



**OPINION 6**  
A SHOWDOWN OF  
ARCH-RIVALS

**WORLD 8**  
FARMERS BLOCK BRUSSELS  
TO PROTEST EU POLICIES

**MONEY 10**  
SENSEX, NIFTY SNAP THREE  
DAYS WINNING RUN

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## Kejriwal stir chokes Central Delhi

**AAP seeks Delhi CM release, BJP his resignation**

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■  
NEW DELHI

The national Capital on Tuesday witnessed massive protests led separately by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

While AAP workers attempted to 'gherao' the Prime Minister residence in Lutyens' Zone, seeking release of their supremo Arvind Kejriwal from the Enforcement Directorate's custody, the BJP organised protest demanding that the arrested Chief Minister step down from his post.

Kejriwal, who was arrested on March 21 and subsequently remanded to ED custody till March 28 by a Delhi court, faces charges of direct involvement in a conspiracy related to the formulation of the excise policy favouring specific individuals.

The protests led to massive traffic jams in the Central and New Delhi areas and as preventive measures the Delhi Police issued directions to shut down the entry and exit gates of the Lok Kalyan Metro Station from where the PM's residence is nearby.

The Delhi Police beefed up security in several parts of the national Capital,



AAP workers during their protest outside Patel Chowk metro station in New Delhi on Tuesday  
Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer



BJP workers protest on Tuesday in Delhi demanding resignation of Arvind Kejriwal after his arrest by the ED  
Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

including around the PM's residence and Central Delhi, by deploying its personnel and those of paramilitary forces.

Prohibitory orders under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure were imposed in the Patel Chowk area.

A senior police officer said they cannot allow anyone to gather and added that in view of this, "we have to clear this area".

"We will not allow anybody to gather here," he said. Deputy Commissioner of Police of New Delhi Devesh Kumar had earlier warned that those who gather at the chowk to demonstrate would be detained immediately.

### Kavitha remanded in judicial custody till April 9

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A court here on Tuesday sent ABRS leader K Kavitha to judicial custody till April 9 on a plea made by the Enforcement Directorate that the "highly influential" arrestee, if released, is likely to influence witnesses and tamper with evidence.

The 46-year-old leader was arrested by the Central probe agency on March 15 in a Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case.

The federal probe agency's application seeking 15-day jail custody was filed before Special Judge Kaveri Baweja, saying an investigation into economic crimes was more complex than ordinary crimes as economic offenders were influential, resourceful and committed the crime meticulously. The plea sought her judicial custody on the ground that "the arrestee is highly influential and there is every likelihood the arrestee will influence the witnesses and tamper with the evidence if released, (and) it may hamper the ongoing investigation."



### BJP to go solo in Punjab

RAJESH KUMAR ■  
NEW DELHI

After days of parleys with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the BJP on Tuesday announced that it will contest the upcoming Lok Sabha polls on its own in Punjab, with the announcement coming amid 'hints' from its ex-ally SAD that the latter could go solo in the border State. With this development, the border State will see a four-cornered contest in the general elections. Punjab is the latest State after the BJP and Naveen Patnaik-led BJD alliance did not work out despite days of deliberations and both announced to go solo in Odisha.

The BJD last month had supported the Rajya Sabha candidature of Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

Both the SAD and the BJD were the natural ally of the BJP since year until SAD broke ranks from the NDA after the controversial farm laws which however now stands repealed.

The SAD's latest decision is a major shift from late Parkash Singh Badal's 24-year policy of "unconditional support" to the BJP from 1996 to 2020. The two parties had formed an alliance in 1996 and had been fighting elections together. In 2019, they won two Lok Sabha seats each in Punjab. This will be the first Lok Sabha poll since 1998 which the BJP and SAD will contest alone. In the first Assembly poll they fought separately and both suffered jolts with the BJP winning two and Akalis 3 seats out of 117 and AAP sweeping with 92.



### US comments on AAP chief arrest

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After Germany, the United States of America Government on Tuesday said they are closely watching the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and support a fair, transparent, and prompt legal process.

"We encourage a fair, transparent, and timely legal process for Chief Minister Kejriwal," news agencies quoted a US State

Department spokesperson as saying.

The US Government's response follows India's summoning of a senior diplomat from the German Embassy to express its objection to the country's remarks regarding Kejriwal's arrest.

In a statement, Germany's foreign affairs spokesperson expressed hope that the "standards regarding the independence of the



judiciary and fundamental democratic principles" would be upheld in Kejriwal's case.

"...Like anyone facing accusations, Kejriwal is entitled to a fair and impartial trial, this includes he can make use of all available legal avenues without restrictions. The presumption of innocence is a central element of the rule of law and must apply to him [sic]," the spokesperson said.

### Efforts on to find stolen vehicle of JP Nadda wife

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has launched an operation to find the stolen luxury car linked to BJP National president JP Nadda. A Toyota Fortuner, belonging to Nadda's wife Mallika Nadda, was stolen while it was taken for servicing on March 19. Despite CCTV footage showing the vehicle registration number HP-03-D-0021 heading towards Gurugram with a Himachal Pradesh registration, efforts to locate it remain futile.

According to the report, the vehicle was brought to Govinpuri after servicing by its driver Joginder. An FIR has been lodged based on the driver's complaint, as authorities intensify efforts to recover the seven-seater SUV, valued between ₹33 lakh to ₹51 lakh.

Mallika is the chief of 'Special Olympics Bharat', a national sports federation registered under the Indian Trust Act 1882 in 2001. Recognised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, the organisation works to develop sports for persons with intellectual disabilities. In the past, the Delhi Police has demonstrated swift resolution in cases involving prominent figures and leaders. For instance, in the 2019 incident where Prime Minister Narendra Modi's niece Damayanti Ben had her purse snatched in Delhi's Civil Lines area, the Delhi Police mobilised 700 personnel and meticulously reviewed 200 CCTV recordings to apprehend the perpetrators.



### Majestic cats continue to perish

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The recent discovery of carcasses of two tiger cubs in Madhya Pradesh's Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve and a tigress in Uttar Pradesh's Kheri forest division has brought the total tiger death toll to 39 even as the third month of this year is yet to conclude.

This accounts to nearly one tiger death every alternate day, underlining the multifaceted threats confronting these majestic animals, particularly territorial fights given that out of the total deaths, majority ie 22 occurred within tiger reserves, while 17 were reported from non-protected areas. The other threats encompass habitat loss, territorial disputes, human-wildlife conflicts, poaching, and other illicit activities.

This alarming rate equates to nearly one tiger death every alternate day and highlights the various threats faced by tigers, including habitat loss, territorial fights, human-wildlife conflict, poaching, and other illicit activities. At least 22 perished inside the tiger reserves while 17 in non-protected areas. Fateh Singh Ninama, the sub-divisional forest officer from Madhya Pradesh said the carcasses of the cubs, both less than a year old, were found in separate locations within the Panpatha and Khitoli ranges of the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve.

He said while one cub died as a result of a territorial fight, investigations are on to find the reason behind the death of another young tiger whose body was found deceased near Gadhpuri village in the Khitoli range in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve which has already lost five majestic cats till date this year.

Kanha Tiger Reserve in the State has recorded three tiger fatalities. Overall, the top tiger State i.e. Madhya Pradesh has



Representative Image

lost 12 big royal cats so far till March 26, 2024.

In a separate incident in the South Kheri forest Division of Uttar Pradesh, a tigress was discovered dead. Sanjay Biswal, divisional officer of the South Kheri forest division, said the tigress was found dead on Monday, with all vital organs intact, suggesting no involvement of poachers.

The data shows that the royal predators have been unsafe not only in non-protected areas but also inside reserves, given that many deaths have occurred outside the tiger reserves. Overall while Madhya Pradesh reported highest tiger death at 12, followed by Maharashtra at seven fatalities while Karnataka lost five felines. Last year, a total 181 majestic cats had died as per the NTCA data while according to figures compiled by non-profit Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), India lost a record 204 tigers from January 1-December 25, 2023.

### Mumbai surpasses Beijing as billionaire hub

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

India's financial hub Mumbai has emerged as "Asia's billionaire epicentre" for the first time, surpassing Beijing, as per the Hurun Global Rich List 2024.

According to the list, Mumbai now boasts 92 billionaires, edging past Beijing's count of 91. While Mumbai added 26 new ultra-rich to the club, Beijing lost 18. "Mumbai was the fastest-growing billionaire capital in the world, adding 26 in the year and taking it to third in the world and Asia's billionaire capital. New Delhi broke into the Top 10 for the




Representative Image/PTI

first time," the report read. India has ranked third in the list of the world's richest people, with 271 billionaires, as per a new global list, which said that Mumbai has


emerged as Asia's billionaire capital, with Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani occupying a key spot in the list. Globally, Mumbai now ranks third in terms of

billionaires after New York, which has 119 and London 97, as per Hurun's list. Industries that the report attributed India's growth in rank to were Pharmaceuticals (39) and Automobile and Auto Components (27). As per the list, there are 3,279 billionaires in the world today, with 167 of them added in the previous year. The United States added 109 billionaires, maintaining its lead with a total of 800 billionaires, while China, despite a decline of 155 billionaires, retained its position as the world's leader with 814 billionaires.



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# BJP has ambitious target of inducting 1 lakh Cong workers in MP

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Besides the target of clean sweep in the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP has set an ambitious target to induct 1 lakh workers of Congress in Madhya Pradesh, including disgruntled influential leaders, in its fold to achieve a clean sweep of all 29 seats, according to a senior leader.

The strategy is to cripple Congress at the grassroots level and simultaneously ensure defections of senior leaders who are unhappy in the party organisation, as per political observers and BJP insiders.

In the 2019 elections, the BJP virtually white-washed Congress in the central state by winning 28 seats, except Chhindwara constituency, a bastion of Kamal Nath which Congress managed to save.

On the other hand, MP Congress chief Jitu Patwari said deserters have no future.

The BJP has set a specific target to induct 50,000 Congress workers from Chhindwara and asked its district unit to achieve this goal, another saffron party leader said.

"I think around 50,000 workers, including influential leaders unhappy with Congress, have already joined the BJP," claimed MP BJP chief VD Sharma.

He said that the defection of big leaders of Congress is only talked about, even though Congress is seeing the "exodus" at district, tehsil, block and booth levels across the state.

Sharma, seeking a second term in Lok Sabha from Khajuraho seat, claimed at least 1 lakh workers of Congress across the state are going to cross over to BJP before the Lok Sabha polls.

On March 15, former Congress MLA Antar Singh Darbar and his colleague from Indore, Pankaj Sanghvi and others joined the BJP.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav claimed, "Modi Ka Parivar was growing at the fastest pace in Madhya Pradesh".

Madhya Pradesh has been the political arena of BJP doyens like former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Jan Sangh stalwarts like Vijaya Raje Scindia and Kusha Bhau Thakre.

A BJP leader claimed it was Union Home Minister Amit Shah who asked party leaders and booth workers at a closed-door meeting held in Gwalior to fetch disgruntled leaders and workers of Congress.

Shah asked the attendees at the meeting to induct local influential leaders of Congress and

leave the inducting of senior leaders from the opposition camp to BJP's Central leadership, he claimed.

According to him, Shah told BJP leaders not to worry about the influx of Congress leaders and assured them that their seniority wouldn't be affected and they would enjoy a special place and respect in the party.

"The BJP has set a target to induct 50,000 Congress workers from Chhindwara and asked its district unit to achieve this goal," BJP nominee from the seat, Vivek Sahu claimed.

Last week, Deepak Saxena, a close aide of Kamal Nath resigned from Congress and is expected to join BJP.

Notably, the "exodus" from Congress to the BJP accelerated in Chhindwara after Kamal Nath and his MP son Nakul Nath went to Delhi last month amid

speculation about a switchover to BJP.

The Nath father-son duo have dismissed as "media creation" the reports of their potential switch.

Sahu stated that more than 5,000 Congressmen from Chhindwara have already defected to the BJP.

"I left the Congress due to Nakul Nath. I was not getting along well with him. He does not like senior party leaders," said former Chhindwara city Congress president Nand Kishore Suryavanshi, who joined BJP on March 21.

According to political observers, the BJP is aiming to deprive Congress of its foot soldiers who play a crucial role during elections.

Former state Home Minister Narottam Mishra, a Brahmin leader, has been entrusted to lead the party's team looking for potential Congress turncoats, they said.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav during 'Nari Shakti Vandan' programme on Bhaiya Dooj in Bilehra, Sagar district, Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday.

## Efforts on to check fire incidents in future

PNS ■ UJJAIN

After the fire accident in Shri Mahakaleshwar Temple, effective efforts are being made to improve the fire fighting arrangements in the district.

Under the direction of Ujjain Collector Neeraj Kumar Singh, an action plan is being prepared to further strengthen the security measures and better management in Mahakal Temple. So that this type of fire accident does not happen again in future.

Collector Singh and Superintendent of Police Sharma are continuously inspecting the Mahakal temple and taking the opinion of experts.

On the initiative of the administration, forensic fire expert Mumbai Nilesh Ukunde reached Ujjain for a detailed investigation on the fire accident that occurred at Shri Mahakal Temple.

On Monday, Collector Singh

held a meeting with fire expert Ukunde and informed him about the fire accident. He has asked the expert to quickly make a better action plan and give security suggestions.

A magisterial inquiry into the fire accident is also ongoing. Chief Executive Officer District Panchayat Mrinal Meena said that all aspects of the incident will be thoroughly investigated and a report will be given. It has been told that a preliminary report on important points found in the investigation will be submitted as soon as possible. Whose detailed investigation report will also be prepared. On which effective action can be taken.

Additional Collector Anukul Jain said that all the video footage of the accident is being thoroughly reviewed in connection with the investigation. Besides, statements of regular devotees, priests and temple committee employees are also being taken. Discussions

are also being held with fire experts in this regard.

On Monday night, Ujjain Collector Singh and Superintendent of Police Sharma inspected the Mahakal temple closely. He gave strict instructions to the concerned officials to ensure that such fire accidents do not happen in future.

Regarding the upcoming Rang Panchami festival, he gave instructions that God should be worshipped in the temple on Rang Panchami as per the guidelines prescribed by the temple committee. Apart from the prescribed puja material, any kind of color, gular or any material which has the potential to cause an accident will not be allowed to be taken into the temple.

Strict action should also be taken against those who violate the rules. He has also given instructions to ensure all necessary safety measures as a precautionary measure during the upcoming festivals.

## Centre's advisory to States to prevent fire incidents in hospitals

PNS ■ INDORE

The Union Health Ministry has issued an advisory to the states regarding measures to prevent fires in hospitals during the summer months and instructions have been given to ensure that they conduct thorough inspection of all the hospitals within their jurisdiction.

Mainly eliminate the discrepancy in power load capacity. Apart from this, also check and confirm the fire extinguisher and its NOC etc., so that fire incidents can be prevented.

As temperatures rise during the summer months, fires become a greater threat in hospitals. To prevent this, the Union Health Ministry and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) have issued a joint

advisory for all states/UTs. After which Hamidia management has taken the decision to remove illegal parking of vehicles in Hamidia Hospital so that in case of fire, the fire brigade etc. do not have to face problems.

Superintendent of Hamidia Hospital, Dr. Sunit Tandon said that apart from the parking around Hamidia, vehicles are also parked in the remaining area. New space will be generated for unauthorised vehicles in Hamidia.

Superintendent of Hamidia Hospital, Dr. Sunit Tandon said that the area behind Block-2 of Hamidia is rough. Apart from the parking around Hamidia, vehicles are also parked in the remaining area. If a fire situation arises, it will be difficult for the fire brigade to come, hence this area will be leveled and an empty area will be created.

Due to which, when the vehicles parked nearby will move from here, this area will also become free.

Actually, there is a multilevel parking in the hospital premises, but it is at the main gate of the hospital. The new buildings of the hospital are quite far from here. Such patients and their families along with doctors and staff do not park their vehicles in multilevel parking. Due to this, vehicles get parked here and there and a traffic jam is created in the hospital.

Conduct comprehensive fire safety audit/on-site inspection of all hospitals to assess fire safety compliance. Ensure that fire fighting systems, including fire alarms, fire smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, fire hydrants and fire lifts, are in place and fully functioning.

Hospitals should conduct regular electrical load audits, especially when new equip-

ment is added or locations are converted to ICUs. Any identified discrepancies should be corrected immediately.

Hospitals should obtain valid fire no objection certificates (NOC) from state fire departments. The fire extinguisher and its NOC etc. should be checked. Additionally, hospitals should regularly inspect fire-fighting equipment such as fire extinguishers, hydrants and alarms. Checking expiry dates of fire extinguishers

Establish a maintenance schedule for all safety equipment. This includes monthly testing of fire extinguishers, quarterly testing of fire alarms and hydrants as per relevant Indian standards.

In areas with oxygen tanks or piped oxygen, enforce strict smoking policies and no smoking at heat sources. Signage should clearly mark these areas, and staff should be

trained on the risks associated with high oxygen environments.

Make sure fire smoke detectors and fire alarms are installed in all hospital areas, especially patient rooms, hallways, and common areas. Test these systems regularly as scheduled and replace batteries annually or as needed.

Identify and audit non-combustible or fire-resistant alternatives, especially this material.

Make sure and inspect every single detail about electrical conduits.

Regularly review and update the hospital infrastructure to comply with the latest fire safety standards as outlined in the National Building Code 2016. This includes ensuring proper ventilation systems, fire resistant doors and emergency lighting in corridors and staircases.



Reverellers dance during a procession taken out by Hindu Utsav Samiti on the occasion of Holi festival in Bhopal on Monday.

Pioneer photo

## Udbhav organises seminar on festival of Holi

PNS ■ GWALIOR

On the occasion of Holi, a seminar of Udbhav Literary Forum was held on Tuesday under the chief hospitality of senior litterateur Ram Gopal Bhavuk and under the chairmanship of Keshav Pandey. The seminar held at the International Centre of Media Excellence began with the garlanding of Maa Saraswati by the guests.

Saraswati Vandana was presented by Shri Dinesh Vikal. Thereafter, the President of the organization Keshav Pandey and Secretary Deepak Tomar honored the senior litterateur Ram Gopal Bhavuk with a shawl and quince. In his address, Dr. Keshav Pandey said that Udbhav Literary Forum from time to time encourages such people who dedicate their lives in the service of literature. He added that in the same sequence, the



organization is proud to honor the senior litterateur of Dabra, Ram Gopal Bhavuk, who has written many historical novels including Bhavabhuti.

While reciting his composition during the seminar, Ram Gopal Bhavuk asked the audience to understand colors in confusion, not in solution because according to him after the solution, everything will seem dull.

Reciting his poem. Ghanshyam Bharti said, "In

the showers of Holi, in the spring, let us color our body and mind, let us have a colorful weather."

Rajesh Sharma, Dr. Kinkar Singh, Hargobind Thakur, Surendra Singh Parihar and Surendra Pal Singh Kushwaha also enthralled the audience with Holi related poems. The program was conducted by Surendrapal Singh Kushwaha and vote of thanks was expressed by Deepak Tomar.

## 3 die as car collides with tree

Bhopal: Three people died and two were injured after a car collided with a tree near Damoh's Patera area on Monday (March 25). After the accident, all five were taken to the nearest hospital. One person died at the nearest primary health centre, and two others took their last breath at the district hospital.

Treatment is underway for the two injured people in the district hospital in Damoh.

"A car went out of control and collided with a tree near Patera. Five passengers in the car were shifted to the hospital. A total of three people died in the hospital...", said Patera, SHO Amit Gautam.

The postmortem of three deceased will be conducted on Tuesday, police said. Further information is awaited.

## COMEDK- Karnataka's engineering entrance exam opens applications

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Over the last five decades, Karnataka has stood as a pillar of leadership in higher education. It remains the preferred destination for individuals aspiring to build a career in engineering, considering its array of diverse colleges, outstanding educational offerings, and a remarkable track record of high job placement rates post-graduation. The state's commitment to higher education has cultivated a substantial pool of skilled professionals, attracting significant global demand.

PMuralidhar, CEO, ERA Foundation and S Kumar, Executive Secretary, ComedK were talking to media persons virtually, on Tuesday.

The COMEDK UGET and UNI-GAUGE entrance examination is scheduled to take place on Sunday, May 12, 2024, as a combined examination for admissions to over 150 Engineering colleges in Karnataka and 50+ reputed private and deemed universities across India, respectively. This unified examination is tailored for colleges affiliated with the Karnataka Unaided Private Engineering Colleges Association (KUPECA) and Uni-GAUGE member uni-

versities offering B.E/B.Tech programmes. The online exam will be conducted across 200+ cities in India, in 400+ test centers. This year, it expects over 1,00,000 students to appear for the examination. Candidates from across India can apply for the exam.

Applicants can register at [www.comedk.org](http://www.comedk.org) or [www.unigauge.com](http://www.unigauge.com). The application process is open online from February 01, 2024 to April 05, 2024.

In 2022, COMEDK introduced the COMED KARES innovation hubs, aimed at preparing students from participating institutions for the workforce through skill enhancement courses. Eight Innovation Hubs have been established across Karnataka, with four located in Bengaluru and the others in Mysuru, Kalaburagi, Mangalore, and Belgaum. These state-of-the-art centers, each spanning over 5000 sq-ft, are equipped with advanced tools such as Wood routing, Laser cutting, 3D printers, AR-VR equipment, Hand tools, Computer software, UI-UX tools, etc. The Innovation Hubs offer programs in Rapid Prototyping, Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Internet of Things (IoT).

## Woman hangs her 3 daughter, ends life

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Tormented by husband and in-laws a 28-year-old married woman hanged her three daughters and committed suicide by hanging at Rodia village on Monday; one daughter escape and is struggling for life.

In Bhopal, a mother committed suicide by hanging herself after hanging her three daughters. The woman and two daughters died.

A two and a half year old daughter has been admitted to the hospital in critical condition. The woman's brother has accused her in-laws of harassing her for not giving birth to a son. However, initial information surfaced about murder.

The incident took place in Rodia village of Gunga police station area, 35 km from Bhopal.

The matter came to light on Tuesday afternoon. The bodies of all three have been sent to Hamidia Hospital.

The name of mother is Sangeeta Yadav, 28 years old, daughter Aaradhya was 5 years old and Manu 2.5 years Shrishti is 1.5 years old.

Gunga police station in-charge Arun Sharma said that Sangeeta, a resident of

Sangrampur in Raisen district, was married to Rajat Yadav, a resident of Rodiya village in Bhopal, in 2018.

In the initial investigation, indications of suicide by the woman and murder of three girls before this have been found during the investigation of the incident spot.

The woman committed suicide after hanging her daughters. Before this she had sent five messages to sister-in-law Mona. The first message was sent at 12.24 on Monday night and the remaining four at 12.55. After this he sent the same message to his brother Neeraj.

Sangeeta's brother Neeraj Yadav has accused his sister's in-laws of harassing her.

Neeraj told that at night Sangeeta sent five messages one after the other on the mobile. I saw the messages in the morning.

Neeraj said- I called Sangeeta's mobile after seeing the message. But, I did not get any response from there. Also called Sangeeta's brother-in-law. He did not pick up my call twice. When he picked up the phone the third time, I asked if everything was alright at home. He said yes, everything is fine. I didn't believe them. I got suspicious and callex my

aunt who lives and when they in the neighboring village and when they reached their house, they saw that the bodies of all three were kept in the house. They told me and I informed the police. After that the police reached there.

Neeraj told that the bodies of the three were first seen by Sangeeta's sister-in-law. They removed the dead bodies from the noose at around 6 in the morning. They did not even inform the police. The younger niece who is admitted in the hospital has also been put to death by her in-laws.

Neeraj told that whenever sister came to her maternal house, brother-in-law Rajat Yadav used to threaten to die. He used to say, I am not coming to take it.

The family has alleged that when Sangeeta was found hanging, a letter was stuck on her back. This was a suicide note, in which he had written - There is a lump in his stomach. Because of this she can no longer have children. I cannot give a son to my family, so I am going to do this. However, some other family members say that no letter has been received. At the same time, if policemen are to be believed, a letter has been recovered from the spot.



Former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan with his supporters on the occasion of Holi festival at his residence in Bhopal on Monday.

Pioneer photo

## Governor applauds AIIMS Bhopal for better services to patients

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Mangubhai Patel, Hon'ble Governor of Madhya Pradesh, today graced the premises of AIIMS Bhopal, marking a significant milestone in the institution's journey towards excellence in healthcare. The visit showcased the Governor's commitment to understanding and supporting the health-

care needs of the state's populace. <

Governor visited various departments within AIIMS Bhopal, including Emergency Medicine, Radiology, Cardiology, Ophthalmology, and the Medicine Ward.

His keen interest and engagement underscored his dedication to ensuring that the citizens of Madhya Pradesh receive the highest standards of med-

ical care. Impressed by the facilities available for patient care, investigations, admissions, surgical interventions, and more, Governor Mangubhai Patel expressed his satisfaction with the robust infrastructure and services offered by AIIMS Bhopal. He took the time to gather feedback, reflecting his commitment to continuous improvement and patient-centric care.



# AAP invites all for Maharally against BJP on March 31

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a showdown against the BJP by the INDIA bloc, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has invited students, residents welfare associations, non governmental organisations and social organisations for the maha rally at Ramlila Maidan on March 31. "As many as 2600 teams will go door-to-door in the national capital, inviting people to come to Ramlila Maidan from March 28," Delhi AAP state unit chief Gopal Rai said while addressing a press conference on Tuesday. Rai said many prominent leaders of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc will

join the mega rally in which lakhs of people will be present.

Rai said that students, youth, RWAs, NGOs and social organizations are being invited to attend the rally in Delhi.

Rai said that preparations were underway for the mega rally for which ministers, MLAs and office bearers of the AAP were deployed as observers for monitoring the arrangements. Social organisations, students outfits, traders bodies and resident welfare associations were also being sent invitations to join the rally, he said.

Rai said the party office bearers and councillors will hold meetings with the public at all polling stations



across Delhi regarding preparations for the rally. The observers will visit each Assembly constituency to take stock of the preparations, he added.

"If the dictatorial government in the country can arrest Chief Minister Kejriwal, it can do so with

anyone raising voice against it. This fight has now become the fight of everyone and those who love democracy and the Constitution will join this fight," Rai said.

The INDIA combine is confident that March 31 will be a "historic day" at the Ramlila Maidan, he added. From March 28 onwards, one in-charge will be appointed for each Mandal team that will go door-to-door in the designated areas, inviting the people to gather at the Ramlila Maidan on March 31, Rai said. Senior party leader and

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said the maha rally will be an occasion where all big leaders of the INDIA bloc will come together. The entire country will raise its voice against Kejriwal's arrest just ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, he said. Bharadwaj said the AAP's legal team is looking into permission for the rally and added that poll rallies are allowed normally. Congress' Delhi unit president Arvinder Singh Lovely whose party has a tie up with the AAP within the INDIA bloc for seat-sharing in many states, including Delhi, said the rally will prove to be a "milestone" against the BJP led Central government's move to "crush" the opposition.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav greets BJP State President VD Sharma and Organisational Secretary Hitanand Sharma on Holi festival, at his residence in Bhopal on Tuesday. Pioneer photo



Senior Congress leader Kamal Nath, State Congress President Jitu Patwari and Leader of Opposition Umang Singhar during a rally before filing the nomination papers of Congress candidate Nakul Nath for Chhindwara Lok Sabha seat for upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday. Pioneer photo

## Traffic management team rewarded by DCP Traffic for providing prompt medical aid to mother-child

PNS ■ INDORE

At Radisson intersection, the driver of loading vehicle number MP13-ZF-4424, while driving at high speed and carelessly, hit a mother and son riding motorcycle number MP 09 ME 9954. Subedar Amit Yadav, Constable Jitendra Yadav, Bhavna and Nikita looking after the work of traffic management at the intersection. Bhavna and Nikita immediately reached the spot and picked up mother, son and the bike. Subedar Amit Kumar Yadav called the ambulance and found that motorcyclist Jitendra's son of Babul had a general injury, while his mother Sushila Sharma's left leg was broken below the knee

and his leg was hanging. Seeing the seriousness of the matter, without waiting, wounded were taken in an auto and taken to MY Hospital. Subedar Amit Yadav and constable Sanjay Jay got both of them treated in the hospital and the family members were informed. Some medicines were prescribed by the doctor from the market, due to the lack of money with the concerned person, they were made available by the traffic team. The injured were treated by the traffic officers and staff along with the traffic management. DCP Traffic Management, Indore, Arvind Tiwari, to encourage the above commendable work of helping, rewarded the traffic police team of Radisson intersection.

## Havells, betting big

**New Delhi:** Lloyd, a leading consumer durables brand from Havells India, announced its vision today to bolster its 'Make in India' strategy by launching its industry-first designer Lloyd Stellar & Stylus air conditioner range, alongside industry-leading refrigerators equipped with Rapid Cool Technology capable of producing ice in just 29 minutes. Additionally, Lloyd introduced its latest Novante Fully Automatic Washing Machines and expanded its QLED TV lineup to include new 85-inch and 100-inch models, featuring advanced far-field technology. This move underscores the brand's dedication to innovation, research and development in its product offerings, securing its position as one of the top air-conditioning manufacturing companies in India. By extending its manufacturing operations beyond the Ghiloth facility, which produces air conditioners and washing machines.

## 100% linking of MNREGA labourers' bank accounts in Indore district

VIKAS TYAGI ■ INDORE

The Government of India has decided to provide direct benefits to the deprived population covered under 34 Central Schemes. For this purpose, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) program was started. Through the DBT programme, the government will provide final Transfers payments directly to beneficiaries' Aadhaar-linked bank accounts, thereby bypassing the existing system. Irregularities like payment of assistance amount into accounts and duplicate payment can be eliminated. The primary objective of the devolution program is to increase transparency in the distribution of funds sponsored by the Central Government of India and to end the misuse of funds.

Chief Executive Officer, District Panchayat, Indore, Sidharth Jain said that the MNREGA scheme is applicable for rural areas. There is an important scheme to provide 100 days of employment in a year to the laborers in case of need of work, under which an average of 15 lakh days of employment is available every year to about 45000 workers in the Indore district.

To ensure continuous and correct wage payment to these workers, in Indore district 61287 bank accounts have been linked to Aadhaar Based Payment System (ABPS). 100% Indore district stood first in the state by converting RIMCO accounts into Aadhaar based payment system. The total beneficiaries are 19717 in District Panchayat Depalpur, 6376 in District Indore, 24591 in District Mhow, 10603 in Sanwer total 61287 in Indore district the MNREGA workers' through Aadhaar based payment system

ABPS has been added. Under MNREGA, under Benefit Transfer DBT, the amount of wages will be transferred directly by the Central Government to Individual. The beneficiaries will be able to get benefit from this.

CEO District Panchayat Indore Sidharth Jain said that the accounts of all MNREGA Labourers in the district now getting linked with Aadhaar payment system, the workers will be able to get regular payment of wages made under MNREGA. And with this, the ambitious scheme sponsored by the Central Government will be utilized along with increasing transparency. There will be no incidents of mismanagement and payment will be made into the accounts of actual workers only.

For this work, laborers will be recruited by village employment assistants of Panchayats by running a campaign in the district. By making them present at the bank branch, their bank accounts were converted into Aadhaar linked DBT accounts. CEO District Panchayat, Chief Executive Officer of janpad Panchayat and Assistant of MNREGA. The progress of the campaign was continuously reviewed with the . Indore District by CEO Sidharth Jain, CEO's of all Janpad Panchayats for the achievement of being the first 100% ABPS district of the state under MNREGA.

आम सूचना

सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है हमारी फर्म में आदित्य राज (M/S ADITYA RAJ) के नाम से एक भागीदारी फर्म है। जिसका पंजीयन क्र. 04/17/06/00026 दिनांक 03.06.2009 है। इस फर्म से दिनांक 31.03.2022 से एक भागीदार (1) श्री दशरथ सिंह चौहान पिता स्व. श्री रघुवीर सिंह चौहान निवासी संतोषी माता वार्ड नं. 25 पांडुणा तह. पांडुणा जिला छिन्दवाड़ा (म.प्र.) निवृत्त रहे हैं एवं उक्त भागीदारी फर्म में दिनांक 01.04.2022 से एक भागीदार (1) श्री आदित्य चौहान पिता श्री उज्ज्वल चौहान निवासी संतोषी माता वार्ड नं. 25 पांडुणा तह. पांडुणा जिला छिन्दवाड़ा (म.प्र.) शामिल हो रहे हैं। अतः उक्त भागीदार फर्म में दिनांक 01.04.2022 से संशोधन उपरान्त चार साझेदार रहेंगे। उक्त फर्म का रजिस्टर्ड ऑफिस संतोषी माता वार्ड नं. 25 पांडुणा तह. पांडुणा जिला छिन्दवाड़ा (म.प्र.) स्थित है। सर्व साधारण को सूचना हेतु जारी धन्यवाद दिनांक : स्थान : छिन्दवाड़ा

पार्टनर श्रीमती रेखा चौहान

## 33 candidates files 43 nomination papers

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan said that as per the election schedule of Lok Sabha Elections-2024, the process of filing nomination papers for the first phase is going on. On Tuesday, March 26, 33 candidates have filed 43 nomination papers. Since the release of the notification. A total of 64 nomination papers have been filled by 49 candidates. Affidavits and other information of the candidates who have filed nomination papers can be seen on the website of Election Commission of India, link <https://affidavit.eci.gov.in/>.



Congress candidate from Chhindwara Lok Sabha seat Nakul Nath files his nomination papers for the upcoming Lok Sabha election in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday. Senior Congress leader Kamal Nath and his wife Alka Nath and daughter-in-law Priya Nath were also present on the occasion. Pioneer photo

## Holi celebrated on the lines of Kashi, Mathura in Sehore

PNS ■ SEHORE

Like every year, this year also Mahadev Holi was organized in the city on the second day of Holi. During this period, Holi was celebrated with great enthusiasm in the city. During this, a lot of colors were blown. Holi was organized in Sehore on the lines of Kashi, Mathura and Barsana. Before this, Pandit Pradeep Mishra reached the major Shiva temples of the city and also offered prayers. The enthusiasm of Holi was once again seen after the message of Pandit Pradeep Mishra, who spread Sanatan Dharma to the masses and spread enthusiasm in the festivals and traditions of the country. Holi was played with

great enthusiasm in the Mahadev temples of the city. On Tuesday, about 40 feet long stage was built by Vithlesh Seva Samiti city unit at the corner of Mukeri Line of the city for Mahadev's Holi. Apart from serving milk at Chamatkaleshwar Mahadev Temple near the city municipality, breakfast was also arranged with the help of Sri Siddh Hanuman Temple located in the cantonment and Nav Jyoti Organization. The event started with a procession-Vithlesh Seva Samiti's media in-charge Priyanshu Dixit said that like every year on Tuesday morning, this year also Mahadev's Holi procession was taken out from the Chamatkaleshwar

Mahadev Temple located in the Nadi Chauraha Municipality complex in the city with much fanfare amidst drums and DJ tunes. Shiva devotees were dancing, singing and throwing colors in the grand procession. Started by offering water to Lord Shiva-Pandit Pradeep Mishra, who reached Chamatkaleshwar Mahadev Temple in the morning, offered a pot of water mixed with sandalwood and saffron to Lord Shiva among hundreds of devotees and after that reached many Shiva temples of the city. More than four modern machines were arranged on vehicles for Mahadev's Holi by Sameer Shukla, adminis-

trator of Vithlesh Seva Samiti. Pandit Pradeep Mishra described the incident of arson that took place on the day of Dhulendi in Mahakal temple in Ujjain as tragic. He said that the incident that happened during the Aarti in Mahakal temple in Ujjain might have happened due to chemicals. Material coming from outside should be banned in all the temples of the state. There should be arrangements for the security of every temple, the sanctity of the temple should be maintained. All types of goods from outside should be banned immediately. I pray to Baba for the speedy recovery of those who are injured in this accident.

## Citizens face problems with AAP, BJP protests

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Protests by the BJP and the AAP in the national capital on Tuesday, commuters travelling in the city faced inconvenience while being met with traffic jams in Central Delhi during their journey.

Taking note of the situation in light of the protests organised by the political parties, Delhi Police beefed up security in several parts of the national capital, including around the PM's residence and Central Delhi, by deploying its personnel and those of paramilitary forces. Due to protests, nine hours after shutting the gates of Lok Kalyan Marg metro station due to security reasons, the DMRC has opened its entry and exit on Tuesday evening, officials said. Two gates of Patel Chowk and Central Secretariat metro station were also opened, they said.

Ahead of the AAP's protest against Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Tuesday closed the entry and exit gates at Lok Kalyan Marg metro station. The entry and exit have been restricted at Patel Chowk and Central Secretariat metro stations. "Due to security reasons, entry/exit at Lok Kalyan Marg

Metro station, Gate no 3 of Patel Chowk Metro Station and Gate no 5 of Central Secretariat Metro station will remain closed till further notice," the DMRC said in a post on X. Later in the evening, the DMRC said that the entry and exit gates at Lok Kalyan Marg metro station have been opened. Gate number 3 of Patel Chowk metro station and gate number 5 of Central Secretariat metro station are now open for entry and exit.

"There is no permission to hold protest. We also got information that protesters will gather at the Patel Chowk Metro station. In view of that, we have stepped up security arrangements," Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Devesh Kumar said. Security personnel in anti-riot gear were seen around the metro stations and at other places in the Central Delhi area. Kumar said if protesters try to reach and gather, they will be detained immediately. "We have proper security arrangements at the prime minister's residence and the Patel Chowk metro station. Protest will not be allowed. As common people also travel by the metro, they will not be disturbed. We have deployed staff to identify protesters and to detain them," the DCP said. Another senior police officer said that "robust

security arrangements have been made. We have installed layers of security to maintain law and order situation in the area".

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure have been already imposed around the prime minister's residence, and no one will be allowed to protest there, the officer said. Traffic movement is likely to be affected in parts of New Delhi and Central Delhi due to the proposed "gherao", an officer of the Delhi Traffic Police said. Diversions have also been put in place at seven points, police said. "Commuters must avoid Kemal Atatürk Marg, Safdarjung Road, Akbar Road and Teen Murti Marg on Tuesday in view of protest," the officer said. The security arrangements come after AAP leader and Delhi Minister Gopal Rai had announced plans of the party to "gherao" the prime minister's residence on Tuesday, as a form of protest against the arrest of Kejriwal by the ED.

The Delhi Traffic Police has made special arrangements, restricting the movement of vehicles in the national capital's central part. In an advisory, it said traffic in central Delhi will be affected and parking of vehicles will not be allowed on Tughlaq Road, Safdarjung Road and Kemal Atatürk Marg.

**Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd.**  
Corporate Office: Unit No. 802, Natraj Rustumjee, Western Express Highway and M.V. Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai - 400069  
Bhopal (Old Branch Mandideep) Branch : Plot No.11, 3rd Floor, Alankar Complex, Ward No.47,M.P.Nagar, Zone-2, M.P.Nagar, Above ICGI Bank, Bhopal-462991

**POSSESSION NOTICE Appendix IV (for immovable property)**  
Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of **Aadhar Housing Finance Limited (AHFL)** under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, Demand Notice(s) issued by the Authorised Officer of the company to the Borrower(s) / Guarantor(s) mentioned herein below to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower(s) / Guarantor(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under Sub-Section (4) of the Section 13 of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement rules, 2002. The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets. The borrower in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of AHFL for an amount as mentioned herein under with interest thereon.

S. N.	Name of the Borrower(s)/ Co Borrower(s) (Name of the Branch)	Description of Secured Asset (Immovable Property)	Demand Notice Date & Amount	Date of Possession
1	(Loan Code No. 00694004624/ Bhopal Branch) Raj Kumar Malviya (Borrower), Krishna Malviya (Co-Borrower)	All that part & parcel of property bearing, Plot No 80 Himanshu Greens Phase 1 Village Kotra, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, 462046. <b>Boundaries :</b> East-Plot No. 92, West- Colony Road, North- Plot No. 81, South- Plot No. 79	<b>10-12-2023</b> & <b>₹ 4,62,309/-</b>	<b>22-03-2024</b>
2	(Loan Code No. 07000000046/ Bhopal (Old Branch Mandideep) Branch) Prakash Chouhan (Borrower), Radha Chouhan (Co-Borrowers)	All that part & parcel of property bearing, Ward No 9 Mandideep Near Chauhan Aata Chakki Mandideep, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, 462046. <b>Boundaries :</b> East- House of Habib Miyan, West- House of Roshan Lal, North- House of Irfan Khan, South- 10' Way	<b>09-01-2024</b> & <b>₹ 7,88,819/-</b>	<b>22-03-2024</b>

**Place : Madhya Pradesh**  
**Date : 27-03-2024**  
**Authorised Officer**  
**Aadhar Housing Finance Limited**

**Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd.**  
Corporate Office: Unit No.802, Natraj Rustumjee, Western Express Highway and M.V.Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai-400069  
Vidisha Branch : 1st Floor, Gaurav Business Square, Opposite Adani Wilmar Plant, Sanchi Road, Vidisha-464001 (M.P.)  
Authorized Officer : Lokendra Rathore, Contact : 997783890

**PROPERTY FOR SALE UNDER PROVISIONS OF SARFAESI ACT, 2002 THROUGH PRIVATE TREATY**  
Whereas the Authorised Officer, Aadhar Housing Finance Limited (AHFL) has taken the Possession u/s 13(4) of the Securitisation & Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (The SARFAESI Act, 2002) of the property ("the Secured Asset") given below The Authorised Officer has received offer of Sale from some interested party against the above mentioned Secured Asset under the SARFAESI Act for recovery of the Secured Debt. Now, the Authorised Officer is hereby giving the Notice to Sale of the above said property through Private Treaty in terms of rule 8 and 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002. The Details of the Account are as follows:

S. N.	Loan App. No./ Branch	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrowers	Demand Notice Date & Amount	Reserve Price (RP)	Total Outstanding Loan Amount as on date 23-01-2024	Description of the Secured Asset
1.	(Loan Code No. 07600000330/ Vidisha Branch)	Anil Kumar (Borrower) Poonam Agarwal (Co-Borrower) Deen Dayal (Guarantor)	13-05-2022 & ₹ 6,18,496/-	₹ 4,00,000/-	Rs. 1,10,469/-	All that part & parcel of property bearing, KH NO 925 1 325 2 925 3 93 Plot No.297 Ward No 06 Sant Ravidas Ward Shri Ji Puram Near H P Petrol Pump Sironj Road Lateri, Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh, 464114. <b>Boundaries:</b> East: Plot No. 213, West: Road, North: Way, South: Plot No. 298

The Authorised officer will hold auction for sale of the Secured Asset on 'As is where is Basis', 'As is what is basis' and 'Whatever is there is basis'. AHFL is not responsible for any liabilities whatsoever pending upon the said property. The Authorised Officer reserves the right to accept or reject the offer without assigning any reason whatsoever and sale will be subject to confirmation by Secured Creditor. On the acceptance of offer of proposed buyer, he/she is required to deposit 25% of accepted price inclusive adjustment of Earnest Money Balance immediately and the balance amount shall be paid by the purchaser within 15 (fifteen) days from date of acceptance of Offer by the Secured Creditor. The proposed buyer is to note that in case of failure of payment of balance amount by him/her within the time specified, the amount already deposited shall stand forfeited and property will be resold accordingly. This is **15 DAYS SALE NOTICE UNDER SARFAESI ACT, 2002** is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s), Co-Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the above described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the **Physical Possession** of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Aadhar Housing Finance Limited (AHFL) Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" and to the amount due to Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd., in full before the date of sale, auction is liable to be stopped. If the Borrower(s), co-borrower(s) has any buyer who is ready to purchase the mortgage property/secured asset at price above the given reserve price of then Borrower(s), Co-borrower(s) must intimate to AHFL on or before 12-04-2024 AHFL shall give preference to him. If Borrower(s), Co-borrower(s) fails to intimate on or before 12-04-2024 the AHFL will proceed sale of property at above given reserve price. **The Date of Auction is fixed for 12-04-2024.**  
**Place : Vidisha**  
**Date : 27.03.2024**  
**(Authorised Officer)**  
**For Aadhar Housing Finance Limited**



# Modi calls Sandeshkhali survivor and BJP Lok Sabha candidate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday called up the BJP's Lok Sabha poll candidate from Basirhat, Rekha Patra, who had highlighted the plight of women in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali, and lauded her as "Shakti Swaroopa", BJP leaders said. Patra, who had raised her voice against the alleged atrocities by local Trinamool Congress (TMC) strongman Shajahan Sheikh and his cronies, was picked by the BJP as its candidate from Basirhat Lok Sabha seat, under which the village falls. Modi spoke to her about her campaign preparations and the support for the BJP among voters and other issues, while she narrated the ordeal of Sandeshkhali women. Patra told Modi she feels good that he is standing by them and said, "It is like Ram ji is with us". She said she has not voted since 2011 due to the situation in the area, to which Modi assured that the Election Commission will hold free and fair elections and ensure everyone can vote. Patra also said that the TMC supporters around her initial-



ly opposed her candidature from the BJP, but are supporting her now. She said she has no enmity with anyone. She also said that she hails from a poor family and her husband works in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. "I will do something so that no one has to go so far for work. They will get employment here only," she said. PM Modi hailed her as "Shakti Swaroopa". Shakti is a Hinduism term associated with goddesses like Durga and Kali. "You fought the battle in Sandeshkhali, you are 'Shakti Swaroopa'...", PM Modi said. He also said that she should take the message to the masses about how the Trinamool Congress government is working against the people of the

state. "Work in the midst of people, take the message to them that the TMC government is creating problems for the people, they do not allow implementation of the BJP (union) government schemes in West Bengal. Tell people that they are indulging in corruption, and changing names of schemes," the prime minister was quoted as saying by a BJP leader. Basirhat, one of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal, is currently represented by the TMC. Sheikh, who has been suspended by the TMC, and some of his associates have been arrested in connection with attacks on ED officials and are in CBI custody.

# Varun absence from BJP list stirs up political speculation

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Varun Gandhi's absence from the BJP candidate list for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections has stirred up political speculation, particularly in the Pilibhit constituency, indicating a significant rift between the outspoken parliamentarian and the party leadership. Sources indicate that Varun Gandhi's vocal criticisms of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policies have caused discomfort among party higher-ups, resulting in his exclusion from the electoral lineup. The decision has fueled conjecture about Gandhi's potential political maneuvers, with speculation rife regarding his possible candidacy as a Samajwadi Party (SP) nominee or as an independent candidate. Such a move could potentially disrupt the BJP's aspirations to secure all 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh. Senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury too extended an invitation to him to join the grand old party. Chowdhury described Varun as a "dabang neta (strong leader)" and said he is a learned man with a clean image. "He is a dabang neta and a very educated man. He has a clean image. Varun Gandhi



has a connection with the Gandhi family. This is why the BJP denied him a ticket (for Lok Sabha polls). I think he should come (join the Congress), we will be very happy," Chowdhury, the leader of the Congress party in the outgoing Lok Sabha, said. Varun and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi are cousins. Varun, a two-term Lok Sabha MP from Pilibhit, has often aired views deemed critical of his party's governments at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh. However, the BJP has renominated his mother Maneka Gandhi from Sultanpur. Varun has been substituted with former Congress member Jitin Prasada to run for the Pilibhit seat in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh. Renowned for his candid opinions, Gandhi has been a

vocal opponent of several key initiatives of the Modi government, including its agricultural policies, retirement schemes, and employment programs. His dissenting stance has resonated with opposition factions, amplifying discussions on contentious issues and injecting vigor into political discourse. The SP's offer of a seat to Gandhi has added an intriguing dimension to the unfolding narrative. Party leaders, including national President Akhilesh Yadav and national general secretary Ram Gopal Yadav, have hinted at a possible induction if the BJP fails to nominate him. However, Gandhi's response to this overture remains uncertain, given his longstanding association and ideological alignment with the BJP. A recent comment by Akhilesh Yadav indicating the SP's open-door policy for

Gandhi underscores the potential for a realignment of political allegiances. Meanwhile, Bhagwat Saran Gangwar has been announced as the SP's official candidate for Pilibhit, though he has expressed willingness to step aside if Gandhi joins the fray. In a surprising move, the BJP has nominated Jitin Prasada, the Public Works Department Minister in the Yogi Adityanath cabinet, as its candidate for Pilibhit, replacing Varun Gandhi. Additionally, Meneka Gandhi, Varun's mother, has been tasked with contesting from Sultanpur, the constituency she successfully represented in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The Gandhi family's stronghold over the Pilibhit parliamentary constituency has been undeniable for over three decades. Beginning with former Union Minister Maneka Gandhi's victory in the 1989 elections, the family has maintained a formidable presence in the region. Varun Gandhi succeeded his mother in representing Pilibhit, solidifying the family's legacy in Indian politics. However, the decision to deny Varun Gandhi a ticket for the upcoming elections marks a significant departure from tradition. In 2014, he was shifted to Sultanpur while his mother contested and

won from Pilibhit. Nonetheless, Gandhi reclaimed the seat in 2019, securing a decisive victory by a staggering margin of over 2.5 lakh votes, reaffirming the family's enduring dominance. Gandhi's commentary on social and political issues has often made headlines. In December 2021, he criticized the government's handling of job opportunities and recruitment processes, highlighting the plight of millions of unemployed youth. Similarly, his response to the withdrawal of the contentious agricultural laws and his condemnation of communal narratives in the aftermath of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence showcased his willingness to challenge prevailing narratives. Moreover, Gandhi's advocacy for government employees' rights and his call to reevaluate pension schemes have underscored his commitment to social justice and equitable governance. As the political landscape evolves and alliances shift, Varun Gandhi's exclusion from the BJP ticket raises questions about the party's internal dynamics and its approach to dissenting voices within its ranks. It also presents Gandhi with a pivotal decision regarding his political future and ideological alignment.

# Congress leader post on Kangana sparks row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Every woman, irrespective of her background and profession, deserves dignity, actor Kangana Ranaut said on Tuesday as Congress leaders' comments on Mandi from where she is contesting the Lok Sabha elections snowballed into a massive political row. Ranaut, who makes her political debut as a BJP candidate from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, said she was particularly pained by the derogatory comments on the constituency that is often referred to as "Chhota Kashi" the world over. The Congress has been in the crosshairs after demeaning remarks on Ranaut and Mandi were posted on the social media handles of its leaders Supriya Shrinete and HS Ahir. The party has always believed there is no place for such language in public discourse and the matter should end with Shrinete clearing the air, Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit told reporters at the AICC headquarters. "Whatever be the profession of a woman, be it teacher, actress, journalist, politician or sex worker, all of them deserve dignity. I'm pained especially because of the deplorable comments made about Mandi... All of us who



come from Mandi have been hurt by the comments," Ranaut told reporters outside the Chandigarh airport. Asked whether she plans to take any action against the two Congress leaders, the "Queen" actor, often in the news for her controversial comments on a range of issues, said she had been called to Delhi by BJP president J P Nadda and would respond only after meeting him. "I have to maintain the dignity of the party. I can't walk before it. I have to walk with them and follow their instructions," the 37-year-old said. A host of BJP leaders, including Bansuri Swaraj, Amit Malviya and former Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur, spoke up on the issue. Congress spokesperson

Shrinete said in her defence on Monday, when the controversy erupted, that many people have access to her Facebook and Instagram accounts and one of them made the inappropriate post. She also said she had deleted the post and will take action against a parody account that is using her name. But that had little impact. "If your account is posting what a parody account posts, then it simply means that admins of both accounts are same. One has to be self-conscious, to the point of being deranged, to do so. Also the admins must have very low opinion of you to post such offensive stuff and get away," Malviya said. Bansuri Swaraj, daughter of the late Sushma Swaraj and the party's candidate from New Delhi, said the

top leadership of the Congress must apologise. "Such derogatory words were used for someone who is India's daughter and a woman. This is very shocking, and has shown the mentality of the Congress. The top leadership of the Congress should apologise for this," she said. Thakur added in a statement that the remarks would be legally examined and the BJP was moving towards registering a case. Shrinete, he said, had made a "big mistake" as people of faith come to Mandi, which is known as "Chhoti Kashi" and is an abode for over 300 temples. "It is unfortunate that being a woman herself, the Congress spokesperson has made such remarks against another woman and now she is trying to retract by saying that someone has used her other account," Thakur said. Union minister Smriti Irani and BJP's Chandigarh MP Kirron Kher have also added their voice to the chorus of condemnation. While Irani is a former TV actor, Kher continues to be a prominent face in Hindi films. There were others who backed Ranaut. "Targeting Shrinete, former Congress leader Sharmistha Mukherjee said, "She's saying 'access', not hacked! One gives access to SM accounts only to known & trusted people.

Nothing left of Congress ideology with the Rahul Congress gang. 'Nari Nyay' is nothing but an empty slogan by a bunch of hypocrites!" Former diplomat Lakshmi Puri termed the remarks against the actor "despicable, derogatory & condemnable". "That it should come from another woman politician is all the more galling - how can we as women become transmitters of toxic patriarchy & demeaning slurs & insults that scrape at the bottom of the barrel of indignity!" she posted on X. Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera took up cudgels on his colleague's behalf. "Anybody who has known my colleague @SupriyaShrinete will vouch for the fact that she can never resort to such objectionable language ever." Dikshit added that Shrinete had said she will find out who has done it. "Supriya ji has said whoever has done it, it's a mistake. She has explained and the matter should end there," he said. The party's Srinivas BV agreed that the remarks against Ranaut from Shrinete's account were "absolutely derogatory". However, he also raked up Ranaut's past controversial statement in which she had called actor-politician Urmila Matondkar a "soft porn star".

# Jaishankar visits Indian Coast Guard ship Samudra

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar visited Indian Coast Guard ship Samudra Paheredar, a specialised Pollution Control Vessel, which is in Manila Bay in the Philippines as part of an overseas deployment to the EAN countries, and said the civilizational imprint of India's long and distinguished maritime tradition is still visible in the region. The ICG ship arrived at Manila Bay on March 25 on a three-day visit. The ship is equipped with specialised marine pollution control equipment and a Chetak Helicopter in pollution response configuration designed to contain and recover spilled oil and augment the operation, officials said on Tuesday. "Pleased to visit the Indian Coast Guard Ship Samudra Paheredar during its port call to Manila. My visit and the ship's presence signifies the deepening India-Philippines relations. India's long and distinguished Indian maritime tradition's civilizational imprint is still visible in this region. Our Act East policy and Indo-Pacific vision will continue giving it a more contemporary form," the External Affairs Minister (EAM) posted on X

on Tuesday. The Union minister is on an official visit to the Philippines. The Defence Ministry earlier in the day said the ICG ship is on an overseas deployment to the EAN countries -- the Philippines, Vietnam and Brunei -- from March 25 to April 12. "The visit of a specialised Pollution Control Vessel is part of a broader initiative aimed at demonstration of the ICG's marine pollution response capabilities and shared concern and resolve towards marine pollution in the EAN region besides bolstering bilateral cooperation with the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG)," the ministry said. "The deployment is the third in a row by the Indian Coast Guard to the EAN countries.

Earlier in the year 2023, ICG Pollution Control Vessels visited Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia as part of the initiative," it said. During this deployment, the ship is also scheduled to make port calls at Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam) and Muara (Brunei). The demonstration at visiting ports includes pollution response training and a practical display of various equipments, the statement said. Additionally, the ship has also embarked 25 cadets of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) to participate in the Indian government's initiative 'Puneet Sagar Abhiyan' and provide it an international outreach in coordination with partner nations, the officials said.

# BJP urges EC to take actions against poll code violations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Tuesday raised the issue of objectionable comments by Opposition leaders, including Tamil Nadu Minister Anitha Radhakrishnan, against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the lack of action against him, as it urged the Election Commission to take stringent measures on its own against poll code violations. A BJP delegation flagged the "differing" approaches of poll officials in various States to similar infractions by politicians and claimed that not much is done against the errant leaders in states like Karnataka, Telangana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. All these states are ruled by the BJP's rival parties. A BJP delegation, including Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and its general secretary Vinod Tawde, met the poll watchdog to highlight this "discrepancy". Opposition leaders are continuously "abusing" Modi and denigrating women power and Indian culture, Tawde told reporters later. The poll process has just started and the EC should take "suo moto action" against any violation of the poll code, he said. He said while action was rec-



ommended against Union minister Shobha Karandlaje, who is contesting the Lok Sabha polls from Karnataka, for her controversial comments against Tamils, objectionable remarks of a Tamil Nadu minister and DMK leader have not drawn any censure. In this context, Tawde also highlighted Shiva Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut's comparison of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Mughal king Aurangzeb, considered by many a religious zealot. While action was called for in the case of Shobha Karandlaje, poll officials are seen to be having a different stand in other states, he said. "We urged the Election Commission to take stringent action at the right time and we were assured that it will

look into the issue," he said. BJP leaders Om Pathak and Sanjay Mayukh were also part of the delegation. The BJP's written submission to the EC was in reference to Radhakrishnan's alleged use of profanities against the prime minister during an election rally. The party demanded that the poll body bar him from the campaign and direct the DMK leader to tender an apology. An FIR should also be registered, it said. Its complaint also highlighted the alleged insult of Indian culture and personal attacks by DMK leaders, including former Union minister A Raja. Raja had said that Tamil Nadu will never accept phrases like Bharat Mata and Jai Shri Ram, the BJP noted.

# ECI issues advisory for voter safety against heatwave

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With the seven-phase Lok Sabha poll occurring at the peak of the summer amid warnings of above normal temperature and heat wave conditions by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the Election Commission (EC) issued an advisory to States and Union Territories and sought "strict compliance" of its directive of providing assured minimum facilities on the day of polls at polling stations for voters as well as polling personnel, including drinking water, shade and medical kit, ramp, polling states at ground floors, proper lighting and electricity, furniture's and proper signages at polling stations. The Commission has also shared with its state chief electoral officers a set of 'dos and don'ts' issued by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to minimise the impact of the impending heat wave. The commission has cited IMD to note that there is a high probability of above normal temperatures during summer season, "which may translate into stronger and longer spells of heatwave especially during months of March to June, 2024". The Meteorological Scientists have advised political parties to factor in the



impacts of rising temperatures while campaigning outdoors and conducting big rallies. The NDMA in its do's and don'ts advised to avoid going out in the sun, especially between 12.00 noon and 3.00 p.m.; Drink sufficient water and as often as possible, even if not thirsty; Wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose, and porous cotton clothes. Use protective goggles, umbrella/hat, shoes or chappals while going out in sun, avoid strenuous activities when the outside temperature is high. Avoid working outside between 12 noon and 3 p.m. The April 19 to June 1 polls are likely to witness an above-normal number of heatwave days in most parts of the country, barring a few pockets in the western Himalayas, north-east and peninsular India. Traditionally, polls in India used to happen either in the winter or in the spring until 2004, when the then-prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, decided to dissolve the Lok Sabha eight months in advance

and went to polls in April-May. Subsequently, four Lok Sabha polls were held amidst the heat and dust. With the Indian subcontinent emerging as a "hotspot" of extreme heat waves owing to global warming, studies have documented the deaths of thousands due to extreme heat events. In cities, there is an additional contributor in the form of "urban heat island" effects. In a letter sent out to its Chief Electoral Officers, the Commission reminded them about its earlier set of instructions on assured minimum facilities at polling stations. According to the June 2023 instructions on assured minimum facilities, which have been circulated afresh, during summer, every polling party shall be supplied with oral rehydration salts (ORS) for their own use as well as for any voter needing the same due to heat-stroke. "A hand bill on 'Dos and Don'ts' in case of heat stroke may be prepared and supplied to each of the polling parties. An appeal to the electors may be issued to carry wet towels to protect themselves against dehydration and also advise women electors to avoid bringing children along with them to polling stations during hot weather conditions," the instruction said.

# Pets in peril due to humans: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst the common practice of culling animals to curb the spread of diseases to humans, a study has brought to light a startling reversal: It is pets that are in more peril due to humans. After analysing 12 million viral genomes, the scientists from University College London (UCL) found that humans pass on more viruses to domestic and wild animals than the other way around. The researchers whose study is published in the journal Nature Ecology & Evolution have called for better understanding and monitoring of viral transmission between animals and humans to prepare for future outbreaks and aid conservation efforts. Generally speaking, the majority of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases are attributable to animal viruses. When these pathogens transmit from animals into humans (a process called zoonosis), it leads to disease outbreaks and epidemics such as Ebola and new flu strains. Considering the tremendous impact zoonotic diseases can have on public health, humans have historically been seen as a "sink" for viruses rather than a source. In other words, human-to-animal transmission of viruses usually gets far less attention.



Moreover, as the study noted that even more animal-to-animal host jumps that didn't involve humans at all. "We should consider humans just as one node in a vast network of hosts endlessly exchanging pathogens, rather than a sink for zoonotic bugs," said study co-author Professor Francois Balloux (UCL Genetics Institute). "By surveying and monitoring transmission of viruses between animals and humans, in either direction, we can better understand viral evolution and hopefully be more prepared for future outbreaks and epidemics of novel illnesses, while also aiding conservation efforts." On average, viral host jumps show an association with an increase in genetic changes, or mutations in viruses, relative to their continued evolution alongside just one host animal. Study authors say this reflects how viruses must adapt to better exploit new hosts.





# BJP fields four Congress turncoats for Assembly bypolls in Gujarat

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Four Congress turncoat MLAs, including former leader of opposition Arjun Modhwadia, and an independent legislator, all of whom resigned from the Gujarat assembly membership in the last few months, were on Tuesday fielded by the ruling BJP for bypolls in five constituencies. These five seats — Vijapur, Porbandar, Manavadar, Khambhat and Vaghodia — fell vacant after their sitting MLAs, four from the Congress and one independent, resigned between December 2023 and March 2024 and subsequently joined the BJP. An official list

declaring them to be BJP candidates for the bypolls to these five seats was issued by the party here. The Congress MLAs who resigned were CJ Chavda (Vijapur), Arjun Modhwadia (Porbandar), Arvind Ladani (Manavadar) and Chirag Patel (Khambhat). Apart from them, independent MLA from Vaghodia, Dharmendrasinh Vaghela, had also resigned as legislator and joined the saffron party. Now, the BJP has chosen these five former MLAs to fight the bypolls on the party's symbol from their respective seats. They all were elected as legislators after defeating BJP candidates in the assembly polls held in

December 2022, in which the saffron party won 156 of the 182 seats. The Congress is yet to announce its candidates for these five assembly seats. The by-elections for five out of six vacant assembly seats in Gujarat is scheduled on May 7, when voting would take place for all the 26 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state. The Election Commission has not declared bypoll on the Visavadar seat because a case about the election of its former MLA Bhupat Bhayani is pending before the Gujarat High Court. Bhayani, who won as the AAP candidate from the seat, also resigned in December and later joined the BJP.

# BJP demands sedition case against Kerala CM for speeches on CAA

PTI ■ PALAKKAD (KERLA)

The BJP on Tuesday demanded the registration of a sedition case against Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan over his recent speeches on the Citizenship Amendment Act, alleging they aimed to instill insecurity in the Muslim community and create “extreme religious blindness” among them. Senior BJP leader P K Krishnadas accused the Marxist veteran of trying to create division in society and promote enmity among religious groups through his speeches against the CAA, implemented by the Centre. The recent speeches made by Vijayan on the topic were in violation of constitutional norms and the oath of office, and thus he lost the legal right to continue in the office, he claimed. Referring to the statements made by Vijayan during the anti-CAA rally in Malappuram on Monday, the BJP leader said these were the arguments made by Mohammed Ali Jinnah while demanding two nations decades ago. “The CM said that Muslims were second-grade citizens in the country, and the Union government, the BJP, and the RSS were trying to drive them away into Pakistan by suspending their citizenship,” Krishnadas said. His words were a reflection of the ideology of Jinnah, who had also said that Muslims were second-grade citizens and insecure in India, and so there should be a separate nation for them. “Vijayan was reiterating what Jinnah had said...His words were anti-national. So, a case of sedition



should be registered against him,” he said. He also accused Vijayan of paving the way for a “religious riot” by creating division between Muslims and Christian and Hindu communities. “Vijayan’s speeches aimed to instill insecurity in the Muslim community and create “extreme religious blindness” among them,” he further alleged. The BJP leader also rubbished Vijayan’s statement in Malappuram that the BJP and RSS might not know that the slogans like “Bharat Mata ki Jai” and “Jai Hind” were first raised by two Muslims and would they abandon them as they were coined by those belonging to the minority community. Seeking to counter Vijayan, Krishnadas asked whether he and the other Left leaders would be ready to raise the slogans as they were coined by Muslims. He also claimed that the CAA has nothing to do with the 18 crore Muslims in the country. The saffron party’s scathing attack

against the Chief Minister came in the wake of the Left veteran recently addressing four consecutive rallies organised by the CPI(M) in the northern part of Kerala against the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). During the rallies, Vijayan had attacked the BJP-led Union government over the implementation of the CAA and accused it of attempting to give citizenship on the basis of religion. Reaching out to the minority community in Muslim-dominated Malappuram district on Monday, the veteran CPI(M) leader said Muslim rulers, cultural icons and officials had played a significant role in the country’s history and independence movement. He said Sangh Parivar leaders and activists advocating the extradition of Muslims from India to Pakistan ought to be acquainted with this historical context. Along with others, Muslims also played a crucial role in the country’s freedom movement, the chief minister pointed out.

# ZPM trying hard to join BJP led NDA: Zoramthanga

PTI ■ AIZAWL

MNF president Zoramthanga on Tuesday claimed that ZPM was “trying hard” to join the BJP-led NDA at the Centre. Addressing a rally in Saitual town in northeastern Mizoram, Zoramthanga alleged that Chief Minister Lalduhoma had approached Assam CM Himanta Biswas Sarma before the assembly polls so that the ZPM could become a part of the NDA. “The ZPM suddenly got more money in its hand before the assembly polls because it had already sold itself to the BJP,” he said. The ZPM wanted the MNF to sever ties with NDA to pave the way for it to be part of the alliance, he added. Zoramthanga, the former CM, claimed that his party has constantly opposed the NDA government at the Centre on issues affecting the interest of minorities and Mizoram despite being in the alliance. “The NDA sees the MNF as a nuisance because we often oppose it from within on issues affecting Mizoram. Like MNF, the ZPM wouldn’t be able to oppose the NDA,” he said. Zoramthanga claimed that Union Home Minister Amit Shah “stopped pushing” him to withdraw Mizoram Police from the inter-state border during the dispute with Assam when he warned that he would resign as the chief minister. Earlier, Lalduhoma had said that his party will remain independent of any alliance at the Centre. He had said that a regional party can’t put forward its view and take independent decisions on important issues as long as it aligned with either of the two blocs, one led by the BJP and the other by the Congress, at the Centre.



# Manipur Education Minister to contest LS polls as BJP candidate

PTI ■ IMPHAL

The BJP on Tuesday nominated Manipur Education Minister Thounaojam Basantakumar Singh from the Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat, dropping sitting MP and Union Minister Rajkumar Ranjan Singh. The contestant, aged 59, is the son of former Union minister Thounaojam Chaoba Singh. The former IPS officer is now an MLA from the Nambol assembly constituency in Bishnupur district. The announcement comes two days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh claimed that the BJP would win by a huge margin in the state. BJP candidate Thounaojam Basantakumar Singh is pitted against Congress nominee Angomcha Bimol Akoiyam in the Inner Manipur seat. The saffron party has decided not to contest from the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency and extended its

support to ally Naga People’s Front nominee Kachui Timothy Zimik, a retired Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer. The Inner Manipur seat and some areas of the Outer Manipur constituency will vote in the first phase on April 19, while the remaining segments of the Outer Manipur seat will go to poll in phase 2 on April 26. Those living in camps in violence-hit Manipur will be allowed to vote from their temporary settlements, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said on March 16, the day the Lok Sabha poll schedule was announced. Ethnic clashes between the Meitei and tribal Kuki communities in the northeastern state since May last year have resulted in the loss of over 200 lives. According to officials, over 25,000 people have been rescued by the security forces, while around 50,000 are living in camps following the unrest.

# Local outfit GGP first list of 10 LS picks out in Chhattisgarh

PTI ■ RAIPUR

The Gondwana Gantantra Party (GGP), a regional outfit with pockets of influence in Chhattisgarh, on Tuesday released its first list of candidates for 10 of the 11 Lok Sabha seats in the state, a party leader said. Candidates for 10 Lok Sabha seats in Chhattisgarh have been announced and discussion on the nominee for the remaining one seat Kanker (Scheduled Tribe reserved) was underway, the party’s president and MLA Tuleswar Singh Markam told PTI. As per the list, Dr LS Uday has been fielded from Surguja (ST) seat, Madan Gond from Raigarh (ST), Manharan Lal Bhardwaj from Janjgir-Champa (Scheduled Caste reserved), Shyam Singh Markam from Korba, Nandkishore Raj from Bilaspur, Naresh Kumar Motghare from Rajnandgaon, Manharan Singh



Thakur from Durg, Lalbahadur Yadav from Raipur, Mohd Fareed Kureshi from Mahasamund and Tikam Nagvanshi from Bastar (ST), he said. The GGP has not yet won a Lok Sabha seat in the state. Polls will be held in three phases in the Naxal-affected state on April 19, April 26 and May 7 and votes will be counted on June 4. The GGP contested the last year’s Chhattisgarh assembly elections in

alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), but the outfit is going it alone in the Lok Sabha polls. It managed to win just one seat — Pali Tanakhar — its first victory since the formation of the state in November 2000, in the last assembly polls, while the Mayawati-led party drew a blank. The BSP has so far announced candidates for two Lok Sabha seats — Janjgir-Champa and Bastar. The Naxal-hit Bastar constituency alone will witness polling on April 19 in the first phase for which filing of nominations started on March 20. Three constituencies, Kanker (ST), Rajnandgaon and Mahasamund, will vote on April 26 in the second phase, while the remaining seven seats — Surguja (ST), Raigarh (ST), Janjgir-Champa (SC), Raipur, Durg, Korba and Bilaspur — will witness polling on May 7 in the third and last round.



# Highway dacoity case cracked in Palghar; four held

PTI ■ PALGHAR

Police have cracked a highway dacoity case involving Rs 5.5 crore in cash in Palghar district with the arrest of four persons, a senior official said on Tuesday. The incident in question occurred on March 17 when three employees of a Gujarat-based company were transporting Rs 5.5 crore in cash from Surat to Mumbai in a car, said assistant commissioner of police (crime) Madan Ballal. At around 9 pm, five unidentified individuals, posing as policemen, intercepted the employees’ car with a van on a highway near Khanivde toll plaza. After a brutal assault, the victims were thrown out of the vehicle at separate locations, while the culprits fled the scene with the

cash, he said. Subsequently, an FIR was filed under relevant IPC sections including 395 (dacoity), 363 (kidnapping) and 419 (cheating by personation) at the Mandvi police station. During investigation, the police arrested four persons, Muruganandan Abhimanyu, Babu Moda Swami, Manikandan Chalaiyya and Balaprabhu Shanmugam, in connection with the incident, said Ballal. They were remanded to police custody till March 28 by a court in Palghar. Police have recovered a significant portion of the stolen cash amounting to Rs 4.87,50,000, said the ACP. Preliminary investigations revealed the involvement of one of the arrested suspects, Abhimanyu, in criminal activities, including murder, he said.

# NDA needs to return to power to help Andhra Pradesh development: BJP

PTI ■ VIJAYAWADA

BJP leader V Varaprasad Rao on Tuesday said it was important for the NDA to return to power at the Centre as it would hold the key for Andhra Pradesh’s development. Rao, one of the three candidates chosen by BJP to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections in Andhra Pradesh, along with C M Ramesh and K Geetha, thanked the party leadership for choosing them and underlined the importance of NDA coming to power for the development of the state. Rao, candidate from Tirupati Lok Sabha seat, said he is very happy to be fielded in the elections by a party like BJP

and heaped praise on the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. “When I was the member of Parliament between 2014 and 2019, I had seen the dynamism of Modi. How he has been empowering women. How he is trying to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor,” said Rao, on the sidelines of a BJP office-bearers meeting in Vijayawada. He observed that the Central government under the leadership of Modi has developed several national highways and also helped him in fulfilling various requests pertaining to the Railways, such as granting train halts and others. Rao highlighted that he has

seen the proactive development done by the BJP government and was waiting for an opportunity to work for it. Further, he noted that the saffron party is a disciplined one which is not interested in local politics but development and empowerment. Meanwhile, Rao said he still doesn’t know why he was demoted from being an MP to an MLA by the ruling YSRCP. Rao, a former IAS officer, who joined the saffron party on Sunday was announced as the BJP candidate from Tirupati (SC) constituency. He was an MP representing the YSRCP from the same constituency between 2014

and 2019. He also went on to become an MLA from the same party from Gudur segment in 2019. Within a few hours of his joining BJP, his candidature was announced by the party. Echoing Rao’s thoughts, the party’s Anakapalli candidate Ramesh thanked the BJP’s national and state leadership for giving him a ticket to contest the polls. Ramesh said he hoped to help develop Anakapalli constituency if he emerged victorious at the hustings. Geetha, who will be contesting from Araku constituency, thanked the party’s leadership for giving her an opportunity and recalled that she had carried out several welfare measures

between 2014 and 2019 as an MP. In 2014, Geetha had won from the same constituency on a YSRCP ticket, however, later she switched over to BJP. She alleged that Andhra Pradesh had fallen behind in the past five years under Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy’s rule. Rao, Ramesh and Geetha are three of the six BJP candidates who would be contesting from the state as part of a seat-sharing deal between NDA partners-BJP, TDP and Janasena. Elections for 175 Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh will be held simultaneously on May 13 and the results will be declared on June 4.

# Veterinary student death: Kerala Government suspends three employees for delay

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government on Tuesday suspended three employees of the Home Department alleging “dereliction and unresponsiveness” in handling over documents and details to Central Bureau of Investigation with regard to the investigation into the recent death of a veterinary student. The staff, Anju, who was serving as an assistant, Bindhu V K, a section officer and Prasantha V K, deputy secretary, were placed under suspension by Home Secretary Bishwanath Sinha. The action was taken by the Pinarayi Vijayan government a day after it faced widespread criticism from opposition Congress and BJP,

alleging it was yet to hand over necessary files to the CBI weeks after the Chief Minister had assured a central agency probe into the death of Sidharthan JS. Besides the opposition, the deceased student’s family also came out against the government, alleging that the government was deliberately trying to delay the CBI probe without handing them over the necessary files and by destroying the evidence. The 20-year-old student was found hanging inside the bathroom of the college hostel in Wayanad district on February 18, and his family and friends alleged that he was subjected to ragging by fellow students, including activists of CPI (M)’s students’ outfit, SFI. The state government

announced it would hand over the case to the CBI on March 9 after the incident triggered a huge political row in the state. In the suspension order, the government made it clear that the order handing over the probe to the Central agency was issued on the same day itself. But it was only on March 26 that the file was submitted along with the pro forma report and all other necessary documents in this regard. The delay clearly demonstrates the “lack of diligence, proper and adequate action and dereliction and unresponsiveness” of the officials in dealing with the subject matter in the file, it said.



# Much ado about nothing

Arvind Kejriwal governing from jail may look unconventional, but it is not unconstitutional

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is keeping his word so far: That he would rule the Capital from behind bars upon being arrested in the multicrore liquor scam. The issuance of Government orders from prison, however, has sparked a controversy. His political opponents, including the BJP, are raising concerns about the influence of criminal elements within the Government apparatus. The saga began when Kejriwal, also the national convener of AAP, was incarcerated following his alleged involvement in the liquor scam. Despite being in jail, he continued to issue orders related to governance matters in Delhi. This is unprecedented as no serving Chief Minister has ever been jailed. While Kejriwal's supporters argue that his actions demonstrate a commitment to his responsibilities, critics point to the broader implications of a jailed politician running a Government. BJP leaders have wasted no time in alleging that this development is emblematic of the pervasive influence of criminal elements. The BJP leaders



assert that allowing individuals facing serious criminal charges to wield power from jail sets a dangerous precedent. Moreover, they argue that it raises questions about the efficacy of the justice system in curbing such abuses of power. On the other hand, AAP supporters claim the BJP's allegations are aimed at tarnishing their party's image. They maintain that Kejriwal's actions are within bounds of his duties as Chief Minister and emphasise his commitment to serving the people of Delhi. Furthermore, they contend that Kejriwal's governance from jail reflects the resilience and determination of a leader who refuses to be deterred by legal challenges. In reality, the entire

controversy is unfounded. If the Constitution permits an individual to retain a constitutional position while under judicial custody, it logically follows that they have the right to govern from wherever they are. Given its lack of prudence, it might appear unconventional, but it aligns perfectly with the constitutional framework of India's political system. Unlike Laloo Yadav and Hemant Soren, Kejriwal chose not to comply with the establishment's expectations by resigning and instead remained in his post. Additionally, being in judicial custody alone does not constitute a conviction or indictment, regardless of the strength of the allegations, and thus holds no legal validity. In the wake of the controversy surrounding Kejriwal's governance from jail, the next logical step for him would undoubtedly be to pursue avenues for securing bail. For a sitting Chief Minister to be in jail is an extraordinary circumstance, and Kejriwal's legal team will likely be working diligently to secure his release at the earliest opportunity. Amidst the heated exchange of accusations and counter-arguments, the broader implications of this controversy cannot be ignored. It highlights the complex interplay between politics, law enforcement and the justice system in India. As the debate rages on, it remains to be seen how this controversy will shape the political landscape in Delhi and beyond in the days to come.

## PICTALK



Devotees carry Seethala Mallikarjuna Swamy's 'Rathotsava' towards Mullayanagiri hill, in Chikkamagaluru

# Water, an elixir of life and an agent of peace

Ineffective water management practices contribute to water scarcity by water loss, inefficient allocation and degradation of water resources

Water is an indispensable factor in the survival of humanity on this planet. For everything related to humans, we have one or other alternative. But for water, there is no alternative. Water is essential for life, playing a critical role in various bodily functions and processes. Science and religion have a consensus on one point. The first life on the planet originated in water. Water is often referred to as the "elixir of life" because it is essential for all living organisms' existence and survival. Without water, life as we know it would not be possible. All our civilizations and international co-operations have taken place through water bodies. But the recent water shortage plaguing the silicon city of India, Bengaluru, has sent shocking waves among the city dwellers, who, despite having financial stability, are finding it difficult to get water for their daily use. If it's Bengaluru today, it will be in other cities shortly. According to a recent United Nations report, multiple zones within India's Indo-Gangetic basin have surpassed a critical level



of groundwater depletion, with the entire northwestern region projected to face significantly diminished groundwater resources by 2025. Groundwater depletion occurs when the water extraction rate from aquifers exceeds the recharge rate, leading to a decline in groundwater levels over time. In the Indo-Gangetic basin, excessive groundwater pumping for irrigation, urban water supply, and industrial use has resulted in the widespread depletion of aquifers. The conversion of agricultural lands to high-rise commercial buildings also affects proper recharging. Ineffective water management practices contribute to water scarcity by exacerbating water loss, inefficient allocation, and degradation of water resources. Over-extraction of groundwater, inefficient irri-

gation techniques, leaky distribution systems, and inadequate conservation measures all contribute to the mismanagement of water resources. Urban planners should leave a "water buffer space" within every 1 km radius for proper recharging of the groundwater. For this, they should construct beautiful artificial lakes that harvest rainwater and recycled water. Similarly, in every household or high-rise building, the Government should see that they have proper working rainwater harvesting facilities. Access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation is a basic human right and is essential for preventing waterborne diseases and maintaining health and hygiene. Without sufficient water, people cannot meet their basic drinking, cooking, and sanitation needs, jeopardising their health and well-being. Water is a key driver of socioeconomic development, supporting various sectors such as agriculture, industry, and tourism. Water infrastructure investments, water-based industries, and water-related services contribute to eco-

nomic growth and job creation. In regions where water is already scarce or shared by multiple parties, disputes over water allocation, usage rights, and infrastructure development can arise, leading to tensions and conflicts. In India, we have seen severe conflicts over water sharing in the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. More such tensions will erupt in future when water scarcity increases. The developments in science and technology can artificially produce anything related to human life, including food products or even human babies; however, research to date has not made it possible to produce water artificially. Hence, we need to maintain the natural water balance on this planet without disturbing it. In the current pace of urbanisation and environmental degradation being carried out by humans, it would be very difficult to regenerate water if it gets depleted.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

# A showdown of arch-rivals

This electoral battle is shaping up to be a multi-party contest, primarily between the ruling BJP-led NDA and the INDIA bloc

Who will win the 2024 Lok Sabha polls? The election scene has become clear after the Chief Election Commissioner announced the poll schedule last week. They will begin next month and end on June 4, when the results will be announced. It will be a multi-party contest, with the ruling BJP-led NDA alliance and the opposition coalition of the INDIA bloc being the primary contenders. Meanwhile, alliances are being built and major parties have announced the candidates. Party hopping and secret deals are also going on. Prime Minister Modi aims to perform a hat trick. Currently, it is a one-horse race, with the BJP dominating and the opposition parties trailing behind.

The Opposition INDIA coalition comprises 26 parties. They have formed a pre-poll alliance to challenge the BJP. It aims to field a single opposition candidate against the BJP in the upcoming elections. The Opposition suffered two consecutive defeats in 2014 and 2019, significantly damaging its image. It needs to connect with voters, including millennials. Congress, leading the Opposition, is a 138-year secular party that used to represent marginalised groups like SCs, STs, OBCs and Muslims. It has been weakened since the eighties, with the rise of regional satraps and today, it is a mere shadow of its former strength. It lacks leadership. After the 2014 and 2019 defeats, Congress now claims it is committed to social justice and empowering India's poor, oppressed, Dalits, farmers, youth and women with its five guarantees: Yuva Nyay, Bhagidaari Nyay, Naari Nyay, Kisan Nyay and Shramik Nyay. The Opposition mainly aims to challenge Modi by consolidating anti-BJP votes and offering incentives. This strategy worked for Congress in recent Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana Assembly polls, which Congress won. Congress hopes to gain from the BJP's anti-incumbency buffering sops and freebies. They also highlight Rahul



Gandhi's recent Bharat Jodo Yatra, which was meant to connect with the people. To succeed, Congress must raise bread-and-butter issues such as inflation, joblessness and social discord to engage with young voters who play a decisive role in elections. They must show an alternate strategy to appeal to them. Simultaneously, some powerful chief ministers of state-level parties dominate their states, making it a tough fight for Prime Minister Narendra Modi in these areas. 2019, the BJP and its allies secured only 45 per cent of the votes. The remaining 55 per cent were up for grabs for the INDIA bloc. Although no national leader matches Modi's popularity, some influential regional leaders can sway voters in their respective regions. This is particularly true for West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. The biggest challenge for the coalition is to project a single leader against Modi. Unfortunately, there is an ego clash among the coalition partners, which makes it difficult to agree on someone. Secondly, the BJP boasts a strong organisation with immense financial and political power. The Opposition doesn't seem to have a solid



WITH BOTH SIDES RAISING THEIR PITCH, THE 2024 ELECTIONS WILL SEE A NO-HOLDS-BARRED NEGATIVE CAMPAIGN, AS THIS WILL DECIDE THE FUTURE OF THE OPPOSITION AND THE AGGRESSIVE BJP

and compelling storyline, except for its commitment to safeguarding the Constitution and democratic values. However, voters are more concerned about basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. For instance, Sonia Gandhi's Aam Admi slogan in 2004 resonated well with the masses. Low-income people generally live paycheck to paycheck and may not relate to abstract political concepts. The Congress Party is still clinging to its glorious past and failing to acknowledge the current scene. As the second-largest Party, Congress automatically expects to lead the coalition. It has been losing its leaders to the BJP and a steady flow of these leaders demoralises the Party. The Opposition needs a solid counter to the BJP's propaganda and religious narrative. The BJP has grown since 1980; today, it is the biggest Party in India. It has a strong organisation with unlimited money power. The Party seeks votes in the name of the Prime Minister. The BJP has a better chance of winning this time. The BJP's lucky mascot is Modi. His supporters consider him a doer due to the implementation of various measures. These include the Triple Talaq, CAA,

revocation of Article 356 in Jammu and Kashmir and the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The BJP highlights its achievements in the last decade and various welfare initiatives to attract voters. The continuity has helped Modi achieve his agenda. Modi has gained international recognition over the past ten years and ensured India's position at the high table, which excites his supporters. On the negative side, the Opposition claims that the Modi Government has been targeting Opposition leaders and harassing them with Government probe agencies. The BJP poaches on other parties, lawmakers, and leaders. It has absorbed many second-rung leaders who chose to find better prospects in the saffron Party. With both sides raising their pitch, the 2024 elections will see a no-holds-bar negative campaign, as this will decide the future of the Opposition and the aggressive BJP. Modi's secret to success is a divided opposition. As long as this continues, Modi will continue to win. The Opposition must chant the mantra of unity to win or even improve.

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### KEJRIWAL CANNOT BE CM

Madam — Apropos news article "After Kejriwal, AAP Sealed," published on March 24, this is my response. As far as Arvind Kejriwal is concerned, he will have to stay out of politics for a long time. Aam Aadmi Party leaders may claim that Kejriwal will remain the Chief Minister. Still, now it will be almost impossible for Arvind Kejriwal to remain in the post of Chief Minister. Delhi state holds a special position. Here the Lieutenant Governor has unlimited powers. The Lieutenant Governor comes under the Central Home Department. In such a situation, if Arvind Kejriwal does not resign, he will certainly be dismissed in the future. The arrest of Kejriwal will have an impact on the election campaign of Delhi and Punjab. AAP is playing the victim card but the public must repeatedly criticise it. That means the entire opposition is currently on the defensive on the issue of corruption. Kejriwal has committed a huge strategic and legal mistake by not responding to ED's nine summonses. He has to bear the brunt of this at the time of the Lok Sabha elections. If he had gone to the ED office for questioning in November itself, he would have been arrested today. One does not have to see this day. Even if ED had arrested him in November, he could have got bail after four to five months as it happened in the case of Sanjay Raut. The leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party made serious mistakes in the case of Arvind Kejriwal.

Govind Rao Rotti | Vijayapura

### REGULATE REUSED COOKING OILS

Madam — In commercial settings like restaurants, it's common practice not to discard oil after a single use. Unfortunately, with deep frying, failure to regularly change the oil can lead to the generation of trans fats through repeated reheating, potentially causing inflammation in the body as per health experts. Unhealthy oils can adversely affect mainly heightening the risk of cardiovascular diseases and type 2 diabetes. Repeated heating of oil also leads to the

## The parched IT hub



Apropos news article "Zero Water Day Night in Bengaluru," published on March 25, this is my response. Bengaluru is known as the garden city of India. It had more green patches earlier. It had more lakes. Nearly 80 per cent were greenery patches. Now things have changed. Water scarcity was quite unknown to the people of this city since the perennial Cauvery River flows here. Now due to the advent of IT corridor, the city has become a concrete jungle. People have migrated in large numbers to Bengaluru. Also, the change in the climatic conditions and

failure of monsoon rains have resulted in acute water scarcity. Water is more misused here than purposefully used. Even tanker supply by the Corporation is seen as inadequate. Private suppliers fleece the people taking advantage of the situation. The storage in the reservoirs is far below the demand. Not only in Bengaluru but in other places of the state the situation is grim. Places like Raichur, Bellary and Mysore are reeling under water scarcity. Hyderabad, Chennai, Coimbatore, Ooty, Delhi and Gurgaon are no exceptions. The Government should identify water storage lakes and desilt them periodically. Rainwater harvesting should be done on a war footing. Our forefathers saw potable water in rivers and lakes. The next generation saw it in the wells. We now see water in bottles. Our future generation will see it in capsules may ring true if we don't act now. We must sustain judicious water management else the situation will become disastrous.

Sravana Ramachandran | Bengaluru

accumulation of visible and invisible granules, altering the oil's composition and introducing neo-formed compounds (NFCs) over time. This process diminishes the oil's nutritional quality. FSSAI lacks regulations or definitions for reused cooking oils, often leading food safety officials to rely on visual cues such as colour or appearance. Therefore, FSSAI must frame regulations for reused cooking oils.

Vijaykumar H K | Raichur

### MONEY MANAGEMENT IS AN SKILL

Madam — Everyone continually works hard to accumulate wealth and lead a luxurious lifestyle, and money is the source of all these pleasures. Although making money is not a particularly tough chore for everyone, how one manages their finances is what counts. In numerous instances, individuals who were fortunate enough to inherit wealth but lacked financial management skills have become mired in debt;

conversely, those who began from nothing and were fortunate enough to possess sound money management skills have seen their wealth increase threefold. A quotation reads, "Money moves from those who do not manage it to those who do." Money management is very underrated but still, a very crucial skill to be learned although these skills are already built in the people of our country giving the right direction to these skills can add fuel to the fire. People should be taught money management skills like saving, investing and maintaining personal finances. This will help them to enjoy life to the fullest and have emergency funds on hand. It will also help them to become financially independent and lead balanced lives when they move abroad for college or a job.

Lisha Gera | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)



FIRST COLUMN

LIFE SHOULD BE A PRECIOUS JOURNEY

In the rush to meet obligations, do we overlook beauty around us?



Life is something very precious, a divine gift given to us by God or nature. Do humans realise how high-priced is it? When we wake up in the morning, aren't we in a tearing hurry to accomplish all the unfulfilled tasks of yesterday? Do we spend some quality time embracing nature, take a few deep breaths, spend moments in solitude and feel the silence encompassing us? Are we grateful for our existence or do we mechanically hit the gym and head for the kitchen to have the mandatory morning cup of coffee? Yes, for sure morning exercise like a walk, a jog, or executing the chores are essential, but it is equally important to slow down the pace of life and become grateful to the Universe for its vastness and its exquisite grandiose geometry. Pierce Brosnan, who wielded guns and gals with remarkable felicity once remarked, 'I realise how precious life is, probably because I've seen how it can be taken away.' As the cloud moves across the sky, so do moments in our lives. We need to be in harmony with our thoughts and actions and also realise the ephemeral nature of events. Once, a student approached his Master and complained that he could not meditate as his body ached, he felt distracted or asleep and was extremely disconcerted. The wise man smiled and merely said that this would pass. After some days, the tutee was in an ecstatic mood and apprised his teacher that the meditation was wonderful and he had had an experiential feeling. He could observe stillness in the mind; see a shimmering light and experience levitation. The Master merely smiled and added that even this would pass. Life should be treated as a celebration and as a precious gift since it is fleeting and transitory.



The sacrosanct premise of life therefore should be to focus on its truly celebratory nature and savour its prepossessing moments. For all this to happen, we need to increase our prana/energy levels manifold. We derive energy from food, breath and rest provided to the body and by maintaining a calm and meditative mind. These sutras or tenets are imparted during the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living. However, the prana/energy level needs to be sustained to nurture the precious moments of life. Humans have to treat their minds and bodies as sacred. Early morning blues can be combatted with warm lime water laced with honey. It is efficacious for the human body to have a few glasses of this elixir of life. A sattvic diet helps in increasing prana levels and also in meditation. The purpose of yoga is not just performing physical exercises but to ultimately do pranayama and meditation. This helps assuage the mind so that we are in a position to recognise and appreciate life's precious journey. Physical sciences, till recently, were all about matter and particles. However, newer studies reveal the mysteries of science have transcended the boundaries of matter and dwelled on waves and their patterns. Waves connect us to science and also to people. While acknowledging the precious nature of life, we need to harness the potential further by choosing a passion. This is an outlet from the dreary ho-hum of life and we can appreciate the droplets on the petals, a nest built on our roof or a koel bird singing mellifluously. In this age of a wired world, humans need to break the chains of tech bondage and develop a harmonious dwelling place where people care and share making life a truly momentous journey. *(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)*

# Conspiracy theories abound for terror attack

A cloud of speculation surrounds the Moscow terror attack; allegations range from claims of internal collusion to Ukrainian complicity, supported by the West



In the end, neither these corrupt politicians nor the manifestos of these inhuman actions, but unarmed civilians will have to pay the price. Over a hundred unarmed civilians were mercilessly killed by those brutal assailants, while hundreds more were wounded in Saturday's terrorist attacks on the outskirts of Moscow. Conspiracy theories, as in many other cases, are deepening. Some say it was an inside job orchestrated by certain parties to gain sympathy. Second, Ukrainians planned it with the help of Western intelligence agencies. Third, this was perpetrated by extremists. Consequently, conflicting yet interesting reports are emerging from all sides. Though these warning messages sound fishy, the amount of intelligence activities in the region certainly emphasises recent detailed reports on CIA activities in Ukraine published by The New York Times, stating that the US and UK were in Ukraine long before the war. "At the end of 2021, Putin was considering whether to launch a full-scale invasion. He met with the head of one of Russia's main spy services, who told him that the CIA, together with British intelligence MI6, controlled Ukraine and turned it into a staging ground for operations against Moscow." However, it is interesting to note that in this brutal attack, terrorists who targeted concertgoers at Moscow's Crocus City Hall not only successfully executed the operation, but also managed to evade capture and attempted to cross the border located over three hundred kilometres away. Later, according to Russian media, all four attackers were apprehended by Russian security forces. A man detained on suspicion of involvement in the Crocus City Hall attack has reportedly confessed to being promised a reward of 500,000 rubles, according to Russian journalist Margarita Simonyan. The alleged killer stated in a video posted by her, 'I shot down people at the Crocus for money; [I was promised] about 500,000.' Strangely, Russia was attacked by the Islamic State, or more accurately, according to Western media outlets, by ISKP. The Islamic State—Khorasan Province is a regional branch of the Islamic State terrorist group active in South-Central Asia. At the beginning of this month, on March 7, the FSB stated that it had stopped an ISKP cell from carrying out a terrorist attack targeting a synagogue. "On the territory of the Kaluga Region, a stop was put to the activity of Wilayat Khorasan, a cell of the Afghan branch of the international terrorist organisation Islamic State, which is banned in Russia, whose members were planning to commit a terrorist act against one of the Jewish religious institutions in Moscow," the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) said in a statement to the state-run TASS news agency. What is fascinating is that almost all Western countries currently supplying arms, personnel, and other vital support, including precious intelligence, to Ukraine for its fight against Russia, were issuing early warnings about such brutal terrorist attacks. On March 7 and 8, several foreign embassies in Russia warned their citizens about the threat of terrorist attacks in Moscow. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow posted a security alert late on March 7, stating, "The embassy is monitoring reports that extremists have imminent plans to target large gatherings in Moscow, including concerts, and U.S. citizens should be advised to avoid large gatherings over the



WHATEVER THE CONSPIRACY THEORIES OR ANY OTHER GROUND REPORTS THAT CAME TO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN AFTER THIS HORRIFIC TERRORIST ATTACK, ONE THING IS CERTAIN: RUSSIA INDEED HAS INTERNAL SECURITY LOOPHOLES AND ENEMIES ARE CAPABLE OF SNEAKING THROUGH ITS SYSTEM

next 48 hours." The Finnish Foreign Ministry urged its citizens on Saturday to avoid public gatherings in Moscow over the weekend, following the US warning about possible terrorist attacks in Russia. The US Embassy further stated that it is actively monitoring reports indicating that "extremists have immediate intentions to target large gatherings in Moscow." After the US warning, the UK issued a similar advisory advising UK citizens to avoid travelling to Russia due to the risks and terrorist threats. The British Foreign Office recommended against all travel to Russia. Germany, Latvia, and Estonia also urged their citizens and those with dual citizenship not to travel to Russia shortly. These advisories essentially highlight the reliability, effectiveness, and capability of Western intelligence agencies in the region. However, it is important to pay attention to the argument made by the Ukrainian Defence Authority on the attack: "The behaviour of the criminals is also an important factor. They fled, although such attacks are characterised by suicides with the victims and the voicing of demands, or at least reasons. Accordingly, the criminals wanted to survive. But how did they cover a distance of more than 300 kilometres without being noticed? Why, having prepared so thoroughly, did they not do the simplest thing—buy a few spare cars to change on the way? Was it because they were guaranteed security by the Russian special services?" These questions are undoubtedly crucial not only for unravelling the mysteries behind the attack but also for preventing its recurrence. This distinctive IS attack contradicts its previous behaviours; typically, IS members launch attacks to become martyrs. However, in this instance, they attacked to obtain "money"

from unknown sources, a practice strictly prohibited, Haram, according to Islam. Meanwhile, in his address to the nation, President Putin asserted, "All perpetrators, organisers, and masterminds of this crime will face fair and inevitable punishment, whoever they may be and whoever directed them. I emphasise once more: we will identify and bring to justice every individual who stands behind these terrorists, those who orchestrated this atrocity, this assault against Russia and our people." Whatever the conspiracy theories or any other ground reports that came to the public domain after this horrific terrorist attack, one thing is certain: Russia indeed has internal security loopholes, and enemies are capable of sneaking through their system. It is clear that, according to Western pre-warnings of the attacks leading us to presume that these brutal attacks were pre-planned to execute during the recently concluded election where Putin marked the highest percentage of any elections since 2000. This signalled which side the majority of Russians were standing on, while the West kept repeating the same mantra of authoritarianism. On the other hand, can the Ukrainian President go for an election and prove the same, despite remaining in power by manipulating the constitutional clauses? However, Ukrainians, alarmed by the election, launched a risky invasion to halt voting in Russian border areas, particularly in Belgorod city and its region. During the three-day operation, Ukraine killed 11 civilians with drones and rockets and injured 82, including nine critically. Among the casualties were an election official and a thirteen-year-old girl, whose father was seriously injured. Ironically, most Western nations with imperfect democracies expect their enemy countries to be "per-

fect democracies". This paradox can only please a mind accustomed to duplicity but will never overcome common challenges such as normalising the global supply chain and achieving peace while mitigating the burning risk of a possible nuclear attack. The most powerful nations, despite engaging in dirty politics to reaffirm their supremacy, will never hesitate to engage in anything contradictory to their preaching. Nevertheless, determining whether this attack was carried out by ISKP or another group influenced by various integrated parties is a matter that requires verification. However, this attack has the potential to inspire other terrorists in countries facing genuine threats from IS, ISKP, and other extremist factions. We cannot underestimate the importance of security in the forthcoming Indian elections and ISKP's direct threats against China and its investments in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other places. In early September 2022, the ISKP published its most comprehensive critique of China to date, belittling the Belt and Road Initiative and calling on Muslims to take up arms against "red atheists whose hands are soaked with the blood of innocent Uyghur Muslims." Ironically, the tone of these threats is very similar to how the United States evaluates its competitors. Should we take lightly what the Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump repeatedly referred to as the president as 'Obama and Hillary Clinton are as ISIS co-founders'? Sometimes, political jokes, rhetoric and blabbering play a very important role in understanding the context of our day-to-day life and its reality. *(The writer, a journalist, expresses personal views which are independent of any institutional affiliations)*

# Controversial issues reignite India-Lanka relations

## The contentious issues of Katchatheevu and Sethusamudram resurface amid Tamil Nadu's election fervour

The schedule for the General Election 2024 has been announced and the State of Tamil Nadu is full of rattle and brouhaha over non-issues. The ruling DMK which has been maintaining silence over issues like the provision of drinking and irrigation waters and the fate of the State's fishermen arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy have dusted and taken out age-old topics for use as campaign materials in the election. A cursory glance over the election manifesto of the DMK drafted under the chairmanship of M K Kanimozhi, the late Karunanidhi's daughter by his third wife Rajathi, makes the reader doubt whether Tamil Nadu is a part of India or not. One of the salient points of the



DMK's election manifesto is to make Tamil Nadu a NEET-free State. This means that admission to the undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the State's medical colleges would be free of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test, the selection system ordered by the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court. It was the UPA Government (2004-2014) in which the DMK was the second largest constituent

that brought the NEET into practice. Similarly, the DMK would revive and resume the works of laying a canal through the Palk Strait known as the Sethusamudram Channel. The project work has been put on hold following directives by the Supreme Court based on the fact that it is neither economically sustainable nor commercially viable. The only motivating factor behind the revival of Sethusamudram Channel is that the DMK Government would be able to demolish the Ram Sethu, a stone structure believed to have been built by the army of Lords Ram to cross the sea in their mission to same Maa Sita from the custody of the Ravana. This is being seen as the Dravidian's reply to the Pranaprathista of

the Ram Temple at Ayodhya held in January. The DMK has declared its mission to destroy Sanatana Dharma once and forever. Udhayanidhi Stalin, heir apparent to the DMK throne and the chief minister-ship in the eventuality of Stalin leaving Tamil Nadu for an early rendezvous with his father M Karunanidhi and ideological father Ramasamy Naicker, have declared time and again that Sanatana Dharma is more dangerous than Covid and Cancer and should be banished from the face of the earth. Yet another promise made by the DMK is the retrieval of Katchatheevu, a small islet handed over to Sri Lanka by the Government of India in 1975. The decision to secede this 285-acre uninhabited islet

to Sri Lanka in 1975 was taken after a series of discussions involving top-level diplomats of Sri Lanka and India including G Parthasarathi, a close aide of Indira Gandhi. Katchatheevu is an uninhabited islet in the Palk Strait. The islet once used for pearl farming was strategically important for fishing activities and was owned by the Raja of Ramnad and later became part of the Madras Presidency after the delimitation of Gulf of Mannar and Palk Strait during British rule between the then Governments of Madras and Ceylon. In 1921, both Sri Lanka and India claimed this piece of land and the dispute remained unsettled. The agreement signed by Indira Gandhi and her Sri Lanka counterpart Sirimao

Bhandarenaik in 1975 and 1976 says that with the establishment of the Exclusive Economic Zones by the two countries, India and Sri Lanka will exercise sovereign rights over the living and non-living resources of their respective zones. The fishing vessels and fishermen of India shall not engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the Exclusive Economic Zone of Sri Lanka, nor shall the fishing vessels and fishermen of Sri Lanka engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the Exclusive Economic Zone of India, without the express permission of Sri Lanka or India, as the case may be, according to the agreement. The agreement made it clear that Katchateev belongs to the territory of Sri Lanka.

From 1976 to 2008, the DMK and its leader Karunanidhi were silent over Katchateevu. It was a case filed by AIADMK general secretary J Jayalalitha in 2008 that made Karunanidhi take up the issue as part of his political one-upmanship. When the case came up for hearing, the then chief justice R M Lodha asked Mukul Rohatgi, the then attorney general, what were the possibilities of retrieval of Katchatheev. "If you want Katchatheevu back, you will have to go to war to get it back" Rohatgi told the Court. In another development, the Coast Guard in an affidavit filed by it in Madras High Court said that it was the Tamil Nadu fishermen who violated the International Maritime Boundary Line and fished in

Sri Lankan territorial waters. Sinha Ratnatunga, a respected editor of a popular newspaper in Sri Lanka said that more than 600 fishing boats from India cross over the IMLB and carry out bottom trawling in the island's territorial waters violating all norms. The bottom trawling using purine nets destroys the entire marine wealth in the Sri Lankan waters. The demand for the retrieval of Katchatheev is with an ulterior motive. The Dravidians do not want a cordial relationship between India and Sri Lanka. Should Lanka too end up as the Maldives? asks R R Wijayabalan, who is one of the best friends of India in the island nation. *(The writer is special correspondent with the pioneer; views are personal)*



# Assange’s extradition on hold until US rules out death penalty

AP ■ LONDON

A British court ruled on Tuesday that Julian Assange cannot be extradited to the United States on espionage charges unless US authorities guarantee he won't get the death penalty, giving the WikiLeaks founder a partial victory in his long legal battle over the site's publication of classified American documents. Two High Court judges said they would grant Assange a new appeal unless US authorities give further assurances within three weeks about what will happen to him. The ruling means the legal saga, which has dragged on for more than a decade, will continue — and Assange will remain inside London's high-security Belmarsh Prison, where he has spent the last five years. Judges Victoria Sharp and Jeremy Johnson said the US must guarantee that Assange, who is Australian, "is afforded the same

First Amendment protections as a United States citizen, and that the death penalty is not imposed". The judges said that if the US files new assurances, "we will give the parties an opportunity to make further submissions before we make a final decision on the application for leave to appeal". The judges said a hearing will be held May 20 if the US makes those submissions. The US Justice Department declined to comment on Tuesday. Assange's supporters say he is a journalist protected by the First Amendment who exposed US military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan that was in the public interest. Assange's wife Stella Assange said the WikiLeaks founder "is being persecuted because he exposed the true cost of war in human lives". "The Biden administration should not issue assurances. They should drop this shameful

case, which should never have been brought," she said outside the High Court in London. The ruling follows a two-day hearing in the High Court in February, where Assange's lawyer Edward Fitzgerald said American authorities were seeking to punish him for WikiLeaks "exposure of criminality on the part of the US government on an unprecedented scale", including torture and killings. The US government said Assange's actions went beyond journalism by soliciting, stealing and indiscriminately publishing classified government documents that endangered many people, including Iraqis and Afghans who had helped US forces. The judges rejected six of Assange's nine grounds of appeal, including the allegation that his prosecution is political. They said that while Assange "acted out of political conviction... it does not follow however that the

request for his extradition is made on account of his political views". The judges also said Assange could not appeal based on allegations, made by his lawyers, that the CIA developed plans to kidnap or kill Assange during the years he spent holed up in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, to prevent him from trying to flee. The judges said "plainly, these are allegations of the utmost seriousness", but concluded they had no bearing on the extradition request. "Extradition would result in him being lawfully in the custody of the United States authorities, and the reasons (if they can be called that) for rendition or kidnap or assassination then fall away," the ruling said. They accepted three grounds of appeal: the threat to Assange's freedom of speech, Assange's claim that he faces disadvantage because he is not a US citizen, and the risk he could receive the death penalty.

# Cargo ship collides with Baltimore’s key bridge, causing collapse

AP ■ BALTIMORE

A container ship rammed into a major bridge in Baltimore early Tuesday, causing it to snap and plunge into the river below. Several vehicles fell into the chilly waters, and rescuers searched for survivors. It was also not clear what caused the cargo ship to crash into the Francis Scott Key Bridge long before the busy morning commute in what one official called a "developing mass casualty event" in a major American city just outside of Washington. Two people were rescued, and it was not clear how many more might be in the water. The ship crashed into one of the bridge's supports, causing the structure to snap and buckle at several points and tumble into the water in a matter of seconds — a shocking spectacle that was captured on video and posted on social media. The vessel



Parts of the Francis Scott Key Bridge remain after a container ship collided with one of the bridge supports on Tuesday. **AP/PTI**

caught fire, and thick, black smoke billowed out of it. "Never would you think that you would see, physically see, the Key Bridge tumble down

like that. It looked like something out of an action movie," said Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, calling it "an unthinkable tragedy."

Chief James Wallace said authorities "may be looking for upwards of seven people" but said that number could change and other officials wouldn't give figures. It was not clear if the two rescued were included in the seven cited by the fire chief. Authorities said a crew of unknown size was working on the bridge at the time of the collapse and that sonar had detected cars in the water, which is about 50 feet (15 meters) deep. The water temperature was about 47 degrees Fahrenheit (8 degrees Celsius) before dawn Tuesday, according to a buoy that collects data for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Earlier, Kevin Cartwright, director of communications for the Baltimore Fire Department, told The Associated Press that several vehicles were on the bridge at the time of the collapse, including one the size of a tractor-trailer truck.

# Israel, Hamas dig in as international pressure builds for Gaza cease-fire

AP ■ RAFAH

Hamas has rejected the latest proposal put forward by international mediators for a cease-fire and hostage release, and Israel has blasted a UN Security Council resolution that called for both without linking them. As the war in Gaza grinds through a sixth month, each side has publicly insisted that its own idea of victory is in reach, and late Monday they rejected the latest international efforts to stem the bloodshed. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel can achieve its aims of dismantling Hamas and returning scores of hostages if it expands its ground offensive to the southern city of Rafah, where over half of Gaza's population has sought refuge, many in crowded tent camps. Hamas has said it will hold onto the hostages until Israel agrees to a more permanent cease-fire, withdraws its forces from Gaza and releases hundreds of Palestinian prisoners,



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, right, receives German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, left, at his office in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Monday. **AP/PTI**

including top militants. It said late Monday that it has rejected a recent proposal that fell short of those demands — which, if fulfilled, would allow it to claim an extremely costly victory.

There is no end in sight to the war, which has killed over 32,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The fighting has left much of the Gaza Strip in ruins, displaced most its residents and driven

a third of its population of 2.3 million to the brink of famine. An Israeli strike late Monday on a residential building in Rafah where three displaced families were sheltering killed at least 16 people, including nine children and four women, according to hospital records and relatives of the deceased. An Associated Press reporter saw the bodies arrive at a hospital. On Monday, the Security Council finally managed to pass a resolution calling for a cease-fire as the United States abstained instead of vetoing the measure, angering Israel in a major escalation of tensions between the two close allies. The resolution calls for the release of all hostages held in Gaza but does not condition the cease-fire on it. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz told Army Radio on Tuesday that the resolution had emboldened Hamas by signalling that international pressure would end the war without it having to make any concessions.

"The message delivered to Hamas yesterday... is that you don't have to hurry," Katz said. The war began on October 7, when Hamas-led militants stormed across the border and attacked communities in southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 others. It is still believed to be holding about 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others, after most of the rest were freed in November in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners. The United States, Qatar and Egypt have spent several weeks trying to negotiate another cease-fire and hostage release, but those efforts appeared to have stalled. Hamas said in a statement late Monday that it has informed the mediators it will stick to an earlier position. Hamas said Israel has not responded to its core demands of a "comprehensive cease-fire, an (Israeli) withdrawal from the Strip, the return of displaced people and a real prisoner exchange."

Hamas has previously proposed a phased process in which it would release all the remaining hostages in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the opening of its borders for aid and reconstruction, and the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including top militants serving life sentences. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected those demands as unrealistic. He has vowed to resume Israel's offensive after any hostage release and keep fighting until Hamas is destroyed, saying it's the only way to prevent a repeat of the October 7 attack. But he has provided few details about what would follow any such victory and has largely rejected a postwar vision outlined by the US. That approach has brought him into increasingly open conflict with President Joe Biden's administration, which has expressed mounting concern over civilian casualties

while supplying Israel with crucial military aid and backing Israel's aim of destroying Hamas. The US had vetoed previous UN resolutions calling for a cease-fire. The White House has urged Israel not to undertake a major ground operation in Rafah, warning that it could cause a humanitarian catastrophe. The administration was set to brief visiting Israeli officials on an alternative approach, but Netanyahu called off their visit in response to the US abstention at the UN. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant is in Washington on a separate trip, however, and is to meet with US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on Tuesday. On Monday, Gallant vowed to continue the offensive until Israel's aims are met. "We will operate against Hamas everywhere — including in places where we have not yet been," he said. "We have no moral right to stop the war while there are still hostages held in Gaza."

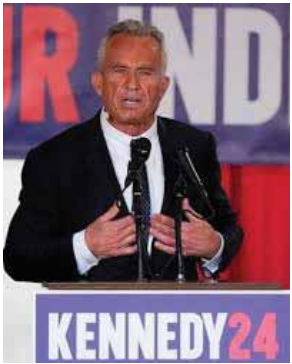
# South Africa's ANC fails in bid to ban Zuma's party from polls

**Johannesburg (AP):** A South African court on Tuesday dismissed the ruling party's case demanding a rival opposition party be deregistered and banned from participating in the upcoming election. The Electoral Court said the ruling African National Congress party's objection to how the Independent Electoral Commission handled the uMkhonto weSizwe Party's registration had no merit, adding it should have addressed the Electoral Commission before filing a court case. Former South African President Jacob Zuma, who headed the country from 2009 to 2018 when he was removed amid wide-ranging allegations of corruption, parted ways with the ANC in December and is now leading the uMkhonto weSizwe Party, or MK Party. His popularity — especially in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal, expected to be a key battleground in this year's elections — has helped MK Party emerge as a potentially significant contender in the upcoming polls. The party is named after the former military wing of the ANC, which was disbanded at the end of white minority rule and racial segregation policies of the regime known as apartheid. On Wednesday, the ANC will launch another court bid against Zuma's party, challenging its right to use the name and trademark of the now-defunct organization. South Africa's 29 May elections are expected to be highly contested with the ANC, once led by anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela, under pressure to remain in power following declining support in successive elections as the country faces stagnant economic growth, high levels of poverty among its Black majority, and an unemployment rate of over 32 per cent. According to recent polls, the ANC may dip below 50 per cent of the national vote for the first since it came into power in 1994 when Mandela became the country's first democratically-elected leader.

# Kennedy Jr. expected to announce his VP pick for WH bid

AP ■ OAKLAND

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. plans to announce his running mate Tuesday as he races to secure a place on the ballot for his independent campaign for president. In advance of an event Tuesday in Oakland, Kennedy and his aides have circulated the names of several contenders, including celebrities with no political experience. Those names include NFL quarterback Aaron Rodgers and "Dirty Jobs" star Mike Rowe as well as former Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura. Speculation most recently has centred on Nicole Shanahan, a lawyer and philanthropist who bankrolled a Super Bowl ad for Kennedy. "This announcement is really going to shake up the political establishment," Kennedy said in a video he posted on social media last week. Kennedy's campaign has spooked Democrats, who are fighting third-party options that could draw support from President Joe Biden and help Republican former President Donald Trump. As they head into a 2020 rematch, Biden and Trump are broadly unpopular with the US public and will compete for the votes of people who aren't enthusiastic about either of them. Without the backing of a party, Kennedy faces an arduous task to get on the ballot, with varying rules across the 50 states. He's picking a running mate now because about half of the states require him to designate one before he can apply for ballot access. The requirement is already bedeviling Kennedy's ballot access effort in Nevada, where Democratic Secretary of State Francisco Aguilar said in a March 7 letter to independent candidates that they must nominate a vice presidential candidate before collecting signatures. The letter came days after Kennedy's campaign announced he'd collected enough signatures in the state. If Aguilar's opinion



survives a likely legal challenge, Kennedy will have to start again in collecting just over 10,000 signatures in the state. "This is the epitome of corruption," said Paul Rossi, a Kennedy campaign lawyer, in a statement Monday, accusing Aguilar of doing the bidding of the Democratic National Committee. Kennedy has secured access to the ballot in Utah. He and an allied super PAC, American Values 2024, say they've collected enough signatures to qualify in several other states, including swing states Arizona, Nevada and Georgia, but election officials there have not yet signed off. Kennedy is a descendant of a storied Democratic family that includes his father, Robert F. Kennedy, who was a US senator, attorney general and presidential candidate, and his uncle former President John F. Kennedy. He began his campaign as a primary challenge to Biden but last fall said he'd run as an independent instead. Kennedy was a teenager when his father, known as RFK, was assassinated during his own presidential campaign in 1968. RFK Jr. built a reputation of his own as an activist, author and lawyer who fought for environmental causes such as clean water. Along the way, his activism has veered into conspiracies and contradicted scientific consensus, most infamously on vaccines. Some members of his family have publicly criticised his views.

# Farmers block Brussels to protest EU policies

Brussels (AP) Dozens of tractors on Tuesday sealed off streets close to European Union headquarters where the 27 EU agriculture ministers were planning to discuss the crisis in the sector that has led to months of protests across the bloc. The farmers were protesting anything from what they see as excessive red tape to increased environmental measures, cheap imports and unfair trading practices. "Let us make a living from our profession," read one billboard on a huge tractor blocking a main thoroughfare. Even if smaller than previous demonstrations, the impact on the Belgian capital was sizable during the morning rush hour, and authorities asked commuters to stay out of Brussels and work from home as much as possible. With protests taking place from Finland to Greece, Poland, and Ireland, the farmers have already won a slew of concessions from EU and national authorities, from a loosening of controls on farms to a weakening of pesticide and environmental rules. Earlier this month, the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, proposed weakening or cutting rules in areas like crop rotation, soil cover protection and tillage methods. Small farmers, representing some two-thirds of the workforce and the most active within the continent-wide protest movement, will be exempt from some controls and penalties under the new rules. Environmentalists and climate activists say the change in EU policies under the duress of protesting farmers is regrettable. They say the short-term concessions will come to haunt the bloc in a generation when climate change will hit the continent even harder. Politically, the bloc has moved to the right over the past year. The plight of farmers has become a rallying cry for populists and conservatives who claim EU climate and farm

# Senegal’s president-elect pledges to fight corruption after stunning victory

AP ■ DAKAR

Senegal woke up Tuesday to a new president-elect, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, a former tax inspector and political newcomer who was released from prison just weeks ago and had inspired voters, many of them unemployed youth, with a vow to fight corruption and reform the economy. Faye was catapulted into a presidential campaign after popular opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, who was barred from running due to a prior conviction, had backed him. As he gave his first speech as president-elect on Monday evening, it represented a dramatic rise for the 44-year-old who is due to be the youngest leader of the West African nation. "I pledge to govern with humility and transparency, and to fight corruption at all levels. I pledge to devote myself fully to

rebuilding our institutions," he said, restating promises made during his campaign. While official results of Sunday's vote were not yet available, the other front-runner — the former prime minister who was backed by incumbent President Macky Sall — had conceded defeat. Sall followed with congratulations, also naming Faye as the winner. The election followed months of unrest ignited by Faye and Sonko's arrest last year, and concerns that the president would seek a third term in office despite constitutional term limits. The violence shook Senegal's reputation as a stable democracy in a region that has seen a wave of coups. Rights groups said dozens were killed in the protests, while some 1,000 people were jailed. Considered the anti-establishment candidate, Faye's campaign messages of economic

reform and anti-corruption resonated with the youth. Almost a third of young people are unemployed with thousands risking their lives on dangerous journeys in search of jobs in the West. Faye has vowed to improve Senegal's control over its natural resources by promoting national companies to prevent the country from falling into what his campaign called "economic enslavement." His manifesto promised to renegotiate Senegal's oil and gas contract and introduce a new currency. On Monday night, Faye outlined some early foreign policy priorities, which included reforming the troubled West African regional bloc known as ECOWAS. "A win by the opposition also means major changes ahead in domestic and foreign policies," said Rida Lyammouri of the Policy Center for the New South, a Morocco-based think

tank, adding that a promise to move away from former colonial power France could define the foreign policy of the country's new government. The election was largely peaceful and early counts showed voters turned out overwhelmingly in favor of the opposition. Sonko had promised a resounding victory on his YouTube channel. By Monday evening in Dakar, Faye had been declared the winner and celebrations erupted in neighbourhoods around the capital, where supporters danced, played music and set off fireworks. Faye's roots lie in a small town in central Senegal. He is a practicing Muslim and has two wives. Ahead of Sunday's election, Faye published a declaration of his assets, and called on other candidates to do the same. It lists a home in Dakar, and land outside the capital and in his hometown.

# King Charles III to attend Easter service

**London (PTI):** Britain's King Charles III will attend the traditional royal Easter service at St. George's Chapel in Windsor on Sunday, Buckingham Palace said on Tuesday, confirming the 75-year-old monarch's first major public appearance as he undergoes treatment for an unspecified form of cancer. The King had taken a back seat from public-facing duties since his cancer diagnosis was made public last month. But in a sign that he intends to begin a return to a more active schedule gradually, Charles also took part in an audience at the palace in London with community faith leaders from across the UK. "Their Majesties The King and Queen [Camilla], accompanied by other members of the royal family, will attend the Easter Mattins Service at St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle on Easter Sunday," Buckingham Palace said. Several royal family members

gather to celebrate Easter and are annually photographed walking into the service at St. George's Chapel. However, unlike in the past, Prince William and his family will not be joining the service after his wife Kate Middleton revealed she is undergoing preventative chemotherapy following her cancer diagnosis. The family, including children Princes George and Louis and Princess Charlotte, are privately spending the school Easter holidays this year. The latest palace announcement comes as the King met faith leaders from the Windsor Leadership Trust at Buckingham Palace. "In February 2024, 18 influential leaders from the Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths were invited to St. George's House, Windsor Castle, by the Windsor Leadership Trust for the Faith Leaders' Forum," the palace said.

# UK police share family tribute to Indian student killed in collision

PTI ■ LONDON

The Metropolitan Police in London on Tuesday officially named a former NITI Aayog employee Cheistha Kochhar as the 33-year-old woman who was killed in a road collision in north London while she cycled back home from London School of Economics (LSE). There have been no arrests a week after the incident, police said. The police said Kochhar, who was pursuing her PhD in behavioural research at the LSE, died following a collision involving a refuse lorry on Clerkenwell Road near the junction with Farringdon Road on March 19 evening. The force said enquiries into the circumstances of the collision are ongoing as officers continue to appeal for witnesses and for any road users with dashcam footage from the scene to come forward.



Cheistha was cycling when she was involved in a collision with a refuse lorry — the lorry stopped at the scene and the driver is helping police with their enquiries. There has been no arrest and enquiries into the circumstances continue," the Met Police said. The police also released a statement on behalf of Cheistha Kochhar's family, which praises her "deep intelligence" and "sprightly demeanour" which

won her many friends. "She always had a hug to spare for anyone and she lived her life with the principle that it was more important to be the kindest person in the room, than to be the smartest person in the room. In the short span she had on this planet, she touched tens of thousands of people in extremely meaningful ways and the magnitude of this loss is incomprehensible," the family tribute reads. Cheistha was born in Bareilly in 1990 and graduated high school from the Convent of Jesus and Mary, New Delhi. After graduating from Delhi University with a BA in Economics and Mathematics in 2008, she went on to finish the PGP in Liberal Arts as a Young India Fellow from Ashoka University and then did another post-graduation from the University of Chicago in International Development and Policy (MAIDP).



# 5 Chinese among 6 killed IN Pak suicide attack

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

At least five Chinese nationals were among the six persons killed on Tuesday when an explosives-packed vehicle rammed into their bus in Pakistan's troubled province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, officials said, in the second suicide attack on the personnel working on the China-backed hydropower project since 2021. The Chinese were working on the Dasu hydropower project, which is about 300 km to the north of Islamabad. The 4,320 MW project is being constructed by the China Gezhouba with funding from the World Bank. In Tuesday's attack, several others were injured in the incident that occurred in the Bisham area of Shangla district of the province when a bus, escorted by a five-vehicle convoy, en route from Islamabad to Kohistan was hit by a vehicle coming from the opposite direction in the hilly terrain, police said. The incident occurred around 1 pm. One of the vehicles of the 13-vehicle convoy caught fire and fell into a ravine, follow-

ing the attack, China's Xinhua news agency said, quoting the sources.

Senior police officer Muhammad Ali Gandapur confirmed the incident and the death toll, adding that apparently, it was a suicide attack. "Five Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver were killed in the attack," Gandapur told the media. No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack. The police and officials of other security agencies rushed to the scene of the attack and launched a probe into the incident.

The Pakistan Army said that strategic projects and sensitive sites vital for Pakistan's economic progress are being targeted as a conscious effort to retard progress and sow discord between Pakistan and its strategic allies and partners, most notably China.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said the attack was "orchestrated by the enemies of Pakistan-China friendship" and added that "Such dastardly acts cannot dent the resolve of Pakistani nation to fight against the scourge of terrorism." The Chinese Embassy

here announced taking all necessary measures to protect the Chinese citizens, institutions and projects in Pakistan, and to ensure such incidents will not happen again. This is the second such attack that has killed Chinese nationals since 2021.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi rushed to the Chinese embassy here and met Chinese ambassador Jiang Zaidong. Naqvi offered condolences and also assured the envoy that the Pakistan government would bring the perpetrators to justice.

President Asif Ali Zardari strongly condemned the attack and said, "Anti-Pakistan elements will never succeed in damaging Pak-China friendship." Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province Ali Amin Gandapur also has condemned the suicide attack and sought a detailed report from the provincial police chief into the attack on the Chinese vehicle.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Army said that the recent incidents of terrorism in Pakistan, notably in Gwadar,

Turbat, and Besham on Tuesday were dastardly acts aimed at destabilizing the internal security situation. "While the first two attempts were successfully thwarted by the armed forces, the latest incident at Besham claimed six innocent civilians including 5 Chinese nationals," the army said in a statement, condemning the incident. "Certain foreign elements are complicit in aiding and abetting terrorism in Pakistan, driven by their vested interests. Despite the veneer of innocence, these elements are being continuously exposed as sponsors of terror," it said.

The army declared that Pakistan with the unwavering support of the resilient nation and "our iron-clad ally China" will ensure that all those involved in aiding terrorism, directly or indirectly, are held accountable and find their due comeuppance. The Foreign Ministry also "strongly condemned" what it called as the "heinous act of terrorism" and said it will take all necessary measures to bring the terrorists and their facilitators to justice. "Such dastardly acts cannot

dent the resolve of the Pakistani nation to fight against the scourge of terrorism. Today's attack was orchestrated by the enemies of Pakistan-China friendship. We will resolutely act against all such forces and defeat them," it said. "Pakistan and China are close friends and iron brothers. The life and safety of Chinese nationals in Pakistan is of paramount importance. Pakistan will continue to work with our Chinese brothers in ensuring the safety and security of Chinese nationals, projects and institutions in Pakistan," the statement added.

Separately, the Chinese Embassy, in a statement, too "strongly condemned the attack" and expressed "deep condolences" to the victims and sincere sympathy to the bereaved families. The Chinese Embassy and Consulates General in Pakistan have launched an emergency plan immediately, requesting the Pakistani side to thoroughly investigate the attack and severely punish the perpetrators, it said. The embassy announced tak-

ing all necessary measures to protect the Chinese citizens, institutions and projects in Pakistan, and to ensure such incidents will not happen again.

It also reminded the Chinese citizens, and enterprises in Pakistan to pay close attention to the security situation, enhance security alerts, strengthen security measures, and make every effort to take safety precautions.

Chinese experts believe the latest attack is a copy of the July 2021 Dasu terror attack in which nine Chinese nationals and four Pakistani people were killed.

This latest case should serve as a wake-up call for Pakistan that it needs to improve the security situation in the country and for China that it should be aware of the terrorist forces that are trying to sabotage the success of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Chinese security experts told the Global Times. Thousands of Chinese personnel are working in Pakistan on several projects being carried out under the aegis of the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

# ‘Pak to seek US waiver for Iran pipeline project’

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan has decided to plead "vigorously" and seek exemption from potential US sanctions against the planned construction of a multi-billion dollar pipeline to import cheap gas from neighbouring Iran, the petroleum minister has said, asserting that it "can't afford sanctions" on the project.

Minister for Petroleum Dr Musadik Malik said that the government would seek exemption from US sanctions for the multi-billion-dollar Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project, the Dawn newspaper reported.

"We will seek exemption from US sanctions. Pakistan cannot afford sanctions in the gas pipeline project," he told journalists during an informal chat on Monday evening.

The development came after US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Donald Lu said at a congressional hearing that Pakistan had so far not sought exemption for the 1,150-kilometre gas pipeline.

Malik said the government would "plead vigorously" Pakistan's case for the waiver on technical, political and economic grounds at relevant forums, including through lobbying.

He also expressed the hope that the project's construction would begin soon while complying with contractual obligations with Iran. Malik's remarks were in contrast to the stance put forward by the Foreign Office, whose spokesperson told a press briefing last week that there was no room for any discussion or waiver from a third country. An official said the caretaker government had delayed the filing of a request for exemptions from US sanctions due to the changing geopolitical situation, though its draft had been finalised, according to the report. Pakistan and Iran signed an agreement in May 2009 for the supply of 750 million cubic feet per day of gas for 25 years from Iran's South Pars gas



field. Both countries were required to implement the project in their respective territories.

The project was initially conceived as an India-Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline, but later, India left it and became a bilateral project between Pakistan and Iran.

According to the agreement, the project was to start supply by January 2015. While Iran has already built over 900 km of the pipeline, the remaining 250 km segment has yet to be completed.

The caretaker government opted to start building an 80-kilometre segment of the gas pipeline, extending from the Iranian border to Gwadar, at an estimated cost of USD 158 million (Rs 44.2 billion) to ward off USD 18 billion potential penalties from Tehran. In August last year, Pakistan temporarily shelved the gas pipeline project, apparently under pressure from the US, which imposed sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear programme. On December 21, 2023, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) served a material breach notice to Pakistan's Inter-State Gas Systems (Pvt) Ltd (ISGS), an entity of the petroleum division, alleging material breach of buyer's warranties. The NIOC gave the ISGS 180 days to remedy the alleged material breach and referred the matter to the coordination committee for resolution. If Pakistan doesn't implement the project, Tehran has the option to move the Paris-based International Court of Arbitration, with potential contractual liability estimated to be USD 18 billion, according to the report.

## Pak PM says cash-strapped country has to seek another IMF bailout

**Islamabad (PTI):** Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday said his government is planning to approach the IMF for "another programme", days after the cash-strapped country struck a staff-level agreement with the global lender regarding the disbursement of the final tranche of USD 1.1 billion. Shehbaz, who took oath as the country's premier on March 4 for a second time since 2022 amidst staggering economic and security challenges, said, "We have to do another IMF programme and it won't work out without one." "Rome wasn't built overnight," the 72-year-old added while addressing the Tax Excellence Awards in Islamabad, The News International reported.

Washington-based IMF's global team reached a staff-level agreement with the Pakistani authorities last week on the second and final review of Pakistan's stabilisation programme supported by the global lender's USD 3 billion standby arrangement approved in July last year. Shehbaz, the younger brother of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif, said, "While the programme has some limitations, it is important for ensuring economic stability."

The prime minister, who came to power with the formation of a coalition government supported by the Pakistan Peoples Party and four smaller parties, reiterated that a "route will have to be taken to ensure economic stability as well as focus on the country's growth, provide job opportunities to people and address inflation". Last week, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb also maintained that Pakistan will discuss an Extended Fund Facility (EFF) with the IMF in Washington next month, the report said.

Russia is still reeling from the attack Friday in which gunmen killed 139 people in a concert hall on the outskirts of Moscow. Russian President Vladimir Putin said Monday that the gunmen are "radical Islamists," but despite all evidence pointing to the involvement of Islamic State, Putin repeated his accusation that Ukraine could have played a role. Kyiv has strongly denied any link to the attack. Four men accused of carrying out the attack appeared before a

## Militants attack Pak naval air base; 4 terrorists killed

PTI ■ KARACHI

Armed Baloch militants tried to infiltrate one of the main naval air bases in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, but security forces foiled the attack and killed all four terrorists.

The attack on Monday night took place in Turbat, a turbulent district in the sparsely populated province. Makran Commissioner Saeed Ahmed Umrani told the media that security forces had foiled an armed terrorist attack at the PNS Siddique Naval Air Base which is among the biggest naval air stations in the country.

"The armed men attacked from three sides of the airport boundary, but security forces responded immediately and foiled their attempt to infiltrate the premises," he said. Eyewitnesses reported they had heard gunfire and explosions



throughout the night. According to a statement by the army, terrorists on the night of March 25/26 attempted to attack Pakistan Naval Base, PNS Siddique in the Turbat area of Balochistan province. However, it was thwarted due to the swift and effective response by the troops ensuring the safety and security of personnel and assets. "Security forces in the vicinity

were immediately mobilized to support the naval troops. Synergetic and effective response by the armed forces enabled the killing of all four terrorists in ensuing joint clearance operation," the army said. However, during an intense fire exchange, a 24-year-old Sepoy of the paramilitary Frontier Corps Balochistan was killed. A security official said on condition of anonymity that terror-

ists were unable to cause any damage at the airbase or to aeroplanes.

No loss of sensitive naval installations was reported, the official said.

A sanitisation operation was being conducted to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area and Pakistan Armed Forces were committed to eliminating the menace of terrorism from the country at all costs. The banned Balochistan Liberation Army claimed that its Majeed Brigade was behind the attack.

This is the third major attack on security forces and installations this year in Balochistan claimed by the BLA with the first two attacks being also being repulsed by security forces.

Earlier in the year, security forces were attacked in Mach town in which at least ten people were killed but attempts to breach the Mach jail were

thwarted by security forces.

On March 24, the BLA also claimed responsibility for an attack on the Gwadar Port Authority Complex. Security forces had killed eight militants of the banned separatist group in the gunfire.

Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is home to a long-running violent insurgency. Baloch insurgent groups have previously carried out several attacks targeting the USD 60 billion CPEC projects.

The BLA accuses China and Islamabad of exploitation of the resource-rich province, a charge rejected by the authorities. BLA's Majeed Brigade, which was formed in 2011, is a particularly lethal guerilla cell of the BLA.

It has been alleged that the group also maintains sanctuaries in areas along the Pakistan-Iran border.

## Senior PML-N leader rebukes PPP over approach towards coalition government

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In the first reported public spat between Pakistan's ruling coalition members, a senior leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has launched a scathing criticism of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) for its "attitude" towards the coalition government at the Centre.

PML-N leader Rana Sanaullah, while speaking on a Geo News programme, said the "attitude of the PPP will remain the same throughout the tenure of the government". "Look at their reaction to the Indus River System Authority (IRSA) chairman (appointment) issue," he said.

The former interior minister of Pakistan said it is clear the Bilawal Bhutto Zardari-led PPP will have their "own position on everything".

"An impression is coming from allies to have the same attitude. However, we will try to move forward," he added. Sanaullah's remarks come after the PPP strongly objected to



the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif government's decision to appoint Zafar Mahmood, a retired federal government officer, as the IRSA chairman, The News International reported. The PPP termed Mahmood's appointment for a three-year tenure as a violation of constitutional procedures. Following the party's concerns,

the government backtracked on the appointment with Shehbaz Sharif assuring Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah of retracting the notification regarding the appointment.

Sanaullah said the PPP should have approached the PML-N directly before reaching out to the media on the appointment.

Sanaullah said if PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif had been the prime minister instead of Shehbaz, he might have said "a decision had been made and it would be reviewed later".

In the February 8 general elections, the Sharifs-led party failed to garner a clear majority, albeit technically, it was the largest party with 75 out of 265 seats.

In a surprise move, the elder Sharif stepped back in favour of Shehbaz to allow him to lead the coalition as he is believed to have the knack of taking along diverse groups in the polarised country.

The elections saw more than 90 independent candidates backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's PTI winning the maximum number of seats in the National Assembly.

The PPP and four smaller parties joined the coalition with the PPP supporting the government from outside in return for PML-N support for the election of its senior leader and former president Asif Ali Zardari as the president.

## Prisoners jailed for national security crimes unlikely to get early release: HK leader

**Hong Kong (AP):** Hong Kong's leader said Tuesday that prisoners convicted for serious national security crimes would not likely be granted early release under the tightened rules of a new national security law, signalling a hardening government stance against jailed political activists.

Chief Executive John Lee said the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance stipulates that people found guilty of endangering national security must not be granted remission unless the commissioner of correctional services believes the move would not be a national security risk. This also applies to inmates who received sentences before the new law was introduced last Saturday, Lee said.

Previously, inmates could have their prison sentences reduced by up to one-third for good conduct under the city's prison rules, provided they were serving terms longer than one

month.

At a weekly press briefing, Lee urged residents not to defy the law. "We need to make sure everyone understands that if someone was convicted of serious national security offenses, normally there would not be remission of sentence," he said. Lee's comments came after local media, including the South China Morning Post, reported that the early release of activist Ma Chun-man, which had been scheduled for Monday, was blocked under the new national security law. The remission had been granted due to his good conduct and the blockage was the first of its kind, according to the reports, which cited unnamed sources. The revised practice is expected to affect other activists who are jailed or undergoing trials under a similar sweeping security law imposed by Beijing four years ago to quell massive anti-government protests in 2019.

## NZ joins US, UK in alleging it was targeted by China-backed cyberespionage

**Wellington (AP):** Hackers linked to the Chinese government launched a state-sponsored operation that targeted New Zealand's Parliament in 2021, the country's security minister said Tuesday.

New Zealand's allegation comes a day after American and British authorities announced a set of criminal charges and sanctions against seven hackers, all believed to be living in China, who targeted US officials, journalists, corporations and pro-democracy activists, as well as the UK's election watchdog.

"The use of cyber-enabled espionage operations to interfere with democratic institutions and processes anywhere is unacceptable," Judith Collins, the defense minister responsible for the Government Communications Security Bureau, said in a statement.

## Multiple victims of Moscow attack in serious condition: Russian officials

**Moscow (AP):** Twenty-two victims of the Russia concert hall attack that killed more than 130 people remain in serious condition in the hospital, Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said Tuesday, according to state news agency Tass. Two of them are children, it said.

Russia is still reeling from the attack Friday in which gunmen killed 139 people in a concert hall on the outskirts of Moscow. Russian President Vladimir Putin said Monday that the gunmen are "radical Islamists," but despite all evidence pointing to the involvement of Islamic State, Putin repeated his accusation that Ukraine could have played a role. Kyiv has strongly denied any link to the attack. Four men accused of carrying out the attack appeared before a

Moscow court on Sunday on terrorism charges and showed signs of severe beatings. One appeared to be barely conscious during the hearing.

The men are citizens of Tajikistan, authorities said, and were named by investigators as Dalerdzhon Mirzoyev, 32; Saidakrami Rachabalizoda, 30; Shamsidin Fariduni, 25; and Mukhammadsobir Faizov, 19.

They were charged with committing a terrorist attack resulting in the death of others. The offense carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Russian officials said they detained a total of 11 people over the attack. Another of those detained appeared in court Monday. Alisher Kasimov, a citizen of Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia, was charged

over renting an apartment to the men accused of carrying out the attack. A senior Turkish security official confirmed Tuesday that two of the Moscow attackers had spent a "short amount of time" in Turkey before travelling together to Russia on March 2.

One of the attackers, Fariduni, entered Turkey on February 20, checked into a hotel in Istanbul's Fatih district the next day and checked out on February 27, the official said. The other, Rachabalizoda, checked into a hotel in the same district on January 5, checking out on January 21. The official said Turkish authorities believe the two suspects "became radicalized in Russia" because they were not in Turkey for long.

## Ukraine ramps up spending on homemade weapons

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine needs any edge it can get to repel Russia from its territory. One emerging bright spot is its small but fast-growing defence industry, which the government is flooding with money in hopes that a surge of homemade weapons and ammunition can help turn the tide.

The effort ramped up sharply over the past year as the US and Europe strained to deliver weapons and other aid to Ukraine, which is up against a much bigger Russian military backed by a thriving domestic defence industry. The Ukrainian government budgeted nearly USD 1.4 billion in 2024 to buy and develop weapons at home — 20 times more than before Russia's full-scale invasion. And in another major shift, a huge portion of weapons are now being bought from private-

ly owned factories. They are sprouting up across the country and rapidly taking over an industry that had been dominated by state-owned companies. A privately owned mortar factory that launched in western Ukraine last year is making roughly 20,000 shells a month. "I feel that we are bringing our country closer to victory," said Anatolii Kuzmin, the factory's 64-year-old owner, who used to make farm equipment and fled his home in southern Ukraine after Russia invaded in 2022. Yet like many aspects of Ukraine's war apparatus, its defence sector has been constrained by a lack of money and manpower — and, according to executives and generals, too much government red tape. A more robust private sector could help root out inefficiencies and enable factories to churn out weapons and ammunition even faster. Russia controls nearly a quar-

ter of Ukraine and has gained momentum along the 1,000 kilometre front line by showing a willingness to expend large numbers of troops to make even the smallest of advances. Ukrainian troops regularly find themselves outmanned and outgunned, and this has contributed to falling morale. "You need a mortar not in three years, you need it now, preferably yesterday," said Taras Chmurt, director of the Come Back Alive Foundation, an organization that has raised more than USD 260 million over the past decade to equip Ukrainian troops with machine guns, armoured vehicles and more.

Kuzmin, the owner of the mortar factory, fled the southern city of Melitopol in 2022 after Russia invaded and seized his factory that mostly made spare parts for farm equipment. He had begun developing a prototype for mortar shells

shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, when it illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula. Kuzmin took over a sprawling warehouse in western Ukraine last winter. His long-term goals include boosting production to 100,000 shells per month and developing engines and explosives for drones. He is just one of many entrepreneurs transforming Ukraine's weapons industry, which was dominated by state-owned enterprises after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Today, about 80 per cent of the defence industry is in private hands — a mirror image of where things stood a year ago and a stark contrast with Russia's state-controlled defence industry. Each newly made projectile is wrapped in craft paper and carefully packed into wooden crates to be shipped to Romania or Bulgaria, where are loaded with explosives. Several weeks

later, they're shipped back and sent to the front.

"Our dream is to establish a plant for explosives," said Kuzmin, who is seeking a partner to make that happen. Ukraine's surge in military spending has occurred against a backdrop of USD 60 billion in US aid being held up by Congress and with European countries struggling to deliver enough ammunition. As impressive as Ukraine's defence sector transformation has been, the country stands no chance of defeating Russia without massive support from the West, said Trevor Taylor, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, a London-based think tank. "Ukraine is not capable of producing all the munitions that it needs for this fight," Taylor said. "The hold up of USD 60 billion of American help is really proving to be a significant hindrance."



# Sensex, Nifty snap three days winning run

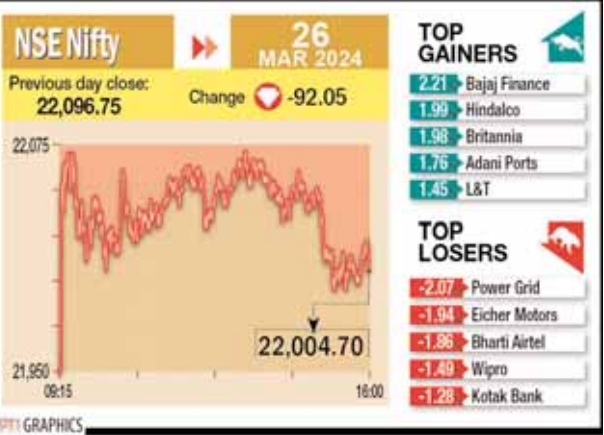
PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex declined by 361 points on Tuesday, snapping its three-day gaining streak due to selling in index major Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank and IT shares amid mixed global trends. The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 361.64 points or 0.50 per cent to settle at 72,470.30 with 20 of its components ending in the red and 10 in the green. During the day, it fell by 468.91 points or 0.64 per cent to 72,363.03 points. The broader Nifty of NSE declined 92.05 points or 0.42 per cent to 22,004.70 as 30 of its constituents dropped and 20 advanced. Among Sensex shares, PowerGrid fell the most by 2.07 per cent. Bharti Airtel dropped 1.99 per cent amid its subsidiary Bharti Hexacom announcing the launch of its Rs 4,275-crore IPO on April 3 at a price band of Rs 542 to Rs 570 per share. HDFC Bank declined 1.11 per cent contributing over 106 points to the total fall in Sensex. Reliance Industries fell



0.88 per cent, adding over 77 points to the fall. IT major Wipro dropped 1.5 per cent, Infosys by 1 per cent and TCS by 0.92 per cent and were a major drag on key indices. Kotak Mahindra Bank, UltraTech Cement, and Asian Paints were also among the losers. Bajaj Finance, NTPC, Larsen & Toubro, Axis Bank, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank and Bajaj Finserv were among the gainers. "Aligned with global trends, the domestic market sustained

its consolidation pattern, ending close to 22,000. While key data such as US GDP and inflation during the week may provide some clues on future rate cut paths, the fiscal year-ending truncated week, coupled with reduced trading volumes and monthly expiry, are likely to contribute to volatility. "Generally, midcaps are performing well post the consolidation of the last 2-3 weeks, while the IT sector continued to experience sluggishness following weak global IT spending forecasts,"



said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.11 per cent while midcap index climbed 0.71 per cent. Among the indices, teck fell by 0.83 per cent, IT dipped by 0.57 per cent, bankex by 0.51 per cent and financial services by 0.26 per cent. Services jumped 1.48 per cent, really climbed 1.45 per cent, industrials (0.95 per cent) and oil & gas (0.84 per cent) were among the gainers.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled lower, while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the positive territory. European markets were trading mostly in the green. Wall Street ended lower on Monday. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,309.76 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Equity markets were closed on Monday for Hol. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.17 per cent to USD 86.60 a barrel.



## IRDAI issues series of regulations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Insurance regulator IRDAI has notified a host of regulations, including on surrender charges wherein insurers have to disclose such charges upfront. IRDAI (Insurance Products) Regulations, 2024 merge six regulations into a unified framework aimed at enabling insurers to swiftly respond to evolving market demands, enhancing the ease of conducting business, and boosting insurance penetration. These regulations promote good governance in product design and pricing, including strengthening the principles governing guaranteed surrender value & special surrender value along with disclosures thereof, IRDAI said in a statement. It also ensures that the insurers adopt sound management practices for effective oversight and due diligence, it said. These regulations, which will be effective April 1, 2024, stipulate that the surrender value is expected to remain the same or even lower if policies are surrendered within three years of the purchase. For policies that have been surrendered from the fourth to the seventh year, the surrender value may see a minor increase, it said. A surrender value in insurance refers to the amount paid by the insurers to the policyholder upon terminating the policy before its maturity date. If the policyholder surrenders during the policy tenure, the earnings and savings portion will be paid to him or her. The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) at its meeting held on March 19 approved eight principle-based consolidated regulations, following the comprehensive

review of the regulatory framework for the insurance sector. These regulations encompass pivotal domains such as safeguarding policyholders' interests, rural and social sector responsibilities, electronic insurance marketplace, insurance products and operation of foreign reinsurance branches, as well as aspects of registration, actuarial, finance, investment and corporate governance. This comes after the notification of the first consolidated regulation on Expenses of Management of Insurers in January 2024. "It marks a significant milestone in regulatory governance which has replaced 34 regulations with six regulations and introduction of two new regulations enhancing clarity and coherence in the regulatory landscape," the IRDAI said in a statement. The process involved extensive consultations with diverse stakeholders, including insurance industry, experts, and public at large ensuring a comprehensive consideration of varied perspectives in shaping the revised framework, it said. The IRDAI (Rural, Social Sector, and Motor Third Party Obligations) Regulations, 2024 consolidate 2 erstwhile regulations pertaining to minimum business obligations in rural, social sector and motor third party business for insurers, as mandated under the Insurance Act, 1938, it said. Compliance and measurement of these statutory obligations have been revised where the unit of measurement under the rural obligations will now be Gram Panchayat, the scope of social sector has been extended to cover cardholders and beneficiaries under various schemes, it said. Under the Motor Third Party

Obligations, the unit of measurement will be the renewal of insurance coverage to goods-carrying vehicles, passenger-carrying vehicles and tractors, it said. Besides, the IRDAI (Registration and Operations of Foreign Reinsurers Branches & Lloyd's India) Regulations, 2024 consolidate two regulations and aims to foster the systematic development of the reinsurance sector in India by promoting orderly growth and harmonizing the existing legal and regulatory framework. These regulations seek to streamline the operations of entities engaged in reinsurance operations, it said. By promoting transparency and stability, these regulations aim to create a conducive environment for the growth and expansion of the reinsurance sector, ultimately benefiting both insurers and policyholders in India, it said. At the same time, the IRDAI (Protection of Policyholders' Interests and Allied Matters of Insurers) Regulations, 2024 consolidate eight regulations into a unified structure, focusing on several key objectives aimed at ensuring fair treatment of prospects during solicitation and sale of insurance policies and protecting the interests of policyholders throughout their engagement with insurers and distribution channels. These regulations emphasize the adoption of standard procedures and best practices by insurers and distribution channels to fulfill their obligations towards policyholders, including grievance redressal and policyholder-centric governance, it said. Additionally, it said, the regulations aim to promote prudent practices in risk management related to outsourcing activities by insurers.

## LIC world strongest insurance brand: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Insurance behemoth Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has emerged as the strongest insurance brand globally, according to a report Brand Finance Insurance 100 2024. The report said that LIC's brand value remains steady at USD 9.8 billion, accompanied by a brand strength index score of 88.3 and an associated AAA brand strength rating. Following LIC, the rankings highlight Cathay Life Insurance as the second strongest brand, experiencing a 9 per cent increase in brand value to USD 4.9 billion, closely followed by NRMA Insurance, which saw an 82 per cent rise in brand value to USD 1.3 billion, according to a statement by Brand Finance Insurance. Notably, Chinese insurance brands maintain dominance in the global rankings, with Ping An leading with a 4 per cent increase in brand value to USD 33.6 billion, followed by China Life Insurance and CPIC defending their 3rd and 5th



positions, respectively, it said. Allianz from Germany and AXA from France retain their spots in the 2nd and 4th positions to complete the Top 5, it said. Among the brands experiencing significant growth in brand value, NRMA Insurance from Australia stands out with an 82 per cent increase to USD 1.3 billion, along with Denmark's Tryg, which saw a 66 per cent rise to USD 1.6 billion. Additionally, LIC India achieved the highest first-year premium collection of Rs 39,090 crore in FY23, while SBI Life Insurance

and HDFC Life Insurance led the private sector with new business premium collections of Rs 15,197 crore and Rs 10,970 crore, respectively. In recent developments, the government approved a 17 per cent wage revision for LIC employees, effective from August 2022, benefiting over 110,000 employees. LIC's shares also reached an all-time high of Rs 1,175, making it India's most valuable PSU company and reclaiming its status as the fifth most valuable Indian listed company, surpassing SBI in market valuation.

## Nissan to launch three all new models in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Japanese auto major Nissan Motor Co Ltd plans to launch three all-new models in India by fiscal year 2026 and make the country a hub for exports under its new global business plan to drive value and strengthen competitiveness, according to a company statement. Under the new plan, which is split into mid-term imperatives for fiscal years 2024 through 2026, and mid-long-term actions to be carried out through 2030, the company is targeting additional 10 lakh unit sales compared to fiscal year 2023. Globally, Nissan plans to launch 30 new models over the next three years, of which 16 will be electrified, and 14 will be ICE (international combustion engine) models, to meet the diversified customer needs in markets where the pace of electrification differs, the company said. It plans to launch a total of 34 electrified models from fiscal year 2024 and 2030 to cover all segments, with the model mix of electrified vehicles expected to account for 40 per cent global-



ly by fiscal year 2026 and rise to 60 per cent by the end of the decade. In India, the company said it would "launch three all-new models and become a hub for exports, at a level of 1,00,000 units". The company on Monday launched "The Arc", its new business plan to drive value and strengthen competitiveness. "The Arc plan shows our path to the future. It illustrates our continuous progression and ability to navigate changing market conditions. This plan will enable us to go further and faster in driving value and competitiveness. Faced with extreme market volatility, Nissan is taking decisive actions guided by the new plan to ensure sustainable growth and profitability," Nissan President and Chief Executive Officer Makoto Uchida said.

## Zee identifies verticals for critical assessment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Zee Entertainment has decided to have a "critical assessment" of some of its business verticals to reduce losses and enhance performance levels to achieve key performance metrics. The company has formed a Monthly Management Mentorship, called 3M Program, which will guide and enable the management team to achieve key performance metrics, including a targeted 20 per cent EBITDA margin, as proposed by its MD & CEO recently, said a statement from Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL). The 3M Program Special Committee has identified business verticals such as Margo Networks, which offers internet connectivity under the brand name 'Sugarbox', Teleplay (showing theatre play), and Zindagi, a general entertainment channel which broadcasts short-run programming, rather than ongoing, indefinite series. The list also includes the movie app Weyyak and the English Cluster of Linear TV Business. "The Special Committee has advised that the identified business verticals will need to substantially reduce losses and enhance their performance levels," it said. To drive the 3M Program, the ZEE board has formed a Special Committee



comprising its Chairman R Gopalan and Chairman of the Audit Committee U P Agarwal to review the business performance and provide the required directional guidance, it said. Besides, 3M Program Special Committee has also reviewed the music Business of Zee and advised enhancing the monetisation avenues and subsequently increase the vertical's contribution to the company's bottom line. "It has also advised that the Music Business should focus on further optimising its costs, without losing its leadership position in the market," Zee said. It has also conducted a detailed analysis of the Technology and Innovation Centre (TIC), which had incurred an expenditure of approximately Rs 600 crore last year. The Committee has advised to "reduce the expenditure at the TIC by 50 per cent, for the financial year 2024-25 and utilise its

services to enhance the company's content development, distribution and monetisation approach. Though TIC has developed a substantial level of technology and tools, it needs to focus on return on investment. The Committee has advised the management to "stay focused on its core expertise, ethos and DNA i.e. Content" and to utilise the services of TIC to enhance its content development and distribution process. "It has also advised that the management should leverage the TIC's Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) tools to gain a deeper insight into the consumer profiles," it said. Earlier this month, in an investor's conference call, Zee Chairman had said since 2020 ZEEL's performance has been impacted due to industry-wide macro slowdown, transitory issues, and management bandwidth constraints due to merger activities. The board has also decided to closely monitor the business model and plan presented by the MD & CEO of the company, wherein he has provided the roadmap to improve the performance and efficiency of each of the businesses to achieve higher EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization).

## Amazon invested \$1.2 billion in 2023 to tackle counterfeit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Online marketplace Amazon invested more than USD 1.2 billion and hired about 15,000 experts in 2023 to protect the brand, its sellers, and customers from fraud and counterfeit, according to the Amazon 2023 Brand Protection Report. Amazon said when a customer purchases from the store, they trust they will receive an authentic product, and when businesses choose to sell in the store, they trust Amazon to provide a great selling experience free from competition with bad actors. "In 2023, Amazon invested more than USD 1.2 billion and employed more than 15,000 people, including machine learning scientists, software developers, and expert investigators, who were dedicated to protecting customers, brands, selling partners, and our store from counterfeit, fraud, and



other forms of abuse," it said. Amazon said it uses document forgery detection, advanced image and video verification, and other technologies to confirm the authenticity of government-issued identity documents quickly and whether they match the individual applying to sell in the marketplace. These technologies, it said, coupled with continued innovation in its machine learning-based detection, are deterring bad actors from attempting to create new Amazon selling accounts. "In 2023, Amazon stopped more than 700,000 bad actor attempts

to create new selling accounts, stopping them before they were able to list a single product for sale in our store. This is down from 6 million attempts by bad actors to create new Amazon selling accounts in 2020," the report said. It added that Amazon identified, seized, and appropriately disposed of more than 7 million counterfeit products worldwide in 2023, preventing them from harming customers or being resold elsewhere in the retail supply chain. It added that since its launch in 2020, Amazon's Counterfeit Crimes Unit has pursued more than 21,000 bad actors through litigation and criminal referrals to law enforcement. Since 2020, it said, while the number of products available for sale in the store has grown significantly, the platform saw a more than 30 per cent decrease in the total valid notices of infringement submitted by brands.



## Rupee jumps 33 paise to close at 83.28 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee recovered from all-time low level and appreciated 33 paise to close at 83.28 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday on decline in the US dollar and positive Asian currencies. Forex traders said weak domestic markets and surge in crude oil prices capped sharp gains for the local unit. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.33 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.26 and a low of 83.37. The local unit finally settled at 83.28 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 33 paise from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee depreciated 48 paise to settle at an all-time low of 83.61 against the American currency. Forex and equity markets were closed on Monday on account of Hol. Market analysts said, for the domestic unit, record forex reserves provide a cushion, enabling the Reserve Bank to mitigate the rupee's downside.

**BUSINESS BRIEF**



**VIT-AP HOLDS VLAUNCHPAD 2024**  
**AMARAVATI:** The third Annual National level Business Plan Competition, VLaunchPad 2024, held its Grand Finale and Award Ceremony on March 23. Organised by VIT-AP School of Business (VSB) in collaboration with the Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship Cell (IIEC) of VIT-AP University, the event aimed at promoting creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovative ideas geared towards the development of our nation - Viksit Bharat @ 2047. VLaunchPad 2024 attracted registrations from across India, with over 650 teams representing 72 universities, including prestigious institutes such as IITs, IIITs, IIMs, NITs, and others.

## Shapoorji Pallonji Group sells Gopalpur port to Adani Ports

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Shapoorji Pallonji Group on Tuesday announced the sale of its brownfield Gopalpur Port to Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd for an enterprise value of Rs 3,350 crore, as part of its deleveraging strategy with planned asset monetisation. The under-construction Gopalpur Port in Odisha was acquired in 2017 by the SP Group. Currently, it is capable of handling 20 MTPA. The port had recently signed up with Petronet LNG for setting up a greenfield LNG regasification

terminal, adding predictable long-term cash flows for the port, the group said in a statement. The sale of the Gopalpur Port is the second port divestment in the last few months from the SP Group, a diversified construction and infrastructure, real estate and energy conglomerate. It had earlier divested its Dharamtar Port in Maharashtra to JSW Infrastructure Ltd for an enterprise value of Rs 710 crore. The group had acquired the Dharamtar Port in 2015 and had successfully turned around port operations, increasing

capacity from less than 1 MTPA, when it took over to an expected capacity to handle 5 MTPA in FY24." The planned divestments of Gopalpur Port and Dharamtar Port, at a significant enterprise value, demonstrate our group's ability to turn-around assets and create stakeholder value in a relatively short period of time, capitalising our core strengths in project development and construction," a Shapoorji Pallonji Group spokesperson said. The spokesperson further said, "These divestments are key milestones in our roadmap to reduce group debt."

## SpiceJet shares climb four per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of SpiceJet on Tuesday jumped 4 per cent after the company said it has signed a pact with Export Development Canada (EDC) to settle liabilities worth USD 90.8 million (around Rs 755 crore). The stock climbed 3.93 per cent to settle at Rs 61.06 apiece on the BSE. During the day, it jumped 7.23 per cent to Rs 63. In terms of volume, 93.12 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE during the day. The liabilities stem from a loan acquired by the airline in 2011 for the procurement of 15

aircraft. The terms of the settlement pact will allow the airline to clear major liabilities, leading to a comprehensive revitalisation of the airline's balance sheet, SpiceJet said in a statement on Tuesday. Under the agreement, SpiceJet will acquire full ownership of 13 EDC-financed Q400 aircraft, bolstering the airline's operational capabilities and fleet management, it said. SpiceJet will pay a comprehensive settlement amount to resolve outstanding liabilities amounting to close to USD 91 million, the airline said.



## HOCKEY INDIA AWARDS

# Sreejesh, Savita, Harmanpreet in contention for multiple honours

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran goalkeepers P R Sreejesh and Savita Punia found themselves in contention for the 'Player of the Year' honours in the men's and women's category respectively as Hockey India unveiled nominees for its annual awards which will be presented here on March 31. Sreejesh, a former captain, and Punia have been among the most consistent performers for India and have also been nominated for the goalkeeper of the year award. India men's team captain and defender Harmanpreet Singh has also been shortlisted in two categories. He will be in contention for the player of the year as well as the defender of the year award. The player of the year award in

both categories comes with a prize of Rs 25 lakh each, while the goalkeeping trophy will fetch the winner Rs five lakh. From eight different categories, a total of 32 nominations have made the shortlist for a total prize purse of Rs 7.56 crore, Hockey India said in a press release. "Notably, the pinnacle of the event, the Hockey India Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award, will carry the most substantial cash purse of Rs 30 lakh, honouring an individual's extraordinary contributions to the sport over the years," the HI added. The Jugraj Singh Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Men) and Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Women), which are meant for Under-21 players, offers a cash prize of Rs 10



lakh each. The Pargat Singh Award for Defender of the Year, Ajit Pal Singh Award for Midfielder of the Year, and Dhanraj Pillay Award for Forward of the Year come with a prize of ₹five lakh. "Selecting the nominees proved to be a challenging task, given the outstanding performances showcased by both the men's and women's teams in recent times," said Hockey India President Dilip Kumar Tirkey. "These awards serve as a testament to the dedication, talent, and passion that our athletes, coaches, umpires, and officials bring to the field day in and day out," added secretary general Bhola Nath Singh. The Nominees for the Hockey India Annual Awards:

Goalkeeper of the Year: Mohith HS, PR Sreejesh, Savita Punia, Krishan Bahadur Pathak  
Defender of the Year: Deep Grace Ekka, Amit Rohidas, Harmanpreet Singh, Udita Tete, Hardik Singh, Manpreet Singh, Navneet Kaur  
Forward of the Year: Vandana Kataria, Abhishek, Sukhjeet Singh, Mandeep Singh  
Upcoming Player of the Year (Women — Under 21): Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Deepika, Deepika Soreng, Sunelita Toppo.  
Upcoming Player of the Year (Men — Under 21): Uttam Singh, Amir Ali Vishnukant Singh, Arajjeet Singh Hundal  
Player of The Year (Women): Savita Punia, Salima Tete, Vandana Kataria, Navneet Kaur.

## Sathiyam jumps 43 places to reach 60th spot

### Sreeja rises to career-high 40 in ITTF rankings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leading Indian table tennis player G Sathiyam on Tuesday leapfrogged 43 places to be 60 while Sreeja Akula rose to a career-high 40 in the ITTF World Rankings, following their WTT Feeder Series title wins last week. Sathiyam, who has a career-best ranking of 24, had dropped out of the top 100 recently. The title in Beirut earned him 125 points. Veteran Sharath Kamal, who has dropped a place to be 35, continues to be the top-ranked Indian. Manav Thakkar and Harmeet Desai also find themselves in the top 100. Manav, who reached the men's doubles final in the WTT Feeder last week, has moved 11 spots to be 63, while Harmeet has dropped two places to be 67.



Like Sathiyam, the 25-year-old Sreeja who won her second WTT singles career title on Sunday. Manika Batra held on to her 38th spot in the women's singles rankings while Archana Kamath advanced 13 places to be 99. India has already qualified for the team events at the Paris Olympics. Two singles entries in men's and women's singles will be decided by the Table Tennis Federation of India by May 16 after considering the world rankings at the time.

## BOXING SUB JUNIOR NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

# Haryana crowned champions

PTI ■ GREATER NOIDA

Haryana clinched the team titles in both the boys and girls categories with an impressive combined haul of 19 medals at the boxing Sub Junior National Championship here. Haryana, the reigning champions in the girls section, successfully defended their title after finishing on top of the table with 64 points. They won 10 medals including seven gold, one silver and two bronze. Haryana boxers stamped their authority with a dominating display as six out of seven boxers won comfortably with unanimous 5-0 decisions. Diya (61kg) continued her phenomenal form with a convincing 5-0 win over Delhi's Yashika. She was also adjudged the best boxer. The other gold medallists for Haryana in the girls category were Bhoomi (35kg), Nischal Sharma (37kg), Rakhi (43kg), Naitik (52kg), Navya (55kg) and Sukhreet (64kg).



Delhi and Maharashtra finished second and third with 34 and 31 points respectively. Boxers from

three silver and two bronze medals. Bronze medallist Hillang (37kg) of Arunachal Pradesh secured the most promising boxer award in the girls category. Haryana boxers showcased their might in the boys category as well, winning nine medals which included six gold, two silver and one bronze to secure the first position with 62 points. Uday Singh led Haryana's domination with 5-0 victory in 37kg against S Sujith of Tamil Nadu. Nitin (40kg), Ravi Sihag (49kg), Lakshay (52kg), Naman (58kg) and Anmol Dahiya (64kg) also won their respective finals to give Haryana a perfect end to their impressive campaign. Uttarakhand finished second with 34 points (three gold and three silver medals) followed by UP (one gold, three silver, one bronze medal). The tournament witnessed the participation of 612 boxers, including 337 boys and 275 girls.



## Murray sustains serious ankle injury

AP ■ MIAMI GARDEN

Three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray said he suffered a significant ankle injury at the Miami Open that he expects will keep him out for some time. Murray said on an Instagram post Monday he had a "full rupture" of the anterior talofibular ligament (ATFL) and a "near full thickness rupture" of the calcaneofibular ligament (CFL). He said he will see an ankle specialist to determine what's next. "Goes without saying this is a tough one to take and I'll be out for an extended period,"

Murray continued. "But I'll be back with 1 hip and no ankle ligaments when the time is right." Murray had hip resurfacing surgery in 2019. He lost to Tomas Machac 5-7, 7-5, 7-6 (5) on Sunday. "I obviously still love competing and still love the game, but it obviously gets harder and harder the older you get to compete with the young guys and keep your body fit and fresh," Murray said in an on-court interview after a win in Dubai last month. "I probably don't have too long left, but I'll do as best as I can these last few months."

## Flamengo striker Barbosa suspended for two years in doping fraud case

AP ■ SAO PAULO

Brazilian striker Gabriel Barbosa was suspended for two years following a doping fraud investigation. The country's Anti-Doping Sports Court of Justice voted 5-4 to punish Barbosa to April 2025. He brought attention to himself by his erratic behavior during a surprise test on April 8, 2023, one day before Flamengo played the Rio de Janeiro state championship. Anti-doping officers who came to test players at the club training ground were largely ignored by Barbosa, who took his test hours after his teammates. Barbosa's lawyers argued his blood test at the time, which is considered a more effective test, proved he was clean, and added his unfriendly behavior toward the officers



did not mean he tricked the test. "Despite my respect for the court, I stress that I never tried to obstruct or fraud any test. I trust that I will be found not guilty in my appeal," Barbosa said on his social media channels. "Since the beginning of my career as a footballer I always

followed the rules of the game and I never used prohibited substances. I have been a subject of dozens of tests, they all came negative, which shows my commitment with my club and with Brazilian fans." Flamengo said "there was no fraud, not even an attempted fraud."

"The club received the decision with surprise and will help the athlete in his representation at the Court for Arbitration of Sport," it added in a statement. Nicknamed Gabigol, the 27-year-old Barbosa is in the final year of his contract with Flamengo, which has given him national acclaim after failed stints at Inter Milan and Benfica. The striker was part of Brazil's Olympic gold medal squad at the Rio Olympics in 2016. He left that year for Europe but returned to Santos in 2018, and became one of the most prolific scorers in Brazil. He moved to Flamengo in 2019 and helped it win two Copa Libertadores and two Brazilian leagues. But he has been benched since former Brazil coach Tite took over at Flamengo last October.

## Bopanna, Ebden advance to Miami Open quarterfinals



PTI ■ MIAMI GARDENS (US)

Indian tennis player Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden moved to the men's doubles quarterfinals of the Miami Open with a hard-fought win against Hugo Nys and Jan Zieliński here. Top seeds Bopanna and Ebden toiled for one hour 39 minutes before pulling off a 7-5 7-6 (3) win over Monegasque Nys and

Poland's Zieliński in the second round of the ATP Masters 1000 on Monday night. The 43-year-old Bopanna and Ebden will take on Australia's John Patrick Smith and Netherlands Sem Verbeek. The reigning Australian Open champions hit four aces and won 84 per cent (37/44) of their first serve points. The match was contested on an even keel. Bopanna and Ebden broke Nys and Zieliński in the 11th game to take a 6-5 lead. They then fought off a late challenge, saving a couple of break points before taking the 12th game and the opening set. There was not much separating the two pairs in the second set as well with both of them holding serve till 6-6 to take the match to the tiebreaker.



## Top ranked Iga, Coco knocked out of Miami Open

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS (US)

Top-ranked Iga Swiatek and U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff have been knocked out of the Miami Open. Swiatek lost to Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-4, 6-2 on Monday night, hours after the third-seeded Gauff fell in three sets to No. 23 Caroline Garcia 6-3, 1-6, 6-2. In the men's draw, top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz advanced to the round of 16 with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Gael Monfils. Garcia defeated her second straight Grand Slam champion to reach Miami's quarterfinals. She ousted four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka 7-6 (4), 7-5 on Sunday. Garcia said it had been a while since she had a victory over a top-10 opponent like Gauff. "You keep working and trying to stay positive about what's coming, that it's going to pay off," she said. "Sometimes, it's very hard. But I'm lucky enough to have very good people behind me to help me and stay positive when I'm

struggling." "It means a lot to have this little reward and keep going in the tournament," she said. Also moving into the quarterfinals was No. 4 seed Elena Rybakina, who defeated 17th-seeded American Madison Keys 6-3, 7-5. Rybakina will next face No. 8 seed Maria Sakkari, who advanced to her second Miami Open quarterfinal when Anna Kalinskaya, seeded 22nd, withdrew with a right thigh injury. Victoria Azarenka, who's won the Australian Open twice, made the quarterfinals with a 7-5, 6-1 victory over Katie Boulter. Yulia Putintseva also advanced, defeating No. 27 seed Anhelina Kalinina straight sets, 6-4, 7-6 (5), and No. 5 seed Jessica Pegula beat Emma Navarro 7-6 (1), 6-3. Alcaraz will next face Lorenzo Musetti, who beat Ben Shelton 6-4, 7-6 (5). Alexander Zverev, the fourth seed, defeated Christopher Eubanks 7-6 (4), 6-3, and No.

## Germany to impose security checks on all its borders during soccer European Championship

AP ■ BERLIN

Germany will carry out Gborder controls at all its frontiers during soccer's European Championship in June and July, the country's top security official told local media. Interior Minister Nancy Faeser told the daily Rheinische Post in comments published Tuesday that checks will be carried out at all German borders during the tournament "to be able to prevent possible violent criminals entering." She added that "this is necessary to protect this major international event as best possible."

Authorities' focus is on protection against Islamic and other extremists, hooligans and others, and securing networks against cyberattacks, she said. Faeser's comments come shortly after the attack on a suburban Moscow concert hall that was claimed by an affiliate of the Islamic State group. However, the decision to restore border checks during the soccer tournament had long been expected. It has become standard practice for countries in Europe's nominally ID check-free travel zone known as the Schengen area during big sports events and major summits.



Germany already is carrying out checks on its eastern and southern borders with Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria and Switzerland as a result of concerns over migration. The European Championship starts June 14, with host Germany playing Scotland in the opening match in Munich. The final will be played in Berlin on July 14. Italy followed France on Monday in stepping up security after the Moscow attack. Faeser's ministry said Monday that while the threat from Islamic extremists remains acute, German authorities' risk assessment hasn't changed so far as a result of the attack.





# MI, SRH LOOK TO MAKING WINING COMEBACKS

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Mumbai Indians will aim to land the killer punch after fluffing an easy run-chase in their opener when they meet a dangerous Sunrisers Hyderabad in the Indian Premier League here on Wednesday.

Five-time champions MI had a lot going for them in their tournament opener against the Gujarat Titans, whether it was the incisive spells from pacer Jasprit Bumrah, Dewald Brevis' impactful knock or Rohit Sharma's fireworks at the top of the order.

But MI, who have built a reputation of slow starters over the years, could not manage 48 runs off 36 balls with seven wickets in hand. With the 10-team event being more competitive than ever before, Mumbai cannot afford more such lackadaisical performances going forward.

In his first game as Mumbai captain, Hardik pushed himself down the order at number seven to accommodate the likes of Tim David and Brevis higher up.

Considering he batted much higher for the Gujarat Titans last year, there is a case for him to bat higher up the order.

Opener Ishan Kishan, back to action after a long break, could

only last four balls against GT. With the T20 World Cup in mind, his performances will be tracked closely and have added significance. He needs to be at his best with the bat and behind the stumps to make the national squad.

Hardik will also be expecting an improved performance from spinners Shams Mulani and Piyush Chawla.

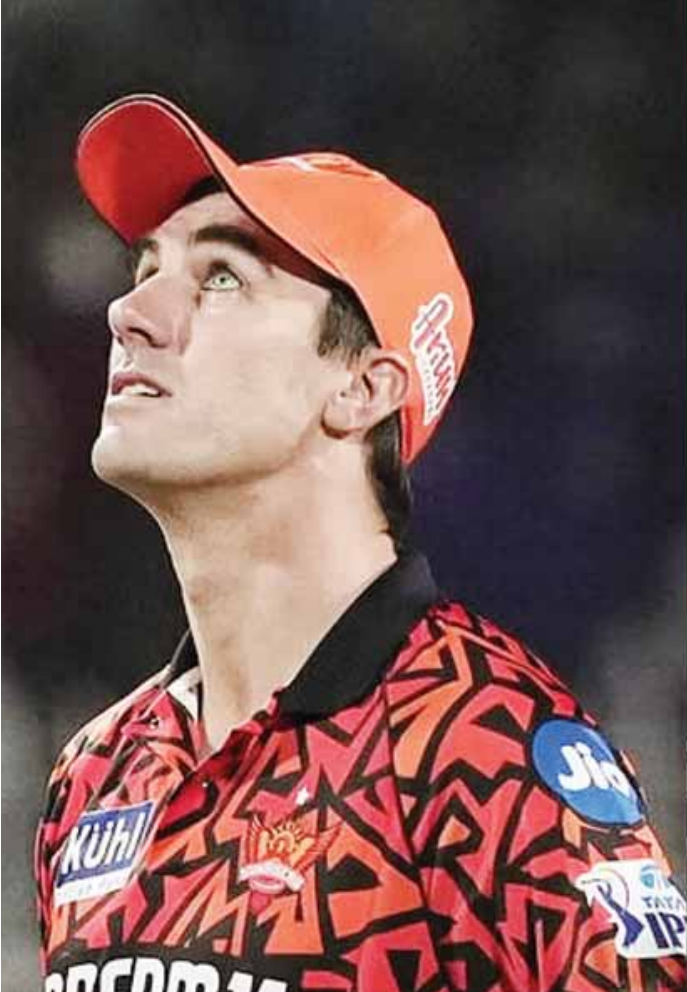
They face SRH on their home turf and the Pat Cummins-led side showed against Kolkata Knight Riders what they are capable of. The big-hitting Heinrich Klaasen almost got them over the line from a hopeless situation though the rest of the batters put up below par performances.

The opening duo of Mayank Agarwal and Abhishek Sharma has shown promise but would also need to be consistent if SRH are to do well in the competition.

SRH have invested heavily in pinch hitter Abdul Samad and it is high time he delivers on the promise.

The seasoned Bhuvneshwar Kumar was Andre "Russelled" on Saturday night and will look to bounce back strongly.

"Tough job in cricket to bowl to someone like him (Russell). It's one of those ones which goes one way or the other. Who would have thought we



would have got that close? Unfortunately, a bit too much. Lots to be encouraged by. A couple of points to work on also," Cummins said after the narrow loss at Eden Gardens.

### SQUADS:

**Mumbai Indians:** Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan, Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kvena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Vishnu Vinod, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood, Suryakumar Yadav.

**Sunrisers Hyderabad:** Pat Cummins (c), Abdul Samad, Abhishek Sharma, Aiden Markram, Travis Head, Wanindu Hasaranga, Marco Jansen, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Glenn Phillips, Sanvir Singh, Heinrich Klaasen, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mayank Agarwal, T. Natarajan, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Markande, Upendra Singh Yadav, Umran Malik, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Shahbaz Ahmed, Jaydev Unadkat, Akash Singh, Jhathavedh Subramanyan.

## Mahipal adds depth to RCB batting

PTI ■ BENGALURU

On a balmy Monday night, Mahipal Lomror gave Royal Challengers Bengaluru two tantalising options — an 'Impact Player' who can yank the match away from the opposition and a potential successor to Dinesh Karthik, their designated finisher who is playing his last IPL season.

Lomror, who replaced Yash Dayal during the chase of 177 as Impact sub, made an eight-ball 17 and assisted Karthik (28, 10b) in knocking off 47 runs in 22 balls that powered RCB to a four-wicket win over Punjab Kings.

But his maiden foray into the world of 'Impact Players' taught Lomror how "weird" that role could be, particularly because of its hurried nature.

"To be honest, it (being an Impact Player) was quite weird when I went into bat. The Impact Player rule is such that you have to be ready as you can get a call at any time to go in," said Lomror in the post-match press conference.

However, the 24-year-old said the RCB management had communicated the possibility of him being used as the substitute player against Punjab.

"As the name suggests, you have to make an impact on the game from the word go. The management had discussed it last night. They told me: 'If we are chasing, we might use you down the order.' So mentally, I was prepared."

During the IPL 2023, RCB had availed the 'Impact Player' option in 12 matches out of 14,



and Anuj Rawat came in twice as the No. 8 finisher, similar to what Lomror did against PBKS at the Chinnaswamy Stadium.

On the other 10 occasions, it was either a bowler or a top/middle-order batter who walked in as 'Impact Player'.

However, Rawat could not make the desired impact as he could score only 16 runs off 27 balls in those two games.

Perhaps, that failed experiment prompted the RCB thinktank to give that duty to the big-hitting Lomror in this IPL.

The Rajasthan-born player, who joined Royal Challengers ahead of IPL 2022 from Rajasthan Royals, was ready for the grind too as it was his best chance to get a place in the eleven.

"This is what the team management wants me to prepare for. They are very clear because we have a really strong batting lineup, and this is the only place where they can use me,"

he said.

Lomror has been quietly upskilling himself at nets once the RCB top brass conveyed their decision.

"Earlier, I used to bat up the order, and that gave me more balls to bat. But now as an Impact sub, there's not going to be many balls to play. So, whenever I'm going into nets, I just try and hit boundaries from the very first ball," he offered.

But polishing the skills against your own teammates or local trundlers at nets is quite different from what a batter gets in a real match situation.

Lomror, though, aced the test against proven performers like Arshdeep Singh and Sam Curran at a stadium with an unusually gripping pitch that made shot-making a tricky proposition.

He, however, reduced the equation to 43 off 21 balls and thereby the pressure on Karthik

too with a first-ball boundary off left-arm pacer Curran.

But Lomror soon bettered that effort against Arshdeep. On the third ball of the 18th over, he smoked the left-arm quick over the cow-corner for a six and in the next ball pulled him for a four through backward square leg.

That over had started with RCB needing 36 runs from 18 balls and three balls later it became a more comfortable 24 runs from 14 balls.

Lomror was not hesitant to give a slice of credit to his senior partner Karthik for keeping his pulse against racing.

"I think batting with him makes things really easy. He has some 15-17 years of experience in IPL. He was telling me to stay calm and focus on the next ball, not to get overexcited or not to get too aggressive," he said.

The apprentice has certainly left the master a beaming man.

## Rachin, Dube power CSK to 206/5 against Gujarat Titans

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Rachin Ravindra started with a bang and Shivam Dube finished with a flourish as Chennai Super Kings posted a commendable 206 for 5 against Gujarat Titans in an IPL match here on Tuesday.

Rachin made full use of the Powerplay, racing to 46 off 20 balls while Dube, a nightmare for spinners, then used his long levers to whack 51 in only 23 deliveries to increase the challenge of GT batters by manifold.

Dube's innings had as many as five sixes.

In between, skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's chiselled 46 off 36 balls also was a significant contribution in another impactful batting performance by the team on a hard bouncy track that was on offer.

Not to forget CSK's Rs 7.60 crore recruit Sameer Rizvi (14 off 6 balls), who pummelled Rashid Khan (2/49 in 4 overs) for two sixes to mark a memorable IPL debut.

Rachin, who has already become a darling of the CSK fans, enthralled all and sundry with his audacious stroke-play. While he missed out again on a half-century but team's 'spiritual skipper' Mahendra Singh Dhoni would be all smiles knowing that his choice was perfect to the T.

The three sixes — a flick



behind the square and one over long-on off the normally profligate Umesh Yadav and one off Azmatullah Omarzai were hit with so much disdain that it did put Gujarat Titans in a spot.

There were some crunchy cover drives as well as Ravindra let his skipper Gaikwad breathe a little easy at the other end.

Finally, it was GT's 'Go-To' bowler Rashid, who drew the first blood but more because of smart work from Wriddhiman Saha, who

removed the bails in a flash after the Black Caps opener lost his balance and moved out of his crease trying to whip the delivery.

Saha's next stumping was way easier as Sai Kishore shortened the length and drew Ajinkya Rahane out of his crease for an indiscreet loft. The ball deviated enough and the keeper completed mere formality.

Gaikwad wasn't as fluent as Rachin to begin with but in his five boundaries and a six, he oozed class before

becoming Saha's third victim with the gloves, trying to pull Spencer Johnson, only to end up edging one behind the stumps.

After that it was Dube, who just plonked his front-foot and bludgeoned Sai Kishore for two monstrous sixes and also sent Johnson's delivery soaring for a maximum.

Dube had the composed Daryl Mitchell for company, who also chipped in with an unbeaten 20-ball 24 in a stand of 57 runs for the fourth wicket in 5.5 overs.

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Not just a marketable name to promote T20 cricket, he's still got the game. This was the subtle message Virat Kohli sent out amid unfounded chatter surrounding his place in the side ahead of the World Cup's debut appearance in the United States.

Kohli, who is back after a two-month paternity break, scored a match-winning 77 off 49 balls for Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday night against Punjab Kings and deservedly walked away with the player of the match honours.

"I know my name is nowadays quite attached to just promoting the game in many parts of the world when it comes to T20 cricket. But, I've still got it, I guess," said the 35-year-old father of two in the post-match presentation.

His comments came in the backdrop of never-ending media speculation surrounding the team's composition for the big event to be jointly hosted by the USA and the West Indies starting June 1.

Former players like Kevin Pietersen have asked whether Kohli would make the Indian squad purely on merit or for being a megastar who will pull

## My name these days is attached to just promoting T20 cricket but I have still got it: Kohli

in fans. Kohli averages over 50 in the format and has a strike rate of 138.15.

On Monday night, hallmark of Kohli's classy knock was the way he stepped out to dispatch the fast bowlers over the extra cover boundary.

The former India captain has nothing left to prove but he realises the need for constant evolution in T20 format.

"Well I mean you have to (make additions to your game)," he said when asked about going aerial against the pacers on the off-side.

"People know I play the cover drive pretty well so they're not going to allow me to hit gaps and with guys like KG (Kagiso Rabada) and Arshdeep (Singh) as well, he's tall. So, I mean, if they're hitting length, you have to create some momentum in the ball.

"And once you're closer to the ball, you kind of negate the bounce that's going to happen. You meet it earlier. So, I mean, you have to come up with a game plan here and there and try to keep improving your



game," he explained at the post-match presentation.

**IT WAS SURREAL NOT TO BE RECOGNISED FOR**

**TWO MONTHS:** Kohli had missed the five-match Test series against England as he was overseas for the birth of

his second child. The long break allowed him to spend much needed quality time with his family and not being

recognised on the streets was something that he enjoyed the most.

"We were not in the country.

We were at a place where people were not recognising us. Just time together as a family, just to feel normal for two months. For me, for us as a family, it was a surreal experience.

"Of course, having two kids, things become totally different from a family perspective. So just the ability to be together, the connections that you make with your older child, it's amazing.

"I mean, I couldn't have been more grateful to God for the opportunity that I got to spend time with my family."

For Kohli, not being mobbed is a luxury and he loved every bit of his time away from the limelight.

"And yeah, just the place that we were in, I was telling the guys (RCB teammates) that when we came back, the voices back home felt that much louder.

"I couldn't look up because I was just not used to being called my name for two months. And then immediately you hear these

loud noises and then you're back in it all again.

"But it was beautiful. It's an amazing experience to just be another person on the road and not be recognised and just carry on about life that normally people would on a daily basis," he said.

Kohli is also forever grateful to the loyal and passionate RCB fans who keep backing the team that is yet to win the IPL.

"It's been going on for years and you know, people talk about a lot of other things when you play sport. The achievements, the stats, the numbers. Look at the end of the day when you look back you're not going to think of the numbers and the stats.

"It's the memories that you create. Famously, Rahul bhai (India head coach) in the change room nowadays says exactly the same to us. When you play, you play your heart out because you're going to miss these times when you're with your friends in the change room playing in front of fans.

"So the relationship that's happened organically over so many years it's something that I can never ever forget. Just the love and the appreciation and the backing I've received for so many years that's been amazing," Kohli added.