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INDIA'S YOUNG PACERS

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Now, count your blessings on June 4

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The largest festival of democracy concluded on Saturday that began on April 19, with 60 per cent voters turnout after the seventh round of polls on 57 seats, including Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third consecutive term in the Lok Sabha. The voter turnout percentage is likely to be upgraded by the Election Commission.

As per the Election Commission's voter turnout app till 7 pm, West Bengal took back the lead with almost 70 per cent voter turnout, while Bihar continues to be at the lowest with 49.12 per cent voting turnout. Modi's constituency Varanasi recorded 54.83 per cent voting. Jharkhand recorded 68.16 per cent voting, Himachal Pradesh 66.91 per cent, Odisha 62.55 per cent, Punjab 55.58 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 55.53 per cent and Chandigarh 62.80 per cent.

Violence broke out between TMC and BJP supporters in Sandeshkhali in West Bengal, and complaints of EVM glitches and rigging at some booths were lodged. Barring incidents of clashes in Odisha, voting was almost peaceful. The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4. In Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, the counting for the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari

Assembly polls will be held on June 2. Modi also appealed to people to exercise their franchise. "Together, let's make our democracy more vibrant and participative," the Prime Minister wrote on X. "Today is the final phase of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. As 57 seats across 8 States and UTs go to the polls, calling upon the voters to turnout in large numbers and vote. I hope young and women

voters exercise their franchise in record numbers," he said. The counting of votes on June 4 will decide how close the BJP or NDA finishes its target of "Ab ki baar 400 paar". As the exit polls numbers trickle in, multiple pollsters are predicting a return of the Narendra Modi-led NDA Government, winning over 350 seats, with the Opposition's INDIA Bloc managing somewhere between 125 and 150. After

the exit polls result, BJP chief JP Nadda exuded confidence that his party will win more than 370 Lok Sabha seats and the NDA more than 400. After the meeting with its alliance parties, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge claimed INDIA Bloc parties will get more than 295 seats. The BJP is hoping for a historic third term for Modi. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections witnessed how Modi himself used 'Brand Modi', during the campaign

while the Opposition also chanted 'Brand Modi' to corner him. The BJP carried out a sustained campaign in southern States besides its traditional stronghold in the Hindi heartland. The INDIA Bloc also made a determined effort to garner votes to make a dent in BJP's backyard and prevent the saffron party from gaining seats in its citadel.

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Not '400 paar' but NDA head, shoulders ahead

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in all likelihood is set to retain power for a third straight term, as several exit polls on Saturday predicted BJP-led NDA's huge win in the Lok Sabha polls.

The ruling alliance in all likelihood will open its account in Tamil Nadu and Kerala and sweep Karnataka but may see a fall in its tally in States like Bihar, Rajasthan and Haryana, according to these pollsters. The Republic TV-P Marq poll claimed that the ruling alliance will win up to 359 seats and the Opposition INDIA Bloc will bag 154 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha. The Republic TV-Matrise poll gave 353-368 seats to the NDA and 118-133 seats to the Opposition. The Jan Ki Baat poll gave 362-392 seats to the ruling NDA and 141-161 to the Opposition alliance.

The India TV-CNX gave them 371-401 and 109-139 seats respectively, while the corresponding tally predicted by News Nation was 342-378 and 153-169.

A few other exit polls, including those from Axis My India and Today's Chanakya, were yet to forecast the full results till

EXIT POLL 2024



Source	NDA	INDI Alliance	Others
NDTV	361	145	37
India TV	371-401	109-139	28-38
Jan Ki Baat	362-392	141-161	10-20
News Nation	342-378	153-169	21-23
Republic Bharat-Matrise	353-368	118-133	43-48
Republic TV-P MARQ	359	154	30
CNN News 18	355-370	125-140	42-52

filing of the report.

In the 2019 polls, the BJP won 303 seats, while the NDA tally was 353.

Congress had bagged 53 seats and its allies 38. The INDIA Bloc was formed by Opposition parties to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections.

After the seventh and last phase of voting ended on Saturday, Modi exuded confidence that people have voted in record numbers to re-elect the NDA Government and said the "opportunistic INDI

Alliance" failed to strike a chord with the voters who rejected their "regressive politics".

BJP president J P Nadda, however, asserted that people have voted for a capable, powerful, developed and self-reliant India and to put aside appeasement, nepotism and corruption, exuding confidence that his party will win more than 370 Lok Sabha seats and the NDA over 400. The counting of votes will take place on June 4.

Kejriwal back in jail today, decision on bail on June 5

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will have to return to Tihar jail as the Rouse Avenue court reserved the order, observing that the application was for grant of interim bail on medical grounds and not for the extension of the interim bail granted by the Supreme Court.

During the proceedings, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday opposed an application moved by Kejriwal before a court here seeking interim bail in a money laundering case related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam. Special Judge Kaveri Baweja deferred the bail petition after hearing both sides. After the judge reserved the order, Kejriwal's counsel Hariharan urged the court to pass the order on Saturday itself, considering that he has to surrender on Sunday.

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BLOOD SAMPLE SWITCH Mother of Porsche's minor driver arrested

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a fresh arrest in the sensational Porsche hit-and-run case, the Pune police on Saturday took into custody the mother of the minor accused who ran over two techies in an alleged inebriated state, for allegedly giving her blood sample to swap with that of the 17-year-old boy.

Confirming the arrest of the mother of the minor accused, Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar said the accident investigation had revealed that the minor's blood sample was replaced with that of his mother. The sample was replaced to prove that the minor accused was not in a drunken condition at the time of mishap. With the latest development, four members from the family of the minor accused — the 17-year-old boy himself, his father Vishal Agrawal, grandfather Surendra Kumar Agarwal and now the mother — have been arrested ever since the mishap took place in the small hours of May 19.

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Cong assured of 295+ seats for INDIA bloc

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday claimed that INDIA Bloc coalition will register a win over 295 plus Lok Sabha seats in the seven-phase general elections 2024 that concluded on Saturday.

Kharge, along with top leaders of the Bloc including former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, met at the residence of Congress president to discuss their strategy for the counting of votes on June 4. "INDIA Bloc will get a big majority, we have a people's survey with us," Kharge said after the Opposition meeting. He said the parties have also sought time from the Election Commission of India on Sunday for steps to be taken during counting of votes besides having conveyed their workers not to leave the counting hall till all formalities are over on June 4. Senior leaders of the Congress, Samajwadi Party,



Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, CPI(M)'s Sitaram Yechury, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Sanjay Singh, CPI's D Raja during the INDIA Bloc's meeting in New Delhi on Friday

CPI-M, CPI, DMK, JMM, AAP, RJD, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharad Pawar) held discussions, even as the last phase of polling was underway. Opposition leaders who attended the meeting included Sharad Pawar, Akhilesh Yadav, Tejashwi Yadav, Anil Desai, Sitaram

Yechury, Arvind Kejriwal, Bhagwat Mann, Sanjay Singh and Raghav Chadha, Champai Soren, Kalpana Soren, TR Baalu, Farooq Abdullah, D Raja and Mukesh Sahani. DMK was represented by party treasurer

and leader of DMK's Parliamentary Party, Thiru. T.R. Baalu.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was also present in the meeting, said INDIA Bloc is getting 295+ seats and the BJP will win around 220 seats and the

NDA Bloc will win 235 seats. "INDIA alliance will form a strong and stable Government on its own. (The PM face) will be decided on June 4..." said Kejriwal who formed an alliance with Congress elsewhere including Delhi except for Punjab where the parties fought against each other.

Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav said in Uttar Pradesh, all seats of the BJP will be lost and the INDIA Bloc will win the most seats. "There was an earthquake of unemployment, price rise, GST, CBI, ED and Income Tax. All of these earthquakes will end," Yadav said after the same meeting. While former Bihar Dy CM and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav too exuded confidence of securing 295+ in the Lok Sabha polls. "INDIA (alliance) is winning. We will decide later (on PM's face)... Their (BJP's) film of '400 paar' became a flop in the first phase itself," said Tejashwi.

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THE PIONEER REPORTS FROM GROUND ZERO

UTTAR PRADESH

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW

An estimated 55.60 per cent voter turnout was recorded till 6 pm in the seventh and final phase of Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh on Saturday. Poll officials said the turnout figure could increase as data was being compiled. The Election Commission of India will release the final data of voting by 5 pm on Sunday.

Voting ended at 6 pm sealing the fate of 144 candidates in 13 constituencies of the state, including Varanasi, from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third consecutive term in the Lok Sabha. As voting concluded in the Lok Sabha elections on Saturday, Uttar Pradesh will be in focus. The outcome in UP will be key to the '400 Paar' target the Bharatiya Janata Party has set for the National Democratic Alliance's return. The bypoll for the Duddhi (ST) assembly constituency



in Sonbhadra district was also held on Saturday where 54.48 per cent voter turnout was recorded. Six candidates are contesting from the Duddhi assembly seat that fell vacant after BJP MLA Ram Dular's disqualification following his conviction in a rape case. UP sends 80 members to the lower house of Parliament and the polling was spread over all seven phases of the Lok Sabha elections.

Continued on Page 2

HIMACHAL PRADESH

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SHIMLA

A voter turnout of 66.56 per cent was recorded till 5 pm on Saturday in the four Lok Sabha constituencies of Himachal Pradesh where polling was held in the last phase of the general election, officials said here. They said the Kangra parliamentary seat recorded 64.07 per cent polling, Mandi 69.07 per cent, Hamirpur 65.90 per cent and the Shimla (SC) seat 67.50 per cent. Of the six Assembly constituencies where bypolls are being held simultaneously, Dharamshala recorded a turnout of 66.27 per cent, Lahaul and Spiti 73.72 per cent, Sujapur 63 per cent, Barsar 50 per cent, Gagret 68.28 per cent and Kutlehar 71.40 per cent.

The BJP has filed a complaint against Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu with the chief electoral officer of Himachal Pradesh alleging a violation of the model code of conduct. The complaint said Sukhu wore a scarf of the National Students' Union of India - the student wing of the Congress - while voting in Nadaun which was objectionable and demanded action against the CM and the election agent. In Chamba district's Churah subdivision, residents of the Makhana-Chachul area falling under the Sanval gram panchayat and Juri under Chadra Gram Panchayat boycotted the Lok Sabha polls over road connectivity.

PUNJAB

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab saw a voter turnout of 55.20 per cent till 5 pm for the 13 Lok Sabha constituencies while polling remained peaceful on Saturday, said the officials.

In the lone parliamentary seat of Chandigarh, the voter turnout was at 62.80 per cent. The polling came to an end at 6 pm but the turnout figure will rise as there were several people in queues waiting for their turn to cast votes. In 2019, voter turnout in Punjab was 65.96 per cent and 70.62 per cent in the Union Territory (UT) Chandigarh. Among the 13 Lok Sabha constituencies in Punjab, Bathinda recorded a turnout of 59.25, followed by Gurdaspur with 58.34 per cent, according to the Election Commission data.

Among the prominent faces in the fray were BJP nominee and four-time MP Preet Kaur, who is seeking re-election from the Patiala parliamentary constituency; and Harsimrat Badal, a three-time MP; and BJP's Parampal Kaur Sidhu, a former IAS officer, who are trying their luck from Bathinda. Former Chief Minister and Congress candidate Charanjit Singh Channi and BJP nominee Sushil Rinku were in the fray from the Jalandhar reserved seat.

ODISHA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESWAR

Barring a few incidents of clashes, polling was peaceful in six Lok Sabha constituencies and 42 Assembly segments in Odisha with a voter turnout of over 62 per cent recorded till 5 pm on Saturday, an EC official said.

Sixty-six candidates are in the fray in the Lok Sabha seats, while 394 nominees are contesting the Assembly segments in the fourth and last phase of simultaneous polls in the eastern State. Key candidates in this phase include Odisha Assembly Speaker Pramila Mallik, Government Chief Whip Prashant Kumar Mudli, and State Ministers — Sudam Marndi, Ashwini Patra, Pritiranj Ghadai, Atanu S Nayak, Pratap Deb and T K Behera.

Four sitting MPs — Pratap Sarangi from Balasore, Manju Lata Mandal from Bhadrak, Sarmistha Sethi from Jajpur and Rajashree Mallick from Jagatsinghpur — are in the fray in their respective seats. A polling official and a voter died of suspected heatstroke in the State, he said. Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) NB Dhal said, "Polling was peaceful in 10,882 booths, barring a few reports of EVM glitches, which were resolved."

WEST BENGAL

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ DIAMOND HARBOUR/BHANGAR/KOLKATA

Farce is a small word to express what happened at Diamond Harbour in the name of elections, said BJP and CPI(M) candidates Abhijit Das and Pratik ur Rehman contesting against Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee even as reports of rampant violence surfaced in from most of the nine constituencies that went to polls in the seventh and final phase of polling on Saturday. Rate and frequency of intermittent violence and alleged booth capture was such that by 2 pm the Election Commission of India was flooded with about 1,800 complaints with most number of them 450 each pouring in from Diamond Harbour and Dum Dum alone. The EC sources said they would consider re-polling some booths after going through the complaints. Amidst stray violence, allegations and counter



allegations, Bengal witnessed comparatively sluggish polling that stopped at 69.9 per cent at 5 pm. The EC sources however said the polling percentage could go up by a few percentage points till 6 pm as there were long queues of voters outside the polling booths in many places. Reports trickling in showed about 70.41 per cent voters had cast their votes at elite Jadavpur whereas 67.60 per cent voters had exercised their franchise at Dum Dum while 72.87 per cent people had voted at Diamond Harbour.

Continued on Page 2

Police work out Wazirganj loot case, arrest two

PNS ■ LUCKNOW



With the arrest of two miscreants, including a former staff of a grocery store, on Saturday, the Wazirganj police claimed to have solved the loot of Rs 3.5 lakh from grocer Krishna Gopal Verma in Wazirganj locality on May 26. The accused, identified as Naveen Bajpai of Madaion and Gopal Dwivedi of Kundari Rakabganj, were arrested on a tip-off from an informer who helped the joint team comprising Wazirganj police and Crime Branch of the Lucknow Police Commissionerate in locating the miscreants. Naveen Bajpai, who was driving a scooter on the day of incident with one of his aides riding pillion, had pushed down the victim on the night of May 26 at Nehru Crossing in the area. Naveen's accomplice Gopal Dwivedi had worked at the shop of the victim for three years before he quit the job. Giving details of the arrests, police said Gopal Dwivedi pro-

vided information about the victim and his daily sales. Gopal met Naveen at a place in Naka during a drink session organised by one of their aides and told him that the daily sales at Krishna Gopal Verma's shop ranged between Rs 3 and Rs 5 lakh per day. Naveen, in his confession, told police that he needed money to meet his daily needs and he asked Gopal to suggest some target to loot around Rs 5 lakh. Gopal then told him about the victim who was in the habit of shutting down his shop late in the night and returning home on a scooter. According to Naveen's disclosures, he stole a two-wheeler and detached its registration number plate to cover his trail. On the fateful day, he and his aides pushed down the victim after Gopal Dwivedi identified

him. The victim was riding a scooter and he had hung the bag containing cash on the handle of the scooter. On reaching Nehru Crossing, they pushed the victim down and fled with the bag containing the cash. The police had prepared a list of people who knew the victim's movement at night and the money he would be carrying with him. The police also collected details of the staff who were working at the victim's shop and who had worked in the past 3-4 years and their whereabouts. Out of these, Gopal came under the radar and the police started encircling him. After doing sufficient ground work the police laid their hands on Gopal and then on Naveen. The police recovered over Rs 1.22 lakh in cash and the scooter which Naveen had stolen from Aliganj. The police said Naveen had taken Rs 1 lakh out of the looted cash while Gopal got Rs 25,000 as his share for sharing information about the victim and his daily sale.

Man drowns in bid to save himself from stray dogs

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A pack of stray dogs chased a 25-year-old Andhra Pradesh native staying at a rented accommodation in Ashiyana in the wee hours on Saturday, forcing the panicky youth to jump into a pond in which he drowned. This incident is one among the long list of dog menace incidents which have claimed lives of several persons or injured them in the city. Interestingly, the Lucknow Municipal Corporation's drive to catch the stray dogs and sterilise them to lower the risk of dog bites is on the back burner. As per reports, the victim, Qasim, along with his brother Qasim Peera Sheikh, was staying at a rented accommodation in Aurangabad Jageer locality and was mentally unstable. Around 4 am, Qasim went out of the room after the power supply disrupted as he felt uneasiness and suffocation, as per his brother Sheikh. Sheikh said Qasim went out of the room around 4 am and began to stroll on the road. It was then that a pack of dogs came behind him and started

barking at him. The canines became more aggressive when they heard Qasim screaming and they pounced at him. To save himself, Qasim ran fast and did not see the pond in the way ahead and fell in it. Sheikh said Qasim did not know swimming and he began drowning. "The residents who had gathered at the spot attempted to save him but in vain. They attempted every trick but could not save him from drowning," he said. Meanwhile, a grocer died of burns after the compressor of a fridge in his shop in Bakshi Ka Talab police station area exploded and the refrigerator caught fire which engulfed the shop. As per reports, 55-year-old Shiv Bahal Maurya was at his shop when the compressor of the fridge exploded in the afternoon. The fridge caught fire which soon engulfed the shop. As Maurya attempted to douse the fire, he suffered burns and was pronounced dead at a hospital.

TWO WOMEN DUPED

Three miscreants tricked a woman and changed her ATM

card in Sarojinagar police station area, taking advantage of her lack of knowledge about using digital finance cards. As per reports, the woman, Aneeta of Awadh Vihar Colony, had gone to generate a new PIN for the ATM card issued to her after she opened a new bank account. "I went to an ATM booth at the airport crossing on Friday and followed the computerised instructions as directed after inserting the ATM card. I tried to withdraw money but in vain. Three youths were present inside the booth and they tricked and changed my ATM card. When I reached home I found I had another ATM card which was in the name of another woman," she said. She said she filed a complaint with the police. She said she got a message about deduction of over Rs 20,000 from her bank account. The woman said the security guard had allowed the youths to enter the booth ignoring the norms on entry of a person in the booth in view of security. Police registered a case and started an investigation. Meanwhile, a woman was duped of over Rs 50,000 in the

CRPF officials celebrate birthday of fallen colleague's son in Meerut

Meerut (PTI): A group of CRPF officials celebrated the birthday of the son of a constable of the paramilitary force who was killed during an anti-Naxal operation in 2014. Officials from group centre Noida visited the home of constable Neeraj Kumar in Meerut on Friday with gifts for his son Chirag who was not born when his father died, a senior CRPF officer told PTI. Chirag turned ten on May 31, he said. The visiting officials also conveyed gratitude to the family of Kumar who was killed in

action on March 11, 2014 in Chhattisgarh. They handed over a gift to the birthday boy who turned 10, he said. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is the country's largest paramilitary force with about 3.25 lakh personnel in its ranks and it is deployed for undertaking anti-Maoist operations in various states affected by left-wing extremism for the last two decades. This initiative is part of the forces' efforts to express solidarity with the families of its heroes and brave troops, the officer said.

name of awarding her gifts as her name had figured in the lucky winners of a company's promotional scheme. The woman, Anmol Ahuja of Sindhu Nagar, said she got a call from an unidentified woman who introduced herself as a representative of a company and told her that her name

was in the list of lucky winners. The woman then told the victim that she would be awarded gifts if she did online shopping of goods as per her suggestion and this way made her transfer over Rs 50,000 in a bank account provided to her. Police registered a case and started an investigation.



NOTICE

Lost original allotment letter dated 03/07/2014 and builder Bayer agreement dated 27/06/2016 and 17 receipt as per affidavit dated 31/05/2024. Of flat no 401 on forth floor situated in tower omaxe palace A T1 the palace Lucknow having carpet area 92.34 sqmt situated at sector 7 Ahmamau Lucknow belonging to Sri Mukesh Khandelwal s/o Sri Shyam kumar Khandelwal and mrs Seema Khandelwal w/o Mukesh Khandelwal both R/O New obri Gaytri Nagar Vikas bhawan road Barabanki 225001

NOTICE

To be informed that my daughter RUCHI SINGH high school certificate No TT-80172105 and Marksheets No TT-40172139 passing year 2021 and intermediate certificate No BN-9007392 & marksheet No BG-90072609, passing year 2023 for CISCE Board. My name is wrongly mentioned KRISHAN KUMAR SINGH whereas my correct name is KRISHNA KUMAR SINGH all future purposes. Krishna Kumar Singh s/o Palak Dhari Singh R/o-547KA/1/88/01, Devpur Shivpuri Rajajipuram Lucknow.

NOTICE

"Smt. Radha Tripathi W/o Ashutosh Tripathi R/o H.No.-128/539 Block-Y Kidwai Nagar Kanpur Nagar has resident. And she is owner of H.No./Plot No.-494, Block-Y-1, Yojana-02 Kidwai Nagar Kanpur Nagar. Area 356.00 Sq.Yards or 297.66 Sq.Mtr. of Original Sale Deed Doc. No.-14776 dated 11/12/2020 have missed on the way and which use the above miss Document will be illegal."

NOTICE

I Amrendra Bahadur Singh (service no. -2890871M) F/o Shalini Singh, Divyanshi Singh, Krishna Bahadur Singh vill-Shivpur post-Gahrouti dist-Raebareilly- 229202. Solemnly declare that My daughter's and son name written wrong in my army discharge book 1.shalini singh correct name is-shalini Singh,2 Divyanshi correct name is-Divyanshi Singh,3 Krishan Bahadur singh correct name is-Krishna Bahadur Singh.



CHANGE OF NAME

I Abhishek Pandey So Ashok Kumar Pandey R/o -N9/87-D 78 Jankinagar Colony Kakramatta Varanasi Uttar-Pradesh-221106 have changed my name to Abhishek Pandey Pandey. PD(493)A I Nain Yadav D/o Asha Ram Yadav R/o -2/12 Vipul Khand Lucknow Gotinganar Uttar Pradesh-226010, have changed my name to Naina Yadav. PD(494)A

Lioness gives birth to 4 cubs

Etawah: A lioness gave birth to four cubs at Etawah Lion Safari here, officials said. Director of the park Anil Kumar Patel said a lioness named 'Neeraj' gave birth to four healthy cubs. With the birth of the four cubs, the number of lions in the park has increased to 16. Deputy Director Dr Vinay Kumar Singh said that the health and behaviour of the lioness and the newborn cubs are being constantly monitored. Coolers and water sprinkling are being used to protect them from the scorching heat.

Rapdi being developed as new ecotourism destination in Firozabad

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department has developed a new ecotourism destination at Firozabad, a place best known for the craft of glass bangles. UP Tourism Director Prakhar Mishra, while giving the details here on Saturday, said that Rapdi, a piece of barren land on the banks of river Yamuna, had been developed as an ecotourism destination. "This destination has developed really well and the good thing about this is that the entire destination has been created by us on the forest land.

Earlier nobody would visit the area," he said. Mishra said that they had created a boating facility, butterfly garden, cafeteria, two cottages and the landscaping of the entire riverfront had been done so that people from Firozabad and nearby places could visit this area. "It is only five minutes' drive from Agra-Lucknow Expressway. Someone who is travelling from Lucknow to Agra has to simply take a break at this point," he added. The Tourism director said that Rapdi was emerging as a very calm and quiet destination and that they had not integrated the

unique cultural aspects of Firozabad in the destination as of now. "This destination has emerged after the development of the Eco-Tourism Development Board which functions to bring the UP Tourism department and Forest department in sync. In this case the land belongs to the Forest department and it has been developed by the Tourism department," he added. When pointed out that there were many eco-tourism sites in the state which were not drawing tourists so how would they manage to bring tourists to this newly-created site, Mishra said,

"There are two aspects when we talk about eco-tourism projects, the local population can help destinations to a certain extent. However, when it comes to attracting foreign tourists or tourists from different states, it requires a bigger pull factor and a couple of more services as in tiger reserves and sanctuaries. Different tourist destinations have different objectives. But that does not deter us from creating detour kind of destinations at different places because at the end of the day it creates an opportunity on a minor expenditure to give work to the local population and the expectation is that these destinations

will add on to the itinerary of local hoteliers." Officials point out that Firozabad is a historical city with many places of faith. Located in the centre of the city is the Shahi Masjid which is a living example of Mughal period history. The construction of this mosque started in 1648 AD, and it took about five years to be completed. It was built by Mughal ruler Shahjahan. Forest dept to introduce Malabar neem species The Forest department is all set to introduce a new species in its agro-forestry division called

the Malabar neem known by the scientific name of Melia dubia. A senior forest official said here on Saturday that they would spread awareness about this species on the World Environment Day on June 5. He said that they had brought the seeds of the plant from Karnataka and Forest Research Institute to their forest nurseries. "Eucalyptus is not favoured by the higher authorities of the state as they feel that these trees draw a lot of water from the ground hence the Malabar Neem comes as a replacement for the eucalyptus," he added.

UTTAR PRADESH

From Page 1 Besides Varanasi, the other constituencies where polling took place on Saturday were Maharajganj, Gorakhpur, Kushinagar, Deoria, Bangsaon (SC), Ghosi, Salempur, Ballia, Ghazipur, Chandauli, Mirzapur and Robertsganj (SC) spread across 11 districts. UP Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said here on Saturday that by 5 pm, 58.66 per cent voting was recorded in Maharajganj, 52.53 per cent in Gorakhpur, 56.04 per cent in Kushinagar, 54.13 per cent in

Deoria, 50.06 per cent in Bangsaon (SC), 53.19 per cent in Ghosi, 50.21 per cent in Salempur, 50.56 per cent in Ballia, 53.53 per cent in Ghazipur, 58.19 per cent in Chandauli, 54.58 per cent in Varanasi, 55.83 per cent in Mirzapur and 54.25 per cent in Robertsganj (ST). Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath exercised his franchise in Gorakhpur, while Union minister Anupriya Patel, a candidate from Mirzapur, cast her vote in Mirzapur. UP's chief electoral officer said the polling was peaceful across 13 Lok Sabha constituencies and no untoward incident was reported from anywhere. He said 236

complaints relating to polling were received and they were immediately disposed of. He said the maximum 41 complaints were received from Ballia constituency, followed by 34 in Deoria, and 28 each in Varanasi and Ghazipur. He said on different social media platforms 180 complaints were received. The CEO said for effective monitoring of the polling process, the Election Commission of India had made arrangements for webcasting at 13,092 polling booths while videography was done at 2,304 polling booths. Rinwa said one voter, Rambachan Chauhan, died at polling booth number 257 in

assembly segment of Ballia Lok Sabha constituency. The 70-year-old man collapsed and died at the polling booth set up in a primary school in Chak Bahuddin village. Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Sikandarpur, Ravi Kumar, said Rambachan Chauhan fell ill before he could join the queue of voters at the booth. Local residents claimed that he experienced dizziness while standing in the queue and fainted. According to reports, voters in Ballia's Math Dhajju Giri village boycotted the polls over their demand for road connectivity and electricity supply. Local SHO Dharamveer Singh said there are about 900 voters in the village.

In Rasulpur village of Ballia, several voters boycotted the Lok Sabha polls and raised their demand for an underpass, saying they were facing great difficulties in its absence. In Maharajganj district, voters were given a sapling each at the polling centre set up at a primary school in Nagar Panchayat Chowk. In the seventh phase of Lok Sabha elections, Uttar Pradesh is witnessing direct contest between the BJP-led NDA and INDIA Bloc members Samajwadi Party and Congress. Among the prominent Lok Sabha seats in this phase are Modi's Varanasi, Gorakhpur, which has

been represented by UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath five times, and Chandauli, Maharajganj and Mirzapur from where Union ministers Mahendra Nath Pandey, Pankaj Chaudhary and Anupriya Patel are contesting. Taking a swipe at the opposition bloc meeting at Delhi on Saturday Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said, "INDI Alliance will hold its final meeting today. After the election, everyone will blame each other; they will make fun of each other. EVM (electronic voting machine) accusers will make new accusations. Those who patronise the mafia should not be talking about this."

Now, count your blessings on...

From Page 1 Data showed highest polling of 76.56 per cent was registered in West Bengal's Basirhat, followed by Mathurapur (74.13), Jaynagar (73.44), Diamond Harbour (72.87), Barasat (71.80), Jadavpur (70.41), Dum Dum (67.60), Kolkata Dakshin (60.88) and Kolkata Uttar (59.23). Voter turnout in Baranagar bypoll till 5 pm was 66.70 per cent. The polling percentage in UP till 7 pm recorded at Ballia 50.56, Bangsaon 50.06, Chandauli 58.19, Deoria 54.13, Ghazipur 53.53, Ghosi 53.19, Gorakhpur 52.53,

Kushinagar 56.04, Maharajganj 58.66, Mirzapur 55.83, Robertsganj 54.25, Salempur 50.21 and Varanasi 54.83. In Odisha, the Jagatsinghpur Lok Sabha seat recorded the highest voter turnout of 65.93 per cent, followed by Mayurbhanj (64.17), Jajpur (62.92), Kendrapara (62.02), Balasore (61.91) and Bhadrak (58.21). In Himachal Pradesh, highest polling of 69.47 per cent was registered in Mandi, followed by Shimla 67.61 per cent, while Kangra recorded lowest at 64.92 per cent in Punjab, highest polling of 60.84 per cent was registered in

Bathinda, followed by Gurdaspur 58.56 per cent and lowest 50.33 per cent in Amritsar. The poll body said Jammu and Kashmir shone bright with a voter turnout of 58.58 per cent which is highest in the last 35 years. 102 villages in LWE affected Bastar also had polling stations in their villages and saw unprecedented voting. The EC on Saturday said it was "deeply humbled" by the voters who made it to polling stations overcoming many challenges and dilemmas they might have. The commission's remarks came after the votes were cast for

the seventh and final phase of the Lok Sabha elections which were announced on March 16. The first phase was held on April 19. "Indian voters have given their most cherished right to vote for the Constitution of the 18th Lok Sabha. Indian democracy and Indian elections have again done the magic. The great Indian voters, irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, socio-economic and educational background have done it once again," the poll watchdog said in a statement. The real winner, EC said, is the Indian voter.

PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti did not attend the meeting due to some medical reasons in family. Interestingly a day after the Congress announced not to participate in the exit poll debates, Kharage said the members of INDIA Bloc decided in the meeting to participate in the debates on television. Congress's media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said INDIA Bloc parties met and decided to expose the BJP and its ecosystem on the prefixed exit polls. On

Friday, Khera had said people have cast their votes and their verdict has been secured. Kharage had earlier said this was an informal meeting where they would only discuss what kind of preparations they should have on the day of counting and how people should be alert, whether it is about the EVMs or the use of Form 17C. The meeting was only for discussing the counting preparations and the Congress has already told its State units to be alert about form 17C, he had said.

Kejriwal back in jail today, decision on bail on June 7

From Page 1 "It will become infructuous. I will require it by tomorrow. Otherwise I will have to surrender," Hariharan said. "You have said you are not asking for an extension of interim bail," the judge replied, while reiterating that the order would be pronounced only on June 5. Special Counsel Zohab Hossain and Special Public Prosecutor NK Matta representing the ED were present in court and ASG SV Raju joined the proceedings via Video Conferencing (VC). Solicitor General Tushar Mehta also joined via VC. During the proceedings, Mehta, appearing for the ED, told the court that Kejriwal made misleading claims at a Press conference on Friday that he would surrender on June 2 on his own. He said the interim bail application was not maintainable as the trial court cannot modify the

order of the Supreme Court mandating Kejriwal to surrender tomorrow. Mehta said, "Kejriwal yesterday declared that he is going to surrender. Is he taking a chance and then surrendering?... I want to ask if his statement was genuine? ... We have preliminary objections. False statements have been made about his health, there is suppression... We have objections to filing of interim bail as well. This court cannot modify the Supreme Court order." Mehta said, "Kejriwal campaigned throughout his interim bail period and, now, he suddenly claims he is ill. Kejriwal suppressed facts and made false statements, including about his health." Kejriwal's counsel told the court that he was ill and needed treatment. SG Mehta said Kejriwal is lying about experiencing health problems. Notably, in his plea for interim bail, Kejriwal had claimed that he

lost 6-7 kilograms during his arrest, which he could not regain even after his release. The sudden weight loss, coupled with high ketone levels, could be indicative of kidney damage, serious cardiac ailments and even cancer, Kejriwal had submitted. Mehta made it a point to refute this claim today, saying: "His claim that he has lost 7 kilograms is false. He has, in fact, gained 1 kilogram," he said. Later in the hearing, senior Advocate N Hariharan (Kejriwal's counsel) stood by Kejriwal's claim "His weight today is 64 kilogram. When he was taken into custody, it was 69 kg." "A person who is saying his condition is serious, look at his conduct. From the day he was released, he is campaigning everywhere and not like one minute or two minutes, it's for hours. At that time, nothing happened to his health," he

said. The ED alleged that Kejriwal wants to cheat the court by delaying medical tests. "If any tests are required, we'll provide all facilities in jail. If required, we will take (Kejriwal) to AIIMS or any hospital," it said. The ED's counsel said, "A person who claims on TV that I may die, kidney failure etc, didn't go for a basic test since May 25? The entire system cannot be taken for a joy ride. It is a game being played by the litigant with the system. The prayers may not be granted." Additional Solicitor General SV Raju submitted that Kejriwal is asking for extension of the Supreme Court's order which is not permissible. Seeking the relief, Kejriwal's counsel told the court that despite his ill health, the AAP leader campaigned because that was the purpose for which the interim bail was granted by the Supreme Court.

against venturing out ... in many areas voters' ID cards have been snatched and confiscated by the TMC goons," said Khalilur at Diamond Harbour. Reports of violence came in from Sandeshkhali which erupted once again when BJP supporters resorted to brick-battling inviting a brief tear gas and lathi-charge after alleged motorbike-born TMC goons attacked locals who were going to cast their votes. Police-public clashes were seen at various places including Bermajur, Kanimari, Boyarbari, Rajbari and Agarhati of Sandeshkhali Assembly segment, sources

said. Down south Sandeshkhali-like situations erupted at Canning Assembly segment of Mathurapur parliamentary constituency where hundreds of BJP supporters clashed with the police -- after TMC supporters stopped them from voting --- necessitating a lathi-charge, sources said. In a grim reminder of 2023 panchayat elections TMC and Indian Secular Front members fought with bombs and brickbats at Bhangar area of Jadavpur leaving several persons injured, sources said adding sluggish polling rate in these areas were due to such intermittent bombing.

Mother of Porsche's minor...

From Page 1 It may be recalled that in the small hours of May 19, the 17-year-old boy -- after parting with his friends at a Pune bar -- who had driven off in his Porsche car in his inebriated state at a speed of some 200 kmph and rammed into a motorcycle killing killing Ashwini Koshta and Aneesh Awadhya (both aged 24 years) who were returning home after a reunion with friends. After her arrest, the minor accused -- who is currently in Juvenile Observation Home -- was questioned by the police for an hour in the presence of his mother.

Earlier the police had arrested the Dr. Ajay Taware, Head of the Forensics Department, Dr. Shrihari Halnor Halnor, the chief medical officer of the hospital, and a peon for allegedly manipulating the blood sample of the accused. Dr Taware and Dr Halnor, who have been suspended from their service by the Maharashtra government, have been charged with the alleged "manipulation" of blood samples and destruction of evidence in the case. The police have recovered Rs 3 lakh during the raid conducted on the homes of Dr. Halnor and another hospital poen Atul Ghatkambe.

Modi govt to be re-elected with full majority: Yogi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday exuded confidence that the Narendra Modi government would be re-elected with an overwhelming majority in the Lok Sabha elections 2024.

He claimed that people were strongly supporting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for a Viksit (developed) and Aatmanirbhar (self-reliant) Bharat.

Addressing reporters after casting his vote in the last phase of the Lok Sabha elections on Saturday morning, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said, "The final phase of the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, is taking place today across 57 seats in eight states. This includes 13 seats in eastern Uttar Pradesh: Maharajganj, Gorakhpur, Deoria, Kushinagar, Banskagan, Salempur, Ballia, Ghosi, Robertsganj, Ghazipur, Varanasi, Chandauli and Mirzapur, where voting is also being conducted today."

He mentioned that over the past two and a half months, various political parties have presented their issues to the people to fulfill the aspirations of the general public. They have presented the work and achievements of their governments.

"To elect the new government in the country, people have done a comparative analysis of the performances of the previous governments and the Modi govt in the last 10 years. Considering the support received across the nation, it can be said that when the results will come on June 4, those individuals, parties, and governments that have worked towards a self-reliant and developed India, preserving heritage while fostering development, showing compassion for the poor, and ensuring a bright future for the youth, will receive full support," Chief Minister Yogi added.

He said that over the past 10 years, everyone had witnessed a changing India, and in the last seven years, they had seen a



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath show his inked finger after casting his vote at a polling booth during the seventh and last phase of Lok Sabha elections in Gorakhpur on Saturday. PTI

new Uttar Pradesh under the double-engine government. Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, work was done for the youth, the farmers, businessmen, women, and every section of society with a spirit of security, respect and development.

Chief Minister Yogi expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the voters for their enthusiasm despite the soaring mercury reaching around 50 degrees at this time. Despite this, the enthusiasm of the people to vote in order to strengthen democracy has not diminished, he stated.

The chief minister urged people to rise above caste and religion and vote to realise the vision of a Viksit (developed) and Aatmanirbhar (self-reliant) Bharat. He said, "To make the country the world's third-largest economy in the next three years and to bring prosperity to the lives of all citizens,

the people's blessings were with Prime Minister Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party."

Yogi further mentioned that under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, the government has undertaken unprecedented work for the safety, respect and self-reliance of women. Initiatives like the Shakti Vandana Act, Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao and Matru Vandana Yojana have given a new direction to women's empowerment.

In response to a question about the review meeting of the parties in the INDI Alliance, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath remarked that it is good that the leaders of the parties of the opposition will sit together before June 4 because, as many parties as there are in this alliance, there will be as many disputes after June 4. They will all then blame each other, and insult each other.

Responding to questions raised

by Samajwadi Party workers during the controversy over the arrangement for protection of electronic voting machines (EVMs) before the vote count, he said, "Those who did not find candidates for 80 seats in the state are bound to blame someone or the other. These people have become tired of blaming EVMs. Now, by accusing the Election Commission of India, they are undermining the atmosphere of democracy."

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, adhering to the mantra of 'Pehle Matdaan, Fir Jalpaan', exercised his voting right at booth number 249 of Gorakhnath Primary School (girls) on Saturday, the final phase of the Lok Sabha elections. He arrived at the booth at seven o'clock in the morning and became one of the first voters at his booth. After casting his vote, he interacted with the media and then proceeded to Gorakhnath temple.

Yogi's 18-day campaign covered several states

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath held an intensive 18-day campaign across various states for Lok Sabha elections 2024. His campaign covered 12 states and two Union territories, with a total of 46 election programmes, including 44 public meetings and two roadshows. As the star campaigner of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Chief Minister Yogi sought support for several Central ministers and National Democratic Alliance leaders through his rallies and roadshows.

He conducted the highest number of rallies, nine each, in Maharashtra and Bihar. Voters in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh welcomed Yogi Adityanath wholeheartedly, contributing to the BJP's victory under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

In Rajasthan, Chief Minister Yogi held four public meetings and two roadshows, while in Chhattisgarh, he organised three rallies.

Chief Minister Yogi held nine rallies each in Maharashtra and Bihar. He stayed in Maharashtra for three days, while his public meetings were held in Bihar for five days. In Bihar, he campaigned for Bharatiya Janata Party candidate, former Union minister and MP from Patna Sahib Lok Sabha constituency of Bihar, Ravi Shankar Prasad, holding two rallies in a single day. In Maharashtra, he sought votes for both BJP and Shiv Sena candidates.

The Chief Minister held public meetings and roadshows in favour of Union ministers contesting elections in Uttar Pradesh as well as other states. This included Union minister and candidate from Nagpur seat of Maharashtra Nitin

Gadkari, Jitendra Singh from Udhampur seat of Jammu, Ajay Bhatt from Nainital-Udhampur seat of Uttarakhand, and Gajendra Singh Shekhawat from Jodhpur. He also campaigned for Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia from Guna Lok Sabha seat of Madhya Pradesh on May 4, and Union minister Giriraj Singh in Begusarai of Bihar.

On the final day of campaigning, he sought votes for Union minister Anurag Singh Thakur from Hamirpur constituency of Himachal Pradesh.

Chief Minister Yogi extended his support to several prominent BJP leaders. He campaigned for former chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat in Haridwar and held a roadshow for party state president CP Joshi from Chittoorgarh seat of Rajasthan. In Chhattisgarh, he held a public meeting for BJP vice-president Saroj Pandey at

Korba constituency. Additionally, he rallied for former Union minister SS Ahluwalia in Asansol seat of West Bengal, and Rajiv Pratap Rudy in Saran, Bihar. He also sought votes for famous lawyer and candidate from Mumbai North Central Ujjwal Nikam. On May 20, he campaigned for Naveen Jindal in Kurukshetra and Ashok Tanwar in Sirsa constituencies of Haryana. On May 23, he reached out in Odisha's Puri for party candidate and BJP spokesperson Dr Sambit Patra, Baijayant Panda from Kendrapara, former Union minister and BJP candidate from East Champaran Radha Mohan Singh. On May 28, he held two public meetings in a single day at Patna Sahib Lok Sabha constituency. On the last day of campaigning, he held a public meeting in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi in favour of film actress Kangana Ranaut.

Met forecasts rains in isolated parts of UP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

There is some relief finally in the offing for Uttar Pradesh reeling under heatwave conditions as the Met department has forecast rains in isolated parts of the state on Sunday. Meanwhile Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath held a high-level meeting in which he directed special monitoring of heatwaves in sensitive districts and warned that no laxity in this regard would be tolerated.

The weather conditions saw an improvement on Saturday. Following slight fall in maximum temperatures over west UP, severe heatwave conditions were abated while isolated heatwave conditions prevailed over the region. With appreciable fall in temperature over east and central UP, heatwave conditions have almost abated from east UP except Kanpur, which recorded 45.4 degree Celsius temperature. Jhansi was the hottest place in the state with 46.9 degree

Celsius temperature. Lucknow recorded a maximum temperature of 42.2 degree Celsius.

The local forecast is partly cloudy sky with the possibility of light rain and drizzle. Maximum temperature will be around 41 degree Celsius.

Rain and thundershowers are likely at isolated parts of the state. There is a warning of dust storm and thunderstorm accompanied with gusty winds very likely over isolated parts of the state. Met senior scientist Mohammed Danish said that the presence of a western disturbance and the interaction between the easterly and the westerly winds would cause rain.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in a high-level meeting directed special monitoring of heatwaves in sensitive districts. He also asked officials to make arrangements to provide compensation to the victims within 24 hours.

The chief minister stressed on

special monitoring to prevent loss of life and animal loss due to the heatwave. He also instructed the officials to prepare a report every week and submit it. Yogi said that negligence regarding scorching heat would not be tolerated and strict action would be taken against the errant official.

The relief commissioner said that in view of the severe heat and heatwave that occurs every year in the state, the department had prepared an action plan in the month of April itself. "Under this, work is being done continuously in every district of the state. Apart from this, continuous publicity is being done at the tehsil level in the state to alert the people of the state about the heatwave," he said. He said that the general public was being alerted about the do's and don'ts to protect themselves from the heatwave. "The people of the state are being made aware through newspapers, radio jingles, posters and loud-

speakers so that they can caution themselves as well as others. Apart from this, special monitoring is being done by the department in the most sensitive cities of the state. In these cities, the teams formed by the district administration are continuously making field inspections," he said.

He informed that on the instructions of the chief minister, all the district magistrates of the state have been asked to immediately share information related to loss of life due to heatwave with the department so that compensation can be given to the affected family within 24 hours.

He said that keeping in view the geographical situation of the state, the state government had included 21 types of loss of life in natural disasters. At the same time, advance money was released to all the districts of the state for payment within 24 hours so that such situations could be dealt with immediately, he added.

Crowds braved the scorching sun to see Yogi Adityanath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

After over two months of campaigning and seven phases of voting, everyone is now awaiting the election results on June 4. During the 61-day period, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath made a significant impact with 204 election programmes across 12 states and two Union Territories. Crowds braved the scorching sun to see him, and his fiery speeches and challenges to the opposition were met with enthusiastic cheers and chants of 'Jai Shri Ram'.

CM Yogi, who has been in power in UP for the past seven years, has also gained a reputation as a strict administrator. In every public meeting, he emphasised eliminating mafia elements and ensuring the safety of daughters and businessmen. His proclamations were met with loud cheers and chants of 'Yogi-Yogi'.

In western UP, the chief minis-

ter pledged to end mafia rule, while in Bundelkhand, he focused on targeting land mafias and dacoits. The public everywhere showed strong support for his fight against crime.

In each public meeting, CM Yogi praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 10-year rule for the country's development and contrasted it with the dire situation in Pakistan. His challenges to Pakistan energised the crowds, who responded with enthusiastic chants. He highlighted that under PM Modi's leadership, any disturbance in India would prompt immediate denials from Pakistan, as the new India does not provoke but would not tolerate provocations. He also criticised those in India who support Pakistan, suggesting they should go and beg there instead.

In the 2024 electoral contest, CM Yogi drew parallels between the intentions of the Congress and Samajwadi Party and those of Aurangzeb, historically known as

one of the most ruthless Mughal emperors. Criticising the Congress based on its manifesto, he referred Aurangzeb's legacy in nearly every public gathering.

On one hand, he likened the Congress manifesto to Aurangzeb's oppressive Jizya tax, while on the other, he ignited considerable public fervour by pledging to eradicate mafia elements in UP who emulate Aurangzeb. He labeled Aurangzeb as the perpetrator behind the destruction of the Kashi Vishwanath temple and the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi temple in Mathura. He appealed to the public to thwart the resurgence of Aurangzeb-like mentalities in the country.

He further remarked that today, no civilised Muslim would name his son Aurangzeb, citing the historical emperor's cruel imprisonment of his father and the brutal murder of his brother. Throughout the election campaign, CM Yogi consistently began by paying homage to prominent temples,

deities, and courageous freedom fighters at each of his stops. This gesture was warmly received by the people. In his speeches, the chief minister reflected the sentiments of the nation, reiterating at every rally that wherever he traveled, he sensed the nation echoing the slogans 'Fir Ekbar, Modi Sarkar' and 'Abki Baar, 400 Paar'. He also emphasised the government's accomplishments in development initiatives, infrastructure projects, and welfare schemes targeting the impoverished over the past decade. He directed attention towards the substantial progress made in combating terrorism and Naxalism under PM Modi's guidance. In each public gathering, he attacked Congress over its alleged conspiracies to enforce Jizya tax through inheritance tax, conduct surveys on ancestral property, institute Taliban-like regulations via personal laws, and permit cow slaughter under the pretext of the freedom to choose one's diet.

Akhilesh: BJP 'misused' administration in UP

Lucknow: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday accused the ruling Bharatiya Jnata Party of misusing the administration in UP and said the Election Commission of India was slow in taking action.

In a press statement issued from the SP headquarters, former chief minister of UP, Akhilesh Yadav alleged, "Today, when it was the last phase of voting, the BJP did not stop its habitual misuse of the administration." Giving the example of booths of Mirzapur and Barhaj of Deoria district, he said many complaints were registered against the BJP for intimidating the voters, obstructing voting and threatening or chasing away the polling agents on the strength of power.

Yadav said, "At many places, SP workers were misbehaved with and arrested. The administration's intention was to not let SP supporters vote." Expressing dissatisfaction, the SP

chief said, "It is regrettable that the Election Commission was very slow in taking action. The lack of transparency that should have been seen in the work of the ECI for free and fair elections puts a question mark on the democratic systems."

However, he also said at present, the public was aware and they resisted at many places.

Yadav claimed that the wind that blew from the west in favour of Samajwadi PDA (Pichhda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak)-INDIA bloc to save the Constitution and democracy turned into a tsunami in the seventh phase. All sections of the society, including farmers, youth, businessmen, teachers, employees and advocates voted to remove the BJP, he said. Expressing gratitude to the voters, he said on the last voting day of the seventh phase of the Lok Sabha elections 2024, the voters completely vented out their entire anger to remove the BJP from power by voting against it. PTI

Kin of poll staff who died on duty to get ₹15L as compensation

LUCKNOW: The Election Commission of India has directed payment of ₹15 lakh as compensation to the survivors of the polling staff who died on duty due to heat stroke. As many as 15 poll personnel have died in Mirzapur. UP Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said the district magistrates had been asked to file the report along with the post-mortem report of the poll personnel who died on duty. According to a report from the principal of Mirzapur's Maa Vindhayavasi Autonomous State Medical College, 13 poll staff died

at the hospital. The deceased include seven home guard jawans, three sanitation workers, one clerk posted at the chief medical officer's office, one chakbandi adhiikari (consolidation officer), and one peon in the home guard team.

According to officials, in Sonbhadr district, two polling staff died due to heat-related causes while nine personnel are being treated at a hospital. In Kaushambi, two people, including an elderly woman, died at the district hospital following heat stroke on Thursday.

Notification for the destruction of Medical Records
It is informed to all concerned that the Medical Records Department (MRD) has decided to destroy all normal discharge In-Patients medical records for the period from 2018 to 2020 (IPD NO. 01 to 29376), by shredding. The destruction will be undertaken by ensuring strict adherence to all statutory guidelines applicable. Patients who want to obtain photocopies of their original Medical Records can submit written requisition along with ID proof and patient ID number to MRD on or before 30.06.2024. No requests will be considered after this date.
Contact MRD for further information: S/d
Contact No. 0522-6666666 (Medical Suptd.)
Chandan Hospital Ltd., Faizabad Road, Near Chintah Flyover, Vijaynt Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226010

Namami Gange programme achieves significant milestones

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Since its inception in 2014, the Namami Gange programme has achieved significant milestones in its mission to rejuvenate the Ganga.

The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has stated that upon completion of Phase II of the Namami Gange Mission, an additional 3,108 MLD of sewage treatment plant (STP) capacity will be achieved. This capacity in March 2014 was only 1,221 MLD, which has increased to 3,110 MLD after rehabilitation of existing sewage treatment plants (STPs) and development of new capacities. Recent assessments by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) across five Ganga main stem states show notable improvements in the river's water quality. Dissolved Oxygen (DO) levels, a key indicator of river health, now meet primary bathing water

quality standards, supporting the river's ecosystem along most of its stretch. Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) levels are also within acceptable limits, with minor exceedances in certain areas of Uttar Pradesh. From 2014 to 2023, multi-sectoral interventions have led to improved levels of DO, BOD, and faecal coliforms (FC). Dr Vinod Tare, a professor at the Indian Institute of Technology at Kanpur and founder of the Centre for Ganga River Basin Management and Studies (cGanga) has stated that, "All the technologies adopted for sewage treatment under the Namami Gange programme are capable of treating faecal coliforms to the prescribed standards. This has resulted in significant improvements in aquatic life within the Ganga basin. Enhanced water quality and sewerage infrastructure improvements by the National Mission for Clean Ganga have

contributed to the restoration of biodiversity and ecosystem in the river, with notable increases in the populations of Gangetic dolphins, otters and turtles." The STP has played an important role in Ganga conservation. The NMCG has incorporated stringent parameters into STP designs to combat pollution. Targeted interventions have been implemented to address complex challenges, such as effluents from tannery and textile industries. Notably, a 20 MLD common effluent treatment plant (CETP) has been established in Kanpur, the largest of its kind for the tannery sector in India. Rigorous inspections of grossly polluting industries have resulted in improved compliance with environmental regulations. The STP infrastructure is designed not only to meet current demands but also to anticipate future requirements over the next 15 to 30 years. The STPs are engineered

to operate below their full capacity to accommodate projected growth. In Varanasi, the STP capacity has increased significantly from 100 MLD in 2014 by 4.5 times, with an additional 55 MLD STP currently under construction. This approach ensures that India's sewage treatment infrastructure is prepared for future population growth and environmental demands. Through dedicated efforts and successful initiatives, Namami Gange is rapidly becoming a successful global model for river rejuvenation. With 465 projects approved at a cost of ₹38,696 crore, the Namami Gange programme initiative has made substantial progress in addressing long-standing environmental and infrastructure challenges. The programme's steady pace over the past 10 years has shown tremendous results, spanning small rivers, tributaries, and the main stream of the Ganga.

SP ex-MLC booked for remarks against DM, minister

Shahjahanpur: Police have booked a former MLC of the Samajwadi Party here for remarks he made against the district magistrate and a cabinet minister in a social media post, officials said.

Circle Officer (City) Saumya Pandey on Saturday said that former MLC Amit Yadav wrote a Facebook post, alleging possible "dishonesty" in counting of votes by the district magistrate and other public representatives. "Do not indulge in dishonesty during counting of votes, else there will be bloodshed. Officers are famous for dishonesty," he said in the post. A case has been registered against him under sections 171G (false statement in connection with an election), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace) and 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code, Pandey said. PTI

NATIONAL HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY OF INDIA
(Ministry of Road Transport and Highways) PIU-Gorakhpur (U.P.)
PUBLIC NOTICE
The Public is hereby informed that User Fee Rate(s) for the year 2024-25 applicable w.e.f. 3rd June 2024 (00:00 hrs.) for the following Toll Plaza(s) on NH-28 in the State of Uttar Pradesh are as follows :-
Tendua Toll Plaza at Km. 256.500 (Gorakhpur bypass Section)

Category of Vehicle	Fee for Single Journey (in Rs.)	Fee for Return journey within a day (in Rs.)	Fee for monthly pass valid for 50 journeys in a month (in Rs.)	Fee for Commercial vehicle registered with in the Gorakhpur district (Excluding Vehicle paying Under National Permit (in Rs.))
Car, Jeep, Van or Light Motor Vehicle	100	150	3315	50
Light Commercial Vehicle, Light Goods Vehicle or Mini Bus	160	240	5355	80
Bus and Truck (Two axles)	335	505	11225	170
Three-axles commercial vehicles	365	550	12245	185
Heavy Construction Machinery (HCM) or Earth Moving Equipment (EME) or Multi Axles vehicle (4 to 6 axles)	530	790	17600	265
Oversized vehicles (seven or more axles)	645	965	21430	320

Muzaina Hetim Toll Plaza at Km. 313.372 (Gorakhpur-Kasia Section)

Category of Vehicle	Fee for Single Journey (in Rs.)	Fee for Return journey within a day (in Rs.)	Fee for monthly pass valid for 50 journeys in a month (in Rs.)	Fee for Commercial vehicle registered with in the Gorakhpur district (Excluding Vehicle paying Under National Permit (in Rs.))
Car, Jeep, Van or Light Motor Vehicle	65	95	2095	30
Light Commercial Vehicle, Light Goods Vehicle or Mini Bus	100	150	3390	50
Bus and Truck (Two axles)	215	320	7100	105
Three-axles commercial vehicles	230	350	7745	115
Heavy Construction Machinery (HCM) or Earth Moving Equipment (EME) or Multi Axles vehicle (4 to 6 axles)	335	500	11130	165
Oversized vehicles (seven or more axles)	405	610	13550	205

Salemgarh Toll Plaza at Km. 361.902 (Kasia-U.P./Bihar Section)

Category of Vehicle	Fee for Single Journey (in Rs.)	Fee for Return journey within a day (in Rs.)	Fee for monthly pass valid for 50 journeys in a month (in Rs.)	Fee for Commercial vehicle registered with in the Gorakhpur district (Excluding Vehicle paying Under National Permit (in Rs.))
Car, Jeep, Van or Light Motor Vehicle	65	95	2085	30
Light Commercial Vehicle, Light Goods Vehicle or Mini Bus	100	150	3370	50
Bus and Truck (Two axles)	210	320	7065	105
Three-axles commercial vehicles	230	345	7705	115
Heavy Construction Machinery (HCM) or Earth Moving Equipment (EME) or Multi Axles vehicle (4 to 6 axles)	330	500	11075	165
Oversized vehicles (seven or more axles)	405	605	13485	200

The rates for monthly pass applicable to mechanical vehicle registered for local non commercial purposes and person resides within a distance of 20 Km. from the toll plaza for the year 2024-25 shall be Rs. 340/- per month.
BUILDING A NATION, NOT JUST ROADS

Polling passes off peacefully in Varanasi LS seat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The polling in the high-profile Varanasi parliamentary constituency where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking his third consecutive win was peaceful. The voting was almost peaceful, barring sporadic incidents of altercation and names missing from the voters list. Though enthusiasm was seen everywhere, the polling was heavy in the rural assembly segments of Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency like Rohania and Sewapuri. Similarly, the polling was heavy in two assembly segments of Chandauli parliamentary seat falling in the district. In Varanasi Lok Sabha con-



Long queue of voters in Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency on Saturday.



UP Minister Anil Rajbhar after casting his vote in Chandauli Lok Sabha constituency on Saturday.

39.25 per cent, including 43.12 per cent in Sewapuri, 40.4 per cent in Rohania. 38.84 per cent in Varanasi North, 37.5 per cent in Varanasi South and 35.95 per cent in Varanasi Cantt. By 1 pm polling percentage was 29.28 per cent in Sewapuri, 27.64 per cent in Rohania, 25.3 per cent in Varanasi North, 20.34 per cent in Varanasi South and 23.8 per cent in Varanasi Cantt. Besides, 30.18 per cent in Ajgara and 28.20 per cent in Shivpur whereas by 9 am it was 12.91 per cent in Varanasi Lok Sabha including 14.46 per cent in Sewapuri, 13.28 per cent in Rohania, 13.82 per cent in Varanasi North, 12.03 per cent in Varanasi South and 11.88 per cent in Varanasi Cantt.



An elderly voter leaves a polling booth after casting his vote during the seventh and last phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Varanasi, on Saturday. PTI



Voters cover themselves in protection against scorching sun as they arrive to cast their votes in Varanasi on Saturday. PTI



A voter shows his finger marked with indelible ink after casting vote in Varanasi, on Saturday. PTI



'Sadhus' show their inked fingers as they pose for pictures after casting their votes at a polling booth in Varanasi on Saturday. PTI

stituency, the polling percentage was 56.35 per cent and the maximum voting was seen in Sewapuri 60.93 per cent, followed by 58.77 per cent in Rohania, 57.7 per cent in

Varanasi South, 54.55 per cent in Varanasi North and 51.47 per cent in Varanasi Cantt. Besides, the polling percentage of two assembly segments of Chandauli parliamentary con-

stituency falling in the district were 65.63 per cent in Ajgara and 63.53 per cent in Shivpur. Union Minister Dr Mahendra Nath Pandey is seeking his hat trick of victories in the seat. Elaborate security arrangements were made at all the polling centres. Divisional Commissioner (DC) Kaushal Raj Sharma, Commissioner of Police Mohit Agrawal, District Magistrate S Rajalingam and others visited different places to inspect the

polling process. Despite scorching heat enthusiasm was seen at most of the polling centres and booths since morning. However, the voters heaved a sign of relief when in day hours, the mercury dropped from 46-47 degrees Celsius to 38-39 degrees Celsius. By 5 pm, the overall polling percentage in Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency was 54.76 per cent. Long queues were seen at some centres as 59.14 voters had cast their votes in

Sewapuri assembly segment of Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency followed by 56.8 per cent in another rural segment of Rohania. However, the polling was slightly lower in all three urban constituencies, including 54 per cent in Varanasi South, 53.08 per cent in Varanasi North and 50 per cent in Varanasi Cantonment. In comparison to Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency, the polling percentage was much higher in two assembly segments of

Chandauli parliamentary constituency as by 5 pm it was 62.62 per cent in Ajgara (SC) and 60.74 per cent in Shivpur. Earlier, by 3 pm polling percentage in Varanasi Lok Sabha seat was 47.86 per cent, including 52.53 per cent in Sewapuri, 49.79 per cent in Rohania, 47.36 per cent in Varanasi North, 46.21 per cent in Varanasi South and 44.22 per cent in Varanasi Cantt. Besides by 1 pm polling percentage in Varanasi Lok Sabha seat was

Dignitaries exercise franchise in morning hours



Sikkim Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya with wife Kumud shows inked fingers after casting vote at a polling booth in Varanasi on Saturday. PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Most of the dignitaries cast their votes in the morning hours during the seventh and final phase of Lok Sabha elections on Saturday. They reached their respective polling stations, along with their family members and many of them preferred to get photographs at selfie points. Enthusiasm was seen at different polling booths of Varanasi and Chandauli parliamentary seats since morning. Uttar Pradesh Minister Anil Rajbhar along with wife and other family members reached the Sakaldiha Inter College in Chandauli district while UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) Ravindra Jaiswal cast his vote at booth number 287 of Government Girls Inter School and UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu'



Congress candidate Ajay Rai with his family after casting his vote at a polling booth in Varanasi on Saturday. PTI

at booth number 146 of Harishchandra Degree College. Both the ministers were accompanied by their wives, family members and some supporters. Besides, Congress candidate from Varanasi Lok Sabha seat

School in Mahmoorganj area, along with his mother and three-time MLA from the area Dr Jyotsana Srivastava. Former minister and MLA of City South Dr Neelkanth Tiwari cast his vote at booth number 198, Kanya Prathamik Vidyalaya Sankuldhara, while MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma at booth number 185 of Kanchanpur and MLC Dharmendra Rai at the polling station of Nav Rachna. Among the other dignitaries, Chairperson of Zila Panchayat Poonam Maurya exercised her franchise at booth number 267 of Kadiapur while Mayor Ashok Tiwari at booth number 31 of Cantt. Besides, Padma Vibhushan Pt Chhannulal Mishra cast his vote at Municipal Corporation polling station, Padma Shri Rajeshwar Acharya at Composite School Bhelapur (near Lolark Kund) polling station, Padma Shri Pt Shivnath

Rameshwari Goyal English School Ramapura polling station, Padma Shri S Supkar at Girls Primary School Dhoopchandi polling station, Padma Shri Rajnikant Dwivedi at Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Mavaiya (Sarnath) polling station and Padma Shri Dr Saroj Choodamani at Banaras Hindu University's Faculty of Arts. Apart from this, Divisional Commissioner Kaushal Raj Sharma cast his vote at JP Mehta Inter College polling station. He was accompanied by his parents, wife and son while Commissioner of Police Mohit Agrawal at Cantonment Board polling station and District Magistrate S Rajalingam at the polling booth of Cantonment Board Model Primary School. Sikkim Governor Lakshman Acharya and Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpur also cast their votes.

Craze for selfie points

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

At most of the polling centres voters were seen getting attracted to getting their photographs clicked at selfie points. Several dignitaries, including Divisional Commissioner (DC) Kaushal Raj Sharma, Commissioner of Police (CP) Mohit Agrawal and others were seen getting their photographs clicked at selfie points. The DC after casting his vote at the polling station of JP Mehta Inter College termed the occasion as a great festival of democracy and appealed to the people to exercise their franchise in large numbers. According to him, arrangements for sherbet, biscuits, water etc have been made by Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust for the voters coming to the five major polling stations. Apart from this, drink-



DC KR Sharma along with family at a selfie point at JP Mehta College in Varanasi on Saturday.

ing water was arranged for the voters at all polling stations. Most of the roads looked deserted due to the closure of the market and due to scorching heat people preferred to stay

indoors. But at many places the children were seen playing cricket and other sports. At many places the old and handicapped voters were seen using wheelchairs and sticks.

12-year-old girl crosses Yamuna in 17 min

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Shanvi Sonkar, a class VI student here, has done wonders. Shanvi (12) of Mundera swam across the Yamuna river in just 17 minutes here on Saturday. The city residents are proud of her achievement. Family and college people are sending data, videos, photos for the Guinness Book of Records. When the summer holidays started in school, Shanvi joined the swimming club to learn swimming. She says after just one week of training, she swam across the Yamuna river in just 17 minutes. Shanvi started swimming

from the Bargad Ghat of Meerapur and completed it by swimming till Sindhu Sagar Ghat Kakra Ghat towards Naini. Experts say that the length of Yamuna river is about 600 metres and depth is about 25 feet. Trainer Tribhuvan Nishad said every year he trains hundreds of children in swimming at Bargad Ghat of Meerapur through Swimming Club with the help of Kamala Nishad and Limca Book of Record holder Manas Nishad. From this year, he is teaching swimming to children through the club to promote Khelo India. Shanvi's spirits are high and she

is very happy with this achievement. **BODY FOUND:** Panic gripped the area after the body of a saint was found lying on the banks of Sharda Sahayak Khand-39 canal in Chirauda of Pulphur here on Saturday. The villagers said people had seen the saint going towards the canal. On receiving the information about the matter, IFFCO outpost in charge Chandan Saroj reached the spot and sent the body for the post-mortem examination. According to the police, efforts are made to identify the body of the saint whose death is suspected to be due to heat.

Heat: Hospital supts told to remain in alert mode

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The havoc of severe heat and Nautapa (nine days of severe heat) continues here. The focus is being placed on better treatment of patients with heat stroke. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Ashu Pandey has asked all hospital superintendents to remain in alert mode. On the instructions of the government, a cold room has been built in all government hospitals of the district so that the patients suffering from heat and heat stroke can be immediately kept in them and

treatment can be started. No leave is being given to the doctors posted in all community health centres and government hospitals of the district. Dr Pandey said keeping in view the convenience of the general public, a control room has been set up in the office. Information related to the treatment of patients suffering from heat or heat stroke can be obtained by calling here. The helpline number is 0532-2644644, he said. Dr Pandey said 160 people have been affected by heat stroke in the district till May 31. He said 108

ambulances are active. He appealed that if anyone is seen falling or fainting in the sun, then a call can be made on 108 so that he can be taken to the nearest hospital in time and his life can be saved. ORS, medicines etc have been kept in all ambulances so that primary relief can be given to the patients affected by heat before taking them to the hospital. Meanwhile the maximum temperature in Sangam city on Saturday was recorded at 42.4 degrees Celsius while the minimum temperature was 31 degrees Celsius.

Inspection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Lucknow Division (Northern Railway) DRM Sachindra Mohan Sharma on Saturday inspected the development work being done in Prayag and Phaphamau railway stations. The DRM first came to Prayag railway station and saw the railway overbridge under construction in front of IERT. He talked to the engineers of Setu Nigam about the technical problem in bridge construction. The DRM saw the footover bridge under construction at the station. The DRM went to see the railway underpass. After seeing all the work, the DRM took officers, engineers and contractors to task for lax attitude.

12 rly employees retire

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As many as 12 employees of Varanasi Division of North Eastern Railway (NER) retired and were paid their final amount of ₹5,20,82,593 in a simple ceremony organised in the Premchand auditorium room of divisional office here on Friday which was held under the chairmanship of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vineet Kumar Srivastava. The function was also attended by Senior Divisional Personnel Officer (SDPO) Sameer Paul, Senior Divisional Finance Manager (SDFM) Rajesh Kumar, Divisional Personnel Officer (DPO) Vivek Mishra, along

with inspectors and employees of Accounts and Personnel departments. The DRM said in his presidential address that the railway employees have an important role in all the records being set in Indian Railways today. Addressing the retired employees, he advised them to do regular exercise, yoga etc to stay healthy and spend their remaining time in fulfilling social and moral obligations. Along with this, he said for the past many years, all the employees retiring from Varanasi division are paid their dues on the day of their retirement and this is possible due to mutual coordination and hard work of the officers and employees of the Accounts and Personnel departments. On this

occasion, he gave service medals to all the retiring employees and wished them a good life ahead and expressed gratitude for their long and remarkable services. Earlier SDPO Sameer Paul honoured all the retiring employees by garlanding them. He told them in detail about all the documents related to I Card, Service Certificate and PPO and explained to them that they should use their receipts very wisely and should not give it to the wrong person by getting carried away by the influence or emotions of any person or organisation. He said many people are in search of such opportunities and trap the money by offering various kinds of temptations.

Farewell function

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The farewell function 'ABHAS' was organised at the Faculty of Commerce in BHU on Friday in the presidency of Prof DC Rai, Vice-Chancellor of Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar University, Muzaffarpur. Prof Rai emphasised on implementation of NEP-2020 for restoration of 'Vishwa Guru' position by adopting the philosophy of Gurukul. The function was also addressed by Prof OP Rai, former Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya and Prof Prashant Kumar, Ex-Dean, Faculty of Commerce. The welcome speech was delivered by Prof HK Singh, Dean, Faculty of Commerce, BHU.

BJP will win more than 370 LS seats, says Nadda



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

People have voted for a capable, powerful, developed and self-reliant India and to put aside appeasement, nepotism and corruption, BJP chief J.P. Nadda said on Saturday, exuding confidence that his party will win more than 370 Lok Sabha seats and the NDA more than 400. His remarks came on a day when polling was held for the seventh and last phase of the general elections. Counting of votes will be conducted on

June 4. In a statement, Nadda thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for making this "festival of democracy" a success for the BJP. "His efforts are definitely yielding results," the BJP chief said. Nadda also thanked BJP leaders, including Union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and Nitin Gadkari, and the "crores of party workers" for their contributions during the elections. He also thanked constituents of the NDA for enthusiastically participating in the election and said with their hard work, they succeeded in con-

veying their thoughts to the people. "In this election, the voters of the country have voted for a capable India, a powerful India, a developed India, a self-reliant India and to move ahead in the economy, and to put aside appeasement, nepotism and corruption," Nadda said. "I have full faith that the voters of India will make the BJP win more than 370 seats and the NDA win more than 400 seats under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said. Nadda thanked the people for their participating in the election.

Modi ends 45 hours long meditation in Kanyakumari

PTI ■ KANYAKUMARI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday concluded his 45-hour-long meditation at the Vivekananda Rock Memorial here and paid floral tributes to Tamil saint poet Thiruvalluvar. On conclusion of his dhyana session, Modi, clad in white, visited the 133-ft statue of Thiruvalluvar, located next to the rock memorial and placed a huge garland there marking his tribute. He arrived at the statue complex by a ferry service and later reached the shore using the service.

The Prime Minister left by a helicopter for Thiruvananthapuram and from there, he left for Delhi. On his arrival here on May 30, the PM prayed at the Bhagavathy Amman temple and later arrived at the Vivekananda Rock Memorial. During his stay at the memorial, the PM did meditation and also performed 'Surya Arghya' at the time of sunrise, a ritual associated with spiritual practice. Modi was clad in saffron while he was engaged in meditation at the Vivekananda Rock Memorial. The PM's visit to Kanyakumari to perform meditation evoked opposition from INDIA bloc constituents including Tamil



Nadu's ruling DMK. The opposition was to the broadcast of meditation in view of last phase of polling on June 1. In view of the PM's stay, senior DMK leader and Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan on May 31 alleged that tourists were not allowed in that area which had seriously affected the local businesses and 'we have pointed out that this is not good.' Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president K Selvaaperunthagai on Saturday told reporters that those doing meditation do it peacefully without any hindrance

and all alone. "How can a person do Dhyana with 14 cameras in front of him? Is this meditation? This is dhyana eyeing electoral politics," the Congress leader alleged. He accused Modi of trying to sully Swami Vivekananda's reputation by acting against the spiritual leader's legacy and hence, "condemnable." At the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, the PM embarked on his 45-hour long meditation on the evening of May 30 and completed it on Saturday. Kanyakumari is famous for its sunrise and sunset and the memorial is located on a tiny islet near the shoreline.

Combined passing out parade of Agniveervayu trainees held at Tambaram



PTI ■ CHENNAI

A total of 1,983 Agniveervayu trainees including 234 women of other than science stream, successfully passed out from the Mechanical Training Institute (MTI) and Workshop Training Institute (WTI) here on Saturday. The grand event held at Air Force Station, Tambaram, marked the successful culmination of 22 weeks of rigorous and transformative military training at both training institutes. Air Vice Marshal Aman Kapur, Senior Officer-in-Charge Administration, Central Air Command, was the Reviewing Officer and chief guest for the impressive combined Passing Out Parade. Various activities including blindfold stripping and assembling, arms drill, physical training display, drill by Agniveervayu team, yoga, continuity drill without arms

and unarmed combat drill were held on the occasion. The Reviewing Officer congratulated all trainees passing out and felicitated the award winners who had performed exceedingly well in various fields. In his address, he urged all trainees to hone their skills further, enhance professional knowledge and develop an ecosystem to learn so that they can contribute towards aerospace safety and organisational objectives in defence of the nation, a release here said. He pointed out that the IAF has been witnessing major changes in operational philosophy and is on the path of transforming itself into a vibrant strategic force of great calibre. The officer called upon the Agniveervayu to keep themselves physically fit, and mentally agile and to uphold the core values of the Indian Air Force.

Congress questions PM's silence on Revanna arrest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With sexual-abuse accused Prajwal Revanna's arrest, the Congress on Saturday questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "silence" on the matter and claimed that he has "failed" to provide justice to women in the last 10 years. Suspended Janata Dal (Secular) MP Revanna, facing sexual-abuse allegations, was remanded in police custody on Friday, hours after he was arrested by a Bengaluru Police team on his return from Germany. A special court in Bengaluru remanded him in police custody till June 6. Revanna was arrested in the wee hours of Friday by a Special Investigation Team (SIT), minutes after he landed in Bengaluru past midnight from Germany. He had left the country on April 27.



Hitting out at Modi for "allowing" Revanna to flee in the first place, All India Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba said letting a "mass rapist" escape is "Modi ki Guarantee". Revanna, the member of Parliament from Karnataka's

Hassan, has been arrested by the SIT constituted by the state government, she said, adding that this was done by a women police team formed by the SIT. "We congratulate the Karnataka government," Lamba said. "Narendra Modi kept raising the 'Beti Bachao' slogan, but did

not break his silence on Prajwal Revanna," she told a press conference at the All India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters here. Lamba said Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah wrote to Modi on the matter for help from the Centre but did not get a reply. The chief minister had to write to Modi again after 21 days, asking him to bring Revanna back to the country. "This shows how serious Modi was about the Prajwal Revanna case," Lamba said. She said the possibility of pressure being put on victims and witnesses still exists and "we urge the prime minister to break his silence and assure that there would be no tampering with evidence and justice will be ensured to our daughters". The Congress leader also cited the case of a Dalit girl being "raped" in Madhya Pradesh

and the perpetrators of the crime allegedly being Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders. "In this case, first the victim's brother, then the victim's uncle were killed. Finally, the victim also died by falling off an ambulance while bringing back her uncle's mortal remains," she said about the incidents that have taken place in Madhya Pradesh's Sagar. "In the last five months, 12,000 cases of rape and sexual harassment of women, including 1,644 girls, have come to light in Rajasthan," Lamba said, hitting out at the BJP. More than 25 tribal women and students have been raped in Sidhi in Madhya Pradesh, she claimed. "It is unfortunate that in the last 10 years, Narendra Modi has failed to provide justice to our daughters," Lamba alleged. "Break your silence as it encourages the perpetrators of such crimes," she said.

Coast Guard undertakes steel cutting ceremony on next generation patrol vessel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Signifying self-reliance in defence manufacturing, steel cutting ceremony for the first next-generation Offshore Patrol Vessel (NGOPV) for Indian Coast Guard was undertaken at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL), Mumbai on Friday, Coast Guard said here on Saturday. The cost of the project is Rs 1,614 crores. Giving details, officials said this project aims to bolster our capabilities in coastal and offshore patrolling, safeguarding maritime zones, and enhancing operational efficiency. The NGOPVs, designed to meet the evolving challenges of maritime security, are equipped with state-of-the-art machinery and equipment. Powered by two diesel engines,



these vessels are capable of achieving a maximum continuous speed of 23 knots and covering a distance of up to 5,000 nautical miles. Furthermore, they boast integral twin-engine helicopter facilities and staging for heavy helicopters, enabling swift and effective aerial surveillance

and response capabilities. Incorporating advanced features such as multipurpose drones, AI capabilities, and wirelessly controlled remote water rescue craft, the NGOPVs provide the Indian Coast Guard with unparalleled flexibility and operational edge.

Authentic dying declaration can be sole basis for conviction without any corroboration: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An authentic dying declaration that inspires the confidence of the court can be relied upon and be the sole basis for the conviction of an accused without any corroboration, the Supreme Court has said. The top court made this observation on May 15 while upholding the conviction of an ex-army personnel for murdering his wife, a police constable, in Maharashtra's Beed district 22 years ago. It said that the court has to scru-

tinise the dying declaration carefully and ensure it is consistent, credible and devoid of tutoring. "Once a dying declaration is found to be authentic and inspiring the court's confidence, then the same can be relied upon and can be the sole basis for conviction without any corroboration. "However, before accepting such a dying declaration, the court must be satisfied that it was rendered voluntarily, is consistent and credible, and is devoid of any tutoring. Once such a conclusion is reached, a great deal

of sanctity is attached to a dying declaration and as said earlier, it can form the sole basis for conviction," a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said. In this case, the prosecution claimed that the victim was subjected to cruelty by her husband, brother-in-law and other in-laws. On the fateful day, the woman was beaten up by her husband and brother-in-law who tied her hands with a 'gamcha' (thin and coarse cotton towel) and her feet with a towel and gagged her



face. The brother-in-law then got a matchbox and a bottle of kerosene, which the husband poured on her, and then lit the matchstick. The woman got completely burnt in the incident. Her neighbours took her to the hospital, where her dying declaration was recorded based on which the Ambajogai police station in Beed district registered a case under sections 307 (attempt to murder), 498A (subjecting women to cruelty), 342 (wrongful confinement), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and

504 (intentional insult) read with section 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The trial court in 2008 had convicted the husband for committing an offence punishable under section 302 (murder) read with section 34 of the IPC 1860 and sentenced him to life imprisonment and to pay a fine of Rs 25,000. This verdict was upheld by the Bombay High Court. The husband then moved the Supreme Court, which suspended his sentence and grant-

ed him bail in 2016 noting that he had already undergone about nine years of sentence. Accepting the dying declaration of the deceased woman as a valid piece of evidence, the top court said that having sieved through the evidence carefully, it has no hesitation that the appellant is guilty of committing the offence and that the guilt has been proved beyond all reasonable doubt. The appellant is directed to surrender before the trial court within two weeks to carry out his sentence, it said.

Every State should appoint anti human trafficking nodal officer, says NHRC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Expressing concerns that despite existing laws and court judgments, human trafficking persists in the country, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Friday recommended that every State should appoint an "anti-human trafficking nodal officer" to coordinate government efforts in combating the menace. This officer should be of a rank not below a state government secretary or an inspector general of police, the NHRC stated on Friday as it also cited Supreme Court orders to reinforce its recommendations. The suggestions follow an NHRC investigation, initiated suo motu in October 2022, based on reports of girls being "sold on stamp paper" in several Rajasthan districts and trafficked to other parts of India and abroad, where they faced abuse and sexual assault. The NHRC also highlighted



the plight of women dancers trafficked from Rajasthan to Mumbai bars and forced into prostitution. The NHRC directed the chief secretary and Director General of Police (DGP) of Rajasthan to send a senior police officer to Mumbai to investigate the situation of these trafficked girls, with assistance from the Maharashtra police. The

NHRC emphasized the need for state and district committees to rehabilitate the victims according to its directives. The top rights body noted that the practice of "selling girls" persists in certain communities, particularly the Kanjar community in Rajasthan, and urged immediate and stringent action to stop it. The Commission had earlier sought

reports from Rajasthan's chief secretary and DGP and confirmed that charges had been filed against 23 accused individuals. The seven trafficked girls were rehabilitated in Ajmer's reform homes. In its recommendation, the NHRC said that states should establish District Anti-Human Trafficking Units (DAHTUs), headed by officers not below the rank of deputy superintendent of police, to monitor and prevent human trafficking. These units should include representatives from various departments and NGOs. The NHRC has issued notices to all state and Union Territory chief secretaries to report compliance within eight weeks and emphasized the need for awareness campaigns to eradicate child prostitution and the selling of minor girls. Despite existing laws and court judgments, the NHRC noted that human trafficking persists, and it cited Supreme Court orders to reinforce its recommendations.

WHO issues stark warning about alarming rate of youth addiction to e-cigarettes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued a stark warning about the alarming rates of youth addiction to e-cigarettes, highlighting a troubling trend of the industry targeting young people for long-term profit. Saima Wazed, WHO Regional Director said, "The fight against tobacco is particularly important for us in South-East Asia. The tobacco industry's targeting of youth is rampant across our Member States. As a result, we have a very worrying 11 million adolescents using various tobacco products in the region." She called upon the governments to adopt policies to protect them from the manipulative practices of tobacco and related industries, which includes the relentless marketing of their dangerous products through social media and streaming platforms. "The tobacco industry moves



with speed to launch new products, using every means to expand market share before regulations can catch up," the WHO Regional Director said cautioning that they continue to oppose evidence-based measures, such as increases in excise taxes, and comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotions, and sponsorships. "They even threaten legal action against governments that try to protect the

health of their citizens." Echoing similar concerns, anti-tobacco platform Mothers Against Vaping, a united front of concerned mothers combating the escalating vaping crisis among youths, organised an event "Saving the Next Generation from New-Age Addictions" recently. Kushboo Sundar, Actress and Politician, a special invitee of the BJP National Executive Committee and a member of the National Commission for Women and Kishwar Desai, Author and Columnist, joined the cause which already has support of the sports icons and influential role models like Baichung Bhutia, Deepa Malik and Neha Dhupia among many others. Dr Bhavna Barmi, Clinical Psychologist, Founder, Happiness Studio said: "Children's mental states make them highly susceptible to early experimentation with addictive behaviours. Hence, we are witnessing an escalating surge in children being drawn to enticing electronic addictive devices like vapes and e-cigarettes. A major factor fuelling this trend is the packaging and advertising tactics employed by manufacturers of these modern devices." At the event, the organization released a 4-point agenda to counter and neutralise 5 popular alleged strategies adopted by the global tobacco industry to promote gateway devices to young children.

Passenger vehicle wholesales in slow lane in May due to high base effect, elections

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Passenger vehicle wholesales in India witnessed a marginal growth in May on account of high base effect and muted demand due to general elections.

The overall passenger vehicle dispatches from companies to dealers stood at 3,50,257 lakh units last month as compared to 3,35,436 in the same month a year ago, registering a growth of 4 per cent.

Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) said its total domestic passenger vehicle sales rose marginally to 1,44,002 units last month from 1,43,708 units in the year-ago period.

The company saw year-on-year dip in sales of entry level and compact cars last month as against May 2023.

Utility vehicle sales, including that of Brezza, Grand Vitara, Ertiga, S-Cross and XL6, however, rose to 54,204 units last month as against 46,243 units a year earlier.

"It has been discussed that



growth this year will not be very high. It will be in single digit because of the high base effect. Secondly, there were elections and the scorching temperatures also had an impact on the overall sales in May," MSI Senior Executive Officer (Marketing & Sales) Partho Banerjee told reporters.

He further said: "We are very hopeful that we will start seeing the green shoots coming with the election results coming in. I think things will turn around." Banerjee noted that the company is going to introduce a limited edition trims of its entry level cars — Alto K10, S-Presso and Celerio — in order

to rejuvenate the small car segment.

The Dream Series edition trims of the three models will be launched at a price point of Rs 4.99 lakh (ex-showroom), he said.

"Based on the feedback of our target customers we have come up with an edition in which we are mostly focusing on the utilities and convenience features," Banerjee said.

Sales of Maruti Suzuki's mini segment cars, comprising Alto and S-Presso, declined to 9,202 units last month from 12,236 units in May 2023.

Rival Hyundai Motor India reported a 1 per cent year-on-

year increase in domestic dispatch of vehicles to dealers last month.

The company's wholesales rose to 49,151 units in May as compared to 48,601 units in May 2023.

Hyundai Motor India COO Tarun Garg said that the sales growth this financial year is anticipated to remain in low single digit range.

"In April also the industry grew by around 1.5 per cent ...So April plus May the industry growth should be around 2-2.5 per cent over same period last year," he noted.

Tata Motors said its passenger vehicle sales, including electric vehicles, in the domestic market, were up 2 per cent at 47,075 units as compared to 45,984 units in the year-ago month.

Mahindra & Mahindra on the other hand reported a robust 31 per cent year-on-year increase in passenger vehicle dispatches last month at 43,218 units. It had sold 32,886 units in May 2023.

Toyota Kirloskar Motor reported a 24 per cent year-on-year increase in total wholesales in May at 25,273 units as compared to that of same month last year.

Kia India said its total wholesales increased 4 per cent year-on-year to 19,500 units in May. The automaker had dispatched 18,766 units to dealers in May 2023.

"So far in this year, we have been aggressive in introducing new competitive variants of our models, which has contributed significantly to our sales," Kia India Senior VP and Head Sales & Marketing Hardeep Singh Brar said.

With a robust network expansion strategy in place, the company shall continue to grow in the rest of the year and cross 1 million domestic sales milestone soon, he added.

MG Motor India reported a 5 per cent dip in wholesales at 4,769 units in May compared to the same month last year. The company had dispatched 5,006 units to dealers in May 2023.

Top 100 companies to verify market rumours

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The top 100 listed companies by market capitalization will have to confirm or deny any market rumour reported in the mainstream media from this Saturday.

The rule will be applicable for top 250 companies from December 1.

Under the Sebi's rule, these companies will have to 'confirm, deny, or clarify any reported event or information in the mainstream media that is not general in nature and that indicates that rumours of an impending specific material event are circulating amongst the investing public within 24 hours from the reporting of the information.

Sebi through its newly introduced rumour verification framework has excluded the price volatility in arriving at average market price for the purpose of corporate actions in a bid to make it fair for all investors at large. "The move would dissuade



leaking of information that would affect the valuation in the given corporation action. This initiative of Sebi would help strengthen the rumour verification framework. It would help in achieving a fair market thereby making it a preferred market for investors all over the world," Makarand M Joshi, founder, MMJC and Associates, a corporate compliance firm, said.

While calculating the price for various corporate actions such as buyback through book building, buyback through stock exchange, qualified institutional placement, preferential allotment, Operating Officer of Tradejini, had said.

price due to material price movement and confirmation of reported event or information can be excluded. It means that while calculating price for corporate actions the period during which material price movement was seen in the stock due to confirmed rumours would be excluded. Market rumours pertaining to a company's business can create significant volatility in stock prices, often leading to transactions that don't reflect a company's true value. This market rumours could be related to anything, including exiting of top management, cancellation of an order and financial health.

"Sebi's framework addresses this issue by establishing a mechanism to determine the unaffected price — the price of a stock before the rumour surfaced. This price would be used for transactions unless the rumour itself caused price fluctuations in subsequent trading days," Trivesh, Chief

ATF price cut 6.5 per cent, commercial LPG by ₹69

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Jet fuel or ATF price on Saturday was reduced by a steep 6.5 per cent and that of commercial LPG used by hotels and restaurants by Rs 69 per 19-kg cylinder on declining international oil prices.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was cut by Rs 6,673.87 per kilolitre, or 6.5 per cent, to Rs 94,969.01 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

The reduction follows a marginal 0.7 per cent (Rs 749.25 per kl) increase on May 1.

The ATF rate in Mumbai was slashed to Rs 88,834.27 per kl from Rs 95,173.70.

Prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes.



Alongside, oil firms also cut the price of commercial LPG by Rs 69 to Rs 1,676 per 19-kg cylinder. This is the third straight monthly reduction in rates.

The price was on May 1 reduced by Rs 19 per cylinder and by Rs 30.5 on April 1. Rate of cooking gas used in domestic households,

however, remained unchanged at Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder.

April 1 saw the first reduction in commercial LPG prices since January. The rate had gone up by Rs 14 per cylinder on February 1 and Rs 25.5 on March 1.

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) revise prices of ATF and cooking gas on 1st of every month based on the average price of benchmark international fuel and foreign exchange rate.

Prices of petrol and diesel continue to remain frozen. Rates had been cut by Rs 2 per litre in mid-March. Petrol costs Rs 94.72 a litre in Delhi while diesel is priced at Rs 87.62.

Mumbai city sees 12,000 property registrations in May

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Registration of properties in Mumbai municipal region increased 22 per cent during May to 12,000 units driven by strong housing demand, according to real estate consultant Knight Frank.

Citing Maharashtra government data, Knight Frank India said Mumbai city (area under BMC jurisdiction) recorded around 12,000 property registrations last month as against 9,823 units in May last year. State exchequer garnered Rs 1,034 crore in May 2024, up 24 per cent from the same month last year.

Of the overall registered properties in May 2024, residential units constituted 80 per cent. "The continuous year-on-year growth in property sales and registrations provides a continuum to the growth

story that propelled on the back of state government incentive and since then, despite a rise in average prices across the city, sales and registrations of properties have maintained the momentum," Shishir Bajjal, Chairman & Managing Director, Knight Frank India, said.

This reflects the appetite of the market as well as the confidence buyers have in the economic fundamentals of the country, he added. "This positive trend is expected to persist, bolstered by strong economic growth and a favourable interest rate environment, creating an encouraging atmosphere for potential buyers," Bajjal said. In the first five months of this year, the total number of properties registered was 60,820, up 17 per cent from 52,173 units in January-May 2023.

Bata India introduces New York's footwear brand to Indian market

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

It was a glamorous affair at the exclusive preview of Nine West's latest collection in the Capital hosted by Bata India! This event marks a significant moment as Bata India introduces New York's renowned footwear and accessories brand, Nine West, to the Indian market.

Actor Chitragda Singh alongside Delhi's top fashion influencers indulged in a stylishly curated evening as they adorned NINE WEST's latest styles, brought to India exclusively by Bata. Speaking at the grand unveiling of the Nine West collection, Deepika Deepti, Head of Marketing, Bata India said, "At Bata, our aim is to bring the best of world's fashion to India for our discerning customers. Nine West, born in New York City and thriving globally, is one of the most recognisable brands in the world. With its entry in India exclusively in partnership with Bata, we are proud to continue to make truly high fashion & premium styles accessible to all."

The latest collection is inspired by empowered women who dream, lead & slay. Iconic silhouettes & dainty designs ranging from sleek metallic stilettos to famed monogram style bags, each article is crafted to complement the fashion-forward women. The latest Nine West collection is now available exclusively at Bata.Com and your nearest Bata stores! Strengthening its portfolio of fashion footwear and accessories, Bata India had announced in November 2023 licensing and manufacturing deal with Authentic Brands Group (Authentic) for Nine West winning rights to manufacture, market and distribute Nine West footwear and accessories across India.



For close to a century, Bata India has been a symbol of trust and quality for the Indian consumers, serving 250,000 customers every day in 2022. Throughout this journey, Bata has continuously evolved to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of its customers to become the largest footwear retailer and manufacturer in the country. Its expansive retail network consists of 2,100 stores (Company Owned, Franchise and Store in store point of sales). Augmented by thousands of Multi Brand Outlets and a robust omnichannel presence across D2C and marketplaces, Bata India sells close to 50 million pairs annually.

Bata India's mission is to make global trends and premium fashion accessible to all consumers through its extensive retail network. It is redefining the intersection of fashion and comfort through its various brands — Bata Red Label for in trend global styles, Bata Comfit for technology enabled comfort in daily wear, athleisure brand Power for fitness sneakers and apparel, NorthStar for sneakers inspired by global youth trends, fashionable range of clogs and slip-ons under Floatz, kids brand Bubblegummers that has won the trust of parents while inspiring fun, and Hush Puppie's the global brand that epitomises comfort and elegance to name a few.

Special talk show held on jewellery used in Heeramandi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The national Capital decided to beat the heat by having a special talk show on jewellery of the most talked about Netflix series Heeramandi —the Diamond Bazaar.

Hosted by the National Fashion & Jewellery Initiative team of FICCI-FLO, under the leadership of Anjali Aggarwal, the event held at FICCI House was attended by the FLO president, Joyshree Das Verma, high profile FLO members and dignitaries too. Anjali Aggarwal, herself a Jewellery designer and stylist, moderated the talk show and asked the Jeweller duo, Vinay and Anshu Gupta, questions about how they were chosen to do the entire jewellery for Heeramandi by Sanjay Leela



Bhansali and how they managed this mammoth project. Their answers gave deep insights into the process of jewellery designing, planning, manufacturing and into the dynamics of Bollywood. Interestingly, Vinay Gupta hails from an old renowned Jewellery family of Delhi and his experience, research and designing expertise helped him create such a magnificent collection. Today, they go by the brand name Paramani Jewels.

Maruti Suzuki sales drop 2 per cent to 1,74,551 units in May

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki India on Saturday reported 2 per cent year-on-year dip in total wholesales at 1,74,551 units in May 2024.

The company had dispatched a total of 1,78,083 units to its dealers in the same month last year, Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) said in a statement.

Total domestic passenger vehicle sales rose marginally to 1,44,002 units last month from 1,43,708 units in the year-ago period, it added.

Sales of mini segment cars, comprising Alto and S-Presso, declined to 9,902 units from 12,236 units in May 2023. Sales of compact cars, including Baleno, Celerio, Dzire, Ignis, Swift, Tour S and



WagonR, also fell to 68,206 units from 71,419 units in the year-ago month.

Utility vehicles, including Brezza, Grand Vitara, Ertiga, S-Cross and XL6, clocked sales of 54,204 units last month as against 46,243 units earlier. Sales of vans were at 10,960

units in May 2024 as against 12,818 units a year ago, while that of light commercial vehicle Super Carry stood at 2,692 units as against 2,888 units in May 2023. MSI said its exports last month declined to 17,367 units from 26,477 units in the same period last year.

IIFL Samasta Finance to raise up to ₹ 1,000 crore via bonds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IIFL Samasta Finance, a non-banking microfinance company (NBFC-MFI), plans to raise up to Rs 1,000 crore through public issue of secured bonds for the purpose of capital augmentation and business growth. The bond issue opens on June 3 and closes on June 14, IIFL Samasta Finance said in a statement.

IIFL Samasta Finance plans to issue bonds, aggregating to Rs 200 crore, with a green-shoe option to retain over-subscription of up to Rs 800 crore, it said. The IIFL Samasta bonds offer the highest coupon rate of 10.50 per cent per annum for a tenor of 60 months, it claimed.

Companies counter IAMAI's submission on Draft Digital Competition Bill

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Matrimony.com and Sharechat are among four companies that have written to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, saying they do not agree with the submissions on draft digital competition bill made by industry association IAMAI, of which they are members.

IAMAI's submission, they claim, is not reflective of the entire digital startup ecosystem or its diverse membership of over 540 companies. According to them, while only a small fraction of members have opposed the 'ex-ante' provisions introduced by the Draft Digital Competition Bill (DCB), yet the submission made by the association

"predominantly echoes this minority perspective".

Any opposition to 'ex ante' regulations and continuation of the 'ex post regime' will allow entrenched players to "continue exploiting regulatory gaps to stifle competition and innovation", they argued.

The letter sent to Corporate Affairs Secretary Manoj Govil earlier this week was signed by Murugavel Janakiraman, Founder and MD of Matrimony.Com; Vishnu Moha, Co-founder of Hoichoi; Morgan Cauvin, Head, Government Relations, India and Europe, Middle East, Africa, Match Group; and Manohar Singh Charan, Chief Financial Officer, Sharechat.

"...Signatories, all members of the Internet and Mobile



Association of India (IAMAI), write to express our diverging views to IAMAI's recent submission on the Draft Digital Competition Bill (DCB) and the Report of the Committee on Digital Competition Law. We state

that IAMAI's submission is not reflective of the entire digital startup ecosystem or IAMAI's diverse membership of over 540 companies as only a minuscule percentage of these members have opposed the ex-ante provisions

introduced by the DCB, yet the submission predominantly echoes this minority perspective," the letter said.

Put simply, the 'ex-ante' provision aims to ensure that the behaviours of large digital enterprises are proactively monitored and that the CCI intervenes before instances of anti-competitive conduct transpire.

Currently, the Competition Act primarily envisages an 'ex-post' framework of intervention, wherein the CCI intervenes after the occurrence of an anti-competitive conduct.

The dissenting companies, in their letter, said they believe that opposition of 'ex ante' regulations and continuation of the 'ex post regime', will lead to status quo being

maintained and allow entrenched players to continue exploiting regulatory gaps to stifle competition and innovation.

The invocation of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance' conveniently ignores the reality of market distortions and abuses that necessitate targeted regulatory interventions, they said.

"While we share similar concerns over the thresholds for designation of Systemically Significant Digital Enterprise (SSDEs), IAMAI's submission on the rest of the draft DCB seems to present obtuse concerns which go against the broader imperative of fostering fair competition across all core digital services in India, supporting the growth of

startups and protecting consumer welfare in India's digital economy," the letter said.

The thresholds for designation of an SSDE may require revision to ensure that only those entities which are sufficiently large and having substantial presence in digital markets in India are subject to the ex-ante regulations proposed in the DCB.

"This ensures that financial strength and user spread thresholds outlined in the DCB do not inadvertently encompass startups and other digital enterprises which are not true digital gatekeepers. This issue can also be effectively addressed by advocating for higher thresholds, so nascent digital services /products remain protected...By revisiting

thresholds, it can be ensured that only the largest digital gatekeepers (or 'Big Tech' companies), which have benefitted from network effects, fall within the DCB's scope," it said.

The letter exhorted the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to move forward with the draft DCB at the earliest.

"We believe that any lingering apprehensions can be effectively addressed during the drafting of the regulations under the draft DCB, ensuring that the Indian digital ecosystem benefits from a clear regulatory framework that fosters fair competition and incentivises innovation among startups and smaller businesses without fear of suppression by larger dominant gatekeepers," it said.

Hostage families urge ceasefire

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Families of Israeli hostages held by Hamas called for all parties to immediately accept a proposal detailed by US President Joe Biden to end the nearly 8-month-long war and bring their relatives home, but Israel's government said conditions for a cease-fire still must be met. Biden outlined a three-phase deal Friday proposed by Israel to Hamas, saying the militant group is "no longer capable" of carrying out another large-scale attack on Israel. He urged the Israelis and Hamas to come to an agreement to release some 100 remaining hostages, along with the bodies of around 30 more, for an extended cease-fire. Cease-fire talks ground to a halt last month after a major push by the US and other mediators to secure a deal in hopes of averting a full Israeli invasion of Gaza's southern city of Rafah. Israel says the Rafah operation is vital to uprooting Hamas



A Palestinian mourner carries the body of a child killed in Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip, during their funeral in Deir al Balah, Friday. AP/PTI

fighters responsible for the October 7 attack on southern Israel that triggered the war. Israel on Friday confirmed its troops were operating in central parts of the city. The ground assault has led to an exodus of around 1 million Palestinians out of the city and has thrown

UN humanitarian operations based in the area into turmoil. Following Biden's speech, hostage families said Saturday time was running out with the onus on both Israel and Hamas to accept the deal. "We want to see people coming back from Gaza alive and soon,"

Gili Roman told The Associated Press. His sister, Yarden Roman-Gat, was taken hostage and freed during a weeklong cease-fire in November, but Yarden's sister-in-law, Carmel, is still being held. "This might be the last chance to save lives. Therefore, the current state must be changed and we expect all to adhere to Biden's call for accepting the deal on the table, immediately. There is no other way towards a better situation for all. Our leadership must not disappoint us. But mostly, all eyes should be on Hamas," he said. The proposal came after what hostage families said was an aggressive meeting Thursday with Israel's national security adviser, Tzachi Hanegbi, who told them that the government wasn't ready to sign a deal to bring all of the hostages home and that there was no plan B. Hanegbi said this week he expects the war to drag on for another seven months, in order

to destroy the military and governing capabilities of Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad militant group. Netanyahu has promised a "total victory" that would remove Hamas from power, dismantle its military structure and return the hostages, and on Saturday, the government said its conditions for ending the war had not changed. Putting a permanent cease-fire in place before the conditions are fulfilled is a "non-starter," it said. Many hostage families blame the government's lack of will to secure a deal for the deaths of many of the hostages in captivity. "We know that the government of Israel has done an awful lot to delay reaching a deal and that has cost the lives of many people who survived in captivity for weeks and weeks and months and months. Our hearts are broken by the amount of people we will receive that are no longer alive," Sharone Lipschitz told AP.

Hezbollah fighters shoot down an Israeli drone in Lebanon

Beirut (AP): The militant Hezbollah group said it shot down an Israeli drone over southern Lebanon on Saturday, after hours Israeli drone strikes killed at least one person and wounded 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 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. "The incident is under review," the military said. The Hermes 900 Kochav is a medium altitude and long endurance drone that can carry four anti-tank guided missiles. Earlier Saturday, an Israeli drone strike on a motorcycle near the southern Lebanese village of Khibret Selm wounded two people, state-run National News Agency said. The agency reported another drone strike Saturday afternoon in a village near the southern city of Nabatiyeh. An Israeli airstrike on a house in the coastal village of Adloun killed one woman and wounded several others on Friday evening, the agency reported. Hezbollah began attacking Israeli military posts along the Lebanon-Israel border a day after the Israel-Hamas war broke out on Oct 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 non-combatants. In Israel, 15 soldiers and 10 civilians have been killed since October.

'War with China neither imminent nor unavoidable'

AP ■ SINGAPORE

United States Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin told a gathering of top security officials Saturday that war with China was neither imminent nor unavoidable, despite rapidly escalating tensions in the Asia-Pacific region, stressing the importance of renewed dialogue between him and his Chinese counterpart in avoiding "miscalculations and misunderstandings." Austin's comments at the Shangri-La defense forum in Singapore came the day after he met for more than an hour on the sidelines with Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun, the first in-person meeting between the top defense officials since contacts between the American and Chinese militaries broke down in 2022 after then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, infuriating Beijing. Neither side budged from their longstanding positions on Taiwan — which China claims as its own and has not ruled out using force to take — and on China's sweeping claims in the South China Sea, which has led to direct confrontations between China and other nations in the region, most notably the Philippines. While declining to detail the specifics of their conversation, Austin said the most important thing was that the two were again talking. "As long as we're talking, we're able to identify those issues that are troublesome and that we want to make sure that we have placed guardrails to ensure there are no miscalculations ... that can spiral out of control," he said. "You can only do that kind of thing if you are talking."



Addressing the same forum on Friday night, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr bluntly outlined what could be at stake, saying that if a Filipino were killed as China confronts his country's coast guard and merchant fleet to press its claims

in the South China Sea, it would be "very, very close to what we define as an act of war and therefore we will respond accordingly." Marcos added that he assumed the Philippines' treaty partners, which include the US, "hold the same standard." In his own speech, Austin lauded how Marcos "spoke so powerfully last night about how the Philippines is standing up for its sovereign rights under international law." But when pressed later, he would not say how the US might react if a Filipino were killed in a confrontation with China, calling it hypothetical. He did say the US commitment to the Philippines as a treaty partner is "ironclad," while again stressing the importance of dialogue with China. "There are a number of things that can happen at sea or in the air, we recognize that," he said. "But our goal is to make sure that we don't allow things to spiral out of control unnecessarily." Beijing in recent years has been rapidly expanding its navy and is becoming growingly assertive in pressing its claim to virtually the entire South China Sea. Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Richard Marles noted that not only had Philippine ships been rammed and hit with water cannons by China, but said a Chinese warplane dropped flares above an Australian helicopter earlier in the year, and in November a Chinese navy ship injured Australian divers in Japanese waters with sonar.

It's 'hard to meet' call for talks on Russia-Ukraine war: China

Beijing (AP): China said Friday it would be "hard to meet" calls for discussions on the Russia-Ukraine war, citing problems with arrangements that appear to point to Beijing's strongly pro-Moscow stance. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that "China's hopes appear to be hard to meet at the meeting." "There is still a clear gap between the arrangements for the meeting and the demands of the Chinese side, as well as the general expectations of the international community," Mao said. Mao gave no details, but said that China has "informed parties concerned about our considerations and concerns" and would keep in touch with all parties concerned. China claims to be neutral in the conflict, but has strongly backed Russia, most recently hosting President Vladimir Putin on a state visit. In an interview with China's

official Xinhua News Agency released Wednesday, Putin hailed his ties with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, saying that "President Xi maintains a respectful, friendly, open and at the same time business-like style of communication." "Our every meeting is not just a dialogue between old friends ... but also a fruitful exchange of views on the most topical issues on the bilateral and international agenda," Putin said. Putin hailed Beijing's peace plan for Ukraine that has been largely dismissed and makes no requirements for Moscow to return land it has seized, saying that "we commend China's approaches to resolving the crisis in Ukraine". Switzerland had proposed the talks for the coming days in hopes of bringing an end to the war, which was sparked by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb 24, 2022, but they haven't been endorsed by Moscow.

19 hurt as Russia hits Ukraine's power grid with fresh barrage

AP ■ KYIV

Russia pummeled Ukraine's energy infrastructure with a large-scale drone and missile attack Saturday, injuring at least 19 people, local officials said. The Ukrainian military reported that it had downed 35 out of the 53 missiles launched at targets across the country overnight on June 1, as well as 46 out of 47 attack drones. Injuries were reported by officials across the country, including in Ukraine's western Lviv region and the central Dnipropetrovsk region. Twelve people, including eight children, were hospitalized after a strike close to two houses where they were sheltering in the Kharkiv region, said Governor Oleh Syniehubov. The strikes were part of a series of sustained attacks by Russia against Ukraine's power grid, which has been ongoing since March. Ukraine's largest

private energy firm, DTEK said that two of its power plants had been seriously damaged in what it said was the sixth attack on the company's plants in two and a half months. Meanwhile, Ukraine's Energy Minister, Herman Halushchenko, said in a statement on social media that energy infrastructure in the Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Kirovohrad and Ivano-Frankivsk regions had also been targeted. Damage to Ukraine's energy infrastructure in recent weeks has forced leaders of the war-ravaged country to institute nationwide rolling blackouts. Without adequate air defences to counter assaults and allow for repairs, the shortages could still worsen as need spikes in late summer and the bitter-cold winter. In response to the strikes, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reiterated

Kyiv's need for additional air defense systems from its Western allies. "Civilians, infrastructure and energy facilities. This is what Russia is constantly at war with," he said in a post Saturday on X, formerly Twitter. "Our partners know exactly what is needed for this. Additional Patriot and other modern air defence systems for Ukraine. Accelerating and expanding the delivery of F-16s to Ukraine. Providing our warriors with all the necessary capabilities." Elsewhere, five civilians died amid Ukrainian shelling in the Russian-occupied Donetsk region, said the area's Moscow-installed leader Denis Pushilin. Another three people were injured, he said. The Russian Defence Ministry also said that it had shot down two Ukrainian drones on Saturday morning over Russia's Belgorod region. No casualties were reported.

ANC party that freed S Africa from apartheid loses its 30-year majority

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

The African National Congress party lost its parliamentary majority in a historic election result Saturday that puts South Africa on a new political path for the first time since the end of the apartheid system of white minority rule 30 years ago. With nearly 99% of votes counted, the once-dominant ANC had received just over 40% in the election on Wednesday, well short of the majority it had held since the famed all-race vote of 1994 that ended apartheid and brought it to power under Nelson Mandela. The final results are still to be formally declared by the independent electoral commission that ran the election. While opposition parties hailed it as a momentous breakthrough for a country struggling with deep poverty and inequality, the ANC

remained the biggest party by some way but will now need to look for a coalition partner or partners to remain in the government and reelect President Cyril Ramaphosa for a second and final term. Parliament elects the South African president after national elections. The result ended the ANC's dominance three-decade dominance of South Africa's young democracy, but the way forward promises to be complicated for Africa's most advanced economy, and there's no coalition on the table yet. The main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, was on around 21%. The new MK Party of former President Jacob Zuma, who has turned against the ANC he once led, came third with just over 14% of the vote in the first election it has contested. Which parties the ANC might approach to co-govern with is the urgent focus now, given Parliament needs to sit and elect a presi-

dent within 14 days of the final election results being officially declared. A flurry of negotiations were set to take place and they will likely be complicated. The MK Party said one of their conditions for any agreement was that Ramaphosa is removed as ANC leader and president. "We are willing to negotiate with the ANC, but not the ANC of Cyril Ramaphosa," MK Party spokesperson Nhlamulo Ndlela said. More than 50 parties contested the national election, but given how far off a majority the ANC appears to be, it is likely that it will have to approach one of the three main opposition parties. MK and the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters have called for parts of the economy to be nationalised. The centrist Democratic Alliance is viewed as a business-friendly party and analysts say an ANC-DA coalition would be more wel-

comed by foreign investors. Despite the uncertainty, South African opposition parties were hailing the new political picture as a much-needed change for the country of 62 million, which is Africa's most developed but also one of the most unequal in the world. South Africa has widespread poverty and extremely high levels of unemployment and the ANC has struggled to raise the standard of living for millions. The official unemployment rate is 32%, one of the highest in the world, and the poverty disproportionately affects Black people, who make up 80% of the population and have been the core of the ANC's support for years. The ANC has also been blamed - and apparently punished by voters - for a failure in basic government services that impacts millions and leaves many without water, electricity or proper housing.

Sri Lanka police arrests wanted hand of 4 ISIS suspects

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lankan Police have arrested the suspected handler of the four of its nationals who were arrested at Ahmedabad airport in India for their alleged links with the banned Islamic State (ISIS) outfit. The Criminal Investigation Department arrested Pushparaja Osman, 46, on Friday in Colombo. Sri Lanka Police recently announced a cash award of Rs. 2 million for any credible information on his whereabouts. Police had issued a wanted notice and a video of him seeking information from the public. The CID arrested him and he was believed to have made telephone contact with the four people arrested at the Ahmedabad airport, the police said. The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad arrested four Sri Lankans with links to ISIS at the airport in Ahmedabad.

North Korea launches more trash-carrying balloons to South

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea launched more trash-carrying balloons toward the South after a similar campaign earlier in the week, according to South Korea's military, in what Pyongyang calls retaliation for activists flying anti-North Korean leaflets across the border. South Korea's Defence Ministry did not immediately comment on the number of balloons it had detected or how many have landed in South Korea. The military advised people to beware of falling objects and not to touch objects suspected to be from North Korea, but report them to military or police offices instead. In Seoul, the capital, the city government sent text alerts saying that unidentified objects suspected to be flown from North Korea were being detected in skies near the city

and that the military was responding to them. The North's balloon launches added to a recent series of provocative steps, which include its failed spy satellite launch and test-firings of about 10 suspected short-range missiles this week. South Korea's military dispatched chemical rapid response and explosive clearance teams to recover the debris from some 260 North Korean balloons that were found in various parts of the country from Tuesday night to Wednesday. The military said the balloons carried various types of trash and manure but no dangerous substances like chemical, biological or radioactive materials. In a statement on Wednesday, Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, confirmed that the North sent the balloons to make good on her country's recent threat to "scatter

mounds of wastepaper and filth" in South Korea in response to leafletting campaigns by South Korean activists. She hinted that balloons could become the North's standard response to leafletting moving forward, saying that the North would respond by "scattering rubbish dozens of times more than those being scattered to us". North Korea is extremely sensitive about any outside attempt to undermine Kim Jong Un's absolute control over the country's 26 million people, most of whom have little access to foreign news. In 2020, North Korea blew up an empty South Korean-built liaison office on its territory after a furious response to South Korean civilian leafletting campaigns. In 2014, North Korea fired at propaganda balloons flying toward its territory and South Korea returned fire, though there were no casualties.

Suu Kyi close ally Tin Oo, dies

AP ■ BANGKOK

Tin Oo, one of the closest associates of Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi as well as a co-founder of her National League for Democracy party, has died. He was 97. Tin Oo died Saturday morning at Yangon General Hospital, said Moh Khan, a charity worker, citing a member of his family. Charity workers in Myanmar handle funeral arrangements. Moh Khan said Tin Oo had been hospitalised at Yangon General Hospital on Wednesday due to difficulty urinating and other health problems, including weakness. His cause of death was not immediately announced. Tin Oo was respected by many of his party's members for his outspokenness and courage as he shared many of Suu Kyi's travails. In 1988, Tin Oo helped found the National League for Democracy with Suu Kyi after a failed revolt against military rule. He became vice chairman, then chairman of the new



party. But when the military cracked down the following year, he was put under house arrest, as was Suu Kyi. Similar to her, he spent 14 of the next 21 years under house arrest or in prison before he was released ahead of the 2010 general election. The party had won a 1990 election, but the results were annulled by the ruling military, which launched a crackdown on its opponents. In 2003, in one of the intermittent periods when he and Suu Kyi were at liberty before their 2010 release, they had the har-

rowing experience of being ambushed on a country road in upper Myanmar by a mob widely believed to have been assembled by an element of the military. The incident occurred as the party leaders were making a political tour and attracting large crowds of supporters. The two leaders managed an escape, though dozens in their entourage were apparently killed in the attack, details of which remain murky. Despite being the targets, Suu Kyi and Tin Oo were detained in prison and then house arrest again after the incident.

Sexist tropes and misinformation swirl online as Mexico prepares to elect its first female leader

AP ■ MEXICAN CITY

Mexican voters are poised to elect their first female president, a cause of celebration for many that has also touched off a flurry of false and misogynist online claims, blurring the lines behind fact and fiction. The two leading candidates, both women, have had to respond to demeaning attacks about their appearance, their credentials and their ability to lead the nation. The candidate considered the favourite in Sunday's contest, former Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum, has also faced slurs about her Jewish background as well as repeatedly debunked claims she was born in Hungary. This week, in an apparent bid to undermine her candidacy, a social media account impersonating a legitimate news outlet posted fake, AI-generated audio of Sheinbaum admitting that her campaign was failing in a key Mexican state. The wave of



election misinformation facing voters in Mexico is the latest example of how the internet, social media and AI are fuelling the spread of false, misleading or hateful content in democracies around the world, warping public discourse and potentially influencing election outcomes. "We have a general atmosphere of disinformation here in Mexico, but it's slightly different from what is happening in India, or the US," said Manuel Alejandro Guerrero, a professor

and communications researcher at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. In Mexico's case, that misinformation is the result of growing distrust of the news media, violence committed by drug cartels, and rapid increases in social media usage coupled with a lag in digital literacy. Guerrero added one more contributing factor now familiar to Americans: political leaders who willingly spread disinformation themselves.

Sheinbaum is a member of the Morena party, led by current President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. She faces opposition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez and Jorge Álvarez Máynez of the small Citizen Movement party. Compared with election misinformation spread about male candidates, the attacks against Gálvez and Sheinbaum often take a particularly personal nature and focus on their gender, according to Maria Calderon, an attorney and researcher from Mexico who works with the Mexico Institute, a think tank based in Washington, D.C., that studies online politics. "I was surprised by how cruel the comments could be," said Calderon, whose analysis found that attacks on female candidates like Sheinbaum and Gálvez typically focus on their appearance, or their credentials, whereas misinformation about male candidates is more often about policy proposals.

Spelling Bee finalists, mostly Indian-American children, visit WH

Washington (PTI): Bruhat Soma, the Scripps National Spelling Bee's Indian-American winner, along with the seven other finalists was invited by the White House for a visit, a lifetime experience for these young talents. Bruhat, a 12-year-old seventh-grade student from Florida, emerged victorious in the prestigious Scripps National Spelling Bee on Thursday, earning more than USD 50,000 in cash and other prizes. He blitzed through 30 words in 90 seconds Thursday night and judges determined that he spelled 29 of them correctly — nine more than his competitor, Faizan Zaki. On Friday, the White House invited them to attend an event on the South Lawn where President Joe Biden welcomed the Kansas City Chiefs to celebrate their championship season and victory in Super Bowl LVIII.



Explore the artistic brilliance and cultural legacy of Sonal Mansingh through the fascinating world of classical dance with **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

THE LIVING LEGEND OF SONAL MANSINGH

In the realm of Indian classical dance, few names carry as much weight and reverence as that of Sonal Mansingh. Her life's journey is not just a tale of individual accomplishment but a testament to the power of art in transcending boundaries and enriching lives.

Sonal Mansingh's relationship with dance began at an early age. Raised in a family that valued both tradition and modernity, she was exposed to various forms of art and culture from childhood. Her initial training in Bharatanatyam began under the tutelage of renowned Guru Shri Chandralekha. However, it was her encounter with the legendary Odissi guru, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, that shaped her destiny. Under his guidance, Sonal delved deep into the intricate nuances of Odissi, a classical dance form from the eastern state of Odisha, India. She mastered the art with such finesse that she became one of its foremost exponents, earning acclaim both nationally and internationally.

Sonal Mansingh's journey has not been without its share of challenges. As a woman navigating the patriarchal landscape of Indian society, she faced skepticism and resistance from traditional quarters. Yet, with unwavering determination and resilience, she shattered stereotypes and carved a niche for herself in a male-dominated field. Her artistic integrity and commitment to her craft have been unwavering, even in the face of adversity. Through her performances, workshops, and lectures, she has tirelessly worked towards preserving and promoting India's rich cultural heritage, inspiring generations of artists to follow in her footsteps.

As a cultural icon, Sonal Mansingh's legacy transcends boundaries of time and geography. She has not only enriched the world of dance with her unparalleled talent but has also left an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of millions



SONAL MANSINGH'S JOURNEY HAS NOT BEEN WITHOUT ITS SHARE OF CHALLENGES. AS A WOMAN NAVIGATING THE PATRIARCHAL LANDSCAPE OF INDIAN SOCIETY, SHE FACED SKEPTICISM AND RESISTANCE FROM TRADITIONAL QUARTERS. YET, WITH UNWAVERING DETERMINATION AND RESILIENCE, SHE SHATTERED STEREOTYPES AND CARVED A NICHE FOR HERSELF IN A MALE-DOMINATED FIELD. HER ARTISTIC INTEGRITY AND COMMITMENT TO HER CRAFT HAVE BEEN UNWAVERING, EVEN IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY



around the world. Her life's journey is a testament to the transformative power of art and its ability to bridge divides, foster dialogue, and celebrate the beauty of human expression.

In an ever-changing world, where the allure of tradition often clashes with the forces of modernity, Sonal Mansingh stands as a beacon of a vibrant tradition, innovation, and timeless grace, reminding us of the enduring relevance of our cultural roots. As she continues to inspire and enchant audiences with her artistry, her legacy remains etched in the annals of Indian classical dance, a shining testament to the enduring power of the human spirit.

Sonal Mansingh's dance themes often encompass a rich tapestry of mythological narratives, cultural traditions, and social issues. Through her performances, she weaves together stories from Indian history and legends, ancient and contemporary texts exploring the tales of gods and goddesses with intricate choreography and expressive movements. Her interpretations of classical dance are imbued with deep spiritual and philosophical elements, reflecting her profound understanding of Indian culture and traditions.

Additionally, she often addresses contemporary social issues through her choreography, using dance as a medium for commentary and reflection. Whether addressing themes of gender equality, environmental consciousness, or the human experience, Mansingh infuses her performances with relevance and meaning, engaging audiences on both artistic and intellectual levels. Overall, Sonal Mansingh's dance themes transcend mere entertainment, serving as a platform for storytelling, cultural preservation,

and social advocacy. Through her artistry, she continues to captivate and inspire audiences around the world, leaving a lasting impression with each graceful movement.

Sonal Mansingh, a prominent figure in the world of Indian classical dance, also had a notable involvement in politics. While she is primarily celebrated for her contributions to dance, her engagement in political discourse arose when she was nominated to the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian Parliament, in 2018. Her nomination was a recognition of her achievements and contributions to Indian culture and arts, acknowledging the importance of promoting and preserving India's rich cultural heritage within the political sphere. As a member of the Rajya Sabha, Mansingh has used the platform to advocate for the arts, cultural preservation, and the promotion of Indian dance forms. She actively participated in debates and discussions concerning cultural policies, education, sociology of culture and the role of the arts in society.

Mansingh's foray into politics highlighted the intersection of culture, arts, and governance in India. Her journey serves as a reminder of the importance of recognizing and supporting cultural icons within the political landscape, ensuring that the nation's rich artistic heritage continues to thrive and flourish.

Sonal Mansingh, a luminary in the realm of Indian classical dance, has left an indelible mark through her illustrious career. Honored with the Padma Bhushan in 1992, and the Padma Vibhushan in 2003, she has been lauded for her exceptional contributions to the performing arts.

As the founder of the Centre for Indian Classical Dances (CICD) in New Delhi, Mansingh established a bastion for the promotion and preservation of various classical dance forms, nurturing young talent and disseminating awareness of India's rich cultural heritage. Her mesmerizing performances have graced prestigious stages worldwide, serving as a cultural ambassador and fostering appreciation for Indian art and heritage.

Appointed as a UNESCO Artist for Peace in 2003, Mansingh's efforts in promoting intercultural dialogue through dance have been globally recognized. Beyond tradition, her artistic vision fearlessly explores new themes, narratives, and choreographic styles, breathing fresh life into age-old traditions and inspiring generations of artists.

Sonal Mansingh's life is a tapestry of devotion to Indian classical dance, and a commitment to preserving and promoting India's cultural heritage. Born in 1944 in Bombay, she began her dance training at a young age, later becoming a trailblazer in the field. With a career spanning over six decades, Mansingh has dazzled audiences worldwide with her performances, lectures & interviews earning numerous accolades and honors along the way.

Beyond her contributions to dance, Mansingh has been a cultural ambassador for India, spreading awareness of its rich artistic traditions.

“As in life, so in dance, character is essential”

SONAL MANSINGH talks about her art, life and life philosophy that went into making the person she is. She opened up to **THE PIONEER**. Excerpts

What are some memorable performances or collaborations that have shaped your artistic journey?

Well, memorable performances and collaborations are different. From the very beginning in 1961, when I gave my maiden solo performance, to this day, every performance has been memorable for one reason or another. Whether it was in Venezuela or China, Mongolia or Mandi, in a big opera house of a megapolis or on a small-town stage, each one was memorable. Choosing the best among them all is rather difficult. However, the performance in Delhi after my car accident in Germany in 1975 stands out. Many dancers told me they were inspired by it, saying that at times they didn't see me but saw sparks. The performance for the Dalai Lama in McLeod Ganj in 1994 was also significant for its content, which moved him to tears. Performing in front of Mount Kailash was a once-in-a-lifetime divine experience.

Tell us something about your collaborations.

Regarding collaborations, I haven't had many. My performances in Bharatanatyam, Odissi, or Chhau are



collaborations with musicians, my guide and Guru Shri Jeevan Pani Ji, researchers, gurus, yoga gurus, and anyone from whom I learned something. Life itself is a great collaboration. Learning is an effort unto itself. Things keep happening, and one must become aware of them. Life is a jigsaw puzzle from which one picks little nuggets of wisdom.

What values are essential in classical dance?

As in life, so in dance, character is essential. Character building starts in mother's womb or even from previous births (poorva janma) and karma samskara. It then grows with upbringing, nurturing, travel, and learning. Due diligence is essential. Even slight lethargy or negativity can creep in if you leave the door of consciousness ajar, so one must always be aware. What must be

done should be done in a timely manner, and every detail must be worked out. Humility is important. Remember, reevaluate, reassess, and move on (manan chintan). Reading is essential, especially in times of dependence on social media: read, discuss, understand, and carve your own path.

How do you approach interpreting classical dance forms to suit contemporary audiences?

I always did what I wanted to do, and this tendency was further encouraged by my Bharatanatyam guru, U.S. Krishna Rao. We are different from Western classical dancers, where brochures are distributed at the beginning, and ballerinas dance with 50 other dancers. Audience should read the brochure before the performance begins because



later there are no commentaries or announcements. That stuck with me. You cannot give a rundown of every performance you give. Every sanchari (to convey a story or series of events through body language, hand gestures, and facial expressions) must be spontaneous. If it is pre-decided, it doesn't stay spontaneous. But I leave it to each dancer, as it depends on her training, way of thinking, and approach to dance.

Tell us something about the themes and content of your choreographic works.

I have always chosen themes of women empowerment, such as Devi, Draupadi, Panchkanya, river pollution (Krishna-Kaliya) atmospheric pollution, and thought pollution. I always say the three Vs-vichar (thought), vaani (speech), and vyavhaar

(behavior)-need to be cleansed from time to time to ward off negativity. Today, people are stressed, tired, and emotionally burdened. Our dances address these issues and uplift emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

What advice do you have for aspiring classical dancers regarding training and technique?

Many things have changed over the years, but some things remain the same. Ekagrachitta (एकाग्रचित्त), or focus and commitment, is one such tenet all students must observe. When you go to a Guru to learn, you must be well-prepared for the next class. You must have respect for the teacher, the traditions, the place you perform, the iconography, the messages contained in the Puranas, the temples, their

architecture, and so on.

What do you have to say about the mythology of the Puranas from where you draw your themes?

I would say mythology is the wrong word. Mythology comes from 'mythos' (in Greek) which is akin to fairy tales. Our stories are not fairy tales; they are actual events that took place long ago. They have messages and inspirations that transcend time. We must honor, respect, and work according to these stories.

What are some of the challenges you've faced in your career, and how have you overcome them?

Life is a journey full of challenges, and these challenges shape who you are and how you deal with them. They help you grow, evolve, and become a



better person. I took two vows with my grandfather: I will never commercialize dance, so I give all the money from my performances to my institute, Shri Kamakhya Kalapeeth (Centre for Indian Classical Dances). I have lived in rented accommodations and will continue to do so, after my term as Member of Parliament is over.

Could you share a particularly rewarding or transformative experience you've had?

There are not just one but many. If one allows oneself to be like a lotus and opens up to Sun, every moment is transformative and rewarding. One needs to open up to accept beauty with one's eyes, ears, mind, and heart-Satyam Shivam Sundaram. There is a beautiful prayer, "Asatoma Sadgamaya" (Lead me from ignorance to truth), "Tamasoma Jyotir Gamaya" (Lead me from darkness to light), "Mrityorma Amritam Gamaya" (Lead me from time-bound consciousness to the timeless state of Being). May we all have that rewarding journey. Through my dance, learning, and friends, I have lived a fulfilling and rewarding life. The human avatar is very rare; let's make the most of it.

The Niazi brothers have not only preserved the traditional essence of Qawwali but have also managed to infuse it with contemporary relevance, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

KEEPERS OF QAWWALI'S SOUL IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

Immersed in the mysticism of Sufi music, the Niazi Brothers stand as luminaries in the realm of Qawwali, weaving a tapestry of tradition and innovation. Sufi music, with its ethereal melodies and profound lyrics, transcends the boundaries of time and culture, reaching deep into the human soul. Rooted in the mystical traditions of Sufism, this genre resonates with listeners by invoking a sense of spiritual awakening and emotional connection. The timeless appeal of Sufi music lies in its ability to convey universal themes of love, devotion, and the quest for divine union, making it a poignant and enduring form of artistic expression that continues to captivate audiences across generations.

A JOURNEY THROUGH SUFI MUSIC
The Niazi Brothers, hailing from Pakistan, are renowned for their powerful and evocative performances

that capture the very essence of Qawwali. The group's roots can be traced back to the renowned Patiala Gharana, known for its distinctive style and musical prowess. Growing up in a family where music was as essential as air, the brothers were immersed in the world of Qawwali from a young age, learning the intricacies and subtleties of the genre from their forebears. Their father, Ustad Allah Rakha, was a renowned Qawwali singer who instilled in them a deep respect for the traditional forms and the spiritual messages conveyed through their music. This early education laid a strong foundation, allowing the Niazi Brothers to develop a profound understanding of both the technical and emotional aspects of Qawwali. However, the Niazi Brothers' rise to prominence was not an overnight success but a journey of relentless dedication and passion. Their performances are characterised by a deep emotional connection, powerful vocals, and a mastery of the harmonium and tabla, all of which are central to the Qawwali experience. The brothers have performed on numerous prestigious stages around the world, captivating audiences with their dynamic energy and spiritual depth. Their repertoire includes classical Qawwalis that date back centuries, as well as more contemporary pieces that reflect current social and spiritual themes. This blend of old and new has helped them reach a diverse audience,

from traditionalists who appreciate the purity of their classical renditions to younger listeners who find resonance in their modern interpretations.

THE FUTURE OF QAWWALI IN A FAST-PACED WORLD

As the world hurtles forward with technological advancements and shifting cultural landscapes, the future of Qawwali faces both challenges and opportunities. The Niazi Brothers are acutely aware of this dynamic and have been proactive in adapting to the changing times while preserving the core essence of their music. One significant avenue they have explored is the digital realm. Through social media platforms, streaming services, and online concerts, the Niazi Brothers have reached a global audience that transcends geographical boundaries. These platforms have allowed them to share their music with fans who might never have had the opportunity to experience a live Qawwali performance, thereby expanding the genre's reach and relevance. Moreover, collaborations with artists from different musical backgrounds have also played a crucial role in keeping Qawwali vibrant and relevant. By blending traditional Qawwali with contemporary music styles, the Niazi Brothers have created a unique fusion that appeals to a broader audience. This fusion not only keeps the tradition alive but also introduces its profound

spiritual and emotional depth to new listeners.

PRESERVING TRADITION WHILE EMBRACING INNOVATION

The Niazi Brothers' approach to the future of Qawwali is a delicate balance of preservation and innovation. They remain deeply committed to the traditional aspects of Qawwali, understanding that its true power lies in its authenticity and spiritual roots. At the same time, they are not afraid to experiment and incorporate new elements that resonate with today's audiences. Education and mentorship also form a significant part of their vision for the future. By teaching young musicians the art of Qawwali, the Niazi Brothers are ensuring that this ancient tradition is passed down to future generations. They conduct workshops and training sessions, sharing their knowledge and passion with aspiring Qawwalis, thus creating a new generation of musicians who can carry the torch forward. The journey of the Niazi Brothers is a testament to the enduring power of Qawwali. Through their dedication, talent, and willingness to innovate, they have kept this ancient form of spiritual music alive and thriving. As the world continues to change at a rapid pace, the Niazi Brothers stand as guardians of a rich musical heritage, ensuring that the soul-stirring strains of Qawwali continue to resonate across the globe for generations to come.



NIAZI BROTHERS ENTHRAL AT JASHN-E-QAWWALI CONCERT

Wishes & Blessings, a Delhi-based NGO committed to aiding those in need, organised the third edition of the fundraising concert, Jashn-E-Qawwali at Kamani Auditorium, Delhi. The event showcased mesmerizing performances by the internationally acclaimed Qawwali group, Niazi Brothers. Their soulful melodies captivated the audience, who swayed to power-packed performances ranging from traditional Qawwali tunes to popular Bollywood hits and original compositions by the Niazi Brothers. Standout renditions included timeless classics such as 'Kun Faya Kun,' 'Chaap Tilak,' 'Bhar De Jholi,' and 'Dama Dam Mast Qalandar'. The event attracted a wide audience, including beneficiaries of various Wishes & Blessings programmes like Sahas (an upskilling programme for women), the street-to-school initiative, and the community kitchen. "We are extremely overwhelmed by the turnout and the resounding success of Jashn-E-Qawwali," said Dr Geetanjali Chopra, Founder and President of Wishes & Blessings, adding that,

"This marks the third edition of the fundraiser, with the previous two being immensely successful. The funds raised this year will directly contribute to our WB Raso program, addressing the fundamental need for food among those in need. We are grateful to Niazi Brothers for their continued support and to everyone who attended and contributed for the cause."



The funds raised will support the expansion of WB Raso, a new initiative aimed at providing nutritious meals to individuals in need. The NGO recently launched its first WB Raso in NOIDA, NCR. Shahid Niazi of the Niazi Brothers shared, "It was an honour to perform for such a noble cause. When we needed help, they were there for us. This was our time to give back. We are proud to be associated with Wishes & Blessings NGO for the past three years and look forward to contributing more in the future." The triumphant culmination of Jashn-E-Qawwali underscores Wishes & Blessings' commitment to making a meaningful difference in marginalised communities and lives and exemplifies music's power in fostering social change.



Photos: Pankaj Kumar

Theatre of Enchantment

Gulzar's captivating adaptation of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* took centrestage last week with director Salim Arif's masterful vision bringing this timeless comedy to life, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Delhi was recently treated to an evening of theatrical enchantment at the prestigious Shri Ram Centre Auditorium. Amidst the city's vibrant energy, laughter and thunderous applause emerged as the renowned Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts (SRCPA) Repertory unveiled Gulzar's spellbinding adaptation of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, titled *2 BY 2*. The auditorium was transformed into a realm of lighthearted gaiety, captivating the audience with the timeless magic of a live performance. Every artist was wholeheartedly appreciated, showcasing the audience's love for exceptional work. In a world where appreciation is often fleeting, this play, masterfully directed by the renowned Mohammed Salim Arif, stood as a testament to the enduring power of art. An acclaimed visionary in the realms of film, television and theatre, Salim's directorial prowess in *2 BY 2* can only be described as a masterpiece of the highest calibre. The play is a comedic masterpiece that tickles the funny bone with its hilarious depiction of mistaken identities and coincidental mix-ups involving identical twins with identical names. Designed and directed by Salim Arif and performed by ace artists, the play is a delightful experience. The audience was particularly impressed with the fact the actors performed and delivered on a script like Gulzar's script and Arif's direction. Resemblance with the adaptation of Shakespeare's classic drama in the film *Angoor* was quite obvious but the theatrical adaptation was indeed a beautiful execution of the masterpiece.

2 BY 2, like Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, centres on two pairs of identical twins with identical names. Raj Tilak, a wealthy merchant, has identical twins named Ashok. During a journey, Raj Tilak discovers another pair of identical twins and adopts them, calling them Bahadur. An unfortunate accident separates the family, with each parent ending up with one child from each pair. One set of twins grows up married while the other remains single and mischievous. The comedy unfolds when the unmarried Ashok and Bahadur duo arrive in the city where the married Ashok and Bahadur reside. The ensuing confusion, involving their families, a jeweller, a taxi driver, and an inspector, leads to a series of hilarious misunderstandings that has the audience in stitches. The play masterfully blends humour, acting, and a classic script to create an entertaining experience. Gulzar's script, known for its poetic and situational brilliance, adds depth and flavour to the play, enthraling the audience all along. Director Salim Arif commented, "Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* is a classic that centres on the notion of 'mistaken identity'. In Gulzar Saab's adaptation *2 BY 2*, the arrival of the unmarried Ashok and Bahadur in the city where the married Ashok and Bahadur reside creates a confusion that involves more than their families, to extend to a jeweller, a police inspector, and the town." The performances by the cast was exceptional, their expressions, delivery

and timing impeccable. The sets, lighting, costumes and props were meticulously crafted, adding to the play's charm. The success of *2 BY 2* is an indication to the enduring appeal of high-quality, engaging theatre. The combination of Salim Arif's direction and Gulzar Saab's writing created an unforgettable experience, proving that great work continues to receive the appreciation it deserves. *2 BY 2* is more than just a simple tale of confusion. The script, penned by the legendary Gulzar, is a masterpiece of situational comedy. Each dialogue adds a layer of humour to the chaos, keeping the audience perpetually on the edge of their seats in anticipation of what comes next. Director Salim Arif masterfully brings the script to life, ensuring the comedic timing is spot on. The talented cast deserves credit for its captivating performances. From subtle inflections to dramatic gestures, every aspect of the actors' performance is a testament to their dedication to the craft. The play does not just rely on the actors. The set's design, perfect lighting, costumes and props, all contribute in transporting the audience into the world of *2 BY 2*. *2 BY 2* is indeed a celebration of theatre at its finest. As the curtains came down on the play, a thunderous applause filled the auditorium, showcasing the profound impact on the audience. The seamless blend of Gulzar's storytelling, Salim Arif's direction and the exceptional performances created an unforgettable evening of laughter and delight. With this play, the SRCPA further underlined its commitment to bringing exceptional theatre to Delhi, reminding us of power of art to unite, entertain and inspire. As one left the theatre, one was reminded of the fact that amidst life's complexities, the gift of shared joy through a live performance is an eternal treasure.

TRAILBLAZING JOURNEY THROUGH BHARATANATYAM

Apeksha Niranjan Mundargi, a pioneer in the field of Bharatanatyam, has ushered in a new dawn for this ancient art form with her passion and innovative spirit, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

In the vibrant tapestry of classical Indian dance forms, Bharatanatyam is a captivating expression of grace, rhythm and storytelling. At the forefront of this ancient art's contemporary renaissance is Apeksha Niranjan Mundargi, a celebrated dancer, choreographer, and teacher from Mumbai. With a journey that began in the culturally rich city of Kolhapur, Apeksha's unwavering passion and dedication have elevated her to the ranks of the most accomplished Bharatanatyam artists of our time. Through her exceptional talent, innovative choreography and profound understanding of the art form's rich heritage, she has captivated audiences across the globe, ushering in a new era of appreciation for this timeless dance tradition. Apeksha's journey in mastering Bharatanatyam has been one of dedication, discipline and learning. She describes how her love for the dance form is rooted in its profound ability to tell stories through rhythm, expression and grace. From a young age, she was captivated by the intricate footwork, eloquent gestures and expressive use of the eyes. Her journey, guided by her gurus, has deepened her appreciation for the rich cultural heritage and intricate techniques of Bharatanatyam. One of Apeksha's notable productions, *Nayanam*, which means eyes in Sanskrit, explores the myriad emotions conveyed through the eyes. This thematic performance highlights the eyes as windows to the soul, capable of portraying joy, love, sorrow and longing. Apeksha recounts a memorable moment during her Poland Spring Tour 2024 when a girl in the audience was moved to tears by *Nayanam*, underscoring the power of dance to push barriers.

Apeksha's training in the *Nritya-Ganga* dance style, introduced by her Guru Dr Sucheta Chapekar, has significantly influenced her interpretation and performance of Bharatanatyam. This style blends tradition with innovation, enhancing her performances while staying true to the essence of the art form. She emphasises that dance is a form of visual poetry, where the essence lies in dancing to the music rather than treating it as a mathematical exercise. Reflecting on her performance at a festival in Italy in 2022, Apeksha shared how she traversed a kilometre on the road while performing Bharatanatyam, ending at the 'Gate of Peace'. She portrayed the story of *Yamuna Gatha*, addressing the pollution and pain of the Yamuna River. This contemporary theme demonstrated the relevance and power of Bharatanatyam in addressing contemporary issues

and left a lasting impact on the international audience. Apeksha also highlighted the unique aspects of the Tanjavur school of Bharatanatyam, which prioritises fluidity and musicality. She incorporates these elements into her performances, creating a harmonious and synchronised expression. Her choreography balances traditional elements with her unique artistic expression, ensuring that the soul of Bharatanatyam remains intact while infusing it with innovation. Addressing the challenges faced by classical dancers today, Apeksha emphasises the importance of finding platforms to present her art and balance multiple roles while managing family life. She credits her supportive family and dedicated team for helping her navigate these challenges. She sees Bharatanatyam evolving in the modern era by making it more accessible and relatable. She aims to showcase stories that resonate with the audiences and connect through local music and folk stories. By incorporating elements such as the poetry of saints from Maharashtra and performing Bharatanatyam based on local folk stories and Gregorian chants, she hopes to bridge cultural divides and ensure that the art form remains relevant. For young dancers aspiring to pursue Bharatanatyam professionally, Apeksha advises prioritising dedicated practice, seeking guidance from knowledgeable gurus and embracing innovation within the framework of tradition. She encourages dancers to focus on expressing emotions authentically and maintaining physical and mental fitness.

Apeksha prepares for her performances through a holistic process that begins months in advance. This involves choreography, music creation, refining movements and mental rehearsal. She emphasises the importance of being adaptable and maintaining a calm demeanour, acknowledging that uncertainties may arise on a given day. She recalls her moment of connection with her audience during a performance in Poland, where she danced to Polish folk music. The fusion of Bharatanatyam with traditional Polish music created a unique and captivating experience, highlighting the universal language of dance. She aspires to spread the beauty and richness of Bharatanatyam worldwide, ensuring it remains accessible and appreciated by diverse audiences. Through innovative choreography and engaging performances, she continues to contribute to the global recognition of Bharatanatyam as a profound and timeless art form. Apeksha Niranjan Mundargi's journey through Bharatanatyam is a testament to the transformative power of dance. Her dedication, innovative spirit and profound connection to the art form have not only elevated her performances but also enriched the cultural landscape. As she continues to spread the beauty and richness of Bharatanatyam worldwide, Apeksha inspires us to embrace tradition while welcoming innovation to deepen our appreciation for this timeless art form. In this, Apeksha Niranjan is truly a beacon of light, illuminating the path for future generations, ensuring that the rich tapestry of Bharatanatyam continues to captivate and inspire audiences for times to come.



WHERE FOOD MEETS ART IN PLATING

It is not just about cooking the dish well but also plating them right is the idea is to engage all the senses for an overall dining experience, says **SHARMILA CHAND**



Sculpt, layer, paint, drizzle. Splash, a squiggle, dots, the jus, the sauce... there is an artist at work, bent, eyes fixed at his plate, in front of you at your table in the restaurant. He is undeterred till he finishes his task. Another few minutes, he finally looks up and tells you, your dish is ready. The artist is none other than the chef who has been busy meticulously plating the dish you ordered. The plate is his canvas and he is creating a visual masterpiece.

It's not just about cooking the dish right but the idea is to engage all the senses for an overall dining experience. "I find the process of plating to be as crucial as the preparation of the dish itself," says Chef Amandeep Singh, Executive Sous Chef at The Westin Mumbai Garden City. For him, "Plating is an art form cherished by food connoisseurs worldwide, where every element on the plate serves as a canvas for creativity and expression."

Colour and Shape Chef Amandeep's preference leans towards minimalist, neutral-coloured plates that allow the vibrant hues of the dish to shine. "The shape of the plate is equally significant; I favour plates with clean lines and ample space for artistic arrangement. Each dish has its personality, and the shape of the plate can either accentuate or detract from its essence. For instance, a circular plate complements dishes with symmetrical components, while elongated plates are ideal for showcasing linear arrangements," he says.

"The colour of the dish and its ingredients wield immense influence over the plating process. Take, for example, my signature dish, Tandoori Salmon with Mango Salsa. The vibrant hues of the succulent salmon and the vibrant mango salsa pop against a pristine white plate, creating a visually captivating presentation that entices the palate even before the first bite," adds Chef Amandeep.

According to Chef Sandeep Kalra, Director of Culinary, Pullman Novotel, New Delhi, Aerocity, "The colour of the plate totally depends on the colour and textures of the dish. Both have to complement each other. The colour of the plate one chooses can make a big difference in how the dish looks. If you want your food to really stand out, pick a plate colour that is different from the colours of the food. White plates are a good choice for colourful dishes because they make the colours pop. On the other hand, if you want the colours

to blend well together, choose a plate colour that goes well with the food colours. Earthy tones like beige or light brown can make green vegetables look even better. Also, consider the theme of your meal. If you're going for a modern look, white or black plates are often a good choice. Dark plates can also help keep food warm longer. Ultimately, the plate colour should match the style of your meal to create a beautiful and cohesive presentation."

Simran Singh Thapar, Executive Chef, The Leela Palace Bengaluru echoes the sentiment: "Play with complementary hues and remember, a pop of colour can make all the difference. Adding a variety of textures can make your dish visually interesting and enticing. Combine crunchy elements with smooth components, as I like to do in my dish 'Truffled Russet Mille Feuille with Butternut Squash Quasar -e- Pukhtan, Golden Almonds and Charcoal touille'. A crisp potato Mille Feuille is paired with a velvety smooth and rich sauce. Layering ingredients not only adds depth but also adds a sense of complexity to your presentation. I have used green microgreens to pop up the otherwise warm hues of orange and brown. An almond charcoal touille creates a visual and texture impact on my plate."

"Creating a theme or a story with your plating can make your dish more memorable," adds chef Simran. "A theme can tie everything together and captivate your audience. On my plate, I have created a theme of classics from two cuisines pairing together to create magic -- Classic French and Classic Indian."

Ingredient is the Key Chef Sandeep emphasises on the 'ingredient' as the key focus. "Using the main ingredient as the central focus and organising the rest of the ingredients in various forms of purees, gels, mousse or whole forms works the best. There is no specific style that I incorporate but looking at the ingredients I adapt to plating techniques and style that complements the textures and enhances the look of the dish. One favourite dish that I love to plate often is the grilled chicken breast with sweet potato mash and sautéed green beans. The dish features a perfectly grilled chicken breast placed slightly off-centre on the

plate. Alongside, a generous serving of creamy sweet potato mash, flavored with cinnamon and nutmeg, provides contrast. Crisp green beans are delicately piled next to the mash, adding a fresh touch. A sprinkle of finely chopped parsley garnishes the plate, adding a pop of green. Presented on a square, off-white plate, this dish is not just delicious but also visually appealing, designed to delight both the eye and the palate." Garnishing Lends visual Allure "When it comes to garnishes, I believe in the power of simplicity," tells Chef Amandeep. "Fresh herbs like cilantro and microgreens add a burst of colour and flavour without overwhelming the dish. A delicate sprinkle of sea salt or a drizzle of high-quality olive oil can elevate even the simplest of presentations," he says.

Likewise for Chef Sandeep, it is important to give vitality to the dish with microgreens or herbs and add a touch of elegance and beauty through edible flowers. "Show off the dish and keep room for theatrics," is his mantra. Gerwin D'souza, Pastry Sous Chef, The St Regis Goa Resort feels, "Perhaps a swirl of sauce, a fine scattering of berries to enhance. At our Italian restaurant, Oliveto, we serve tiramisu in a glass to show off the varied layering. To add that extra flair, we place a spoon made of solid chocolate on it. Now that's my style of garnishing. That expression of my diners at the first look of tiramisu says it all."

Chefs Are Artists Too Who says we deck up our plates just because we are going through an era of social media, ask chefs. Plating as an art satisfies the aesthetic sense of creativity within us, they say. "The artist in me likes the Free Form or keeping the plating abstract," opines Chef Anshul Dhyani, Executive Chef ITC Grand Central, adding that "Not giving a



Chef Simran Singh Thapar



Chef Amandeep Singh



Gerwin D'souza



Executive Chef Anshul Dhyani



Chef Subhankar Chitrakar



Sandeep Kalra

particular structure to it, I like to keep it simple and let the ingredients be as natural. I would like the ingredients and flavour to do the talking. Prefer to treat the plate as a canvas where every ingredient can show its own colours. For example in my dish, Seared Scallops with slow braised pork belly, granny smith puree and macerated golden raisins, Scallops and Pork belly are the main ingredients of the dish

complemented by the raisins and apple puree. The dish has been plated in a free flow manner. All the ingredients are plated in a way that they all stand out and no single ingredient overshadows the other one. All the colours and textures are preserved and no ingredient loses its individuality but together bring about a complete culinary harmony."

"Indeed I am an artist," says Chef Aashutosh Shende, Executive Sous Chef of Paper Moon, Taj Fort Aguada Resort Spa. "For instance in my dish Tagliolini with Pesto Sauce and Pine Nuts, I treat the white plate as my blank canvas, the green pesto sauce is my vibrant paint. The green pesto sauce offers a colour palette to create a visually stunning composition on a white plate.

Composition of the dish is the king and arrangement is the key. Swirling the pesto in an artistic flourish and strategically placing the elements for balance and contrast. I build height with rolling the pasta around a large fork and then slide it on the plate. This gives not only clean lines but also height to the dish, techniques used by both chefs and artists. I express my personality and my expressions through my plating. I am not a fan of bold or dramatic swirls and many colours on my plate; I prefer a simple bed for a wild abstract masterpiece for my Tagliolini."

He has more to add: "I like to sign every dish that goes out of my kitchen and, as such, a final flourish on food plating has my signature. It could be a sprinkle of fresh herbs, in this case in particular a drizzle of balsamic reduction and a scattering of toasted pine nuts. These finishing touches showcase my creation from a meal to a work of art."

"I work in a bakery which can be at times devoid of human interaction and through my bakery items I express myself," says Chef Subhankar Chitrakar from Bakery of Taj Holiday Village Resort Spa, Goa. Citing an example of his dish, Caramel Porto, he tells, "This rich, decadent dessert - Caramel Porto - presents a fantastic opportunity every time to pique my inner artist."

Considering the portion size -- if it is a single serving I prefer a small dessert plate with a rim, for four portions I choose a shallow bowl or couple glass which allows for beautiful layering. Choosing whether to keep the same colour or play a colour contrast game, I prefer a white plate to enhance the various hues of caramel. Sometimes I do use a dark plate to create a dramatic backdrop for a glistening sauce. Considering the overall mood of the diner a classic white plate offers timeless elegance and on the other hand a more colourful bowl would add a touch of casual charm. I am not afraid to add a delicate web like swirl for a touch of whimsy.

Or for a bolder statement, a thicker controlled pour creates a dramatic centre piece. Go ahead and experiment with what's at hand, add a spring of fresh mint or a sprinkle of chopped nuts or a dusting cocoa powder to add pops of colour and flavour like a bold brushstroke. I am an artist and this is my soul that I bare through my Caramel Porto."

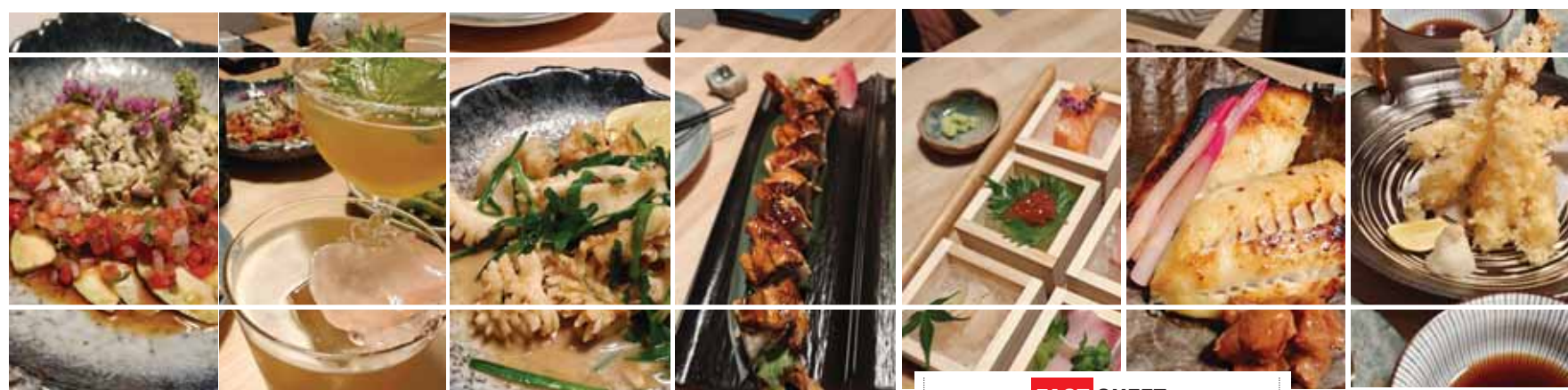
Author Intro: Sharmila Chand is an Author and Freelance Journalist who writes on Food, Travel, Lifestyle, Art and Wellness. She can be reached at chand.sharmila@gmail.com.

FOOD TRENDS

Falling in Love with Japanese cuisine

At Shin'ya, an Izakaya-inspired resto-bar at Hyatt Regency Gurugram, is drawing crowds because of the evident attention to detail and its commitment to source the best and freshest ingredients possible for a hearty Japanese meal, says **PAWAN SONI**

Japanese cuisine is winning hearts across the Indian community, and it is no surprise why. The dishes are light, nutritious, and packed with flavoUrs, thanks to ingredients like seaweed, soy, and seafood. The freshness of these ingredients is crucial, leading to high prices for premium seafood and fruits in Japan and sold in auctions. In India, particularly in the North, seafood is not as accessible due to the lack of coastline. However, logistics can ensure a steady, fresh supply. During my recent visit to Shin'ya, the new Japanese restaurant at Hyatt Regency Gurugram, I was impressed by the quality of the ingredients used. At Shin'ya, attention to detail is evident from the freshly grated wasabi to the sashimi made from yellowfin tuna, a step above the commonly used bluefin tuna. Sonale Zagade, Hyatt Regency's dynamic General Manager,



emphasised their commitment to sourcing the best ingredients, recalling her personal involvement in tasting each one before finalising. With seating for around 45 guests, this Izakaya-inspired resto-bar, with its light and minimalistic

decor, is perfect for small gatherings. On the recommendation of Shashwat Prasad, Shin'ya's mixologist, I started with a gari-infused bourbon mixed with yuzu juice and honey water. This mild drink perfectly set the tone for the

evening. The avocado carpaccio, chosen for my wife's vegetarian preference, was appreciated by both of us. The buttery avocado with caramelized onions, ponzu, and tomato salsa made a delightful start, while I enjoyed one of the lightest and crunchiest

FACT SHEET
Food: 4.5/5 | **Drinks:** 4.5/5 | **Service:** 4.5/5 | **Ambience:** 4.0/5 | **Overall:** 4.5/5
Address: Shin'ya, Hyatt Regency, NH48, Sector 83, Gurugram
Phone: 9355816517
Meal for Two: INR 4000 + Taxes
Timing: 6:00 PM to 3:00 AM (Monday to Saturday), 12 Noon to 9: 00 PM (Sundays)

prawn tempuras. Coated with a bit of potato starch and accompanied by a miso daikon dip, these were among the best prawn tempuras I've ever tasted. Each dish, from the selection of sashimi to sushi, was special. Apart from the Japanese fare,

Shin'ya also offers a small mix of Korean and Asian dishes. I tried the Korean-style sautéed garlic butter squids and prawn gyoza dumplings, each dish telling a unique story. Another cocktail, the Houji tea-infused tequila with agave nectar topped with fresh shiso leaf, further demonstrated the mixologist's expertise. Both food and drinks at Shin'ya are crafted to ensure guest delight. My meal concluded with the robata-grilled miso black cod. The silky pieces of fish, with slight charred edges, contrasted beautifully with the buttery flavours and pickled plum. Shin'ya stands out for its high-quality ingredients and expertly prepared classic dishes. This restaurant is definitely one to watch in 2024.

— Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com



YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

This week, your focus gravitates toward finances, business, and material wealth. You possess the astuteness of a monarch, making shrewd decisions that promise advantageous outcomes. Property investments yield profitable returns, adding to your financial prosperity. Entrepreneurs, investors, and landlords witness an influx of wealth, a testament to your diligent efforts. Opportunities abound, presenting themselves unexpectedly, accompanied by enticing remuneration packages. Your preference for electronic communication stems from a bustling schedule, leaving little time for face-to-face interactions. Towards the week's end, a spiritual inclination emerges, prompting acts of devotion, charitable deeds, and assistance to the less fortunate. Exercise caution in monetary transactions during this period to safeguard your assets. Your intuitive sense serves as a guiding force, ensuring financial stability amidst dynamic circumstances.
Lucky number 18 | **Lucky colour** Brown
Lucky day Sunday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

During the initial days of the week, your confidence radiates brightly, illuminating your endeavors with a promising glow. Projects initiated the previous week are now flourishing, guided by your dedicated efforts. Support from loved ones serves as a vital source of motivation, empowering you to excel further. Collaborative ventures are poised to yield favorable outcomes. However, exercise caution as the week progresses, as adversaries may attempt to disrupt your plans. Flexibility is essential, as unexpected changes in familial commitments may arise. Attend to pressing matters promptly, prioritizing both your health and financial affairs. A thorough medical evaluation is advised, alongside prudent financial management to avert potential monetary strains. Vigilance in monetary transactions is paramount, ensuring fiscal stability amidst potential budgetary constraints looming ahead.
Lucky number 2 | **Lucky colour** Grey
Lucky day Saturday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

You exhibit generosity and kindness, particularly in your expenditure towards spiritual endeavors. The inclination towards charity and donations reflects your compassionate nature. Financial considerations may arise concerning the higher education of your children, amidst other familial concerns demanding attention. This phase prompts an understanding of life's equilibrium. Implementing structured approaches and conscientious work ethics becomes crucial in fulfilling your obligations. Legal matters may find resolution in your favor, bringing relief. The week's end promises moments of joy, with anticipated positive news finally arriving. Possibilities of relocation or desired transfers, including changes in workplace dynamics, could manifest during this period. Your reputation as a diligent worker enhances within your social circles, reinforcing your industrious image.
Lucky number 8 | **Lucky colour** Pink
Lucky day Sunday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This week, you may experience a sense of sluggishness in the progression of your tasks. Despite your efforts in various projects and ventures, tangible results may seem elusive. Patience becomes paramount during this period. Embrace the analogy of a farmer diligently sowing seeds, nurturing plants, and awaiting the harvest. Rest assured, your endeavors will bear fruit in due time. Midweek, anticipate unexpected shifts. Financial inflows from diverse channels could boost your resources. Some may embark on work-related journeys, potentially leading to favorable placements. Loans or debts owed are likely to be settled promptly. Towards the week's end, a tendency towards fanciful thinking and indulgence may emerge, clouding your focus on practical goals. Loved ones may gently guide you back to a grounded perspective, steering you away from excessive materialism and towards meaningful aspirations.
Lucky number 14 | **Lucky colour** White
Lucky day Friday



VRIGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This week, your keen intellect and analytical nature will be pivotal in navigating a significant phase. Whether it's a personal or professional matter, your wisdom will guide you to its resolution. Opportunities may arise, such as job offers or promising assignments, promising a positive shift in your trajectory. However, amid progress, you may require some form of healing or medical assistance. While initial relief is experienced, later in the week, vulnerability resurfaces, potentially stemming from emotional wounds. It's important to acknowledge and address these sensitivities, as ignoring them could exacerbate tensions, especially within familial dynamics. Taking time to rest and recharge becomes imperative, as a sound mind is intrinsically linked to a healthy body. Prioritize self-care to ensure holistic well-being amidst life's fluctuations.
Lucky number 10 | **Lucky colour** Teal
Lucky day Thursday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

The week kicks off with a jubilant atmosphere, marking the successful completion of tasks, a wedding, or a celebratory promotion. Joyous moments with loved ones ensue. Midweek, you exhibit initiative and strong determination, empowering you to tackle challenges with wisdom and focus. A pilgrimage to a sacred place is indicated, offering solace and clarity amidst life's uncertainties. As the week winds down, prudent financial management becomes paramount. Feeling the pinch, you realize the importance of mindful spending. Seeking assistance from loved ones or considering loans may be necessary. It's a timely reminder to assess finances, devising a budget to navigate through this phase with prudence and foresight. The week culminates with a reminder that diligent saving today ensures financial stability tomorrow, urging you to prioritize fiscal responsibility and long-term financial planning.
Lucky number 12 | **Lucky colour** Green
Lucky day Friday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

This week brings a multitude of fluctuations for individuals, encompassing both highs and lows. Commencing on a joyful note, familial bonds bring immense delight, accompanied by robust health and a surge of creativity. Novel opportunities, both career-wise and financially, manifest, potentially originating from distant places. Domestic felicity graces homes with auspicious ceremonies. As the week progresses, a shift in circumstances prompts contemplation of necessary alterations in lifestyle, work routine, or dietary habits, fostering the groundwork for a brighter future. Financial scrutiny and health maintenance become imperative, with attention directed towards tax obligations, financial transactions, and healthcare concerns as the week draws to a close. Additionally, charitable endeavors may beckon, urging individuals to extend their generosity towards noble causes.
Lucky number 9 | **Lucky colour** Purple
Lucky day Monday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

Beware of unseen forces casting shadows upon your path. Maintain integrity and fairness to ward off negativity. Deceptive influences may threaten your peace, urging caution in all dealings. Guard against entanglements born of secrecy or temptation, as they could lead to unforeseen complications. Midweek signals a shift in perspective, prompting profound changes in your beliefs and actions. Embrace this transformation, finding newfound clarity and structure. Show concern for loved ones, particularly siblings and family friends, as their well-being weighs heavily on your mind. Children hold a pivotal role in your heart, demanding your attention and care. As the week draws to a close, embark on a journey of spiritual discovery, finding strength and resolve to confront life's trials head-on.
Lucky number 7 | **Lucky colour** Olive
Lucky day Tuesday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

The week commences with challenges looming ahead. Despite hurdles in your project or assignment, you may feel inclined to abandon your efforts at times. Yet, an inner resilience propels you forward, transforming you into a determined warrior ready to confront any obstacle. Eventually, triumph awaits, bringing a sense of fulfillment. Midweek heralds a wave of positivity touching various aspects of your life – from financial gains to domestic harmony and even your children's academic success. Some may secure promising job opportunities, enhancing financial stability. Fueled by creativity and enthusiasm, your week becomes dynamic, prompting thoughts of leisurely excursions. Towards the week's end, a spiritual awakening unfolds, drawing you towards communal prayers and religious contemplation, nurturing your spiritual journey.
Lucky number 19 | **Lucky colour** Magenta
Lucky day Tuesday



CANCER June 21-July 22

This week brings a sense of gratitude and optimism, promising various blessings and positive experiences. You'll begin with deepening connections in your relationship, experiencing mutual understanding and emotional closeness. Spiritual pursuits will also be fulfilling, allowing you to focus on personal growth and enlightenment. However, as the week progresses, you may encounter moments of doubt or temptation, stirring up inner conflicts. Yet, there are subtle signs and intuitive messages guiding you towards balance and resolution. Towards the week's end, creativity will flourish, offering opportunities for both financial and emotional growth. Business ventures will pick up pace, bringing in increased income. Additionally, joy and satisfaction through familial bonds, particularly with children, are indicated. There's even potential for the joyous news of a new addition to the family or the prospect of conception.
Lucky number 4 | **Lucky colour** Maroon
Lucky day Wednesday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, you may find yourself deeply absorbed in personal agendas, potentially overlooking promising opportunities. Your focus could be introspective, with a tendency towards self-absorption. Despite this, you'll maintain a certain level of interaction, primarily through digital means like internet chats and phone calls. Around midweek, a surge of creativity may connect you with influential individuals who could offer assistance in financial matters. Expect stable finances and a desire to savor life's pleasures across various domains. Property transactions might feature towards the week's end. Nurturing relationships with both in-laws and parents is advisable, while children may require your attention. Some may embark on brief trips to their place of origin. Domestic discussions could prove beneficial, fostering harmony within the household.
Lucky number 13 | **Lucky colour** Black
Lucky day Wednesday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

Overextending your investments may lead to anxiety as desired outcomes remain elusive. Sleep eludes you amidst worry and uncertainty, especially in the initial days. However, a shift occurs for Pisces midweek, ushering in a period of divine favor and potential financial windfalls. Your innate kindness and generosity come to the fore, alongside a spirit of charity. The week favors career-oriented women, equipped to handle their myriad responsibilities with grace and strength. A maternal or sisterly presence brings auspicious influences, emphasizing the importance of familial blessings for progress. Consider reconnecting with your mother, spouse, or elder sister for their guidance and support. Travel prospects brighten, promising fulfillment and satisfaction ahead.
Lucky number 8 | **Lucky colour** Orange
Lucky day Wednesday

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Don't take things on face value

What are destiny prospects of my son? When is his career breakthrough due? He is already 27, and yet not settled. When he was born, many astrologers had declared in one voice that he will make it big in life and make me proud. Their observation was based on five markers: Jupiter conjunct Moon in lagna sign Leo forming Gajakeshari Yoga; the lagna lord Sun in the 11th house identified with fulfillment of desires; Destiny indicating 9th lord Mars in the 9th house itself; 10th and 3rd lord Venus in the 11th house; and Karmic Saturn in its own sign. How comes that with so many positive indicators in his chart, he has not been able to move in life? Of late, in his state of frustration, his behaviour has become erratic, sometimes difficult to bear with. Meanwhile, I got many pujas done as suggested by the pundits but in vain. As a mother, driven by hope against hope, I am making the last attempt to know if you could suggest some workable remedial measure." Well, the pundits seem to have taken the planets on their face value and that

too individually. They did not take note of their nakshatra modification and inter-planetary alignments. They won't visualise negative roles played by Uranus and Neptune either. They have yet not acknowledged their relevance simply because they don't find mention in our ancient texts. Perhaps not having exposure to energy principles of creation, they treat the planets as divine celestial objects believed to be defining our destiny in finite terms and that too individually. These cosmic bodies, on the contrary, are energy-balls marked with energy streams passing through a particular region. All these energies put together frame our destiny. They, thus, failed to take a synthetic view of his chart, and so could not read his personality traits with precision. True, Jupiter and Moon when conjunct form Gajakeshari Yoga. It, however, just implies having a fertile imaginative mind, which gets further augmented because Jupiter is also beautifully aligned to Uranus and Neptune. Consequently, he may come out with big ideas, apparently carrying gainful prospects. Their translation



into fruits will, however, depend on how efficiently and sincerely he works towards that end. In this respect, even Jupiter the lord of 5th house (pleasure pursuits) as well as 8th (pains and sufferings) plays a dampener. That often drives him crazy with pleasure motive, which by itself is enough to make him susceptible to become a victim of his own making.

Now his overall personality traits. Being born on 5th lunar day, he would be comfort loving, not keen to take challenges. The two luminaries, the Sun and Moon are ill-disposed off to erratic Uranus and mischievous Neptune, both posited in the 5th house. It, in the first place, implies that he lives in an ivory tower of his delusory self-beliefs and perceptions, mostly distanced from ground realities. He would not be open to look beyond for better option if any available. Second, he may not acknowledge truth on its first appearance. Rather driven by a sense of hope against hope, continue to passionately pursue his fanciful dreams perceptions till pushed to the wall. Third, he seems to be a schemer, who, applying his mischievous mind may wish to have gains without pains. Fourth, he is temperamental, who may consciously throw tantrums to force his way. On top of that, Venus identified with finance and pleasure pursuit too is opposed to Uranus and Neptune. It implies that for fulfillment of his pleasure motive, he may wish to have quick monetary gains, even if it

implies taking resort to unethical means. It also makes his character questionable. Mars placed adverse to Mercury and Saturn implies that he is restless, lacks focus, who may keep moving unthinkingly in life, and with obvious consequences. He appears to be a habitual liar. Inherently revengeful by nature, which comes into full play if ever denied what he is asking for. In the heat of moment, he won't hesitate even hurting the elders. Had these traits been identified early, timely corrective initiatives would have been possible. From the above analysis, it is clear, the root of the problem is firmly grounded in his mind. So, only such remedial measure can work as would correct the thought process by absorbing fresh educative inputs. A person can himself do that under the guidance of a Guru. It is difficult to digest that transactional puja mediated by a pundit could invade the person's mind space for necessary correction. The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com

IF HE HAS APPLIED, GAMBHIR WOULD BE GOOD COACH FOR INDIA: GANGULY

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former India captain Sourav Ganguly on Saturday said Gautam Gambhir would be a "good coach" for the national cricket team if he has applied for the job as his "hunger and passion" was evident in the recently-concluded IPL. Speaking at the inauguration of the International Procurement and Supply Chain Conference organised by the Blue Ocean Corporation, Ganguly also gave his views on India's chances in the upcoming T20 World Cup. The former BCCI President said he is in favour of the national team having an Indian coach since there is enough talent in the country. "I am in favour of an Indian coach because we have enormous talent in our country, enormously high-skilled players who have done wonders for Indian cricket and very rightfully they should be a part of the system," Ganguly said. On whether the widely

perceived front-runner Gambhir would be suitable for the position, Ganguly had a query of his own at first. "...Has he applied? I really don't know because first he has to apply and then only he will get the job...I think (May) 27th was the last date of application," Ganguly said. "Obviously, BCCI has the right to extend it (the deadline) as well. If he applies and if he wants it, and I say if he applies and if he wants it, he will be a very good candidate," he said. The 51-year-old said Gambhir's winning attitude as IPL champion Kolkata Knight Riders' mentor was there for all to see this year. "If Gambhir applies — you can see it on TV — he worked for KKR this year. I was with Delhi (Capitals), you can see the hunger, the passion and the want to win and I will be happy if he applies and if the board decides to give him the job, I think he is a good candidate," Ganguly said. India's head coach position will fall vacant after Rahul Dravid steps down at the end of the team's T20 World Cup



campaign in the Americas. A few days ago, BCCI secretary Jay Shah also hinted that an Indian coach would be preferred. "We are focused on identifying individuals who possess a deep understanding of the Indian

cricket structure and have risen through the ranks," Shah had said. **INDIA STRONG CONTENDERS FOR T20WC:** Ganguly also said India's chances are "very good" in the T20 World Cup but the

team should play with "freedom". The event, to be jointly hosted by the USA and the West Indies, gets underway on Saturday. "...Play without fear and just keep hitting. There is enormous talent, (this is) a

team which has (Virat) Kohli, Rohit (Sharma), Surya (Suryakumar Yadav), (Rishabh) Pant, (Shivam) Dube, (Hardik) Pandya, (Ravindra) Jadeja, Axar (Patel), (Jasprit) Bumrah, Sanju (Samson)," he said when

asked about India's chances. "That's why I say everyone is capable of winning it for India and the only way they will do it is (if they) just play with freedom. "Play with that extra batsman and hit from the first ball, hit till you have to defend (and) play like the last ball," he added. Ganguly backed the pair of Rohit and Kohli to open for India. "It is Virat and Rohit, both should open. Virat has been in tremendous touch in the IPL, he is a great player," he said. The former opener said the drop-in pitches brought from Adelaide in the USA leg of the World Cup should be batting-friendly. "I am very keen to see how the conditions are in the US. (The Nassau County Cricket Stadium is a) new ground, new stadium. I know there have been drop in pitches from Adelaide. "The ICC has spent a lot of money to bring in the drop-in pitches to America," he said. "(The) drop-in pitches are normally very good, very

batting friendly. And they don't change much over a period of time because they are different from natural pitches. So we are expecting the pitches to be very good," he added. Ganguly said India are superior to Pakistan but the arch-rivals will pose a tough challenge in the T20 format when the two sides clash on June 9. "Our record against Pakistan has been very, very good over a long period of time. In the T20 format, probably Pakistan is more dangerous compared to 50-overs (format). We beat them in Ahmedabad when they came to India and we beat them easily. "India is superior and if they play well, if they play freely and I keep saying the word 'freely' all the time because (in) the last World Cup in Australia, I don't think we played freely," he said. "Just put all the cobwebs behind. Don't worry about winning or losing. Don't think about winning the World Cup. Just go and play every game," he added.



I don't try to over-teach: Bumrah on mentoring India's young pacers

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Considered a mentor for the young crop of Indian fast bowlers, pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah says he never tries to "over-teach" the younger lot and steps in to help only when asked, to avoid burdening them with information. The 30-year-old Bumrah would be a key player for India in the T20 World Cup, starting here on Saturday and he would also be expected to be a guiding force for India's pace battery, featuring the relatively younger and less experienced Mohammed Siraj and Arshdeep Singh. "You don't try to over-teach. That is something that I have learned," Bumrah told the ICC's official website for the T20 World Cup. "Because whenever people need help, I let them have their own questions... Because you don't want to give too much information," he said. Bumrah said it is important for youngsters to know their path without being burdened with an overkill of information. "It's not like they have just been lucky and they land here. So that is what I try to do. I do pass on certain information that I have gained over from my experience," he said. "But I don't try to burden them with (over) information. Because that is a part of the journey as well. That you have to find your own ways and solutions," he added. Bumrah has battled a nagging back injury for the past couple of years and it even kept him out of the 2022 T20 World Cup but he has managed to fight through and enjoyed a brilliant run in the 2023 ODI showpiece. He snared 20 wickets at an average of 18.65 with an economy of just about four in that event. The reticent bowler said his focus since coming back has been to simply enjoy his game. "Because (certain) things will

go my way. (Certain) things will not go my way," he said. "All of these things will be a part of my process. So I have just realised that I started playing this sport. Because I love this sport. And I will focus on that rather than the end result. "So in that aspect you reduce your pressure. And you enjoy the sport. When you focus on those things. Rather than the things you cannot control," he added. Bumrah has 74 T20 International wickets, which puts him third in India's all-time list. He is widely perceived to be the best among the current lot of international pacers when it comes to consistently bowling yorkers. Australian great Brett Lee has even gone to the extent of saying that Bumrah is the only pacer in the world who is executing the yorker correctly right now. Bumrah said his consistent yorkers are a result of years of practice. "So I played a lot of tennis-ball, rubber-ball cricket when I was growing up. I used to play a lot with my friends in summer camps," he said. "...I used to think that this is the only way to get wickets. Because I was a fan of fast bowling. I was really fascinated by what I saw on the television. So I tried to replicate that. Is it (tennis-ball cricket) a secret (to bowling yorkers) or not? I don't know," Bumrah wondered. "But repetition surely is. Because I have kept this delivery. I still practice it. I keep on practicing it. Because every skill that you develop, you have to practice it and make it stronger. So I think a combination of both would be the answer." India are in Group A of the T20 World Cup, along with Pakistan, Ireland, Canada, and the USA. They will begin their campaign against Ireland on June 5.

Shanaka grabs 4/23 in Sri Lanka's scrappy win over Ireland

PTI ■ LAUDERHILL (USA)

Dasun Shanaka produced a solid all-round performance, including bowling figures of 4/23, as former champions Sri Lanka overcame some jittery moments to down Ireland by 41 runs in their T20 World Cup warm-up game here. Put in to bat at the Central Broward Regional Park Stadium Turf Ground here on Friday, Sri Lanka saw their batting misfire in the initial phases of the game. They lost half of their side for 82 runs in 11 overs before managing to post a respectable 163/8. All-rounders Wanindu Hasaranga (26), Angelo Mathews (32), and Shanaka (23) fired up the proceedings down the order to take them to a competitive total. In reply, quick-fire knocks from Paul Stirling (21) and George Dockrell (17) were the bright spots in the initial stages of the Irish chase, but former skipper Shanaka swung the momentum with his medium



pace bowling as Ireland were bowled out for 122 in 18.2 overs. Sri Lanka will face South Africa in their opening match in New York on Monday, while Ireland will be up against India on Wednesday. **AFGHANISTAN EXCEL VS SCOTLAND:** At the Port of Spain in Trinidad, Gulbadin Naib, Rashid Khan and Mujeeb Ur Rahman starred for Afghanistan in a commanding 55-run win over Scotland. Having missed out on batting in the rain-hit warmup game against Oman, Afghanistan

made the most of their encounter against Scotland. Electing to bat, Afghanistan sent all-rounder Naib to open with Rahmanullah Gurbaz and the duo set them off to a blistering start. Naib struck 20 runs off the second over of the innings, hitting two fours and two sixes against Brandon McMullen and top-scored for the Afghans with a 30-ball 69 (5x4, 6x6) that took the total to 178/8. Azmatullah Omarzai also contributed with a solid 36-ball 48. For Scotland, Chris Sole (3/35)

and Bradley Currie (2/26) managed to stem the flow of runs by picking regular wickets. Afghanistan then restricted their opponents for 123/9 with their spinners, led by Mujeeb Ur Rahman (2/23 in 3 overs) and Rashid Khan (1/3 in 2 overs), taking control of the game. Afghanistan open their T20 World Cup campaign against Uganda, while Scotland play England in Barbados on Tuesday. **BRIEF SCORES:** At Lauderhill: Sri Lanka 163/8; 20 overs (Angelo Mathews 32 not out; Josh Little 2/45, Barry McCarthy 2/31) beat Ireland 122; 18.2 overs (Curtis Campher 2/6; Dasun Shanaka 4/23, Maheesh Theekshana 2/14, Wanindu Hasaranga 2/40) by 41 runs. At Port of Spain: Afghanistan 178/8; 20 overs (Gulbadin Naib 69, Azmatullah Omarzai 48; Chris Sole 3/35, Bradley Currie 2/26) beat Scotland 123/9; 20 overs (Mark Watt 34; Karim Janat 2/13, Mujeeb Ur Rahman 2/23) by 55 runs.

Gilchrist backs Nepal, Netherlands

PTI ■ BARBADOS

Legendary Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist believes Nepal and the Netherlands could surprise teams like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in the upcoming T20 World Cup. Nepal and the Netherlands are clubbed with Bangladesh, South Africa and Sri Lanka in Group D. Gilchrist believes that the international exposure gained by the youngsters in Rohit Paudel-led Nepalese team has made them a formidable unit. As for the Netherlands, Gilchrist observed that they have been always tough customers in ICC events and would like to make the most of the limited opportunities they get to play against big teams. "I think Nepal would be a team that might be able to fire a shot," Gilchrist told SEN Radio on Saturday. "They've got a couple of young players who have been in all the big leagues for a number of years now," he said. Nepal, however, has suffered a big blow ahead of the World Cup as their ace leg-spinner



Sandeep Lamichhane has been ruled out after his US visa application was rejected for a second time. With the Dutch having upset the Proteas in the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia, Gilchrist felt they definitely would be a tough proposition. "The Dutch always seem to ruffle a few feathers, they always seem to get under the skin, and they're drawn in the same pool as South Africa again. They nailed them in the T20 World Cup last time in Australia in Adelaide. So, it might be the Dutch," he said. Citing the example of the USA upsetting Bangladesh 2-1 in a three-match T20 series late last month, Gilchrist said lesser-known cricket-playing nations are always looking at opportunities to beat bigger teams.

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USA open against Canada

ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP: 1ST MATCH



2016. He was the top-scorer in the World T20 Americas qualifier 2018 with 208 runs from six innings and made his T20I debut against UAE in 2019. The team will also feature some

familiar names in former Mumbai and Rajasthan Royals left-arm spinner Harmeet Singh and ex-Delhi and Royal Challengers Bengaluru batter Milind Kumar. They also have Saurabh Netravalkar, the most capped USA player, Aaron Jones, and opener Steven Taylor, their highest run-scorer in international cricket. Tearaway quick Ali Khan is also fit for the tournament, shaking off a hamstring injury which kept him out of the Canada series. Batting all-rounder Nitish Kumar, who played 18 T20Is for Canada from 2012 to 2019, has now switched sides and will be seen in the USA jersey. He made his T20I debut for the USA against Canada in April this year. Left-arm orthodox spinner Saad Bin

Zafar brings a wealth of experience to the Canada team, with top-order batter Aaron Johnson and left-arm seamer Kaleem Sana also expected to feature heavily in a side with just four players under the age of 30. **TEAMS (FROM) USA:** Monank Patel (c), Aaron Jones (vc), Andries Gous, Corey Anderson, Ali Khan, Harmeet Singh, Jessy Singh, Milind Kumar, Nisarg Patel, Nitish Kumar, Noshtush Kenjige, Saurabh Nethralvakar, Shadley Van Schalkwyk, Steven Taylor and Shayan Jahangir. **Canada:** Saad Bin Zafar (c), Aaron Johnson, Ravinderpal Singh, Navneet Dhaliwal, Kaleem Sana, Dillon Heyliger, Jeremy Gordon, Nikhil Dutta, Pargat Singh, Nicholas Kirton, Rayankhan Pathan, Junaid Siddiqui, Dilpreet Bajwa, Shreyas Movva and Rishiv Joshi. **Match starts:** 6 am IST.

WI aim for solid start against PNG

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)

More than eight years after Carlos Brathwaite's four sixes at Eden Gardens gave them their second T20 world title, a wounded West Indies will look to redeem themselves at home when they begin their campaign in the event's ninth edition by taking on Papua New Guinea, here on Sunday. Brathwaite had slammed Ben Stokes for four successive sixes in the final over to pull off one of the most astonishing chases that made the West Indies the first team to win the T20 World Cup twice. Their maiden triumph was in 2012. But what followed was years of agony as the team found itself lost in transition. In 2021, they endured four defeats in five games to make a Super 12 exit. Worse was in store in the 2022 edition in Australia when they failed to qualify for the main round after

shock defeats to minnows Scotland and Ireland. It's been 2982 days since the memorable night at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata, something they would be desperate to reclaim especially when the tournament is at home. Their two-time T20 World Cup winning skipper Darren Sammy is back as a coach and the Rovman Powell-led side already made its intention clear with a ruthless win over Australia in a warmup match. But that Australia was a depleted side as only nine players from their squad were available for the match. Nicolas Pooran will play a pivotal role in the middle-order, but West Indies boast additional firepower with Powell, Andre Russell, Shimron Hetmyer, Sherfane Rutherford, and Romario Shepherd, making them one of the most formidable batting line-ups in the tournament. Russell has been in exceptional form,

both with bat and ball, after aiding Kolkata Knight Riders in clinching their third IPL title recently. West Indies will also be looking to become the first team to win a T20 World Cup at home. They have replaced the experienced but injured Jason Holder with left-arm fast bowler Obed McCoy. McCoy was the leading wicket-taker during the West Indies As recent tour to Nepal, grabbing eight wickets in five matches. Assadollah Vala-led PNG will make their second appearance after 2021 after sealing their spot via the East Asia-Pacific regional final in July 2023. Vala is one of 10 players from their 2021 campaign, with that edition's reserve member Jack Gardner picked in the 15-player group this time. Leg-spinning all-rounder CJ Amini will be his deputy. The side boasts no fewer than eight recognised all-rounders, with both

right and left-arm bowling options. Left-arm quick Sema Kamea and Kabua Vagi Morea both enjoyed

quaffing action, with the latter taking a hat-trick in the game against the Philippines.

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