampa, Nathan Ellis and Ashton Agar as bowlers, and all went for plenty.

All-rounder Mitchell Marsh, recuperating from an injury, refrained from bowling, though he later batted.

West Indies innings was built around fine partnerships between Pooran and Johnson Charles (40), who milked 90 runs for the second wicket and a 63 for the unbroken fifth wicket between Rutherford and Shimron Hetmyer (18).

The absence of skipper Pat Cummins, Glenn Maxwell, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Cameron Green and Travis Head was felt as they are yet to join the squad.

They are spending a few extra days at



home after a taxing campaign in the recently concluded IPL. **NAMIBIA BEAT PNG:** Namibia

defeated Papua New Guinea by three runs under the DLS method. Batting first, PNG were restricted to 109 for seven in 20 overs, and Namibia were 93 for six in 16.5 overs when the skies opened up in Tarouba. But they were three runs ahead in the DLS calculations at that stage.

At Dallas, the match between the Netherlands and Canada was abandoned without a ball being bowled.

BRIEF SCORES
West Indies: 257/4 in 20 overs (Nicholas Pooran 75, Rovman Powell 52; Sherfane Rutherford 47 not out; Adam Zampa 2/62) beat Australia: 222/7 in 20 overs (Josh Inglis 55, Nathan Ellis 39; Gudakesh Motie 2/31) by 35 runs.
Papua New Guinea: 109/7 in 20 overs (See Bau 29; David Wiese 2/8, Ruben Trumblemann 2/15) lost to Namibia: 93/6 in 16.5 overs (Jan Frylinck 36, JP Kotze 30; Alei Nao 2/9, Assad Vala 2/14) by 3 runs (DLS)



Lamichhane to miss T20 World Cup after US denies visa to Nepalese leg spinner

AP ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's ace leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane was ruled out of the Twenty20 World Cup on Friday after his US visa application was rejected for a second time.

The Nepalese government and its cricket authorities took up Lamichhane's case after his visa was first rejected last week.

The Cricket Association of Nepal said in a statement that "despite taking necessary initiatives... The US Embassy has expressed its inability to give travel permission (visa) to national player Lamichhane to play the World Cup."

The Nepalese cricket association suspended Lamichhane after he was arrested in 2022 over an accusation of the rape of an 18-year-old woman. He was found guilty in January this year but was acquitted on appeal because of "lack of evidence" and the cricket association allowed him to resume playing cricket.

Nepal, placed in Group D, opens its T20 World Cup campaign against the Netherlands on June 7 in Dallas before taking on Sri Lanka at Lauderhill, Florida on June 11.

Warm up game opportunity to check Indian players' rhythm

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Yashasvi Jaiswal will aim to add his bit to the combination conundrum with a handy contribution while Arshdeep Singh and Mohammed Siraj need to put their best foot forward during India's only T20 World Cup warm-up game against Bangladesh ahead of their tournament opener on June 5.

With all 15 cricketers being regular playing XI members of their respective IPL franchises, the team is certainly not short on game time but an assortment of 15 high-calibre players and finding that perfect combination will be key to ending India's 13-year global trophy drought.

In the warm-up game, it is expected that save for Virat Kohli, who is expected to touch down some time before the practice game, all other 14 players will be given a go as it doesn't have an official status.

It will be an opportunity to check everyone's rhythm after most of the core team members enjoyed a two-week break.

There will be two areas where skipper Rohit Sharma and outgoing head coach Rahul Dravid need to

take a judicious call. Even if Jaiswal is in good nick, how to fit him in the side will be an issue as it would mean keeping a power-hitter like Shivam Dube out of the playing XI.

It is a foregone conclusion that Jaiswal might have to sit out as it would not only allow Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma to open but could also open the door for Dube at the back end of the tournament.

"Shivam Dube is a six-hitting machine. He can be the 'x-factor' in the T20 World Cup. But if Shivam has to be in the XI, then you can't play Yashasvi. Rohit has to take that call and I prefer both pace-bowling all-rounders in the XI. If Shivam plays, he can take on the opposition wrist spinners in the latter half," Suresh Raina, one of India's premier T20 batters of his time, said on Friday when asked about a possible combination.

The second teething problem for India would be to find Jasprit Bumrah's opening pace-bowling partner. Both Arshdeep Singh and Mohammed Siraj have blown hot and cold in the IPL and their form has left a lot to be desired.

RP Singh, one of the heroes of India's



inaugural edition victory, feels that Hardik Pandya's four overs will be very important. Besides, he feels that Arshdeep should be the second frontline pacer on the newly-laid drop-in track. Talking about the length to be bowled on the tracks in the US during an early morning start, he felt variations will be important, which make Arshdeep a better bet compared to Siraj.

"As per my understanding, there should be a bit of slowness in the wicket. So, the ideal length will be somewhere around just short of good length. There will not be a lot of swing for the bowlers but the bowlers with variations, not only yorkers but also slower ones, leg and off cutters..." RP replied to a PTI query during a promotional event in Delhi.

"These deliveries will be utilised a bit more by Arshdeep, so the success rate will be automatically higher for him and that's what I understand the wickets in the US," he explained.

Against Bangladesh on a slowish track, it would also be a challenge for the middle-order as to how they deal with Shakib Al Hasan and Mahedi Hasan apart from questions asked by cutter master Mustafizur Rahaman.

PTI ■ BARBADOS

Mitchell Marsh will not bowl in T20 WC opener against Oman: Coach McDonald

Australia skipper Mitchell Marsh will not bowl in their T20 World Cup opener against Oman on June 6 and will play only as a batter as he continues his recovery from a hamstring injury sustained during the IPL, said head coach Andrew McDonald on Friday.

Marsh played both the World Cup warm-up games against Namibia and co-hosts West Indies in Trinidad, scoring 18 and 4 respectively.

But the pace-bowling all-rounder did not field for the full bowling innings in either games, with Matthew Wade taking over captaincy duties in his absence. "For Mitch, (the warm-up games) was about ticking off where his body was at," McDonald told cricket.Com.Au.

"He fielded more overs tonight (in the warm-up against West Indies), he was able to move more freely, so he's building a little bit of confidence there. It looks as though he's all set for the first game," he added.

Marsh played just four matches for Delhi Capitals in the recently concluded IPL following a right hamstring niggle and he flew back to Australia in the last week of April to continue his recuperation.

"The second part is just when the bowling comes back online... It won't be the first game," said McDonald.



During the second warm-up game against the West Indies, nine-man Australia lost by 35 runs, with the absence of skipper Pat Cummins, Glenn Maxwell, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Cameron Green and Travis Head, who are yet to join the squad, being felt by the Kangaroos.

The Australian players who took part in the IPL flew back home to be with their families and were exempted from the warm-up fixtures.

"It was by design, in terms of when we were getting people back after the IPL, we were well aware we weren't going to get the squad together until the first of next month," said McDonald. "We've got some things in place where we'll bring the group together, we'll work through our plans leading into Oman and there's a bit of space between that game and (playing) England."

Australia will play arch-rivals and defending T20 World Cup champions England here on June 9. "We feel as though we have plenty of time to bring that group together. It's a familiar group, they've played a lot together. If they hadn't played a lot together then the prep might have looked different," the coach added.

"We feel comfortable though as they know how to play with each other. It will just be finalising the XIs for the games, and the balances that we want. We've got plenty of options.