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DAWN OF A NEW ERA
IN INDIAN POLITICS

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HEZBOLLAH FIGHTERS SHOOT
DOWN ISRAELI DRONE IN LEBANON

MONEY 10
RBI UNLIKELY TO CUT INTEREST
RATE ON JUNE 7, SAY EXPERTS

DEHRADUN, MONDAY JUNE 3, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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12 SPORTS

Modi hits the ground running for 3.0



Prime Minister Narendra Modi chairs a meeting to review post cyclone Remal situation, especially in the Northeast region, in New Delhi PTI

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A majority of exit polls predicted a massive win for the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Prime Minister Narendra Modi held multiple meetings on Sunday on a "wide range of topics" including one on the post-cyclone Remal situation, especially in the northeast region, and another to review the 100-day agenda that his team will seek to implement once Government formation is completed. The Prime Minister held the review meeting on the 100-

day agenda of the new Government that his team will seek to implement once Government formation is completed. According to sources, senior bureaucrats on several Ministries attended the review meeting and some of them made a presentation before the Prime Minister. Sources added that at least 10 groups, each headed by a secretary-level official as a coordinator, have been created to implement this agenda over the first 100 days of the new Government. Much before the Lok Sabha polling exercise began, Modi had set in motion the exercise

for different Government Ministries to prepare the 100-day agenda for the new Government. He had asked his Council of Ministers to prioritise programmes and initiatives for the first 100 days. PM Modi's day-long marathon meetings come a day after he returned from a 45-hour meditation at Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari. Informing about the meeting, PM Modi wrote in a post on X, "Chaired meetings to review the situation in the wake of heatwaves and post-cyclone flood situations in different

parts of the nation. Took stock of the efforts underway to assist those affected by these adversarial conditions." The first meeting focused on the extensive damage caused by the cyclone, including the loss of human lives, and destruction of homes and properties due to widespread landslides and flooding. PM Modi stressed the need to ensure regular fire and electrical safety audits in hospitals and other public places as he reviewed the heatwave situation in the country amid fire incidents which have claimed many lives. The Prime Minister

instructed officials that proper drills for preventing and handling incidents of fire must be undertaken on a regular basis, according to an official statement. He also said that regular drills for the maintenance of fire lines in forests and productive utilisation of biomass must be planned. Modi was briefed that as per forecasts, the heatwave is likely to continue in parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Monsoon this year is likely to be normal and above normal in most parts of the country and below normal in parts of peninsular India, the statement said. In the meeting to review the post-Cyclone Remal situation, another official statement said, Modi was briefed about its impact in the affected states, including the loss of lives and damage to houses and other properties due to landslides and floods in Mizoram, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura. National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams have carried out evacuation, airlifting and road clearance operations, it said, adding the Union home ministry is in regular touch with State Governments. PM Modi said the Union Government will continue to extend full support to the States affected by the cyclone, according to the statement.



BJP, INDIA bloc say EC must follow protocols

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the counting of votes for Lok Sabha elections, the leaders from both the ruling side and the Opposition side met the election commission of India (ECI). While senior BJP leaders and Union Ministers Piyush Goyal and Nirmala Sitharaman urged the commission to implement several critical measures to safeguard the integrity of India's electoral process, a delegation of leaders from the INDIA bloc met the full bench of the election commission and urged it to ensure that all the guidelines are followed on June 4, when the votes polled in the LS polls will be counted, including



Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi with INDIA bloc leaders comes out after a meeting with the Election Commission of India Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

declaring the postal-ballot results before the outcome of the EVMs is announced. Goyal alleged that certain INDIA bloc parties along with some civil society groups and NGOs, are attempting to undermine the electoral process. "We had to call upon ECI today, in light

of the repeated attempts by a section of the political parties in INDI alliance and certain motivated civil society groups and NGOs who are trying their level best to undermine the integrity of India's electoral process," he said.

Exit polls fake: Delhi CM as he returns to lock-up

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday surrendered at the Tihar jail after his interim bail granted by the Supreme Court in the excise policy-linked money laundering case ended on June 1. The AAP chief was granted interim bail on the grounds for campaigning in the Lok Sabha 2024 elections. Before surrendering, Kejriwal paid



Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

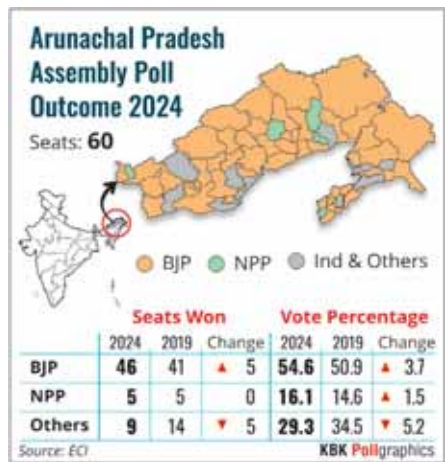
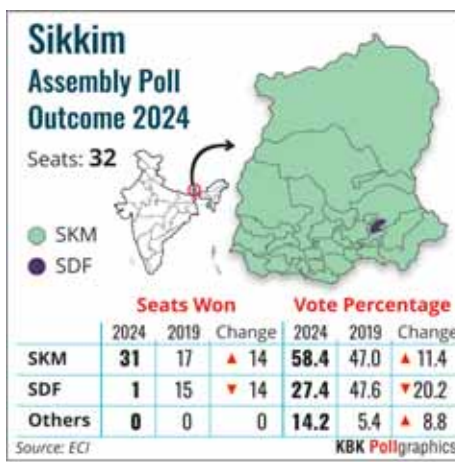
homage to Mahatma Gandhi at the Raj Ghat, offered prayers at the Hanuman temple in Connaught Place and addressed AAP leaders and workers at the party office. Before surrendering at the Tihar, AAP supreme addressed party workers and leaders. During his address, Kejriwal said, "I am going back to jail not because I was involved in corruption but because I raised voice against dictatorship," he said.

NO SURPRISES IN NORTHEAST

BJP, SKM retain Arunachal, Sikkim

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As results of Assembly elections in two northeastern States announced on Sunday, both the BJP and the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) retained their hold over Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, respectively. With 55 per cent vote share and 46 seats, the BJP won the 60 members Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly polls and is set to come back for a third consecutive term. In Sikkim, the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha won 31 seats in the 32 members Sikkim Legislative Assembly polls, comfortably surpassing the majority mark over the Sikkim Democratic Front. SDF which ruled the State for 25 years in a row till 2019, bagged just one seat. Former India football captain and SDF candidate Bhaichung Bhutia lost the Barfung seat by a margin of 4,346 votes, his sixth defeats in the last 10 years since 2014, he had joined TMC to contest from Darjeeling. In Arunachal Pradesh, only 50 of the 60 Assembly seats went to polls, as 10 BJP MLAs, including outgoing Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Deputy CM Chowna Mein, secured victory unopposed.



The BJP vote share also increased to 55.86 per cent as compared to 50.86 per cent in 2019. Taking to X, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Thank you Arunachal Pradesh! The people of this wonderful state have given an unequivocal mandate to politics of development. My gratitude to them for reposing their faith in @BJP4Arunachal yet again. Our Party will keep working with even greater vigour for the State's growth." The PM also said, "I would like to appreciate the hardwork of the exceptional

@BJP4Arunachal Karyakartas through the election campaign. It is commendable how they went across the state and connected with the people." The National People's Party (NPP) bagged five seats, while the People's Party of Arunachal won two seats and the NCP secured three. The Congress won one seat, and independent candidates emerged victorious in three constituencies. In the first declared result of the day, independent candidate Wanglam Sawin triumphed over the BJP's

Kamrang Tesia in the Khonsa (East) constituency. Responding to the verdict, incumbent Chief Minister Pema Khandu said, "This is a mandate for 10 years of development with huge support from the centre. You all know Arunachal Pradesh is the land of rising sun. BJP's victory here shows (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi ji will become PM for the third term." Khandu was also regarded as a strategist who, through political manoeuvring, brought the BJP to power for the first time in the northeastern state bordering China. However, if it proves to be

Vedic scientist's study forecasts 'BJP 400 paar'

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

With most of the exit polls showing a comfortable win for the BJP in the Lok Sabha 2024 elections, vedic scientist and a doctorate holder in astrology and vedic science from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) Dr. Shesh Narayan Vajpayee has affirmed a thunderous win to the BJP led NDA Government. His predictions through "varn vigan" hit the bulls-eye for the saffron party fulfilling their "abki bar 400 par" slogan, forecasting NDA 432 seats. His predictions suggest that the BJP will secure 368 seats in the highly anticipated general elections of 2024 where on one side the saffron party is looking comfortable enough to secure a third term as per to exit polls and the INDIA Bloc is denying all predictions awaiting the actual results on June 4. The scientist, who predicted corona early on in 2018, has also predicted the date for the next wave of a variant of Covid on May 25, 2025 which will hit people worldwide. However, he said, "I do not have the knowledge of the impact vaccines will create. If it proves to be effective it will decrease the impact of the wave. However, if it proves to be



ineffective, the effect would be devastating." Vajpayee in a letter to the Prime Minister's Office and the United Nations early on in 2018 wrote that a big disease that causes difficulty in breathing, dry cough, dizziness, vomiting, diarrhea and other such serious issues is just around the corner. "While I didn't write about the pandemic, I informed them that a big disease is coming. But no one paid heed to me," he said. He has been warning the Government of India about this virus turning into an epidemic since January 2020,

even before the first wave of Corona started. On March 19, he had predicted to the PMO through email that the vaccine might be more detrimental in curing virus infection than help. Citing vedic science, he had suggested that no medicine can be made for the epidemic as they start at their own time and end at their own time and with the scientists in the world that a big disease is coming, he said. He has been warning the Government of India about this virus turning into an epidemic since January 2020,

to the PMO that if possible, do not get the vaccine because the claims of making the vaccine are not credible. On 8th December, in Britain, the vaccine was given to a 90-year-old woman. She was in a bad condition from 14 December. I wrote at this time, applying the vaccine is taking a risk." He added that the subject was not if the vaccine was effective or not, it meant that the time was not right. Dr. Vajpayee has been regularly sharing forecasts of weather-related natural disasters, earthquakes and terrorist incidents with the government for the last few years. He claims that he shares his forecasts based on vedic science with the Prime Minister's Office, Meteorological Department and Ministry of Earth Sciences every month. He also said that he not only predicted the days when the pandemic will start, he also informed about the peak of a Covid wave. Vajpayee claimed that he was in constant touch with Government officials in the Central Government and Delhi Government, informing them of his predictions, many of which did match in hindsight. However, most seemed hesitant to accept that vedic science could be used to do such forecasts regarding pandemic and weather.

Muggy, parched, blacked-out Mungeshpur dances in the rain

SAUMYA SHUKLA/ ABHI SINGHAL ■ NEW DELHI

As the droplets of respite fell after dust storm in Delhi on sparsely populated area of northwest Delhi's Mungeshpur, residents breathed a sigh relief from temperature that soared above 50 degrees Celsius, water scarcity and power cuts with some of them in the area not even having a fan. Residents have been having difficult time in the past 15 days as they grapple with severe water shortages as water is coming for only 10 minutes in the day and tankers hardly makes an appearance to the area. Many told The Pioneer about filling

water from the tube wells in the field. Adding to their woes, residents said they had to walk a kilometer to fill water from tankers available in the nearby areas or turn to the tube wells. As the rainfall brought some comfort, many were seen sitting on the pavements of their homes to feel the cold air, where they generally take refuge due to the power cutoffs. On Wednesday, when they faced a 12 hours cut in the night. Santoshi Devi, 56 years said, "raat ko 11 bajte gyi thi light aur subah 11 bajte aayi, 12 ghante mein halat kharab ho gyi" (the electricity was cut from 11 pm to 11 am. In these 12 hours it was very difficult to survive in such hot



The residents of Mungeshpur came out of their suffocating houses and stood in the open to enjoy the drizzle; (R) most of them displayed a big smile as rain brought much-delayed relief Abhi Singhal/Pioneer

time). Children rushed out of their home to rejoice in the rainfall which was preceded by a dust-storm. Four kids playing in the rain shared how only one of them had a fan in their home. So eager were they to take to the streets, many responded to questions with "please ask fast. We have to go and play". Varsha, an eight year old girl, playing barefoot with four of her friends had a grin on her face and said, "This is the first time I have come to play in afternoon since the summer vacations started." Another 13 years old boy, playing along, added that, "papa lohar hain, itni garmi mein paseene mein bheege

rehte hain" (my father is a blacksmith, he keeps sweating while working the whole day due to heat). A father and a son duo, including a 65 year old Arman and a 27 year old Subhash, who have their own junk shop, brave heat, dust and rain daily to work for nonstop 12 hours without a fan in their shop. "Papi paet ka sawal hai" says the duo when asked about working in such conditions without any precautions to safeguard them from the heatstroke that has claimed two lives, which has been reported, in Delhi. A 20 years old Suresh, lying on a charpai in the rain told that the water supply was

down for 15 days in between and at that time their only support was the water from the tube wells in the fields. He further added that the water supply has been back on track in the last 3 days but the water still comes for only 2 hours in the morning. A mother of two children shared her ordeals of feeding her baby. "I feel uneasy while feeding my two years old girl. In fact she has been unwell too and has been vomiting for the past two days due to the scorching heat." Many, who have spent their whole life in this place, stated that while summers are usually very hot but this time around, temperatures are soaring very high.

GUEST COLUMN

Focus on land restoration, desertification and drought resilience on this WED



Govind Singh Rajwar

The theme for this year's World Environment Day on June 5 is "Land Restoration, Desertification and Drought Resilience". The slogan for this event for this year is "Our Land, Our Future. We are Generation Restoration." World Environment Day (WED) was established in 1972 by the United Nations at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment after discussions on integrating human relationships and the environment. A year later, on June 5, 1973, the first Environment Day was held with the theme "Only One Earth". This is the biggest international day for the cause of the environment, led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and has been held annually since 1973. Land restoration is a key pillar of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), a global call for the protection and revival of ecosystems across the world, which is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The organisers will unite people around the world to restore ecosystems. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will host the 2024 World Environment Day global celebration. As a nation facing degradation, desertification and drought, Saudi Arabia is working to deliver solutions. It is acting nationally and regionally through the Saudi Green Initiative and the Middle East Green Initiative. The actions of the Saudi presidency of the G20 resulted in the adoption of the Global Land Restoration Initiative. Such leadership and action are vital as we face high intensity of the triple planetary crisis: the crisis of climate change, the crisis of nature and biodiversity loss and the crisis of pollution and waste. This crisis is placing the world's

ecosystems under assault.

Various ecosystems of the world are being heavily inundated by plastic. More than 400 million tonnes of plastic is produced annually, half of which is classified as being single-use, of which only 10 per cent is recycled. An estimated 19-23 million tonnes go into lakes, rivers and seas. Nowadays, plastic plugs the landfills, leaches into the ocean and is combusted into toxic smoke, making it the biggest threat to the planet. The single-use plastic products have severe environmental, social, economic and health consequences. In total, half of all plastic produced is designed for single-use purposes. A forecast says that the level of greenhouse gas emissions associated with the production, use and disposal of conventional fossil fuel-based plastics would grow to 19 per cent of the global carbon budget by 2040. Rivers and lakes carry plastic waste from deep inland to the sea, making them major contributors to ocean pollution. Unless we change how we produce, use and dispose of plastic, the amount of plastic

management practices leading to soil erosion. Some regions of the world show a severe loss of soil, thereby causing degradation of land. For example, Eastern and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean have more than a fifth of their total land areas classified as degraded. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has set a target to restore one billion hectares of degraded land by 2030. Botswana and Dominican Republic have shown good results. Land restoration can reverse the creeping tide of land degradation, drought and desertification. Restoration boosts livelihoods, lowers poverty and builds resilience to extreme weather. Restoration also increases carbon storage and slows climate change. The drivers of land degradation, drought and desertification need to be ended. The world is facing the impacts of rising temperature, not just in heat, but in storms, floods and drought. Restoring land without mitigating climate change would be like giving with one hand and taking away with the other, so G20 nations must come

the world. The World Environment Day celebrations bring together millions of people from across the globe, engaging them in the effort to protect and restore the Earth. People from more than 150 countries participate in WED, which makes environmental action and asks the power of governments, businesses and individuals to create a more sustainable world. In India land degradation and desertification pose an environmental problem as the deserts are said to be spreading to the vegetated and human settlement areas.

Natural spaces such as forests, farmlands, savannahs, peatlands and mountains provide humanity with food, water and raw materials for survival. As per estimates, more than two billion hectares of the world's land is degraded, which is affecting more than three billion people. UNEP aims to show governments, businesses and everyday people can halt land degradation and restore natural spaces to their former shape. It is expected that this year United Nations, NGOs and other bod-

land restoration, desertification and drought resilience in the region. During this event, the solutions applicable for the region will be discussed and applied, such as circular water resource use, sustainable food production and drought-resilient urban development.

Restoring ecosystems is much more than planting trees and involves reviving the natural processes and relationships that sustain life. More efforts are needed to meet the required restoration goals and to mitigate the widespread impacts of land degradation on ecosystems, food security and climate change. Urgent action to mitigate the climate crisis is required as highlighted in the latest IPCC report, which warns of rising temperatures and biodiversity loss. In Atharvaveda, the Earth is considered as the mother, and human beings symbolise her sons. Not only this, Vedas have also explained the importance of trees and plants including their plantation on the lunar eclipse day. Trees provide us with Prana Vayu and maintain the harmony between the earth and the sky. As per Vedic astrology, a person can get freedom from ailments, physical, social, and economic problems by planting a tree. This is perhaps one of the reasons, our ancestors worshipped trees. By restoring ecosystems, we can mitigate climate change and improve human well-being. Reforestation is not only important for the environment but also economically beneficial. Green recovery strategies provide a unique opportunity to prioritise ecosystem restoration. Everyone - governments, businesses, communities and individuals - has a role. The most important need of the day for our planet is to mount public and political pressure to scale up and speed up actions from governments, companies, and other stakeholders to solve the desertification crisis.

(Asia representative at the International Society of Ethnobiology, the author is a former professor of botany who has also researched the ecology of the Himalaya & other mountain ranges; views expressed are personal)



waste entering aquatic ecosystems could nearly triple from 9-14 million tonnes per year in 2016 to a projected 23-37 million tonnes per year by 2040.

Desertification is a global issue as the world loses an estimated 100 million hectares of healthy land annually due to desertification, drought and land degradation. The causes of rapid land degradation are mainly due to unsustainable land

forward across the whole climate agenda - as Saudi Arabia has done and continues to do on land restoration. By hosting World Environment Day, and through hosting the UN Convention to Combat Desertification's Conference of the parties in December 2023, Saudi Arabia can build momentum and action towards these restoration goals, slow climate change, protect nature and boost the livelihoods and food security of billions of people around

ies will celebrate together the WED to show how best they can tackle the problem of desertification, land degradation and drought. The majority of people living in Asia and the Pacific live in cities and the increasing urbanisation is expected to increase the impacts of water stress and urban droughts. On WED, the UNEP will bring together on a platform the partners and stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific to discuss the priority areas on

Transport department to suspend licence for 3 months for wrong-side driving

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Transport department will suspend the driving license for three months of those found driving vehicles on the wrong side of the road. The enforcement teams of the department will also send the cases against such offenders to court where action will be taken against them accordingly. The department issued the order after two people died in an accident in the Doiwala area on May 30 due to riding on the wrong side of the road.

road is one of the major causes of road accidents, especially in cities. He said that people tend to drive on the wrong side to avoid a few metre long stretches on

officials concerned of Traffic police, Public Works Department and National Highways. We checked the site and made necessary recommendations to ensure



roads to save a few seconds which often leads to fatal accidents, especially on main roads and highways.

The department also recently inspected the site in Dehradun where two people died in the accident on May 30 due to the same reason. "I inspected the site with the

such accidents do not occur there again. The police and enforcement teams will also conduct regular checks there. However it is important for drivers to understand and follow basic traffic rules as it often turns out to be fatal not just for drivers but for several other people on the road," he said.

The regional transport officer (Enforcement) of the Dehradun division Shailesh Tiwari said that the department has already issued over 160 challans to people driving on the wrong side of the road since Friday on Rajpur Road, Sahasthradhar Road, Saharanpur Road, Haridwar Bypass, Harwarala, Jogiwala and Sahasthradhar Road, among others. The department is gearing up to suspend the license of these drivers and will send cases against them to the court too, the RTO said. He stated that driving on the wrong side of the

STF arrests notorious criminal wanted in three States

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand Special Task Force (STF) arrested a notorious criminal wanted in three States for robbery and murder cases from Delhi. At least 38 cases of robbery, theft and murder are registered against him in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the senior superintendent of police of STF Ayush Agrawal said. He informed that the accused Sagir belongs to Rampur in UP and 30 cases of robberies, theft and murders are registered against him in Delhi in addition to seven cases in Moradabad and Rampur districts of UP. The accused along with his accomplice had also allegedly robbed a man in broad daylight in Bajpur area of Udham Singh Nagar district on March 11, 2023. They robbed the victim of Rs 50,000 cash, his wallet and his mobile phone. The SSP said that the Delhi and UP police had also been searching for Sagir for the past several months. The Moradabad police and Udham Singh Nagar police had also announced a reward of Rs 25,000 on his arrest. The Ut-

tarakhand STF received confidential information about him hiding in Delhi about 10 days

Saturday. Agrawal said that Sagir had been living in disguise to avoid being arrested



ago. The STF team reached Delhi and gathered information about the accused for several days and finally arrested him from Delhi's Babu Nagar in the Mustafabad area late on

by the police for the past several months. The police are investigating him and further action will be taken accordingly, he added.

Two-day annual function concludes at All Saints' College

PNS ■ NAINITAL

The two-day annual function of All Saints' College concluded here on Sunday. The students participated in various sports programmes and a parade as part of the

depicted how the school has undergone changes during its 155 years in existence to keep up with the changing times without changing the quality, ethics and ideals.



event. The students displayed various gymnastic skills which were appreciated by the gathering. Students of classes II to V performed a drill on songs from various Indian States to depict the nation's unity in diversity. Students of classes VI to VIII displayed skills taught in self defence classes while shouting Jai Hind. All the students of the school participated in a mass PT. The performance

Agra diocese, Church of North India, honorary treasurer Avinash Chand was the chief guest on the occasion. He appreciated the students for the drill and other performances, adding that it was a result of their hard work under the leadership of the school principal Kiran Jeremiah and the team work of the entire school team.

High tech testing laboratory starts functioning in Doon

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

On the directions of chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, the Food Safety and Drug Administration department has established a high tech laboratory for testing samples of medicines, medical equipment and cosmetics in Dehradun. These samples are being tested using modern machines in the laboratory with the facility of online certification also available. The Food Safety and Drug Administration commissioner R Rajesh Kumar said that this laboratory is likely to get recognition from the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) in the near future. Following this, the report from this laboratory will be recognised across the world. Kumar further said that this lab will further speed up the testing of drugs, medical equipment and cosmetic samples. This will enable strict action against the companies manufacturing spurious and adulterated products, he said.



According to officials, the high tech laboratory has been prepared in the compound of the Food Safety and Drug Administration at Danda Lakhond on Sahasthradhar Road. This facility was constructed on the directions of the chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami. Drug controller Tajbar Singh Jaggi informed that this laboratory has been built at a cost of Rs seven crore with the assistance of the Government of India. Pharmaceutical and in-

jectable medical devices are tested in this laboratory in addition to the testing of cosmetics. He further informed that all relevant products manufactured in India are tested in this laboratory. Jaggi said that the load of testing such samples used to be handled in the State by the laboratory in Rudrapur. However, with the opening of the laboratory in Dehradun the testing of such samples will be expedited. The Food Safety and Drug Administration is consistently con-

ducting campaigns in the State against those indulging in adulteration and selling spurious products. The officials state that they are making all possible efforts to check the producing and marketing of spurious drugs. More than 2,000 tests have been conducted in the new laboratory in Dehradun so far, the officials said. The facility includes five labs including a chemical testing lab, minor, major, cosmetic and microbiology labs.

Electric car trial successful in Nainital

PNS ■ NAINITAL

The Nainital municipality conducted a trial to ferry four persons in an electric car to the Nainital zoo on Sunday. The trial was conducted to prevent inconvenience to the visitors in the absence of a shuttle service to the zoo. The

four taxis to provide shuttle service to the zoo so that the tourists do not face any inconvenience.



municipality's executive officer Atul Bhandari said that the trial with the electric car was successful. However, the cost of the electric car is high considering which various aspects are being considered to deploy it for the shuttle service. He said that the municipality will soon start the operation of

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Officials to be held responsible for issues in power & water supply: CM

CM directs PWD to prepare proposal for bypasses in small cities suffering from frequent jams

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Expressing dissatisfaction at official apathy, chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has directed the departmental officials to improve their working. At a time when power cuts and issues in water supply are being experienced in various parts of the State amidst high summer temperatures, he warned that officials will be held responsible and face action in case the people suffer from issues in the supply of electricity and drinking water. The CM said this while chairing a meeting with officials of Power, Drinking Water, Forest department, Public Works Department and the Irrigation department at Banbasa during his visit to Champawat district on Sunday. Directing the officials to ensure proper arrangements at Purnagiri, he said that devotees coming to pay obeisance to Goddess Purnagiri should not face any problems with the supply of electricity and drinking water.



together and start construction of new power houses in the near future, he said. The district magistrate Navneet Pandey was directed to ensure quality, transparency and time bound completion in every construction work in the district. The DM should himself conduct site inspections and review the works, Dhami said.

transfer issues. For issues related to the State administration, the officials should meet the department concerned and myself to resolve the issue to prevent delays. Officials should accord priority to listening to the grievances of the public and ensure their timely redressal. Considering the rising demand for electricity amidst the rising summer temperatures, the officials should set up grid connected solar power plants in their offices

and homes under the CM Surya Ghar Yojana," the CM said while also appealing to the public to take the benefit of this scheme.

Dhami directed the PWD principal engineer to prepare a proposal for construction of bypasses in small cities and areas in the State suffering from frequent traffic jams. Officials should seriously consider options to provide permanent solutions to problems, he stressed.

"Officials should take individual responsibility for swift disposal of projects being delayed due to forest land

Dhami told officials to prepare supply schemes considering the projected electricity demand in the future. UPCL, PTCUL and UREDA should prepare proposals

Char Dham pilgrim numbers continue to soar

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The heat in the plains and occasional rainy weather in the mountains has not affected the flow of pilgrims undertaking the Char Dham Yatra. A total of 65,236 people visited the Char Dham temples in Chamoli, Rudraprayag and Uttarkashi districts on Sunday. According to official data, the total number of pilgrims who have visited the temples since the reopening of Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri on May 10 and Badrinath on May 12 reached 15,67,096 on Sunday.

the Chamoli district, 21,269 people visited Badrinath on Sunday while the total number of people who have visited this temple so far is 3,79,042. In the Uttarkashi district, 11,942 people visited Yamunotri on Sunday whereas a total of 2,85,631 have visited the temple so far. Similarly, 12,541 people visited Gangotri on Sunday while the total number of people who have visited this temple so far reached 2,75,210 on Sunday.

It is pertinent to mention here that more than 56 lakh people had visited the Char Dham temples during 2023. The government has been expecting that this record will be broken this year with a much bigger number of people expected to undertake the pilgrimage in 2024.

The maximum number of people have visited Kedarnath in Rudraprayag district. According to official figures, 19,484 people visited Kedarnath on Sunday while a total of 6,27,213 have visited this temple so far. In

SSP forms SIT to investigate fake Char Dham registration scams

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Sunday for swift action against agents and travel agencies providing fake registrations of pilgrims for Char Dham temples. The team will work under the supervision of the superintendent of police (Rural) Lokjeet Singh for speedy and successful legal disposal of all cases registered in Rishikesh or Vikasnagar police stations regarding fake registrations during Char Dham Yatra. The SSP stated that the team comprises seven police personnel who will conduct an impartial investigation and ensure that all the culprits are brought to justice, regardless of where they carried out the fake registration scam. The Dehradun police have registered a total of 41 cases against travel agencies and agents for fake registrations of pilgrims since the

commencement of the Char Dham Yatra in the State on May 10-12. The police have caught eight accused so far from Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haridwar. Singh further said that these agents charge lakhs of rupees for the fake registration from pilgrims who belong to different parts of the country and get to know about the scam only during checking in Rishikesh. Singh said that though police provide them all possible assistance, it causes considerable inconvenience to them. The police are inspecting the registrations at checking centres established in Rishikesh to ensure no unregistered pilgrim travels to Char Dham temples. Strict action will be taken against all offenders irrespective of their location across the country. The SIT will dedicatedly investigate such cases and will ensure swift action against culprits, the SSP added.

Plains to remain hot, rain to bring relief in mountains

Thunderstorms with gusty winds likely in isolated places

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Dehradun and other places in the State witnessed relief from heat wave conditions on Sunday following a spell of rain on Saturday night. The temperatures remained high in the plains but were below 40 degrees Celsius. The weather is likely to remain similar on Monday.

remaining districts of the State. The meteorological centre has also issued a yellow warning (Watch)



regarding the possibility of thunderstorms accompanied with lightning/gusty wind (30-40 kmph) likely to occur

at isolated places in the mountainous districts of the State on Monday.

The provisional State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a mainly clear to partly cloudy sky today. Thunder cloud

development is likely to occur in some areas. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 39 degrees Celsius and 24 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today.

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in various parts of the State on Sunday were 38.6 degrees Celsius and 21 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 38.6 degrees Celsius and 26.6 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 27.5 degrees Celsius and 11.9 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 28.3 degrees Celsius and 18.2 degrees Celsius in New Tehri.

Term of local body administrators extended by three months

DMs to continue as administrators in local bodies

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Following the approval of the governor lieutenant general (ret'd) Gurmit Singh, the State government has extended the term of administrators appointed in urban local bodies in the State by three months or till the formation of the new boards in these municipal bodies.

bodies ended on December 1, 2023, the State had appointed the district magistrates concerned as the administrators in the local bodies till further orders. Due to the model code of conduct being in place for the Lok Sabha elections 2024, the election process in the local bodies may get delayed. Considering this, the term of the administrators has been extended by a period of three months or till the formation of the boards in the local bodies, whichever is earlier.

In the notification order issued by Urban Development principal secretary Ramesh Kumar Sudhanshu, it has been stated that when the term of the boards in the urban local

Dehradun DM removes officer from ADM's post for negligence in election duties

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun district magistrate Sonika has removed the additional district magistrate Ramji Sharan Sharma from his post just three days before the counting of votes polled in the Lok Sabha election set to be conducted on June 4. This decision was reportedly taken as per the order of the Election Commission of India (ECI) for his alleged negligence in carrying out election related duties for Lok Sabha elections. According to official sources, Sonika had received information about Sharma's negligence towards works related to election duties. She forwarded this information with valid reports to the

chief electoral officer of the State who forwarded it to the ECI after checking it. After reviewing the report, the ECI directed the DM to relieve Sharma of his duties as ADM. The DM issued the order regarding the same on May 31. According to the order, Sonika relieved Sharma of his duties as ADM and attached him to the office of the additional chief secretary of the department of Personnel and Vigilance. According to the official sources, the ECI has also reportedly sought departmental action against Sharma but nothing has been confirmed by the officials concerned so far.

Afraid of unprecedented results, Congress searching for excuses for poll defeat: Bhatt

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Bharatiya Janata Party State president Mahendra Bhatt has opined that the Congress is anxious due to fear of defeat considering the unprecedented results of the Lok Sabha election set to be announced on June 4. The Congress should wait for the declaration of the election results if it does not believe in the exit polls. However, it is making baseless statements against the BJP government which shows its fear of the imminent defeat it will face in the election. "The people have cast their vote and the situation will be clear in front of all within a couple of days. If the Congress considers the exit polls fake, the option it has to face the reality and it should

be prepared for that. The senior leaders of the Congress have also started questioning electronic voting machines. The Congress often raises this issue when the people have rejected it in the elections. On the contrary, it considers the public supreme when it wins an election in any State," Bhatt said.

The BJP State president further said that the Congress should exercise patience, adding that it does not have the right to question the public mandate. "The BJP approached the public in the Lok Sabha elections on the basis of its development works and a target of more than 400 seats under its dynamic leader



Prime Minister Narendra Modi. We are awaiting the election results like the whole world is. On the other hand, the Congress is already searching for excuses for the electoral defeat for fear of the unpre-

cedented results expected this time. The Congress will learn about the reality because the people of India have understood that it didn't serve the nation but ruled it for 70 years," Bhatt added.

BJP prepared to handle opposition's attack on counting day

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The BJP State president Mahendra Bhatt told party leaders to prepare to effectively present the party's position in front of the media on the day of counting of the votes polled in the Lok Sabha elections. Chairing a meeting of the party's media team on Sunday, Bhatt issued directions for media coordination to the office bearers while also wishing them in advance for the party's victory. Informing about the meeting, the BJP State media in-charge Manveer Singh Chauhan said that senior office bearers of the party and members of the media team attended the meeting. Bhatt said in the meeting that history will be made on June 4 with the announcement of the election results which will result in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's re-election to a third term in office. He said, "The party is going to win all the five parliamentary seats in

Uttarakhand with a resounding majority. However, we have to be fully prepared to present our position in the media because the opposition will once again blame the EVMs, Election Commission, the administration and the media for its electoral defeat. They will be frustrated but we have to reply to them with patience, logic and figures. We will have to present information about their actions to suppress the media, judiciary and executive. One thing is clear is that the result of this election has been effectively influenced by PM Modi's guarantee. This kind of a victory is against corruption, familism, appeasement and casteism," the BJP State president said. BJP State general secretary (Organisation) Ajaey Kumar and general secretary Aditya Kothari also shared their views in the meeting.

Police divert route on vote counting day

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Several routes will remain diverted in Dehradun on account of the counting of votes polled in the Lok Sabha elections on Tuesday. The police on Sunday issued a traffic arrangement plan for smooth traffic and to prevent inconvenience to commuters. This plan will be applicable from 6 AM to 8 PM on Tuesday, the officials said.

Maldevta or Thano Road during the said time duration on Tuesday. The police will allow only officers, employees, polling agents and candidates on counting duty. Besides this, only pass holding media personnel will be allowed entry from the stadium and the college's gate. Also, no heavy vehicles will be allowed to enter the entire Ring Road, Survey Chowk to Sahastradhara Crossing and to Raipur Chowk and Chhe Number Puliya to Maharana Pratap Sports College, the officials said. They added that strict legal action will be taken against those violating these rules on the vote counting day.

The counting process will be held at Maharana Pratap Sports College in Raipur and movement of all vehicles will remain prohibited within a 100-metre radius of the premises. As per the instructions, no heavy vehicle will be allowed to come towards the college's stadium from

Sonika checks arrangements at vote counting venue

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun district election officer and district magistrate Sonika inspected the Maharana Pratap Sports College in Raipur area of Dehradun to check the arrangements for counting of votes polled in the Lok Sabha elections. She directed the officials concerned to ensure that all the arrangements for the

pus to be used for counting of votes and also checked the preparations made for the counting process. She also inspected the media centre and directed the nodal media officer/assistant director of Information to ensure proper arrangements in the media centre. City magistrate Pratyush Singh, Information



counting of votes on June 4 are done as per the directions of the Election Commission of India. Sonika directed the basic facilities like drinking water, electricity supply without disruption along with toilets and sanitation, among other aspects should be ensured at the venue of the counting of votes. The DEO inspected the entire cam-

assistant director BS Negi, Public Works Department executive engineer Jitendra Kumar Tripathi, Power EE Gaurav Saklani and PWD EE Kapil Kumar along with other officials concerned were also present during the inspection conducted by the district magistrate.

Forest fire reported in Nanda Devi national park

PNS ■ JOSHIMATH

With high temperatures and dry conditions being experienced in various parts of the State, forest fires have resumed in some areas. A fire erupted in the jungles of Selang under the Nanda Devi national park in Chamoli district on Sunday morning.

The Nanda Devi range officer Gaurav Negi said that 40 personnel of the department along with personnel of



The Forest department personnel reached the site and started efforts to extinguish the fire. However, winds in the afternoon further enflamed the fire and spread it to the area above the national highway

the Fire Service were deployed to bring the fire under control. Traffic was also halted temporarily on the road due to the forest fire.

BJP excited as exit polls predict Modi's landslide win

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/PATNA

With exit polls indicating that Prime Minister Narendra Modi all set to return for third term, BJP leaders expressed a lot of enthusiasm over the massive winning margin predicted by pollsters. Former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, a party candidate from Patna Sahib constituency, on Sunday, targeted former Congress president Rahul Gandhi over his remark about exit polls and claim of getting 295 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections. The senior BJP leader said the grand old party is performing poorly because it didn't stop daydreaming. Advising Congress to work on the ground and stop criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Prasad said "There is no bar on daydreaming in India. The Exit Poll is only reflecting the exact poll. We will cross 400 in Delhi (Centre) and 40 in Bihar." The exit polls have predicted a stunning victory for the saffron party, with



some pollsters claiming that the BJP-led NDA's score may well cross the 400 mark. "PM Narendra Modi worries about the poor, worries about

the farmers, he is the one who is working to develop this nation, and he is the one who is safeguarding the country," said Prasad at Patna.

Prasad also jibed at Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh's statement and said that Congress's current situation is because the party never

stopped daydreaming. "People can dream during the day and there is no restraint on that. Congress is performing poorly because they haven't stopped daydreaming. They should work on the ground and win the confidence of the public and should stop criticizing and abusing PM Modi." Tripura unit BJP president Rajib Bhattacharjee claimed on Sunday People have voted for "Modi's guarantee", and this will ensure 400 seats for the BJP-led NDA on June 4. Speaking to reporters, Bhattacharjee claimed the opposition bloc INDIA will be defeated in the elections as it had no promise or programme for the people. "Almost all the exit polls have predicted a landslide victory for the BJP-led NDA. My prediction is that the NDA will cross the 400-mark target set by PM Narendra Modi," he told reporters. "The opposition bloc has no programme for the people. They will be defeated in the elections," he said, adding that several opposition leaders were sent to jail because of cor-

ruption, while the remaining were waiting for the same fate after June 4. Founder of CVOTER, Yashwant Deshmukh said "NDA is winning primarily because PM Modi is popular and because there is a huge gap of vote share in different states wherever they are winning...Two states are a good battleground- West Bengal and Maharashtra, there is a contest in each state. Beyond these states, all the states are one-sided..." On Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's "Modi fantasy poll" remark, Deshmukh said "Politicians are free to say whatever they wish. They can say that they are fantasy polls of PM Modi but when our exit polls were showing that Congress is winning in Karnataka or Telangana or other INDI alliance partners in West Bengal, Delhi, Punjab, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, whenever we were saying that they are leading and they are winning, were we fantasy polls of Rahul Gandhi or Arvind Kejriwal or Mamata Banerjee or Stalin?"

India sends 90 tonnes of pharmaceutical ingredients to Cuba



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Sunday sent 90 tonnes of pharmaceutical ingredients to Cuba as part of its humanitarian assistance to the island nation. Cuba has been reeling under shortage of essential goods, food items and medicines. "The government of India is extending humanitarian assistance to the government of the Republic of Cuba. A consignment of approx 90 tonnes of nine Made in India Active

Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) left Mundra port on June 2," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. "These APIs will be used by the Cuban drug manufacturers to produce essential antibiotics in the dosage form of tablets, capsules, syrups and injections, needed for treatment of chronic communicable diseases," it said. The MEA said the assistance reaffirms India's status as the "Pharmacy of the World" and underlines its commitment to historic friendship with Cuba.

Congress confident of party surpassing exit poll projections

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leaders on Sunday exuded confidence that the party will do much better than what was projected in the exit polls in states such as Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and asserted the INDIA bloc is going to form the next government. Two separate virtual meetings were held with one involving Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former AICC chief Rahul Gandhi with the party's Lok Sabha candidates, legislative party leaders and state unit chiefs while another by Congress general secretary

Jairam Ramesh with key state leaders, PCC presidents and legislature party leaders of various states. Kharge, Rahul, party general secretaries Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal, along with other senior leaders, interacted with the party's Lok Sabha candidates and reviewed the preparations for the counting day on June 4. The meeting comes a day after exit polls 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. Ramesh has said that the exit polls that came out Saturday evening are "completely bogus" and have been "orchestrated

and masterminded by the man whose exit is inevitable and guaranteed on June 4." "These are all part of the psychological games being played by the outgoing prime minister (Narendra Modi) and the outgoing home minister (Amit Shah). The outgoing home minister calls up 150 District Magistrates and collectors yesterday. The results that the exit polls have come up with bear no relation to reality," the Congress leader alleged. Leaders of several INDIA bloc parties had also met here on Saturday and took stock of the opposition's preparations leading up to the June 4 counting of votes polled in the Lok Sabha elections, and asserted they will get more than 295



seats, enough for them to form the next government. During his zoom call interaction with Ramesh, Assam Congress chief Bhupen Borah said that his party would win

at least seven seats in the state. He said that alleged internal squabbling in the BJP and the impact of the INDIA bloc had benefitted the Congress. Leader of Opposition in the Punjab Assembly Partap Singh Bajwa said all the surveys have given 7-9 seats to the Congress. "We are ahead on 9 seats, 1 seat will go to the AAP and 3 seats will be won by the candidates who will not in any way help the NDA or PM. The INDIA alliance will get a minimum of 10 seats...In Punjab, the NDA is not going to get even a single seat," he said. Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said the Congress has an edge on two parliamentary seats and is in a tight contest on

the two other seats in the hill state. He exuded confidence that the Congress was also winning the six assembly seats where the bypolls have taken place. Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said that his party would win at least two-third of the 28 seats on the back of the popularity of the guarantees the Congress fulfilled after coming to power in the state. Bihar Congress chief Akhilesh Prasad Singh said that his party would definitely win 6-7 seats out of 9 seats it contested in the state. Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole, Haryana state unit chief Uday Bhan, Rajasthan Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra and Uttar Pradesh

Congress chief Ajai Rai also spoke during the interaction and exuded confidence of a much better performance in their respective states than the projections made in the exit polls. "The unusual interaction before the media came a day after the Exit polls on Saturday predicted that Prime Minister 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. All the state leaders, who spoke at the virtual interaction, debunked the exit polls as part of a psychological game being played by the BJP to "reduce the morale of the Congress workers".

India hails amendments aimed at enhancing global response to health emergencies at World Health Assembly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has hailed the amendments aimed at enhancing the global response to Public Health Emergencies of International Concern and Pandemic Emergencies at the 77th World Health Assembly held recently. It was based on 300 proposals made by member countries after the Covid-19 pandemic. These amendments include provisions to facilitate equitable access to essential health products during health crises and the mobilization of financial resources to support developing countries in building, strengthening, and maintaining the core capacities mandated by the International Health Regulations (IHR). India played a pivotal role in the development of this instrument, advocating for operationalizing equity to ensure a

fair and effective response by developing countries to Public Health Emergencies. Apurva Chandra, Union Health Secretary and Chair of Committee A at the World Health Assembly (WHA), emphasized, "This is a step towards equity and the creation of an umbrella of solidarity that will help protect the world from future pandemic threats." The Working group on International Health Regulations (WGHR) and Intergovernmental Negotiating Body on Pandemic treaty with country representations began the negotiation process in two separate groups almost two years ago and met a number of times, including many resumed sessions on the issue, the statement said. The processes witnessed a number of close calls with seeming deadlocks over positions taken by the various stakeholders, it added.

Exit polls deliberate attempt to justify rigging of elections: Opposition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/MUMBAI/LUCKNOW/PATNA

Opposition parties on Sunday termed the exit polls "bogus" and it was Congress a "deliberate attempt" to justify rigging of the elections and part of "psychological games" being played by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to lower the morale of the INDIA bloc workers. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi dubbed the exit polls as "Modi media poll". "This is not called an exit poll but its name is 'Modi media poll'. This is Modi ji's poll, it is his fantasy poll," Rahul Gandhi told reporters at the AICC headquarters after a meeting with party's Lok Sabha MPs via video conference. Exit polls on Saturday predicted that Prime Minister 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. Asked how many seats INDIA

bloc will get, the former Congress chief said, "Have you heard Sidhu Moose Wala's song '295? So 295 (seats)." While Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut described the exit polls as a "corporate game and a fraud" and claimed there was pressure on the media companies which conduct it, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav also questioned the veracity of the exit polls, saying the opposition had already said that "pro-BJP media" would show the ruling party crossing 300 seats in the Lok Sabha. Speaking to media, the Rajya Sabha member claimed the opposition INDIA bloc will win 295 to 310 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha and form government. Raut also said they do not require the exit polls as they work on the field and know the "undercurrent". "There is lot of pressure on these media companies. The exit poll exercise is a corporate game and a fraud. Do these companies conduct exit polls



for free?" Raut asked. The Shiv Sena (UBT) leader too claimed the opposition INDIA alliance will win 295 to 310 seats. "This is not an exit poll but the figures are taken through a people's poll," he said. In Maharashtra, the Maha Vikas Aghadi, which comprises the Uddhav Thackeray-headed Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress and Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP), will win more than 35 seats out of the total 48, Raut said. "The Shiv Sena will maintain its 2019 tally of 18 seats and the

Congress and NCP will also do well. (NCP(SP) Lok Sabha member) Supriya Sule will win in Baramati by more than 1.5 lakh votes and the Congress will deliver its best performance," he said. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka will bring a change in the country along with Maharashtra, Raut claimed. "The INDIA bloc will win 35 seats (out of 80) in UP and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (headed by Lalu Prasad) will get 16 seats (out of 40) in Bihar," he claimed. Akhilesh alleged that using

the exit polls, the BJP wanted to benefit from the share market which opens on Monday, and added that "disappointed faces" of BJP leaders are telling the truth. Insisting that the INDIA bloc was winning the Lok Sabha polls, the SP chief also called on the candidates and their poll agents to closely "monitor" the EVMs on counting day. "Understand the chronology of the exit poll. The opposition had already said that pro-BJP media would show the BJP crossing 300 seats that would create the scope for fraud. Today's pro-BJP exit poll was prepared many months ago, the channels just aired it now. People's public opinion is being deceived through this exit poll," Yadav said. "Based on this exit poll, BJP wants to benefit from the share market which opens on Monday. If these exit polls were not false and BJP was not losing, then BJP would not have blamed its own people. The disappointed faces of BJP leaders are showing the truth," he added.

He said that BJP leaders are realising that the result of the whole country cannot be changed like the Chandigarh mayoral election because this time the opposition is fully alert and public anger is also at its peak. "Corrupt officials who are in cahoots with BJP are also not able to muster the courage to rig the elections after seeing an active Supreme Court, and they also do not want to become a victim of public anger," the SP chief said. All the workers, office bearers and candidates of INDIA bloc should not make even one per cent mistake in monitoring the EVMs, Yadav said and added that the opposition alliance is winning the polls. "That is why remain alert and get the counting done and celebrate the victory only after official certification," he said. In a separate social media post Akhilesh said, "The basis of exit poll is not EVM but the DM. Administration should remember that there is no greater force than people's power."

EC seeks factual information from Ramesh on his remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) sought factual information from Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Sunday on his claim that Home Minister Amit Shah has called up 150 district magistrates and collectors ahead of the June 4 counting of votes for the Lok Sabha polls. In a letter to Ramesh, the poll panel has asked him to share details regarding his claim by 7 pm on Sunday. The EC has referred to his post on X on June 1, in which the Congress general secretary had alleged that "the outgoing Home Minister has been calling up DMs/Collectors. So far, he has spoken to 150 of them. This is blatant and brazen intimidation, showing how desperate the BJP is..." The process of counting votes is a sacred duty cast upon every returning officer and such public statements "tend to put an element of doubt and thus, deserves to be addressed in



larger public interest", the EC has told Ramesh. It has also told the Congress leader that when the Model Code of Conduct is in force, all officers are under the deemed deputation of the commission and they report directly to the poll watchdog for any directions. "However, no DM has reported any such undue influence as alleged by you...", the EC's letter to Ramesh has stated. "It is requested that details of 150 DMs to whom such calls

have been allegedly made by the Home Minister along with the factual matrix/basis of your information are shared by 7 pm today -- June 2, 2024, so that appropriate action can be taken," it has told the Congress leader. It has said that being a responsible, experienced and very senior leader of a national party, Ramesh must have made such a public statement ahead of the counting day on the basis of facts or information he believes to be true.

INS Shivalik departed from Singapore for Japan: Navy



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Navy warship, INS Shivalik, mission deployed to the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean, departed Singapore on Thursday for onward passage to Yokosuka, Japan, navy said here on Saturday. The ship is scheduled to participate in JIMEX 24 and RIMPAC 24. This deployment is aimed at enhancing the degree of interoperability with the JMSDF, US Navy and other partner navies participating in RIMPAC 24.

Researchers announce successful trials of nutraceutical in protecting smokers' lungs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

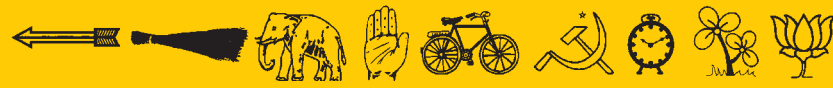
Offering a promising preventive measure against smoke-related diseases, Indian researchers have announced successful clinical trials of HARAS, a curcumin-based nutraceutical in protecting smokers' lungs by significantly reducing carbon monoxide (CO) levels. The clinical study findings are published in peer reviewed journals International Journal of Chemical and Biochemical Sciences and Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology. This breakthrough formulation utilizes curcumin, a compound derived from turmeric and has been developed by Cambridge-educated nanoscientist Dr. Vijay Kanuru, Founder of Nanoved Research Foundation through innovative nanotechnology. Clinical trials, conducted by Sharda University's researchers including Dr Deepak Bhargava, Dr Vidya Devi Chandvarkar, and Dr Mithilesh



Mishra, involved 25 healthy smoker volunteers who were administered 10 ml of HARAS juice daily for 30 days. CO levels were meticulously monitored using a breath analyzer at the beginning, mid-point, and conclusion of the trial. Results revealed a statistically significant reduction in CO levels by the 30th day (P<0.001), underscoring HARAS's effectiveness in detoxifying smokers' lungs. Dr. Bhargava, Professor and Head of the Department of Oral Pathology and Microbiology at Sharda University, emphasized the

clinical importance of these findings: "Our clinical studies demonstrate that HARAS provides substantial lung protection for smokers by significantly reducing carbon monoxide levels. This nutraceutical stands as a crucial tool in combating the adverse health effects of smoking." Cigarette smoking remains a leading cause of lung cancer and other chronic diseases, with statistics showing it accounts for 90% of lung cancer cases in men and 70-80% in women. Smokers are 15 to

30 times more likely to develop lung cancer or succumb to it compared to non-smokers. Dr. Mithilesh Mishra, Associate Professor at Sharda University, noted the clinical benefits: "In our extended study with 100 smoker patients, HARAS showed no side effects while significantly reducing CO levels, confirming its safety and efficacy." Dr. Kanuru said, "By utilizing liposomal nanotechnology, we have vastly improved the bioavailability of curcumin, allowing even small doses to offer significant health benefits. HARAS is not only beneficial for smokers but also provides protection against conditions induced by air pollution, such as fatigue, inflammation, and cardiovascular issues." Dr. Pradyut Waghray a leading pulmonologist at Apollo Hospitals Hyderabad, added: "HARAS's capacity to mitigate cigarette smoke-induced pulmonary inflammation and oxidative stress marks it as a vital preventive measure for millions of smokers."



NDA will get more seats than predicted by exit polls: Athawale

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Union minister Ramdas Athawale on Sunday said the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will get more number of Lok Sabha seats than predicted by the exit polls. Addressing a press conference here, Athawale expressed confidence that the BJP-led NDA will get more than 400 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha.

On Saturday, exit polls 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 India Today-Axis My India has forecast 361-401 seats for the BJP-led alliance and 131-166 seats for the opposition INDIA bloc in the 543-member Lok Sabha, the ABP-C Voter predicted 353-383 seats for the ruling alliance and 152-182 seats for the INDIA bloc.

Today's Chanakya predicted 335 seats to the BJP and 400 to the NDA, with a margin of 15 seats either way. It predicted 107 seats to the opposition alliance with a possibility of its tally going up or down by 11 seats.

The BJP had given the slogan of '400 paar' for its alliance in



the Lok Sabha polls. Athawale said the exit polls have predicted the NDA will win 350 to 375 seats, but the BJP-led alliance will get more seats. "In Maharashtra, the ruling Mahayuti win will 35 to 40 seats (out of 48), and in the country, the NDA will get more than 400 seats," said the Republican Party of India (A) chief, whose party is a constituent of the NDA.

The Mahayuti in Maharashtra comprises the Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, BJP, and the NCP headed by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. Athawale said that last year,

the BJP got more success than what the exit polls predicted in the assembly elections to Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. "Now the exit polls have given the NDA 375, but the ruling alliance will cross 400 seats," he said.

Athawale said the Congress-led opposition tried to create confusion among Dalits by saying the Constitution will be changed, but the NDA has been able to clear the air among people. This mischievous campaign of the Congress and its allies was countered well and hence Dalits, Bahujans, Buddhists and the followers of

Babasaheb Ambedkar supported the ruling alliance, he claimed.

PM Modi addressed 18 rallies in Maharashtra and informed the people about the work of his government, Athawale said and expressed confidence that the ruling alliance in the state will win 35 to 40 seats.

In Maharashtra, there is a neck-and-neck fight between the ruling and opposition alliances, but the Mahayuti will win, the Union minister said.

The RPI (A) activists supported the Mahayuti candidates and campaigned wholeheartedly, he added.

Nine counting centres set up for five LS seats in JK; one in Delhi

PTI ■ JAMMU

With two days left for the declaration of results of the Lok Sabha polls, nine centres have been set up for counting of votes in five Lok Sabha constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir, officials said on Sunday.

In addition, one counting centre has also been set up in Delhi for the counting of Kashmiri migrant votes which were polled by the displaced community at specially set up polling stations in Srinagar, Baramulla and Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seats, they said.

The counting of votes, scheduled for Tuesday, also covering Udhampur and Jammu parliamentary seats in J-K, will decide the fate of 100 candidates, including senior BJP leader and Union minister Jitendra Singh, two former chief ministers - Omar Abdullah of National Conference (NC) and Mehbooba Mufti of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

The other bigwigs include former ministers Raman Bhalla and Choudhary Lal Singh of Congress, GM Saroori of DPAP, Aga Ruhullah Mehdi and Mian Altaf of NC, Ashraf Mir of Apni Party, Sajjad Lone of Peoples Conference. Former MLA Engineer Rashid is fighting from Tihar Jail.

Officials said all arrangements including security and deployment of staff have been made at all the 10 counting



centres. The Combined Voter Turnout (VTR) at the polling stations for the entire Union territory (five Lok Sabha seats) was 58.46 per cent - the highest poll participation in the last 35 years.

The voter turnout of 50.86 per cent from the three parliamentary constituencies in the Kashmir Valley witnessed a jump of 30 percentage points from the 2019 general elections when it was 19.16 per cent.

Srinagar, Baramulla and Anantnag-Rajouri in the valley recorded VTR of 38.49 per cent, 59.1 per cent and 54.84 per cent respectively, which has been highest in the last three decades.

The other two constituencies in the UT, namely Udhampur and Jammu in the Jammu region, recorded 68.27 per cent and 72.22 per cent voter turnout respectively.

The counting of votes in Udhampur constituency where Union minister Jitendra Singh is seeking his third consecutive

term will be held at government degree college, Kathua.

Apart from Singh, there are 11 other candidates that includes Lal Singh, also a two-time former MP, and GM Saroori in the fray. Seven of the candidates are independents. The counting of votes in Baramulla constituency will be held in Government Degree College (Boys), Baramulla. Omar Abdullah is pitted against 21 candidates in the constituency, prominent among them being Lone and Rashid.

Among the 14 independents who are contesting in the seat, two are women. In Anantnag-Rajouri constituency, divided by the mighty Pir Panjal range, officials said the counting of votes will be held at Government Degree College (Boys) Anantnag and Government PG College Rajouri. Mehbooba Mufti is seeking a victory from this constituency and is facing a major challenge from NC's Mian Altaf.

There are also 10 independents and eight other candidates, including the BJP-supported Apni Party's Zaffar Manhas.

The counting of votes in Srinagar parliamentary constituency, which has the highest number of 24 candidates, including 16 independents, will take place at Sher-i-Kashmir International Convention Cent (SKICC) along the banks of Dal Lake. NC's Ruhullah, Mir of Apni Party and PDP youth leader Waheed Para are the strong candidates from the constituency.

Counting of votes for the Jammu constituency, where BJP's Jugal Kishore is eyeing a hat-trick of wins, will be carried out at the premises comprising Government Polytechnic College and Government MAM college. Raman Bhalla, the working president of the J&K unit of Congress, is among the 21 other candidates in the fray from the seat.

Officials said counting of Kashmiri migrant votes will take place at Government College for Women Gandhi Nagar, Jammu, Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Udhampur and J&K House, New Delhi.

J-K Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Pandurang K Pole had a comprehensive review of preparedness of the districts ahead of the final counting of votes at Nirvachan Bhawan here on Saturday, they said.

No worries on LS polls outcome, expecting good results: KCR

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

A mid exit poll reports indicating a "poor show" by the BRS in the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections, former Chief Minister K Chandrababhan Naidu on Sunday downplayed it, saying whatever be the outcome, the party will work for the people.

Addressing the leaders and workers of the party on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the formation of Telangana state, Naidu, also known as KCR, said the BRS's defeat in the recent assembly polls was a temporary setback.

Attacking the Congress government in the state, Naidu said the present regime has become unpopular in a short span of time, and that the anger among people is such that the discontent will "explode like a bomb" shortly.

"What will happen in the Parliament elections? It (result) can be any number. Somebody said we (BRS) would get 11 seats. Some other person said we get only one seat. Somebody said 2 to 4. This has become gambling. Let us see. There was a good response among the public during my bus yatra (poll campaigning). We can expect a good result. Whatever be the outcome, there is no need to worry," he said.

"Whatever be the outcome, BRS is the protection shield for Telangana," he further said. Several exit poll predictions indicated that there will be tough fight between the Congress and the BJP while the BRS would be marginalised in the recently held Lok Sabha elections. Telangana has 17 Lok Sabha seats.

Alleging that some people are saying that they'll finish off the BRS, KCR said the "pink party" is "like an ocean", and no one can destroy it. "There is a bright future for us, and don't get confused with political results. This decennial celebration should become an inspiration for us," the BRS supremo advised his party cadres.

Rao said the defeat in the assembly elections was a temporary setback that would occur to any political party during its journey and exuded confidence that BRS would come back to power again in the next assembly elections. Even six months after coming to power, the Congress government has not announced even a single policy for sectors such as industry, IT, and agriculture, he said. He recalled that the whole of Telangana region, before becoming a state, was plagued with suicides, famine, power cuts, hunger deaths of weavers, and that there have been major improvements since then.

Telangana suffered destruction of 100 years in ten years: CM

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Claiming that Telangana suffered "destruction of 100 years" during the 10-year BRS rule, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Sunday said his government is working for the state's cultural and economic revival and expressed his desire to make it a destination for the world.

Addressing the 10th Telangana formation day celebrations organised by the state government here, he thanked Congress leader Sonia Gandhi and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for fulfilling the decades-long demand of statehood for Telangana during the previous UPA regime at the Centre. He also defended his government's decision to invite Sonia Gandhi to the event though she did not attend. A video message of Sonia Gandhi was played at the event. He recalled the crucial role played by Sonia Gandhi, former Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar and also late BJP leader Sushma Swaraj in the passage of the bill for formation of Telangana state in Parliament in 2014. "We invited Sonia Gandhi, who fulfilled the Telangana people's aspirations, as a guest to the state formation day celebrations. Someone asked in what capacity she was invited. Does it require permission to invite the mother to the child's home?" he asked. As long as the history of Telangana exists,



Sonia Gandhi will be recognized and respected as "mother" by the Telangana society, he said. Taking strong exception to the Congress government's decision to invite Sonia Gandhi to the Telangana formation day celebrations, the BJP had said the government should inform people in what capacity Sonia Gandhi is being invited. Recalling the role of Sonia Gandhi, Meira Kumar and also Sushma Swaraj in passage of Telangana bill in Lok Sabha in 2014, Revanth Reddy thanked them on behalf of the state's people. Sushma Swaraj, who was Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha then, had extended cooperation for the passage of the bill, he said. He targeted the previous BRS government, without naming the party, for the alleged destruction in the state. "During the 10 years of rule, Telangana has suffered 100 years of destruction. It was not just physical destruction but also fundamental freedom has been assaulted. Social justice was denied. The

wealth of the state, which should belong to all the people, has gone into the hands of a few," he said. He accused BRS of destroying Telangana's culture and traditions. Soon after taking over, his government had restored "freedom" and made the government accessible to people, he added. According to Reddy, the previous Chief Minister's camp office-cum-official residence has been named after social reformer Jyotiba Phule and a mechanism to receive representations from people on their grievances has been set up there. Noting that his government is working towards the state's cultural and economic revival, he said the state does not have an official song even 10 years after its formation. As per the wishes of the people, the government is proudly announcing the song "Jaya Jaya he Telangana...," penned by noted Telangana poet Ande Sri, as the state's official song from today. During the official event, Revanth Reddy unveiled the song for which

music was composed by Oscar-winning music director M M Keeravani. Pointing out that an emblem reflect a nation's history, Revanth Reddy said the government is working on a new emblem taking into consideration the suggestions and advice from various sections. Quoting the Sanskrit phrase "Janani j a n m a b h o o m i s c h a swargadapi gariyasi", he said an average Telangana rural woman will be the replica of 'Telangana Talli' (mother) who is hard working and generous. Taking this into consideration, the 'Telangana Talli' statue will be designed.

He alleged that the state's economy was completely ruined when his government came to power in December last year. The state's debt burden mounted to Rs seven lakh crore. The government is laying a strong foundation for the state's progress by conceiving long term plans for future generations. "We are preparing the "Green Telangana - 2050 Master Plan" for the entire Telangana."

He highlighted his government's welfare and development initiatives, including Musi Riverfront Development project in Hyderabad, stringent measures to check the menace of drugs, recruitment of 30,000 youth in 70 days, depositing Rs 7,500 crore in the accounts of 69 lakh farmers and uninterrupted power supply.

Will win Nagaland lone LS seat, says Congress

PTI ■ KOHIMA

The Congress on Sunday expressed confidence about winning the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland and forming the next government at the Centre.

Addressing a press conference, AICC in-charge of Nagaland Girish Chodankar said the exit poll figures were imaginary and all would be clear in the next two days. "We will not only win the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland but the INDIA bloc will get majority seats in the country, while many other parties will also support the alliance."

"India has voted against fake promises, misgovernance, unemployment, price rise and inflation. People have voted for the future of India and we are confident that we will prove the exit polls wrong," the Congress leader said.

Chodankar, who arrived in Kohima on Saturday evening, said that it was decided at the extended executive meeting of state Congress that the party will contest the elections to the urban local bodies in the state scheduled on June 26. Except for the eastern Nagaland areas, Congress will contest in most wards of the three municipalities and 36 town councils, he said. Chodankar said that if the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) reconsiders its decision to participate in the civic polls,

Congress would field candidates there as well.

State Congress president S Sumpommeren Jamir said that those aspiring to contest the elections on a Congress ticket can submit applications till June 7. BJP worker killed in Bengal post-poll violence Kolkata, Jun 2 (PTI) A BJP worker was killed by a group of men in West Bengal's Nadia district in post-poll violence, with the saffron party pointing fingers at the ruling Trinamool Congress. The TMC, however, claimed that the killing was a fallout of a family feud.

Police sources said the incident happened at Kalganj in the northern part of the district when BJP worker, Hafizur Sheikh, was playing carrom with others on Saturday night.

It is alleged that 10-12 people came on motorbikes and first shot Sheikh and then hacked him, killing him on the spot. Local people demonstrated for over two hours and did not allow the police to lift the body. The body was later sent for post-mortem examination. The BJP's Uttar Nadia unit president Arjun Biswas alleged that TMC goons killed the party worker.

District TMC leader Rubkanur Rahman, however, blamed family feud behind the murder and the Trinamool Congress has no role in it. Family members of the deceased demanded immediate arrest of the culprits.

People voted for Modi's guarantee, NDA will win 400 seats: Tripura BJP chief

PTI ■ AGARTALA

People have voted for "Modi's guarantee", and this will ensure 400 seats for the BJP-led NDA on June 4, the party's Tripura unit president Rajib Bhattacharjee claimed on Sunday. Speaking to reporters, Bhattacharjee claimed the opposition bloc INDIA will be defeated in the elections as it had no promise or programme for the people.

"Almost all the exit polls have predicted a landslide victory for the BJP-led NDA. My prediction is that the NDA will cross the 400-mark target set by PM Narendra Modi," he told reporters.

"The opposition bloc has no programme for the people. They will be defeated in the



elections," he said, adding that several opposition leaders were sent to jail because of corruption, while the remaining were waiting for the same fate after June 4.

Former CM Manik Sarkar of the CPI(M) said it was better to wait for the actual results. "They have conducted exit polls and presented those before the people. On the other hand, the INDIA bloc after a meeting said it will win close to 300 seats based on reports from various states. Let's wait for June 4," he said.

Senior Congress MLA Gopal Chandra Roy said that exit polls have often failed to predict the actual outcomes of elections. "In 2004, there was no indication that the Congress was returning to power but it had happened. Therefore, I will not make any comment on the exit polls, but the Congress is hopeful that the INDIA bloc will form the next government in Delhi," he said.

BJP seeks repoll at multiple booths in Bengal Diamond Harbour LS seat

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The BJP has sought repoll at several booths in the Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha seat in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district, alleging that malpractices were carried out during the voting process on Saturday.

In a letter to the West Bengal chief electoral officer (CEO) on June 1, BJP leader Shishir Bajoria said booth agents of the saffron party were driven out, CCTV cameras were found facing in directions other than the polling cubicle and voters were prevented from reaching booths.

"On behalf of Abhijit Das (Bobby), candidate of BJP of the Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha constituency, we request you to grant repolling



in several booths", the letter said. Repoll was sought in booths in the assembly segments of Budge Budge, Falta, Maheshatala, Diamond Harbour, Bishnupur, Satgachia and Metiabruz. Sitting TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee was seeking reelection from Diamond Harbour.

One arrested in attack on BJP MP Ram Kripal Yadav

PTI ■ PATNA

A person was arrested on Sunday in connection with the attack on the convoy of BJP MP Ram Kripal Yadav in Patna, police said. The accused was identified as Bikash Yadav, a resident of Masaurhi, they said, adding that a special team was formed to nab the eight other accused who were on the run. Yadav alleged that he and his



convoy were attacked by supporters of the RJD about an hour after polling was over in his Patliputra Lok Sabha constituency. He claimed that some of his supporters were also injured in the attack that took place around 7.30 pm in the Masaurhi area of Patna. Deputy CM Samrat Chaudhary demanded strict action against those involved in the incident from the Election Commission.

Chaudhary told reporters. "The attack was aimed to harm Yadav. But he escaped unhurt. However, our several supporters were injured in the incident," he added.

Yadav, a former Union minister, said he could never imagine the way shots were fired targeting him and his convoy. "I never stay inside the security cover because my voters and party workers protect Ram Kripal Yadav. I have never indulged in the politics of violence. I could never imagine the way shots were fired at me and my workers were beaten, they could have died," he said. "I met injured supporters who are undergoing treatment and enquired about their condition," he added.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

An encore?

Exit polls predict an easy win for NDA, though INDIA says it is confident of 295+ seats

If what the exit polls say holds true, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is going to form its third successive Government at the Centre. The seventh and final phase of polling has concluded and the nation eagerly awaits on June 4 a formal announcement of the results. The exit poll predictions notwithstanding, the Opposition Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) coalition remains optimistic of securing over 295 seats. This juxtaposition of predictions raises intriguing questions about the electorate's intentions as well as the efficacy of exit polls itself. These polls, often seen as a barometer of public sentiment, do give a sense of the electorate's mood though it may or may not be accurate. If the predictions ring true, we can confidently say that it reflects a continued endorsement of the NDA's policies and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. We can conclude that the BJP's focus on economic development, national security and social welfare schemes seems to have struck a chord with a substantial number of voters. Initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and various infrastructure projects have likely contributed to this favourable outlook. On the other hand, INDIA has been claiming, based on its own assessment, a clear majority for itself. Despite the exit polls, the INDIA alliance, comprising 28 major Opposition parties, remains confident of winning over 295 seats.



This coalition, which includes the Congress too, believes that their emphasis on inclusive growth, social justice and a more decentralised governance model has resonated with a significant segment of the population. INDIA's campaign has centred on addressing economic disparities, improving education and healthcare and promoting secular values. Their optimism suggests a belief that there is a substantial undercurrent of support not fully captured by the exit polls. As far as exit polls are concerned, it would be too early for the NDA to start celebrating and for INDIA to sulk. There have been instances when exit polls have been wide of the mark and actual results have been at total variance with the predictions. Experts say the sample size must be at least five per cent (which is rarely the case) and it should be spread across demographics. Besides, predicting the number of seats based on exit votes is always subjective. What is important right now is a smooth transition/retention of power by whichever alliance takes Delhi. As the nation waits for the final results, the exit polls and INDIA's confidence set the stage for a potentially transformative election. The voters' message appears to be multifaceted, reflecting a balance between a desire for stability and development on the one hand and a push for inclusive growth and accountable governance on the other. Ultimately, regardless of the outcome, the next Government will need to respect the mandate and address the aspirations of the populace without discrimination and bias. So, till the actual verdict comes, keep your fingers crossed!

PICTALK



People take a boat ride on the Ganga at Assi Ghat, in Varanasi

PTI

Dawn of a new era in Indian politics

Beyond the immediate winners and losers, the aftermath promises to be marked by potential new alliances, power shifts and the rise of emerging political forces



KALYANI SHANKAR

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections are closing and the results will be on June 4. The aftermath of the election is not simply about winners and losers. It is about more than just the anticipated outcomes. It includes the potential for unforeseen alliances, dramatic shifts in power dynamics and the emergence of new political forces, all of which are yet to be unveiled. The BJP's potential win in the election is a significant event that could reshape the political landscape. However, the outcome is uncertain, with two possible scenarios, each with implications. One scenario predicts a massive victory for the BJP, possibly even exceeding 400 seats. The other scenario suggests a more modest result for the BJP with fewer seats.

A landslide victory for the BJP could

have far-reaching consequences. In a worst-case scenario, if the BJP wins fewer seats, the party could still secure support from other parties. If the party emerges as the single largest, albeit with fewer seats than in the 2019 poll, it has a plan B to form the Government with the help of some neutral parties.

The strategic decisions made by the Congress party, such as reducing the number of contested constituencies, highlight the depth and complexity of Indian politics. Each move is a calculated step towards a larger goal. As the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha polls concluded on Saturday, the Congress claimed the BJP's fate is "all but sealed," with the INDIA bloc having already crossed the halfway mark of 272 seats and is on course for a total of over 350 seats.

The INDIA Alliance, a significant player in Indian politics, was formed by 26 Opposition parties last year to fight Modi unitedly. However, if the BJP returns to power, the alliance may face a significant challenge. Some partners, such as the Trinamool Congress and the AAP, have decided to refrain from forming partnerships for the Lok Sabha polls, weakening the Congress's position. A BJP victory could lead to reevaluating the INDIA



Alliance's strategy, with some partners choosing to align with the BJP and others seeking new partnerships or independent paths.

If the BJP wins more seats, smaller parties may rush to join the alliance. This rush may be fueled by their desire to align with the winning side, which could impact the post-election scenario. However, this rush to join the coalition may be more than just motivated by political interests. Some parties want to oppose Modi, while others see alliances as a failed attempt. Others, like the Trinamool Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab, have chosen to refrain from engaging in partnerships. They, along with the Congress and the Left Parties, would challenge the NDA.

This could result in the collapse of the newly formed India coalition, as this alliance has many fair-weather friends who may ally with any party based solely on their self-interest. The BJP's ability to secure more seats or gain support from other parties will not be a surprise. This could impact the political landscape, potentially leading



THE UDDHAV THACKERAY FACTION OF THE SHIV SENA AND THE SHARAD PAWAR-LED NCP WERE PREVIOUSLY WITH THE BJP AND IT WOULDN'T BE SURPRISING IF THEY HELPED THE NDA

to a realignment of political forces, including the INDIA Alliance.

The BJP has lost some crucial allies, such as SAD, Shiv Sena and JD(U). However, JD(U) and the TDP have now rejoined. In Tamil Nadu, the AIADMK, a former NDA ally, may also rejoin the NDA depending on its performance in the polls. Even the ruling DMK is considering its options after the election. The party understands the importance of maintaining a solid working relationship with the NDA and PM Modi. These potential alliances and shifts in power dynamics could significantly impact the political landscape after the elections.

The BJP could seek support from parties led by influential leaders such as Naveen Patnaik, Jagan Mohan Reddy, K Chandrashekhara Rao, Mayawati and others. Though not aligned with any coalition, these leaders have significant political influence and have helped the BJP in the past when the ruling party needed them. Their potential role in the post-election scenario could significantly shape the political landscape.

The Uddhav Thackeray faction of the Shiv Sena and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP were previously with the BJP and it wouldn't be surprising if they helped the NDA.

Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal is ambitious and eyeing the prime ministership. He will remain in opposition. Kejriwal predicted that if Modi wins again on June 4, he will put Uddhav Thackeray, Sharad Pawar, Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge in jail. He would also be sent back to jail. However, it's important to note that these are potential scenarios and not confirmed outcomes. Various factors, including the election outcome, can influence it. The June 4 election results will show how politics will shape the Indian alliance, splintering or strengthening it. They will also indicate whether the BJP will become more arrogant with a hat trick under its belt. A third consecutive BJP win could embolden the party, leading to a more assertive political landscape.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OPPOSITION ASSURED OF VICTORY

Madam — Apropos the news story "Congress assured of 295+ seats for INDIA bloc," published on June 1, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, I find the recent claims by Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge quite significant. The assertion that the INDIA Bloc will secure over 295 Lok Sabha seats in the 2024 elections reflects a strong confidence in their coalition's appeal. The strategic meeting, attended by prominent opposition leaders like Sonia Gandhi, Arvind Kejriwal and Akhilesh Yadav, underscores their united front and meticulous planning for vote counting on June 4.

Kharge's emphasis on staying vigilant during the vote count, particularly concerning EVMs and Form 17C, highlights the coalition's commitment to ensuring a fair process. The involvement of various party leaders, including Sharad Pawar and Tejaswini Yadav, signals a robust alliance to overcome the BJP's influence. The INDIA Bloc's confidence, bolstered by their internal survey, suggests a significant shift in Indian politics. If their predictions hold, we could witness a transformative phase in the country's governance.

Tisha Reddy | Hyderabad

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Madam — Apropos the news story "Economic growth raises sustainability concerns," published on June 1, this is my response. India's economic ascent is remarkable, with its GDP growth rates positioning it as the fifth largest economy, surpassing the UK in 2022 and poised to overtake Japan by 2025. This growth is fueled by increased consumption, driving production and employment. However, this surge in consumerism raises significant sustainability concerns. The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, 2022-23, shows a notable rise in average Monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE), with urban and rural households increasing their spending by 33.5 per cent and 40.42 per cent respectively since 2011-12. This shift from "needs to

Haryana thrives under current Govt



This is my response to the news story "Haryana is driving towards progress and prosperity," published on June 1. Haryana embodies courage and strength. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has savoured Haryana's spirit, has led with vigour for ten years. Seeing Rafale jets soar in Ambala skies today is a proud moment

for all of us. Modi recently highlighted the opposition's deceitful intentions and reaffirmed the BJP's dedication to Haryana's development. Earlier this month, former Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar led a mega rally endorsing Lok Sabha candidate Mohan Lal Badoli, marking a significant moment in Haryana's political landscape. The rally, attended by over 15,000 supporters, showcased the deep-rooted admiration for Khattar's leadership. The Modi-Manohar effect has propelled Haryana towards economic prosperity and social development. Initiatives like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* and PM-KISAN have brought transformative changes. Haryana's rise as an investment hub, with significant contributions in textiles and agriculture, underscores its progressive vision and commitment to holistic development.

Rishabh Khanna | Chandigarh

wants' echoes Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs but also underscores the unsustainable wastage of resources.

High consumption depletes non-renewable resources, leading to scarcity and environmental degradation, including pollution, deforestation and climate change. Income disparities exacerbate these issues, as benefits are unevenly distributed, increasing economic inequality. To balance economic growth with sustainability, India must promote environmentally friendly consumption through education, incentives and regulations, investing in renewable resources and green technologies and implementing policies that encourage sustainable practices. Prioritising sustainability can ensure growth benefits society while preserving the environment for future generations.

Yashika Mehta | Mumbai

REVIVE FARMING, SAVE ENVIRONMENT

Madam — Apropos the news story "Recycle nutrients to mitigate fertiliser crisis," published on June 1, this is my response. As someone who follows environmental issues closely, the growing concerns about the disruption of natural

nutrient cycles due to human activities are alarming. Historically, sustainable farming practices effectively maintained the balance of essential nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. The staggering Rs. 2 lakh crore annual subsidy on fertilisers in India underscores the scale of this problem. Compounded by the separation of livestock farming from crop production, vast amounts of nutrients now pollute water bodies, causing eutrophication and damaging ecosystems. It's encouraging to see advancements in wastewater treatment and nutrient recovery. Cities like Delhi and Hyderabad are expanding their treatment capacities and exploring nutrient recycling. However, the challenge remains immense. Implementing efficient nutrient recovery systems and adopting best practices from Europe could significantly reduce environmental pollution and support sustainable agriculture, potentially transforming India's agricultural landscape and mitigating the ongoing nutrient crisis.

Aarav Singhania | Jaipur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Tobacco addiction grows steadily among the youth

With 24 per cent of children under 16 already using tobacco, the urgency for immediate intervention and education cannot be overstated

The escalating trend of addiction among the youth in India is a serious challenge to public health. Each year, tobacco consumption claims the lives of 1.2 million people in the country. The theme of World No Tobacco Day 2024, "Protecting Children from Tobacco Industry Interference," underscores the urgent need to shield the younger generation from the harmful influence of the tobacco industry. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable deaths and diseases worldwide. It significantly contributes to heart disease, cardiovascular issues and brain strokes. The Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2016-17 revealed that approximately 29 per cent (270 million) of Indian adults use tobacco products, including cigarettes, gutkha, supari tobacco, jarda, bidi and hookah. Alarmingly, about 24 per cent of children under 16 years old in India consume tobacco in some form, leading to devastating health outcomes. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) indicates that about 38 per cent of Indian men are addicted to



tobacco. Notably, tobacco consumption is higher in rural areas (42.7 per cent) compared to urban regions (28.8 per cent). Among women, tobacco use stands at approximately 8.9 per cent, with rural women showing higher consumption rates than their urban counterparts. These statistics are a cause for significant concern. World No Tobacco Day, celebrated by the World Health Organization and global partners, aims to raise awareness about the detrimental effects of tobacco use and promote cessation. The 2024 theme focuses on protecting children, as the majority of regular smokers start before the age of 18. This highlights the necessity of safeguarding adolescents from the perils of tobacco. Smoking damages the alveoli in the lungs, leading to lung diseases, with most lung cancer cases linked to cigarette

smoking. Tobacco increases the risk of cancers such as oral, throat, oesophagal, bladder, kidney and lung cancer. It also leads to chronic diseases like COPD, heart attacks and strokes. Smoking is responsible for approximately 90 per cent of cancer deaths. The risk of death from heart disease and strokes rises significantly among tobacco users. Smokers are prone to numerous diseases, with a general decline in overall health. Additionally, tobacco use reduces fertility in both men and women and can cause severe complications during pregnancy. Smoking and use of tobacco can lead to severe lung diseases, including COPD, Asthma, TB and Lung Cancer causing significant suffering. Smokers are significantly more likely to die from COPD and are at a higher risk of developing TB. People should avoid tobacco products and seek medical help if addicted. Various resources, including nicotine replacement therapy, prescription medications, counselling services, support groups and smartphone apps, are available to help individ-

uals quit tobacco. Among youth, smoking is often wrongly perceived as a sign of masculinity. Additionally, tobacco use is not universally seen as a vice. The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003 aims to protect consumers, reduce tobacco use and prevent related diseases. It includes measures such as banning smoking in public places, regulating sales near educational institutions and issuing health warnings to inform the public. The Telangana Government in May 2024 has recently banned all tobacco products for one year, realising the grave consequences of tobacco usage. The rising addiction among youth threatens their future health. Young people must resist industry influences that target youth and promote e-cigarettes and flavoured nicotine pouches and candy which are also harmful and lay the foundation for tobacco use later on.

(The author is a public health expert working as an Assistant Professor at MLB Medical College, Jhansi UP; views are personal)



SUDHA SHARMA



FIRST COLUMN

MIND MANAGEMENT IS CRUCIAL FOR HAPPINESS

We can truly celebrate only if we are able to silence our mind



RAVI VALLURI

What is the difference between PK and PIKU? Two letters, 'I' and 'U'; I is us and U are them (an extra-terrestrial Aamir Khan). Their CPU is cerebral and our CPU is at the level of abdomen. Or say for vast multitudes the focus is at the abdomen. It would be quite captivating watching the main protagonists PK (of the eponymous movie) and Bhaskar (of Piku fame) sharing their thoughts and respective metabolisms in a spaceship.

Food has a tremendous impact on our system, which we do not quite comprehend. Improper diet first takes a toll on the metabolism and then attacks other organs of the body. Simply put, intake of toxic foods generates repugnant thoughts and results in a weak mind and body.

The human mind is an enigma and a reservoir of potential. But the moot question is how do we tap this potential? The mind is a movie theatre where we script and enact innumerable movies and soap operas.

Technology alone cannot be a substitute for the enormous potential of the mind. It needs to be cultured, harnessed, and harmonized with needs and wants.

We need to distinguish brain from the mind. The brain is an organ that serves as the center of the nervous system in all vertebrate and most invertebrate animals. Only a few invertebrates such as sponges, do not have a brain, diffuse or localized nerve nets are



present instead.

Mind on the other hand is the faculty of consciousness and thoughts. It is an individual's intellect or memory or his attention span or will. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has captured it very succinctly. He says mind is like the sky and thoughts are like clouds. Your thoughts make or mar the progress and development of the mind.

To be happy in life humans need to calm the obdurate and recalcitrant mind. Further keep reminding ourselves that we are blessed, grateful and have abundance in our lives. Life is full of valleys and peaks. It can never be a rising curve or a straight line permanently.

The human mind vacillates between the past and the future. In the past, the mind is regretful and if it is in the future, it is anxious. In either situation the mind is not at peace nor in the present moment and thus remains unhappy.

Incidentally there is a deep connect between the stomach and mind. That is why it is called the gut feeling or the sixth sense. Our solar plexus keeps sending us signals. It depends as to whether we are conscious and wakeful enough to grasp those signals.

We humans can truly celebrate only if we are able to silence our mind. There are techniques to do it and develop a relaxation room or space in our minds and harness the energy so that it does not get enervated. By practicing Suryanamaskars and Padmasadhana as crafted by Gurudev we can enhance our Prana, (chi) or energy levels substantially.

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

New sankalps from the sadhana in Kanyakumari



NARENDRA MODI

Kanyakumari has always been close to Modi's heart; on his recent visit to India's southernmost part, he gets into a pensive mood to reflect on Bharat's future

My dear fellow Indians, the biggest festival of democracy, the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, are concluding today in our nation, the Mother of Democracy. After a three-day spiritual journey in Kanyakumari, I have just boarded the plane for Delhi. Through the day, Kashi and numerous other seats have been in the midst of voting. My mind is filled with so many experiences and emotions... I feel a boundless flow of energy within myself. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections are the first in the Amrit Kaal. I began my campaign a few months ago from Meerut, the land of the First War of Independence of 1857. Since then, I have traversed across the length and breadth of our great nation. The final rally of these elections took me to Hoshiarpur in Punjab, the land of the great Gurus and a land associated with Sant Ravidas Ji. After that, I came to Kanyakumari, at the feet of Maa Bharti. It is natural that the fervour of the elections was echoing in my heart and mind. The multitude of faces seen in rallies and road shows came in front of my eyes. The blessings from our Nari Shakti... the trust, the affection, all of this was a very humbling experience. My eyes were getting moist... I entered into a 'sadhana' (meditative state). And then, the heated political debates, the attacks and counter-attacks, the voices and words of accusations which are so characteristic of an election... they all vanished into a void. A sense of detachment came to grow within me... my mind became completely detached from the external world. Meditation becomes challenging amidst such huge responsibilities, but the land of Kanyakumari and the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda made it effortless. As a candidate myself, I left my campaign in the hands of my beloved people of Kashi and came here.

I am also grateful God for instilling me with these values from birth which I have cherished and tried to live up to. I was also thinking about what Swami Vivekananda must have experienced during his meditation at this very place in Kanyakumari! A part of my meditation was spent in a similar stream of thoughts. Amidst this detachment, amidst the peace and silence, my mind was constantly thinking about the bright future of Bharat, the goals of Bharat. The rising sun at Kanyakumari gave new heights to my thoughts, the vastness of the ocean expanded my ideas, and the expanse of the horizon continuously made me realize the unity, the Oneness, embedded in the depths of the universe. It seemed as if the observations and experiences undertaken in the lap of the Himalayas decades ago were being revived.

Kanyakumari has always been very close to my heart. The Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari was built under the leadership of Shri Eknath Ranade ji. I had the opportunity to travel extensively with Eknath ji. During the construction of this Memorial, I had the opportunity to spend some time in Kanyakumari as well. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari... this is a common identity that is deeply ingrained in the heart of every citizen of the country. This is the 'Shakti Peeth' (seat of Shakti) where Maa Shakti incarnated as Kanya Kumari. At this Southern tip, Maa Shakti performed penance and waited for Bhagwan Shiva, who was residing in the Himalayas at the northernmost parts of Bharat. Kanyakumari is the land of confluences.



The sacred rivers of our country flow into different seas, and here, those very seas converge. And here, we witness another great confluence—the ideological confluence of Bharat! Here, we find the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, a grand statue of Saint Thiruvalluvar, Gandhi Mandapam, and Kamarajar Mani Mandapam. These streams of thought from these stalwarts converge here to form a confluence of national thought. This gives rise to great inspirations for nation-building. This land of Kanyakumari gives an indelible message of unity, especially to any person who doubts Bharat's nationhood and the sense of unity.

For thousands of years, Bharat has been moving forward with this sense of meaningful purpose. Bharat has been a cradle of ideas for thousands of years. We have never considered what we have acquired as our personal wealth or measured it purely by economic or material parameters. Therefore, 'Idam-na-mama' (this is not mine) has become an inherent and natural part of the character of Bharat. Bharat's welfare benefits our planet's journey to progress as well. Take the freedom movement as an example. Bharat gained independence on August 15, 1947. At that time, many countries around the world were under colonial rule. Bharat's independence journey inspired and empowered many of those countries to achieve their own freedom. That same spirit was seen decades later when the world came face to face with the once in a century COVID-19 pandemic. When concerns were raised about the poor and developing countries, Bharat's successful efforts provided courage and assistance to many nations.

Today, Bharat's governance model has become an example for many countries around the world. Empowering 25 crore people to rise above poverty in just 10 years is unprecedented. Innovative practices such as Pro-People Good

Governance, aspirational districts, and aspirational blocks are being discussed globally today. Our efforts, from empowering the poor to last-mile delivery, have inspired the world by prioritising individuals standing at the last rung of society. Bharat's Digital India campaign is now an example for the entire world, showing how we can use technology to empower the poor, bring transparency, and ensure their rights.

Inexpensive data in Bharat is becoming a means of social equality by ensuring the reach of information and services to the poor. The whole world is witnessing and studying the democratization of technology, and major global institutions are advising many countries to adopt elements from our model. Since the success of the G-20, the world has been increasingly envisioning a bigger role for Bharat. Today, Bharat is being acknowledged as a strong and important voice of the Global South. The African Union has become a part of the G-20 group at the initiative of Bharat. This is going to be a crucial turning point for the future of African countries.

The development trajectory of Bharat fills us with pride and glory, but at the same time, it also reminds the 140 crore citizens of their responsibilities. Now, without wasting a single moment, we must step forward towards greater duties and larger goals. We need to dream new dreams, convert them into reality and begin living those dreams.

We must see Bharat's development in a global context, and for this, it is essential that we understand Bharat's internal capabilities. We must acknowledge Bharat's strengths, nurture them, and utilize them for the benefit of the world. In today's global scenario, Bharat's strength as a youthful nation is an opportunity from which we must not look back.

The world of the 21st century is looking towards Bharat with many

hopes. And we will need to make several changes to move forward in the global scenario. We also need to change our traditional thinking regarding reform. Bharat cannot limit reform to just economic reforms. We must move forward in every aspect of life towards the direction of reform. Our reforms should also align with the aspirations of a 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India) by 2047.

We should take pride in every moment that God has blessed us with birth in the land of Bharat. God has chosen us to serve Bharat and fulfil our role in our country's journey towards excellence.

We must redefine our heritage in a modern way while embracing ancient values in a modern context. As a nation, we also need to reassess outdated thinking and beliefs. We need to free our society from the pressure of professional pessimists. We must remember that freedom from negativity is the first step towards achieving success. Success blossoms in the lap of positivity.

My faith, devotion, and belief in the infinite and eternal power of Bharat are growing day by day. Over the past 10 years, I have seen this capability of Bharat grow even more and have experienced it firsthand.

Just as we utilized the fourth and fifth decades of the 20th century to impart a new momentum to the freedom movement, we must lay the foundation for a 'Viksit Bharat' in these 25 years of the 21st century.

Today, we have the same golden opportunity. Let's dedicate the next 25 years solely for the nation. Our efforts will create a strong foundation for the coming generations and the coming centuries, taking Bharat to new heights. Looking at the energy and enthusiasm of the country, I can say that the goal is not far away now. Let us take swift steps... let us come together and create a Viksit Bharat.

(These thoughts were penned by PM Modi on 1st June during his return flight from Kanyakumari to Delhi)



THE RISING SUN AT KANYAKUMARI GAVE NEW HEIGHTS TO MY THOUGHTS, THE VASTNESS OF THE OCEAN EXPANDED MY IDEAS, AND THE EXPANSE OF THE HORIZON CONTINUOUSLY MADE ME REALISE THE UNITY, THE ONENESS, EMBEDDED IN THE DEPTHS OF THE UNIVERSE

Kerala Govt faces backlash over flawed liquor policy

Criticism has arisen over the demand for bar owners to pay ₹2.5 lakh each to circumvent a Government-mandated monthly closure

The demand that all bar owners in the State should pay Rs 2.5 lakh per establishment instead of cancelling a Government order that makes it mandatory for all watering holes to down shutters on the first of every month and restrictions on opening more bar hotels underscore the opinion that it is time for the Kerala Government to come out of liquor business.

The latest controversy about the demand made by the powers that be to the bar owners to pay exorbitant money as a bribe for altering the excise department's laws establishes that the CPI(M)-led LDF and Congress-led UDF are swindling the State alternately, a charge made time and again by Prime Minister Narendra



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Modi during his campaign speeches in the State.

The Government has no business to be in business and is more so in the case of the liquor business. Unlike other States, Kerala and Tamil Nadu follow liquor policies that promote high-level corruption. The Governments in these two States are the monopolies in the liquor trade. The Beverages Corporation of Kerala (BEVCO) and Tamil

Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC), the State-owned entities are the only bodies that can buy and sell liquor. Bar restaurants owned by the private sector should procure the liquor supplied by these two bodies. Long back there were private liquor outlets in these States doing roaring business.

After the "nationalisation" of the liquor business in Kerala, the tippers face severe hardship in getting their daily quota of spirits and they are also forced to consume what the brands that BEVCO 'impose' on them. Earlier, the tippers had the choice of getting their favourite brands and drinking too. After the taking over of the liquor business by the Government, the brands to be

sold in the States are decided by the party in power and there is no transparency in the selection of liquor to be traded through the outlets or restaurants (bars). The liquor manufacturers who pay the ruling parties get the contract and laugh at the banks.

The Government claims that the nationalization is the prelude to the introduction of total prohibition in Kerala. This is a dream that will never materialise unless other States bring in legislation banning liquor. Neighboring Karnataka is a tippler's paradise as the private outlets sell all popular brands patronized by the consumers.

While arrack, the country spirit is banned in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the same is available in the rest of the country

much to the delight of the working class. Those who toil in farmlands from morning to evening need a bit of relaxation after a hard day's work and hence it is not proper on the part of the Government to ban the stuff.

Pinarayi Vijayan, chief minister of Kerala, is on record stating that today is a most nutritious drink and not alcohol. Tamil Nadu has banned toddy tapping forcing the poor workers to rush to TASMAC with their hard-earned wages to buy the spirit for the evening. If arrack is not banned in these States (where spurious arrack is available from bootleggers) the workers need not have spent the day's earnings in State-owned liquor outlets.

The notion that liquor would

imperil health has to go. Many findings have been confirmed through scientific research that a moderate quantity of liquor is good for health. There is a Chinese adage about liquor: "A man takes a drink. The drink takes more drinks. Finally, the drinks take the man". If the authorities could make the man consume fewer drinks, that would be the best solution to alcoholism. But it should not be by killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. We live in an era when Indian-made scotches have beaten the spirits brewed in Scotland and the USA to emerge as their rivals in the global market.

Colombo and suburbs, hardly an hour of air journey from Kochi is a study in contrast. Though there are many liquor

outlets in Sri Lanka, one cannot come across long queues of tippers in front of these shops. Devan Ramachandran, a judge of the Kerala High Court, said recently that the drinkers need much better treatment from the BEVCO outlets. He was drawing the attention of the Government to the plight of tippers who have to wait for hours in the queue braving the scorching sun and heavy downpours to get their daily evening quota. Sunil Kumar, a fellow journalist, said that the Government's stringent and outdated regulations alone are responsible for making people consume more and more liquor.

He says that the decision to down the shutters of liquor outlets on the first day of every month is a regressive

measure as it forces the drinkers to buy an additional bottle in the previous evening to stock for the next day. But what happens is that they consume that extra bottle on the same evening leaving them "high and dry" on the day of shutdown. Let the tippers have the freedom to gulp down their quota.

It is impossible to have total prohibition in the country. Piloos Modi, the veteran parliamentarian said during a debate on prohibition that he could stay away from alcohol for any number of years. But I cannot live even for a minute without the right to consume liquor," Piloos Modi had said. Let better sense prevail.

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

Hezbollah fighters shoot down Israeli drone in Lebanon

AP ■ BEIRUT

The militant Hezbollah group said it shot down an Israeli drone over southern Lebanon and fired rockets at an Israeli military base on Saturday, hours after Israeli drone strikes killed at least one person and wounded several others. Hezbollah said in a statement that its fighters struck the Hermes 900 Kochav drone, saying such aircraft have been targeting militants and civilian homes. The exchange of fire along the Lebanon-Israel border has been intensifying over the past weeks with Israel's military push on Gaza's southern city of Rafah. The Israeli military said a surface-to-air missile was fired toward a drone operating in Lebanese airspace, adding that it was hit and fell in Lebanese territory.

34 taken into custody after pro-Palestinian protest at Brooklyn Museum

New York (AP): New York City police said on Saturday that they took 34 people into custody following a pro-Palestinian protest at the Brooklyn Museum, which reported damage to some artwork and harassment to security staff by demonstrators. Hundreds of protesters marched to the museum on Friday afternoon, set up tents in the lobby and unfurled a "Free Palestine" banner from the building's roof before police moved in to make arrests. New York City police officers tackled and punched some protesters during scuffles that broke out in the crowd outside the museum

while some demonstrators hurled plastic bottles at officers and shouted insults. Other protesters held banners, waved Palestinian flags and chanted boisterously on the steps of the grand Beaux Arts museum, which is the city's second largest. City police said of the 34 people detained, six were arrested and charged with crimes ranging from trespassing to assault. Another 23 were released after receiving tickets or summonses for misdemeanours, including trespassing, making graffiti, damaging property and resisting arrest. Police did not say what happened to the remaining five people.

Museum spokesperson Taylor Maatman said in a statement that the museum closed an hour early because of concerns about people's safety and the art collections. "Unfortunately, there was damage to existing and newly installed artwork on our plaza, and our public safety staff were physically and verbally harassed," Maatman said. The rally started across the street from the Barclays Center, home of the NBA's Brooklyn Nets. Marchers banging drums and chanting then made their way to the museum about a mile away.

Iran's ex-President registers for June 28 presidential election

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran's hard-line former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad registered Sunday as a possible candidate for the presidential election, seeking to regain the country's top political position after a helicopter crash killed the nation's president. The populist former leader's registration puts pressure on Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In office, Ahmadinejad openly challenged the 85-year-old cleric, and his attempt to run in 2021 was barred by authorities. The firebrand, Holocaust-questioning politician's return comes at a time of heightened tensions between Iran and the West over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program, its arming of Russia in its war on Ukraine and its wide-reaching crackdowns on dissent. Associated Press journalists in



Tehran saw Ahmadinejad arrive at the Interior Ministry and begin the registration process. Before his arrival, his supporters chanted and waved Iranian flags. An election is planned June 28 to replace Khamenei's hard-line protégé President Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash in May along with seven other people.

Ahmadinejad previously served two four-year terms from 2005 to 2013. Under Iranian law, he became eligible to run again after four years out of office, but he remains a polarizing figure even among fellow hard-liners. His disputed re-election in 2009 sparked massive "Green Movement" protests and a sweeping crackdown in which thousands of people were detained and dozens were killed. Broad, he became a caricature of Western perceptions of the Islamic Republic's worst attribute, questioning the Holocaust, insisting Iran had no gay or lesbian citizens and hinting Iran could build a nuclear weapon if it chose to do so. But Ahmadinejad remains popular among the poor for his populist efforts and home-building programs. Since leaving office, he's raised his profile via social media and written

widely publicized letters to world leaders. He's also criticized government corruption, though his own administration faced graft allegations and two of his former vice presidents were jailed. Khamenei warned Ahmadinejad in 2017 that his standing for office again would be a "polarized situation" that would be "harmful for the country." Khamenei said nothing during Ahmadinejad's 2021 attempt, when his candidacy was rejected by the 12-member Guardian Council, a panel of clerics and jurists ultimately overseen by Khamenei. That panel has never accepted a woman or anyone calling for radical change to the country's governance. That panel could reject Ahmadinejad again. However, the race to replace Raisi has yet to draw a candidate with clear, overwhelming support from Khamenei.

Parade for Israel in NYC focuses on solidarity

New York (AP): An annual New York City parade for Israel that draws thousands of people is scheduled to hit the streets Sunday with heightened security and a focus on solidarity during the war in Gaza. The parade comes almost eight months after the unprecedented Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, the deadliest in Israel's history. The parade in the past was dubbed "Celebrate Israel," but organizers said the exuberant atmosphere would be paused this year given the war and Israeli hostages still being held in captivity, as well as outbursts of antisemitism worldwide. The parade, now called "Israel Day on Fifth" because of the route along Fifth Avenue from 57th Street to 74th Street in Manhattan, will instead focus on solidarity, strength and resilience, said Mark Treyger, CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council. "This is not a mood of confetti and music," Treyger said. "This is more of

A Israeli airstrike on a house in the coastal village of Adloun killed one woman and wounded several others on Friday evening, the agency reported. Late on Saturday night, Israel's warplanes attacked areas west of the northeastern city of Baalbek, slightly wounding two people and causing material damage, the agency said. Such strikes deep inside Lebanon and far away from the Israeli border have been rare since the latest round of fighting began nearly eight months ago. The Saturday night strike was about 100 kilometres from the Israeli border. Hezbollah began attacking Israeli military posts along the Lebanon-Israel border a day after the Israel-Hamas war broke out on October 7. Since then, tens of thousands of people have been displaced on both sides of the border. Over the past seven months, more than 400 people have been killed in Lebanon, most of them fighters but they also include more than 70 civilians and noncombatants. In Israel, 15 soldiers and 10 civilians have been killed since October.

a mood of unwavering, iron-clad solidarity with hostages to bring them home, and also our unwavering love and pride in our Jewish identity." The parade, which is in its 59th year, kicks off at about 11:30 a.m. Sunday and is expected to draw more than 40,000 participants, including Israeli dignitaries, celebrities and some of the hostages' families. There was never a thought of cancelling the parade this year, Treyger said, despite what he termed an astronomical rise in antisemitism. "This is a moment that we have to meet," he said. But there will be significant security. New York Police Department officials said Friday they plan to implement measures typically used for high-profile events such as New Year's Eve and July 4. That includes drones, K-9 units, bike patrols, fencing and barriers and designated entry points for spectators all along the parade route.

UN development specialist arrives in Haiti to take up PM's post

Miami (AP): A UN development specialist tasked with restoring order to Haiti arrived on Saturday to the Caribbean nation to take up his new post as prime minister. A transitional council seeking to pave the way for an election in Haiti named Garry Conille this week. He replaces interim prime minister Michel Patrick Boisvert, who he met upon arrival on Saturday to the capital, Port-au-Prince, according to a government statement. Conille has been UNICEF's regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean since January 2023 and previously served as Haiti's prime minister from October 2011 to May 2012 under the then president Michel Martelly.



President Joe Biden bikes at Gordons Pond State Park near Rehoboth Beach, Del on Saturday. AP/PTI

Trump's attacks on US justice system after guilty verdict could be useful to autocrats like Putin

AP ■ NEW YORK

After his historic guilty verdict in his hush money case, Donald Trump attacked the US criminal justice system, making unfounded claims of a "rigged" trial that echoed remarks from the Kremlin. "If they can do this to me, they can do this to anyone," Trump said Friday, speaking from his namesake tower in New York on Friday. Thousands of miles away, Russian President Vladimir Putin was probably "rubbing his hands with glee," said Fiona Hill, a former senior White House national security adviser to three US presidents, including Trump. Hill and other analysts say Trump's attacks could be useful to Putin and other autocrats as they look to boost their standing among their

own citizens, potentially sway the upcoming US presidential election in which Trump is the presumptive Republican nominee, and undermine the United States' global influence. Some autocratic countries reacted swiftly in support of Trump. Moscow agreed with Trump's assessment of Thursday's verdict, calling it the "elimination of political rivals by all possible legal or illegal means," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. In September, Putin said the prosecution of Trump was political revenge that "shows the rottenness of the American political system." After the verdict, Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, called Trump a "man of honour" and urged him to "keep on fighting." China's state-owned Global Times newspaper suggested Trump's conviction adds to the

"farical nature" of this year's US presidential election, adding that it will aggravate political extremism and end in "more chaos and social unrest." Putin is especially likely to see the latest turmoil as an opportunity, analysts say. He has long sought to widen divisions in Western societies in an attempt to advance a Russian worldview. Since the invasion of Ukraine, and ahead of crucial elections throughout the West this year, Russia has been accused of carrying out multiple attacks of sabotage and of targeting dissidents abroad to stoke anxieties and sow discord. Moscow was accused of meddling in the 2016 US election that Trump won by creating a troll factory, hacking Hillary Clinton's campaign, spreading fake news and trying to influence Trump-linked offi-

cial. What mischief does he have to make when you have people within the American system itself denigrating it and pulling it down?" Hill said of Putin. Political chaos can benefit autocratic leaders by distracting Washington from key issues, including the war in Ukraine. Russia's goal is to move voices from the "fringes of the political debate to the mainstream," said David Salvo, Managing Director of the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the German Marshall Fund in Washington, DC. The Kremlin does that partly by pushing Russian points of view under the guise of news and social media posts that look like they originate in the West. Salvo noted that disagreements in Congress that delayed an aid package to Ukraine followed a Russian social media campaign aimed at Americans.

S Africa's ANC rejects calls for Ramaphosa's resignation in coalition talks

Cape Town (AP): South Africa's African National Congress party will not consider any demands from possible coalition partners that President Cyril Ramaphosa step down, a top official said Sunday, as the ANC attempted to present a united front after a stinging election result ended its 30-year majority. As South Africa heads for a series of complex talks to form a national coalition government for the first time and establish stability, ANC secretary-general Fikile Mbalula said Ramaphosa would remain as party leader and any demands from others that he resign for talks to go ahead was "a no-go area." "President Ramaphosa is the president of the ANC," Mbalula said in the ANC leadership's first public comments since the landmark election results. "And if you come to us with that demand that Ramaphosa is going to step down as the president, that is

not going to happen." Mbalula said the ANC was open to talks with every other political party in an effort to form a government, but "no political party will dictate terms to us, the ANC. They will not... You come to us with that demand, forget (it)." Mbalula conceded the ANC, which has dominated South African politics since the end of apartheid in 1994, "suffered heavily" in the election but said it was "not booted out." The ANC received just over 40% of votes, falling well short of the majority it has held for all of South Africa's young democracy. It will still be the biggest party by some way. But it needs to talk with others to form a government and to reelect Ramaphosa for a second and final term. South Africa's president is elected by Parliament after national elections. "The results send a clear message to the ANC," Mbalula

said. "We wish to send a message to the people of South Africa: We have heard them." He said the ANC was committed to forming a government that reflects the will of the people and is stable. The new MK Party of former President Jacob Zuma, which won 14% in the election in a surprise showing that makes it the third biggest in parliament, has said Ramaphosa must go as leader of the ANC and the country for it to enter any coalition talks with the ANC. The ANC has many options for coalition partners among South Africa's other parties, including one with the main opposition Democratic Alliance, which won 21% of votes. "We'll talk to everybody," Mbalula said. "We are talking to everybody because the election did not give us outright majority. Talks about talks are in full swing. We are engaged and we are open to engagement."

1 dead, 8 injured in Istanbul building collapse

Istanbul (AP): An apartment building collapsed in the Turkish city of Istanbul on Sunday, killing one person and injuring eight, authorities said. The collapse renewed fears about the resilience of buildings in a city prone to earthquakes. TV images showed firefighters shifting rubble by hand from the flattened five-story building in Kucukcekmece, on the city's European side. Seven people were initially pulled from the debris, including two who were seriously injured, Istanbul Governor Davut Gul said while visiting the scene. His office later said one more injured person was rescued and a body was recovered. The governorship said the 36-year-old structure collapsed at 8:40 am (0540 GMT). The cause was not immediately clear but there was no sign of an explosion or seismic activity. Only the top two floors were being used as residences, with the rest of the building being occupied by businesses. Images from a camera across the street showed passengers waiting to board a public minibus at the time of the collapse narrowly escaped being struck by falling debris. More than 59,000 people were killed last year when a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck parts of southern Türkiye and neighbouring Syria. The disaster highlighted the poor enforcement of building regulations in Türkiye. Istanbul, with an official population of 16 million, lies near the North Anatolian Fault. A 1999 earthquake centred to the south of the city killed at least 18,000 people. The municipality has said there are 200,000 buildings housing 3 million people that are in urgent need of improvement.

China's Chang'e-6 successfully lands on Moon's far side

PTI ■ BEIJING

A Chinese spacecraft successfully touched down on the far side of the Moon on Sunday, in the first endeavour of its kind to collect samples from this rarely explored terrain. The Chang'e-6 landed at the designated landing area at 6:23 am (Beijing Time) in the South Pole-Aitken (SPA) Basin for the first time in human history, the China National Space Administration (CNSA) announced. Chang'e-6 consists of an orbiter, a returner, a lander and an ascender. Since its launch on May 3 this year, it has gone through various stages such as Earth-Moon transfer, near-Moon braking, lunar orbiting and landing descent. The lander-ascender combination separated from the orbiter-returner combination on May 30, the CNSA said. For the powered descent, regarded as the most complex manoeuvre, an autonomous visual obstacle avoidance sys-



tem was used to automatically detect obstacles. A visible light camera selected a comparatively safe landing area based on the brightness and darkness of the lunar surface, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. The Chang'e-6 mission is tasked with collecting and returning samples from the Moon's far side, the first endeavour of its kind. India became the first country to land near the little-explored

lunar south pole region last year when its Chandrayaan-3's lander, carrying the Pragyaan rover successfully landed there. The Chang'e-6 landing site is at an impact crater known as the Apollo Basin, located within the SPA Basin. The choice was made for the Apollo Basin's potential value of scientific exploration, as well as the conditions of the landing area, including communication and telemetry conditions and the flatness of the terrain, Huang Hao, a space expert from the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) said. The terrain on the far side of the Moon is more rugged than the near side, with fewer continuous flat areas Huang told Xinhua. However, the Apollo Basin is relatively flatter than other areas on the far side, which is conducive to landing. The lander is equipped with multiple sensors, including microwave, laser and optical imaging sensors which can measure distance and speed, and identify

obstacles on the lunar surface, Huang said. To prevent interference to optical sensors by lunar dust during landing, the lander is also equipped with gamma-ray sensors to accurately measure the height through particle rays, ensuring that the engine can be shut down on time and the lander can touch down smoothly on the lunar surface, he added. After the landing, the probe is scheduled to complete sampling within two days. It has adopted two methods of Moon sampling, which include using a drill to collect subsurface samples and grabbing samples on the surface with a robotic arm. Due to the Moon's obstruction, the Earth-Moon communication window period on the far side of the Moon, even with the help of the Queqiao-2 relay satellite service, is still shorter than that on the near side. Therefore, the sampling time of Chang'e-6 will be reduced to about 14 hours, compared with the 22 hours used by its predecessor Chang'e-5, the report

said. The CNSA said earlier that the mission is poised to make breakthroughs in key technologies, such as automatic sample collection, take-off and ascent from the far side of the Moon. Meanwhile, the probe will carry out scientific exploration of the landing zone. The CNSA announced that scientific instruments from France, Italy and the European Space Agency/Sweden will be on board the lander of the Chang'e-6 mission and a Pakistani payload on the orbiter. This is the first time China has included an orbiter from its all-weather ally Pakistan in its Moon mission. According to reports from Pakistan quoting the Institute of Space Technology (IST), the satellite ICUBE-Q has been designed and developed by IST in collaboration with Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Pakistan's national space agency Suparco. The Chang'e lunar exploration probe is named after the Chinese mythical Moon goddess.

The Chang'e 5 brought samples from the Moon's near side. Chinese said during the analysis of the samples it was found they contained water in tiny beads embedded in lunar dirt. China also plans to have a lunar station on the Moon in future. A major space power, China in the past successfully launched unmanned missions to the Moon which included landing a rover. China has also sent a rover to Mars and built a space station which is currently in operation. Earlier, China announced plans for a manned lunar landing by 2030. The country's plans include landing astronauts on the Moon by 2030 and building a research base at its south pole - a region believed to contain water ice. Sunday's landing comes as a growing number of countries, including the United States, eye the strategic and scientific benefits of expanded lunar exploration in an increasingly competitive field.

Attacks on infrastructure trigger energy shutdowns in Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine imposed emergency power shutdowns in most of the country on Sunday, a day after Russia unleashed large-scale attacks on energy infrastructure and claimed it made gains in the eastern Donetsk province. The shutdowns were in place in all but three regions of Ukraine following Saturday's drone and missile attack on energy targets that injured at least 19 people.

Ukraine's state-owned power grid operator Ukrenergo said the shutdowns affected both industrial and household consumers.

Sustained Russian attacks on Ukraine's power grid in recent weeks have forced the government to institute nationwide rolling blackouts. Without adequate air defences to counter assaults and allow for repairs, though, the shortages could still worsen as need spikes in late summer and the bitter-cold winter.

Among the most significant recent strikes were an April barrage that damaged Kyiv's largest thermal power plant and a massive attack on May 8 that targeted power generation and transmission facilities in several regions.

Following Saturday's barrage, Ukraine's air force said Sunday that air defences had shot down all 25 drones launched overnight.

Russia claimed Sunday that it had taken control of the village of Umanske in the partially Russian-occupied Donetsk region. Russia's coordinated



A thermal power plant damaged by a Russian missile strike, amid Moscow's attack on Ukraine, at an undisclosed location in the west of the country in May.

new offensive has centred on Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region, but seems to include testing Ukrainian defences in Donetsk farther south, while also launching incursions in the northern Sumy and Chernihiv regions. In Russia, six people were injured in shelling in the city of Shebekino in the Belgorod region bordering Ukraine,

regional Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said Sunday. He also said that a local official, the deputy head of the Korochansky district, had been killed by "detonation of ammunition". He gave no details. In the neighbouring Kursk region, three people were injured Sunday when an explosive device was dropped from a drone,

according to acting regional head Alexey Smirnov. Speaking at Asia's premier security conference in Singapore, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused China on Sunday of helping Russia to disrupt an upcoming Swiss-organised peace conference on the war in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy urges defence officials to attend summit on ending Russia-Ukraine war

AP ■ SINGAPORE

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged a group of top defence officials at Asia's premier security conference on Sunday to attend an upcoming peace summit, saying Ukraine was ready to hear "various proposals and thoughts" on ending the war with Russia.

Zelenskyy told the group of more than 500 delegates from about 40 countries that he was "disappointed" some world leaders had not yet confirmed attendance at the conference in Switzerland in about two weeks.

He did not specify any country by name, but the possible participation of China, Russia's most important ally, has been seen as a key issue. Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun spoke earlier in the day at the Shangri-La conference but he did not appear to be in the room when Zelenskyy made his appeal. Zelenskyy said that Ukraine had 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.

"Time is running out, and the children are growing up in the Putin-land where they are taught to hate their homeland," he said. At the same time, Zelenskyy 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."

The greater participation, the more likely it will be that Russia will have to listen, he said.

"The global majority can ensure with their involvement that what is agreed upon is truly implemented," he said. Zelenskyy said he was later to meet one-on-one with Singapore's prime minister and would urge him to participate in person in the Switzerland talks. "The same goes for the countries in the region," Zelenskyy said through an interpreter. "We truly count on you supporting this summit, and that

you will be present in Switzerland."

Singapore Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen, who shared the stage with Zelenskyy, did not say whether his country's leaders would attend, but did note Singapore had condemned the invasion and provided Ukraine with military ambulances.

"We stand with you, and I think your appearance at this Shangri-La Dialogue is the epitome of what we are all hoping for, a rules-based order that guarantees the security and survival of large nations and small," he said.

Earlier in the day in his own address to the forum, Dong did not specifically mention the Switzerland meetings, but did say "on the Ukraine crisis, China has been promoting peace talks with a responsible attitude."

He added that China had not provided weapons to either side of the conflict.

"We have never done anything to fan the flames," he said. "We stand firmly on the side of peace and dialogue."

South vows 'unbearable' retaliation against N Korea over its launch of trash balloons

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea said Sunday it'll soon take "unbearable" retaliatory steps against North Korea over its launch of trash-carrying balloons across the border and other provocations. In the past week, North Korea floated hundreds of huge balloons to dump rubbish on South Korea, simulated nuclear strikes against its neighbor and allegedly jammed GPS navigation signals in the South in an escalation of animosities between the rivals.

South Korea's national security director Chang Ho-jin said Sunday that top officials at an emergency meeting decided to take "unbearable" measures against North Korea in response to its recent series of provocative acts.

Chang called the North's balloon campaign and its alleged GPS signal jamming "absurd, irrational acts of provocation that a normal country can't



South Korea's national security director Chang Ho-jin said Sunday that top officials at an emergency meeting decided to take "unbearable" measures against North Korea in response to its recent series of provocative acts.

its abysmal human rights situation, world news and K-pop songs. North Korea is extremely sensitive to such broadcasts because most of its 26 million people have no official access to foreign TV and radio programs.

Earlier Sunday, South Korea's military said that more than 700 balloons flown from North Korea were additionally discovered in various parts of South Korea. Tied to the balloons were cigarette butts, scraps of cloth, waste paper and vinyl, but no dangerous substances, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

It was North Korea's second balloon activity in less than a week. Between Tuesday and Wednesday, South Korean officials said they had found about 260 North Korean balloons carrying trash and manure. There have been no reports of major damage in South Korea. North Korea said its balloon floating was in reaction to

South Korean activists flying anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets via their own balloons across the border. North Korea often responds with fury to balloons from South Korea. In 2020, North Korea exploded an empty, South Korean-built liaison office in the North in anger over the South Korean balloon activities.

Experts say North Korea's balloon campaign, reportedly the first of its kind in seven years, is meant to stoke an internal divide in South Korea over its conservative government's tough policy on the North. They say North Korea is also expected to further ramp up tensions ahead of the U.S. presidential election in November. Since 2022, North Korea has sharply increased a pace of weapons tests to build a bigger nuclear arsenal. Last week, it fired a barrage of nuclear-capable weapons into the sea in a drill simulating a preemptive attack on South Korea.

'Pak forces killed 504 terrorists in last 5 months'

Peshawar (PTI) Pakistani authorities have neutralised a total of 504 terrorists in the last five months in the country's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, according to a report issued by the security agencies.

The report, which is a compilation of inputs from country's forces on the operations against the militants, said that the terrorists killed in the last five months includes important commanders of the banned outfits TTP and Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group.

"The Security forces in their hot pursuit against terrorism, mowed down 504 terrorists in first five months of 2024 (January-May) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan Provinces. Important commanders of the banned outfit TTP and Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group were also killed," said the report.

According to the report, over 158 militants have been arrested for allegedly being involved in money extortion, target killings, kidnapping for ransom

and provision of financial assistance to the militants in the same period.

The militants carried out 398 attacks against security forces in which 240 innocent civilians lost their lives and 200 security personnel embraced martyrdom while fighting in the line of duty, said the report.

The security forces and police conducted joint 479 intelligence-based operations. Giving break up of the militants killed in operations, it said 107 militants killed in January, 75 in February, 78 in March, 130 in April and 132 in May.

It said that 253 militants in KPK and 251 in Baluchistan provinces were eliminated in operations. "Southern districts of the KPK remained hot bed of militancy in last 5 months with North Waziristan tribal district on top of the list where 97 militants tried to be followed by Dera Ismail Khan (DI KHAN) where 48 militants assassinated in operations," said the report.

Pakistan's law minister bats for judges from minority communities to join higher judiciary

Lahore (PTI): Pakistan's Law Minister Azam Nazir Tarar has advocated for judges from minority communities to join Pakistan's higher judiciary.

Speaking at the Justice A R Cornelius Conference held here on Saturday, Tarar emphasised the importance of religious freedom and minority rights in Pakistan and expressed his aspiration for judges from minority communities to join the country's higher judiciary, the Express Tribune newspaper reported on Sunday. The minister highlighted that Pakistan's Constitution guarantees complete religious freedom. At the same time, he lamented the decline in religious tolerance post-Afghan war.

Tarar talked about the ongoing efforts to establish a Minority Rights Commission and proposed reserving quotas for minority law officers and legal advisors. Supreme Court Justice Mansoor Ali Shah echoed Tarar's sentiments and advocated for the appointment of minority judges to the higher judiciary. According to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in 2021, there are 96.47 per cent Muslims in the country, followed by 2.14 per cent Hindus, 1.27 per cent Christians, 0.09 per cent Ahmadi Muslims and 0.02 per cent others.



Firefighters battle wind-driven wildfire east of San Francisco

San Francisco (AP): California firefighters aided by aircraft battled a wind-driven wildfire burning Saturday in an area straddling the San Francisco Bay Area and central California, authorities said.

The Corral Fire began burning Saturday near the city of Tracy, 60 miles (96 kilometers) east of San Francisco, and the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in the city of Livermore, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire. Dark plumes of smoke travelled high into the sky over the fire area comprised mostly of grassy hills, where strong winds were expected to continue overnight.

Late Saturday, Cal Fire updated the size of the fire to 15.6 square miles (40.4 square kilometers) with 13% contained, which increased from an earlier report of 13.7 square miles (35.4 square kilometers). Interstate 580, which connects the San Francisco Bay Area to San Joaquin County in central California, was closed in both directions from Corral Hollow Road to Interstate 5 due to the lack of visibility from the smoke, the California Department of Transportation said in a statement.

Cal Fire Santa Clara Unit Chief Baraka Carter said two fire workers were injured, the San Francisco Chronicle reported. The San Joaquin County Office of Emergency Services issued an evacuation order, pinpointing the wildfire in an area east of Interstate 580. Residents between Corral Hollow Road and Tracy Boulevard were ordered to leave their homes, with residents south of Tracy Boulevard told to be prepared for evacuation.

Overnight shooting in Ohio street kills 1, wounds 2 dozen

Akron (US) (AP): An early morning shooting on a street in Ohio killed one person and injured 24 others, some critically, police said.

Police said shots were reported early Sunday just after midnight in the city of Akron, where multiple victims struck by gunfire were reported. Local hospitals told emergency dispatchers soon afterward that people were arriving in their emergency departments with gunshot wounds.

Capt Michael Miller, an Akron police public information officer, said Sunday morning that there were 25 total victims with one deceased. Some of the victims were in critical condition while others had injuries that were not life-threatening, he said. No arrests were immediately reported. Police said the investigation is in its preliminary stages and asked anyone with information to call detectives.

WEWS-TV reported that a street party was happening in the area before the gunfire broke out, and an unnamed witness at the scene told the station that hundreds of people were enjoying themselves with everyone in white T-shirts and "women on top of vehicles dancing."



A scene of a street shooting in Akron, Ohio, where one person was killed and 24 others injured.

Mexico votes in historic elections marred by cartel violence

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

Mexicans vote Sunday in historic elections weighing gender, democracy and populism, as they chart the country's path forward shadowed by cartel violence.

With two women leading the contest, Mexico will likely elect its first female president — a major step in a country long marked by its macho culture. The election is also the biggest in the country's history. More than 20,000 congressional and local positions are up for grabs, according to the National Electoral Institute.

Claudia Sheinbaum, the former mayor of Mexico City, has maintained a comfortable double-digit lead in opinion polls for months. Xóchitl Galvez, an opposition senator and tech entrepreneur, represents a coalition of parties that have had little historically to unite them other than their recent opposition to outgoing President Andrés Manuel



López Obrador. Mexico goes into Sunday's election deeply divided: Friends and relatives no longer talk politics for fear of worsening unbridgeable divides, while drug cartels have split the country into a patchwork quilt

of warring fiefdoms. The atmosphere is literally heating up with a wave of unusual heat, drought, pollution and political violence. STORES OFFER FREE GOODS FOR SUNDA VOTERS Thousands of Mexican

stores are advertising offers of free goods for customers who come in Sunday and show ink on their finger, a security measure to prevent anyone from voting twice. The offers are intended to encourage voting. Some outlets

in the nation's largest convenience store chain, Oxxo, are offering voters a free cup of coffee. The national restaurant chamber said some members will be offering discounts on food or beverage as well.

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION CRITICISES ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES

Mexico's once-autonomous National Human Rights Commission issued an unusual statement criticising electoral authorities. The commission, which has largely followed and supported the policies of outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, claimed on Saturday electoral authorities have not acted forcefully enough against "slander," a term frequently used by López Obrador in reaction to any criticism. Elections in Mexico are run by the independent National Electoral Institute, and the commission is supposed to have no role in the process.

Boeing's first astronaut flight called off at last minute

AP ■ CAPE CANAVERAL

Last-minute computer trouble nixed Saturday's launch attempt for Boeing's first astronaut flight, the latest in a string of delays over the years. Two NASA astronauts, including Indian-origin Sunita Williams, were strapped in the company's Starliner capsule when the countdown automatically was halted at 3 minutes and 50 seconds by the computer system that controls the final minutes before liftoff. With only a split second to take off, there was no time to work the latest problem and the launch was called off. Technicians raced to the pad to help astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams out of the capsule atop the fully fueled Atlas V

rocket at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. Within an hour of the launch abort, the hatch was reopened. The team can't get to the computers to troubleshoot the problem until the rocket is drained of all its fuel, said Tory Bruno, CEO for the rocket maker, United Launch Alliance. Bruno said one of the three redundant computers located near the rocket at the pad was sluggish. All three must work properly to proceed with a launch, he said. Depending on what needs to be fixed, the next launch attempt could be as early as Wednesday. If it doesn't blast off this coming week, then that would be it until mid-June in order to move the rocket off the pad and replace bat-

tonaries. "This is the business that we're in," Boeing's Mark Nappi said. "Everything's got to work perfectly." It was the second launch attempt. The first try on May 6 was delayed for leak checks and rocket repairs. NASA wants a backup to SpaceX, which has been flying astronauts since 2020. Boeing should have launched its first crew around the same time as SpaceX, but its first test flight with no one on board in 2019 was plagued by severe software issues and never made it to the space station. A redo in 2022 fared better, but parachute problems and flammable later caused more delays. A small helium leak in the capsule's



propulsion system last month came on top of a rocket valve issue. More valve trouble cropped up two hours before Saturday's planned liftoff, but the team used a backup circuit to get the ground-equipment valves working to top off the fuel for the rocket's upper stage. Launch controllers were relieved to keep pushing ahead, but the computer system known as the ground launch sequencer ended the effort. "Of course, this is emotionally disappointing," NASA astronaut Mike Fincke, the backup pilot, said from neighboring Kennedy Space Center shortly after the countdown was halted. But he said delays are part of spaceflight. "We're going to have a great launch in our future."

RBI unlikely to cut interest rate on June 7, say experts

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is unlikely to cut the benchmark interest rate at its upcoming monetary policy review meeting, taking place soon after the announcement of the Lok Sabha election results, amid inflation challenges, said experts.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) may also refrain from rate cut as economic growth is picking up, notwithstanding the elevated interest rate of 6.5 per cent (repo) prevailing since February 2023.

The meeting of the Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das headed MPC is scheduled for June 5 to 7. The decision will be announced on June 7 (Friday). Results of the Lok Sabha elections will be announced on June 4.

The central bank last hiked the repo rate to 6.5 per cent in February 2023 and since then it has held the rate at same level in its previous six bi-monthly policies.

If the interest rate remains untouched again on June 7, it would be the eighth time for the RBI to maintain the status quo on the benchmark repo rate.

On expectations from the June policy, Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda, said economic conditions have largely remained unchanged since the last policy. High-frequency indicators like PMI and GST collections do show that growth is on course.

He further said concerns on inflation remain even though the last couple of numbers have come at less than 5 per cent. The ongoing heat wave has affected prices of



vegetables in particular and while the IMD has predicted a normal monsoon, it would be prudent to wait and monitor how it progresses.

“Under these conditions, a status quo on policy rate and stance may be expected. It would be interesting to see, however, if RBI changes forecasts of GDP and inflation for FY25,” Sabnavis opined.

Sanjay Nayyar, President of industry body Assocham, too said the central bank is expected to keep the repo rate unchanged in the ensuing MPC meeting as retail inflation remains above the target of 4 per cent.

“Though inflation has started receding, the macros would

become clearer only after the monsoon season plays out in September. To get a sustainable balance between cyclical consumption-driven growth and inflation, investment growth to propel the supply side...,” he added.

The government has mandated the Reserve Bank to ensure the consumer price index (CPI) based inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

The retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was 4.83 per cent in April this year.

Aditi Nayyar, Chief Economist, ICRA, said the recent inflation data and the outlook for prices of food and commodities had suggested a status quo on the rates and stance in the upcoming June 2024 monetary policy review.

“This has been further

cemented by the higher-than-forecast expansion in the Indian economy in Q4 FY2024, which led to the full year GDP growth printing above 8 per cent. As a result, the likelihood of a stance change in August 2024 followed by a rate cut in October 2024 has eased, unless an abundantly well distributed monsoon quells food prices in a sustainable fashion,” she added.

The MPC is entrusted with the responsibility of deciding the policy repo rate to achieve the inflation target, keeping in mind the objective of growth.

Ranen Banerjee, Partner and Leader Economic Advisory, PwC India, opined that given the uncertainty and risks on the inflation front, commodity prices and oil prices trending higher, the MPC will be constrained to have a status quo on the policy rates.

“There is no urgency on rate action too as the growth is sustaining and the US economic data also suggests that the US Fed will not cut rates before October 2024. The yields have softened without any rate action given the expected lower borrowings by the government from the high dividends from RBI,” he said.

There could however be some action by way of reduction in the CRR given the liquidity challenges, Banerjee added.

Manish Jaiswal, Group COO, Eldeco, also expects the RBI to keep the repo rate steady at the forthcoming monetary policy meeting.

“This policy aims to stabilize the real estate market, make homes more affordable, and sustain growth. Stable home loan rates improve consumer confidence and enable more informed investment decisions. This favourable environment enables us to launch new projects and encourages buyers to invest confidently, thereby driving real estate sector growth and contributing to India’s economic progress,” he said.

The MPC consists of three external members and three officials of the RBI. External members of the rate-setting panel are Shashanka Bhide, Ashima Goyal, and Jayanth R Varma.

In an off-cycle meeting in May 2022, the MPC raised the policy rate by 40 basis points and it was followed by rate hikes of varying sizes, in each of the five subsequent meetings till February 2023. The repo rate was raised by 250 basis points cumulatively between May 2022 and February 2023.



AC makers clock two-fold jump in sales in May amid scorching summer

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A blistering summer has led to an almost two-fold jump in sales of air-conditioners in May even as leading manufacturers have been grappling with delays in installation and replenishing inventories of hot-selling energy-efficient models.

The mercury is hovering above 45 degrees at several places including the national capital, which has been under the grip of a severe heatwave for the past few days. At the same time, AC makers are navigating exceptional demand, recording their best-ever sales in a month so far.

Leading brands like Voltas, LG, Daikin, Panasonic, and Blue Star witnessed robust sales in May and the industry expects an overall growth of 30 to 35 per cent in 2024 compared to their sales of last year.

Voltas recorded a two-fold jump in the sales of residential AC in May and expects the positive momentum to continue in the remaining period of the April-June quarter, said its MD & CEO Pradeep Bakshi.

“As we reflect on May 2024, Voltas has a remarkable surge in sales, showcasing a stupendous volume growth of 100 per cent compared to the same period last year. This milestone is particularly significant as May historically stands as one of the highest contributing month in the AC and cooling products industry,” Bakshi told PTI.

The Tata Group firm is optimistic to achieve 2 million units of AC sales

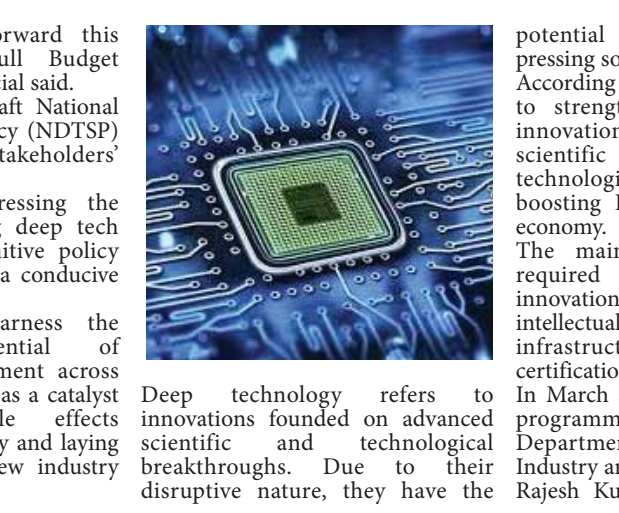
Deep tech startup policy likely in forthcoming Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce and industry ministry may propose a dedicated policy for deep tech startups to promote innovation, for the forthcoming Budget to be announced by the new government, an official said.

Voting for the Lok Sabha polls is over and the counting is scheduled for June 4. The new government is likely to take oath this month. The new government may announce the full Budget for 2024-25 in July.

The official said that startups have to convert their innovation into intellectual property rights and for that extensive R&D is required. The policy is in the final stages and



Deep technology refers to innovations founded on advanced scientific and technological breakthroughs. Due to their disruptive nature, they have the

potential to solve India’s most pressing societal issues.

According to the draft, the priority is to strengthen the research and innovation ecosystem leading to scientific breakthroughs and technological advancements, boosting India’s knowledge-driven economy.

The main elements which are required to promote R&D and innovation include the creation of intellectual property rights, funding, infrastructure, standards and certification, and capacity building.

In March at a Startup Mahakumbh programme, Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajesh Kumar Singh stated, “The Government of India is in the process of creating a separate dedicated deep tech startup policy. The policy paper is now in the final stages of inter-ministerial discussion. We hope to bring it forward soon.”

“We will move towards creating funds of funds. Hopefully, you will see a separate window for deep tech startups,” Singh had said.

The Prime Minister’s Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC), in its 21st meeting on July 7, 2022, recommended the creation of a national consortium and a working group to propose a comprehensive policy framework to address the needs and strengthen the Indian deep tech startup ecosystem.

Properties worth ₹1.17 lakh crore sold by 18 listed realty firms in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Eighteen major listed real estate developers sold properties worth ₹1.17 lakh crore during the last fiscal with Godrej Properties becoming the largest player posting ₹22,527 crore of sales bookings.

Except for a few realty players, all major developers have achieved higher sales bookings in 2023-24 compared to the preceding financial year.

This was largely driven by strong demand for residential properties, especially luxury homes, across major cities.

Many developers clocked record pre-sales in the 2023-24 fiscal, riding on a surge in consumer demand.

According to the data compiled from regulatory filings, eighteen major listed realty firms have reported combined sales bookings of about ₹1,16,635 crore in the 2023-24 fiscal, up 33 per cent from nearly ₹88,000 crore in the preceding year.

Of these combined sales bookings of nearly ₹1.17 lakh crore, bulk of pre-sales came from the residential segment.

Industry experts attribute this surge in sales bookings of major listed players to strong housing demand post-COVID pandemic and the



shifting of demand towards those companies and brands which have better track records of executing projects.

In terms of sales bookings, Godrej Properties has become the largest listed player in the 2023-24 fiscal with pre-sales of ₹22,527 crore.

Prestige Estates Projects, based in Bengaluru, clocked sales bookings of ₹21,040 crore to become the second-largest listed player in terms of sales bookings.

DLF, the country’s largest realty firm in terms of market capitalisation, achieved sales bookings of ₹14,778 crore in the last fiscal year.

Selling properties under the ‘Lodha’ brand, Mumbai-based Macrotech Developers clocked pre-sales of ₹14,520 crore.

Gurugram-based Signature Global, which was listed last year, performed exceedingly well and achieved sales bookings of ₹7,270 crore last fiscal, more than double from the preceding fiscal.

Bengaluru-based firms Sobha Ltd and Brigade Enterprises sold properties worth ₹6,644 crore and ₹6,013 crore during the last fiscal.

Another Bengaluru-based realty company Puravankara Ltd was not far behind and achieved sales bookings of ₹5,914 crore.

Mumbai-based Oberoi Realty, which is in the luxury segment, sold properties worth ₹4,007 crore last fiscal.

Kolte-Patil, which is based in Pune, sold properties worth ₹2,822 crore last fiscal.

Mumbai’s Mahindra Lifespace Developers Ltd and Keystone Realtors (Rustumjee) clocked sales bookings of ₹2,328 crore and ₹2,266 crore, respectively.

Sunteck Realty, headquartered in Mumbai, sold properties worth ₹1,915 crore last fiscal.

Ashiana Housing, based in the national capital, achieved sales bookings of ₹1,798 crore.

Ahmedabad-based Arvind Smartspaces Ltd sold properties worth ₹1,107 crore, while Ajmera Realty & Infrastructure Ltd, with headquarters in Mumbai, reported pre-sales of ₹1,017 crore.

Lucknow-based Eldeco Housing & Industries Ltd sold properties worth ₹388 crore while Mumbai-based Indiabulls Real Estate Ltd ₹280 crore.

Sales booking data of some listed players, like Omaxe, was not available.

Real estate developers, which are not listed on stock exchanges, do not report their quarterly and annual sales bookings.

Tata Realty & Infrastructure Ltd, Adani Realty, Piramal Realty, Hiranandani Group, Embassy Group and K Raheja Group are major players in unlisted space.

Gautam Adani overtakes Ambani to become richest Asian

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gautam Adani has retaken the tag of richest person in Asia after a surge in stock price of the listed companies in his aples-to-airport conglomerate helped him overtake Reliance Industries head Mukesh Ambani.

Adani with a net worth of USD 111 billion is now ranked as the 11th richest in the world, ahead of Ambani whose USD 109 billion wealth placed him at No. 12, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Shares of all Adani Group companies surged on Friday by up to 14 per cent after US brokerage Jefferies put a bullish view on the group that is back to an expansion spree with a planned USD 90 billion capital expenditure over the next decade.

An addition of ₹84,064 crore in market value took the market capitalisation of 10 Adani group listed firms to ₹17.51 lakh crore at the close of trading on Friday. This helped Adani, a first generation entrepreneur and chairman of the namesake conglomerate, overtake Ambani, who is currently on a cruise in Europe for a second, multi-million-dollar pre-wedding celebration of his youngest son Anant.



Adani, 61, had in 2022 become Asia’s richest man after his personal wealth rose even as the global economy suffered a period of slowing growth. But in January 2023, his sprawling USD 21 billion conglomerate that owns many of India’s airports, the nation’s largest private-sector port, the media giant New Delhi Television, largest renewable energy firm, data centres and many other holdings was hit by a damning report by prominent short-seller Hindenburg Research.

Hindenburg alleged Adani’s business empire was built through fraud, sending stock prices of his group crashing by USD 150 billion at its lowest point and him out of the world’s top 20 billionaires.

Ambani, who had to give away his Asia’s richest tag to Adani in 2022, was again the top billionaire.

India receives highest FDI from Singapore in 2023-24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India received the highest foreign direct investment (FDI) from Singapore in 2023-24 even as overseas capital inflows into the country contracted by about 3.5 per cent due to global economic uncertainties, according to the latest government data.

Though FDI from Singapore has dipped by 31.55 per cent to USD 11.77 billion in 2023-24, India has attracted the maximum inflows from that country, the data showed.

During the last fiscal, FDI equity inflows decreased from major countries, including Mauritius, Singapore, the US, the UK, UAE, Cayman Islands, Germany, and Cyprus.

However, investments increased from the Netherlands and Japan.

Since 2018-19, Singapore has been the largest source of such investments for India. In 2017-18, India attracted the



maximum FDI from Mauritius.

According to experts, after the India-Mauritius tax treaty amendment, Singapore has emerged as the preferred jurisdiction for investment in India.

Rumki Majumdar, Economist, Deloitte India, said that as one of the world’s prominent financial hubs, Singapore attracts global investors who want to invest in Asia.

“Recently, India’s initiatives such as amendments by the SEBI to the REIT Regulations 2014 have created new opportunities for Singapore-based investors, which is why India is likely seeing high FDI from Singapore,” Majumdar said.

She also hoped that FDI into India would pick up in the latter half of 2024-25.

Sanjay Malhotra, Senior Advisor, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co, said that Singapore and Mauritius are

jurisdictions used by global investors to route their money into developing economies such as India.

“While there are many geo-economic and political factors why Singapore has gained more prominence in the recent past, the primary reason for it topping the FDI charts for India is tax,” Malhotra said, adding Singapore has a very competitive domestic tax regime and efficient regulatory set-up.

Historically, the double tax avoidance agreement between India and Singapore provided for many beneficial provisions including capital gains exemption in India for investments made from Singapore and even though this provision has been amended, Singapore still is a credible place to create operations with substance to invest further in South-East Asia (including India), he added.

Malhora added that in 2023-24, India witnessed a drop in FDI primarily due to the global uncertainty on account of the disturbances in the Middle-East and Europe.

“Hopefully FDI inflows to India may improve in 2024-25 (from 2023-24) but they may still remain below 2022-23 levels. A stable government post elections surely will help the cause of more FDI into India but I see the global headwinds to be too strong as of now,” he said.

Anindya Ghosh, Partner, INDUSLAW, too said that prior to 2016, Mauritius was a preferred jurisdiction for foreign investment in India due to the significant tax advantage it offered as a low-tax jurisdiction for routing investments.

However, in 2016, India amended its tax treaty with Mauritius to introduce a source-based taxation regime for capital gains, eliminating

the tax advantage and reducing the attractiveness of Mauritius as an investment hub for India.

After the India-Mauritius tax treaty amendment, Singapore has emerged as the preferred jurisdiction for foreign investment in India due to various factors, Ghosh said.

She added that many multinational companies have their regional headquarters or holding companies based in Singapore, making it a convenient location for channelling investments into India. She added that global economic conditions, geopolitical tensions, and domestic policy developments may influence the overall FDI inflows in 2024-25.

FDI equity inflows in India declined 3.49 per cent to USD 44.42 billion in 2023-24 as against USD 46.03 billion in 2022-23.

The total FDI -- which includes equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other capital -- declined marginally by one per cent to USD 70.95 billion during 2023-24 from USD 71.35 billion in 2022-23.

In 2021-22, the country received the highest ever FDI inflows of USD 84.83 billion.

Sectorally, inflows contracted in services, computer software and hardware, trading, telecommunications, automobile, pharma and chemicals.

In contrast, construction (infrastructure) activities, development and power sectors registered a healthy growth in inflows during the period under review.

FDI from Mauritius dipped to USD 7.97 billion in the last fiscal from USD 6.13 billion in 2022-23.

The US is the third largest investor in India in 2023-24 with USD 4.99 billion foreign investments, though it is down from USD 6 billion in 2022-23. It was followed by the Netherlands (USD 4.93 billion), Japan (USD 3.17 billion), the UAE (USD 2.9 billion), UK (USD 1.2 billion), Cyprus (USD 806 million), Germany (USD 505 million), and Cayman Islands (USD 342 million).

As per the data, Mauritius accounts for 25 per cent of the total FDI which India has received during April 2000 to March 2024 (USD 171.84 billion), while Singapore’s share is 24 per cent (USD 159.94 billion). The US accounted for 10 per cent of total overseas investments with USD 65.19 billion during the period.

Foreign investments are crucial for India to overhaul its infrastructure such as ports, airports and highways to push growth.

FDI also helps improve the country’s balance of payments situation and strengthen the rupee value against other global currencies, especially the US dollar.



HEART HEALTHY HABITS HELP REVERSE AGING



According to a study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association (JAMA), adopting heart-healthy behaviours might reverse the aging process in cells i.e. biological aging. **ARCHANA JYOTI** dwells into these findings in the context of India which is witnessing the silent epidemic of cardiovascular diseases

The study has shed light on how heart-healthy behaviors can significantly reduce biological aging, ultimately decreasing the risk of heart disease, stroke, and overall mortality. The study identifies DNA methylation as a crucial mechanism through which cardiovascular health impacts biological aging. The findings hold significance for India where, as per a Lancet study alarming obesity rates have been reported, with 70% of the urban population overweight. India ranks third globally in obesity, following the US and China. Approximately 8 crore Indians are obese, with 1 crore aged 5-19. What is biological aging? The basic idea behind biological aging is that aging occurs as you gradually accumulate damage to various cells and tissues in the body. The poor lifestyle expedites biological aging.

TIPS FOR HEART WELLNESS



Eat better: Follow a healthy, balanced diet consisting of unprocessed, nutrient-rich foods, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts, plant-based proteins, lean animal proteins, skinless poultry, fish, and seafood.

Be more active: Aim for at least

150 minutes of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week.

Quit tobacco: Smoking cessation is always recommended by experts to avoid numerous health problems.

Get healthy sleep: Most adults need 7-9 hours of sleep each night.

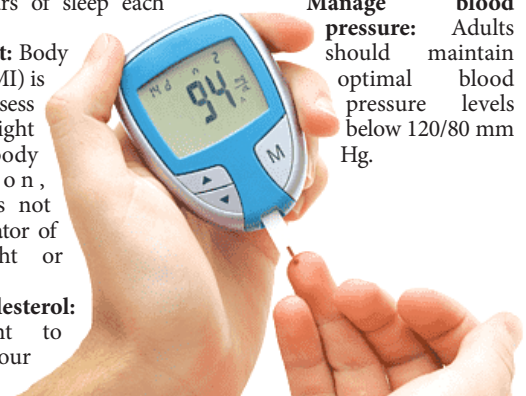
Manage weight: Body mass index (BMI) is often used to assess a person's weight or body composition, though this is not the only indicator of healthy weight or obesity.

Control cholesterol: It's important to manage your

levels of low-density-lipoprotein (LDL or "bad") cholesterol for overall health.

Manage blood sugar: Tracking your levels of hemoglobin A1c can help you keep your blood sugar levels in check.

Manage blood pressure: Adults should maintain optimal blood pressure levels below 120/80 mm Hg.



on DNA methylation. For those with higher genetic risk, this association increased to almost 40%.

MECHANISM OF ACTION

DNA Methylation as a Mediator: The study indicates that DNA methylation could serve as a mediator between heart-healthy behaviors and reduced biological aging. This biological mechanism explains how lifestyle improvements can translate into tangible health benefits, influencing gene expression and promoting better cardiovascular outcomes.

Role of DNA Methylation-Based Biomarkers:

While commercially available DNA methylation-based biological age calculators exist, the study suggests focusing more on improving cardiovascular health through lifestyle changes rather than solely relying on these tools.

CONCLUSION

The research highlights the profound impact of heart-healthy behaviors on biological aging and cardiovascular health. By addressing modifiable lifestyle factors, individuals can significantly reduce their risk of heart disease, stroke, and mortality, promoting healthier aging. The study encourages adopting and maintaining healthy lifestyle practices to enhance longevity and quality of life. As research continues to expand across diverse populations, these findings could inform broader public health strategies and personalized medicine approaches to combat cardiovascular disease and promote overall health.

AUTISM A SPECTRUM OF EXPERIENCES

As autism, a neurological condition, becomes more prevalent, fostering awareness and acceptance is crucial. Early identification, often by age two or three, relies on behavioral assessments. An inclusive society that supports individuals with autism helps them thrive and enriches our communities, says **DR PRAVEEN SUMAN**

In a world that celebrates diversity, it is crucial to deepen our understanding of autism, a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects millions of individuals globally. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is characterized by a range of challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech, and non-verbal communication. With prevalence rates rising, it's more important than ever to foster awareness and acceptance.



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Autism is typically identified in early childhood, often by the age of two or three, though some individuals may receive a diagnosis later, especially if symptoms are less severe. Early signs include delayed speech, difficulties in social interactions, and restricted interests. Diagnosis is based on behavioral assessments and developmental history, as no medical tests like blood tests can diagnose autism.

The term "spectrum" is used because ASD varies widely in its manifestations and severity. Some individuals with autism may require substantial support in their daily lives, while others may live independently and pursue successful careers. Common traits across the spectrum include difficulty in understanding social cues, preference for routines, and sensitivity to sensory stimuli. One of the challenges for individuals with autism and their families is navigating a world designed for neurotypical people. Social situations, education systems, and workplaces often need to adapt to accommodate the unique needs of those with ASD.

There is no cure for autism, but various interventions can help improve the quality of life for those affected. Early intervention, particularly therapies focused on speech, occupational, and behavioral skills, has been shown to significantly benefit children

with autism. Educational support is also crucial. Inclusive education models, where children with autism learn alongside their neurotypical peers, have gained popularity. These models promote social interaction and understanding, benefiting all students involved. For adults with autism, support systems vary widely. Employment programs tailored to the strengths of individuals with ASD, such as those focusing on detail-oriented tasks, have proven successful. Despite advancements, individuals with autism often face social stigma and misunderstanding. Misconceptions can lead to isolation and discrimination. Families frequently encounter financial and emotional burdens due to the cost of therapies, special education, and medical care. Advocacy for better insurance coverage and government support is ongoing.

As our understanding of autism deepens, so too does our appreciation for the diversity of the human experience. By fostering acceptance and providing appropriate support, we can create a more inclusive society where individuals with autism thrive.

PTSD in Women: Unseen Challenges and Critical Health Impacts

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder significantly impacts women's health, presenting unique and often unseen challenges, says **DR JYOTI KAPOOR**, emphasising the importance of recognising these distinct issues to provide effective support and treatment

A complex mental health condition, PTSD can affect anyone who has experienced a traumatic event. However, research has shown that the disorder can have a particularly significant impact on women's health. From heightened risk factors to unique symptom presentations, understanding how PTSD affects women is crucial for providing effective support and treatment.

Gender Disparities in PTSD Prevalence: Studies consistently show that women are more likely than men to experience PTSD in their lifetime. This heightened vulnerability can be attributed to various factors, including the prevalence of traumatic experiences such as sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and childhood abuse, which disproportionately affect women.

Impact on Physical Health: PTSD doesn't just manifest in psychological symptoms; it also takes a toll on physical health. Women with PTSD are more likely



WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

PTSD is a mental health condition that develops following exposure to a traumatic event, either through direct experience, witnessing it, or learning about it happening to a close friend or family member. The symptoms must persist for at least one month and significantly impact the individual's ability to function in daily life or work.



DR. JYOTI KAPOOR
Senior Psychiatrist
Founder-Director, Manasthali

to experience a range of health issues, including chronic pain, cardiovascular problems, gastrointestinal disorders, and autoimmune diseases. The chronic stress associated with PTSD can weaken the immune system and disrupt various bodily functions, contributing to these health complications.

Reproductive Health Challenges: PTSD can intersect with women's

reproductive health in several ways. Research suggests that women with PTSD may have higher rates of menstrual disorders, infertility, and pregnancy complications. Additionally, the stress of living with PTSD can exacerbate symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and menopause.

Increased Risk of Substance Abuse and Self-Harm: Many women with PTSD turn to

substance abuse as a way to cope with their symptoms. Alcohol and drugs may provide temporary relief from distressing thoughts and emotions, but they can exacerbate mental health issues and lead to addiction. Furthermore, women with PTSD are at higher risk of engaging in self-harming behaviors, such as cutting or burning themselves, as a maladaptive coping mechanism.

Relationship and Social Implications: It can strain relationships and social connections, leading to isolation and loneliness. Women with PTSD may struggle to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships due to symptoms such as hypervigilance, avoidance, and emotional numbing. This social withdrawal can further exacerbate feelings of alienation.

Barriers to Treatment: Despite the

significant impact of PTSD on women's health, there are several barriers to accessing effective treatment. Stigma surrounding mental health issues, particularly in certain cultural and societal contexts, may prevent women from seeking help. Additionally, the shortage of specialized services and the high cost of mental health care can pose significant obstacles to treatment access.

Tailored Approaches to Treatment: Effective treatment for PTSD in women requires a tailored approach that addresses the unique biological, psychological, and social factors at play. Psychotherapy, particularly trauma-focused therapies like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), has been shown to be highly effective in reducing PTSD symptoms. Medications such as antidepressants may also be prescribed to alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety commonly associated with PTSD.

Importance of Social Support: Building a strong support network is crucial for women coping with PTSD. Peer support groups, community organizations, and online forums can provide a sense of belonging and validation. Cultivating supportive relationships with friends, family members, and healthcare providers can also play a pivotal role in recovery.

Education and Advocacy: Raising awareness about the impact of PTSD on women's health is essential for reducing stigma and improving access to care. Education campaigns aimed at healthcare providers, policymakers, and the general public can help dispel misconceptions and foster empathy for those living with PTSD. Additionally, advocating for policies that prioritize mental health services and address the root causes of trauma can create a more supportive environment for women seeking treatment.

USA THUMP CANADA BY SEVEN WICKETS

BEGIN TRYST WITH TOP FLIGHT CRICKET IN STYLE

PTI ■ DALLAS

USA announced their arrival in top-flight cricket in spectacular fashion as Aaron Jones introduced himself with a 40-ball 94 in a seven-wicket hammering of Canada in the opening match of the T20 World Cup here.

Batting first, Canada posted 194 for five, but USA turned what could have been a tricky chase into a cruise, completing the task with as many as 14 balls to spare.

America's very own Jones, who was born in Queens, a New York City borough, smashed 10 sixes and four boundaries to make a statement on behalf of the team full of expatriates.

While Jones was without an iota of doubt the star batter of the match, Andries Gous too made an impression with his 65 off 46 balls.

Gous hit seven fours and three sixes during his stay in the middle, after USA lost two wickets with just 42 runs on the board.

It was fitting that Jones finished the chase with a pair of sixes.

Before that, left-arm seamer Kaleem Sana gave Canada the perfect start, dismissing the dangerous Steve Taylor for a duck.

Gous joined skipper Monank



Patel, and the duo tried to up the scoring rate with a flurry of boundaries.

Canada, however, maintained discipline with the ball and soon struck again with Monank's wicket. The batter fell a run-a-ball

16 while trying to take on Dillon Heyliger. A 19-run over against Nikhil Dutta, featuring a six each

for Gous and Aaron Jones, helped pick the USA rate up. Jones continued to attack, hitting Canada skipper Saad

Bin Zafar for a six and a four in the 10th over. The duo continued going for their shots, and pumped up

the USA scoring rate. From 81/2, USA added 45 runs over the next three overs. Jones hit three sixes off Saad in the 13th over, reaching the fastest T20I fifty for his side in the same over, from merely 22 balls.

Gous reached a fifty off his own in the next over, and survived a scare after he hit one straight to Dilpreet off Gordon, but the pacer had bowled a no-ball.

His partner, Jones took advantage of the free hit and hit his eighth six off the next ball. The duo brought up their 100-run stand off merely 45 balls.

Earlier, Canada were off to a decent start with the opening duo of Navneet Dhaliwal and Aaron Johnson (23) putting on 43 runs in just over five overs at the Grand Prairie Stadium.

Mumbai-born left-arm spinner Harmmeet Singh effected the first breakthrough of the tournament proper when he dismissed Johnson in the sixth over.

Pargat Singh, another Canadian player of Indian origin, fell cheaply for five runs when he was run out in the eighth over.

However, Dhaliwal found an able ally in Nicholas Kirton, who got his runs at a brisk pace while hitting three

boundaries and two sixes. Dhaliwal found the fence thrice and cleared it six times during his 66-run partnership with the left-handed Kirton.

After the others have failed, it took former New Zealand player Corey Anderson to break the partnership between Dhaliwal and Kirton as he had the former caught by Jessy Singh at the start of the 15th over.

The dismissal of Dhaliwal did not have any bearing on Canada's game plan thanks to wicketkeeper Shreyas Movva's enterprise. The right-handed batter blazed away to 32 off 16 balls, striking two sixes and as many fours during his cameo to lift Canada's scoring rate.

Dilpreet Bajwa chipped in with a five-ball 11 after Kirton's departure, as Canada posted a challenging total on the board. The USA however, after a wobble initially, completed the task to open their account in their very first match in the World Cup.

The third-wicket stand between Jones and Gous produced 131 runs, laying the foundation of a fine victory on their home turf.

The USA and the West Indies are jointly hosting the T20 showpiece.

Amit Panghal clinches Paris Olympics spot



PTI ■ BANGKOK

Amit Panghal's comeback to the Indian team culminated in an Olympic quota as the world champion silver medalist boxer qualified for the Paris Games with a quarterfinal win in the 2nd Qualification Tournament here on Sunday.

Panghal, India's lone male world championship silver medalist, notched a hard-fought 5-0 win over China's Chuang Liu for a ticket to his second Olympic Games.

He thus joins the quartet of Nishant Dev (71kg), Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg) and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg). All of them have booked Olympic berths.

Panghal had only one shot at making the Paris Olympics and the 2018 Asian Games champion made the most of his opportunity.

The going has been tough for Panghal as he lost his place in the national team on the basis of BFI's evaluation system to world

championship bronze medalist Deepak Borhria, who competed at the earlier two qualifying events.

Since the Tokyo Olympics, the only big-ticket event that the Haryana boxer has competed in was the Commonwealth Games in 2022, where he won the gold medal.

He also emerged victorious at the prestigious Strandja Memorial tournament earlier this year.

The quarterfinal bout began on a rather sedate note with both boxers trying to assess each other. One minute into the bout, Liu went after Panghal. At an height disadvantage, the Indian struggled to find his range, and he did manage to land a couple of scoring shots but didn't engage much.

Trailing 1-4, Panghal, a three-time Asian Championship medalist, changed his strategy. He went on the offensive, beginning the second round on a positive note.

The Chinese boxer retaliated by launching some counterattacking blows but Panghal continued with his punches and ended the round on a high, forcing all five judges to rule in his favour.

In the last three minutes, Liu changed his game and moved closer to Panghal. It was an energy sapping affair as both fighters traded punches, going hammer and tongs at each other. In the end, the former world number one prevailed.

Later in the day, Jaimine Lamboria (57kg) and Sachin Siwah (57kg) will also look to secure Olympic quotas.

Sri Lanka look to muffle big guns in South Africa batting

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Sri Lanka will rely on their exceptionally varied bowling attack to tame the unrestrained batting power of South Africa in their Group D T20 World Cup opener here on Monday. They will be eager to get onto the points table at the earliest too as some tricky teams like Netherlands, Bangladesh and Nepal are clubbed with them in the group.

South Africa have spread all their cards on the table as the team selection indicated the most likely route they would take in this ICC showpiece.

A batting line-up consisting of captain Aiden Markram, wicketkeeper batter Heinrich Klaasen, Quinton de Kock, David Miller and Tristan Stubbs could be a nightmare for any bowling attack.

Klaasen and Stubbs have been in roaring form of late. In this World Cup cycle, the right-hander has averaged 41 and struck runs at 182.

In the IPL 2024 too, Klaasen made 471 runs from 176 matches at a strike rate of 161 for the Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Stubbs has been equally impressive for the Delhi Capitals, amassing 378 runs from 14 matches and he made them at a strike-rate of 190.

Both these gifted power-strikers come in the middle-order when the spinners will be in operation, and to add to Lanka's worries, they are phenomenal against the tweekers, especially Klaasen.

In the run-up to the World Cup, the 32-year-old from Transvaal has averaged 59 against spin and made runs at an eye-watering strike-rate of 191.

It will certainly worry a set of



Lankan spinners such as captain Wanindu Hasaranga (economy 7.42) and Maheesh Theekshana (6.71), both of whom had to battle injuries in the recent past.

So, Sri Lanka, who have not reached the knockouts of a T20 WC after their triumph in 2014, will be eager to try a couple of overs from pacers Matheesha Pathirana and Dilshan Madushanka in that phase when Klaasen and Stubbs are looking for acceleration.

However, Lanka might take heart from the fact that the Proteas went down 0-3 to the West Indies in a recent T20I series at Kingston.

Lanka will also hope that the New York pitch will continue to offer some help to the bowlers as it had happened in Saturday's warm-up match between India and Bangladesh, where a few deliveries did not rise above the ankle and knee level.

Beyond that, the Lankans are also one of the teams that have played a good number of T20Is this year. In 2024, they have series wins over Zimbabwe and Afghanistan at home and Bangladesh away.

In fact, they have won six of the last nine T20Is.

But those external factors will

not have much bearing on a fresh day and Lanka know that their batters too will have to come good against the African rival.

They have the experienced Angelo Mathews, the explosive Kusal Mendis and the rock-solid Dhananjaya de Silva to bank on while the former captain Dasun Shanaka can make a few quick runs down the order.

The SA attack does not have that much variety in their bowling unit as it largely revolves around Kagiso pacer Rabada and left-arm wrist-spinner Tabraiz Shamsi.

Anrich Nortje is still finding his range after coming back from an injury and had an underwhelming IPL where he conceded more than 11 runs an over.

The SA management will hope that the pacer will regain his rhythm in the biggest stage and that will have a major say in avoiding another below-par outing in a World Cup.

SQUAD: South Africa: Aiden Markram (c), Ottiel Baartman, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan

Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs.

Sri Lanka: Wanindu Hasaranga (c), Charith Asalanka, Kusal Mendis, Pathum Nissanka, Kamindu Mendis, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Angelo Mathews, Dasun Shanaka, Dhananjaya De Silva, Maheesh Theekshana, Dunith Wellalage, Dushmantha Chameera, Nuwan Thushara, Matheesha Pathirana, Dilshan Madushanka, Travelling Reserves: Asitha Fernando, Vijayakanth Vijayakanth, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Janith Liyanage.

Match starts at 8 PM IST.

Oman face Namibia

In a Group B clash at Bridgetown, Namibia, a dominant force in the African Qualifiers, will be hoping for a winning start against Oman.

However, it would not be that easy for Namibia as Oman had run them close in April, before conceding the five-match series 2-1.

Hence, Oman, who are making their third appearance in a T20 WC, will be hoping for a better outcome this time.

SQUAD: Oman: Aqib Ilyas (c), Zeeshan Maqsood, Kashyap Prajapati, Pratik Athavale, Ayaan Khan, Shoaib Khan, Mohammad Nadeem, Naseem Khushi, Mehran Khan, Bilal Khan, Rafiullah, Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Shakeel Ahmad, Khalid Kail. Reserves: Jatinder Singh, Samay Shrivastava, Sufyan Mehmood, Jay Odedra.

Namibia: Gerhard Erasmus (c), Zane Green, Michael Van Lingen, Dylan Leicher, Ruben Truempelmann, Jack Brassell, Ben Shikongo, Tangeni Lungameni, Niko Davin, JJ Smit, Jan Frylinck, JP Kotze, David Wiese, Bernard Scholtz, Malan Kruger, PD Bignault.

We have not really nailed down our batting unit: Rohit Sharma

PTI ■ NEW YORK

The Indian team is yet to "nail" its batting line-up for the T20 World Cup and much shouldn't be read into the think tank's decision to send Rishabh Pant at number three in the warm-match against Bangladesh, said skipper Rohit Sharma.

India emerged winners by 60 runs at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, restricting Bangladesh to 122 for nine after posting 182 for five in the allotted 20 overs on Saturday.

On Pant batting at No.3, Rohit said, "Just to give him an opportunity. We have not really nailed down what the batting unit will look like. Even the bowlers did pretty well. All in all happy with how things went." Pant struck a fluent 53 off 32 balls, while Hardik Pandya smashed 40 in 23 deliveries after Suryakumar Yadav helped himself to an 18-ball 31.

"Quite happy with how things went. Pretty much got what we wanted from the game. Like I said at the toss, it was important to get used to the conditions.

"New venue, new ground, drop-in pitch - important to get used to it and we managed pretty well," Rohit said after the match. Left-arm seamer Arshdeep Singh shone with the ball, picking 2/12 in three overs while all-rounder Shivam Dube grabbed 2/13 in three overs.

Asked about Arshdeep, Rohit said, "He has shown us, in whatever games he has played, he has the skills up-front. He



has got a very good skill-set (at the death too). "We saw it today. He bowled pretty well, swung the ball up front, and then bowled one at the backend. We have got 15 good players here. We have to see what the conditions are and then see what combination is best for us."

A little spang at times: David Head coach Rahul Dravid said the pitch was a bit soft and spongy, while lauding the performance of his players.

"It's great to get a good hit-out. Obviously, it looks like a good facility in terms of as quickly as they have put up. The ground is a bit soft and the guys could feel that on the hamstring and the calves.

"So, that's the area we need to ensure that we are working around and ensuring that the guys are looking after does feel a little bit heavy underneath," Dravid said in a video posted by the BCCI.

India ticked multiple boxes during their comfortable win over Bangladesh in the warm-up match, but none bolder than the fifty by Pant which has all but sealed his place as the first-choice wicketkeeper batter in the ICC showpiece.

Dortmund rues missed chances in Champions League final loss

AP ■ LONDON

The scrappy German team missed a slew of big chances against Real Madrid in the Champions League final before losing 2-0 at Wembley Stadium on Saturday.

"You have to use your chances in the final," midfielder Emre Can said. "Unfortunately we didn't."

The loss comes a year after Dortmund failed to clinch the Bundesliga title on the last day of the season, and 11 years after losing to Bayern Munich 2-1 the last time they reached the Champions League title game, also at Wembley.

In 2013, Dortmund coach Edin Terzic was in the stands as a fan of the black-and-yellow.

Last year, Terzic had tears in his eyes after Dortmund missed the

chance to win the Bundesliga when it was held by Mainz to 2-2. On Saturday night, more heartbreak.

"I'm proud but disappointed and empty," Terzic said. "After a Champions League final that we lost, it is quite hard to find the right words."

Karim Adeyemi was in alone on goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois in the 21st minute with Dortmund's yellow-clad, flag-waving fans poised to erupt.

But the winger pushed the ball too far to his left as the 6-foot-6 Courtois used all of his length to get down and reach for the ball at the top of the area. Adeyemi got a left-footed shot off, but Dani Carvajal was there to block it.

Two minutes later, Niclas Fullkrug poked a shot past Courtois but it bounced off the right post and across the goalmouth.



Dortmund had another chance just before the half-hour mark when Adeyemi's shot was saved by Courtois. Fullkrug wasn't able to get a clean header on the rebound.

Marcel Sabitzer forced another save from Courtois in the 41st.

"We managed to escape from the first half, when we could have been losing 2-0 easily," Courtois said. "We never stop and found a way to put it in."

Carvajal's header broke the deadlock in the 74th and Vinicius Junior sealed it seven minutes from time.

Madrid star Jude Bellingham summed it up nicely: "Dortmund had the better of the game, the better chances, but if you don't kill us then we will come back."

Fullkrug had another good chance in the 63rd but his header was straight at Courtois, who punched

it away.

The Germany forward finally did put the ball in the net with a bullet header but he was well offside and the score remained 2-0.

Fullkrug faulted himself for not converting his opportunities and said he feels particularly bad for Marco Reus, who played his final game for Dortmund. Reus is leaving Dortmund after 12 years at the club.

Reus and Mats Hummels were members of the last Dortmund team to make it this far. They lost the 2013 Champions League final to Bayern Munich.

"They told us about the game and how it felt," Fullkrug said. "I'm very sad for them."

Still, he's optimistic for the future. "We can go on very confident. We played against the biggest team - a lot of the biggest teams in Europe