

OPINION 6
INDIA AND BANGLADESH:
A TALE OF TWO BOOKS

WORLD 8
TRUMP FIRST EX-PREZ
CONVICTED OF FELONY

MONEY 10
INDIA'S GDP EXPANDS 7.8 PER CENT
IN Q4, 8.2 PER CENT IN FY24

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Torrid summer kills 71, mostly in Bihar

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Severe heatwave sweeping Northwest and Central India is increasingly becoming a public health crisis in India with around 71 people succumbing to heat-related illness especially sunstroke since March 1 till date even as Uttarakhand and Jammu region reported forest fires adding complexity to the ongoing situation on Friday. The reports of deaths and illness cases due to heatwaves continue to surface every day. Tragically, on Friday, as several pockets of Northwest and Central India turned into a baking pan with temperatures soaring as high as 45 degrees Celsius, it proved fatal particularly to the polling personnel. The Jammu and Kashmir Disaster Management Authority (JKDMA) which is mobilising resources, including drones, to combat the fires has issued an extreme forest fire risk warning for the coming week as temperatures soar and the dry conditions persist. Fourteen people, including 10 polling personnel lost their lives to heatwave in the last 24 hours in Bihar alone, while four persons succumbed to sunstroke in Jharkhand. In the eastern State 1,326 people were hospitalised due to the health risks posed by the intense heatwave. Uttar Pradesh's authorities also reported the death of 13 poll



Smoke rises from a forest fire in Uttarakashi district

File Photo: PTI

personnel in poll-bound Mirzapur district following fever, high BP. However, Principal of Maa Vindhyavasini Autonomous State Medical College Raj Bahadur Kamal said the exact reason is yet to be ascertained. The deceased include seven Home Guard jawans, three sanitation workers, one clerk posted at the Chief Medical Officer's office, one chakbandi adhikaari (consolidation officer), and

one peon in the Home Guard team, according to PTI reports. Meanwhile, the situation in Uttarakhand too is alarming as it has started battling another series of forest fires after a brief lull, affecting over 1,300 hectares and causing significant environmental damage. Since November 2023, there have been 1,167 forest fire incidents in the State, claiming six lives and injuring five people, as per the officials.

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

illness data might represent only a fraction of the actual impact, highlighting the severe health consequences of humid heat in Northwest and Central regions. As the intense heatwave wreaks havoc in Bihar, where temperatures soared to 47.1 degrees Celsius in Buxar, the State Government has shut down schools and educational institutions until June 8 and has initiated ex-gratia payments to the families of the deceased.

Remal aftermath wreaks havoc in Assam, Manipur

PNS ■ IMPHAL/NEW DELHI

About four lakh people have been affected in the northeastern States of Assam and Manipur, which have been hit by heavy rain and thunderstorms triggered by Cyclone Remal in the last few days. A total of 1,88,143 people have been affected by floods in Manipur following incessant rainfall in the aftermath of Cyclone Remal, a State Minister said on Thursday. It has also damaged at least 24,265 houses in the last few days, he said. The Central Water Commission said six rivers in Assam and Manipur, including Brahmaputra, and Barak, are experiencing severe flooding, putting numerous districts in the region at risk. Altogether 18,103 people have been evacuated and 56 relief camps were set up, Manipur Minister for Water Resources and Relief & Disaster Management Awangbou Newmai said. Around 401 hectares of crop have been affected, too, he said. Relief materials have been distributed to Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Noney, Churanchanpur, Senapati and Kakching, the Minister said.



Residents fill water from a tanker amid water crisis at the Vivekanand Camp in Chanakyapuri area of New Delhi on Friday

PTI

Delhi moves SC for more water from neighbours

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid acute shortage of water in the national Capital, the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP Government approached the Supreme Court on Friday, seeking its intervention to direct neighbouring States, including Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, to immediately release the additional raw water provided by the Himachal Pradesh to Delhi through the Wazirabad Barrage, to enable urgent mitigation and resolution of the ongoing water and sanitation crisis here. The plea, filed by Delhi's Water Minister Atishi, has made the Centre, BJP-governed Haryana and Congress-ruled Himachal Pradesh parties to the petition and said access to water is essential for survival and one of the basic human rights.

The move comes as Delhi grapples with a severe water crisis, which has affected millions of residents. The BJP lambasted the Kejriwal Government, terming it mismanagement and an artificial water crisis created by the Kejriwal Government while Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal made an appeal to the BJP-led Governments in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to provide water relief to Delhi amidst the ongoing heatwave. Highlighting the severe water demand caused by the relentless heat, Kejriwal called for a united effort, urging political collaboration over conflict while criticising the Delhi government, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said water crisis in Delhi is a result of mismanagement of Kejriwal.

One last battle today for taking the crown

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Voting across the 57 parliamentary constituencies in seven States and Union Territory of Chandigarh in the seventh and last round of the Lok Sabha elections will be held on Saturday including Varanasi, from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third consecutive term. Saturday's voting will mark the end to the marathon polling process that began on April 19 and has already covered 486 Lok Sabha seats in 28 States and Union Territories. The Assemblies of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim also went to polls. Counting of votes will be taken up on June 4. The Election Commission also called upon voters to turn out in large numbers and vote with responsibility and pride. According to the poll body, over 10.06 crore eligible voters, including nearly 5.24 crore men, 4.82 crore women and 3,574 third gender electors are eligible to vote in this phase. Polling for the remaining 42 Assembly constituencies of Odisha and bypolls to six Assembly seats in Himachal

STARS IN FRAY

CONSTITUENCY	CANDIDATE	PARTY
Varanasi	Narendra Modi	BJP
	Ajay Rai	Congress
Gorakhpur	Ravi Kishan	BJP
	Kajal Nishad	SP
Hamirpur	Anurag Thakur	BJP
	Satpal Singh Raizada	Congress
Mandi	Kangana Ranaut	BJP
	Vikramaditya Singh	Congress
Pataliputra	Ram Kripal Yadav	BJP
	Misa Bharti	RJD
Patna	Ravi Shankar Prasad	BJP
Sahib Ghazipur	Anshul Avijit	Congress
	Paras Nath Rai	BJP
Jalandhar	Afzal Ansari	SP
	Charanjit Singh Channi	Congress
Bhatinda	Pawan Kumar Tin	AAP
	Parampal Kaur Sidhu	BJP
Godda	Jeet Mohinder Singh Sidhu	Congress
	Harsimrat Kaur Badal	Shiromani Akali Dal
Diamond Harbour	Nishkant Dubey	BJP
	Pradeep Yadav	Congress
	Abhijit Das	BJP
	Abhishek Banerjee	TMC

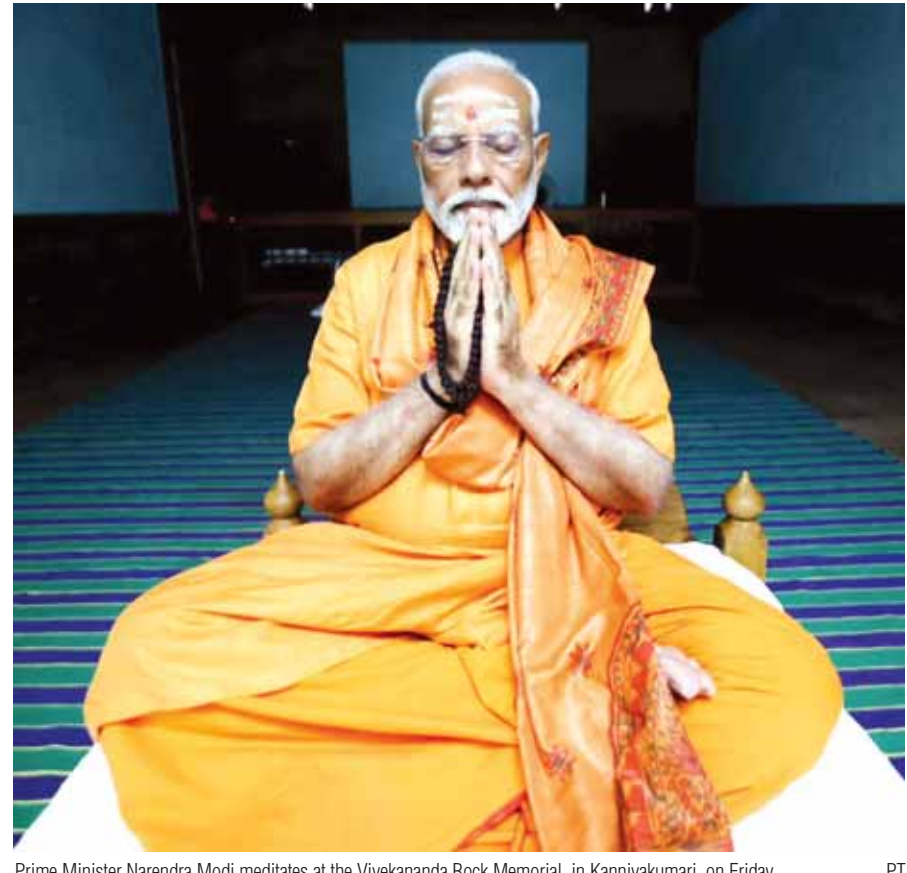
Pradesh will also take place simultaneously. The 75-day campaigning for the seven-phased Lok Sabha elections — the longest in Indian election history after the 1951-52 polls — ended on a

combative note with the ruling BJP-led NDA and Opposition INDIA Bloc engaging in a bitter war of words with each of the seven phases of polling. Besides Prime Minister Narendra Modi (Varanasi, UP), prominent candidates from the BJP are Union Minister Anurag Thakur (Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh), Ravi Shankar Prasad (Patna Sahib, Bihar) and Kangana Ranaut (Mandi, Himachal Pradesh); while from the Congress is Manish Tewari (Chandigarh), Vikramaditya Singh (Mandi) and Ajay Rai (Varanasi). The campaigning for the last phase which ended Thursday evening saw BJP leaders led by Modi accusing the Congress of being corrupt, anti-Hindu and engaging in loot, appeasement and dynastic politics. The Opposition parties have been claiming that the BJP is anti-farmer, anti-youth and will change and scrap the Constitution if they win the elections. The BJP based their campaign on

'Modi ki Guarantees' and the Prime Minister's personality, the Congress was betting on 'Nyay Patra' that talked about five 'nyays' and 25 guarantees targeting youth, farmers, workers and women. The Congress and its alliance campaign centred around "saving" the Constitution and the country's democracy while claiming that the BJP's '400 paar' target was meant to get the mandate for rewriting the Constitution and end the quota regime. Modi and the BJP countered the Opposition onslaught with the Prime Minister first seeking to link the Congress manifesto with the pre-partition Muslim League, redistribution of wealth. In the second phase of election, Modi sought to target Congress saying it was going to snatch 'mangalsutra' of women, to claim that Congress is going to redistribute wealth to Muslims. For Rahul Gandhi, a copy of the Constitution, which he displayed at rallies, was a constant companion, while Mallikarjun Kharge warned people that if Modi is reelected, then there will be no more elections. Opposition leaders claimed that their campaign had a resonance, especially among Dalits, tribals and OBCs.



TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meditates at the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, in Kanyakumari, on Friday

PTI

LONG ARM OF THE LAW

Women cops 'greet' Prajwal upon return

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

Suspended JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna, facing sexual abuse allegations, was arrested on Friday upon his return from Germany, a month after he left the country in the wake of explicit videos of his alleged actions doing the rounds in Karnataka's Hassan. In a clear messaging by the SIT probing the allegations, a team of women police personnel 'welcomed' Prajwal upon his arrival here, as they were deputed to execute a warrant and take him to the CID office for interrogation. After evading summons and staying out of the country for a little over a month, the 33-year-old grandson of JD(S) supreme and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda landed at Bengaluru past midnight from Germany's Munich, only to be arrested by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) minutes later and whisked away for questioning.

Denied court relief, Kejriwal is 'proud of going to jail'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With only two days left for his interim bail to end, AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said he will surrender before the police at Tihar Jail on Sunday. The AAP chief said he feels "proud" that he is going to jail to "save the country from dictatorship". "I will surrender the day after tomorrow. I will leave my house at around 3:00 pm to surrender. It is possible that this time they will torture me more, but I will not bow down", Kejriwal said. AAP convener is currently out on interim bail, claiming his body has lately shown symptoms of a serious disease. In an emotional video message to the people of Delhi on Friday, Kejriwal, who is supposed to surrender at Tihar Jail on Sunday, June 2, asserted that the work being done in Delhi by his Government will not stop.

Air India fliers gasp for air, literally!

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the severe heatwave in Delhi, an Air India flight to San Francisco from the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport was delayed for over 24 hours due to multiple reasons after passengers were allegedly made to board the flight and sit without any air conditioning, causing several fliers to faint. This was the second incident in less than a week when an Air India flight suffered an inordinate delay while passengers were made to wait without proper assistance. Taking note of the incident, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) issued a show cause notice to Air India for inordinate delay of at least two international flights and failure to take due care of passengers. The DGCA mentioned about the inordinate delay of two international flights — AI



183 from Delhi to San Francisco on May 30 and AI 179 from Mumbai to San Francisco on May 24. Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia took cognisance of the flight delays and inconvenience caused to passengers, following which the DGCA issued the show cause notice. AI 183, which was to depart from Delhi at 15:30 IST on

May 30, was rescheduled after a 24 hours delay on May 31. There were around 200 passengers onboard the Boeing 777 aircraft that was to operate flight AI 183. Several passengers fainted inside the aircraft, passengers claimed on social media. Visuals posted by many other passengers show people including children sitting on the floor. They

appear exhausted. One passenger shared their experience, saying, "People were made to board the plane and sit without AC. Then I was deplaned and not allowed to enter the terminal because immigration was done." While sharing the ordeal on social media platform X, journalist Shweta Punj claimed that the passengers were made to board the AI183 New Delhi- San Francisco Air India flight and sit without air-conditioning. The airline deplaned the passengers after some fliers fainted on the flight at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport. "If there is a privatisation story that has failed it is @airindia @DGCAIndia AI 183 flight has been delayed for over 8 hours, passengers were made to board the plane without air conditioning, and then deplaned after some people fainted in the flight.

This is inhuman @JM_Scindia," she said. However, the airline responded to the passenger, regretting the inconvenience and said it's working to provide necessary assistance to the passengers. "Dear Punj, we truly regret to note the disruptions. Please be rest assured that our team is actively working to address the delay and appreciate your ongoing support and understanding. We are also alerting our team to provide necessary assistance to the passengers," Air India said. Another user, Abhishek Sharma (@39Abhishek) urged the airline for swift action and drew its attention to let his parents and "numerous other parents" stranded at the boarding area to go home. However, the airline official claimed that passengers were offered the options of full refund, complimentary rescheduling and hotel accommodation.

'Bokaro Diksha' trainees secure positions at YIPL, Bangalore

R SHARMA : BOKARO

Nine trainees from the Bokaro Steel Plant's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, "Bokaro Diksha," have been successfully placed at Yazaki India Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore. These individuals, trained as Assistant Electricians, have secured positions with a net annual salary of ₹204,000. Upon completion of their training period, their annual salary will increase to ₹264,000.

It is noteworthy that "Bokaro Diksha" is a collaborative effort between the CSR



department of Bokaro Steel Plant and Dalmia Bharat Foundation. The initiative operates a short-term technical training center located in Sector 01/C, aimed at enhancing the skills of youth from the surrounding villages of Bokaro. The primary objective is to prepare these young individuals for dignified self-employment and employment opportunities.

The training programs offered under this initiative include courses for Assistant Electricians, Solar Panel Technicians, General Duty Assistants, Customer

Relationship Management, and Sewing Machine Operators. Future plans include the introduction of short-term technical courses for Mechanical Fitters, Welding, Plumbing, and Automobile Technicians. All courses are provided free of charge for women and differently-abled individuals.

This placement success marks a milestone for "Bokaro Diksha," demonstrating the effectiveness of its training programs and its commitment to the socio-economic development of the local community.

Central jail inmate dies in MMCH Daltonganj : Jail Supdt

PNS : DALTONGANJ

Sanjay Sharma, 44, an inmate of the central jail Daltonganj died in the MMCH Daltonganj during treatment on the intervening night of Thursday / Friday, said the central jail superintendent Bhagirath Karjee today.

Sharma was in the central jail since December 12, 2017. He was booked under sections 304 B and 34 of the IPC.

Karjee said the deceased was a mental patient. He was under medical care here in the central jail. He was rushed from the jail hos-

pital to the MMCH Daltonganj last night, claimed Karjee. He was unconscious when shifted to the MMCH, Daltonganj added Karjee.

Incharge medical superintendent of the MMCH Daltonganj Dr R K Ranjan said a board of 3 doctors of the MMCH Daltonganj namely Rohit Pandey, Satranjan Giri and Umesh Kumar Singh conducted the post mortem in presence of the magistrate and the proceedings of the autopsy were videographed.

Dr Ranjan said the inmate was brought to the MMCH Daltonganj last night in a highly critical condition.

Seminar on World No Tobacco Day held in Garhwa



NITYANAND DUBEY : GARHWA

On World No Tobacco Day, a seminar was held at Sadar Hospital Garhwa on Friday. Chief guest Civil Surgeon Harenchandra Mahato also inaugurated the seminar by lighting the lamp. A signature campaign was launched on the occasion.

On the occasion, the Civil Surgeon said that many diseases including cancer are taking people's lives due to consumption of tobacco and its products. There is a need to make people aware of the harm caused by tobacco products.

He said that the sale of tobacco products is banned near educational institutions. Celebrating World No Tobacco Day is meaningful only when the COTPA law is implemented and people are

made aware. In the seminar, PLV Murali Shyam Tiwari said that the District Legal Services Authority is running an awareness program on all intoxicants including tobacco. In this, people are constantly being alerted about the use of intoxicants and involvement in the sale of drugs by children below 18 years of age. Deputy Superintendent Dr. Harenchandra Mahato also expressed his views in the seminar.

District BHBD Consultant Arvind Kumar Dwivedi, Dr. Bharat Bhushan, Physio Abhishek Kumar Singh, PLV Umashankar Dwivedi, Sangeeta Sinha and many others were present on the occasion.

Before this on the occasion hospital staffs took out an awareness rally. It started

from the Civil Surgeon's office located in the Sadar Hospital premises. On the occasion, Civil Surgeon Dr. Ashok Kumar flagged off the awareness rally. Trainee ANMs and GNMs participated in the rally. The rally started from Ranka Mor via Chiniya Mor of the town. The trainee ANMs and GNMs involved in it were walking while raising slogans to make people aware about tobacco and its products. The people involved in the rally from Ranka Mor of the town reached the Sadar Hospital premises again via the main road and the rally concluded. On the occasion, many health workers including physio Abhishek Singh of Sadar Hospital, assistant Vimlesh Kumar, Rajendra Ram, Rajkumar Verma were present.

INCLUSIVE FASHION



BY RACHNA TIWARI

fashion accessible to everyone. This shift is not merely about larger sizes but about acknowledging that fashion should make everyone feel beautiful, confident, and seen.

Moreover, the runway is beginning to reflect the true diversity of India. Fashion shows now feature models of all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds. Take, for instance, Lakme Fashion Week, which has been a pioneer in promoting inclusivity. Recent



seasons have seen shows dedicated to trans visibility, with trans models like Anjali Lama and Nitasha Biswas walking the ramp, breaking barriers and shattering stereotypes. This is a powerful reminder that beauty is not monolithic and that fashion should be a mirror to the society it serves. The importance of adaptive fashion cannot be overstated. Brands are increasingly recognizing the need for clothing designed for people with disabilities, ensuring functionality without compromising on style. This movement is being championed by designers like Siddhartha Tyler and Rina Dhaka, who have incorporated adaptive clothing lines into their collections, providing dignified and fashionable options for all. Inclusivity in fashion also extends to age. In a country that traditionally reveres youth in fashion, there is a growing appreciation for the elegance and grace that come with age. Models like the evergreen Milind Soman and the timeless Zeenat Aman are redefining age norms, proving that fashion is ageless and style is eternal. However, true inclusivity goes beyond the runway. It requires a shift in mindset across the entire industry - from design studios to advertising cam-

paigns. The media plays a crucial role in this transformation. Publications and brands must commit to showcasing diverse representations, and social media influencers are crucial allies in amplifying these voices.

As a model, I have had the privilege of walking for various designers and experiencing firsthand the evolving landscape of Indian fashion. The joy of seeing a more inclusive and representative fashion industry is immeasurable. Fashion is not just about clothing; it's about identity, expression, and empowerment. When we embrace inclusivity, we celebrate the very essence of humanity. The journey towards inclusive fashion is ongoing, and while progress has been made, there is still much work to be done. As consumers, we hold the power to demand and support brands that prioritize inclusivity. By celebrating diversity, we are not only making a fashion statement but also advocating for a more equitable and compassionate world.

In the end, inclusive fashion is not just a trend; it's a movement - one that I am proud to be a part of. Let us continue to push boundaries, break stereotypes, and celebrate the beautiful diversity that is India.

WITH A CAREER SPANNING TEN YEARS, THE WRITER HAS SOLIDIFIED HER EXPERTISE IN HR, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT. SHE IS A PRINT AND RAMP MODEL WHO WAS ALSO FEATURED IN VOGUE AND GLADRAGS MAGAZINES.

SAIL's call to quit smoking on World No Tobacco Day

PNS : BOKARO

On this World No Tobacco Day, the Ministry of Steel, Government of India, and Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) are urging citizens to take a stand against tobacco use. Tobacco consumption is a leading cause of preventable diseases and deaths worldwide, affecting millions of lives and burdening healthcare systems.



This year, the focus is on encouraging individuals to quit smoking and embrace a healthier lifestyle. SAIL, as a responsible corporate entity, supports this initiative by offering resources and programs designed to help employees and the community in their journey towards a smoke-free life.

SAIL appealed to participate in World No Tobacco Day activities and take the pledge to quit smoking. By doing so, one not only improves his health but also contributes to a healthier, smoke-free community.

TSF holds awareness session on World No-Tobacco Day

PNS : DHANBAD

The RISHTA Project's Jamadoba unit organised awareness sessions at two locations including Government High School Karitand under the Dhanbad block and Malkera South Sachivalay under the Baghmara block as part of the World No-Tobacco Day campaign on Friday.

These sessions were aimed at educating the community about the dangers of tobacco use and its adverse impacts on human health.

At the Karitand High School campus, the awareness session was led by Dr Rajkumar, Medical Officer, TMH Jamadoba, with contributions from Bipin Singh Choudhary, Manager, Community Development, Tata Steel Foundation, Bharat Mahato Principal, Karitand High School, Baba Charan Mahato, Secretary, Karitand High School and the RISHTA team. Dr Rajkumar delivered an informative session on the harmful effects of tobacco, emphasizing its link to serious illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, and respiratory disorders.

Simultaneously, another session was held at the Malkera South Sachivalay, attended by Dr Ankit Prakash, Medical Officer, Bhelatand Feeder Hospital, Dr Sudhir Kumar, Medical Officer, Community Health Center Baghmara, Dr Sekhar Chandra, Medical Officer, CHC Baghmara, Dr Vivekananda Patra, Medical Officer TSF. The doctors shared valuable insights regarding how the use of Tobacco impacts the health condition of people. The session was attended by Vinod Rajak, Mukhiya, Malkera South, Anjan Devi, Mukhiya, Malkera North, and the RISHTA team.

Both sessions were very interactive, allowing participants to engage in discussions and learn about the health risks associated with tobacco use. The events saw active participation from the local communities, and a total of 135 people participated in these awareness programmes.

Rajeev Anand receives excellent honor award

AVINASH ANJAN : HAZARIBAG

Lions Club International's Region Chairperson Rajeev Anand has been given the Outstanding Region Chairperson's Award by District Governor Lion Kamal Jain for the excellent work done by Lions Club International. It is noteworthy that the work is being done by the club for health camps and tribal communities. This honor has been given for. In this context, Rajeev Anand said that he is overwhelmed by getting the honor and soon a big program on water conservation will be started in the upcoming project. On receiving the honour, the club's zonal chairperson Rajmohan Verma, club president Hero Mahato Royal's president Swati Verma, Ichak president Sachidanand Agarwal and all the members have congratulated the region chairperson.



BJP leader Kale's mother passes away

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

The city mourns the loss of Sardarni Balwant Kaur Khanuja, mother of former BJP spokesperson and social worker Sardar Amarpreet Singh Kale. Sardarni Balwant Kaur Khanuja, wife of the late Sardar Harjeet Singh Khanuja, passed away today.

Kaur was a revered figure in her community, known for her grace and compassion. Her passing marks the end of an era for the Khanuja family and the local community, who held her in high esteem for her lifelong contributions and her steadfast support for her family.

Her final journey will commence from her ancestral residence at 14/407 Sakchi, located in front of the Gurudwara Petrol Pump. The funeral procession is scheduled for Sunday, June 2, 2024. It will begin at 10:00 am from her residence and proceed via Gurudwara Sahib Sakchi to Swamarekha Burning Ghat, where she will be laid to rest. The procession will pause



briefly at Gurudwara Sahib Sakchi, allowing family, friends, and community members to pay their last respects. Sardar Amarpreet Singh Kale and his family have expressed their heartfelt gratitude for the outpouring of condolences and support during this difficult time.

As a mark of respect and to honor her memory, various dignitaries, community leaders, and party members are expected to attend the funeral. Sardarni Balwant Kaur Khanuja's legacy will continue to inspire those who knew her, and her contributions to her family and community will be remembered fondly.

CPO Meet highlights future of Supply Chain Management

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

The Indian Institute of Materials Management (IIMM), Jamshedpur Branch, successfully conducted a "CPO Meet" at the Center of Excellence. The event was graced by the esteemed presence of Chief Procurement Officer of Tata Steel, Ranjan Sinha, as the Chief Guest.



Sidhartha Dash, Chairman of IIMM Jamshedpur Branch, delivered the welcome presentation, highlighting several new initiatives the branch is embarking on this year. These initiatives aim to enhance the skill sets of industrial staff and contractors, positioning IIMM Jamshedpur as a pivotal player in professional development within the industry located in and around Jamshedpur. Dash further emphasized the goal of increasing membership intake to further the reach and impact of IIMM in the industries to meet the challenges of Industry 4.0 and the 5 Trillion Dollar economy of India.

and uplift the branch's operations. These digital transformations are expected to streamline processes and foster greater engagement among members and stakeholders. Das presented IIMM's role in the ever-growing global Supply Chain Management. CPO of Tata Steel, Ranjan Sinha, pointed out a paradigm shift from materials management to supply chain management, including the management of risk and sustainability in the supply chain. He highlighted the potential growth of Odisha in the upcoming years and how materials management professionals of Jharkhand and Odisha can work together for the overall development of the branch. A K Srivastava added that IIMM can contribute to Tata Steel professionals and supplier partners in the aforementioned areas. The event concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Cdr Sanjeev Raman, Vice Chairman of IIMM Jamshedpur Branch, expressing gratitude to all attendees and contributors for making the event a resounding success. The CPO Meet provided a valuable platform for industry leaders and professionals to share insights, network, and collaborate on advancing procurement practices. IIMM Jamshedpur remains committed to fostering innovation and excellence in materials management and procurement.

Day-night cricket tournament started by AISECT University

PNS : HAZARIBAG

Day-night cricket tournament started on Thursday late evening at the main campus ground of AISECT University, Hazaribag at Taraba-Kharba. The match was inaugurated by the Vice Chancellor of the University, Dr. PK Nayak. The first match of the tournament was played between AISECT University and Silwar Kings. Batting first, the team of AISECT University scored 98 runs in 10 overs, which included a brilliant innings of 58 runs by Atul. Chasing the target of 99 runs, the team of Silwar Kings collapsed at 80 runs and lost the match by 18 runs. Atul was selected as the Man of the Match for his brilliant half-century innings. 16 teams including AISECT University, Silwar Kings, Active Yuva Samiti Taraba, Maheshra Cricket Club, Green Galaxy Barkagaon, Saint Columba Mahavidyalaya, Gopolo Cricket Club, Team Destroyer Amrit Nagar, Meru Striker, Friends Club Dumra, Union Supporting Club Jinga, Academic



Supergiants, Pugmil Night Club, RK Club Kharika, Lakhayya Warrior, Amrit Nagar 11 are participating in this knockout tournament. The teams that win in the first round and make it to the top 8 will clash with each other on June 4 and 5 for the top four according to the ranking. Both the semi-final matches will be played on June 6 and the title

match will be held on the evening of June 8. University Registrar Dr. Mumish Govind said that the cricket tournament is being organized with the aim of developing talent in sports along with studies among the youth of not only the university but also of various areas of the district and to provide a proper platform to better players. The role of

AISECT University Sports Committee Chairman Uday Ranjan, Aditya Kumar, Amit Kumar, Sanjay Dangi, Rajesh Ranjan, Rahul Kumar, Mukesh Kumar Sao, Pankaj Pragna, Alok Kumar Sinha, Shiv Kumar, Ajit Paswan, Ritesh Kumar, Dr. Satyaprakash and Pramod Ram, among others, is important in making the match a success.

Three seats of Santhal Pargana go to vote today

Fate of Sita Soren, Nalin, Nishikant Dubey, Pradeep Yadav, Tala Marandi, Vijay Hansda will be sealed

PNS : RANCHI

In the last phase of polling for the Lok Sabha election, all eyes have now shifted to Santhal region in Jharkhand where voting will take place for three parliamentary seats of Dumka, Rajmahal and Godda.

Voting is to be held on 1 June on 3 seats of Santhal. For security, the borders of Bihar and West Bengal have been sealed. Chief Election Officer K. Ravi Kumar said that voting is on Saturday in Dumka, Rajmahal and Godda parliamentary constituencies. There are 14 candidates in Rajmahal and 19 each in Godda and Dumka. The Chief Election Officer said that every booth of Dumka, Rajmahal and Godda will be monitored through webcasting from the control room. One camera has been installed inside and outside each booth. Observers are also keeping an eye on the entire situation. He said that polling personnel have reached the polling stations. All polling personnel will return the same day after voting. Amidst the possibility



Electoral officers with VVPATs / EVMs are on their way by boats on the river Ganga to the respective polling booths under tight security arrangements to conduct the on-going last phase (7th) in India as well as last phase (4th) in Jharkhand state, to be held tomorrow (1st June 2024), during the Lok-Sabha Election-2024 in Sahibganj district of Jharkhand on Friday. PNS

of rain, every possible arrangement has been made to increase the voting percentage. On the day of voting, arrangements have been made to bring and take voters from remote areas to the polling station by vehicle. Arrangements have also been made to bring senior and handicapped voters to the polling station. He appealed that this time voting is throughout the day, take out time and vote with

your family and neighbours. He was addressing a press conference at Nirvachan Sadan, Dhurva on Friday.

He said that security forces have been deployed at every booth to ensure fair and fear-free voting. The border of Bihar and West Bengal connected to the election area has been sealed. Bike riding quick response team has also been deployed. He informed that a driver of a private bus connected with



Polling officials and security personnel with the election materials leave for their designated polling stations on the eve of the seventh and last phase of Lok sabha elections in Dumka, Jharkhand on Friday. Pix by Ratan Lal

election work has died in Deoghar. His family will be provided ex-gratia grant as per rules. He informed that since the implementation of the model code of conduct, illegal material and cash worth Rs. 134 crore, 75 lakh



has been seized in Jharkhand till now. BJP's prestige is at stake as JMM founder Shibu Soren's eldest daughter-in-law Sita Soren, who quit the party a month before the Lok Sabha election and joined the BJP, is contesting as the saffron party candidate from Dumka. Nalin Soren, seven-time MLA of Sikaripara Assembly seat, is up against Sita Soren. The Dumka parliamentary seat is also impor-

tant for the BJP because its State president Babul Marandi has represented the constituency twice in 1998 and 1999. Winning Dumka has apparently become a matter of prestige for both the BJP and JMM, and the two parties have neither spared strength nor resources in their poll campaigns.

In Godda, sitting BJP MP Nishikant Dubey is locked in a direct contest against Congress candidate Pradeep Yadav. In the 2019 general election, Dubey got the lead in all six Assembly segments — Jarmundi, Madhupur, Deoghar, Poreyhat, Godda and Mahagama. In the previous Lok Sabha election, Yadav had contested the seat on a Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (Prajantrik) ticket.

On the other hand, Rajmahal seat that is reserved for Scheduled Tribes (ST) is presently occupied by JMM where the party has fielded sitting MP Vijay Hansda, who is up against BJP candidate Tala Marandi.

Meanwhile, all schools and educational institutes will remain closed across the

polling constituencies on June 1. Some educational centers are also used as polling booths, so security will remain heightened at these centers.

Further, all state government offices will remain closed during polling hours. Banks in some constituencies will also remain closed, on account of it being a Saturday. Liquor stores will be closed and sale of commercial liquor will be banned during polling hours.

All emergency and essential services such as hospitals, ambulance services, healthcare facilities and law enforcement facilities will remain open on June 1 across all constituencies. Pharmacies and grocery shops will also remain open.

Public transportation will remain active on its usual routes during its functioning hours. Some constituencies may also add some extra routes to facilitate voters on polling day.

Commercial establishments such as hotels, restaurants, shopping malls and theatres are expected to largely remain open.

Vajpayee exudes confidence of winning all 14 seats in State



BJP State in-charge and Chief Whip in Rajya Sabha, Dr. Laxmikant Vajpayee during a press conference in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

PNS : RANCHI

BJP state in-charge and chief whip in Rajya Sabha Dr. Laxmikant Vajpayee today claimed victory of NDA on all 14 Lok Sabha seats of Jharkhand. He also launched a big attack on the state's thugbandhan government and Indl bloc.

Dr. Vajpayee said that two revolutions are important in Jharkhand, which include Bhagwan Birsa Munda's Ulgulan and Amar Shaheed Sidhu Kanhu's Hul. He said that June is the month of Santhal Hul revolution. Santhal society is ready to do Hul for Congress JMM free Jharkhand.

Vajpayee said that due to politics of appeasement, clouds of crisis are looming over the existence of Santhal society. Bangladeshi intruders have not only changed the demography but also looted both land and conscience. The unique culture is the identity of Santhal society, which is being tried to be

eliminated under the protection of the state government. JMM Congress RJD Thugbandhan are erasing the identity and identity of Santhals due to vote bank. Said that to save its power, the Indi Thugbandhan has mortgaged Santhal Pargana to the intruders.

He said that the land of the tribal society is being looted by the intruders through love jihad. Ration cards, Aadhaar cards, voter IDs of the intruders are being made under the protection of Congress JMM.

He said that on the other hand, there is a naked dance of corruption. Mines, minerals, stones, coal and sand are being looted. Everyone knows that seams worth more than one thousand crores have been exposed in Sahibganj district alone. Today, former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who is involved in corruption, is in jail. Government minister Alamgir Alam is in jail. Many IAS officers are in jail. And many are seen standing in the queue to go.

He said that leaders of the Indi Alliance are doing both theft and bragging. They are misleading the public by linking corruption to caste, religion and community. Whereas the public is understanding their cunning very well. Vajpayee said that today the public is seeing the development works of the Modi government, whether it is establishment of AHMS in Deoghar, airport or railway facilities, construction of highways, construction of bridge in Sahibganj on river Ganga. On the other hand, they are remembering the development works done by the BJP in the state government.

He said that the public has tested the intentions and policies of the Congress-JMM government. The public has understood that JMM-Congress wants power only to loot and earn money, whereas BJP is determined and dedicated for development. The public has full faith in Modi's guarantee.

He said that the way lakhs of people gathered in the scorching heat to listen to Modi ji's rallies, that scene is enough to understand the mood of the public. The BJP leader said that the Hul that will be done from the land of Santhal through votes on 1st June will be against corruption, loot, love jihad, land jihad, infiltration, appeasement.

Dr Vajpayee said that after June 4, the action against corruption and corrupt people will be intensified in the country. BJP will never allow Jharkhand to become a land of loot and infiltration. Infiltrators will be selectively thrown out.

He said that the countdown of the corrupt, useless and loot-involved state government of Jharkhand will begin. The fight for power will come to the fore in the Indi Thugbandhan. Hemant Soren is in jail. Champai Soren is in power and Kalpana Soren ji is on the way to power. Amidst this struggle, the path of a strong and honest NDA government dedicated to development in the state will also be paved. State General Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh, State Media in-charge Shiv Pujan Pathak and Spokesperson Avinash Kumar Singh were also present in today's press conference.

ETPBS and postal ballots to open early for LS vote counting



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

As the Lok Sabha General Election 2024 reaches its culmination, the District Election Office has released a detailed schedule for the vote counting process on June 04. To ensure a smooth and transparent procedure, the following timeline has been established: Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) and postal ballot strong rooms will be opened from 4:00 am. EVM strong room will be open at 7:00 am. Final acceptance of postal ballots from service voters at 7:59 am. 8:00 am Counting of ETBPS and postal ballots will commence. 8:30 am Counting of EVM votes will begin.

For assembly-wise counting, the following arrangements have been made:- 14 tables for 44-Baharagora- 15 tables for 45-Ghatshila - 16 tables for 46-Potka - 20 tables for 47-Jugsalai- 19 tables for 48-Jamshedpur East - 16 tables for 49-Jamshedpur West The district administration, under the guidance of District Election Officer Ananya Mittal, has implemented stringent measures to ensure that the counting process is fair and transparent, with all necessary precautions in place.

As the Lok Sabha General Election 2024 finale draws to a close, preparations for the counting of votes have been meticulously arranged. District Election Officer Ananya Mittal convened a crucial meeting with the candidates and election agents in the Collectorate Auditorium to discuss the arrangements and ensure the transparency and fairness of the vote counting process. The meeting was

attended by Deputy Development Commissioner Manish Kumar, ADM Law and Order Anant Kumar, Deputy Election Officer, Priyanka Singh, and District Public Relations Officer Panchanan Oraon.

Mittal emphasized that the guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India will be strictly adhered to. Comprehensive measures have been put in place by the district administration to guarantee an unbiased counting process. He encouraged political parties and independent candidates to appoint counting agents for each table in the counting hall.

The District Election Officer highlighted stringent security arrangements. Entry into the counting center will be restricted to individuals with identity cards. Barricading has been established for secure transport of EVMs from the strong room to the counting hall, and extensive surveillance measures, including 360° CCTV coverage and dedicated videographers, will be in place to monitor all activities within the premises.

Counting agents are allowed to bring only a copy, pen, and paper into the counting center. No electronic devices, food items, or other personal belongings will be permitted. Candidates are instructed to ensure their agents are briefed on these guidelines and maintain discipline throughout the process. Any issues or queries from the counting agents should be directed to the Assistant Returning Officer (ARO), Returning Officer (RO), or the observer present.

First time in history polling was conducted for so long: JMM

PNS : RANCHI

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) General Secretary, Supriyo Bhattacharya has targeted the Election Commission and BJP by holding a press conference on Friday. He said that the last phase of voting will be held in the Country on June 1. He has attacked the Modi government at the Center by cornering the Election Commission. He also said that this is the first time in the history of India that a general election has lasted for such a long time.

Bhattacharya said that the 2024 general election has been held for a full 82 days. Accusing the BJP, he said that the purpose of prolonging the election was only to divide the people by spreading hatred among the people. "The language used by the star campaigners of BJP is shameful. The public will give a befitting reply by voting. It is worth noting that voting is to be held on June 1 on the remaining three Santhal seats in Jharkhand, which include Godda, Rajmahal and Dumka," he added.

The party General Secretary said that this is not just an election, but a fight for one's rights. He said that this election is a question of the identity of the indigenous, tribals, minorities, farmers, laborers, women, youth of Jharkhand and the way BJP's arrogance speaks in Santhal Pargana, Adami's looting is going on, we have to vote against him. He said that how the society can be divided, it was seen in Santhal Pargana. Accusing BJP, he said that they have divided not only the society but also



JMM General secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya during a press conference in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

the family. He claimed that the India Alliance government will be formed on June 4 and we are eagerly waiting for it.

Bhattacharya said that tomorrow there is voting on 3 seats of Santhal. He appealed to the voters to vote in maximum numbers. "If possible, there should be 100 percent voting. No matter how hot it is, leave your homes and go to the polling booths to vote. Carry enough drinking water with you, but definitely vote," he added.

Swachhta Pakhwada concludes at NTPC Coal Mining HQ with Signature Campaign on Cleanliness



PNS : RANCHI

The curtain was down for the fortnight celebration on Cleanliness i.e Swachhta Pakhwada at NTPC Coal Mining Headquarters/NTPC Mining Limited, Ranchi with Signature Campaign among employees and associates on Cleanliness.

The signature campaign

was inaugurated by Animesh Jain, Regional Executive Director (Coal Mining) & CEO(NML) and was followed with participation by senior officials including Ram Baboo Prasad, Associate(Mining), Naveen Jain, Chief General Manager (SSC-C&M), Rajnish Rastogi, Chief General Manager (HR) and employees. The cam-

paign was intended to encourage employees to take pledge to keep the office premises and country clean.

Swachhta Pakhwada-2024 which was celebrated from May 16 to May 31, 2023 with a focus to involve the community in spreading awareness on sanitation and cleanliness.

During this period various activities like cleanliness drives at Ranchi Railway Station, Govt. High school, workshops on kitchen waste management for housewives and office canteen staff, Nukkad Natak at public places, painting competition for school children, distribution of dustbins & hand sanitizers to street vendors etc were conducted with large participation and cooperation of the employees and associates during the fortnightly celebration on cleanliness.

Witch hunting victim's kin given interim compensation of Rs 10000

JHALSA takes cognisance of incident of witch hunting

PNS : RANCHI

Executive Chairman, Jhalsa of Jharkhand High Court, Justice Sujit Narayan Prasad took cognisance of the case of deceased Baleshwar Oraon in the Angada-witch hunting incident published on Thursday in the newspaper and has ordered the District Legal Services Authority, Ranchi to immediately meet the family of the deceased and provide necessary assistance.

In the light of this instruction, Judicial Commissioner-Chairman, DLSA, Ranchi, Diwakar Pandey ordered the DLSA Secretary to immediately form a team and provide legal assistance to the victim's family. In the light of this order, Secretary District Legal Services Authority, Ranchi Kamlesh Behera formed a team, in which Dulari Kumari, Panel Advocate, PIV, Baby Sinha and Tara Minj have been appointed.

Sinha and Minj met the victim's family and gave information about the free legal assistance provided by DALSA.



Ranchi DALSA will provide assistance to the victim's family for the case and Advocate Dulari Kumari has been appointed by the DLSA for legal assistance to the victim's family. Also, the injured Sanichariya Devi, wife of the deceased, was given proper treatment at Ranchi Sadar Hospital and her Ayushman card was also made from Sadar Hospital under Ayushman Bharat Health Scheme.

The process of compensation for the victim was taken forward by DLSA, Ranchi under the Jharkhand Victim Compensation Scheme. As per the instructions of the Executive Chairman, JHALSA, the DLSA Secretary himself met the victim's family and provided a cheque of Rs 10,000 as interim compensation to the family of the

deceased. Apart from this, the process of making widow pension of the deceased's wife and job cards of the three sons under the welfare scheme of the government was also taken forward.

The Block Development Officer (BDO) Angada Block, Jaipal Soye, present on the spot, assured to provide employment to the three sons of the deceased under MGN-REGA.

In reference to the incident, legal awareness was also organized among the villagers in Jarga village, village, Tetri Toli of Angada block under the leadership of DALSA Secretary, where Soye, Angada Police Station In-charge, Chamra Minj, Panel Advocate, Dulari Kumari, Village Head-Christina, PIV-Baby Sinha were present. Behera said that witch hunting is a superstition; there is a provision of punishment for it in the law. Do not harass anyone in the name of witch hunting; it is a serious crime, which DALSA is moving forward to end by running awareness programs from time to time.

Lecture series on Skill development held at SXC

PNS : RANCHI

Society for Earth and Conservation (SEOC), a society for Multi-disciplinary Study and Research in collaboration with IQAC, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Ranchi has arranged 2nd lecture on a lecture series under the skill enhancement program on "Technology for sustainable development and Environment" based upon UGC-NAAC evaluation criteria. In the welcome address Dr. Ritesh Kumar Shukla, Department of Zoology, highlighted the importance and role of SEOC in multidisciplinary approach towards research and education for conservation of the environment.

Bihar and West Bengal borders connected to the election area sealed

Every booth in Dumka, Rajmahal and Godda to be monitored from control room: CEO

PNS : RANCHI

Voting is on Saturday in Dumka, Rajmahal and Godda parliamentary constituencies. There are 14 candidates in Rajmahal and 19 each in Godda and Dumka. Chief Electoral Officer K. Ravi Kumar today said that every booth in Dumka, Rajmahal and Godda will be monitored through webcasting from the control room. One camera has been installed inside and outside each booth. Observers are also keeping an eye on the entire situation. He said that polling personnel have reached the polling stations.

All polling personnel will return the same day after voting. Every possible arrangement has been made to increase the voting percentage amid the possibility of rain. On the day of polling, arrangements have been made to bring and take voters from remote areas to the polling



Chief Electoral Office K Ravi Kumar during a press conference in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

booth by vehicle. Arrangements have also been made to bring senior and handicapped voters to the polling booth. He appealed that this time voting is throughout the day, take out time and vote with family and neighbours. He was addressing a press conference at Nirvachan Sadan, Dhurva on Friday. The CEO said that security forces have been deployed at every booth to ensure fair and fear-free polling. The border of Bihar and West Bengal connected to the polling area has been sealed. Bike riding quick response team has also been deployed. He informed that a driver of a private bus involved in election work has died in Deoghar. His family will be provided an ex-gratia grant as per rules. He informed that since the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct, illegal material and cash worth Rs 134 crore, 75 lakh has been seized in Jharkhand till now.

Lok Sabha Secretariat prepares to welcome members of 18th LS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



RSS chief Bhagwat pays tributes to Ahilyabai Holkar on birth anniversary

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

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

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

Associate of fugitive gangster detained in US



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Centre asks States to be vigilant about unusual bird deaths

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



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

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

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

CWC paints troubling picture of India's water reservoir capacity

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

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

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

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

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

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

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

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

Kolkata South that sent Mamata Banerjee to Parliament for six



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

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

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

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

All eyes could also be set on the

Basirhat seat which has a good 45 percent minority votes. But more importantly Basirhat catches attention on account of Sandeshkhali being its one of the seven Assembly segments. Considered a microcosm of the broader electoral battle this time round drawing national attention due to allegations of atrocities on women and land grabs by local TMC leaders Basirhat could present a tricky picture this time round.

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ PATNA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

a former MLA and state general secretary. The reserved seat has formerly been a Congress bastion, with Jagjivan Ram and Meira Kumar together winning it nine times. However, Kumar has backed out of the race and her party has fielded Manoj Kumar, a recent entrant who was formerly with the BSP headed by ex-CM of UP Mayawati. In Jehanabad, the JD(U) has reposed its trust in sitting MP Chandeshwar Prasad Chandravanshi, whose victory margin in 2019, of less than 2,000 votes, was the lowest for any of the 40 constituencies in Bihar.

The RJD candidate is Surendra Prasad Yadav, the runner up of 2019, who had won the seat in 1998.

In Buxar, the BJP sprung a surprise by denying Union minister Ashwini Kumar Choubey the chance to run for a third consecutive term. The party hopes its candidate Mithilesh Tiwari, a former MLA and state vice president, will retain the seat.

However, Tiwari's bid has met a strong challenge from RJD's Sudhakar Singh, a sitting MLA whose father Jagadanand Singh heads the party's state unit and had won the Buxar seat in 2009.

Queering the pitch, Anand Mishra, a former Assam cadre IPS officer, who resigned from service nursing political ambitions but did not get a ticket from the BJP which had allegedly promised the same, is also contesting as an Independent.

Fate of 62 poll candidates in Himachal to be sealed

PTI ■ SHIMLA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ RANCHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ ARA (BIHAR)

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Om Prakash Rai, who ran one

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

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

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

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

Stage set for polling in 13 LS seats of Punjab

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Among its candidates, the AAP has fielded five Cabinet ministers — Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal (Amritsar), Laljit Singh Bhullar (Khadoor Sahib), Gurmeet Singh

Khuddian (Bathinda), Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer (Sangrur) and Balbir Singh (Patiala).

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

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



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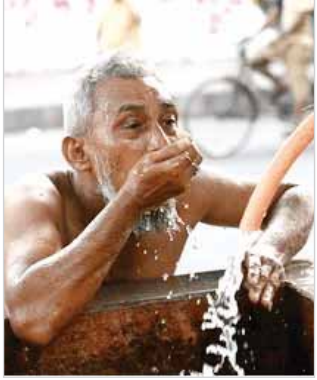
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PAPER WITH PASSION

High and dry

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

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



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

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

PICTALK



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

India and Bangladesh: A tale of two books



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRAGIC BUS ACCIDENT IN JAMMU

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

Arjun Desai | Chandigarh

RBI DIVIDEND BOOSTS GDP

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

Delhi's water crisis worsens



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

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

Vihaan Verma | Jaipur

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

Harminder | Lucknow

PRAGGNANANDHAA'S TRIUMPH

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

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

Arnav Patel | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Economic growth raises sustainability concerns

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

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

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



per cent to ₹2,008. India's consumption story reminds us of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow (1943), wherein there is a transition from psychological needs comprising necessities to security to esteem and self-actualisation needs. A noteworthy phenomenon of this shift from 'needs to wants' is the unlimited nature of the latter and the subsequent and alarming wastage of resources. High consumption can have alarming repercussions on sustainability and long-term economic and social welfare. Foremost, it leads to resource depletion, which may be non-renewable and therefore irreversible, causing scarcity, higher costs and potential financial instability. Environmental degradation is another externality of excessive consumption which includes pollution, deforesta-

tion, biodiversity loss and waste production. According to the Central Pollution Control Board, 2020-21 Annual Report, the total quantity of Solid waste generated in the country is 160038.9 tonnes per day (TPD), out of which 79956.3 TPD (50 per cent) of waste is treated and 29427.2 (18.4 per cent) TPD is landfilled. 50655.4 TPD which is 31.7 per cent of the total waste generated remains ironically unaccounted for. Besides, high consumption also leads to increasing use of fossil fuels and products with large carbon footprints, significantly contributing to climate change.

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

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

By sensibly managing consumption and prioritizing sustainability, it is possible to achieve economic growth that benefits society while preserving the environment for future generations. (The author is assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)



KAJLEEN KAUR



FIRST COLUMN

WITNESSING THE DIVINE PRESENCE

There are multiple instances where the Supreme manifests itself



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

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



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

Recycle nutrients to mitigate fertiliser crisis



NANDULA RAGHURAM

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

(The writer is a Professor and Head of, the Centre for Sustainable Nitrogen and Nutrient Management School of Biotechnology, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi; views are personal)



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

Haryana is driving towards progress and prosperity

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

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



KIRIT P SOLANKI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trump first ex-prez convicted of felony

HUSH MONEY TRIAL



AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

Republicans rally behind Trump to his defence after felony verdict

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

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

16 killed, 35 wounded in joint US-British airstrikes

AP ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

Cop dies in ambush shooting that killed two others in US

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

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

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

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ SINGAPORE

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

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

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

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

Indian-American seventh-grader wins Spelling Bee title

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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



"Together, they were a powerful match. Bee officials activated the spell-off in the competition's closing minutes, giving these stellar spellers an opportunity to show even more of what they can do," Loeffler said. The two final spellers each had

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That position, Blinken noted, was a "hallmark" of the Biden administration's stance on Ukraine to "adapt and adjust" as needed.

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

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

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

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

Berlin lets Ukraine use German weapons against targets in Russia

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

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

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

with Kyiv.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Orban pushes back on NATO proposals to further assist Ukraine

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Russian missiles kill 4 in Kharkiv

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

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

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

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

Apart from Kharkiv, Moscow's troops are pressing in the Donetsk region further south and are assembling a force for an expected attack in the Sumy region further north, according to Ukrainian officials.

The Kremlin's bigger and better-equipped army is exploiting Ukrainian shortages in troops and ammunition after a lengthy delay in U.S. military aid. Western Europe's inadequate military production has slowed crucial deliveries of military aid to Ukraine.

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

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

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



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



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

Paks Defence Minister asks Imran to keep mum

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/ BEIJING

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ex-Iranian parl speaker Ali Larijani registers as presidential candidate

AP ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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



Stock markets snap five days losing streak on value buying

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

Raj comics brings super commando Dhruva, Doga to life

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

POWERGRID acquires Khavda IV-E2 Power Transmission Limited

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



NISHANT DEV BOOKS PARIS OLYMPICS TICKET

PTI ■ BANGKOK

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

AP ■ MADRID

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

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)

Vaishali outwits Cramling, Praggnanandhaa loses to Nakamura

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

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



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

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

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

India parts ways with IBA, joins World Boxing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



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

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

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

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

AP ■ PARIS

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

The challenge for the Indians will be to adapt to the drop-in turf here, something they don't come across very often in international cricket.

"It's just about getting into that rhythm of getting the feel of the ground, pitch and stuff like that," he said.

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

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

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

through the venue for their matches.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



India eye redemption as big ticket cricket touches base in America

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

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

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

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

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

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

There are plots within plots that will unfold in the course of next one month. And perhaps one of the most intriguing would be the one involving India, a team that looks so destined for an ICC trophy but has somehow managed to fall short after the 2013 Champions Trophy triumph.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ PORT OF SPAIN (TRINIDAD)
Fifties by Nicholas Pooran and Rowman Powell helped West Indies outpunch a nine-man Australia by 35 runs in their warm-up match ahead of the T20 World Cup here.

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

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

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



home after a taxing campaign in the recently concluded IPL. **NAMIBIA BEAT PNG:** Namibia defeated Papua New Guinea by three runs under the DLS method. Batting first, PNG were restricted to

109 for seven in 20 overs, and Namibia were 93 for six in 16.5 overs when the skies opened up in Tarouba. But they were three runs ahead in the DLS calculations at this stage.

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

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

Warm up game opportunity to check Indian players' rhythm

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

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

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

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

There will be two areas where skipper Rohit Sharma and outgoing head coach Rahul Dravid need to take a judicious call.

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

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

"Shivam Dube is a six-hitting machine. He can be the 'x-factor' in the T20 World Cup. But if Shivam has to be in the XI, then you can't play Yashasvi. Rohit has to take that



call and I prefer both pace-bowling all-rounders in the XI. If Shivam plays, he can take on the opposition wrist spinners in the latter half," Suresh Raina, one of India's premier T20 batters of his time, said on Friday when asked about a possible combination.

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

RP Singh, one of the heroes of India's inaugural edition victory, feels that Hardik Pandya's four overs will be very important. Besides, he feels that Arshdeep should be the second frontline pacer on the newly-laid drop-in track.

Talking about the length to be bowled on the tracks in the US during an early morning start, he felt variations will be important, which make Arshdeep a better bet compared to Siraj.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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