



OPINION 6
EPIC ELECTION FESTIVAL
CONCLUDES SMOOTHLY

WORLD 8
ISRAEL TELLS CITIZENS TO
AVOID TRAVEL TO MALDIVES

MONEY 10
MOTHER DAIRY HIKES MILK PRICES
BY ₹2 PER LITRE IN NCR

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

Late City Vol.20 Issue 151
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

BHUBANESWAR, TUESDAY JUNE 4, 2024; PAGES 12 & 4

Established 1864



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



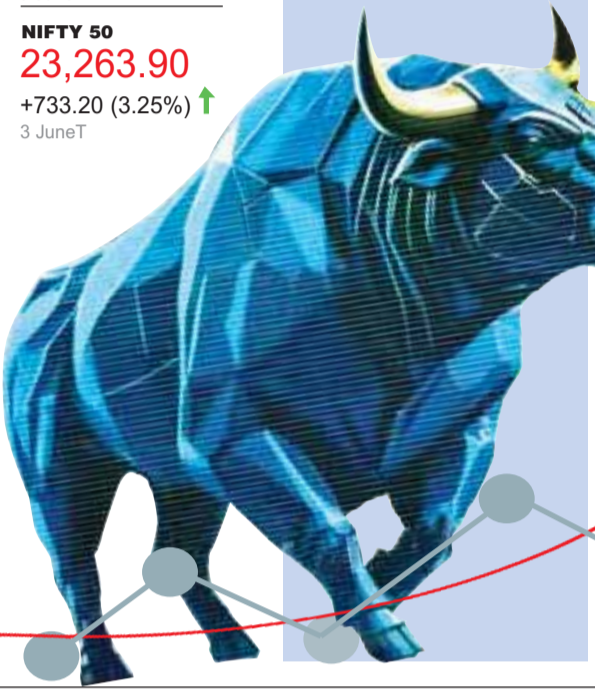
SATWIK, CHIRAG
AIM FOR TITLE
DEFENCE
11 SPORTS

EXIT POLLS, ENTER BULLS

BSE SENSEX
76,468.78
+2,507.47 (3.37%)
3 June

NIFTY 50
23,263.90
+733.20 (3.25%)
3 June

₹ **SURGES 28 PAISE
TO SETTLE AT
83.14 AGAINST
US \$**



Indian Stock markets surged to record highs on Monday following exit polls projecting a third term for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Government. The Nifty 50 jumped up 3.25 per cent (up by 733 points) and closed at 23,264 levels. Meanwhile, the Sensex gained 3.39 per cent (up by 2,507 points) and closed at 76,469 levels.



GOURAV VALLABH

In the past few days, there has been notable positive economic development with the release of the GDP numbers for 2023-24 and S&P's positive outlook upgrade for India. The GDP exceeded market expectations, showing a growth of 8.2 per cent in 2023-24 compared to 7 per cent in 2022-23. It's worth noting that the growth in 2023-24 surpasses the Government's second advance estimate of 7.6 per cent released in February 2024. The sustainability of the current GDP growth in the long term is a matter of concern. Long-term GDP growth heavily relies on the level of investment in the economy, which has seen a healthy 9 per cent increase. It's important to note that the Government sector has been the primary driver of this investment growth. Specifically, the Central Government's capital expenditure (CapEx) has experienced a significant surge of 28 per cent in 2023-24. However, there needs to be more momentum in the private sector CapEx. While the

private sector has shown an increasing willingness to invest, the key factors affecting this are policy certainty and confidence in global and domestic economic stability. The exit poll results signal stability in domestic economic and policy matters, which is one of the critical drivers for private capex. With manufacturing capacity utilisation currently at 75 per cent, and both bank and corporate balance sheets in solid condition, the stage is set for a resurgence in private capital expenditure. Ultimately, the private sector must take the lead in driving the investment cycle. As investment plays a crucial role in job creation, leading to increased demand, ultimately validating the initial investment and attracting further investments. This sets off a positive cycle of investment and growth. It's essential to recognise that sustained investment growth cannot solely rely on Government CapEx year after year. With both public and private investments expected to pick up in the economy, what can be done now to provide suitable employment opportunities for citizens - the answer

is to focus on CapEx in manufacturing, especially labour-intensive. This is answered in one of the guarantees by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, i.e., to transform India into a global manufacturing hub. In the past, India has successfully attracted suppliers for major US corporations such as Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc's Google. However, according to World Bank data, less than 3 per cent of global manufacturing occurs in the world's most populous country, compared to 24 per cent in China. So much has to be done in this area. Another factor contributing to job creation is a focus on boosting exports. This has been limited due to sluggish global growth. While India's service exports have remained strong, merchandise exports have specifically felt the impact of the global slowdown, which is expected to reverse. When investments both in public and private are expected to grow, supplemented with a thrust on labour-intensive manufacturing and exports, the quantity and quality of jobs will increase. Then, private consumption, one of the main pillars of the economy, will also have 8-9 per

cent growth, which was at around 4 per cent in 2023-24. A combination of sustainable long-term GDP growth, increased private sector investment in capital expenditure, S&P's positive outlook upgrade, and the prospect of a third term for Modi's administration, which aims to position India as a global manufacturing hub, is expected to generate significant optimism among investors in India. These factors promise policy continuity and potential for growth, suggesting a positive outlook for the market and inflow of global capital. The new Government's 100-day agenda and the upcoming full Budget in July 2024 were also important focal points. Furthermore, the progression of the monsoon, inflation data, and the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) interest rate policies will continue to significantly influence and guide the Indian economy in the days ahead. So, with all these solid macroeconomic fundamentals and policy continuity, we can expect abki baar GDP growth 10 per cent paar followed by Sensex 100,000 paar.

The writer is a Professor of Finance at XLRI-Xavier School of Management and a BJP leader.

BJP leaders in a huddle, take stock

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



With just a day before the counting of votes, BJP top leaders met at party president JP Nadda's residence on Monday to discuss the party's performance in the Lok Sabha polls and its preparation for the counting of votes scheduled to take place on June 4. The meeting, presided over by Nadda, was also learnt to have taken stock of the prevailing political situation following the exit polls predicting a big win for the BJP-led NDA, and the Opposition INDIA Bloc's series of meetings rejecting the forecast. "A meeting was held to discuss and review the elections conducted in seven phases and also to discuss the counting of votes which is to take place tomorrow. The meeting was presided over by party national president Nadda," BJP national general secretary Vinod Tawde told reporters here after the meeting. He said the meeting discussed the voting pattern observed during all seven phases of polls as to how polling took place. "This was also reviewed," he added. Tawde said the meeting, which was attended by BJP national general secretaries and secretaries, held an "extensive discussion" on all seven phases of the Lok Sabha elections and deliberated on the deployment of party's polling agents across the country for counting of votes.

"That polling agents reach in time across all booths, their proper deployment, whether there is any problem in this - all these things were discussed," he said. The meeting also discussed if there is "any suspicion" over counting of votes anywhere and party office bearers were asked to pay "special attention" to such a situation, he said. Asked if the meeting also discussed BJP's plans for celebrating its victory with most of the exit polls projecting it to be getting a massive mandate for a third consecutive term, Tawde said, "There is no such discussion on this at present. We look into this only after seeing the trends, not on the basis of the exit polls' projections." Replying to a query on formation of the party's Government, the BJP leader said there was no discussion at the meeting on it.

Just wait and see: Sonia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

UPA chairperson and senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi on Monday said her party is very hopeful that the results of the Lok Sabha elections will be totally opposite to what has been shown in the exit polls. "We have to wait, just wait and see," Sonia said when asked about her expectations from the results scheduled to be announced on Tuesday. Congress leaders have said that the INDIA Bloc will win 295 seats and form the Government. Preparations were underway at the Congress headquarters on Monday for the June 4 counting day with many

supporters seeing them as arrangements for celebration of the INDIA Bloc's victory in the Lok Sabha polls despite exit polls suggesting otherwise. Tent-poles have been erected in the grounds of the Congress' 24, Akbar Road headquarters and giant coolers were being set up around its sprawling premises. "We are very hopeful that our results are completely opposite to what the exit polls are showing," the Congress parliamentary party chief added. Sonia Gandhi made the remarks after attending an event held at the DMK office here. She paid tributes to DMK stalwart M Karunanidhi on his 100th



Senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi speaks with the media during a ceremony to pay tribute to former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi on his birth anniversary, at Anna-Kalaignar Arivalayam, in New Delhi on Monday

birth anniversary. Most exit polls have predicted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will retain power for a third straight term, with the BJP-led NDA expected to win a big majority in the Lok Sabha polls. While some exit polls have given the NDA more than 400 seats, most have predicted that it will win over 350, which is way above the majority


mark of 272 seats needed to form the Government. The Congress and other INDIA Bloc parties have trashed the exit polls, claiming that these surveys were a work of "fantasy" and asserting that the opposition alliance will form the next Government. Further, the Congress led INDIA Bloc on Monday said the Election Commission (EC) has agreed to its request of counting the postal ballots first on June 4, when the results of the Lok Sabha polls are scheduled to be declared, and stressed that this is the participatory manner of promoting the spirit of democracy in a non-adversarial fashion.

WhatsApp bans 71 lakh Indians for policy breach

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

WhatsApp has banned 71 lakh Indian users in April this year for violating platform rules and policies. The company assures continued action against accounts breaching its terms to maintain a safe user environment. WhatsApp ban was in line to curb misuse and maintain integrity of the platform. WhatsApp uses machine learning and data analytics to proactively identify and ban suspicious accounts. Every month WhatsApp bans lakhs of Indian users who are reported for being scammers or violating the platform's privacy policies. In its latest India Monthly Report, the Meta-owned instant messaging platform revealed that it banned around 71 lakh Indian accounts between April 1, 2024, and April 30, 2024, to curb misuse and maintain platform integrity. The company has further assured that it will continue implementing more bans if users continue to violate its rules. WhatsApp banned a total of 7,182,000 accounts between April 1 and April 30. Amongst these, 1,302,000 accounts were proactively banned before any reports from users. This proactive stance is part of WhatsApp's broader strategy to prevent abuse before it occurs. The company uses advanced machine learning and data analytics to identify suspicious behaviour patterns indicative of abuse. Notably, in April 2024, WhatsApp received 10,554 user reports on various topics, including account support, ban appeals, product support, and safety concerns.




The Pioneer Bhubaneswar edition completed 19 years of its publication on June 4, 2024. We thank our readers and well-wishers for our successful journey.

Forces neutralise two terrorists in Pulwama

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the counting day, two terrorists were gunned down by a joint team of security forces in the Nihama area of South Kashmir's Pulwama district on Monday. According to media reports, one of the self-styled commanders of the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba Riyaz Dar was believed to have been trapped inside the hideout along with his accomplice. To flush out the terrorists hiding inside the residential building, the security forces blasted the structure to avoid any collateral damage. According to a tweet posted by the Kashmir Zone police on X, "Bodies of two

terrorists killed in the anti-terrorist operation have been recovered so far. Identity and affiliation is being ascertained and the operation is in progress." The operation was launched by the security forces based on inputs received about the presence of terrorists in the built-up area late Sunday evening. According to police, the firefight erupted when the joint team of security forces came under fire from the terrorists hiding in one of the houses early Monday morning. Meanwhile, stringent security arrangements have been made across different parts of Kashmir valley for the counting of votes for three LoK Sabha seats.



Monsoon to reach State in 4 to 5 days

Rains bring temp down in twin city
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even as Nor'wester rains on Sunday night brought relief from the hot and humid conditions in the twin cities on Monday, the Regional Office of the India Metrological Centre here issued a warning for thunderstorms on Tuesday. The IMD said thunderstorm with lightning accompanied with gusty surface wind speed reaching 30 to 40 kmph is likely to occur in the districts of Nabarangpur, Koraput, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Gajapati, Ganjam, Nayagarh, Khordha, Baleswar, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Kandhamal. The weather office said the conditions are favourable for advancement of monsoons to south Odisha in the next four to five days. However, the IMD said no large change in the maximum temperature (day temperature) is likely during the next 24 hours while there would be a gradual rise by 2 to 3 degree Celsius during subsequent four days at many places of the State.

Permission must for poll victory rally: DGP

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In order to maintain law and order and prevent any violent incident after announcement of results of the dual elections on Tuesday, the Odisha Police has made it mandatory for taking its prior permission for victory processions. Speaking to the media on Monday, Director General of Police (DGP) Arun Sarangi said tight security has been enforced in each counting centre to ensure peaceful conclusion of the process and the direction of the Election Commission of India in this regard would be followed strictly. The DGP said any party or candidate has to take prior permission for bringing out a victory procession. Permission for use of public announcement system and firecrackers has been made mandatory. Sarangi said that in anticipation of violence in Ganjam district, around 120 antisocial persons have already been arrested. This year's elections were held without any Maoist violence across the State, he said.

Stage set for counting of votes in State today

70 CAPF companies to be deployed till May 6
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As the stage is all set for counting of votes for the Lok Sabha and Odisha Assembly elections on Tuesday, 70 companies of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) would be deployed in the State till June 6. Already, 25 CAPF companies have been on duty at EVM strong rooms and counting centres set up in different districts. The decision to step up security arrangements was taken after the State witnessed sporadic incidents of post-poll violence from multiple places after completion of the last-phase voting on June 1, during which 74.41 per cent of voters exercised their franchise. Ten Congress supporters were injured in an alleged attack by BJD workers at Basudevpur in Bhadrak district soon after polling ended in evening. A two-tier security arrangement has been put in place at each sealed strong room. The counting of votes would begin at 8 am. To keep incidents of post-poll violence in check, the Election Commission will deploy an additional platoon of CAPF personnel while another platoon of the State Armed Police Force has also been mobilised. Besides, the Commissionerate Police are also keeping a vigil at the BJB Autonomous College in Bhubaneswar, where EVMs of five Assembly segments, Bhubaneswar Central, North, Ekamra, Jayadev and Jatni, have been stored. It is also under CCTV surveillance.

Hostile portrayal took us by surprise, says EC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Just a day ahead of the Lok Sabha elections 2024, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar came down heavily on the "mischievous narratives" that could harm the electoral process during the course of the polls. He was responding to a query against the backdrop of allegations and criticism faced by the election commission over alleged delay in release of voter turnout, disclosure of form 17C data and the sanctity of electronic voting machines (EVMs). In a first, the Election Commission held a Press conference on Monday just a



Chief Election Commissioner of India Rajiv Kumar during a Press conference, in New Delhi, on Monday
Photo by: RANJAN DIMRI/PIONEER

day before the counting of votes and claimed India created a world record with 64.2 crore voters including 31.2 crore women participating in the Lok Sabha elections this year, saying this is a historic movement.

In Malkangiri Mystery deepens around missing doctor

Family appeals for action

PNS ■ MALKANGIRI

Two days have passed by, but there is no information regarding the whereabouts of Doctor Amlan Bhoi, who has been allegedly kidnapped from his official quarters. Amlan was posted at the Kalimela Community Health Centre (CHC) in Malkangiri district.



Some unidentified miscreants allegedly abducted Amlan soon after he reached his quarters after completing his duty on June 1.

Amlan hails from the Tikabali area in Kandhamal district. His family met the Kandhamal Collector and SP in Phulbani on Monday and

have met senior administrative and police officials. They have assured to take the matter with Malkangiri officials in this regard."

Notably, Amlan had reportedly picked up a dispute with some people regarding a post-mortem some days prior to his alleged kidnapping.

Mystery shrouds over the entire incident as Maoist involvement is also suspected behind the kidnapping. However, clarity is yet to emerge in connection with the incident.

Sources said Amlan had withdrawn money from an ATM some hours prior to his mysterious disappearance.

Meanwhile, the hospital authorities could not be contacted over the matter.

Amlan's uncle said, "We

BJYM gheraos DGP office



Demands action over attack on its leader Panda

PNS ■ CUTTACK

Hundreds of activists of the

Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) on Monday gheraoed the DGP office in Cuttack over the brutal attack on BJYM State president Avilash Panda during the last day of campaigning for the final phase at

Chandbali in Bhadrak district. They demanded action against the main accused. They alleged that Chandbali BJD MLA Byomakesh Ray was behind the attack on Panda. To date, police have arrested

10 persons involved in the brutal attack on Panda and his supporters. BJP leader Tusharkanti Chakraborty said, "We strongly condemn the brutal attack on BJYM president

Avilash Panda. The attack was sponsored by BJD leader Byomakesh Ray. We demand immediate arrest of the main accused." However, no reaction was received from the Chandbali MLA.

PhD for research on public relations in Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Amity University Chhattisgarh has awarded Sanjaya Kumar Sahoo a doctorate degree for his research in Odisha's field of public relations.



Hailing from Indupur in Kendrapada district, Sahoo has been working in the field of public relations and communication for the last two decades. He has played a crucial role in shaping strategic communications and media relations for various organisations in Odisha. He has also contributed various research articles to reputed journals in the field of journalism and mass communication. He is currently working at Jindal Steel & Power as the DGM (Corporate Communication).

'Ban cracker explosions post poll results'

Ganjam green activist urges SEC

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAMPUR

Sanjay Kumar Nayak, an environmentalist and founder of the Green Organic Development (GOD) Institute of Babanapur villager in Ganjam district presented a memorandum to the State Election Commission on Monday, urging a ban on the use of firecrackers during victory celebrations.

This year, the oppressive summer heat has exacerbated making life hellish both for the humans and wild lives. The wild animals in particular are struggling with a severe lack of oxygen and drinking wa-



ter. The use of firecrackers during electoral celebrations further endangers both humans and animals, leading to a deteriorating situation for the society as a whole.

In his request to the State Election Commission, Nayak demanded immediate action to prohibit the hazardous practice. The letter highlighted the tragic consequences of firecracker use re-

Nayak's initiative has garnered widespread support and sparked a broader conversation about the impact of electoral celebrations on the environment. While his plea has inspired many, he also called on political parties to exercise restraint and avoid activities that could harm people and nature.

As the nation awaits the election results, Nayak's call to action serves as a stark reminder of the need to balance celebratory traditions with environmental and societal responsibilities. The proposed ban on firecrackers is seen as a necessary step towards ensuring the safety and sustainability of both human and wildlife populations during such significant national events.

cently in Puri where several fatalities occurred, while over 15 people died in Sundergarh due to injuries caused by firecrackers.

"This practice poses a significant risk not only to human life but also to the environment," Nayak stated. "We must prioritize the safety and well-being of all living beings and protect our natural surroundings," he added.

Cabinet recommends dissolution of Assembly

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Cabinet on Monday decided to recommend to the Governor for dissolution of 16th Legislative Assembly, a day before the counting of votes for the two elections held in the State.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

This last Cabinet meeting of the fifth term of the BJD government was held on virtual mode. The main agenda of the meeting was to recommend the dissolution of Legislative Assembly after the election process is over. It was decided that the Governor would be informed about the completion of the BJD government's

tenure and recommend dissolution of the Assembly.

It is a formality mandatorily done before the declaration of election results. The State Assembly is set to complete its five-year term.

Election for the 147-member Assembly was held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls in four phases between May 13 and June 1 in the State.

According to the Constitutional provision, a State Cabinet will pass a resolution to dissolve the Assembly after the declaration of election results and hand over resignation of the Cabinet and Chief Minister to the Governor to make way for the constitution of a new Assembly. The Assembly will stand dissolved after an approval and notification of the Governor.

In Rayagada 2 women killed in lightning

PNS ■ RAYAGADA

Two women were killed in Mirabal and Karubhai villages under Rayagada block when thunderstorm lashed the district on Sunday.

gram panchayat in Gudari block, 20 big bulls and cows died in lightning

The villagers of Dhepagai have demanded compensation from the government for loss of their cattle. Similarly Karubai & Mirabali villagers have requested the district administration to compensate death of two poor tribal women, who were breadwinners of their families.

99 people die of suspected heatstroke in 3 days

Total toll rises to 141 this summer

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As many as 99 people died of suspected heatstroke in Odisha between May 31 and June 2 as a severe heat wave swept many parts of the State.

With this, the total suspected heatstroke death toll in the State during this summer rose to 141, of which 26 cases have been confirmed to be sunstroke taking into account the postmortem and joint inquiry by revenue and medical officials.

During the inquiry, the district administrations have found that eight death cases were not due to the heatstroke while 107 alleged cases are pending with the concerned Collectors for inquiry.

According to a report of the office of Special Relief Commissioner (SRC), out of 99 suspected sunstroke death cases reported between May 31 and June 2, 20 cases have been confirmed by the Collectors taking into account the postmortem and joint inquiry while two other cases have been reported not due to sunstroke. Investigation is

under process for the remaining 77 death cases.

Till May 30, 42 persons have died due to suspected heat-related illness, of which six cases were confirmed due to heatstroke and six others died for some other reasons. The joint inquiry is pending in other 30 heat-related death cases.

Due to the prevailing dry conditions in the State and strengthening of northwesterly dry winds in middle and upper levels of the atmosphere, the day temperature would be above normal by 3-5 degrees Celsius in many places in the

districts of interior Odisha for two days, the IMD's Bhubaneswar centre said in a bulletin.

The temperature is expected to remain between 43 and 45 degrees C in interior pockets and some districts, it said.

The Met department has also said that hot and humid weather conditions would prevail in coastal Odisha for four to five days from Monday.

The IMD has advised people to take precautionary measures while going outside during the peak hours of the day between 11 am and 3 pm for next three days.

World Bicycle Day Cycle rally held in Bhadrak for awareness

PNS ■ BALESWAR

In a noble initiative to spread awareness on the importance of cycling on the World Bicycle Day on June 3, a group of young volunteers under the leadership of noted environmentalist and lawyer Radhakanta Tripathy made a cycle rally from Bhadrak Autonomous College holding placards.

They covered the town area and distributed leaflets following which they participated in a meeting held at the Collectorate in Bhadrak.

Environmental activist Sunita Narain while cycling was hit by a speeding vehicle and was admitted to the AIIMS Delhi in the year 2014. Tripathy said that incident provided the trigger and he filed a petition in the National

Human Rights Commission for the safety and security of the cyclists in India. The NHRC took action on the petition and monitored the case from 2013 to 2020. Accordingly, cyclethons are being conducted and cyclist's lanes on the roads are being marked by various States besides making cycles available for the users on hiring basis, he said, adding that since a day was dedicated for the cyclists as the World Bicycle Day.

"Now the time has come to bring law, specific policies, and guidelines for the cyclists in India for inspiring more and more people to use cycles. In the absence of safety, security and insurance people hesitate to use cycles. Let the people and Government be active on the use of cycles," Tripathy said.

OJEE: Sagarika Dash tops B Pharma

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The results of the Odisha Joint Entrance Examination (OJEE) 2024 were declared on Monday. Sagarika Dash emerged topper among the OJEE qualifiers for B Pharma.



Suryakanta Prushy secured the highest rank among candidates who cleared the test for MBA admission.

Students who cleared the test will undergo counselling for admission to their chosen courses in various institutions in Odisha.

Clearing OJEE is a prerequisite for admission into B Pharma, MBA and Bachelor courses and Ayurvedic and Homoeopathic courses.

This year, total 65,742 candidates registered for the ex-

amination while 56,047 candidates (85.25%) appeared the test. Out of these, 56,000 candidates have been allotted ranks in their corresponding courses as per their performances in the examination. The candidates can download their rank cards from the OJEE website (www.ojee.nic.in / www.odishajee.com). All the candidates, who have been awarded ranks, can take part in OJEE counselling for admission into different technical professional courses in government and private colleges and institutes of Odisha corresponding to their ranks and other qualifying criteria.

Exit polls false, meant to weaken Opp: Cong



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Congress dismissed the exit poll results terming them as false, fabricated and Government sponsored in order to weaken the mental strength of INDIA Alliance.

OPCC Media Department chairman Dr Biswaranjan Mohanty addressing a Press

meet here on Monday said forged exit polls have been prepared with the help of some agencies to spread misinformation against the countrymen and to weaken mental strength of INDIA Alliance.

Dr Mohanty said what Prime Minister Narendra Modi has cheated and misled countrymen in the last 10 years

has been reflected in the election. People are giving mandate on the issues of unemployment, price rise and on the problems faced by poor Adivasis and weaker sections of the society. The Modi Government's false promises to the people of India have been exposed before the Indian electorate, he said, add-

ing that by June 4 evening, Modi will be a retiring Prime Minister.

In 2004, the NDA had similarly spread misinformation by releasing such types of false exit polls. But after that Congress returned to power. Likewise, the exit polls in other states have proved wrong, he added.

It is not good for democracy when the Home Minister influenced the election by personally telephoning 150 district magistrates in the country. The real exit poll is in favour of the INDIA Alliance and the country will see the INDIA Alliance will form the Government by securing 295 seats, Mohanty claimed.

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Authorities deploy three tier security arrangements at counting centres

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The arrangements for the D-day for counting of over 89.21 lakh votes that will begin at 8 am across the seven constituencies of Delhi have been notched up with the authorities deploying a three-tier security arrangement at the counting centres.

The officials of Chief Electoral Office of Delhi said that a total of 7,000 personnel would be deployed at the seven counting centres. "We have made all the necessary arrangements for the counting tomorrow which will start at 8 am sharp. The required security deployment has been made which includes a three-tier security arrangement at the counting centre. The manpower of counting staff is trained and

ready," Delhi Chief Electoral Officer P. Krishnamurthy said. "There will be a total of 7,000 personnel and each segment will have about 1,000 personnel, which includes a lot of support staff who will assist in works such as carrying the EVMs from the strong room to counting halls and back," he added.

Digital monitors will be set up outside the counting centres to share the trends and the poll body personnel will also make mic announcements on the candidates leading in the initial trends. Around 21 to 28 rounds of counting will take place to count a total of 89,21,495 votes that were cast by 58.69 per cent electorates, which includes 59.03 per cent men, 58.29 per cent women and 28.01 third gender individuals.

While the counting is expected to be completed sooner in the New Delhi constituency where only 8,45,285 votes were cast, the North-east Delhi constituency may take more time in the counting of votes as it recorded the highest number of voter turn out with 15,49,202 votes.

Seven returning officers will head a team of dozens of assistant officers and observers, who will oversee the counting of votes in their respective constituencies under CCTV surveillance of about 1,000 cameras installed at every nook and corner of the counting centre.

The strong rooms where the polled EVMs have been stored since May 25 will be opened around 6.30 am in the presence of the candidates in fray and



party representatives. After the counting begins, first the postal ballots will be counted and then the EVMs will be opened. Each constituency will have one counting centre where the polled EVMs and VVPATs will be de-sealed to count the votes. These counting centres have 10 halls with about seven to 14 tables where voting of each of the assembly segments of the parliamentary constituency will be counted. The location of these counting centres are — SKV, Bharat Nagar in Chandni Chowk; ITI, Nand Nagri in North East Delhi; Sports Complex, CWG Village in East Delhi; Atal Adarsh Balika Vidyalaya, Gole Market in New Delhi; DTU, Shahbad Daultpur in Northwest Delhi; NSUT, Dwarka in West Delhi; and Jijabai ITI for Women, Siri

Fort in South Delhi. A total of 162 candidates were in the fray for the May 25 Lok Sabha polls in Delhi with the maximum contesting from North East Delhi constituency with 28 candidates while 17 candidates are contesting from the New Delhi Lok Sabha seat, making it the least across the seven constituencies.

Delhi Police has made elaborate arrangements at each centre to avert any untoward situation during the counting process. Around 70 companies of the force will be deployed at all the seven counting centres across Delhi on Tuesday. Every polling station has a three layered security with two companies of the paramilitary force at the inner portion and personnel of the Delhi Armed Police (DAP) and local police

at its outer layers, an officer said. Overall 7,000 personnel have been deployed at the counting centres. "Each counting centre will have an average of 1,000 personnel," the officer said, adding that the counting centres have been covered with 200 CCTV cameras and drones to keep an eye on every corner. The political parties' representatives can visit the counting centres but they will not be allowed to interfere in the counting process.

A senior police officer said the local police have been directed to keep a tab in the sensitive areas. "Directions have been issued to the district DCPs and SHO's to remain on vigil near the counting centres and their respective areas," the officer said.

Traffic police issues advisories keeping in mind counting of votes

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi traffic police has issued advisories to the general public for Tuesday keeping in mind that the counting of votes will be going on at different locations for the Lok Sabha 2024 elections while informing them of traffic restrictions between 7:00 am in the morning to 10:00 pm at night.

Special traffic arrangements have been made around the location of the counting booths. "Talking about June 4, counting of votes will be held at Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya (SKV), Bharat Nagar, Delhi. There will be some traffic restrictions in the said area on June 4 from 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM," police stated, adding that commuters can use different diversions point including Red Light, Lal Bahadur Shastri Institute of Management College, Swami Narayan Marg and Red Light Bharat Nagar Ganda Nala. It also recommended Shankar Chowk near the Water Tank (Ch. Gulab Singh Marg) but only for heavy commercial vehicles.

The advisory recommends to avoid Swami Narayan Marg, Satyawati College to Prerna Chowk (Ch. Gulab Singh Marg), Dr. Bheem Rao Ambedkar Marg JJ Colony Bharat Nagar and Ashok Vihar PH-1 Marg. Further, the police

said that the counting for New Delhi Constituency will be conducted at Atal Adarsh Balika School Gole Market on June 4 from 08.00 am onwards, which may affect the traffic on surrounding roads.

Talking about the traffic restrictions, a senior police official said, "No vehicle will be allowed to halt or park anywhere on Bhai Veer Singh Marg, Kali Bari Marg, roundabout Gole Market and roundabout GPO. Vehicles found parked on the above roads shall be towed away and prosecuted for improper parking and disobedience of lawful instructions. Towed vehicles would be parked at Kali Bari Pit near CNG Pump at Udyan Marg."

According to the advisory, travelers can use Roundabout Gole Market, Roundabout GPO, Kali Bari Red light Mandir Marg and Bhai Veer Singh Marg red light as diversion routes. Further, it stated that people should avoid Mandir Marg, Bhai Veer Singh Marg, Gole Market and Kali Bari Marg.

"Counting of votes related to Northeast Delhi will take place at ITI Nand Nagri, Delhi. The movement of traffic on the road stretch/carriageway from Gagan Cinema T-Point to Nand Nagri Flyover on Wazirabad road (Mangal

Pandey Road) Delhi will be restricted from 5:00 am onwards," the advisory read, adding that the traffic will be diverted from Bhopura border, Tahirpur T-point and Gagan cinema T-Point.

Further, Wazirabad road (Mangal Pandey Road) will be closed for general traffic from 5:00 am onwards and traffic will be diverted from Gagan Cinema T-Point. General public are also advised to avoid the Wazirabad Road (Mangal Pandey Road) and Road No. 68 and 69 Nand Nagari from 5:00 AM onwards.

Further, they informed that counting of votes will be at Commonwealth Games Village Akshardham Delhi and hence traffic restrictions in the said area will be there from 5 am onwards. "The commuters coming from Sarai Kale Khan/MGM side towards NH-24 will go straight towards Akshardham flyover and will take a left turn to reach Pusta Road/ITO/Vikas Marg to reach their destinations. The commuters coming from ITO/Pusta Road side will come upto Akshardham Flyover in front of Akshardham Temple and they will take U-Turn after crossing Akshardham Flyover and will come on NH -24 to reach their destinations towards Delhi," the advisory read.

Kejriwal accepts former Minister Anand's resignation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who returned to Tihar jail on Sunday, accepted the resignation of its former Delhi Minister Raaj Kumar Anand on Friday. Anand has joined the BSP after resigning from the AAP on April 10 and has contested in the Lok Sabha 2024 election from the New Delhi seat.

The AAP Chief, in his only official communication during the period when he was out on interim bail, has recommended the acceptance of resignation of Anand, who is up against his own party colleague and AAP MLA Somnath Bharti, after a gap of a month and 20 days.

With this recommendation to the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, who has forwarded the resignation for consideration by the President of India Draupadi Murmu as required by law, Saxena said.

"The critical departments of SC/ST Welfare, Social Welfare, Cooperative and Gurudwara Elections have become headless and paralyzed, since in his recommendations to the LG, Kejriwal has not allocated these departments to any other Minister, as law provides.



With no recommendation about re-allocation being made, all these departments will automatically vest into the Chief Minister, who is in jail, thereby making any decision or work in these departments impossible," Saxena stated.

Anand in his resignation to the Chief Minister had outlined inaction and corruption in these departments, as also diversion of SC/ST funds for other purposes and schemes, apart from ministers being in jail, as reason.

"Interestingly, while Kejriwal was out on bail for 21 days, he did not deem it fit to send the file pertaining to Mayoral Elections in MCD to the LG. The Mayor this time is to be from the SC category. He also did not deem it fit to raise the issue of inter-state cooperation / coordination with the LG, in the matter of water crisis in Delhi," Saxena claimed.

Tight security arrangements in place for counting of votes in Gurugram

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Tight security arrangements are in place for the counting of votes for the Gurgaon Lok Sabha constituency as additional personnel have been deployed at key places in the city, officials said on Monday.

"A three-layer security cordon has been stationed around the counting centres in Gurgaon to ensure that no unauthorised person enters the premises," Commissioner of Gurgaon Police, Vikas Arora said.

A heavy security cover has been placed around the strong rooms at the Government Girls College Sector-14 where electronic voting machines have been kept since the close of polling in the respective constituency.

The police commissioner along with Deputy Commissioner Gurgaon Nishant Kumar Yadav took sort of the security arrangements at the government girls' college on Monday.

"Enough security personnel have been deployed in and around the counting centre. Eight police check points have been set up on different roads approaching the centre. Unauthorised person will not be allowed inside the college premises," he said.

Sanjay demands ban on exit polls



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party leader Sanjay Singh on Monday demanded a ban on exit polls in the country, claiming they have been proven wrong several times.

Several exit polls on Saturday predicted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will retain power for a third straight term, with the BJP-led NDA expected to win a big majority in the Lok Sabha polls.

During a press conference, Singh said, "Exit polls should be completely banned in the country since they have been proven wrong not once but many times. This is a wrong attempt to influence the people of the country, the administrative system, and the election commission before the poll counting." He claimed that the INDIA bloc will get 295 seats after the June 4 counting.

Since the exit polls two days

ago, the BJP has been in a celebratory mood ad distributing sweets. Singh said that the people of the country are being misled and an illegitimate attempt is being made to influence the counting of votes on June 4. "I believe that the BJP leaders might have fainted and fell down by seeing these exit polls, they themselves can't believe it. I think even god will not believe this exit poll survey that the BJP is getting 37 per cent vote share in Tamil Nadu," Singh claimed.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday asserted that all exit polls that predicted a third term for the BJP-led NDA were "fake".

"Yesterday, exit polls were out and I can give you in writing that they are fake. In Rajasthan, there are 25 parliamentary seats but one exit poll gave them 33 seats. What was the reason that they had to release fake exit poll results?" Kejriwal asked.

Metro provides cooler option to commuters in scorching heat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

While commuters are trying to escape the scorching sun during the summers, Delhi Metro, known as a lifeline to the city, provided a cooler option for the public to travel to their destinations at affordable prices. The average passenger journeys observed in May 2024 were record high at 60.17 Lakh against the 52.41 Lakh recorded in May 2023.

Delhi Metro Rail Corporation's (DMRC) Principal Executive Director of Corporate Communication Anuj Dayal said, "During this summer when Delhi crossed all time high temperatures on multiple occasions and still no immediate respite in sight, Delhi Metro is silently offering its cool services across the network by performing over 4200 train trips running around 1.40 Lakh Kilometers daily. Thereby, giving much needed relief to commuters with a 24 degree Celsius pleasant commuting experience throughout the day."

Throughout the month of May,



when summer peaked and temperature even hovered around 50 degree celsius, Delhi Metro offered its services in a comfortable manner with no breakdowns or AC failures reported from any of its trains or underground stations which are designed for air-conditioning.

"At present DMRC has a fleet of over 345 trains with around 5000 AC units installed in them. To ensure that all AC units give their optimum per-

formance during peak summers, a comprehensive health check up for these AC units is done before the onset of summers in March every year," Dayal stated.

To ensure that commuters face no issues during their journey in the metro, Dayal shared that it is ensured that faulty components, if any, are timely weeded out and replaced with healthy ones to provide unhindered cooling experience to its commuters during peak sum-

mers. "In addition, regular maintenance of these AC units is also undertaken every three months. Besides this, train operators also regularly monitor coach temperature to promptly address any issues related to temperature variation and ensure a pleasant journey experience for passengers," he stated.

Elaborating further he said, "All underground stations are also equipped with state of art building management system (BMS) and Chiller Plan Manager (CPM) for remote monitoring and control of air conditioning equipment/units. This system continuously monitors the ambient and station temperature in real time basis and takes action to maintain the station temp between 25 and 27 degrees Celsius, even when outside temperatures range from 45 to 50 degrees Celsius."

Additionally, regular inspections are being conducted on infrastructure components sensitive to heat, such as escalators and lifts, to prevent malfunctions. "The frequency of main-

tenance checks for heat-sensitive equipment is also increased during such periods. To prevent any incidence of fire which is a common phenomenon during such heat waves, DMRC has a robust mechanism of fire Extinguishers and Hoses at its stations which are regularly maintained especially at strategic locations in and around metro premises. Sprinkler systems are regularly checked and maintained so that it can be quickly activated in case of a fire," he said.

Apart from Operations, on the Project (construction) front too, DMRC has implemented the provision of providing breaks to the workforce during the afternoons due to the ongoing heatwave. "Other necessary provisions such as drinking water, medical facilities have also been made available at all our sites. We are ensuring that the workforce is not exposed to excessive heat. All Project Managers have been instructed to monitor that these instructions are stringently adhered to by the contractors," Dayal claimed.

Akasa Air flight bound to Mumbai diverted after bomb threat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Days after Vistara bound flight for Srinagar and Indigo flight bound for Varanasi received a bomb threat, an airplane bound to Mumbai for Delhi on Monday was diverted to Ahmedabad after it received a security alert on board.

An Akasa Air flight from the Indira Gandhi International airport in the national capital, which was carrying 186 passengers, including one infant and six crew members, was diverted to Ahmedabad after it received a security alert on board. The aircraft landed at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport at 10:13 am, and all passengers were safely deplaned.

"As per prescribed safety and security procedures, the plane was diverted to Ahmedabad. The Captain followed all required emergency procedures and landed safely at



Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport at 10:13 hrs. All passengers have been deplaned. Akasa Air is following and supporting all safety and security protocols on the ground," Akasa said in an official statement.

This incident follows a trend with the recent security threats to airlines in the past few days. A Vistara flight bound for Srinagar on Friday with 177 passengers and one infant also received a bomb threat. Flight UK-611, which departed from Delhi, landed

safely at Srinagar Airport at approximately 12:10 am. "All passengers were safely deboarded at the isolation bay. Currently, the aircraft is undergoing a thorough security check by the relevant authorities to ensure the safety of all concerned," an airport official said. Meanwhile, IndiGo's Delhi-Varanasi flight received a bomb scare last Tuesday, which turned out to be a hoax threat.

A tissue paper, with the word "bomb@5.30" written on it, was found in the lavatory.

SC calls for Yamuna River Board emergency meeting to deal with Capital water woes

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Hearing a plea by the Delhi government highlighting water woes in the national capital, the Supreme Court on Monday called for an emergency meeting of the Upper Yamuna River Board to be held to deal with the issue on June 5. The vacation bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and KV Viswanathan posted the plea of the Delhi government seeking additional water from neighbouring Haryana for a hearing on June 6 and sought minutes of the meeting and suggestions on the steps taken. Initially, the bench sought to know why there couldn't be a meeting of all stakeholders to

address the issue. "Why can't there be a joint meeting of all the stakeholders?" a vacation bench of Justices P K Mishra and K V Viswanathan asked at the outset.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the Haryana government, said the issue was already being considered by the UYRB where all stakeholder states including Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi are parties. "This is the question which is being considered. Himachal Pradesh is called upon by the board to provide the details as to what is the extra water or additional water if at all they have," he said.

The UYRB was set up in 1995 with one of its main functions

being to regulate the allocation of available flows. The bench observed that as an emergency measure, the meeting of the board may be convened tomorrow to address the issue.

It noted that the advocates appearing for the Centre and the governments of Delhi, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh have agreed that a meeting of the UYRB be held.

The bench was hearing a plea filed by the Delhi government seeking a direction to Haryana to release the surplus water provided by Himachal Pradesh to the national capital to mitigate its water crisis, amongst the beneficiary states and also monitor and review the progress of all projects up to and including



Okhla barrage in Delhi. The states include Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and the National Capital Territory (NCT) of

Delhi. "In the course of hearing, all the parties agreed that there should be a non-adversarial approach to the problem of scarcity of

water faced by the citizens of Delhi," the bench said. It said the lawyers have "agreed that there shall be an emergent meeting of the Upper Yamuna River Board on June 5 to address the issues agitated in this petition and all other connected issues in right earnest so that the problem of scarcity of water for the citizens of Delhi shall be properly addressed".

The bench said the matter be posted for hearing on June 6 along with the minutes of the meeting of the board and the suggested steps to be taken by the stakeholders to solve the problem.

Mehta said as per the figures placed before the board, if 100 litres of water comes to Delhi,

the residents get only 48.65 litres. "Total water loss is 51.35 per cent," he said, adding that though the residents don't misutilise water, there are leakages, tanker mafia and theft by some industrial units.

Mehta said the Delhi government will have to tighten up the strings. "You will make that point but not release water in June," senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Delhi government, said.

Singhvi said the Delhi government was making plans for preventing wastage of water. "What solicitor is saying is also correct that there should be no wastage of water," the bench observed.

When the bench said the board's

meeting can be convened on Tuesday, Mehta responded tomorrow it may be difficult. "Tomorrow, there will be too much of heat," the bench observed. The counting of votes polled in the Lok Sabha elections is scheduled for tomorrow. "As far as Himachal Pradesh is concerned, whatever unutilised water we have, we are ready to provide," the counsel appearing for Himachal Pradesh told the bench.

During the hearing, Singhvi said, "I come from Rajasthan. The highest I have seen in Rajasthan is 50 (degrees Celsius). I never heard of 52 (degrees Celsius) in Delhi. I have been in Delhi for a long time."

Lok Sabha poll counting: Modi eyes record equalling third straight term

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi eyes a record-equalling third straight term in power amid the INDIA opposition Bloc's hope of springing a surprise as the counting of votes for the Lok Sabha election is set for Tuesday, bringing an end to a marathon polling exercise stretching over 80 days. While most experts have long seen the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) as the favourite in the polls, a lot is at stake for the ruling combine in terms of the scale of victory it can pull off and new territories it can conquer. The opposition's stakes are higher still amid its reducing national footprint. Exit polls have been, however, unanimous in their prediction that the NDA is closer to realising Modi's ambi-

tious target of "400 paar" for his alliance than the INDIA bloc is to crossing even the 180 mark, one-third of the total number of seats. Though electoral verdicts have historically been accepted, even though grudgingly, by all parties, there has been a sharper edge to the questions being raised by opposition parties this time over the polling process, including the Election Commission (EC). In the run-up to the counting, the campaign acrimony between the two battling camps has spilled over into the post-poll trading of accusations after the exit polls predicted a massive win for the incumbent alliance, a forecast summarily dismissed by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as "Modi media poll". INDIA bloc leaders, who have been raising doubts over the electronic voting machines (EVMs), have accused the

prime minister of sending a signal to the bureaucracy through these "fantasy" exit polls and marched to the EC, urging the poll watchdog to follow the counting guidelines. In its counter-attack, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has accused its rivals of trying to undermine the integrity of India's electoral process and asked the EC to prevent any attempt of "violence and unrest" during the counting of votes. The results will show if the Congress has it in its organisation and leadership to challenge the BJP amid its reducing footprint across the country since 2014. It has failed to get even the main opposition party status in two consecutive Lok Sabha polls and has been reduced to a pale shadow of itself in a number of states, especially in the Hindi heartland.



Its leaders, including president Mallikarjun Kharge and principal campaigner Rahul Gandhi, have claimed that their alliance will get 295 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha, marking an end of the Modi era. INDIA bloc leaders believe that their alliance has been able to shape the poll narrative around its planks of welfare and an alleged threat to

the Constitution from an all-powerful saffron onslaught, and will get popular support. Modi will equal the country's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's record of leading his party to three straight electoral victories if the BJP retains power. An uncertain future also hangs over the fate of the Left, besides many regional parties including the Trinamool

Congress (TMC), Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and YSR Congress, which are in power in West Bengal, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh respectively. Modi has spearheaded a concerted BJP push to gain further in strength in the two eastern states, where the party surprised everyone by emerging as the powerful second force in 2019, and the exit polls have suggested that it may topple the two regional parties from the top position in these polls. Assembly polls were held in Odisha alongside the national election and the BJP and the BJD, which has been in power in the state since 2000 under Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's leadership, are locked in a fierce battle for power. Assembly polls were also held simultaneously in the YSRCP-ruled Andhra Pradesh. Another issue that has drawn

the limelight is whether the BJP will be able to emerge as a strong force in Tamil Nadu and the Left-ruled Kerala, two states where it has currently no seats but is predicted to win a few this time. A poor show by the Left will further darken its prospects nationwide as Kerala is the only state where it remains a strong force after being knocked of reckoning in its former strongholds of Bengal and Tripura. Always confident of his return to power, Modi has already penned an article about his vision for the country, posted on X about people's support to the NDA and rejection of the opposition, and held a meeting with top officials on the "new government's agenda" for the first 100 days. The results are also expected to spell out the people's verdict on the fate of regional stalwarts like Sharad Pawar

and Uddhav Thackeray, whose parties have joined hands with the BJP and who have run an intense campaign to win over people's support for their factions. The verdict will also be out on a number of Union ministers, including Piyush Goyal, Bhupendra Yadav, Sarbananda Sonowal and Dharmendra Pradhan, all of whom were asked by the BJP to contest the polls, and former chief ministers, such as the BJP's Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Basavaraj Bommai, Trivendra Singh Rawat and the Congress's Digvijay Singh and Bhupesh Baghel. Besides Modi, who contested the election from Varanasi for a third straight term, senior members of his cabinet, such as Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, are in the fray, and the margins of their win will be watched out for as well.

Over 8,000 Independents contesting LS polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Over 8,000 candidates are contesting in the Lok Sabha elections of which 16 per cent have been fielded by national parties, six per cent by state parties, while 47 per cent of candidates are independents, a report by PRS Legislative Research said. The polls were held in seven phases between April 19 to June 1. Counting of votes will be taken up on June 4. This is the highest number of candidates since 1996, when a record 13,952 candidates were in the fray. In the 2019 polls, there were 8,039 candidates. According to PRS, 8,360 candidates from 744 parties, including six nationally recognised parties, are contesting elections across 543 constituencies. Overall, 16 per cent of candi-



dates have been fielded by national parties, six per cent by state parties, and 47 per cent of candidates are independents. Bahujin Samaj Party (BSP), one of the six national parties, has fielded the highest number of candidates -- 488. Among national parties, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is second, fielding 441 candidates, Congress has fielded

328, Communist Party of India (Marxist) has 52 candidates while Aam Aadmi Party has 22 and National People's Party has three. Among state parties, the Samajwadi Party with 71 candidates, and Trinamool Congress with 48 candidates, have fielded the highest number of candidates. AIADMK has fielded 36 candidates, CPI has 30 candidates, YSRCP has

25, RJD has 24 and DMK has fielded 22 candidates. Among the unrecognised parties, the Social Unity Centre of India (Communist) fielded the highest number of candidates (150), followed by the People's Party of India (Democratic), which fielded 79 candidates, the PRS report said. On an average, 15 candidates are contesting from each constituency. The number of candidates contesting from each constituency varies widely across states. Telangana had the highest average number of candidates per constituency that is 31 while Ladakh and Nagaland had three candidates each. Tamil Nadu's Karur had the highest number of candidates that is 54, 46 of these candidates contested as independents (85 per cent). The average age of candidates contesting this election is 48

years. Among the national parties, 13 per cent of candidates fielded are below the age of 40, while 20 per cent of candidates fielded by the BSP (98 candidates) are below the age of 40. Of the candidates from major political parties, 27 per cent have previously been an MP. While 25 per cent have previously been Lok Sabha MPs and 4 per cent have been Rajya Sabha MPs, 2 per cent candidates have been part of both the Houses in the past. Overall, 327 MPs from the 17th Lok Sabha are contesting again and one MP is contesting from two constituencies. Meanwhile, the report also said 34 MPs from the 17th Lok Sabha who are re-contesting, are fighting on a different party's ticket this time. Of these, 11 instances are due to splits in the parties, such as in the case of the Shiv Sena, NCP, and Lok Jan Shakti Party.

CEC on laapata gentlemen memes: 'We are never out, always here'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Monday referred to various memes doing rounds on social media, describing the Election Commission as 'laapata gentlemen', asserting that he and fellow commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu were "never out" and were "always here". Social media users had targeted the Commission for allegedly being absent amid the model code violations by top leaders during campaign for the Lok Sabha elections. The memes were based on a recent drama titled 'Laapata Ladies'. Addressing a press conference here on the eve of

the counting of votes on Tuesday, Kumar said in a lighter vein that now people will see memes on the social media with a tag line that 'laapata gentlemen' are back. "We were never out, we were always here. We chose to interact with you through our press notes. This was the first time we issued close to a 100 press notes and advisories all put together," he said. CEC Kumar, flanked by the two Election Commissioners, said the poll authority has been interacting from behind the scene and on Monday they decided to hold a press meet. He said that questions were raised on flaws in the electoral rolls, on the efficacy of the EVMs and the alleged fudging of voter turnout figures.

The CEC said while the one making allegations was present in the court (kachahari), there was no "gavah" or witness. He said that there was no complaint whatsoever from the candidates and those receiving Form 17 C which records votes polled in a booth. "...Matab, kuch aa raha hai, mein bol nahin raha hoon. (There is something in my mind. But I am keeping quiet)," Kumar said on the various allegations against the EC. Referring to the over one crore polling personnel, he said they have remained the unsung heroes of the elections. Reading out a couplet, the CEC said while people talk of flowers, no one remembers the gardener.

EC agreed to counting postal ballots first: Opposition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The opposition on Monday said the Election Commission (EC) has agreed to its request of counting the postal ballots first on June 4, when the results of the Lok Sabha polls are scheduled to be declared, and stressed that this is the participatory manner of promoting the spirit of democracy in a non-adversarial fashion. Leaders from the INDIA opposition bloc had urged the EC on Sunday to ensure that on June 4, the postal ballots are counted and their results declared before the outcome of the EVMs is announced, and said the poll panel should issue clear guidelines on the counting process and ensure that those are implemented. A delegation of leaders from the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), including the Congress's Abhishek



Singhvi, met the full bench of the EC on Sunday, ahead of Tuesday's counting of the votes polled in the Lok Sabha election. Briefing the media after the meeting, Singhvi had said this was the third time that a delegation of opposition leaders visited the poll panel during the general election and, among other things, urged the officials to ensure that the postal ballots are counted and their results declared before the

results of the electronic voting machines (EVMs) are announced. In a statement on Monday, Singhvi said, "As informed, I am happy and proud to have spoken on behalf of the multi-party delegation which went yesterday to the Election Commission of India. We are also grateful to the ECI for giving us time promptly on a Sunday and for hearing us patiently." "What one is happiest about the most is that a very

glaring issue of democracy, namely counting postal ballots first, has been graciously and promptly agreed to by the ECI, one or two days before the counting of votes and shall be implemented tomorrow," the Congress leader said. This is the participatory manner of promoting the spirit of democracy in a non-adversarial fashion, which works best in the long term, he asserted. In a letter to the EC, the INDIA bloc leaders had said the number of postal ballots has gone up significantly in this Lok Sabha election as senior citizens (aged 85 years and above) and differently-abled persons were allowed to cast their votes through this process. They quoted various rules and guidelines of the EC, including provisions of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 and Handbook for Returning Officer and Counting Agents (August 2023), that said the counting of postal ballots shall be done first.

No doubt about counting of postal ballots first: CEC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Citing the Conduct of Election Rules, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Monday said the count of postal ballots will start first across all counting centres and asserted that there was "no doubt about it". Responding to questions at a press conference here, he said after half-an-hour of the start of the postal ballot count, the counting of votes recorded in the electronic voting machines will commence. A delegation of the opposition parties had on Sunday met the Commission to demand that postal ballot count should start first and the results of postal ballots should be announced first. "Rules clearly state (Rule 54A)

that postal ballot count will start first. On all centres in the country it will start first, no doubt about it. After half-an-hour we start the EVM count. So, there are three countings which are happening simultaneously -- it happened in the 2019 elections, it happened in all the assembly polls held thereafter. It happened yesterday also in case of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim assembly (vote count). We can't change anything mid course. Why can't we change, because it is compliant with the rules," he said. He said the postal ballot count and then the EVM count and finally the marching of VVPT slips with EVM results will continue. In majority of the booths, the number of postal ballot is less. It will automatically end first, he pointed out.

NIA chargesheets 17 hardcore ISIS agents

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday chargesheeted 17 hardcore agents of the proscribed global terrorist organisation ISIS for being part of a conspiracy involving radicalisation of youth and fabrication of improvised explosive devices, according to an official statement. The NIA had originally chargesheeted three persons in March 2023 and filed its supplementary chargesheet before the special court at Patiala House in New Delhi on Monday against 17 others, of whom 15 are from Maharashtra and one each from Uttarakhand and Haryana, it said.

This takes the total number of accused chargesheeted in the case, which had exposed global linkages with foreign handlers, to 20, said the statement issued by the federal probe agency. The accused, chargesheeted under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act, "were found to have been engaged in a massive ISIS conspiracy involving recruitment, training and propagation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) ideology among gullible youth, along with fabrication of explosives and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and fund-raising for the banned outfit", it said.

80th Staff Course commences at Defence College in Wellington

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The 80th Staff Course commenced on Monday at the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) in Wellington, Tamil Nadu. The course is designed to train mid-career officers from the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force to become proficient staff officers and future military leaders and equips officers with the knowledge and skills necessary to operate effectively in an integrated tri-services environment, defence ministry said here. During the course, 480 student officers including 38 officers from 26 Friendly Foreign Countries will gain a deep understanding of the functioning of each service and the warfighting philosophies at tactical and operational level over a duration of 45 weeks. In his address to the student officers, Lt General Virendra Vats, Commandant, DSSC highlighted the dynamic nature and character of warfare, characteristics of the VUCA World and how DSSC would empower the student officers to face future chal-



lenges. He emphasized the critical role of synergy and integration among the Army, Navy, and Air Force and underscored the importance of understanding the unique capabilities of each service to ensure seamless collaboration in modern warfare. The Commandant also highlighted the need for student officers to develop a strong understanding of emerging technologies and geopolitical issues impacting India's military and security landscape. This awareness will empower them to make informed decisions and contribute effec-

tively to military strategies. In a first-of-its-kind initiative, the 80th Staff Course also introduced a specially curated curriculum for a select group of student officers from the Indian Army, Navy, Air Force, and friendly foreign countries. The curriculum would foster a collaborative and inter-service approach to jointness and integration in warfare and focus on inter-service understanding and cooperation at this early stage in their careers, thus empowering them to lead the way in the upcoming era of Theatre Commands.

Modi pays tribute to Karunanidhi on 100th birth anniversary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday paid his tributes to DMK stalwart M Karunanidhi on his 100th birth anniversary, and remembered him for the work he did for the development of Tamil Nadu and the Tamilians. Karunanidhi, born on this day in 1924 and died on August 7, 2018, served as chief minister of Tamil Nadu for almost two decades over five terms between 1969 and 2011. He is popularly referred to as Kalaingar. "I pay tributes to Kalaingar Karunanidhi Ji on his 100th birth anniversary. In his long years in public life, he worked towards the development of Tamil Nadu and the Tamil people," Modi said. "He is widely respected for his scholarly nature. I fondly recall my several interactions with him, including when we both were Chief Ministers of our respective states," the prime minister said on X.

Several rivers flowing above danger level amid incessant rain in Assam: CWC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Several rivers in Assam continue to flow above the danger level amid incessant rain, according to the Central Water Commission (CWC). The commission's latest bulletin highlights critical water levels at various monitoring sites, indicating severe and above-normal flood situations. Three sites in Assam have severe flood situation where the water level is touching or exceeding the danger level but below the highest flood mark, while three sites have above-normal flood situation, according to the bulletin. The CWC said more than 39,000 people displaced by flood are taking shelter in 193 relief camps in different districts. Another 82 relief distribution centres are also operational. Rescue and relief operations are being carried out by multiple agencies, including the NDRF, SDRF and local administration, while medical teams have also been deployed in the affected areas.



Damage to infrastructure, including roads, bridges and other property, has been reported from different districts. According to CWC's bulletin, the Buridehing River continues to flow above the normal situation, registering a water level of 133.54 metres as of 11 am on Monday. This level indicates a potential risk to nearby areas, although it remains below the danger threshold, the commission said. River Jibbarali at NT Road Crossing Jia-Bharali in Sonitpur District also remains

in an above-normal flood situation, with a current water level of 77.30 metres, it added. River Kopili in Marigaon and Nagaon districts is experiencing a severe flood situation at two locations. At Dharamtul in Marigaon, the river is flowing at 56.42 metres, which is 0.42 metres above the danger level, with a rising trend noted. At Kamrup in Nagaon, the water level is at 61.04 metres, 0.54 metres above the danger level, with a steady trend observed. River Kushiya at Karimganj is also in a severe flood situation, flowing at 15.53 metres,

0.59 metres above the danger level. However, a falling trend provided some relief, though the situation remains critical. In Dharamtul, the Kopili River has reached 56.43 metres and is maintaining a steady trend. In Kamrup, the river's level is 61.13 metres with a steady trend. The Kushiya River at Karimganj shows a level of 15.48 metres and is falling. Other rivers in Assam are also being monitored closely. The Brahmaputra at Dibrugarh and Neamatighat in Jorhat, and the Barak at Annapurna Ghat and Badarpur Ghat, are witnessing above-normal flood situations but are currently not exceeding danger levels. An Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) bulletin on Sunday night said 5,35,246 people in 13 districts continued to remain affected by the flood. The number of affected people was 6,01,642 in 10 districts on Saturday. Two deaths were reported in Cachar and one in Nagaon, taking the toll in flood and storm since May 28 to 18.



Hat-trick for BJP or dent in its citadel

Uttarakhand vote counting

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

As Uttarakhand prepares for counting of votes on Tuesday, all attention is riveted on whether the BJP sweeps all the five Lok Sabha seats in the state for a record third straight term or its citadel is dented by its principal rival Congress which had drawn a blank in both 2014 and 2019 general elections. Polling to the five Lok Sabha seats of Uttarakhand was held in the first phase on April 19. It will be interesting to see what the results have in store for the two new candidates fielded by the BJP this time — former CM Trivendra Singh Rawat in place of sitting MP and another former CM Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank in Haridwar and the party's national media in-charge Anil Baluni in place of former CM Tirath Singh Rawat in Pauri Garhwal. Both Haridwar and Pauri Garhwal are high profile seats won in the past by both the BJP and Congress stalwarts. Senior Congress leader and former chief minister Harish Rawat won the Haridwar seat in 2009 but former BJP chief minister Nishank won it in both 2014 and 2019. The Pauri Garhwal seat is



currently held by former BJP chief minister Tirath Singh Rawat. It was won in 2014 by BJP stalwart Bhuvan Chandra Khanduri and in 2009 by Satpal Maharaj who was in the Congress at that time. Eagerly awaited are also the results of Nainital, Almora and Tehri Garhwal constituencies from where sitting MPs Ajay Bhatt, Ajay Tamta and erstwhile Tehri Royal family's Mala Rajya Lakshmi Shah were repeated respectively. Exit poll predictions have given all five seats in Uttarakhand again to the BJP. People are equally curious to

know the fate of Harish Rawat's son Virendra Rawat, a poll debutante who battled it out against former CM Trivendra Singh Rawat in Haridwar and former PCC president Ganesh Godiyal who put up a spirited fight against BJP's national media in-charge Baluni in Pauri Garhwal. Godiyal's campaign meetings in the constituency drew big crowds. Harish Rawat, who is the tallest Congress leader from the state at present, campaigned actively for his son in Haridwar which has a substantial Muslim and Dalit population, while Godiyal

campaigns aggressively for himself in Pauri which also has Muslim and SC dominated pockets. Party star campaigner Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had also campaigned in Ramnagar for him. Winning even a single seat from the state means a lot for the principal opposition party as it would end its prolonged dry spell. It has not just lost all five Lok Sabha seats in 2014 and 2019 but was also trounced by the BJP in both 2017 and 2022 assembly polls. The Congress won only 11 seats against the BJP's 57 in a house of 70 in 2017. It improved its position slightly in 2022 winning 19 seats against the BJP's 47. Though Congress and BJP are locked in direct contests in all seats, there are more than 50 candidates in the fray, including those from the BSP, Uttarakhand Kranti Dal and Independents. Uttarakhand's Chief Electoral Officer BVR Purushottam said counting will begin at 8 am across all counting centres on Tuesday. Counting of votes through EVMs and postal ballots will go on simultaneously, he said, adding around 10,000 personnel have been engaged in the exercise.

Three tier security deployed for counting of votes in Jammu, Kathua

PTI ■ JAMMU

A day ahead of the counting of votes for the Jammu and Udhampur Lok Sabha constituencies along with rest of the country, three-tier security has been activated in and around the counting centres in the two districts. The counting of over 23.94 lakh votes in these constituencies, scheduled for Tuesday, will determine the fate of 34 candidates, including senior BJP leader and Union Minister Jitendra Singh, current Jammu MP Jugal Kishore Sharma and former ministers Choudhary Lal Singh and Raman Bhalla of the Congress. "All arrangements are in place for the June 4 vote counting. Three-tier security has been implemented," said Returning Officer and Jammu District Magistrate Sachin Kumar Vaishya. Vaishya, who reviewed the security measures, logistics and essential amenities at the counting venues, said the counting process will take place in the Polytechnic College and M A M College. "Votes from the seven assembly constituencies will be counted at M A M College, while 11 constituencies will be tallied at Polytechnic College," he added. The administration has fully trained the staff and sensitised all polling agents for the counting process. This includes a detailed examination of the deployment of paramilitary



and police personnel as well as the set up for counting staff and agents. "All counting staff are fully trained and all political parties and their agents have been briefed and issued I-cards. The arrangements are comprehensive, covering traffic and security," Vaishya said. CCTV cameras have been installed and videography arrangements are in place at the counting centres. Over 12.86 lakh votes (72.22 per cent) will be counted in the Jammu constituency, where BJP's sitting MP Jugal Kishore Sharma aims for the third consecutive victory against Raman Bhalla, the working president of the J&K Congress unit, among 22 other candidates. Both BJP and Congress have expressed confidence of winning the seat. "We are very confident that BJP will win this seat. It was predicted by the exit polls as well," Sharma said. In Kathua, three-tier security

is also in place for the Udhampur Lok Sabha constituency counting scheduled for Tuesday. Kathua Superintendent of Police Anayat Ali Choudhary, who took a review visit of the area, said that elaborate security arrangements have been made. "Three tier security has been deployed here. We urge everyone to coordinate with the security forces and police. If there is any problem on the security front, it should be immediately brought to our knowledge," he told reporters. Choudhary said that enhanced security has been deployed along the International Border (IB) and inter-district checkpoints to monitor and prevent any anti-social or anti-national activities. The counting center for Udhampur Lok Sabha seat is set up at the Government Degree College Kathua, equipped with multi-tier security and 24x7 CCTV

surveillance. "Votes from 18 assembly segments, including Kathua, Udhampur, Doda, Ramban and Kishtwar, will be counted in designated halls. Three halls are designated for counting. Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) votes," said Returning Officer Dr Rakesh Minhas. A total of 225 tables, each staffed by three personnel, will facilitate the counting process. Sixty tables are designated for ETPBS votes, each with a counting agent, a micro observer, a supervisor and an Assistant Returning Officer (ARO), the officials said. The CCTV footage of the EVM strong rooms has been shared with the political parties' representatives. Nearly 10,000 staff members will handle the entire counting process, including transferring Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) from strong rooms to counting halls, they added. The Udhampur-Doda parliamentary constituency recorded a 68.23 per cent voter turnout on April 19, with 16,23,195 eligible voters casting their ballots. Over 11.08 lakh votes will determine the fate of 12 candidates, including Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh, who seeks a third consecutive win, competing against former minister and two-time MP Choudhary Lal Singh of the Congress.

BJP, Congress battle it out for two seats in Goa

PTI ■ PANAJI

After a single-phase general election, counting will take place on June 4 for two Lok Sabha constituencies in Goa, where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is in a straight battle with the Congress with both parties currently holding one seat each. The vote counting will be held in seven rounds each for North and South Goa seats, and the results will be out before noon, a senior official said. The counting for the North Goa seat will be held at Government Polytechnic College, Altinho at Panaji, while for South Goa, it will be at Damodar College, Comba in Margao. North Goa has sitting BJP MP Shripad Naik taking on Congress candidate former union minister Ramakant Khalap, while the Revolutionary Goans Party (RGP), a new regional outfit, has fielded its chief Manoj Parab. In South Goa, the Congress denied a ticket to its sitting MP Francisco Sardinha and fielded Navy veteran Viriato Fernandes as the INDIA bloc candidate against businesswoman Pallavi Dempo, who is making her political debut. The RGP has fielded Rubert Pereira from the constituency. The BJP, which has been ruling Goa since 2012, appears to be better placed, while the Congress has contested the election as a key constituent of the INDIA bloc. The contest has gotten interesting as the RGP has



also jumped into the fray with young candidates. Eight candidates each are contesting from both seats. The polls in the coastal state were held on May 7, with North Goa witnessing 76.34 per cent voter turnout and South Goa seeing 73 per cent voting. "We are expecting the results to be out before noon if there is no recounting," a senior official from the state electoral office told PTI on Monday. According to the Election Commission of India (ECI), North Goa will have 157 tables for counting, while the figure is 161 for South Goa. As many as 236 micro observers will be deployed for counting in North Goa and 242 for South Goa, the official said. The ECI has appointed 282 counting supervisors for North Goa and 220 for South Goa, he said. Apart from this, there will be 282 counting assistants for North and 210 for South Goa, and 376 and 210 returning officers for North and South respectively, the official said. There will be 454 counting agents for North and 495 for South Goa and seven and six special observers, respectively, he said.

Rajasthan: Will BJP score clean sweep a third time?

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Going by the exit polls, the BJP might not be able to achieve a hat-trick of clean sweeps in Rajasthan. The BJP won all 25 parliamentary seats in the state in 2014 and 2019 but this time, the polls are predicting that five to seven seats might go to the opposition INDIA bloc. The actual position will be known on Tuesday when the counting of votes takes place. Voting for the 25 parliamentary constituencies in Rajasthan was held in two phases on April 19 and 26. Chief Electoral Officer Praveen Gupta said the votes will be counted at 29 designated centres under strict security measures. He said postal ballots will be counted first, followed by



votes from the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). Amid the heightened anticipation fuelled by the exit polls, Congress state president Govind Singh Dotasra has expressed confidence in

securing 12 to 13 seats. This includes Bharatpur, the hometown of Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma. Sharma, however, has maintained the BJP's stance, asserting that his party will

win all 25 seats. The outcome of prominent leaders such as Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Union ministers Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Arjun Ram Meghwal and Kailash Choudhary will also be decided in the counting process. A notable contender is former chief minister Ashok Gehlot's son Vaibhav Gehlot, who contested from the Jalore-Sirohi seat where his father has significant support. Rajasthan witnessed fierce electoral battles in around 10 seats. The Congress has forged alliances with the CPI(M) in Sikar and the RLP in Nagaur while supporting the Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP) in Banswara-Dungarpur. In contrast, the BJP contested all 25 seats independently.

Seats like Kota, Jalore, Sikar, Nagaur, Churu, Jhunjhunu, Tonk-Sawai madhopur, Barmer, Banswara and Jodhpur have become focal points of intense competition, testing the credibility of senior leaders. In Kota, Birla faces direct competition from the Congress' Prahlad Gunjal. Jodhpur witnessed a contest between fresh face Karan Singh Uchiyarda, a Sachin Pilot loyalist, and Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. In the Barmer constituency, Independent candidate Ravindra Singh Bhati challenged both the BJP and the Congress candidates. The BJP had fielded Union minister Kailash Choudhary from this seat. In Nagaur, a significant showdown unfolded between two prominent Jat leaders,

Congress ally Hanuman Beniwal of the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party and the BJP's Jyoti Mirdha, a former Congress MP. Union minister Meghwal contested against Congress candidate and former minister Govind Ram Meghwal in Bikaner. In Churu, the Congress fielded Rahul Kaswan, a two-time BJP MP who switched allegiance following differences with senior party leader Rajendra Rathore, against the BJP's Devendra Jhahadia, a Paralympic gold medalist. Adhering to the Election Commission's directives, the poll authority in the state has implemented stringent security measures and appointed micro-and counting observers at all centres.

Over 13,000 polling staff to be deployed at 29 counting centres across Karnataka

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Elaborate arrangements have been put in place with the deployment of more than 13,000 staff at the 29 counting centres across Karnataka for the counting of votes on Tuesday for the 28 Lok Sabha constituencies, officials said on Monday. The state has a total of 28 Lok Sabha constituencies. The first phase of polling in the 14 seats in most of the southern and coastal districts was held on April 26 and the second phase in the other 14 segments in the northern districts was held on May 7. Each Parliamentary Lok Sabha constituency has one counting centre each. However, in Tumakuru, counting of votes will be done in two places, so the total number of counting centres is 29. Speaking to PTI, Manoj Kumar Meena, Chief Electoral Officer of Karnataka said, "We have 28 Parliamentary Lok Sabha



constituencies in Karnataka and counting of votes at the 29 counting centres in the state will begin at 8 am on Tuesday." He further said that elaborate arrangements have been made and 13,173 counting staff, including counting supervisors, counting assistants and micro observers have been deployed. "All necessary training for the staff has also been completed. At each counting centre, EVMs and postal ballots will be counted in separate rooms. Media centres have also been set up at each of these counting centres with required

facilities (with computers, xerox, fax, printers) so that they can report to their respective media outlets," he added. According to the police, in Bengaluru alone, more than 2,400 police officers have been deployed at the three counting centres in the state capital, namely Mount Carmel College, Vasantnagar (Bangalore Central Constituency), St Joseph's Indian High School, Vittal Mallya Road (Bangalore North Constituency) and SSMRV College, Jayanagar (Bangalore South Constituency). Appropriate arrangements have been made for counting of votes in the three Lok Sabha constituencies within the BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) limits to ensure the smooth conduct of the counting of votes under tight security, he said. A total of 1,524 officers/personnel, 13 armed reserved units and four quick response teams have been deployed by Bangalore City Police unit for

counting day and already 516 police officers and personnel, including civil and City Armed Reserve wings, have been deployed for maintaining strong room security duty in three shifts. More than 400 traffic department police officers and personnel will be stationed to ensure that traffic flow around the counting centres is not interrupted. A total of more than 2,400 police officers and personnel of the city has been deployed for vote counting duty to monitor the situation in the three counting centres. From Monday midnight to June 4 midnight, sale of liquor is prohibited in city limits and prohibitory orders under section 144 CrPC has been imposed in Bengaluru from 6 am on Tuesday to Tuesday midnight. The Karnataka State Reserve Police (KSRP) and City Armed Reserve platoons will be deployed in sensitive areas of the city to no ensure that no untoward incident occurs, police said.

Bengal BJP, CPI(M) meet CEO to ensure fair counting

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Representatives of the BJP and CPI(M), opposition parties in West Bengal, met the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) here on Monday to highlight alleged threats of manipulation by the state government in the vote counting process. On the eve of the counting of the Lok Sabha elections, they urged the CEO to take measures to prevent any possible rigging during the process. BJP leader Shishir Bajoria said that during the meeting, he highlighted the "post-election violence and the non-adherence to rules" in engaging the workforce for counting by the Trinamool Congress government. He claimed that there is evidence that the state administration is engaging "casual staff" in the vote counting duties, which is against norms. "We are getting news from some constituencies that in complete disregard of the guideline there has been large scale empanelment of such non-permanent/ casual employees," BJP said in a representation to the CEO. Bajoria cited an example from the Malda counting station and said he had submitted a list of the same. The party said it had raised the same issue at a meeting earlier.

Battle of nerves on in Himachal Pradesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/SHIMLA

The battle of nerves between the ruling Congress and the BJP continues in Himachal Pradesh with the Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu Government getting another lease of life and stability after the acceptance of resignations of three Independent MLAs, who had cross-voted in the Rajya Sabha polls. The decision of Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania of accepting the resignations of Independent MLAs K L Thakur (Nalagarh), Hoshiyar Singh (Dehra) and Ashish Sharma (Hamirpur) comes a day ahead of

results of the bye-elections to six assembly constituencies on June 4. Congress currently has 34 MLAs in its favour and the BJP has 25 in the Himachal Assembly whose strength has come down to 59 now. Six Congress MLAs were disqualified earlier and the resignations of three independent MLAs were accepted on Monday creating three more vacancies in the 68-member House. Once the results are out on Tuesday, the strength of the Himachal Assembly will rise to 65, but since its strength is 34 it will remain in majority irrespective of the outcome of the bypolls. Two sitting MLAs Vikramaditya Singh



and Vinod Sultanpuri are also contesting the Lok Sabha elections from Mandi and Shimla constituencies and their victory may usher in fresh bye-elections in their constituencies of Shimla Rural and Kasauli. There has been a tussle for power in

the hill state of Himachal Pradesh ever since the BJP won the Rajya Sabha election after six Congress and three Independent MLAs switched sides and cross-voted in favour of BJP candidate Harsh Mahajan. Ever since its victory in Rajya

Sabha election, the BJP has been sniffing an opportunity and a change of government after some Congress MLAs have switched sides. "By accepting the resignations of three independent MLAs, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu has ensured that his government will survive for another few months. The decision comes as a reprieve for the Congress," a senior BJP leader said. Himachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri, however, accused the BJP of making all out efforts to destabilise the state government, which has just emerged out of the crisis

created by last year's heavy rains during the monsoons that caused widespread devastation and loss of lives. Meanwhile, the Himachal Pradesh High Court has also reserved its order on a petition filed by BJP leader Satpal Singh Satti and 11 other BJP MLAs against the appointment of six Congress MLAs as chief parliamentary secretaries by the Sukhu government. The High Court verdict may have a bearing on the state assembly and politics in the state in case it strikes down the appointment of six chief parliamentary secretaries or disqualify the MLAs, which will create fresh instability in the state.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Green thumbs

Unless reversed, the deforestation in Delhi will lead to its desertification, says HC

Mahatma Gandhi rightly said that what we do to forests is but a reflection of what we are doing unto ourselves. And this apathy to our environment is now causing us untold miseries. The Delhi High Court has issued a dire warning, observing that if the current deforestation trends continue, the city could become a barren desert. This alarming forecast highlights the urgent need for sustainable environmental policies and practices. As urbanisation, construction and pollution intensify, the green cover in Delhi and other metropolitan areas is rapidly depleting, leading to severe ecological and climatic consequences. Delhi's deforestation crisis is fuelled by several factors, including rampant construction, illegal logging and urban expansion. The city's green spaces are shrinking, leading to increased pollution levels, a rise in temperatures and a reduction in natural groundwater recharge areas. The adverse effects are already evident in the city's deteriorating air quality, with smog and particulate matter reaching hazardous levels during winter months. The reduction in tree cover also exacerbates the urban heat island effect, making Delhi increasingly uninhabitable during summer.



The High Court's stark warning underscores the broader implications of this environmental degradation. Trees play a crucial role in carbon sequestration, temperature regulation and maintaining biodiversity. Their removal disrupts these natural processes, leading to soil erosion, loss of habitat for wildlife and a decline in the overall quality of life. If the current trajectory continues, Delhi could face rising temperatures, severe water shortages, loss of biodiversity and a significant decline in public health due to worsening air quality.

Unfortunately, the general tendency is that the Government should do something about it, but the people themselves can bring about a substantial change. In stark contrast to Delhi's environmental challenges, the village of Piplantri in Rajasthan offers a beacon of hope and a model for sustainable development. Located near Udaipur, Piplantri has gained international acclaim for its unique initiative of planting 111 saplings every time a girl is born in the village. This practice, started by former village head Shyam Sundar Paliwal in the memory of his deceased daughter, has transformed the village's landscape and socio-economic fabric. Since its inception, Piplantri has planted over 350,000 trees, turning the once arid region lush green. This has had multiple benefits of improving air quality, increasing groundwater levels and fostering a sense of community ownership over local resources. The initiative also challenges the deeply rooted gender biases in rural India. The environmental benefits in Piplantri are manifold. The increased green cover has helped combat soil erosion, improved agricultural productivity and provided habitat for various species, thus enhancing biodiversity. Delhi's situation and Piplantri's success highlight the critical need for proactive environmental policies and community engagement. Urban areas like Delhi can draw several lessons from Piplantri's example.

PICTALK



Children travel via a boat to reach their school that reopened after the summer vacation, in Thiruvananthapuram

Epic election festival concludes smoothly



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

The 2024 general election campaign has been marked by intense mudslinging, media misrepresentations and sharp ideological battles

With the conclusion of the 7th phase of the voting on Saturday, the long drawn-out Great Election Festival has come to an end. The results of the polls would be announced on Tuesday and the winner would be asked by the President to form the new Government. If a party fails to cross the halfway mark on its own, we will see a coalition government consisting of parties with different ideologies but united in their hatred for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The electioneering of 2024 was nothing other than calling names and distortion statements made by Prime Minister Modi. The misrepresentation of facts by the media has fueled anger among various communities. When the bugle for the electoral battle was sounded by the Election Commission of India, there was no agenda in the BJP's game plan to amend the Constitution. But its rivals were unanimous in their aggressive campaign that if the BJP wins this time, there would not be any more elections in the country and the Constitution would be thrown to the dustbin. Rahul Gandhi, the Prime Minister in waiting, went one step further and declared that the BJP would cancel once and forever the reservation meant for scheduled caste/scheduled tribe and the OBC. Though this was refuted by the BJP camp, the notion in Kerala and Tamil Nadu was that Modi was against reservation of any kind. Meanwhile, leaders of Congress, CPI(M) and like-minded parties blamed Narendra Modi and the Sangh Parivar for the scorching summer as well as the draught that has struck South India. Then came the heavy downpour and upper-level cyclonic circulation in Kerala. The Congress and CPI(M) found Modi as the scapegoat for this too. The contents of the interview given by the Prime Minister to a TV channel too were distorted by the Opposition leaders who accused the former of claiming himself as God. But what he told in the interview was that he saw the 140 crore Indians as his Gods and he was worshipping them. These are



unpardonable sins. Election speeches were a learning process for ordinary mortals. The national and State level leaders of various political outfits enlighten the voters about the failures committed by the parties that ruled the country in different times while the party that was born to rule India would shock the electorate with what they have done to make India what it is now. Though the eminent historian R C Majumdar has edited an XI volume series "The History and Culture of Indian People" which was published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan at the instance of Kulapati Dr K M Munshi, the same has been declared as an "untouchable product" by the Leftist historians of the country. The Leftists and the GOP have a lot to hide and we will come back to that on another occasion. The 2024 General Election was an event that the voters would prefer to forget at the earliest. The electioneering should never be a name-calling exercise and the media should know its role as an observer. The guiding principle of journalism, as coined by C P Scott, late editor of The Guardian,



NOW THAT THE LAST VOTE HAS BEEN CAST, THE ONLY OPTION IS TO WAIT TILL JUNE 4 TO KNOW WHICH WAY THE WIND HAS BLOWN. NEWSPAPERS AND NEWS CHANNELS SHOULD NOT TAKE SIDES IN THIS CONTEST OF DEMOCRACY

was "facts are sacred but opinions are free". But in present-day journalism, this law has degenerated and it has become facts and opinions are free. If one is to go by the news and opinions of most newspapers, the INDI Alliance has already won the election and it is a matter of time before the new government is sworn in. The opinion polls and surveys have become a butt of jokes. Now that the last vote has been cast, the only option is to wait till 4 June 2024 to know which way the wind has blown. Newspapers and News Channels should not take sides in this contest of democracy. No doubt, the claim "my kurta is whiter than his" extends to politics. But it should not lead to an exercise of abusing and belittling the rivals. The speeches delivered by some of the leading lights of the main political parties were deplorable and despicable. The portrayal of Mukhtar Ansari, a dreaded criminal and mafia don, as Shaheed by Asaduddin Owaisi, the president of AIMIM was a shocking incident. We address Bhagat Singh and Chandrasekhar Azad as shaheeds but this is the first

time a mafia don has been accorded the status of Shaheed. Some of the leaders who constitute the INDI Alliance applaud a person convicted to life imprisonment in the fodder scam as the most honest politician in the country even though the latter is out on bail claiming serious medical ailments. The Porsche car mishap that claimed two lives in Pune is further proof that the BJP cannot escape from the allegations of favouritism. The Hindutva brigade is the alliance partner of the government in Maharashtra in which the NCP has a major stake. Only people with knowledge, wisdom and a clean image should win the election and assume power at the Centre. Convicts and mafia dons should not have any place in this electoral battle. Above all, it is for the Election Commission to elevate the quality of the electoral game to that of a royal event. There is no space for anti-social and anti-national elements in this jamboree where people are the masters. Let the electorate have the last word. (The writer is a special correspondent with the Pioneer, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DELHI FIGHTS VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

Madam — Regarding the news story "MCD intensifies efforts to control vector-borne diseases," published on June 2, here is my response. As a daily reader of the newspaper, I find the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's (MCD) intensified efforts to control vector-borne diseases commendable. The deployment of Domestic Breeding Checkers (DBC) has been notably effective, with over 1.35 crore inspections and on-the-spot treatments for more than 25,000 mosquito-breeding sites. The strategic approach, including intersectoral meetings and community awareness campaigns, underscores the importance of collective action. MCD's consistent anti-larval spraying and fogging are critical in curbing the spread of diseases like dengue. However, the real challenge lies in sustaining these efforts and ensuring public cooperation. The civic body's appeal to residents to maintain cleanliness and manage water storage responsibly is vital. With Aedes mosquitoes breeding in stagnant clean water, community involvement in eliminating potential breeding sites is crucial. It's heartening to see such proactive measures, but continuous vigilance and public engagement are essential to prevent future outbreaks.

Jiya Patel | Ahmedabad

ELECTION DYNAMICS IN INDIA

Madam — Apropos the news story "Now, count your blessings on June 4," published on June 2, this is my response. As a regular newspaper reader, witnessing the culmination of the largest festival of democracy in India is a remarkable experience. The recent Lok Sabha elections, with a voter turnout of 60 per cent, underscore the vibrancy and resilience of Indian democracy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a third consecutive term, campaigned vigorously, reflecting the intense political landscape. West Bengal's impressive 70 per cent turnout contrasted starkly with Bihar's 49.12 per cent, highlighting regional

INDIA bloc optimistic despite exit polls



Regarding the news story "Cong Assured of 295+ Seats for INDIA Bloc," published on June 2, here are my thoughts. As a daily reader of The Pioneer, I am deeply impressed by Deepak Kumar Jha's coverage of the INDIA

Bloc's confidence in the 2024 general elections. The detailed account of Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge's assertive claims of winning over 295 Lok Sabha seats highlights the coalition's robust strategy and optimism. It's particularly notable how Jha captures the strategic planning and unity among diverse opposition leaders, including Sonia Gandhi, Arvind Kejriwal, and Akhilesh Yadav. This article sheds light on their collaborative efforts and preparation for the vote-counting process, reflecting a significant political moment. Jha's thorough reporting provides readers with an insightful glimpse into the political landscape, emphasising the Bloc's readiness to challenge the BJP and form a stable government. His articulate narration is both informative and engaging, making it a commendable piece of journalism.

Shaker Kumar | Delhi

differences in electoral engagement. Despite incidents of violence and complaints about EVM glitches, the overall peaceful conduct of the elections is commendable. Modi's call for robust voter participation resonates deeply, emphasising the importance of every vote. The predicted return of the Modi-led NDA, according to exit polls, suggests continuity but also invites reflection on the opposition's strategies. This election underscores the dynamism of Indian politics, where every voter, regardless of background, plays a pivotal role in shaping the nation's future. The real victory, as the Election Commission aptly put it, belongs to the Indian voter.

Dhruv Gupta | Mumbai

LEGACY OF SONAL MANSINGH

Madam — Apropos the news story "The Living Legend of Sonal Mansingh," published on June 2, this is my response. Reading about Sonal Mansingh's remarkable journey is truly inspiring. Her story is one of dedication and resilience, breaking barriers in a male-dominated

field and promoting Indian classical dance on a global stage. Starting her dance education in Bharatanatyam and later mastering Odissi under Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, she has become a luminary in the arts. Despite societal challenges, her unwavering commitment has not only preserved India's cultural heritage but also brought it to the forefront internationally. Mansingh's involvement in politics as a Rajya Sabha member further emphasises the importance of integrating cultural advocacy within governance. Her efforts to use dance as a medium for social commentary and her work with the Centre for Indian Classical Dances highlight her multifaceted contributions. Sonal Mansingh's life and work remind us of the enduring relevance of our cultural roots and the transformative power of art in bridging divides and fostering dialogue.

Ishika Verma | Jaipur

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Is it possible to restore the lost vigour of our planet?

We have caused considerable damage to all our terrestrial as well as all aquatic ecosystems but some initiatives have shown promising results

Humans think about our planet only on two occasions: during celebrations of select days or when catastrophes happen. When everything is normal, we take our planet for granted. We exploit it to the core, and we forget that the resources on this planet are not only for us but for generations to come. At every stage in the history of Homo sapiens, we have caused considerable harm to the environment. But the quantum of destruction humans caused during the last two centuries has caused irreparable loss to the planet. This is mainly due to the advances in modern science and technology. We forgot the value of the Indian philosophy of living sustainably with nature, propagated by our forefathers for our greed. Today, we have fallen to the level that we don't even care about the future of our own children. We amass wealth and physical resources for our children, but what is the use if they don't have a clean and safe area to live? Can we restore the vigour of our planet? Restoring the lost vigour of our planet is essential for



ensuring our environment's long-term health and sustainability. While the challenges are substantial, numerous examples and strategies demonstrate that significant progress can be made with concerted effort, innovative solutions, and global cooperation. We have caused considerable damage to all our terrestrial as well as all aquatic ecosystems. To bring it back to normal is a challenging task. Initiatives such as reforestation, wetland restoration, and coral reef rehabilitation have shown promising results. For instance, reforestation projects in regions like the Amazon, Africa, and Southeast Asia are helping to restore vital forest ecosystems, sequester carbon, and provide habitats for diverse species. Wetland restoration efforts in places like the

Mississippi River Delta and the Danube Delta are improving water quality, reducing flood risks, and supporting rich biodiversity. One successful example of land restoration is the Loess Plateau in China. Over several decades, intensive soil erosion had turned this once-fertile region into a barren landscape. The Loess Plateau has been transformed through large-scale interventions, including terracing, reforestation, and sustainable agricultural practices, resulting in increased agricultural productivity, reduced erosion, and improved local livelihoods. After nearly four decades of pollution and neglect, the Khushal Sar Lake in Srinagar has been restored to its former glory, providing a habitat for thousands of migratory birds. Thanks to a community effort supported by the local administration, the lake has been brought back to life. These examples showcase the potential of comprehensive land restoration strategies in reversing degradation and fostering sustainable development. Every year on June 5th, we Celebrate Environmental Day.

This year's World Environment Day campaign focuses on land restoration, desertification and drought resilience. This year, we have realised the impact of climate change in India through scorching heat wave conditions and unprecedented rains and snowfalls. But when we feel the situation has become normal, we forget our environmental concerns and start harming it. The government must take stringent measures to safeguard the remaining tracts of agricultural lands, wetlands, forests, grasslands, coral reefs etc. No developmental activities should be allowed in these areas. We should carry out tourism-related activities within the region's carrying capacity. The government of Tamil Nadu's recent e-pass system to control tourist influx to Nilgiris is a commendable policy decision. We should implement a similar system in other ecologically sensitive regions of the country, especially those surrounding the Himalayas. (The is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN



FIRST COLUMN CRIME AND CONSCIENCE

Spiritual resilience through meditation can help reform criminal behaviour



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

The whole nation was jolted by a recent hit-and-run tragedy, wherein a teenager, reportedly intoxicated behind the wheel of a luxury car, collided with a motorbike, claiming the lives of two promising young IT professionals. As per criminal psychologists, before a crime can be said to have occurred, it has to be committed. So, without action, there can be no crime. Hence, they say that in most of the cases, a person commits a crime in a moment of high tension, irresistible temptation, uncontrollable passion, deep infatuation, extreme provocation or utter frustration or in answer to an undying call of conviction or conscience. So, according to them if he/she could withstand the pressure of these conditions of restlessness for even a couple of minutes or perhaps, even for a few seconds, he/she would have, perhaps, been out of the crime zone and be free at least from any charge of a cognisable offence. Considering it from another perspective, it could be said that, if a man's rational sense, his self-respect, his control over the emotions, his sober judgement, his noble sentiments and his spiritual or ethical sense had not forsaken him, then, perhaps, the blinding storm of negative forces would have subsided and subdued and he would have refrained from the actual committal of crime and would thus have been saved from the traumatic experience that generally follows the crime. Once a gory crime has been committed, the gentle spirit in man has to go through a humiliating and excruciating experience even before he is jailed for a criminal offence or has to pay a heavy amount as punishment, under the relevant act for his civil offence, or has to suffer both. Not only does he feel depressed and carry a heavy burden on his chest but also, he is unable to face his conscience, stand before a mirror and



see his face as before. We have to consider does the law cover all acts that may cause injury to public welfare? Hence one can say that there is no objective, simple definition of crime. Because the meaning of crime is affected by the particular society in which we live.

Like, there are crimes that occur within strict legal definitions and those that relate to codes or conventions known as normative definitions. They are usually formal moral codes such as religions, or informal codes such as socially acceptable behaviour. The acts of crime and the punishment by the court go on as usual. However, one important question to which no government or judiciary has seriously and assiduously addressed itself lingers on. The question relates to the state of mind of a person before he commits the crime and after he has done the act. It is common knowledge that the forces that goad a person to committal of crime are none other than the maddening feelings of anger, consuming fires of hatred, jealousy, rivalry, vengeance or enmity, expanded greed, aroused strong passion, inflated or injured ego, surge of emotional attachment or grave fear of the unknown. We cannot reduce crime or have a crimeless society unless and until we have greatly reduced or fully removed these negative traits from the minds of the citizens.

It is unfortunate that pre-natal and post-natal aspects of crime have never been adequately dealt with by our society. It is hardly realised that what is required, in fact, are such measures that increase the psychological and spiritual immunity of the citizens to situations of stress and strain or to tempests of greed, ego and passions. This cannot be done except by spiritual education and guidance in Meditation. Because it is meditation which can burn the hidden roots of anger, hatred and other negative and criminal tendencies in a person. The over-all expenditure and the manpower and effort required for this will be "far far less" than is involved to keep the cogged wheels of law oiled and moving.

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

Uncertainties dwindle investors' confidence



SHIVAJI SARKAR

Global uncertainties over rising interest rates, jittery noises of LS elections surpass the RBI's ₹2.10 lakh crore dividend boons, pushing down the Sensex



From its highest 76,010 in the beginning of the week it plunged to 73,866 as the BSE and Nifty indices close in the last six sessions. The RBI forecast of 7 percent growth too has not boosted the spirits as the equity market has been pining for a higher growth. However, RBI claims that even at 7 percent the country would be one of the fastest growing economies in the financial year 2025. The Asian Development Bank and Fitch also concur. But IMF, S&P and Morgan Stanley put it at 6.8 percent and World Bank, Moody's and Deloitte put it at 6.6 percent. The RBI has set a target of inflation at 4.5 percent though the central bank repeatedly has said that for the last ten years average inflation hovered over 5.5 percent. The central bank also notes a slowdown in the last quarter of 2023-24. Global markets remained under pressure due to rising bond yields and denting hopes of a rate cut. A major concern is the spike in US bond yields pushing the 10-year yield above 4.6 per cent. Some of the top companies that raised dollar bonds include India Bulls HF-\$ 350 million; IRB Infra - \$ 540 million; Adani Green Energy - \$ 409 million and Sriram Finance - \$ 750 million, as per Bloomberg. The bond market can trigger continuation of the FII selling which will depress the prices of large stocks further. Volatility is likely to continue the next week as well due to the political uncertainty and global developments. This has been a phenomenon since the elections began in April and now it is spiking to 24.8 - a more than two-year high on the benchmark for volatility India VIX. Except for occasional rises, the stocks remained stagnant. In different phases the losses to investors have been heavy. In the present melee, foreign funds were major sellers at Rs



A PROLONGED ELECTION HAS SEEN INVESTOR CONFIDENCE BEING HIT. FOREIGN PORTFOLIO INVESTORS PREFERRED TO UNLOAD MORE THAN BUYING. ELECTION IS A DEMOCRATIC NECESSITY. THE RULERS, HOWEVER, NEED TO SEE IT BEYOND POLITICAL COMPULSIONS

3,050 crore. In earlier, trading also the FPIs sold stocks worth Rs 27,500 crore. The domestic funds were net buyers at Rs 53,600 crore. It means largely the PSU funds were the buyers. This has a risk to mutual fund investors. During the weekend the BSE sensex had a minor rise of 0.18 percent or 132.44 points and the NSE Nifty 50 closed 61.75 points or 0.27% higher. These minor movements are not capable of recovering the losses. It is found that some of the major corporates like the Tata Steel's profit slides 65 percent to Rs 555 crore down from Rs 1566 crore. It suffered a loss of Rs 594 crore. Of the 12 startups looking to launch IPOs in 2024, eight have incurred a cumulative loss of Rs 8,000 crore, including Swiggy, and Ola Electric. A prolonged election has seen investor confidence being hit. Foreign portfolio investors preferred to unload more than buying. Election is a democratic necessity. The rulers, however, need to see it beyond political compulsions. Ideally, an election could be held in far fewer phases stretched to not more than a fortnight. Most of the southern states had a one-day poll schedule. Only in states of northern and eastern India had multi-phase polls. Even Tripura, one of the tiniest states with two seats, witnessed polls being held in two phases. Longer an election stretches, the administrative cost multiplies. All political parties should sit together with the Election Commission of India (ECI) to

discuss how the modalities could be simplified to hold elections in the shortest possible time to take care of administrative, economic and trading activities. Apart, it also needs to decide whether announcing dividends by organisations like RBI or other PSUs could be announced during the elections. Such moves tilt the balance. Profit booking at higher levels in the stock market has been a synonym to political or economic uncertainties. This needs to be avoided to the maximum. Polls must not come in the way of policy decisions either at the government level or corporate and other institutional functioning. Election schedules are not a matter of mere political management. Polls are held to improve systems. If these affect any aspect of the governance, this must be corrected for all times and should be part of the standard operating procedures of the ECI. Overall, there are risks to the economy, RBI says in its annual report. It has asked banks to address trading norms, banking book risks, and diversify deposit sources to mitigate risks associated with interest rate fluctuations. This variation has also its impact on the stock markets. Its decision to review priority sector lending guidelines and work towards formulating norms for the National Strategy for Financial Inclusion up to 2030 could have wider impact on trading and businesses. The RBI functioning is also being discussed. Its dividend payment of Rs 2.10 lakh crore is linked to

17 percent rise in income, 56 percent drop in expenses due to a much lower transfer to contingency provisions during 2023-24. As against Rs 1.3 lakh crore in 2022-23, only Rs 42,819 crore was transferred to the contingency fund in 2023-24. Another matter that has drawn attention is the domestic assets made up 23.3 percent against 76.7 percent in foreign currency assets, including gold deposits and gold held in the country as also loans and advances to financial institutions outside India. The RBI holds, its annual reports says, 822.1 metric tonnes of gold. The value of gold held as asset increased by 16.9 percent to Rs 1,64,604.9 crore on March 31, 2023. It also mentions heavy liabilities other than deposits and notes issued at 92.57 percent. The recent trend in US inflation data could make an interest rate cut this year. This could cause further flight of capital from India even as rupee continues to fall against the dollar and further fall in the equities are not ruled out. The market awaits new policy formulations. Till such time the volatility is likely to continue. It would require innovative approach to the financial and budgetary policies to boost the overall market so that investors from across the globe are tempted to put their funds in Indian scrip and other instruments. The new government has to trudge cautiously and intelligently to rev up the contours of the market and economy. (The author is a senior journalist; views are personal)

Total knee replacement is a quantum leap towards pain relief

TKR is a transformative solution for those with knee pain. By tackling the root cause of pain, it not only restores mobility but also improves overall health

A 46-year-old woman faced the challenges of bilateral knee degeneration due to a rare congenital condition. Her knees had deteriorated significantly, causing chronic pain and limited mobility. After careful evaluation of her condition and medical history, she was recommended bilateral total knee replacement surgery (TKR) as the most suitable option. Following the surgery, she experienced a remarkable transformation. Today, she enjoys a newfound sense of freedom and vitality. Whether it's walking, hiking, or pursuing her passions, she does so with confidence and ease. Knee pain affects millions of individuals in India, hinder-



VIPUL KUMAR GUPTA

ing basic activities like walking and stair climbing. However, TKR is a breakthrough revolution in this direction, and a study published in the Journal of Arthroplasty reports that over 90% of TKR patients experience significant pain relief and improved mobility post-surgery. TKR, also known as knee arthroplasty, is considered a quantum leap towards pain relief for patients suffering from severe knee pain, often due to arthritis or injuries. This surgical procedure involves replacing the affected parts of the knee joint with artificial components to normalcy. Women often face knee problems because of their body structure and changes

like menopause hormones. This can make everyday tasks harder due to joint weakness and extra knee pressure. That's why doctors suggest knee replacement surgery. It's a way to fix the knee for improved and painless functionality. Unlike conventional treatments, surgery tackles the root cause and enables the person to enjoy a normal and painless life. TKR isn't just for seniors anymore; it's also a lifeline for younger adults, addressing various conditions beyond sports injuries. It's also beneficial for patients with traumatic injuries or fractures leading to irreparable knee damage. TKR addresses these issues, provides long-term relief, and



restores knee function. Eventually, it empowers younger individuals to lead active lives. Factors such as activity level and implant durability are carefully evaluated to ensure optimal outcomes. TKR is a transformative solution for those with knee pain and coexisting health

issues like diabetes or obesity. By tackling the root cause of pain, TKR not only restores mobility but also improves overall health. Reduced pain and enhanced mobility support, increased physical activity, aiding in weight management and blood sugar control. Total Knee Replacement

involves replacing the whole knee joint with artificial parts, which is useful for widespread arthritis or severe damage. On the other side, Partial Knee Replacement (PKR) targets only the damaged part of the knee, keeping healthy tissue and bone intact. Both surgeries aim to reduce pain and improve movement, but they differ in how much of the knee they address. TKR is a comprehensive solution for serious knee issues, while PKR focuses on specific areas of damage. The choice between the two depends on the severity of the injury and the patient's overall health. Physical therapy is crucial before and after TKR. Before surgery, it strengthens muscles and improves flexibility,

preparing patients for the procedure. After surgery, therapy helps reduce swelling, regain mobility, and rebuild muscle strength. Continued therapy ensures optimal knee function, prevents stiffness, and enhances the quality of life. TKR offers hope to people regardless of age, gender, or health challenges. With advancements in medicine, TKR has become a game-changer in treating knee problems as a reliable solution for improving knee function and reducing pain. It's a choice that can truly change their lives for the better! (The writer is a senior Joint Replacement Surgeon at Shalby Hospital, Lucknow; views are personal)

Israel tells citizens to avoid travel to Maldives

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel has advised its citizens, including those holding an additional foreign passport, to avoid travelling to the Maldives and asked those staying there to leave the Indian Ocean archipelago, a day after the Maldivian government decided to ban Israeli passport holders from entering the country amidst the deadly war in Gaza. The Israeli Foreign Ministry made the recommendations on Sunday in view of the Maldivian government's decision to make the legal amendments necessary to ban entry into the Maldives on Israeli passports as soon as possible. "The recommendation is also valid for Israeli citizens holding a foreign passport, in addition to the Israeli passport," the Israeli Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "For Israeli citizens staying in the country, it is recom-

mended to consider leaving, since if they fall into distress for any reason, it will be difficult for us to help," it added. While the Maldivian cabinet decided to ban Israeli passports, the actual implementation of the decision will require legal reforms. Maldives receives more than one million tourists each year. About 10,966 Israeli tourists visited the Maldives in 2023, while 15,748 Israelis travelled to the country in 2023. Israel issued a travel warning in December urging its citizens against visiting the Maldives, citing increased anti-Israel sentiment during the war with Hamas. Israel does not have diplomatic ties with the Muslim-majority nation after they were suspended in 1974. However, Israelis have been allowed to visit the country famed for its islands since diplomatic dialogue to normalise ties between the two

started more than a decade ago, but have not succeeded despite at times looking "promising". The Maldivian cabinet on Sunday also decided to appoint a special presidential envoy to identify the areas in which Palestine requires support from the Maldives and organise fundraising events to assist Palestinians through the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The Gaza conflict began on October 7 after Hamas initiated an attack on Israel, killing over 800 and capturing 240 hostages, according to Israeli authorities. Israel launched a massive counter-offensive against the Palestinian militant group that has ruled Gaza since 2007. More than 36,000 people, including women and children, have been killed in Gaza in Israel's action, according to the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza.



Palestinians look at the destruction after an Israeli airstrike in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, Monday.

AP/PTI

Israel seeks alternative to Hamas in Gaza

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel is looking into an alternative local governing body for Gaza, the defence minister said on Sunday, proposing a future beyond Hamas but giving no idea who those challengers might be. Defence Minister Yoav Gallant's comments came at a time of new uncertainty in the eight-month war. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is under growing pressure from many Israelis to accept a new ceasefire deal proposed by US President Joe Biden while far-right allies threaten to collapse his government if he does. Gallant, part of Israel's three-member War Cabinet who recently urged the government to have a detailed postwar plan for Gaza, said in a briefing that "we seek a governing alternative to Hamas. The framework for this includes isolating areas, removing Hamas operatives in these areas and bringing in other forces that will enable the formation of a governing alternative".

That will achieve Israel's goals of removing Hamas' military and governing authority in Gaza and returning home the remaining hostages taken in the October 7 Hamas attack but delegate civilian administration to local Palestinians unaffiliated with Hamas or the Western-backed Palestinian Authority. He has ruled out a path to Palestinian statehood. "They were considered in the eyes of Palestinians as collaborators, and it ended in a very tragic manner," he said. "Unless Israel maintains a constant presence in Gaza, any 'alternative forces' they try to install will be too fragile, he added. Netanyahu has said Israel will maintain security control over Gaza but delegate civilian administration to local Palestinians unaffiliated with Hamas or the Western-backed Palestinian Authority. He has ruled out a path to Palestinian statehood.

Top ally the US has proposed that a reformed Palestinian Authority would govern Gaza with the assistance of Arab and Muslim nations. The Hamas attack in southern Israel killed around 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250. About 100 hostages remain in Gaza, along with the bodies of around 30 more. Over 36,430 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza by Israel's offensive, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Israel blames Hamas for civilian deaths.

But that approach is challenging and has failed before, one expert said. "I haven't heard of any local players that are brave enough to present themselves as an alternative to Hamas," said Michael Milshtein, an Israeli analyst of Palestinian affairs at Tel Aviv University and a former military intelligence officer. Milshtein said Gallant's "wishful thinking" would amount to a suicidal mission for any local leader. Hamas has threatened anyone cooperating with Israel's government. "Although Hamas suffered severe damage over the past eight months, their impact on the public is still very strong," he said. Milshtein noted that Israel has tried this approach in the past. In the 1970s and '80s, Israel tried to establish "village leagues", empowering local Palestinian leaders. "They were considered in the eyes of Palestinians as collaborators, and it ended in a very tragic manner," he said. "Unless Israel maintains a constant presence in Gaza, any 'alternative forces' they try to install will be too fragile, he added. Netanyahu has said Israel will maintain security control over Gaza but delegate civilian administration to local Palestinians unaffiliated with Hamas or the Western-backed Palestinian Authority. He has ruled out a path to Palestinian statehood.

Mexico elects Claudia Sheinbaum as president

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

Claudia Sheinbaum claimed victory in Mexico's presidential election, becoming the first woman selected for the job by promising to continue the political course set by her populist predecessor despite widespread discontent with persistent cartel violence and disappointing economic performance. The climate scientist and former Mexico City mayor was the favored successor of outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. But her cool temper offers a sharp contrast in style — and a break with Mexico's male-dominated political culture.



Ruling party presidential candidate Claudia Sheinbaum shows her ink-stained thumb after voting during general elections in Mexico City, Sunday.

AP/PTI

Sheinbaum said Sunday night that her two competitors had called her and conceded in an election that guaranteed Mexico would make history. The two leading candidates were women, and Sheinbaum is also the first person from a Jewish background to lead the overwhelming Catholic country. Her main competitor, Xóchitl Gálvez, meanwhile, had a father who was Indigenous Otomi. "I do not arrive alone. We all arrived, with our heroines who gave us our homeland, with our mothers, our daughters and our granddaughters," Sheinbaum said with a smile, speaking at a downtown hotel shortly after electoral authorities announced an early count showed she held an irreversible lead. The 61-year-old Sheinbaum led the campaign wire-to-wire despite a spirited challenge from Gálvez. But Sheinbaum is unlikely to enjoy the kind of unquestioning devotion that López Obrador has enjoyed. Yoselin Ramírez, 29, said she voted for Sheinbaum, but split her vote for other posts because she didn't want anyone holding a strong majority. "I don't want everything to be occupied by the same party, so there can be a little more equality," she said without elaborating. The main opposition candidate, Gálvez, who rose from selling snacks on the street in her poor hometown to start her own tech firms, tried to seize on Mexicans' concerns about security and promised to take a

more aggressive approach toward organised crime. By Monday morning, with the 76.1% of the polling place tallies counted by Mexico's electoral authority, Sheinbaum had 58.6% of the vote, followed by Gálvez with 28.3%. Longshot candidate Jorge Álvarez Máynez trailed with 10.5% of the vote. Sheinbaum's Morena party was also projected to hold its majorities in both chambers of Congress. If the margin holds, it would approach López Obrador's landslide victory in 2018. He won the presidency after two unsuccessful tries with 53.2% of the votes, in a three-way race where National Action took 22.3% and the Institutional Revolutionary Party took 16.5%. The elections were widely seen as a referendum on López Obrador, who has expanded social programs but largely failed to reduce cartel violence in Mexico. In Mexico City's main plaza, the Zocalo, Sheinbaum's lead did not draw the kind of cheering, jubilant crowds that greeted López Obrador's victory in 2018. Those present were enthusiastic, but comparatively few in number. Sara Ríos, 76, a retired literature professor at Mexico's National Autonomous University, celebrated after hearing that Gálvez had conceded. "The only way that we move forward is by working together," Ríos said.

"She is going to work to bring peace to the country, and is going to manage to advance, but it is a slow process." Earlier, Fernando Fernández, a chef, 28, joined the relatively small crowd, hoping for a Sheinbaum victory, but even he acknowledged there were problems. "You vote for Claudia out of conviction, for AMLO," Fernández said, referring to López Obrador by his initials, as most Mexicans do. But his highest hope is that Sheinbaum can "improve what AMLO couldn't do, the price of gasoline, crime and drug trafficking, which he didn't combat even though he had the power." Sheinbaum promised to continue all of López Obrador's policies, including a universal pension for the elderly and a program that pays youths to apprentice. Gálvez, who ran with a coalition of major opposition parties, left the Senate last year to focus her ire on López Obrador's decision to avoid confronting the drug cartels through his "hugs not bullets" policy. She pledged to more aggressively go after criminals. Julio García, a Mexico City office worker, said he was voting for the opposition in Mexico City's central San Rafael neighborhood. "They've robbed me twice at gunpoint. You have to change direction, change leadership," the 34-year-old said. "Continuing the same way, we're going to become Venezuela."

Mexico's first woman pres faces pressing gender-related issues

Mexico City (AP): Claudia Sheinbaum's name will go down in Mexican history. The governing party candidate won Mexico's presidential election on Sunday, a turning point in a mostly conservative nation that for more than two centuries has been exclusively ruled by men. Elsewhere in Latin America, women have presided over Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Nicaragua, Honduras, Ecuador, El Salvador, Panama, Haiti and Costa Rica. Mexican women won the right to vote in 1953. No law prevented female candidates from holding office, but sexism and "machismo" culture continue to permeate the country of 129 million people. Prior to the current presidential race, during which Sheinbaum maintained a comfortable lead against opposition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez, only two women had officially sought Mexico's presidency. Both failed. In her bid to replace outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Sheinbaum struggled to construct an image of her own, leaving many wondering whether she can escape the shadow of her mentor. Women currently lead some key Mexican institutions, such as the Senate, the Supreme Court and the National Electoral Institute. Mexico ranks third among Latin American nations with the most women in the national Cabinet — 44% — and has 10 female governors among its 32 states. In some Indigenous villages, though, men still hold the power. Among the issues that Mexican women face are femicide, or women killed because of their gender, a gender employment gap and inadequate policies guaranteeing sexual and reproductive rights. Sheinbaum, 61, will need to address these after she takes office on Oct 1. Demonstrations on

International Women's Day on March 8 are painful reminders that many Mexican women disappear or are killed on a daily basis. According to UN Women, up to 10 women are victims of femicide each day in Mexico. The number totalled 3,000 in 2023. Thousands more have disappeared. In many cases, it is their mothers, feeling abandoned by the government, who have taken on the task of searching for them. Most femicides go unpunished due to Mexico's inefficient justice system, which frequently dismisses reported crimes or fails to properly investigate and prosecute them. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, more than 40% of Mexican women who are 15 years old or older say they have been victims of some sort of violence in their lives. During her campaign, Sheinbaum said she would replicate measures against gender-based violence that were implemented when she was mayor of the capital. They include the creation of an anti-femicide prosecutor's office and legislation that would force offenders to leave their homes. "We transform, we are warriors who open paths for other women," Sheinbaum said. In spite of this, Sheinbaum has been criticized by feminists and activists arguing that her government lacked gender-related policies. Excessive use of force against women during demonstrations has been flagged as well. Teenage pregnancy among Mexican women and girls has raised concern. According to official figures from 2021, the latest available, there were 147,279 births among adolescents between 15 and 19 years old, and 3,019 among girls under 15.

'Israeli airstrikes near Aleppo kills several'

Beirut (AP): Israeli airstrikes around the Syrian city of Aleppo killed several people early on Monday, Syrian state media reported. The state-run SANA news agency gave no specific toll. It said the strikes were around the southeastern edge of Aleppo. "The aggression led to a number of martyrs and some material losses," SANA said. Israel did not immediately acknowledge the strikes and rarely does when it comes to Syria. Syria and Israel have been at war since Israel's founding in 1948. Syria's President Bashar Assad has been backed by Iran in his country's yearslong war, and Israeli strikes previously have targeted Iranian positions and equipment. The strikes also come while Israel is fighting Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Israel separately has been striking targets in

Iran's acting top diplomat makes first official visit to Lebanon

AP ■ BEIRUT

Iran's acting foreign minister arrived in Lebanon Monday, his first official diplomatic visit since his predecessor died in a helicopter crash last month. Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported that Ali Bagheri Kani would visit Lebanon and then Syria "to meet with the two countries' officials as well as the officials of the resistance front to discuss ways to counter (Israel)". Iran backs a number of armed factions in the region, of which Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah is widely seen as the most powerful. Hezbollah would be Tehran's first line of defense in case of a direct conflict between Iran and Israel. Bagheri Kani's predecessor, Hossein Amirabdollahian, a hard-liner close to the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, died in a helicopter

crash on May 19 in a mountainous area near Iran's border with Azerbaijan, along with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and a delegation of other officials. Bagheri Kani met with his Lebanese counterpart, Abdallah Bou Habib, on Monday and praised the "close relations" between the two countries. He told reporters that "resistance is the basis for stability in the region." "We agreed that all countries in the region, especially the Islamic countries, should adopt a joint movement in order to counter Israeli aggression and protect the Palestinian people, especially in Rafah," he said. Bou Habib said Lebanon, for its part, wants to avoid a wider war and is looking for "sustainable solutions that restore calm and stability to southern Lebanon." Hezbollah has been clashing with Israeli forces along the Lebanon-Israel border since October, against the backdrop of Israel's war against the allied Hamas group in Gaza. The cross-border fighting has intensified in recent weeks, since Israel's incursion into the key town of Rafah in southern Gaza. The border fighting has killed more than 400 people on the Lebanese side — most of them militants but also including more than 70 civilians and noncombatant — and at least 15 soldiers and 10 civilians on the Israeli side. The danger of a direct conflict between Iran and Israel has also risen since Oct. 7. An apparent Israeli airstrike on an Iranian consulate in Syria in April triggered a series of escalatory attacks between Iran and Israel that threatened to set off a wider war, although the two regional archrivals have recently seemed to dial back tensions.

More women among top paid CEOs in 2023, still outnumbered by men

AP ■ SAN FRANCISCO

More women are attaining the top job at companies in the S&P 500, but their numbers are still minuscule compared to their male counterparts. Of the 341 CEOs included in the AP's annual compensation survey, 25 are women. That's the most women making the list since the survey began in 2011. But the numbers haven't budged very much. The second highest tally was 21 women in 2017. The survey, based on data analyzed for The Associated Press by Equilar, includes CEOs at S&P 500 companies who have served at least two fiscal years at their companies, which filed proxy statements between Jan. 1 and April 30, 2024. Christy Glass, a professor of sociology at Utah State University who studies equity, inclusion and leadership, said that while seeing more female CEOs this year is a positive, overall the trends are discouraging. "We'll see a year where there's kind of a banner year of women CEOs," she said. "But then a year or two down the road, we'll see a significant turnover." Lisa Su, CEO and chair of the board of chipmaker Advanced Micro Devices, was

the highest paid female CEO in the AP survey for the fifth year in a row in fiscal 2023, bringing in total compensation worth USD30.3 million — flat with her compensation package a year earlier. Her rank rose to 21 overall from 25. Su received a base salary of USD 1.2 million and a performance bonus of more than USD 1.4 million. The bulk of her package was USD 21.8 million in stock awards. Su has been chief of AMD, based in Santa Clara, California, since 2014. The company is part of a growing number of companies trying to take advantage of a broader interest from businesses looking for new AI tools that can analyze data, help make decisions and potentially replace some tasks currently performed by human workers. AMD's stock price surged 127% in 2023. The others in the top five highest paid female CEOs include Mary Barra of automaker General Motors with total compensation of USD 27.8 million; Jane Fraser of banking giant Citigroup with a package worth USD 25.5 million; Kathy Warden of aerospace and defense company Northrop Grumman Corp. at USD 23.5 million; and Carol Tome of package deliv-

erer UPS Inc., whose pay was valued at USD 23.4 million. Some notable female CEOs aren't included since they became CEO less than two years ago or their company files proxy statements outside of the January through April window, including Julie Sweet of consultant Accenture and Sue Nabi, CEO of Coty Inc. The median pay package for female CEOs rose 21 per cent to USD 17.6 million. That's better than the men fared: Their median pay package rose 12 per cent to USD16.3 million. But the highest paid men still make far more than the highest paid women. Broadcom CEO Hock Tan raked in USD161.8 million — the vast majority of that in stock awards. Part of the issue of the disproportionate numbers of men to women is the "glass cliff," Glass said. Her research shows women are more likely to be appointed CEO at disadvantaged companies. "It's kind of like one step forward, two steps back," she said. "One of the factors driving that is the fact that women tend to have opportunities to serve as CEO when organizations are in crisis. ... That means that they start their leadership trajectory at a disadvantage."

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Quakes in north-central Japan collapse 5 homes

AP ■ TOKYO

Earthquakes early Monday again struck Japan's north-central region of Ishikawa, still recovering from the destruction left by a powerful quake on January 1, but the latest shaking caused no major damage. A magnitude 5.9 tremor on the northern top of the Noto Peninsula was followed minutes later by a 4.8 and then several smaller quakes within the next two hours, the Japan Meteorological Agency said. There was no tsunami. Five houses that had been damaged in the January 1 quake collapsed in Wajima city, but no major damage or life-threatening injuries were reported, according to Ishikawa prefecture. A quake alarm in the town of Tsubata, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) southwest of the epicenter, surprised a resident in her 60s who fell from her bed but the injury was not life-threatening, prefectural officials said. JMA seismology and tsunami official



Satoshi Harada said Monday's quakes were believed to be aftershocks of the magnitude 7.6 earthquake on January 1. Seismic activity has since slightly subsided, but Harada urged people to be cautious, especially near buildings that were damaged earlier. Shinkansen super-express trains and other train services were temporarily suspended for safety checks but most of them resumed, according to West

Japan Railway Co. The Nuclear Regulation Authority said no abnormalities were found at two nearby nuclear power plants. One of them, the Shika plant on the Noto Peninsula, had minor damage, though officials said that did not affect cooling functions of the two reactors. Hokuriku Electric Power Co. said there were no power outages. Monday's rattlings rekindled fear among residents

who are still struggling to recover from damages from the New Year's quake. NHK public television showed a number of people who came out of their homes and temporary shelters to see if there were additional damage. "Many people who have been living at evacuation centers must have been frightened," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said, urging caution against potential falling rocks and landslides in areas that were shaken strongly. Reconstruction comes slowly in mountainous areas on the peninsula, and many damaged houses remain untouched. In Wajima, which was one of the hardest-hit areas, an inn operator told NHK that he immediately ducked under the desk at the reception when the first quake struck Monday. Nothing fell to the floor or broke, but it reminded him of the January shakings and made him worry that a big quake like that had occurred even five months later.

Courts acquit Imran Khan in 3 high-profile cases

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party founder Imran Khan was on Monday acquitted in three high-profile cases, including the cipher case, in a major relief to the beleaguered former prime minister who was sentenced to 10 years in jail for making public a secret diplomatic communication. The 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician has been in jail since August last year after being convicted in some of the nearly 200 cases slapped on him since his ouster in April 2022. On Monday, a two-member bench of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb acquitted Khan and former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in the cipher case. However, the duo are not expected to be released from prison due to Khan's sentence in the Iddat case (illegal marriage) while Qureshi was arrested in a case linked to the May 9 violence. Qureshi is on physical remand till June 5. Khan and Qureshi were sen-



tenced to 10 years of imprisonment in the cipher case in January by a special court, established under the Official Secrets Act. Both Khan and Qureshi had challenged the verdict in the Islamabad High Court. The case pertains to the incident in which Khan showed a piece of paper - allegedly a copy of a diplomatic communication - at a public rally in Islamabad, claiming it as proof of a conspiracy against his government by a foreign power, referring to US diplomat Donald Lu, who has been at the centre of the

cipher controversy. Khan had brandished the cipher paper just two weeks before the ouster of the PTI government in April 2022 through a vote of no-confidence in Parliament. Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Omar Ayub hailed the verdict and called for the immediate release of Khan and Qureshi. In a statement, Khan's party urged the judiciary that the "false cases" against all political prisoners be dealt with as soon as possible and they should be released from jail.

The Cipher case was filed on August 15 last year by the Federal Investigation Agency which accused Khan and Qureshi of violating the secret laws while handling a cable sent by the Pakistan embassy in Washington in March 2022. The two were first indicted in October last year but the process was reversed by the Islamabad High Court while ruling against in-camera proceedings. They were indicted again in December. In a separate development, the district and sessions court of Islamabad acquitted Khan, Qureshi, ex-communication minister Murad Saeed, and other PTI leaders in two cases of vandalism during the 'Haqeeqi Azaadi' march in 2022. In May 2022, the former cricketer-turned-politician launched a march toward Islamabad from Lahore to topple the coalition government of Shehbaz Sharif that assumed power after he was ousted as the premier following a vote of no confidence. The rally was part of the PTI's struggle to achieve "real freedom" and deliver the nation from the "slavery" of the "US-

backed" coalition government. Khan had accused the coalition government of coming to power through a "US-backed conspiracy". The Islamabad police at that time filed separate cases against 150 people, including Khan, Qureshi and other party leaders, over allegations of arson and vandalism in the federal capital. Earlier this month, a judicial magistrate of Islamabad also acquitted Khan in two cases of vandalism during his party's two long marches in 2022. Judicial magistrate Shaista Kundi heard the pleas filed by the former prime minister for his acquittal in the cases registered at Islamabad's Lohi Bhair and Sahala police stations and one related to his production in the court. Separately, the Islamabad High Court on Monday accepted District and Sessions Judge Shahrukh Arjumand's plea for the transfer of the Iddat case to another court, days after the complainant expressed a lack of confidence in the judge. Khan and Bushra, 49, were sentenced to seven years in prison each on February 3 by a trial court for contracting the mar-

riage during iddat, a mandatory period for a woman in Islam to wait before a second marriage after the death of her husband or divorce. The case was filed by Bushra's ex-husband, Khawar Maneka, against the couple in November 2023, alleging that they married without Bushra observing the mandatory waiting period of iddat. He asked the court to declare the marriage null and void. The former first couple had challenged the verdict in Islamabad District and Sessions Court, where Judge Shahrukh Arjumand heard the appeals and reserved the verdict on May 23. The couple had married in 2018, the year Khan went on to win elections and become prime minister. Bushra was ostensibly his spiritual guide, but the two developed affection for each other during their meetings. She got a divorce from her husband of 28 years, with whom she had five children. She is the third wife of Khan, a former cricketer hero who during his heydays of sporting career, had a playboy reputation.

Christian man attacked by mob in Pak's Punjab dies

Lahore (PTI): An elderly Christian man has succumbed to his injuries sustained during an attack by a mob led by a radical outfit following a blasphemy allegation last week in Pakistan's Punjab province, police said on Monday. An enraged mob led by radical Islamist Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) activists on May 25 attacked Christian community members in Mughahid Colony in the Sargodha district of Punjab, some 200 km from Lahore, injuring two Christians and 10 policemen. The mob burned and ransacked the homes and properties of the Christians. According to police, the mob surrounded the residence and shoe factory of Nazir Masih alias Lazar Masih, an elderly Christian, accusing him of desecration of the Quran. The mob attacked him with kicks and fists and hurled stones at him. The enraged mob set fire to the shoe factory, some shops and a couple of houses. Although the deceased's family denied the desecration claims, they said the mob wanted to lynch him. "It also brutally torched Masih, but (the) timely arrival of (a) heavy contingent of police rescued Masih and 10 other members of the Christian community," the FIR says. The FIR says that some pages of the holy Quran were reportedly found outside the shoe factory, instigating the locals. "The enraged mob pelted stones at police personnel when they resorted to baton charge to disperse it. At least 10 policemen, including officers, have been injured," the FIR says. Police arrested a total of 140 suspects involved in attacking Christians, their properties and police personnel. Police booked over 450 people under terrorism and other charges. Masih, who was receiving treatment at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Sargodha, died on Sunday, police said. His nephew, Irfan Gill Masih, also confirmed the death, saying that his uncle's body was being shifted back to Sargodha for a funeral.

Zelenskyy in Manila to promote peace summit

AP ■ MANILA

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with the Philippine president on Monday in a rare Asian trip to urge regional leaders to attend a Swiss-organized global peace summit on the war in Ukraine that he accuses Russia, with China's help, of trying to undermine. Zelenskyy arrived unannounced and under heavy security in Manila late Sunday after speaking over the weekend at the Shangri-La defense forum in Singapore. He was given a red-carpet welcome with military honours Monday at the presidential palace before meeting with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., after which he left the Philippines. Marcos pledged that his country would take part in the peace summit, Philippine Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil said. "I'm happy to hear today from you that you'll participate in our peace steps," Zelenskyy told Marcos. "It's a very strong signal." Zelenskyy said Ukraine needs more mental health workers for its soldiers. Marcos promised to



help and welcomed a decision by Ukraine to open an embassy in Manila this year which would hasten efforts to deliver assistance. "We have ourselves been trying to promote the continuing adherence to international law in our part of the world," Marcos said. "The issues that you are facing are similar and in parallel to ours and, therefore, the position the Philippines takes is always to

promote peace." Both leaders spoke critically of China at the Singapore forum, which was attended by top defense and government officials from around the world, including from Washington and Beijing. The talks were held amid the raging wars in Gaza and Ukraine as well as growing tensions and rivalry for influence between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region.

At a news conference in Singapore on Sunday, Zelenskyy accused China of helping Russia to disrupt the Swiss-organized peace summit by pressuring other countries not to attend. "Russia, using Chinese influence in the region, using Chinese diplomats also, does everything to disrupt the peace summit," he said, without elaborating. "This is unfortunate that such a big independent powerful country as China is an instrument in the hands of (Russian leader Vladimir) Putin." In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning denied the allegation. "Our position is open and transparent, and there is no such thing as pressuring other countries," Mao said. China has taken what it says is a neutral position on the war, putting it at odds with Ukraine, the US and most of Europe. Its trade with Russia has grown, easing the economic impact of Western sanctions. American, Ukrainian and other intelligence agencies say there is evidence that Chinese parts are winding up in Russian weaponry, even if China is not direct-

ly arming its neighbour. Switzerland had been hoping China would attend the peace conference in mid-June, but Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning suggested Friday that was unlikely. At the security forum, Zelenskyy urged top defense officials to participate in the talks in Switzerland, expressing disappointment over the failure of some countries to commit to attending. Ukraine, he said, has proposals to make at the summit as a basis for peace, addressing nuclear security, food security, the release of prisoners of war and the return of Ukrainian children abducted by Russia. He said Ukraine is "ready to hear various proposals and thoughts that lead us ... to an end of the war and a sustainable and just peace." US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the conference and renewed US commitments to Ukraine. In an address to the forum Saturday, Austin said that "Putin's war of aggression has provided us all with a preview of a world that none of us would want."

'Tens of thousands of children in Af affected by flash floods'

AP ■ KYIV

Tens of thousands of children in Afghanistan remain affected by ongoing flash floods, especially in the north and west, the UN children's agency said Monday. Unusually heavy seasonal rains have been wreaking havoc on multiple parts of the country, killing hundreds of people and destroying property and crops. The UN food agency has warned that many survivors are unable to make a living. UNICEF, the UN children's agency, said the extreme weather has all of the hallmarks of an intensifying climate crisis, with some of the affected areas having experienced drought last year. The World Food Programme said the exceptionally heavy rains in Afghanistan killed more than 300 people and destroyed thousands of houses in May, mostly in the northern province of Baghlan. Survivors have been left with no homes, no land, and no source of livelihood, WFP said. UNICEF said in a statement Monday that tens of thousands of children remain affected by ongoing floods.



"The international community must redouble efforts and investments to support communities to alleviate and adapt to the impact of climate change on children," said Dr. Tajudeen Oyewale, the UNICEF representative in Afghanistan. At the same time, "UNICEF and the humanitarian community must prepare ourselves for a new reality of climate-related disasters," Oyewale said. Afghanistan ranks 15th out of 163 nations in the Children's Climate Risk Index. This means that not only are climate and environmental shocks and stresses prominent in the country, but children are particularly vulnerable to their effects compared with elsewhere in the world. Last week, the private group Save the Children said about 6.5 million children in Afghanistan are forecast to experience crisis levels of hunger in 2024. Nearly three out of 10 Afghan children will face crisis or emergency levels of hunger this year as the country feels the immediate impact of floods, the long-term effects of drought, and the return of Afghans from neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, the group said in a report.

S Africa's president urges parties to find common ground in talks after election deadlock

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa called on Sunday for parties to overcome their differences and find "common ground" to form the first national coalition government in the country's young democracy. South Africa announced its final election results on Sunday, confirming that no party won a majority, and unprecedented coalition talks were starting to find a way forward for Africa's most advanced economy. Ramaphosa's African National Congress (ANC) had already lost its 30-year majority after more than 99 per cent of votes were counted by Saturday and showed it couldn't surpass 50 per cent. The ANC received around 40 per cent of the votes in last week's election in the final count, the largest share. Without a majority it will need to agree on a coalition with

another party or parties for the first time to co-govern and reelect Ramaphosa for a second term. South Africa's national elections decide how many seats each party gets in Parliament and lawmakers elect the president later. "Our people have spoken," Ramaphosa said. "Whether we like it or not, they have spoken. We have heard the voices of our people and we must respect their choices and their wishes." "The people of South Africa expect their leaders to work together to meet their needs. This is a time for all of us to put South Africa first." At least 26 political parties, including the uMkhonto weSizwe Party led by former President Jacob Zuma, have lodged objections and complaints with the electoral body over allegations of voting irregularities, which it has promised to address.

The ANC was the party of Nelson Mandela and freed South Africa from the apartheid system of white minority rule in 1994. It had governed with a comfortable majority since then. This election saw an unprecedented slump in its support, with voters seen to be deserting the party due to its failure to solve widespread poverty and extremely high unemployment levels, as well as problems with the delivery of basic government services to many in a nation of 62 million. The ANC had said earlier on Sunday that it was starting its negotiations with all major parties. More than 50 took part in the election, and at least eight had significant shares of the vote. ANC Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula said the party was open to all negotiations, even with the main opposition Democratic Alliance (DA), which has led the chorus of criticism of the ANC for years

but is viewed by many analysts as the most stable coalition option for South Africa. The DA won the second most votes with around 21 per cent and the two parties would hold a majority together and be able to govern. DA leader John Steenhuisen said his party was also initiating talks with parties. The ANC won 159 seats in the 400-seat Parliament, down from the 230 it won in the last election. The DA increased slightly to 87 seats. There is some time pressure for coalition talks to progress and for the uncertainty to be minimised given South Africa's new Parliament needs to sit for the first time and elect a president within 14 days of the election results being declared. Ramaphosa is seeking a second and final term and Mbalula said his position as leader of the ANC was not in question despite the election result.

South plans to nullify peace deal to punish N Korea over trash balloon launches

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea announced Monday it'll suspend a rapprochement deal with North Korea to punish it over its launches of trash-carrying balloons, even after the North said it would halt its balloon campaign. Over several days, North Korea flew hundreds of balloons to drop trash and manure on South Korea in an angry reaction against previous South Korean civilian leafletting campaigns. On Sunday, South Korea said it would take "unbearable" retaliatory steps in response, before North Korea abruptly announced it would stop flying balloons across the border. On Monday, South Korea's presidential national security council said it has decided to suspend a 2018 inter-Korean agreement aimed at easing

frontline animosities, until mutual trust between the two Koreas is restored, according to the presidential office. The security council said the suspension would allow South Korea to resume military drills near the border with North Korea and take effective, immediate responses to provocations by North Korea. It said a proposal on the suspension will be introduced at the Cabinet Council on Tuesday for approval. Observers say South Korea needs the deal's suspension to restart blasting anti-Pyongyang propaganda broadcasts, K-pop songs and outside news from border loudspeakers. They say such broadcasts have previously stung in the rigidly controlled North, where most of its 26 million people are not allowed official accesses to foreign news. The 2018 agreement,

reached during a brief period of reconciliation between then-liberal South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, require the Koreas to cease all hostile acts against each other, including propaganda broadcasts and leafletting campaigns. But the accord doesn't clearly state civilian leafletting should also be banned. That has allowed South Korean activists to continue to fly balloons to drop anti-Pyongyang leaflets, USB sticks with South Korean dramas and world news, and US dollars in North Korea. Enraged over such leafletting campaigns, North Korea has previously fired at incoming balloons and destroyed a South Korean-built, unoccupied inter-Korean liaison office in the North. The 2018 deal has already been in the danger of collapsing. Tension

spiked after North Korea's spy satellite launch last November prompted both Koreas to take steps in breach of the accord — South Korea resuming frontline aerial surveillance and North Korea restoring border guard posts. Since last Tuesday, a total of about 1,000 North Korean balloons carrying manure, cigarette butts, scraps of cloth and waste paper have been discovered in various parts of South Korea. No hazardous substances were found, according to South Korea's military. On Sunday night, Kim Kang Il, a North Korean vice defence minister, said the North would stop its balloon campaign because it left the South Koreans with "enough experience of how much unpleasant they feel". He said North Korea will fly balloons again if South Korean activists restart their own balloon activities.

2 die in Germany floods; situation remains tense

Berlin (AP): The death toll in floods across a large part of southern Germany rose to two on Monday as the body of a missing woman was found. Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited the flooded region and officials warned that water levels could rise further in some areas. The body of the 43-year-old, whom rescuers had been looking for since Sunday morning, was found in a basement in the Bavarian town of Schrobenhausen, police told German news agency dpa. A firefighter was found dead in nearby Pfaffenhofen on Sunday after an inflatable boat he and colleagues were using capsized. Persistent heavy rain led to widespread flooding in the southern states of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg over the weekend.

The floods caused extensive transport disruption, with long-distance rail routes to Munich from the north and west out of action on Monday. Scholz visited Reichertshofen, north of Munich, inspecting a sandbagged river bank and meeting regional officials including Markus Söder, Bavaria's governor. Söder said that the situation "remains critical and tense," with water receding in some places but new flooding and evacuations elsewhere. He noted that water levels are expected to rise in the city of Regensburg and further down the Danube. Scholz said that "this is not just one event like there have been for centuries," and that a succession of floods in recent times shows "we cannot neglect the task of halting man-made climate change".



A buoy is pictured as the river Neckar has left its banks in Heidelberg, Germany on Monday. Big parts of southern Germany have been flooded after heavy rainfalls during the last days. In background the castle. AP/PTI

Swelling lakes in Tibet due to climate change could cause heavy losses for China: Study

Beijing (PTI): Numerous lakes in Tibet dotting the picturesque Himalayan region are set to swell with billions of tonnes of water due to increased rainfall caused by climate warming and the melting of glaciers which could cause massive economic losses for China, a study by a group of international scientists has said. By the end of the century, the surface area of some lakes in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau could increase by more than 50 per cent with the water volume of the lakes in the plateau estimated to expand by more than 600 billion tonnes, according to the study published in the peer-reviewed journal Nature Geoscience last month. If these

predictions are correct, the researchers said it could have a massive economic impact on China, running into the billions of dollars, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Monday, quoting the study's findings. "Our results suggest that by 2100, even under a low-emissions scenario, the surface area of endorheic lakes on the Tibetan Plateau will increase by over 50 per cent (around 20,000 sq km or 7,722 sq miles) and water levels will rise by around 10 metres (32 feet) relative to 2020," the study said. Endorheic lakes, also known as closed lakes, do not have an outlet to drain into. The scientists from China, Wales,

Saudi Arabia, the United States and France said this would correspond to a four-fold increase in water storage compared to what the area experienced over the last 50 years. If steps are not taken to mitigate this, "more than 1,000 km of roads, approximately 500 settlements and around 10,000 sq km of ecological components such as grasslands, wetlands and croplands," will become submerged, the study said. Observers say that the swelling lakes and melting glaciers could also impact neighbouring countries including India as Tibet is the origin of several rivers including the mighty Brahmaputra.

India's manufacturing sector growth eases in May

Upturn in exports strongest in over 13 years: PMI survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's manufacturing sector saw a slower growth rate for the second straight month in May but stayed firmly in expansion mode with global sales increasing to the greatest extent in over 13 years, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 58.8 in April to 57.5 in May, signalling a slower but substantial improvement in the health of the sector.

The index had climbed to a 16-year high of 59.1 in March.

In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

According to HSBC Global Economist Maitreyi Das, "The manufacturing sector remained in expansionary territory in May, albeit the pace... Slowed, led by a softer rise in new orders and output."

The slowdown was attributed to reduced working hours amid intensive heatwaves and rising production costs.

"Panelists cited heatwaves as a reason for lower work hours in May, which may have affected production volumes," Das said.

The headline figure was nearly four points higher than its long-run average.



May data showed a further upturn in Indian factory production, which stretched the current sequence of expansion to nearly three years. Despite easing to a three-month low, the rate of increase remained sharp. Growth was supported by new business gains, demand strength and successful marketing efforts, the report said.

New orders rose at a substantial pace that was nonetheless the slowest in three months. The rise was associated with marketing efforts, demand strength and favourable economic conditions, as per the report. Growth was reportedly stymied by competitions and election-related disruptions, it said, adding that in contrast to the trend for total

Mother Dairy hikes milk prices by ₹2 per litre in NCR

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mother Dairy on Monday announced Rs 2 per litre hike in milk prices in the Delhi-NCR market due to a rise in input cost over the last 15 months.

The increase in prices of all variants of milk is effective from Monday (June 3) in Delhi-NCR as well as other markets where it has a presence.

The company highlighted that it passes an average of around 75-80 per cent of the sales realisation from milk towards its procurement.

This helps in ensuring the sustenance of dairy farming and the availability of quality milk.

"The surge in farm prices is only being partially passed on to the consumers, with an effective revision of 3-4 per cent, thereby securing the interests of both the milk producers and the consumers," Mother Dairy said.

On late Sunday, the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which markets dairy products under the Amul brand, increased milk prices by about Rs 2 per litre from Monday across the country.

The increase of Rs 2 per litre translates to 3-4 per cent increase in MRP which is much lower than average food inflation, GCMMF said in a late night statement.

GCMMF said that since February 2023, it has not made any increase in prices of fresh pouch milk in major markets.

its liquid milk prices in February 2023.

"Despite paying higher prices towards milk procurement in the last few months, the consumer prices were kept intact. Moreover, the heat stress across the country has been unprecedented and it is likely to further impact milk production," Mother Dairy said.

In a statement, Mother Dairy said it is "increasing its liquid milk prices by Rs 2 per litre across all operating markets from June 03, 2024 onwards."

The increase in consumer price is mainly to compensate the producers for increased production costs, which have been on the rise for over one year, it said.

In Delhi-NCR, Mother Dairy full cream milk will be available now at Rs 68 per litre, while toned and double-toned milk at Rs 56 and Rs 50 per litre, respectively.

Buffalo and cow milk prices have been increased to Rs 72 and Rs 58 per litre respectively. Token milk (bulk vended milk) will be sold at Rs 54 per litre.

Mother Dairy, which currently sells 35 lakh litre per day of fresh milk in Delhi-NCR, said it had last revised

Interest rates have peaked, moderation expected towards year end: PNB MD

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Days before RBI's monetary policy, Punjab National Bank (PNB) managing director Atul Kumar Goel said interest rates have peaked and are expected to see a reversal by the end of this year.

The Monetary Policy Committee, which is expected to keep the policy rate unchanged for the eighth time in a row, is scheduled to begin its meeting on June 5. The decision of the rate-setting panel will be announced on June 7.

"Interest rates are contingent upon so many factors like growth, inflation, monetary policy stance of other countries. I think rates have reached the peak. I think after some time maybe by the end of this year, we can see some reduction in the rate of interest," he told PTI.

There should not be an increase in the deposit rate as 95 per cent of deposits have already been repriced, he said.

Goel said the Retail, Agriculture and MSME (RAM) segment is going to be the focus area for the bank but would not shy away from financing good corporate loans.

"RAM is about 55 per cent of total credit. We want to increase this number by around 60 per cent in the next four to five years. For this year, we have set a target to achieve 57 per cent. As I told you we are one of the largest banks in the country, although the focus is on the RAM but if an opportunity



comes, we will not allow it to go out," he said.

As far as corporate credit is concerned, he said, there is demand from infrastructure projects, especially roads.

"Even some of the big corporates are also planning to increase their capacity. So, there is a demand from the steel sector and even renewable energy where we see too much of the demand," he said.

PNB has seen consistent improvement in its financial health and it recorded the highest growth in terms of profit in FY24.

PNB topped the chart recording the highest profit growth of 229 per cent among the 12 public sector banks during the fiscal ended in March 2024. The bank's net profit increased over three-fold to Rs 8,245 crore compared to Rs 2,507 crore in the previous fiscal.

Talking about the strategy to improve profitability, he said, the focus would be on expanding the retail, agriculture, and MSME portfolio, extending good

corporate loans, controlling slippages and improving recovery.

Besides, he said, the thrust would also be on improving forex income and garnering higher fee income from selling third-party products to augment non-interest income.

With regard to improving interest income, he said, the focus would be to increase low-cost deposit CASA (Current Account Savings Account).

CASA as a percentage of total deposits stood at 41.4 per cent at the end of March 2024, he said, the target is to improve beyond 42 per cent by the end of the current fiscal.

The bank intends to keep credit costs below 1 per cent during this financial year. With all these efforts, he said, the Return on Assets (ROA) is expected to increase to 0.8 per cent during the year and touch 1 per cent by the end of March 2025 translating into a substantial jump in profit.

Asked about anticipated business growth in the current financial year, Goel said, credit growth is expected to be 11-12 per cent while deposit would be 9-10 per cent.

To fund this business growth, the bank has received approval to raise capital of Rs 17,500 crore from Tier I and Tier II bonds and share sale through private placement during the year.

During FY24, the bank had raised Rs 10,000 crore from Tier I and Tier II bonds at a very competitive rate, he added.

Shriram Finance raises USD 468 million multi-currency social loan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shriram Finance Limited (SFL) on Monday said it has raised USD 468-million (about Rs 3,880 crore) in multi-currency to fund business growth.

The three-year (External Commercial Borrowing) ECB facility was structured as a social loan anchored by BNP Paribas, DBS Bank, Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation, who were the joint mandated lead arrangers and book runners and social loan coordinators for this facility, SFL said in a statement.

The fundraise comprises USD 425 million and EUR 40 million through a syndicated term loan transaction, it said.

In line with its focus on increasing the accessibility of financial services to the unbanked and underbanked sectors, the funds raised through this social loan will be used to empower small

entrepreneurs and vulnerable groups across India, it said.

This marks the largest syndicated multi-currency transaction by a private sector Non-Banking Finance Company, said Umesh Revankar, executive vice chairman of Shriram Finance.

"This facility is labelled as a social loan, reflecting our commitment to social impact similar to our priority sector initiatives, with certain strict exclusions. The strong interest from the international investor community underscores the global confidence in our mission," he said.

SFL has a wide range of offerings ranging from credit solutions for commercial vehicles, two-wheeler loans, car loans, home loans, gold loans, personal and small business loans. As one of the country's largest retail NBFCs, Shriram Finance has Assets under Management (AUM) of Rs 2,24,862 crore.

Around one third employees experience age related discrimination at work: Study

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Overall 31 per cent of employees in India have experienced age-related discriminations across sectors with the highest prevalence reported in multinational companies, a study said on Monday.

The 'Ageism in the Workplace' study by talent company Randstad India revealed that 31 per cent of employees in India have experienced discriminations due to their age and such discriminations are mostly prevalent during recruitment process, especially in job advertisements of organisations.

About 61 per cent respondents said job advertisements in India have age biases (qualifying age criteria or years of experience), it added.

In India around 42 per cent of employees interviewed, aged below 55 years, have experienced or witnessed ageism or age related discriminations at their workplaces, compared to 29 per cent aged above 55 years,



said the study.

The data suggested that younger age groups faced more age discriminations than older age groups as there was a general lack of trust in the youngest age group's abilities and skills while the oldest age group experienced the privilege of age-based and seniority-based respect.

Surprisingly, 42 per cent of women reported experiencing or witnessing ageism, compared to 37 per cent of men, clearly a reflection of how ageism at work intersects with other dimensions of

diversity, it added.

"Ageism is one of the most overlooked unconscious biases made at the workplace across levels. Overcoming ageism requires a conscious effort to recognise and challenge stereotypes to create an environment where experience and fresh perspectives are equally valued. By fostering an inclusive culture that embraces employees of all ages, organisations can harness the full potential of their workforce, driving collaboration, innovation,

and growth," Randstad India managing director and CEO Viswanath PS said.

The 'Ageism in the Workplace' study is based on qualitative survey including Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and individual interviews among Human Resource heads and C-suite executives across age groups, sectors and regions in India. It also included quantitative survey among 956 respondents across job levels, industries and locations.

The study further revealed that the sectors with the highest proportions of respondents who had experienced ageism were pharma, healthcare and life science (43 per cent), business process outsourcing or IT-enabled services (43 per cent), and construction, infrastructure, and real estate (41 per cent).

Most employees from multinational corporations (MNCs) headquartered in India reported higher instances of ageism, with 41 per cent affirming they faced age-related biases, the study said.

Battery Smart partners with Zepto to provide greener last mile deliveries

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Electric two-and three-wheeler battery swapping network operator Battery Smart said on Monday that it has entered into a partnership with e-grocery and quick commerce service platform Zepto as part of which it will provide delivery partners access to over 1,000 battery-swapping facilities.

The tie-up will enable Zepto's two-minute battery swaps across more than 30 cities, besides helping it deploy 10,000 new electric vehicles (EVs) to its fleet in FY25, Battery Smart said.

"We have partnered with Zepto to enable greener last-mile deliveries and empower more delivery partners to join the adoption of electric mobility. Zepto's growth over the past year has been remarkable, and now, with access to our growing network of swap stations, we look forward to seeing it scale even further by deploying more EVs to its fleet," said Yogiraj Gogia, Senior Director of Partnerships and fleet

business, Battery Smart.

Through this partnership, Battery Smart and Zepto will facilitate a seamless transition to EVs for existing and new delivery partners, who can take advantage of the reduced capital expenditure involved in purchasing an EV without a battery and use the network operators' battery-as-a-service (BaaS) model, Battery Smart said.

Currently, according to the company, EVs hold 20 per cent share in the country's last-mile delivery market, a trend that aligns with the government's target of achieving 30 per cent electrification of the country's vehicle fleet by 2030.

"Our association with Battery Smart gives us access to the country's largest network of battery swapping stations, ensuring our delivery partners are always in proximity to a swap station, with zero wait time. This will also empower partners to save time, complete more deliveries, and ultimately increase their earnings," Zepto COO Vikas Sharma said.

Japan Airlines enters into codeshare pact with IndiGo

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Japan Airlines on Monday said it has entered into a codeshare arrangement with IndiGo, which would help the Japanese carrier expand services to 14 destinations of the domestic carrier's network.

At present, Japan Airlines operates its services to Delhi and Bengaluru from Tokyo. It offers daily flight services to the national capital from Haneda Airport, while its thrice-a-week services to Bengaluru are operated from Narita Airport.

"Japan Airlines (JAL) and IndiGo have agreed on codeshare partnership which will benefit the customers by providing more travel options between Japan and India," a statement said.

The codeshare partnership will allow Japan Airlines to strengthen its connectivity into India initially, while enabling more travel options for IndiGo customers on JAL's extensive domestic and



international network in later phases, the statement said.

The partnership will enable codeshare on India routes that connect to JAL-operated flights from/to Delhi and Bengaluru, as per the statement.

Through this partnership, Japan Airlines said it will be able to establish an extensive network pan-India, including major cities such as Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Kochi, Coimbatore, Thiruvananthapuram,

Tiruchirappalli, Pune, Lucknow, Varanasi, and Goa, which connects to JAL-operated flights.

Later, the two carriers will seek to further expand the cooperation with IndiGo codesharing on JAL-operated flights, it added.

"IndiGo is expanding its portfolio of codeshare partnerships with this agreement with Japan Airlines. This phase of the partnership expands the choices available to Japan Airlines customers for

journeys to/from Japan, using IndiGo's extensive network in India," said Abhijit DasGupta, Senior Vice President for network planning and revenue management at IndiGo.

The partnership will provide seamless connectivity to support trade, commerce, and tourism between the two countries, he said.

"Over time, we intend to expand the scope of geographic and reciprocal coverage of this relationship to further grow travel opportunities for customers of both airlines," DasGupta added.

"With the extensive network, travellers to and from India and Japan will be able to book their flight on one ticket. In recent years, India has achieved remarkable economic growth, and the air travel demand between Japan and India is increasing more than ever before," said Ross Leggett, Managing Executive Officer, Senior Vice President Route Marketing at Japan Airlines.

NITES alleges onboarding delay of over 2,000 campus recruits by Infosys

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IT sector employee union NITES has urged the Ministry of Labour and Employment to probe repeated delays in the onboarding of over 2,000 campus recruits by tech major Infosys.

Nascent Information Technology Employees Senate (NITES) alleged that the delays have persisted for more than two years, and caused significant hardship for affected professionals, leaving

them 'in a limbo'.

Infosys did not comment on the matter. Harpreet Singh Saluja, President of Nascent Information Technology Employees Senate (NITES), in a statement, alleged that Infosys' actions constitute a "serious breach of trust" with these young professionals.

"Many had turned down other job offers in good faith, relying on Infosys's offer letters. Now, they face financial hardship and uncertainty due to the lack of income and a

clear onboarding timeline," he said.

The union has written to the Ministry of Labour and Employment seeking an investigation into the matter, to ensure that Infosys fulfils its obligations to its new hires.

NITES has demanded the affected professionals be given full salary payments for the period during which onboarding has been delayed.

It has also batted for providing these recruits with immediate access to Infosys' employee

assistance programme to address the mental and emotional strain caused by the delay.

"If onboarding remains unfeasible, Infosys must actively work with the recruits to find alternative employment opportunities within the organisation. We have requested the Ministry to take swift action to protect these employees and ensure they are not unfairly penalised for Infosys' decision," the statement said.

₹2000 bank notes: 97.82 per cent returned; ₹7,755 crore worth notes still with public

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said 97.82 per cent of the Rs 2000 denomination banknotes have returned to the banking system, and only Rs 7,755 crore worth of the withdrawn notes are still with the public.

On May 19, 2023, the RBI announced the withdrawal of Rs 2000 denomination banknotes from circulation. The total value of Rs 2000 banknotes in circulation,

which was Rs 3.56 lakh crore at the close of business on May 19, 2023, has declined to Rs 7,755 crore at the close of business on May 31, 2024.

"Thus, 97.82 per cent of the Rs 2000 banknotes in circulation as on May 19, 2023, has since been returned," the central bank said in a statement.

The facility for deposit and/or exchange of the Rs 2000 banknotes was available at all bank branches in the country till October 7, 2023.

The facility for the exchange of

the Rs 2000 banknotes has been available at the 19 issue offices of the Reserve Bank since May 19, 2023.

From October 9, 2023, RBI issue offices are also accepting Rs 2000 banknotes from individuals and entities for deposit into their bank accounts. Further, members of the public are sending Rs 2000 banknotes through India Post from any post office within the country to any of the RBI issue offices for credit to their bank accounts.

Icra revises domestic steel demand growth rate to 10 per cent for FY25

New Delhi: Icra on Monday revised its outlook growth target for domestic steel demand to 9-10 per cent for the current fiscal on healthy government spending and demand from steel-consuming sectors.

The domestic steel consumption registered a growth of 11.3 per cent between February to April 2024, the agency said in a report.

Real Madrid celebrates another Champions League title with its fans on streets of Spanish capital

AP ■ MADRID

For the second time in three seasons, and sixth in 10 years, Real Madrid celebrated a Champions League title with its fans on the streets of the Spanish capital. Several thousands came out Sunday to welcome the team a day after it won a record-extending 15th Champions League title by beating Borussia Dortmund 2-0 at Wembley Stadium.

There could be even more reasons to celebrate for Madrid fans in the coming days with the club reportedly close to announcing the much-anticipated signing of Kylian Mbappé, the France star who left Paris Saint-Germain and has been targeted by the Spanish powerhouse. Celebrations began with the squad leaving the team's Santiago Bernabeu Stadium on top of an open bus that took players and the coaching staff to meet with local officials while fans lined the streets to greet the newly crowned champions.

Toni Kroos attracted most of the attention of fans and teammates after playing his



final match with Madrid on Saturday. Fans repeatedly chanted for him to stay, and players later threw Kroos into the air several times at the Bernabeu.

"I want to say thank you for the last few weeks, it was an unforgettable farewell," an emotional Kroos told the Bernabeu crowd. "And thank you for these 10 unforgettable years. You have supported me from the first day until the last."

Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti repeated the Champions League celebrations in 2022, wearing sunglasses and smoking a cigar while dancing with players.

Several thousand fans were at the club's traditional celebration spot at Cibeles square, where team captain Nacho Fernández draped the statue of the goddess Cybele with a Madrid flag and scarf and lifted the trophy to loud cheers.

The festivities ended at a packed Bernabeu, where players addressed the fans and again presented the Champions League trophy.

"Winning makes us happy, but we are even happier to be able to share moments like this with you," Ancelotti said at the stadium. "Nights like these are spectacular. This stadium is capable of generating an energy that allows us to never give up and to do things that may be unthinkable."

Nearly 80,000 fans had been at the stadium on Saturday to watch the final on large screens that were put on the middle of the field.

"Three weeks ago I promised that we would be back here celebrating the 15th (Champions League) title," Kroos said.

Madrid had celebrated the Spanish league title three weeks ago in similar fashion, but it could not go to the Bernabeu because it had just hosted a concert.

Taylor Swift played at the venue a few days ago but the club was able to make it available in time for the festivities surrounding the Champions League final.



Grigor Dimitrov vs Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz vs Stefanos Tsitsipas in French Open quarters

AP ■ PARIS

Grigor Dimitrov bloodied his racket-holding hand and right elbow by diving for a shot. He was covered in French Open clay - his arm, his leg, his back. He didn't get a whole lot of sleep the night before, because rain forced him to forfeit the usual day off between Grand Slam matches.

None of that mattered. Here's what did: The 10th-seeded Dimitrov reached the quarterfinals at Roland Garros for the first time at age 33, beating No. 8 Hubert Hurkacz 7-6 (5), 6-4, 7-6 (3) at Court Suzanne Lenglen on Sunday.

"Better late than never," said Dimitrov, who was wearing bandages on the side of his hand and arm after getting treatment.

"I was just telling myself: I'm going to get to every single ball that is there," he said. "I'm like: No ball is passing me."

Dimitrov entered the day 0-2 in fourth-rounders in Paris but made it to the final eight in his 14th appearance here, giving him a full set of quarterfinals from the four Grand Slam tournaments. The Bulgarian, who will play No. 2 Jannik Sinner next, got to the semifinals once apiece at the U.S. Open, Australian Open and Wimbledon. "The French Open was the only Slam I felt like I could never make that extra step," Dimitrov said after dropping to his knees when the match ended. "Today, 15 years later, I made it, so I'm really happy with that."

Sinner moved on despite a terrible-as-can-be start, getting

broken in each of his first three service games and trailing 5-0 after 22 minutes against unseeded Frenchman Courentin Moutet in front of a boisterous crowd at Court Philippe Chatrier on Sunday night. But Sinner, the Australian Open champion in January, eventually got going and won 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-1.

"Let's say there are lessons today I can learn from," said Sinner, who came into the tournament with questions about a hip injury that forced him to pull out of the Italian Open last month. "I'm happy with how I responded. I was in trouble, but then I raised my level."

The other men's quarterfinal on the bottom half of the bracket will be No. 3 Carlos Alcaraz vs. No. 9 Stefanos Tsitsipas. Alcaraz, a two-time major champion, defeated No. 21 Felix Auger-Aliassime, and Tsitsipas, a two-time Grand Slam runner-up, came back to eliminate unseeded Matteo Arnaldi 3-6, 7-6 (4), 6-2, 6-2.

This has been a resurgent season for Dimitrov, who won the Brisbane International in January for his first ATP title since 2017, reached the final at the Miami Open in March before losing to Sinner, and returned to the top 10 in the rankings for the first time since 2018.

He wants more.

"My quest and my goal is to be able to win a Slam. I mean, if I think about it, in a way, this is the only thing that is missing in my resume," Dimitrov said in an interview before the French Open. "But this is totally and

entirely my own path. My own goal. My own quest."

Dimitrov also is aware, as he put it when talking about his career, "I'm way closer to the end than the beginning."

He improved to 6-0 against Hurkacz, a friend and frequent practice partner, by withstanding the big server's 20 aces and making far fewer unforced errors, 43 vs. 28.

"He definitely competed really well," said Hurkacz, who beat Roger Federer at Wimbledon in 2021 in what turned out to be the 20-time Slam champion's final match before retirement and defeated Rafael Nadal at the Italian Open last month. "He came (up) with some good shots in the important moments."

There was an unusual exchange between the two players late in Sunday's match, when Hurkacz — upset about a line call — asked Dimitrov at a changeover if he wanted to request that chair umpire Alison Hughes be replaced.

"Up to you," Hurkacz said. Needless to say, that did not go anywhere.

Dimitrov's third-round win against Zizou Bergs was originally supposed to be done Friday, but the rain that affected the schedule for five days in a row got in the way.

So Dimitrov and Bergs did not finish that match until after 10 p.m. On Saturday, it didn't slow Dimitrov down one bit.

"I just tried to prepare more mentally than anything else," Dimitrov said about getting ready to meet Hurkacz on shorter-than-usual rest at a major.

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)

The brother-sister Indian duo of R Praggnanandhaa and R Vaishali suffered defeats in their respective section while Magnus Carlsen justified his top billing with a win over an off-colour Ding Liren to surge to sole lead on 12 points in the Norway Chess tournament here.

Fabiano Caruana also scored over compatriot Hikaru Nakamura to help Carlsen emerge as the front runner for the crown in the six-player double round-robin contest being fought for a total prize pool of USD 161,000.

Praggnanandhaa lost to Firouzja Alireza of France in the Armageddon tiebreaker after suffering a bit through the Classical game too while Vaishali went down to world women's champion Wenjun Ju of China who outplayed the Indian in the endgame. With four rounds still to come in both sections, Carlsen is now followed by Nakamura on 11 points while Praggnanandhaa is still third on 9.5 points in all.

Alireza is on fourth spot with eight points in all and Caruana follows him with 6.5 points. Surprisingly, China's Ding Liren seems completely out of sorts with just 2.5 points thus far, needing a miracle to come back in the tournament.

In the women's section, Wenjun snatched the lead from Vaishali along with Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine who

Praggnanandhaa loses to Alireza, Carlsen jumps to sole lead



won a hard-fought Armageddon against Tingjie Lei of China. Both Wenjun and Muzychuk have an identical 10.5 points, a half point ahead of Vaishali.

Lei is fourth on seven points, enjoying a two-point lead over Koneru Humpy who suffered another loss at the hands of Pia Cramling of Sweden in the Armageddon.

Cramling has 4.5 points now and is still at the bottom of the tables.

Gaining a small advantage out of the opening, the world number one Carlsen capitalised on his double Bishops to launch an offensive on the king side and used another blunder by Ding Liren to finish the game with a child-like queen sacrifice.

Liren looks a far cry from the man who won the last world championship title against Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia and needs to really gather himself to make a match of it in the next edition of

the tournament against India's D Gukesh.

Currently, as per FIDE, the apex governing body, there are bids from Delhi, Chennai and Singapore to hold the World Championship match.

Praggnanandhaa suffered a jolt in his quest as Alireza played a nice game under Classical to put pressure and eventually drew the contest. In the return game however, the Indian faltered and could not really stage a comeback.

In the women's section, Vaishali had her chances but Wenjun Ju was at her technical best and seized opportunities as they came her way. The minor pieces endgame had some chances but Vaishali could not sustain the pressure.

Results men: Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 12) beat Ding Liren (Chn, 2.5) 3-0; Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 11) lost to Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 6.5) 1-1.5; Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 8) beat R Praggnanandhaa (10) 1.5-1.

Women: R Vaishali (Ind, 10) lost to Wenjun Ju (Chn, 10.5) 0-3; K Humpy (Ind, 5) lost to Pia Cramling (Swe, 4.5) 1-1.5; Anna Muzychuk (10.5) beat Tingjie Lei (Chn, 7) 1.5-1.



Satwik, Chirag aim for title defence at Indonesia Open

PTI ■ JAKARTA

Keeping the Olympics in mind, star Indian shuttlers Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will seek consistency as they gear up to defend their doubles title at the Indonesia Open Super 1000 tournament, beginning here on Tuesday.

The top seeded Indian pair, who are one of the favourites to win a gold at the Paris Olympics, have enjoyed a good run this season with four final appearances and two wins (French Open Super 750 and Thailand Open Super 500.)

But they found it a tad difficult to negotiate the variety of serves dished out by the Indonesians and Chinese at the Thomas Cup and made early exits from the All England Open and the Singapore Open last week.

Satwik and Chirag, who created history by winning India's first BWF Super 1000 title here last year, will look to address the slight drop in their level this week when they begin their campaign against Man Wei Chong and Kai Wun Tee of Malaysia.

With the Paris Games less than two months away, the Olympic-bound shuttlers will

have just a couple of tournaments — Australian Open and Canada Open — to polish their skills and eliminate any lingering rust before the quadrennial extravaganza.

Pressure will also be on two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu to build her confidence ahead of the Paris Games.

The runner-up finish in Malaysia would have boosted her morale, but the meltdown in the decider, after leading 11-3 to eventually lose the final against China's Wang Zhi Yi, is worrisome.

While top stars such as An Se Young, Chen Yu Fei, Akane Yamaguchi and Carolina Marin skipped the Malaysia Open, the quartet will be vying for top honours this week.

And should Sindhu win her opening round against Wen Chi Hsu from Chinese Taipei, she would be up against familiar foe Marin, who had beaten her in the pre-quarterfinals last week.

India's top player in men's singles HS Prannoy and Lakshya Sen will also hope for a deep run into the event to receive the ideal boost in the build-up to the Paris Games.

However, it will be a tough test of their temperament as some big guns stand in their way in

Host Germany hoping to create another summer party at Euro 2024 after recent tournament flops

AP ■ BERLIN

Another extraordinary summer or another national embarrassment. No one knows quite what to expect from this Germany team heading in the European Championship.

The optimists point to the opportunity of staging another monthlong party like the one that gripped the country when it hosted the 2006 World Cup. The pessimists can point to three straight fiascos at major tournaments that has forced Germany fans to readjust their expectations of the men's soccer team.

The latest signs seem positive, though, with Germany earning impressive wins in friendlies against France and the Netherlands in March after new coach Julian Nagelsmann instigated a shakeup of the squad.

If the team can carry on carry that momentum into the group stage, expect another festive atmosphere in Germany.

"If we get off to a good start, Germany could experience a similar enthusiasm and energy to that of 2006," said Philipp Lahm, the former national team captain who is now the tournament director of Euro 2024. Many Germans still look back fondly on that summer of 2006, and there are some parallels between the two tournaments.

Back then, the Germany team coached by Jürgen Klinsmann had been criticized before the tournament for conceding too many goals, and the team was coming off an embarrassing exit in the Euro 2004 group stage. Klinsmann was placing his faith in youth, but expectations were still low going into the World Cup.

But after three wins in the group stage, World Cup fever took hold in the host nation.

It was the first tournament that Germany was hosting as a reunified country, and for many Germans it felt like the first opportunity they could wave their flag and show national pride. In addition, the weather was wonderful, the beer kept flowing and everyone seemed to be enjoying the fun. While Germany fell just short of the final,



losing to Italy in the semifinals, Germans still refer to the 2006 World Cup as a "Sommermärchen" — or summer fairytale.

The build-up to this summer's tournament has seen some striking similarities. Germany was playing so badly that Hansi Flick was fired as coach last September. Nagelsmann had a rocky start, but threw caution to the wind when he dropped established players like Leon Goretzka and Mats Hummels and placed his trust in players who were performing well for their club teams.

Nagelsmann also recalled Real Madrid star Toni Kroos, though he didn't know at the time it would be for the midfielder's final hurrah. The 34-year-old Kroos has since announced he will retire after the tournament.

Nagelsmann's changes paid off immediately as his new-look team defeated France and the Netherlands. The old doubts were dispelled, confidence surged back. Former West Germany great Lothar Matthäus declared Germany had to go on and win the European Championship.

Unlike many former Germany teams,

though, this one will not be overly reliant on Bayern Munich players.

After Bayern's domestic supremacy was ended by Bayer Leverkusen - which won a league and cup double without losing a game - that power shift will likely be reflected in the national team.

The only Bayern players involved from the start in March were Jamal Musiala and Joshua Kimmich, although Manuel Neuer should return in goal for the tournament.

Leverkusen will likely have three players in Nagelsmann's starting lineup with Jonathan Tah at the back, Robert Andrich in midfield, and Florian Wirtz in attack. Stuttgart's Maximilian Mittelstädt has been trusted with the troublesome left back position while Arsenal's Kai Havertz is a likely option up front. The host nation opens against Scotland in Munich on June 14, then plays Hungary in Stuttgart on June 19, before finishing the group against Switzerland in Frankfurt on June 23.

Much of the team's success will depend on Kroos, who has the composure to read games and the technical skill to play the ball exactly where he wants it. Kroos is one of the few players left from

the team that won the 2014 World Cup, and finishing his Germany career with a European title would make for a perfect summer, indeed.

"He doesn't have to prove anything to anyone," Nagelsmann said about Kroos. "But he's got one last big tournament left and he's really looking forward to it. He has the chance to win another title. Then I think he would have won everything."

Mbappé not in France squad for Paris Olympics ahead of expected move to Real Madrid

Paris, Jun(AP) Kylian Mbappé will not play for France at the Paris Olympics after he was left out of Thierry Henry's provisional squad for the Games on Monday.

The World Cup winner, who is widely expected to join Real Madrid after leaving Paris Saint-Germain as a free agent, had stated his desire to play at the Games in his home nation.

Henry and even French President Emmanuel Macron wanted Mbappé to be part of the men's Olympic team, but he was not included in the 25-man squad. PSG's Warren Zaire-Emery and Bradley Barcola were included, as well as veteran striker Alexandre Lacazette. Unlike most international tournaments like the World Cup, European Championship and Copa America, clubs are not required to let their players compete at men's Olympic tournaments.

With Mbappé set to play at the Euros for France, his involvement at the Paris Games would have meant he was unlikely to get a break during the offseason.

Still, he said in March that he wanted to be involved: "I have always had the same ambition. I have always said that I wanted to go, but it doesn't depend on me."

Kroos said last month that he was "counting upon Real Madrid to free up Kylian for the Olympic Games," despite his widely anticipated move to the Spanish giant still not confirmed.

Crystal Palace's Jean-Philippe Mateta and Michael Olise have both been included.



ENGLAND HOPE TO SET TONE AGAINST SCOTLAND

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

Deprived of ideal preparation by rain, defending champions England will hope to get their act right straightaway when they face Scotland in their T20 World Cup opener here on Tuesday.

Phil Salt will look to continue his red-hot form of the Indian Premier League in the T20 showpiece, even as pacer Jofra Archer's return adds firepower to the English bowling attack. Rain played spoilsport in the preceding four-match T201 series at home against Pakistan, but England will still enter the tournament as one of the strong contenders to lift the title for an unprecedented third time.

In what will be their first ever meeting against the Scots in the shortest format, the Jos Buttler-led England will be the overwhelming favourites to emerge winners at the Kensington Oval, which offered a two-paced wicket for the game between Namibia and Oman on Sunday evening. Placed in Group B, England have traditional rivals Australia, Namibia and Oman for company besides Scotland. To reach the Super Eight stage, teams will have to finish in the top two of a group.

In white-ball cricket, it hasn't been smooth sailing for England since their five-wicket-victory over Pakistan in the final of the last T20 World Cup in Melbourne in 2022.



A year after their success in Australia, Buttler's men endured a disastrous campaign at the ODI World Cup in India, finishing seventh after winning three and losing six of their nine matches including a painful defeat to Afghanistan. Their poor run in the white-ball game continued with a series of defeats to West Indies in both the 50-over and 20-over format.

In the rain-marred rubber against Pakistan recently, England regained some of their lost ground with a 2-0 series win.

Now focussed on their opener against Scotland, England have fond memories of playing at the Kensington Oval as it is at this very venue the team won its first-ever T20 World Cup title back in 2010 under Paul Collingwood's captaincy, beating Australia by seven

wickets in the summit showdown.

In the last 14 years since that triumph, England have become a dominant force in limited overs cricket, winning the 2019 ODI World Cup before their glory Down Under two years ago.

Playing in their third consecutive T20 World Cup, Scotland are no match to their fancied opponents on paper but they will nonetheless look to make an impression after having breezed through the European qualifiers.

Scotland won all six of their matches in the qualifiers to finish top of the standings, which guaranteed them a ticket to the West Indies and the USA for the marquee tournament.

TEAMS (FROM):
England: Jos Buttler (c), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer,

AFGHANS FAVOURITES IN FACE OFF WITH UGANDA



Jonathan Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, Mark Wood

Scotland: Richie Berrington (c), Matthew Cross, Brad Currie, Chris Greaves, Oli Hairs, Jack Jarvis, Michael Jones, Michael Leask, Brandon McMullen, George Munsey, Safyaan Sharif, Chris Sole, Charlie Tear, Mark Watt, Brad Wheel.

Match starts at 8pm IST.

AFGHANISTAN EYE WINNING START: In the day's other match, Afghanistan will be the overwhelming favourites against Uganda at the Providence in Guyana. The Africans are making their maiden appearance in the tournament.

Afghanistan did extremely well in the last ICC tournament, beating the likes of England, South Africa and Pakistan in the ODI World Cup in India last year, and they will certainly take heart from that showing in this tournament.

TEAMS:
Afghanistan: Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Ibrahim Zadran, Azmatullah Omarzai, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Ishaq, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Karim Janat, Rashid Khan (c), Nangyal Kharoti, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Naveen-ul-Haq, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Fareed Ahmad Malik.
Uganda: Brian Masaba (c), Simon Ssesazi, Roger Mukasa, Cosmas Kyewuta, Dinesh Nakrani, Fred Achelam, Kenneth Waiswa, Alpesh Ramjani, Frank Nsubuga, Henry Ssenyondo, Bilal Hassun, Robinson Obuya, Riazat Ali Shah (vc), Juma Miyaji, Ronak Patel.
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