



OPINION 6
ADDRESSING THE
POLL CONUNDRUM

WORLD 9
ISRAEL RAIDS GAZA
HOSPITAL AGAIN

MONEY 10
MARKETS CLOSE HIGHER
IN VOLATILE TRADE

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

Late City Vol.160 Issue 77
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

LUCKNOW, TUESDAY MARCH 19, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



KOHLI JOINS
RCB TRAINING
CAMP
12 SPORTS

BJP finalises Bihar seat deal

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI/PATNA

In a very significant as well as on an interesting note, the BJP on Monday sealed the Lok Sabha seat sharing with its partners in NDA, including Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led JD(U) and amplifying the base of Chirag Paswan-led LJP faction while completely downgrading the LJP-led by Union Minister Pashupati Paras Paswan. Sources said Paras may quit the Modi Cabinet in a couple of days and either may contest Lok Sabha as an independent candidate or join the RJD-Congress led INDIA Bloc. As per the announcement by Bihar NDA partners, the BJP will contest 17 constituencies, the JD(U) 16 and Chirag Paswan's LJP (Ram Vilas) five, while Pashupati's LJP was left with nil. Two other NDA allies — Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) and Upendra Kushwaha-led Rashtriya Lok Morcha — will contest one seat each. Vinod Tawde, the BJP's in-charge for elections in Bihar, announced the seat sharing formula at the BJP headquarters, along with partners of the State. Tawde expressed confidence that the NDA will win all 40 seats in the State. It had bagged 39 seats in 2019. After Nitish returned to the NDA fold recently, the BJP was able to flex itself and contest on more seats than JD(U). In the 2019 Lok Sabha, both parties had



contested 17 seats each while the then undivided Lok Janshakti Party headed by Ram Vilas Paswan had fought six. The BJP and the LJP had won all of their seats while the JD(U) had bagged 16. "The BJP will contest 17 out of the total 40 seats and the JD(U) will contest 16. The Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) will contest five seats," Tawde said. Bihar LJP (Ram Vilas) chief Raju Tiwari said Chirag Paswan will contest

the Hajipur Lok Sabha seat, which has been given to the party under the seat-sharing pact for the 2024 polls. Paswan's estranged uncle Paras represents the constituency in the outgoing Lok Sabha and had been pitching his claim over it. Bihar BJP chief Samrat



Choudhary said talks are going on with Paras, who has already expressed displeasure with the national party after it sealed its alliance with Paswan a few days back. Tawde informed the BJP will contest Paschim Purvi Aurangabad, Araria, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Maharajganj, Saran, Ujijapur, Begusarai, Nawada, Patna Sahib, Patliputra, Arrah, Buxar and Sasaram. The JD(U) will field its candidates from Valmikinagar, Sitamarhi, Jhanjharpur, Supaul, Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia, Madhepura, Gopalganj, Siwan, Bhagalpur, Banka, Munger, Nalanda, Jehanabad and Sheohar, he said. While the LJP (Ram Vilas) will field its candidates from Vaishali, Hajipur, Samastipur, Khagaria and Jamui Lok Sabha seats, former Bihar Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi-led HAM will join the fray from the Gaya Lok Sabha seat while the RLM from Karakat. All three main parties have been given the seats they won in 2019 barring a few changes to accommodate two smaller parties. The Sheohar seat has shifted from the BJP's quota to the JD(U), while Nawada was obtained from the LJP. The JD(U) ceded its claim on Karakat and Gaya, both of which it won in 2019, to accommodate the two new allies. Sources said Paras who was brought in Modi Cabinet after the demise of Ram Vilas Paswan who held the fort then, successfully broke the LJP by claiming to be the original one while Chirag was ignored.

Continued on Page 8

Some parties dodge donor disclosure

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After the electoral bonds data was released as part of the disclosure of 2018-19, some political parties have 'shied' away to acknowledge donors and said they were unaware of the 'content' in the packet delivered at their premises at some point of time while the maximum amount of recipients of funds the BJP, the Congress, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) have not shared any details about their donors. Some said they received the funding instruments through "drop box" or by post without any name. In a related development, the Supreme Court on Monday directed the State Bank of India (SBI) to disclose all details related to electoral bonds, including the date of purchase and redemption, the name of the purchaser and recipient, denomination, and alphanumeric numbers and serial bonds. The court also ordered chairman of SBI Dinesh Kumar Khara, to file an affidavit by 5 pm on Thursday, indicating that all details in its custody have been disclosed and that no details have been withheld. The data related to electoral bonds disclosed that the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) mentioned "not readily available" in the column for listing out the names of



donors while the Trinamool Congress (TMC) said the electoral bonds were sent to the party office and were "dropped in the drop box". The party said some bonds were sent through messengers from various persons who wished to support the party, many of whom prefer to remain anonymous. The NCP, then led by Sharad Pawar, expressed inability to furnish details of donors against each bond as the party had not maintained details or issued any receipts. The letter by the NCP to the Election Commission said several of its office-bearers were busy with the election campaign. "Wherever possible we have indicated the name of the person through whom bonds were received by the party," the NCP said. The BJP cited the amendments to the Representation of People Act,

1951 and the relevant portions of the Reserve Bank of India Act and the Income Tax Act for not revealing its donors. "It is duly submitted that the electoral bonds were introduced with the aim of bringing only accounted funds in political funding while protecting the donors from any consequences, therefrom," the BJP said in its letter to the Election Commission. The Congress shot off a letter to the State Bank of India (SBI) seeking details of donors of electoral bonds, the amount, the bank account in which it was credited and the date. The SBI responded to the Congress that the details of the electoral bonds were available with the political parties and shared the statement of the bank account which was shared with the Commission. The DMK, which received most of its donations from a lottery firm, reached out to its donors to seek details of the electoral bonds as demanded by the Supreme Court in 2019. The DMK, which received almost 77 per cent of its funds from lottery king Santiago Martin's Future Gaming, said it had reached out to the donors of the party to get details of the donations they had made.

Continued on Page 8

Modi, Rahul engage in verbal duel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD

As the campaigning pitch for the Lok Sabha elections gained momentum, political parties on Monday drew attention to the use of the Hindi word 'Shakti' at an Opposition party rally in Mumbai, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi stating that the upcoming polls will be a fight between those who want to destroy "Shakti" and those who worship it. In a counterattack against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his 'Shakti' jibe against him, Modi mentioned that the nation dedicated the success of 'Chandrayaan' to 'Shiv Shakti', and criticised Opposition parties for discussing the destruction of "Shakti". Rahul in his speech on Sunday said, "Our fight against Modi is not on a personal level. Modi is a 'mask' who works for a 'Shakti' (power). He is a shallow man who doesn't have a 56-inch chest." "On Sunday in Mumbai, there was an INDIA alliance rally after the announcement of the schedule for elections. They announced their manifesto at Mumbai's Shivaji Park, and said their fight was against 'Shakti'. For me, every mother and every daughter is a form of 'Shakti'. Mothers and sisters, I worship you as 'Shakti'. I am Bharat Maa's 'pujari', Modi asserted. "INDIA alliance in its manifesto announced to finish/destroy Shakti. I accept their challenge. I will sacrifice my life for the security of mothers and sisters," he further said. The Congress hits back saying the



elections will decide whether the country would be run by 'Asuri Shakti' (demonic power) or 'Daivik Shakti' (divine power). Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray too came in the line of cross fire and hit out at the BJP for criticising him over his opening remarks while addressing the same INDIA Bloc rally in presence of Rahul and other leaders of the Opposition. Thackeray had addressed the audience as his "deshbhakt and deshpremi brothers and sisters" instead of the traditional invocation of "Hindu brothers and sisters" at the Shivaji Park gathering in Mumbai. Thackeray said he used the "deshpremi" word because the INDIA Bloc wanted to save the country and democracy. Under attack for his "fight against

shakti" remark Rahul clarified that he was not talking about any religious power but the 'shakti' of unrighteousness, corruption and falsehood. He accused Modi of twisting his words and said he was speaking about the power of which Modi was wearing the mask. "The 'shakti' (power) that I mentioned, Modi is the mask of that power and we are fighting against it. It is such a power that today it has captured India's voice, India's institutions, the CBI, I-T, ED, Election Commission, the media, Indian industry and the entire constitutional structure of India in its clutches," Rahul said in a social media post. "The same 'shakti' (power) is given India's ports, India's airports, while India's youth is given the gift of 'Agniveer' that breaks their courage. While saluting the same power day and night, the country's media suppresses the truth."

Continued on Page 8

EC removes top bureaucrats ahead of poll

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Monday issued orders for the removal of six Home Secretaries — including the top bureaucrats from Gujarat, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh including the transfer of West Bengal's Director-General of Police Rajiv Kumar, who is considered close to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. The reshuffle, not an uncommon move by the Election Commission before major polls, also includes the transfer of the Home Secretaries of Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, as well as the secretaries of the general administrative departments of the Chief Ministers of Mizoram and Himachal Pradesh. This aims towards upholding the principles of free, fair and transparent for the conduct of 2024 Lok Sabha elections. "The officials who have been removed in these seven States were found to be holding dual charges in the office of Chief Minister in respective States which may potentially compromise or be seen to be compromising the impartiality and neutrality required during the electoral process, especially in matters relating to law and order, deployment of forces," sources said. Sources said the decision to shift the West Bengal DGP was taken as the officer was removed earlier too from active election management-related duty during the 2016 Assembly election in the State and in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The EC has asked the State Chief Secretary to post Rajeev Kumar to a "non-election" related



File photo

assignment, and, as an interim arrangement, post an officer immediately junior to him as DGP. The State has been asked to send a panel of three officers who would be posted as the DGP. Criticising the removal of West Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar, the Trinamool Congress on Monday claimed it was a glaring example of BJP's "control" over the Election Commission (EC). Addressing a Press conference in Kolkata, TMC general secretary Kunal Ghosh claimed that BJP was gripped by the fear of losing the Lok Sabha seats in the state. "The BJP is trying to misuse all institutions, including the EC. They are even meddling with the appointment of the election commissioners by changing the recruitment panel. The step taken today is a glaring example of the BJP's control over the EC," Ghosh said. "It doesn't matter if BJP changes even 100 such officers because the people of Bengal are with Mamata," he added. Elections for the 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal will be held over seven phases, beginning

on April 19. Kumar was appointed as the DGP in December 2023 after the retirement of Manoj Malaviya. Previously, he has served as the chief of Kolkata Police and Bidhannagar Police. He also headed the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Special Task Force (STF), and served as the principal secretary of the department of information technology and electronics. In 2019, the CBI accused Kumar of allegedly suppressing and destroying evidence in the investigation of the Saradha scam while leading a SIT set up by the State Government to probe the matter. This step comes as part of the Commission's resolve and commitment to maintaining a level playing field and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process, which has been emphasised by CEC Rajiv Kumar time and again and recently during the Press Conference for announcement of Schedule for General Elections 2024.

Continued on Page 8



Telangana Governor Tamilisai resigns

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan has tendered her resignation, the Raj Bhavan in Hyderabad said on Monday. Soundararajan, who is also the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry, has submitted her resignation to President Droupadi Murmu. "The Governor of Telangana and Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan has tendered her resignation with immediate effect. The resignation has been submitted to the President of India," an official communique said. The resignation comes in the wake of reports of her plans to contest the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha polls from Tamil Nadu. Soundararajan had contested the 2019 Parliament elections from Thoothukudi seat in southern TN on a BJP ticket and lost to DMK's Kanimozhi.

Robotic elephant to bless devotees in Kochi

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Next time when devotees throng the Thrikkayil Mahadeva Temple at Kochi, they will be blessed by Mahadevan, an elephant resplendent in his golden Nettippattam and other paraphernalia like Aalavattam, Venchamaram and of course the coloured umbrella. As the devotees chant the panchakshara sloka "Nama Shivaya" and "Shivashtakam", Mahadevan, standing three meters tall and weighing 800 kg would clap his ears and wag his tail. He will also bless the devo-

tees by placing his trunk on their heads. The pilgrims can rest assured that Mahadevan would not do anything to upset them. So what makes Mahadevan different from elephants in other temples? He is a mechanical elephant and a peace loving one. "There will not be any threat to the devotees or for that matter anybody because of him. He enjoys the offerings placed in front of him and blesses all those who come in search of divine blessings," Khushboo Gupta, Director of Advocacy Projects, PETA India, working

on animal rights and safety. This is a major relief to festival aficionados across Kerala where elephants paraded in front of temples misbehaving because of factors like psychological issues or musth. When the pachyderms come under the spell of musth, they run amok and attack whoever comes in front of them. The elephant Mahadevan does not belong to this category. Gupta told The Pioneer that this is the second elephant which is being offered to temples in the State. A major controversy is about parading elephants during temple



festivals (known in Malayalam as Pooram) that are held during February to May. "The scorching summer heat takes a heavy toll on the pachyderms and some of them become violent causing major disasters. They are forced to stand throughout the day as musicians play the percussion instruments. It is a matter of prestige for the temple authorities to parade as many elephants as possible," said Gupta. According to Ramesh, an elephant lover from Palakkad, the Arattupuzha Pooram in Thrissur showcases nearly 80

elephants every year while the Thrissur Pooram has a parade featuring 70 elephants. Animal lovers have been crying foul over the cruelty meted out to these innocent animals which are expected to live in dense forests eating wild grass and drinking water from the streams. Elephants, which are forced out of their "residential areas" in deep forest because of deforestation and encroachments by human beings, come to the periphery of the jungles in search of food and water. But the ingenious humans

blame the animals for trespassing into their settlements, a process by which the victims are blamed as aggressors. South Indian actress Priya Mani too joined the PETA in its endeavour to make the festivals a dignified event. Authorities of the Thrikkayil Mahadeva Temple are ready to rent out the services of Mahadevan to other temples so that devotees in those regions too could enjoy a peaceful festival. Now, the mechanical elephants would make critics of "live" elephants keep their mouths shut.

Teams formed to enforce Model Code of Conduct

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The district administration has formed monitoring teams for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. District Magistrate Surya Pal Gangwar, who is also the district election officer, said on Monday that as per the instructions of the Election Commission, the Model Code of Conduct should be effectively implemented in the district and the expenditure limit as well as rules be followed by the political parties, candidates during the election process. He said that to comply with the instructions, all the monitoring teams have been made operational in the district. He said that nine video surveillance teams (VSTs), 27 flying squad teams (FSTs), nine video weaving teams (VVTs), 30 static surveillance teams (SSTs), nine account teams (ATs), and nine assistant expenditure observers have been formed and deployed in every assembly constituency of Lucknow. "The flying squad teams will detect illegal cash exchange, distribution of liquor and any other suspicious items being used or can be used to bribe the voters. Each team will have an incharge, a senior executive magistrate, a police officer, a

videographer and 3-4 armed police personnel," he said. The static surveillance teams will monitor the movement of illegal cash, illicit liquor, or any suspicious item or weapons brought during the elections. The video surveillance teams will videograph the incidents, vehicles, posters and cutouts during the elections. Speeches and events will also be videographed by this team. With mutual coordination, all the teams will have to ensure compliance with the poll code. The district election officer said all the teams must make sure to put their stickers on their vehicles. "Also, all the teams should ensure action while continuously rotating in their respective areas. Presently, rallies and processions have been banned by the Election Commission. If processions, meetings or rallies are organised anywhere, strict action should be taken. Also, if further permission is given by the EC for rallies, processions and meetings, they should be videographed," he added. Meanwhile, Lucknow Municipal Corporation pulled down posters and banners in the city on Monday. Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh said that from government spaces, 107 wall

writings, 290 posters were removed in zone 1; 215 wall writings, 337 posters, 50 banners were removed in zone 2; 85 posters, 16 banners were removed in zone 3, 710 wall writings, 425 posters, 918 banners were removed in zone 4, 55 wall writings, 325 posters, 18 banners were removed in zone 5; 206 posters, 68 banners were removed in zone 6; 525 posters, 250 banners were removed in zone 7; and 110 posters, 70 banners were removed in zone 8. In the private property area, A total of 355 wall writings, 363 posters, 139 banners and 472 other material were removed.

MEETING

With two Indian Premier League (IPL) matches to be played at Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Stadium in Lucknow on March 30 and April 7, District Magistrate Surya Pal Gangwar had a meeting with the stadium officials, BCCI representatives, and Lucknow Super Giant officials to ensure successful organisation. Collaboration between stadium officials and the district administration was stressed for a positive image of Uttar Pradesh. It was emphasised that safety for cricket enthusiasts was paramount, with strict adherence to standards.

Man impersonating STF cop gets CCTV footage deleted in fake raid

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A man claiming to be an STF sub-inspector, along with his aides dressed as cops, forcibly got a CCTV footage deleted during a fake raid at Friends PG Hostel in BBD police station area on March 8. However, he ran out of luck and was arrested along with an aide following a tip-off on Monday. He was identified as Abhishek Srivastava of Balai and his aide as Vijay Chaudhary. As per reports, Abhishek and his aides impersonating STF sleuths conducted a raid at the hostel office when Mrityunjay Tripathi and his friend Rahul Jaiswal of Goel Enclave were sitting there. "Abhishek and his men reached the hostel by an SUV, registration number of which we noted down. When Abhishek asked for a CCTV footage, so we asked them to show their identity cards. Irrked over this, they abused and thrashed us. They forcibly got a CCTV footage deleted before leaving the scene. Abhishek threatened us with dire consequences. We have secretly filmed their act," Mrityunjay

Tripathi stated in the FIR. Police worked on the case and arrested the prime accused and his aide from BBD police station area. Meanwhile, a woman accused her husband and in-laws of assaulting her and her daughter, alleging attempted murder by choking her throat and stabbing her, in Jankipuram police station area. As per her complaint, she married Salil from Sitapur after converting to Islam. However, she claimed that he now abuses, beats, and mentally tortures her. She said the incident took place when she and her daughter visited Salil's garage to request maintenance funds. She alleged that Salil attacked them, choking her and then brandishing a knife, causing her injuries before fleeing. The complainant further alleged that Salil, along with his brother, sister-in-law, and another woman he intended to marry, abused and assaulted her instead of aiding her to seek medical help. She accused Salil of demanding dowry, involvement in illegal activities, and confiscating her belongings.



A makeshift shop selling sprinklers and colours in Lucknow on Monday

Pioneer

55-yr-old man killed in road mishap

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 55-year-old man was killed in a road mishap in Vibhuti Khand police station area on Sunday. A case was registered in this regard on Monday. As per reports, Moeed Ahmed of Husainabad Takiya Wali Masjid locality in Thakurganj left his house to deliver oil containers to a shop in Yahiyaganj on Sunday. Around 10 am on Sunday, his daughter Huda got a call from one Ashok Singh, who told her that Moeed had been fatally knocked down by a speeding vehicle near Indira Gandhi Pratishthan. "We reached the scene and found him dead. He was supposed to deliver the goods to a shop in Yahiyaganj. It is perplexing how he reached Indira Gandhi Pratishthan where he met with the accident," Huda stated in the complaint. The police sent the body for autopsy and started further investigation. A spokesman said the police talked to the owner of the shop where the victim was to deliver goods

and also scanned the CCTV footage.

COUPLE END LIVES

A 23-year-old youth along with a 20-year-old girl jumped in front of a moving train and committed suicide in Kachhanua area of Hardoi district after failing to get married, police sources said. The youth was having an affair with his brother-in-law's niece and the duo wanted to get married. As both of them were close relatives their families had objections to the marriage. In fact, the girl's family members had started looking for a marriage proposal for her," the sources said. The sources said that on Sunday morning the youth left his house in an SUV and picked the girl midway and reached the railway crossing near Sujanpura village. There they jumped in front of the express train and ended their lives. A case was registered in this connection and bodies were sent for post-mortem. Further investigations are on by the police.

HC dismisses plea against cancellation of land lease of Jauhar University

Prayagraj (PTI): The Allahabad High Court on Monday dismissed a writ petition challenging the cancellation of land lease of Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar University run by a trust led by Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan in Rampur district of Uttar Pradesh. The judgment was passed by a two-judge bench comprising Justice Manoj Kumar Gupta and Justice Kshiti Shailendra. On December 18, 2023, the court had reserved its verdict after hearing counsel for the petitioner and the advocate general (AG) of UP. While filing the writ petition, the Executive Committee of Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar Trust had submitted that the lease deed was cancelled without providing any opportunity of hearing. Appearing on behalf of the state, the AG defended the cancellation of the lease without show cause notice on grounds that public interest is of paramount consideration. It was argued that the land which was acquired for the purpose of higher learning (research institute) was being used to run the Rampur Public School. The advocate general cited the report of the Special Investigation Team to state that sufficient opportunity was given to the petitioner trust before the cancellation of the lease.

PUBLIC NOTICE
NOTICE is hereby given that, Sri Sushil Kumar Puri S/o Sri Joginder Pal Puri R/o House No. 126/F/64 Near Jal Kishan Park, Govind Nagar, Kanpur Nagar has informed that the Original sale deed dated 18.09.1979 registered at Sarjala No. 10594 with its duplicate no. 10595 on 25.09.1979 of the property (i.e. House No. 123/129 B (Old House No. 123/69) Pratapganj Gadaryanpurva, Kanpur Nagar measuring 161 Sq. Yards has been lost somewhere and is not traceable. The Punjab National Bank O Block Govind Branch Kanpur Nagar to intend to create Equitable Mortgage in respect of the above mentioned properties, details which are given in the notice. Any person claiming any interest or title in the property or otherwise having any objection can make representation to the Bank within seven days of such notice. Vivek Awasthi Advocate (Panel advocate of Punjab National Bank) Chamber Opposite New Hanuman Temple, Gate No. 4 Near Registrar Office, Civil Court Compound, Kanpur Nagar-208001 Mobile: 7007568625

44 LU students crack GATE

Lucknow (PNS): As many as 44 students of Lucknow University have cleared the Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE), results of which were declared on Sunday. The successful students included 32 from engineering & technology, six from zoology, three from botany, two from psychology, and one from statistics. "These students demonstrated exceptional dedication, perseverance, and academic prowess, reflecting the university's commitment to fostering a conducive learning environment and providing top-notch educational resources," Lucknow University spokesperson Durgesh Srivastava said. LU Vice-Chancellor Prof Alok Kumar Rai said, "We are proud of our students' remarkable achievement in GATE."



सूचना

सूचित हो कि मेरे प्लॉट नम्बर 10, प्रगति नगर तक्रोही, इंदिरानगर लखनऊ की मूल रजिस्ट्री पेपर दिनांक 03-03-2024 को वास्तव में खो गई है, जिसे भी मिले कृपया संपर्क करें मो. नं.-9935433909 तारा देवी पत्नी श्री प्रतिपाल सिंह निवासी 1C प्रगति नगर तक्रोही, इंदिरानगर लखनऊ

NOTICE

I have changed my name from SHAKIL AHMAD to MOHAMMAD SHAKIL. In future I Shall be known as MOHAMMAD SHAKIL. MOHAMMAD SHAKIL, S/o Shubrati Ahmad, 3A/2, B K Benerji Road, Kutchary Dakhana Naya, Katra, Prayagraj.

सूचना

सूचित हो कि मैं कविता पत्नी गुलशन कुमार, निवासिनी - मोनॉ 414, वायु विहार, हरजेन्द्र नगर, कानपुर नगर 208007, मेरी हाई स्कूल व इण्टर की मार्कशीट में मेरा नाम कविता रानी अंकित है। जबकि मेरे आधार कार्ड में नाम कविता अंकित है। अतः मुझे कविता रानी के स्थान पर कविता के ही नाम से जाना व पहचाना जाय।

REQUIRED

DAYANAND DINANATH MAHAVIDYALA RAMAIPUR, KANPUR NAGAR-209214
REQUIRED
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR FOR BBA & BCA COURSE
Qualification & Salary as per UGC/AICTE / CSJMU Kanpur / State Govt. norms. Interested Candidates can send their resume, educational certificates, experience letter & two passport size photographs to the institute through registered post or email: info@ddckanpur.edu.in within 07 days.
Chairman/Manager

Woman patient duped at hospital

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A woman patient at Lucknow Medical Dental College fell victim to a con-man's trickery in Chowk police station area on Saturday. A case was registered in this regard. As per reports, Shanti Verma from Vijay Nagar in Barabanki, accompanied by her daughter Snehlata, visited the dental college for a consultation. While Shanti, unable to walk properly, sat on the stairs outside, her daughter went inside to get a prescription slip from the OPD. Around 12:30 pm, a man disguised as a security guard approached Shanti and asked her to remove her ornaments.

Claiming her daughter had sent him, he said it was necessary for her medical examination. Trusting the man, Shanti handed over her gold chain, earring, anklets, a toe ring, and Rs 10,000 in cash. The conman collected the booty and disappeared from the scene. Shanti's son Ravindra Kumar Verma informed hospital authorities and later filed a case. Sources said that regular patients often fall prey to such scams. Meanwhile, a woman was duped of Rs 80,000 in Ghazipur police station area. The incident took place on March 8 but a case was registered on Monday. The woman, Vidhushi of Kurmanchal

Nagar in the area, stated in her complaint that her father Peetamber got a WhatsApp call on the fateful day. "The caller introduced himself as sub-inspector Haripal Singh Siddhu in Delhi Police and told my father that his nephew (sister's son) had been caught for rape. He demanded Rs 1 lakh to free his nephew. I paid Rs 80,000," she stated in the FIR. She further said that when her father talked to his nephew, it surfaced that he was present in his house.

MAURYA BOOKED

The Wazirganj police on Monday registered a case against former general secre-

tary of Samajwadi Party Swami Prasad Maurya for his "derogatory" remarks against Goddess Laxmi. The FIR was registered on the order of a special MP-MLA court in Lucknow on Saturday. In a complaint, advocate Ragini Rastogi of Chowk had stated that according to a news report, Maurya made derogatory remarks against Goddess Laxmi. "Maurya repeated her remarks in a post on X," she added. She alleged that Maurya's remarks were aimed to insult Hindus and to vitiate the communal harmony in the society. "His remarks have inflamed the religious sentiments of Hindus, creating hatred in the society," she alleged.

Stress on need for entrepreneurial farming

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Under the aegis of Central Institute for Subtropical Horticulture, an 'Aam Sabha' was held on the Rehmankhara campus in Lucknow on Monday. It was chaired by Agriculture Production Commissioner Manoj Kumar Singh, with Haji Kalimullah Khan as the special guest. The agriculture production commissioner highlighted Uttar Pradesh farmers' advantage, noting that 86 per cent of the land is irrigated, a rarity globally. He emphasised the need for entrepreneurial farming and outlined the government's commitment to intensify horticulture to boost mango productivity and farmers' income through year-round farming. Vice-Chancellor of Chandrashekhar Azad Agricultural University, Kanpur, Dr AK

AAM SABHA

The event featured discussions on fruit crop species, horticultural practices, mango export promotion, and fruit shelf-life enhancement technologies

Singh emphasised the practical application of agricultural education in village development. The event featured discussions on fruit crop species, horticultural practices, mango export promotion, and fruit shelf-life enhancement technologies.

Panel discussions on various mango-related topics like market dynamics, pricing, global competition, and climate resilience strategies were conducted, involving experts and progressive farmers. Progressive farmers and entrepreneurs were honoured during the event, and detailed discussions on mango quality for different markets and the utilisation of mango by-products were held. Principal scientist Dr Prabhat Kumar Shukla addressed the challenges posed by climate change, emphasising the need for adaptive measures like canopy management, disease control, and agroforestry to mitigate storm-related damages to mango crops. Earlier, the guests and farmers participating in the programme were welcomed by CISH director Dr T Damodaran.

2 held with 8.29 kg opium, booked under NDPS Act

Basti: The Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) of the Uttar Pradesh Police on Monday arrested two persons said to be the members of an international narcotics smuggling gang with 8.29 kg opium worth about Rs 1 crore in the international market, officials said. Mukesh Kumar and Deependra Kumar were arrested when they were trying to smuggle consignment of opium from Nepal to Lucknow, they said. The two accused are from Champaran, Bihar, and were involved in narcotics smuggling for a long time, police said. They were arrested on a tip off from the Sadar police station area when they were taking the consignment in a car, they said. Superintendent of Police Gopal Krishan Chaudhury said that the two arrested have been booked under the Narcotics Drug and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and sent to jail.

TWO PAC CONSTABLES IMPRISONMENT
Muzaffarnagar: A special CBI court in Muzaffarnagar on Monday convicted two former PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary of UP Police) constables Milap Singh and Virendra Pratap, and sentenced them to life imprisonment for

gang-rape of an activist from Uttarakhand in connection with the Rampur Tiraha firing case. Special CBI Judge Shakti Singh convicted the two former PAC constables Milap Singh and Virendra Pratap after holding them guilty under several sections of the IPC including 376 (2)G, 354 (assault of criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 392 (punishment for robbery), and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman), Public Prosecutor Dhara Singh said. "At the time, when the incident took place, Section 376 (2)G pertained to gang-rape," he told PTI. Special Judge Shakti Singh also imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 on each of the accused. The court had on March 15 reserved its order till today on the quantum of sentence, the public prosecutor said. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has produced 15 witnesses, including a 75-year-old victim woman and former UP home secretary Deepti Vilas, who had sanctioned permission to prosecute the accused. Seven Uttarakhand statehood activists were killed and women activists were raped during police firing at Rampur Tiraha on October 2, 1994.

Man kills wife over delay in lunch, ends life

Sitapur (PTI): A 30-year-old man allegedly killed his wife using a sharp weapon on Monday after an argument over delay in serving him lunch and then committed suicide by hanging himself in his house in this district, police said. The incident took place in Kotwalanpurva village of Thangaon police station area, they said. The deceased had been identified as Prema Devi (28) and her husband Parasram, Thangaon police station SHO Hanumant Lal Tiwari said. The angry husband first attacked and killed his wife with a sharp weapon and then, fearing that he would have to go to jail, committed suicide by hanging himself inside the house, the SHO said. According to police, Parasram returned home after working in the fields on Monday afternoon and asked his wife for food. The lunch was not ready when Parasram reached home, police said. Due to the delay in getting food, the husband got angry and an argument between the couple took place which escalated to such an extent that he killed his wife by repeatedly attacking her with a sharp weapon, police said. Villagers said that after the incident, the accused husband locked himself in the room and committed suicide by hanging himself.

CITYBRIEFS



Children participating in a programme at a school in Gudamba on Monday

INSPECTION

A window trailing inspection of the Gonda-Bahraich railway section took place on Monday. The inspection commenced with principal chief safety officer Mukesh Mehrotra and the safety audit team examining the sectioning & paralleling post between Gonda-Gangadham stations, ensuring compliance with standard height regulations for electric traction line fittings, assessing battery room safety, checking the neutral section, and inspecting the overhead traction line. Subsequently, at Gangadham station, they scrutinised the station superintendent's office, panel room, station working rules, relay room, and point and crossing. They also engaged with the gate man, discussing safety protocols in the event of gate breakage or failure. Moving forward, the principal chief safety officer led a safety inspection of the interlock between Payagpur-Chilvariya stations, examining safety devices such

as lever locks, boom locking mechanisms, private number transfer registers, safety chains, firecracker signals, and hand torches.

COURSE ENDING PARADE

A Course Ending Parade was held at Officers' Training College, Army Medical Corps Centre and College, Lucknow, on successful conclusion of AMC (non-technical) post commissioning course- 2023 on Monday. The 14-week course was successfully completed by the 49 newly commissioned AMC non-technical officers who took intensive training in unit administration and logistic support for hospitals and field medical units. Lt Gen Kavita Sahai, Commandant, AMC Centre & College, OIC Records and Colonel Commandant Army Medical Corps, reviewed the parade. Lt Apurba Ghosh was awarded Rolling Trophy and GOC-in-C ARTRAC Book Prize for securing First Position in the course.

HDFC BANK We understand your world	Legal Cell: HDFC Bank Ltd, 2nd Floor, Experio Building, Vibhuti Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh-226010
POSSESSION NOTICE APPENDIX IV [RULE 8(1)] Whereas, the undersigned being the authorized officer of the HDFC Bank Ltd. under the Secularization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 read with rule 5 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, issued demand notice dated 01.01.2024 calling upon the borrower(s) 1. M/s Taneesha Enterprises Through It's Proprietor Mrs. Rupashree Rai (Borrower) 2. Mrs. Rupashree Rai W/o Mr. Ashish Sharma (Co-Borrower) 3. Mrs. Usha Sharma W/o Mr. Shiwashray Rai Sharma (Co-Borrower) 4. Mr. Shwasashraya Rai Sharma S/o Mr. Vishwanath Rai Sharma (Co-Borrower And Mortgagee) to pay the amount mentioned in the notice Rs. 48,56,457.00/- (Rupees Forty-Eight Lakh Fifty-Six Thousand Four Hundred And Fifty-Seven Only) within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower(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 section 13 (4) of the said Act on the read with rules 8 & 9 of the said Rules, on this 15 MARCH 2024 . 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 is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to charge of HDFC Bank Ltd. for an amount of notice Rs. 48,56,457.00/- (Rupees Forty-Eight Lakh Fifty-Six Thousand Four Hundred And Fifty-Seven Only) and interest thereon together with expenses and charges etc. less amount paid, if any.	
DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY Municipal House No. B-04/0132, Admeasuring 361.37 Sq Mtr., Situated At Vishal Khand, Gomti Nagar Yojna, Ward- Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Tehsil And District, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh-226010. Which Is In Name Of Shiwashraya Rai Sharma. BOUNDED AS UNDER: NORTH: 12 MTR WIDE ROAD, SOUTH: PLOT No. 4/132A, EAST: PLOT No. 4/131, WEST: 09 MTR WIDE ROAD DATE - 15 MARCH 2024 PLACE - LUCKNOW	
AUTHORISED OFFICER, HDFC BANK LTD.	

KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK LIMITED.					
PUBLIC NOTICE					
We, Kotak Mahindra Bank Limited, (KMBL), for our Bank Branch and other related business (including setting up Automated Teller Machine -ATM), desire to take on Lease for the period of 09 (nine) years the property, more particularly described in the schedule hereunder written, owned by owners as mentioned herein below. Public at large and all the concerned, private individuals, government/semi-government institutions /bodies/authorities, if have got any right, title, interest, or share in the property herein mentioned or anybody who has objection for the aforesaid transaction are herewith publicly informed to raise his/her/their objection/s in writing with copies of all the supportive documents to the undersigned within 7 (Seven) days from publication of this public notice. If the objections are not received by the undersigned in writing along with copies of all supportive documents within 7 (Seven) days from publication of this public notice, then it will be construed that the title to the said property are clear and that all such concerned have waived their rights and all such concerned shall be estopped from raising any objections thereafter and that we shall proceed thereafter further in the execution of the Lease Deed or such agreements and all such persons shall be estopped from raising any objections to such transaction thereafter.					
<table> <tr> <th>Description of the Property to be taken on Lease</th> <th>Owner</th> </tr> <tr> <td>ALL THAT the piece or parcel of property admeasuring about 1189 Sq. Ft. Approx carpet area (approx.) on the Ground Floor of S- 8/417 K Maghool Alam Road, Khajuri, Varanasi- 221002 UP.</td> <td>Mr. Kalam Ahmad Siddiqui S/o late Sultan Ahmad R/o, S- 8/417 K Maghool Alam Road, Khajuri, Varanasi- 221002, UP. Deednumber</td> </tr> </table>	Description of the Property to be taken on Lease	Owner	ALL THAT the piece or parcel of property admeasuring about 1189 Sq. Ft. Approx carpet area (approx.) on the Ground Floor of S- 8/417 K Maghool Alam Road, Khajuri, Varanasi- 221002 UP.	Mr. Kalam Ahmad Siddiqui S/o late Sultan Ahmad R/o, S- 8/417 K Maghool Alam Road, Khajuri, Varanasi- 221002, UP. Deednumber	
Description of the Property to be taken on Lease	Owner				
ALL THAT the piece or parcel of property admeasuring about 1189 Sq. Ft. Approx carpet area (approx.) on the Ground Floor of S- 8/417 K Maghool Alam Road, Khajuri, Varanasi- 221002 UP.	Mr. Kalam Ahmad Siddiqui S/o late Sultan Ahmad R/o, S- 8/417 K Maghool Alam Road, Khajuri, Varanasi- 221002, UP. Deednumber				
Kotak Mahindra Bank Limited. off Western Express Highway, General A K Vaidya Marg, Malad (East), Mumbai 400 087 Ph. Nos.: + 91 22 66055570 / 5548/ 5544, Fax-(022) 67259088					

Teachers boycott evaluation over colleague’s murder

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Late night killing of a teacher by a police head constable following an altercation in the Civil Lines area of Muzaffarnagar on Sunday led to widespread agitation by the teachers’ community. The agitated teachers held demonstrations in several districts, including Varanasi and Prayagraj, and boycotted the evaluation work of Uttar Pradesh Board examination answer sheets. They are also demanding that the murder accused be booked under the National Security Act, the victim’s family be given Rs 10 crore as compensation and a family member of the slain teacher be given a PCS-rank job. The teachers are demanding that the last rites of the slain teacher be performed with state honours and in future teachers should not be sent on duty in trucks or containers. The teachers said the protest would be called off only after getting written assurance on all the demands and till then the teachers would not evaluate the answer sheets. The deceased, Dharmendra Kumar, was part of a team of the Education department from Varanasi that had brought Uttar Pradesh Board examination answer sheets to the local SD Inter College in Muzaffarnagar, Superintendent of Police (City) Satyanarain Parjapat said. The team included another teacher and two class four employees and was accompanied by a police team from Varanasi, he added. The teams from the Education department and Varanasi police were waiting in a vehicle for the college gate to open when the incident took place late on Sunday night, he said. Kumar had an altercation with head constable Chander Prakash while they were in the vehicle following which Prakash shot at the teacher using his service weapon, the police officer said. The injured teacher was rushed to the district hospital where he was pronounced dead, the SP said. The body was sent for post-mortem and a case was registered against the head constable. All others present in the



Members of Rajkiya Shikshak Sangh, UP staging protest against the killing of a teacher by a policeman in Muzaffarnagar, at Government Jubilee Inter College in Lucknow on Monday

Jungle raj prevalent in UP, CM must resign: Cong

Lucknow (PNS): The way a drunken constable killed a teacher with his government carbine in Muzaffarnagar district indicates that the fear of law has completely ended in the state. After criminals, now even protectors have become murderers. This was alleged by Uttar Pradesh Congress president Ajay Rai, who said that jungle raj was prevalent in the state under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Rai said that taking responsibility for the collapsed law and order in Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath should immediately resign from his post. In a statement issued here on Monday, Rai said that the Bharatiya Janata Party’s zero tolerance policy towards crime and criminals had now turned out to be another “false propaganda” spread by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He

vehicle were taken into custody for questioning, he added. Meanwhile, as the news of the killing of the teacher spread like a wildfire, protests started in Varanasi against the murder of Dharmendra Kumar. The teachers, on the call of for-

mer teacher MLA Chetanarayan Singh, stopped the evaluation work of the Board answer sheets at all evaluation centres in Varanasi, Prayagraj and other districts of UP. They gathered at Queen’s Inter College in Varanasi on Monday noon to express con-

science against the death and protest against the sensational killing. Evaluation of UP Board’s high school and intermediate exam answer copies is going on since Saturday at nine evaluation centres of Prayagraj district. The teachers stopped the evaluation work soon after learning about the killing of Dharmendra Kumar. A total of 11 lakh answer sheets are to be checked in Government Inter College, Anglo Bengali Inter College, KP Inter College, Crosthwaite Girls’ Inter College, CAV, Bharat Scout Guide Inter College, Agrasen Inter College, Kulbhaskar Inter College and Kesari Vidyaapeeth Intermediate College in Prayagraj. In Muzaffarnagar, teachers staged a sit-in protest in front of Chaudhary Chhotu Ram Inter College on Circular Road and raised slogans against the murder of the teacher. Police and administrative officials were pacifying the teachers. Meanwhile in Lucknow, the teachers boycotted the evaluation process at Rajkiya Jubilee Inter College. The protesting teachers demanded a compensation of Rs 1 crore for the bereaved family. State vice-president and spokesperson of Madhyamik Shikshak Sangh RP Mishra said the protests were held by teachers at the centres and the evaluation process was boycotted.

dolence on the death and protest against the sensational killing. Evaluation of UP Board’s high school and intermediate exam answer copies is going on since Saturday at nine evaluation centres of Prayagraj district. The teachers stopped the evaluation work soon after learning about the killing of Dharmendra Kumar. A total of 11 lakh answer sheets are to be checked in Government Inter College, Anglo Bengali Inter College, KP Inter College, Crosthwaite Girls’ Inter College, CAV, Bharat Scout Guide Inter College, Agrasen Inter College, Kulbhaskar Inter College and Kesari Vidyaapeeth Intermediate College in Prayagraj. In Muzaffarnagar, teachers staged a sit-in protest in front of Chaudhary Chhotu Ram Inter College on Circular Road and raised slogans against the murder of the teacher. Police and administrative officials were pacifying the teachers. Meanwhile in Lucknow, the teachers boycotted the evaluation process at Rajkiya Jubilee Inter College. The protesting teachers demanded a compensation of Rs 1 crore for the bereaved family. State vice-president and spokesperson of Madhyamik Shikshak Sangh RP Mishra said the protests were held by teachers at the centres and the evaluation process was boycotted.

Polling stns to be set up in gated colonies

Lucknow (PNS): The Election Commission of India (ECI), for the first time, will set up polling stations for the Lok Sabha elections inside the premises of multi-storied residential apartments and gated colonies in Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh’s Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said: “The state has the highest number of polling stations inside high-rise apartment complexes and gated colonies in the country. We have identified 217 such apartment complexes and gated colonies. The maximum is in Dadri (68), Noida (67), Sahibabad (37), Muradnagar (8) and seven each in Loni, Ghaziabad and Bakshi-Ka-Talab in Lucknow.” The CEO said: “Around 82,000 polling stations will have live webcasting facilities. Further, we have ensured that all polling stations are on the ground floor. Arrangements have been made for wheelchairs and ramps for differently-abled voters, toilets, sufficient light, drinking water, help desk, volunteers and signage to facilitate voters in hassle-free polls.” “We have made attempts to set up polling stations with the idea that no voter has to travel more than two kilometres to cast his or her vote,” he added.

BJP targets to increase vote count by 370 in each booth

PNS ■ LUCKNOW



IN UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA’S POLITICALLY CRUCIAL STATE, THE BJP PLANS TO INCREASE ITS VOTE COUNT BY 370 IN EACH BOOTH COMPARED TO THE 2019 LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

party workers, ensuring a united approach towards achieving electoral goals. A BJP spokesperson emphasised the significance of the seating plan, noting its role in fostering deeper engagement and understanding among party cadres regarding the pivotal

role played by each booth in shaping electoral outcomes. In a move to foster camaraderie among booth-level operatives, Singh proposed a collective lunch arrangement symbolising unity and shared commitment towards the party’s electoral objectives. This communal approach, coupled with direct engagement with voters and beneficiaries, underscores the BJP’s holistic approach towards grassroots-level activities. Expressing confidence in the party’s electoral prospects, Singh reaffirmed the commitment of BJP to securing all 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh, while aiming for a formidable tally of 370 seats nationwide. With the support of the National Democratic Alliance partners, the BJP aims to surpass the milestone of 400 seats in the Lok Sabha. Singh’s pivotal role in orchestrating the electoral campaign of the BJP underscores his stature as a key link between the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the BJP. His call to augment the vote count by 370 votes per booth resonates with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s ambitious vision of securing 370 seats for the BJP and surpassing the “400 plus seats” milestone for the NDA in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

SP expects surprising results in Lok Sabha elections

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party is contesting the Lok Sabha elections this time with a new partner – Congress. The SP had contested the 2017 UP assembly elections in alliance with the Congress but it ended in a disaster. This time the SP is confident that the Lok Sabha elections will throw up some surprising results.

The SP had contested to 2019 Lok Sabha polls in alliance with Bahujan Samaj Party and Rashtriya Lok Dal, and had given the Bharatiya Janata Party a good fight in a handful of constituencies in western and eastern parts of UP, but had failed to dent the overwhelming presence of the saffron party in the state. With BSP chief Mayawati deciding to go it alone this time, it will be up to the SP and the Congress to prevent the division of anti-BJP votes and check the onward march of the ruling party in Uttar Pradesh. As compared to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP is much better placed this time as it has stitched alliance with four caste based small political parties – Apna Dal (Sonelal), Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party, NISHAD Party and Rashtriya Lok Dal. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP and allies had won 73 out of 80 Lok Sabha seats in the state. The party ceded some ground in the 2019 general elections, when the opposition parties scraped their combined tally to 16. Even with anti-incum-

Will win 40 seats, says Ram Gopal

Lucknow (PNS): SP chief national general secretary Ram Gopal Yadav has claimed that his party will win at least 40 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. Earlier SP president Akhilesh Yadav had claimed that his party would win all 80 Lok Sabha seats in UP. “There is a strong anti-incumbency against both the Yogi Adityanath government and the Central government in Uttar Pradesh. The situation of INDIA bloc will be very good in UP and we will win at least 40 seats,” Ram Gopal Yadav said in Etawah. The BJP won 62 seats and its ally Apna Dal (Sonelal) two seats in UP in the 2019 parliamentary polls. The Samajwadi Party had contested the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party. While the SP won five seats, the BSP won 10. This time, the SP has joined the opposition INDIA bloc to fight the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. On the electoral bonds issue, the SP Rajya Sabha member said, “People say that they have ended corruption. But bigger corruption than this has never happened in any part of the world. They make the Enforcement Directorate conduct raids and stop the action once a donation is made. Had it been any other country, the government that has given contracts in lieu of donations would have been removed.”

bency apprehensions at work, the saffron party had won 62 seats, bolstered further by two more seats won by its ally Apna Dal (Sonelal). In 2019, the maximum seats – 23 – for the BJP came from the state’s western part, where the SP-BSP alliance could manage to win only four seats each. The BSP won Saharanpur, Bijnor, Amroha and Nagina (SC) Lok Sabha seats in the western UP, while the SP emerged victorious in Sambhal, Moradabad, Mainpuri (first held by Mulayam Singh Yadav then by Dimple Yadav in a bypoll) and Rampur seats that year. The central region of the state has prominent Lok Sabha constituencies of Amethi and Rae Bareilly – both considered bastions of the Congress. In 2019, former Congress president Sonia Gandhi retained her Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha seat while her son, Rahul Gandhi, lost the long-held Amethi seat to Union minister Smriti Irani. The BSP won only one seat from this region – by Ritesh Pandey, who bagged the Ambedkar Nagar Lok Sabha seat. The SP drew a blank. The BJP won 13 seats from the region, which included the coveted Faizabad Lok Sabha seat. Varanasi, represented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Lok Sabha, is one of the 30 seats in the eastern part of the state. From this region, the BSP won five seats, while the SP won one – Azamgarh. Apna Dal (Sonelal) won two seats from here.

Min introduces novel method in re-election bid

Lucknow (PNS): Union Minister Kaushal Kishore, who represents Mohanlalganj in the Lok Sabha for the Bharatiya Janata Party, has introduced a novel method in his bid for re-election for the third consecutive term. In a move to involve a wider section of society in the electoral process, Kishore has initiated a campaign in which he collects a nominal fee of Re 1 from each of his supporters to cover his nomination expenses. Expressing gratitude for the overwhelming support from the residents of Mohanlalganj, Kishore said: “The residents of Mohanlalganj have shown remarkable solidarity by coming forward to support me. With a nomination fee of Rs 10,000 to be paid, around 10,000 individuals have willingly contributed Re 1 each to meet the requirement.” This initiative underscores Kishore’s commitment to engaging citizens in the democratic process. Kishore reiterated his dedication to upholding the model code of conduct, emphasising that his campaign would centre on disseminating Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s message of inclusive development. He underscored the prime minister’s emphasis on transcending caste boundaries and focusing on the empowerment of women, the poor, youth, and farmers, regardless of religious or caste affiliations. Having secured victories in the Mohanlalganj Lok Sabha constituency in 2014 and 2019, Kishore is now seeking re-election for a third term.

Mystery shrouds death of man in STF custody

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Mystery shrouds the death of a man, who died a few hours after being arrested by the sleuths of the Special Task Force. The youth hailing from Lakhara village of Sangpur in Pratapgarh was wanted in a narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances case registered in Lucknow. Reports said that Ajay Singh alias Shakti Singh (45 years), of Lakhara village under Sangpur police station of Pratapgarh, came from Delhi about five years ago and started living in Pratapgarh. He reportedly started fish and pig farming.

On Sunday evening, a team of STF from Lucknow reached his house and took him in custody claiming that they wanted him in connection with an NDPS case registered in Lucknow. As soon as Ajay Singh was taken out of Sangpur in the car, he started having pain in his chest, so he was taken to Lalganj community health centre from where he was referred to the medical college hospital in Prayagraj but he died on the way. The doctors pronounced him dead upon arrival at the medical college hospital. The STF team sent the body for post-mortem and left.

When the family learnt about the death of Ajay Singh late Sunday night, they started accusing the STF of forcibly taking him when he was ill. The family members and the local residents also staged a protest, demanding action against the STF team. Ajay’s wife Chandra and two daughters were present at home. Ajay’s second daughter, Ammu, claimed that her father had a heart surgery during the COVID-19 period and she stopped the STF team from taking her father as he was unwell but they refused and bundled her father in a vehicle and left. She also claimed

to have shown the STF team the hospital slip and medicines prescribed to her father but they took the medicine and the prescription and left with her father. Meanwhile, Superintendent of Police at Pratapgarh, Satpal Antil, said that the STF team had come as Ajay Singh was wanted in a Lucknow case. While taking him, his health deteriorated, so he was taken to Lalganj. From there he was referred to the medical college but was pronounced dead there. The cause of death would be clear in the post-mortem report after which necessary action would be taken, the SP said.

Ayodhya gears up for a spectacular Ram Navami

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As Ayodhya brims with anticipation, preparations are underway for a grand celebration of the first birth anniversary of Ram Lalla on Ram Navami in the resplendent Ram temple consecrated on January 22 this year. With an estimated 35-40 lakh devotees expected to partake in the festivities, the occasion promises to be nothing short of spectacular. In a bid to honour this auspicious event, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has issued directives for uninterrupted 24-hour darshan of Ram Lalla. To cater to the massive influx of devotees, arrangements are being meticulously planned for darshan over three consecutive days, with special emphasis on Ashtami, Navami and Dashami. District Magistrate Nitish Kumar has officially announced that the Ram temple will graciously open its doors round the clock from April 16 to April 18, with the pinnacle of celebrations slated for April 17. In anticipation of the monumen-

tal crowds, a comprehensive crowd management strategy is being prepared, encompassing the strategic deployment of magistrates and police personnel. Furthermore, heightened security measures will be implemented at sensitive areas and major temples to ensure the safety and convenience of all devotees. Efforts are also underway to provide essential amenities, including shaded areas along Ram Mandir Marg and access to clean drinking water, to alleviate the discomforts posed by the impending heatwave. Despite the ongoing construction endeavours, an astonishing influx of approximately 1.5 lakh devotees continues to grace the temple daily, paying obeisance to Ram Lalla. Concurrently, the upcoming provincialised Chaitra Ram Navami fair, scheduled to commence on April 9, promises to infuse the region with an added dose of spiritual fervour. In a bid to keep devotees abreast of the monumental progress, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has taken to social

media platforms, sharing captivating glimpses of the ongoing construction efforts. The shared images vividly depict the intricate craftsmanship on display, with artisans meticulously working on pillars, walls and the first floor of the temple. Notably, the construction of the temple’s spire is also well underway, showcasing the unparalleled dedication of the skilled workforce. Sources within the Ram temple trust have disclosed a targeted completion date of December 2024 for finalising the construction of the first floor and ramparts. Simultaneously, preparations are already underway for the commencement of construction of the second floor, with plans underway to establish the revered Ram Darbar upon the triumphant completion of the first floor. As Ayodhya braces up for this momentous occasion, the fervent devotion and unwavering commitment to the realisation of the grand Ram temple stand as a testament to the enduring legacy of Lord Ram.

Railing collapses at Barsana temple, over 20 devotees injured

Mathura (PTI): Over 20 people received minor injuries when the railing of a staircase broke at the Radha Rani temple in Barsana which was brimming with devotees, the temple priest said on Monday. The incident took place on Sunday evening as the devotees were waiting for hours for the temple doors to open. According to the priest, a pre-holi celebration was organised at the temple and a huge number of devotees had flocked to the temple when the railing collapsed. Dr Manoj Vashishtha, in charge of Barsana’s Community Health Centre, said 22 people were brought to the centre after the incident. Those seriously injured were sent to the district hospital and a private medical college, he said. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Ajay Kumar Verma said all the devotees who were referred to the district hospital or private medical college on Sunday night were discharged

after treatment. There are no devotees in any of the hospitals on Monday, he said. According to eyewitnesses, a large number of devotees were trying to get hold of ‘ladous’ being thrown as part of the celebration at the temple when the incident took place. District Magistrate Shailendra Kumar Singh said the crowd was controlled after the incident and arrangements were made for the devotees to pay obeisance at the temple. About the security deployment in view of the celebrations, PRO in the SSP office Abhishek Kumar said around 2,500 security personnel had been deployed in Barsana. Security personnel were also deployed at every necessary point outside the temple, he said, adding that the incident took place because of an unexpected rush of devotees even though the temple doors were closed. Similar incidents occurred in the temple in 2012 and 2023.

इंडियन बैंक (भारत सरकार का उपक्रम)		Indian Bank (A Govt. of India Undertaking)	
इलाहाबाद		ALLAHABAD	
POSSESSION NOTICE (for Immovable Property)			
[Under Rule-8 (1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002]			
<p>Whereas, the undersigned being the authorised officer of the Indian Bank under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002, (Act 54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3, 8 and 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice as detailed here in below calling upon the borrower to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.</p> <p>The Borrowers/Guarantors having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrowers/ Guarantors and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of the powers conferred on him/ her under section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 and 9 of the said Rules.</p> <p>The Borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties and any dealings with the properties will be subject to the charges of the Indian Bank.</p> <p>The Borrower's / Guarantor'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.</p> <p>This Possession Notice is being served to the Borrower (s), Guarantor (s) & Mortgagor (s) to deposit the said dues. Details as under:</p>			
S. N.	Name & Address of the Borrower (s)/ Guarantor (s)/ Proprietor / Mortgagors	Description of the Immovable Property	Dt. of Demand Notice Dt. of Possession Outstanding Amount
Branch: Sainik Nagar			
1.	1. Sri Ajeet Kumar Gupta S/o Sri Rakesh Babu Gupta and Smt Malti Devi Gupta W/o Sri Rakesh Babu Gupta, 222 Abhay Suraksha Eldeco Rae Bareilly Road Lucknow 226025 2. Sri Rakesh Babu Gupta, Sri Manav Goyal and Sri Yash Goyal (Guarantor), 222 Abhay Suraksha Eldeco Rae Bareilly Road Lucknow 226025 3. Smt Malti Devi Gupta W/o Sri Rakesh Babu Gupta (Mortgagor), Add-1: 222 Abhay Suraksha Eldeco Rae Bareilly Road Lucknow 226025 Add-2: Plot No 489 C Abhishek Udayan II Eldeco Sharda Nagar Yojna Lucknow	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of House on Plot No 489 C Abhishek Udayan II Eldeco Sharda Nagar Yojna Lucknow Area 229.74 sq mtr, Boundaries: North: 12.00 mtr wide road, South: H No 490, East: H No 514, West: 9.00 mtr wide road	06.07.2023 14.03.2024 Rs. 18,82,587.00 and Interest thereon
2.	1. M/s Amrita Gupta Tour and Travels (Borrower), Proprietor-Smt Sonam Gupta, 551 GHA/169 Nand Nagar Alambagh Lucknow 2. Sri Abhishek Gupta (Guarantor), 551 GHA/169 Nand Nagar Alambagh Lucknow 3. Smt Malti Devi Gupta (Guarantor), Plot No 489 C Abhishek Udayan II Eldeco Sharda Nagar Yojna Lucknow	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of House on Plot No 489 C Abhishek Udayan II Eldeco Sharda Nagar Yojna Lucknow Area 229.74 sq mtr, Boundaries: North: 12.00 mtr wide road, South: H No 490, East: H No 514, West: 9.00 mtr wide road	30.11.2023 14.03.2024 Rs. 20,75,306.00 and Interest thereon
Date : 19.03.2024		Authorised Officer Indian Bank	

Violation of MCC punishable: DEO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Election Officer (DEO) S Rajalingam said that the violation of the model code of conduct (MCC) will be punishable with imprisonment of up to six months or fine up to ₹2,000 or both as after the announcement of the schedule of the Lok Sabha general elections by the Election Commission of India (ECI), the same has come into effect in the district with immediate effect.

He said that Section 127A of the Representation of the

People Act, 1951, under which no person shall print or publish or cause to be printed or published any election pamphlet or poster on the front page of which the name and address of the printer and its publisher are not visible. "No person shall print or cause to be printed any election pamphlet or poster unless a declaration as to the identity of the publisher is signed by him and attested by two persons personally known to him and which is duplicated by him and unless a copy of the declaration is sent by the printer of the document along

with a copy of the document to the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) thereof in the capital of the state where it is printed and in any other case to the district to the district magistrate of the place where it is printed," he said.

The district election officer has directed the printers of all the presses in the district that no printer will print any booklet or poster or anything else unless he obtains a declaration (Appendix-A) in duplicate from the publisher about its exclusivity, certified by two persons who know him per-

sonally. After printing the document within the above mentioned time, the printer will submit a copy of the document along with a copy of his declaration (Appendix-B) to the office of the district magistrate (Information Office). "Any person who violates any of the provisions of sub-sections 1 and 2 of Section 127A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, will be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months or with fine which may extend to ₹2,000, or will be punishable by both," he said.

Meeting for evaluation of projects on earth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The three-day seventh meeting of Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) (DST-SERB) on Earth and Atmospheric Sciences was inaugurated in the Department of Geology, BHU, here on Monday. The meeting is for evaluation of ongoing projects on earth and atmospheric sciences. The programme started with the BHU kulgeet and address by head of the department Prof Arun Deo Singh. Prof Singh highlighted the achievements and history of the Department of Geology, BHU.

Record over 5L devotees offer prayers at KVT

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Since its inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 13, 2021, Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham is setting new records breaking its own previous record again and again.

On a normal day 1.5 to 2 lakh devotees visit the Dham (corridor) where it reaches around 10 lakh on Mahashivratri or Mondays in the auspicious month of Shravan. It was around 12 lakh on the occasion of Mahashivratri a few days ago.

However, on Sunday, over five lakh devotees offered prayers at the Kashi

Vishwanath Temple (KVT). Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust Vishwa Bhushan Mishra said on March 17 a new record of the highest daily number of visitors on a normal day (except festivals) was established. A total of 5,03,024 visitors got *darshan* of Mahadev (Lord Shiva) on this day," he said, adding that before the inauguration of the corridor, on normal days the number of devotees used to be around 20,000 to 30,000, whereas after the same, it increased to 1.5 lakh to 2 lakh.

The CEO said due to the convenience and security in

the new and grand Dham, including KVT, the traffic of visitors to Kashi is continuously increasing. "After the transformation of the KVT complex from about 3,000 square feet to a huge area of about five lakh square feet, the devotees are flocking to the Dham for *darshan* in large numbers," he added.

Secretary, Travel Agent Association of India (TAAI), Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, Pradeep Rai said tourists are showing maximum interest for the two-way circuit of Ayodhya and Kashi. "In both the religious cities, maximum number of tourists are coming during the weekends," he said.

AD Medical Health visits Filaria Integrated Treatment Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Additional Director of Medical Health and Family Welfare, Varanasi Division, Dr Manjula Singh visited the Filaria Integrated Treatment Centre located at Government Ayurvedic College, Chowkaghat here on Monday. During her visit, she met the patients suffering from filariasis admitted in the centre and took information about their treatment and other facilities. In charge of the centre Pragya Tripathi gave information about the details and treatment methods of a total of 185 patients admitted there within the last one year and said currently five patients are undergoing treatment at the centre.

The AD said that the Filariasis Integrated Treatment Centre is being run in collaboration with the Institute of Applied Dermatology (IAD) Kerala and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

In this centre, severe filariasis (elephantiasis) patients are being treated with Ayurvedic therapy, allopathy and yoga methods. "The special thing is that its treatment is possible without any surgical procedure. The Ayurveda and Yoga methods present here are proving helpful in the complete treatment of serious patients suffering from elephantiasis



AD (Health) Dr Manjula Singh inspecting the filaria centre in Varanasi on Monday.

and are also taking them towards a normal life," she said and directed the superintendents and in charge medical officers of all block level health centres to ensure that previously identified severe (above grade three) filariasis patients are referred to the IAD Filaria Integrated Treatment Centre.

Dr Manjula Singh said that it is necessary to provide information about this centre

to the needy patients. For this information about the districts should also be made known to the centre so that proper treatment can be made possible by contacting the patients. During the visit, biologist and in-charge of Filaria Control Unit Dr Amit Kumar Singh and all the team members of IAD Centre were present. At the centre complete treatment process of admitted

filariasis patients takes place every day as per time. In this, measurement of the patient, cleaning, Ayurvedic therapy, fanta soaking (solution process), yoga, compression and finally alone yoga and massage are done daily. or screening, treatment etc related to filariasis, the helpline number 9567283334 of Filaria Integrated Treatment Centre can be contacted every day from 9 am to 5 pm.

Autism not a serious disease: Dr Bharat



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A leading child neurologist from London (UK) Dr Rahul Bharat said autism is not a serious disease and parents can cure it by taking proper care and consultation with expert doctors. He was addressing a one-day workshop on

autism at a hotel in the Mahmooganj area here on Sunday. Stressing the need for awareness programmes on autism, he said the sooner the disease is detected, it can be easily treated. Dr Bharat, who has been doing excellent work on autism in India for the last 10 years, said if any child has men-

tal or behavioural problems like epilepsy, autism, problems in studies, not listening even when his/her name is called, excessive playfulness or mischievousness, less socialising with children of his/her age etc, the parents should immediately consult a doctor for treatment. In the beginning programme coordinator Sanjay

Albert welcomed chief guest Dr Rahul Bharat and other guests. Founder and Director of Walk With Me (Centre for Autism) Dr Neelam Yadav threw light on autism. Programme coordinator Sanjay Albert welcomed Dr Rahul Bharat. Resident Medical Officer Dr Juhli Srivastava said if children have autism related diseases they should not be ignored and should be treated as soon as possible.

Dr Bharat said he was treating the patients for autism in Varanasi for the last two months and it is important for parents to know about it. Apart from this, he said it is important to have awareness on autism in schools also. He praised the autism centre here, Walk With Me, for doing a lot of work on autism and the doctors also for taking care of the patients. The programme was conducted by Sanjay Albert while the vote of thanks was proposed by Dr Neelam Yadav.

Illegal arms factory busted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

With the arrest of five accused, the sleuths of Crime Branch in association with Naini police claimed to bust an illegal arms manufacturing factory in the Naini area here on Monday.

Five youths who were manufacturing and selling weapons were arrested from the spot. One revolver, two pistols, five countrymade pistols, six cartridges and a pipe for making countrymade pistols etc have been recovered from them. The call details of the arrested accused are being scrutinised. Investigation revealed arms were being supplied from Uttar Pradesh to Madhya Pradesh (MP).

DCP Yamunanagar Shradhdha Narendra Pandey told mediapersons that the Crime Branch team had received information that an arms factory was running in Naini area and arms were being supplied on demand. On this information, the Crime Branch conducted a raid and arrested Atul Sonkar alias Rishu, Vijay Sonkar and Faizan of Naini. All three of them used to make and sell weapons.

After interrogating them, Vikas Gupta and Monu Bharatiya of Naini were arrested. Vikas used to sell arms while Monu Bharatiya had bought them. The kingpin of this gang is Atul Sonkar. The police said that the accused used to make and sell pistols. Investigation so far revealed that they procured materials from outside. The police is finding out to whom these people have sold arms so far. Police activity has been increased in view of the upcoming elections. I this operation the team of Naini police station's additional inspector Saheja Ali, crime branch in charge Anup Singh and Yamunanagar SOG in-charge Ranjit Singh were involved.

Fire in garage causes huge loss

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A fire broke out in a car garage in Colonelganj police station area late on Sunday night. The fire brigade immediately rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control after around one hour. Goods worth lakhs of rupees and a car were gutted in the incident. The garage situated near the Bagahi Bhatta railway



line in Colonelganj caught fire around 11 pm on Sunday. After informing the garage owner, the people tried to control the fire and then informed the fire brigade. After some time, a fire tender from the Colonelganj fire station reached the spot which extinguished the fire after around one hour. Chief Fire Officer Deepak Sharma said a probe was on to ascertain the cause of incident. Garage owner Bablu said goods worth lakhs of rupees and a car were gutted in the fire.

MISHAP: A man was fatally knocked down by a speeding car near Rasoolpur Gogumau village under Gajner police station area of Kanpur Dehat late on Sunday night. From the Gajner CHC, he was referred to the district hospital

where the doctors declared him dead. Vijay Singh (42), a native of Sarwankheda, Gajner, lived in Gujaini and was employed in a private firm. On Sunday night he was returning to his house on an auto. When he alighted from it near Rasoolpur Gogumau village on Raipur-Sarwankheda road to ease himself, he was knocked down by the speeding car. Nephew Shanker Singh said Vijay Singh was a bachelor and was coming to his native village for some work. Akbarpur Kotwali in charge Satish Singh said the Gajner police had been informed about the incident. Gajner SO Dilip Kumar Bind said on receipt of complaint he will initiate further action in the matter.

Meanwhile the autopsy report on Monday revealed that the IIT contract worker had died of serious head injury. Besides, more than half-a-dozen injury marks were found on his body. On the demand of his kin, blood sample of the deceased was preserved for DNA test. The Kakadeo police said no complaint was so far lodged by the kin of the deceased who had alleged the killing of the contract worker. The SHO said on the basis of complaint, an FIR will be lodged and action taken. Manorama Shukla of Gaongarh, Bilhaur, said her son Devesh Shukla (24) was employed for a project of IIT. She alleged the involvement of

some family members in his death following property dispute. Devesh was found seriously injured in the Kakadeo police station area on Saturday night. He was admitted to the LLR (Hallet) Hospital where he succumbed to his injury on Sunday during treatment. Now in the autopsy report it was revealed that he died of head injury. SHO Kali Prasad Gaud said on receipt of complaint, FIR will be lodged against unidentified persons and probe will be conducted.

3 FALL UNCONSCIOUS: Three safai karmchris (sanitation workers) became unconscious after inhaling the toxic gas in the sewer tank in Shiv Nagar of Unnao on Monday morning. When Jitendra (50) of Narendra Nagar fell unconscious, Ramsey (40) and Pappu (45) of Krishna Nagar went into the tank to rescue him but they also became unconscious after inhaling the toxic gas. On seeing them people present outside the tank raised an alarm, somehow managed to take them out and took to the district hospital where due to their serious condition, Jitendra and Ramsey were referred to the LLR (Hallet) Hospital, Kanpur. On getting information EO Sanjay Gautam, Sanitation and Health inspector Rashmi Pushkar along with other officials rushed to the district hospital and made arrangements for their treatment.

Emphasis on conservation of manuscripts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The concluding function of the week-long national workshop on manuscripts organised under the aegis of the Bharat Adhyayan Kendra in Banaras Hindu University (BHU) was presided over by Prof Deenbandhu Pandey, former head Department of Art History, BHU.

Informing about the science of manuscripts, he said manuscripts are the basic carrier of Indian culture and knowledge science. "Conservation and promotion of manuscripts are our responsibility. Along with the government, the general public will also have to always come forward with awareness and contribute," he said.

The chief guest of this supplementary session was Director of Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) Dr Abhijit Dixit. He explained in detail the initiatives currently being taken for the conservation of manuscripts.

Techkriti '24 comes to an end

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Techkriti '24, IIT Kanpur's flagship technical and entrepreneurial festival, continued to enthral attendees with an array of thought-provoking sessions, adrenaline-fuelled experiences, and captivating performances on its third and fourth days.

The third day commenced with a riveting tech talk by G Satheesh Reddy, President of the Aeronautical Society of India and former chairman of DRDO. He shared insights about India's leading-edge defence technologies, showcasing the nation's prowess as a frontrunner in the sector.

A highlight of this edition was the unique "Shark Tank"-style competition, where entrepreneurs pitched their ideas to an esteemed panel of investors, including ACM RKS Bhadauria, Dr Ajay Kumar, and Prof Abhishek, with a staggering Rs 20 crore at stake.

The Auto Expo, where around 30 stunning supercars, vintage cars and superbikes

showcased their capabilities with jaw-dropping stunts, creating an ultimate fusion of speed, style and adrenaline.

Throughout the day, numerous competitions, workshops, networking lunches, and gala dinners provided attendees with opportunities to upgrade their skills and gain invaluable knowledge. The high-energy EDM night with Ravator electrified the crowd, compelling everyone to dance their hearts to the energetic beats. Kunal Grover's mesmerising beatboxing and Jatun Sangri's melodious performances added a musical touch, leaving the audience spellbound.

As Techkriti '24 entered its final day on Sunday, the excitement reached new heights. Gaurav Jyual, the host of the popular show "Art Attack," inspired attendees to explore their passions and pursue them relentlessly.

The drift show once again stole the spotlight, with renowned and beautifully engineered cars curating a magical experience on the IIT Kanpur

roads. Renowned film writer Yahya Bootwala delved into the intricacies of storytelling, captivating the audience with his performance.

Workshops in emerging fields like Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Data Science provided students with a deeper understanding of these essential concepts.

The excitement peaked as Farhan Akhtar took the stage, performing his top-rated songs to a massive crowd at the Pronite ground. The final Pronite was a spectacle to behold, with attendees singing and dancing their hearts out to a fantastic blend of music.

KY Collective's soulful performances at the events ground brought a fitting closure to the final day, engulfing the audience in their melodies.

As Techkriti '24 came to an end, it left a lasting impact on attendees with a promise to return bigger and better in the coming years, continuing its legacy as Asia's largest annual technical and entrepreneurial festival.

Man's body recovered

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The body of a man was found floating in New Yamuna river under Naini Kotwali station area late on Sunday night. Rajesh Kumar Sharma of EA block of ADA, was the younger of two brothers. He used to work as a vendor at the Naini railway station. Late on Sunday night he got angry over some issue and hanged himself from the ceiling fan. By the time the family came to know about the incident he had died. On getting information the police reached the spot and took possession of the body and sent it for the post-mortem examination.

In another incident, a 35-

year-old man hanged himself in ADA EA block of Naini Kotwali station area late on Sunday night. Rajesh Kumar Sharma of EA block of ADA, was the younger of two brothers. He used to work as a vendor at the Naini railway station. Late on Sunday night he got angry over some issue and hanged himself from the ceiling fan. By the time the family came to know about the incident he had died. On getting information the police reached the spot and took possession of the body and sent it for the post-mortem.

In yet another incident a retired officer of MSME Ministry was deprived of ₹2.90 lakh in an area under Kareli police station. On the complaint, the police have registered a case and started investigation. TH Faruqi (65) who retired from the post of Assistant Director Grade-I lives alone in Kareli area here.

Kareli in charge Amarnath Rai said that on the basis of the complaint, a case has been registered against an unidentified person and help is also being taken from cyber cell in investigating the matter.

India, US review defence ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India and US on Monday reviewed the entire gamut of their bilateral defence ties and ways to further strengthen them during telephone talks between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin. Giving details here later, Defence Ministry officials said both Ministers briefly discussed a range of bilateral, regional security and defence cooperation issues. They reviewed the recent bilateral events such as the INDUS-X Summit held in New Delhi in February and the bilateral Tri-Service exercise 'Tiger Triumph' which has also commenced in India on Monday and ends on March 31. US Secretary of Defence appreciated the important role being played by the Indian Navy in conducting anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean Region. The two Ministers discussed ways and means to implement the India-US Defence Cooperation Roadmap which was concluded last year. Other defence industrial cooperation



issues such as repair of US naval ships in Indian shipyards were also briefly discussed. Both the Ministers had last met in New Delhi in November 2023 during the India-US Ministerial 2+2 Dialogue. As regards the Tiger Triumph drill, they said in consonance with the established partnership between India and the US, the bilateral tri-Service Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise between both countries, Tiger Triumph-24, is scheduled on the Eastern Seaboard from March 18 to 31.

Indian Navy Ships with integral helicopters and landing crafts embarked, Indian Army aircraft, Indian Army personnel and vehicles and Indian Air Force aircraft and helicopters along with the Rapid Action Medical Team (RAMT) would be participating in the exercise. The US would be represented by US Navy Ships with embarked troops of the US Marine Corps and US Army. The exercise is aimed at developing interoperability for conducting HADR operations and refine Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to enable rapid and smooth coordina-

tion between forces of both countries. The Harbour Phase is scheduled from March 18 to 25. Personnel from both navies would participate in Training Visits, Subject Matter Expert Exchanges, Sports Events and Social interactions. On completion of the Harbour Phase, the ships, with the troops embarked, would sail for the Sea Phase and undertake Maritime, Amphibious and HADR operations in accordance with injected situations. The Joint exercise would culminate with a closing ceremony on completion of the sea phase.

Indian Army raises elite unit to focus on futuristic communication technologies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Army has raised an elite unit that will undertake research and evaluation of futuristic communication technologies like 6G, artificial intelligence, machine learning and quantum computing for military use in view of the changing nature of the field. The Signals Technology Evaluation and Adaptation Group or STEAG is mandated to nurture technologies spanning the complete spectrum of wired and wireless systems, officials said. The setting up of STEAG is part of the Army's efforts to develop technologies considering the future battlefield, they said. "It will be a premier organisation, the first of its kind equipped with the capability to harness niche technology, leverage cutting-edge solutions and identify suitable cases for defence applications by fostering collaboration with academia and industry," one of the officials said. The elite unit will focus on all upcoming critical technology domains including electronic exchanges, mobile communications, software defined



radios, electronic warfare systems, 5G and 6G networks, quantum technologies, AI, machine learning, etc., he said. The hi-tech unit will carry out technical scouting, evaluation, development, management of core ICT solutions, and provide user interface support by maintenance and upgradation of contemporary technologies available in the environment, the official added. Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande has been highlighting the need for acquiring new technologies by the force in view of the changing nature of warfare. "Aligning itself with the tenets of Atmanirbhar Bharat and

Start-Up India, STEAG will help bridge the divide between the armed forces on the one hand and industry and academia on the other," the official said on condition of anonymity. The new Centre of Excellence is expected to be a game changer in fostering self-reliance in high-end communication technologies, which have thus far been a monopoly of select countries with advanced economies and research ecosystems, he said. The Army believes communications are going to be an important component of military operations. "In the fast-

evolving technologies for the battlefield, the side with better communication technologies and the ability to connect the various constituents for information sharing will have an edge over its adversary," another official said. He said modern warfare necessitates the induction of new equipment to provide seamless communication support to units and formations during operations. "To imbibe such advancements in technology, the Indian Army has raised this groundbreaking technology-oriented unit STEAG which will bolster its capabilities in the digital domain," he added.

Kavitha conspired with AAP leaders in excise policy: ED

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP leader K Kavitha and some others "conspired" with top AAP leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia, to get favours in the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy by paying ₹100 crore to the political party that rules Delhi, the Enforcement Directorate alleged on Monday. Forty-six-year-old Kavitha, the MLC daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, was arrested by the federal agency last week from her Hyderabad home and she is in the ED custody till March 23. Probe found, the ED claimed in a statement, that Kavitha along with others "conspired with the top leaders of AAP including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia for getting favours in the Delhi excise policy-formulation and implementation." "In exchange of these favours, she was involved in paying Rs 100 crore to the leaders of AAP," the agency said. By the acts of "corruption and conspiracy" in the formulation and implementation of Delhi excise policy 2021-22, a con-



tinuous stream of illegal funds in the form of kickback from the wholesalers was generated for the AAP, it said. It alleged "Kavitha and her associates were to recover the proceeds of crime paid in advance to AAP and to further generate profits/proceeds of crime from this entire conspiracy." The agency, while seeking the remand of Kavitha last week, told the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court that she was "one of the kingpins, a key conspirator and beneficiary of the Delhi excise policy scam". Kavitha asserted earlier that she had done nothing wrong and alleged that the Centre was "using" the ED as the BJP could not gain a "backdoor entry" into Telangana. The

Aam Aadmi Party has accused the BJP was using ED and CBI as its "goons" to finish off political opponents. The agency said it has conducted searches at 245 locations across the country since the registration of a case in 2022 and has arrested 15 persons, including former Delhi deputy CM and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Manish Sisodia, AAP leader Sanjay Singh and some liquor businessmen. It has filed a total of six charge sheets in this case till now and had attached assets worth over Rs 128 crore. The ED and the CBI have alleged that the Delhi government's excise policy to grant licences to liquor traders allowed cartelisation and favoured certain dealers who had allegedly paid bribes for it, a charge strongly refuted by the AAP. The policy was subsequently scrapped and Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena recommended a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the irregularities in its formulation and implementation. Later, the ED registered a case under the PMLA.

Food body set to establish standards for edible seeds

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In view of growing domestic and global demand for edible fruit/vegetable seeds such as sunflower seeds and chia seeds and pumpkin seeds in culinary and traditional foods, the Food and Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) under the Union Health Ministry is now all set to establish standards for them, aiming to bring clarity and consistency to their classification and use. The absence of standards for these 'nutritional powerhouse' was realised when the FSSAI was approached by several representatives seeking the correct categorisation of 'Watermelon Seeds' under Food Safety and Standards Regulation (FSSR). Though temporarily the apex food regulator as an interim measure categorized the products added in FoSCoS for the purpose of licensing of Edible Dried Fruits/ Vegetable Seeds. However at the same time, the order dated March 15, 2024 signed by Ajeet Singh, Joint Director (Regulatory Compliance Division) clarified that "at present, there is no specific standard for



Watermelon Seed' or any other Edible Dried Fruits/ Vegetable Seeds has been laid down under FSSR. "However, the matter has been examined by the FSSAI and as an interim measure to safeguard the interest of consumers, it has been decided that the said product names will be added in FoSCoS for the purpose of licensing of Edible Dried Fruits/ Vegetable Seeds, it added. The order further asked food businesses to apply under the general manufacturing kind of business for the said categories, till such time specific standard is notified by the Food Authority. A senior official from the Ministry pointed out that the long-standing history of

human consumption of seeds from fruits like sunflower seeds, as well as those from vegetables such as chia seeds and pumpkin seeds, in culinary and traditional foods underscores their significance in various cuisines worldwide. However, he admitted that, despite their widespread use, there has been a lack of universal standards for categorizing these edible seeds. "Now, the FSSAI is taking steps to address this gap by considering the establishment of standards for these seeds. This initiative aims to bring clarity and consistency to their classification and use, potentially benefiting consumers, producers, and food industry stakeholders alike.

Centre: No need to bring slaughterhouses under EIA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Centre has ruled out bringing slaughterhouses and meat processing units under the ambit of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006, stating that existing guidelines and safeguards adequately regulate these facilities from an environmental perspective. "There is no requirement to bring slaughterhouses and meat processing units under the ambit of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006, as guidelines and safeguards are already in place to regulate them from an environmental perspective," the Centre told the National Green Tribunal (NGT) recently. The Union Environment Ministry through the NGT was responding to the demand from animal rights activist Gauri Maulekhi who had approached the tribunal last year seeking to bring the slaughterhouses and meat processing units within the ambit of EIA, 2006. She had raised concerns regarding over consumption of water at slaughterhouses, con-

tamination of water bodies due to improper solid waste disposal and the risk of zoonotic diseases due to exposure to unhealthy carcasses among others. However, in its affidavit submitted recently in the NGT, the Ministry maintained that all regulations were in place to regulate such units. The affidavit is based on a report by an eight-member working group set up by the ministry in August last year. "Requisite guidelines/safeguards are already in place to regulate the slaughterhouses /processing units from an environmental perspective, and there is no requirement for bringing slaughterhouses and meat processing units under the ambit of EIA, 2006," the ministry said. It said the regulation framework and monitoring of agencies including district magistrates, pollution control boards, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development (APEDA) is adequate to address the environmental issues related to slaughterhouses and meat processing units.

Congress raises questions on fund

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Monday raised questions about the PM CARES Fund, saying that four years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is still not clear why it was set up, who its donors are and why its administrative structure is so "lacking in transparency". Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh alleged that given the history of the Modi government, as shown by the "electoral bond scam", one can only speculate that the lack of transparency was deliberately engineered to give the prime minister an unsupervised pool of funds to spend as he wishes. In a social media post, Ramesh said, "Now that the corruption, extortion and intimidation of the Modi sarkar through the electoral bond scam is getting

revealed in all its shocking detail, let us not forget another route the Government opened for companies to carry favour: The self-glorifyingly named PM CARES." "The total amount of funds PM CARES received and the names of the donors have never been officially reported. Media reports suggest that it received donations to the tune of Rs 12,700 crore at least, with large donations from a few corporations," he claimed. Some prominent donors who publicly pledged to donate to the fund include the Reliance Group (Rs 500 crore), Adani Group (Rs 100 crore), PayTM (Rs 500 crore), JSW Group (Rs 100 crore) and others, the Congress leader said. "PM CARES is exempt from CAG and RTI oversight — allegedly, because it did not



receive budgetary support from the Government. However, it is well known that at least 38 PSUs, owned and operated by the government, have donated vast sums to the tune of Rs 2,105 crore to the PM CARES fund. An additional 150 crores came from PSU employee contributions," Ramesh said. Moreover, the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund) received several special exemptions from the government such as donations received 100 per cent tax

deduction under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act relating to charities. "Foreign donations were allowed under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act. Donations were made eligible to be treated as Corporate Social Responsibility expenditure under the Companies Act. This privilege is not extended even to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund in States," he said. "Suspiciously, quite a few China-based or Chinese-owned firms have donated to the PM CARES Fund. TikTok claimed to have donated Rs 30 crore, Xiaomi donated Rs 10 crore, Huawei up to Rs 7 crore and OnePlus reportedly donated Rs 1 crore," he claimed. At a time when China is encroaching on Indian territory in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, donations were sought

and accepted from these firms, he said. "Four years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is still not clear why the PM CARES fund was set up, how much it received and from whom, how the funds were disbursed, and why its administrative structure is so lacking in transparency," Ramesh said. "Given the history of the Modi sarkar, as shown by the electoral bond scam, one can only speculate that the lack of transparency was deliberately engineered to give the Prime Minister an unsupervised pool of funds to spend as he wishes. For corporations, this was a new, tax-exempt, CSR-saving way of currying favour with the Prime Minister — possibly to seek government contracts and licenses in the future, or to avoid the intimidation of ED-IT raids," Ramesh alleged.

Study reveals disturbing dietary trends among north Indians

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A study conducted by researchers at The George Institute for Global Health India in collaboration with the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) has revealed disturbing dietary trends among the north Indian population, particularly regarding salt consumption, potassium intake, and protein consumption. Published in the journal 'Frontiers in Nutrition,' the study found that salt intake among the participants surpassed recommended levels. High salt intake is associated with an increased risk of developing hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and chronic kidney disease. Participants also exhibited inadequate potassium intake, which is essential for maintaining cardiovascular and kidney health. Low potassium intake further increases the risk of developing hypertension and related conditions. Protein consumption was below the recommended dietary allowance. This could have implications for overall nutritional status and health, particularly in individuals with chronic kidney disease, said the researchers. The study utilized 24-hour urinary excretion analysis to assess nutrient intake, which is considered more accurate than dietary recall methods.

The findings underscore the importance of accurate dietary assessments in understanding and addressing dietary imbalances. Professor Vivekanand Jha, the lead author of the study, emphasised the need for personalised dietary interventions and public health campaigns to address these dietary trends. The study suggested interventions such as setting up targets that aimed at reducing salt intake and increasing potassium-rich foods in the diet. Providing better information on food labels to help consumers make healthier choices at the same time encouraging the consumption of fruits and vegetables rich in potassium, said the study.

Bilkis Bano case: One more convict moves SC seeking review of verdict cancelling remission

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

One more convict in the Bilkis Bano case has moved the Supreme Court seeking a review of its January 8 verdict cancelling remission of his sentence, contending that it cannot be challenged based on the nature of the crime and "society's cry for justice". The review plea filed by Ramesh Rupabhai Chandana said the top court erred while passing the impugned order and overruling judgment dated May 13, 2022, passed by another bench of the apex court. The Gujarat government and

two of the 11 convicts have already filed a petition seeking a review of the January 8 verdict in which remission orders of all of them were cancelled and they asked to surrender. Listing reasons for seeking a review of the verdict, the plea said the top court bench erred in its finding "on the ground that the remission order passed by the competent authority cannot be challenged on factual grounds, inter alia, the nature of the crime, impact on society and society's cry for justice after the conviction and sentence has attained finality in the eyes of law." It said that overruling of the

judgment dated May 13, 2022, passed by a coordinate of this court, which allowed the Gujarat government to grant remission as per the 1992 policy, the impugned order of January 8 was in contravention of the doctrine of Comity of Courts. The doctrine of Comity of Courts refers to courts respecting the laws and decisions of other courts. The plea said that in the instant case, only the trial was transferred (to Maharashtra) under "extraordinary circumstances" by way of judicial intervention and it is a fact apparent on the face of record that in the trans-



fer petition concerned, the issue of remission was not the matter in issue. "Hence, it is not just and fair to presume that vide the said

transfer order, appropriate government as per section 432(7) CrPC also stood changed to being that of the transferee state," it said.

The plea further said the remission policies of Gujarat and Maharashtra respectively, when compared — both at the time of transfer and subsequent conviction respectively — can be said to be beneficial and prejudicial respectively. "That is to say, since Gujarat policy laying down 14 years as criteria for becoming eligible for grant of remission is beneficial for the petitioner and on the other hand, 28 years for the same as per Maharashtra policy is prejudicial for him," it said. Earlier, Radheyshyam Bhagwandas Shah and Rajubhai Babulal Soni, both lodged in Godhra sub-jail after

the January 8 apex court verdict, filed the review plea. On January 8, the top court quashed the remission it had granted to 11 convicts in the high-profile gang-rape case of Bilkis Bano and the killing of her seven family members while slamming the state for being "complicit" with the accused and abusing its discretion. It ordered all the convicts, who were released prematurely on Independence Day in 2022, back to jail within two weeks. Excoriating the Gujarat government, the apex court said it "usurped" the power of the Maharashtra government to

grant remission to the convicts. It held as nullity the May 13, 2022, judgement of another bench of the apex court, which had directed the Gujarat government to consider the remission applications of the 11 convicts in the case, saying it was obtained by "playing fraud on court". Bilkis Bano was 21 years old and five months pregnant when she was raped while fleeing the horror of the communal riots that broke out after the Godhra train burning incident in February 2002. Her three-year-old daughter was among the seven family members killed.

Pursuit of power

The Russian President is anxious to prove that he actually is his people's choice for the top job

The enigmatic Russian President, Vladimir Putin, has a reputation for having a tight hold on power. Beneath the surface of power, meanwhile, is a convoluted web of manoeuvres designed to validate his administration via elections. Putin has consolidated his control and maintained the impression of popular support despite criticism for being an authoritarian and charges of electoral manipulation. A case in point is the latest crowding of polling stations by Russian nationals as a way of protest during the three-day voting which ended on Sunday. Manipulation of electoral laws and institutions is seemingly one of Putin's most favoured instruments. The Russian leadership has put policies into place over time that essentially silence critics and obstruct real political rivalry. Putin and his associates benefit from selective enforcement of electoral restrictions, skewed media coverage and stringent registration requirements. It is possible for the Kremlin to create the appearance of a competitive electoral process while guaranteeing the intended result by manipulating the narrative and preventing Opposition voices from being heard. In addition, Putin has worked hard to project the image of a powerful, resolute leader who can defend Russia's interests against outside threats. Putin has successfully created a cult of personality by deftly manipulating State-run media and spreading (mis)information that presents him as essential to the safety and prosperity of the country. Putin has also used external wars and geopolitical crises to his advantage domestically. For instance, the Russian people broadly supported the annexation of Crimea in 2014, seeing it as a return of territory and pride in their country.



Many Russians view Putin as a bulwark against perceived foreign aggression, which has further enhanced his popularity. Putin can gain support and unity from the electorate by portraying himself as a global champion of Russian interests, which will validate his authority in public eyes. In addition, Putin has adeptly appropriated State institutions and utilised his command over the security apparatus to guarantee election results that are advantageous to his Government. Incidents of political persecution, like the detention of well-known activists and opposition figures such as Alexei Navalny, serve as a sobering reminder of what happens when you challenge Putin's authority. Putin aims to preserve control over important State power levers in order to secure his ongoing supremacy in Russian politics. Putin's complex campaign of manipulation, disinformation and pressure is part of his effort to gain legitimacy in the Russian elections. Putin aims to hold on to power and create an air of legitimacy by managing the election process, enhancing his public persona and taking advantage of international crises. Nonetheless, the enduring opposition and the diminishing confidence in Governmental establishments underscore the vulnerability of Putin's governance, implying that the pursuit of legitimacy is a continuous conflict in Russian politics.

PICTALK



A realistic mechanical elephant, gifted to Thrikkayil Mahadeva temple by PETA India, in Kochi

Addressing the poll conundrum

To ensure free and fair elections, tackle the menace of muscle power, money power, misinformation and code of conduct violations diligently

The Chief Election Commissioner, Rajiv Kumar, has announced the 18th Lok Sabha election schedule, starting in April. He has identified four major problems that affect India's free and fair elections. These are the 4Ms: Muscle power, Money power, Misinformation, and violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). They are not new. During his campaign in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to end the criminalisation of politics and regulate the use of black money.

However, the question remains whether it is possible to prevent the improper use of the model code of conduct and control the use of money and muscle power. The Association for Democratic Reforms, an election watchdog, has found that several major Indian political parties, including the BJP, Congress, TMC, NCP, RJD, AAP, CPI(M) and YSRCP, have fielded candidates with criminal offences. The current Members of Parliament (MPs) own assets worth Rs 29,251 crores with an average wealth of Rs 38.33 crores. The report found that 44% of Union Ministers in India have a criminal record, and 25% of MPs have serious criminal cases against them. Of the total MPs, 53 are billionaires, and 475 are crorepati. Increasing use of Money and Muscle power threatens Indian democracy. Politicians began using musclemen for their work, but since the 1980s, these criminals have started running for office. Political parties also find it easy as they fund their campaigns, and people vote for them out of fear. The nexus between crime and politics is a persistent issue that will not go away soon. This link impacts the country's democracy and governance. The connection between the two factors leads to high-cost elections and voter bribes. Those with financial resources use their money to buy their way into politics and become competitive. In the Supreme Court verdict, candidates running for election since March 2003 must provide information on their criminal charges, financial situation,



marital status, sources and amounts of income, wealth, and education in a self-sworn affidavit. However, some candidates need to give more consistent information about their education and assets. The Election Commission has changed the rules for political party funding during elections. The new regulations include decreasing the cash donation limit from Rs 20,000 to Rs 2,000 and introducing anonymous electoral bond contributions. However, companies can still donate to political parties without disclosing the source of funds up to a certain amount. The law does not limit the number of cash donations to enhance transparency. The Supreme Court prohibited the sale of election bonds this year. The government introduced the bond system in 2018. Individuals or companies can purchase these bonds at a value ranging from Rs 1,000 to Rs one crore, with no limit on the maximum amount. In the last five Assembly polls, electoral bonds worth Rs 6,128 crore were sold, raising concerns about transparency and accountability. Only a few parties benefitted, including the BJP and the Congress, and the BJP had a significant share. The court found that the



THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA HAS SUCCESSFULLY ORGANISED 17 LOK SABHA ELECTIONS, 16 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND OVER 400 ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. WITH 978 MILLION ELIGIBLE VOTERS, THE CREDIT FOR MAKING THIS HAPPEN GOES TO THE VOTERS

bonds lacked transparency and banned them recently. Poll officials seized drugs, cash, and liquor worth over Rs 1760 crores in the five poll-bound states, more than seven times the seizures made in previous Assembly Elections worth Rs. 239.15 Crore. Rajiv Kumar has banned Cash transportation in bank vehicles after sunset as part of the new rules for the 2024 polls. The Commission will also monitor Non-scheduled chartered flights for cash, liquor, and drug movement to aid in seizure efforts. Indian democracy has thrived for over 75 years despite various challenges such as illiteracy, poverty, and more. The power has shifted smoothly 17 times, unlike in the neighbouring countries. The Election Commission of India has successfully organised 17 Lok Sabha, 16 Presidential elections, and over 400 assembly elections. With 978 million eligible voters, the credit for making this happen goes to them. Several committees in India, such as the Goswami, Vohra, and Indrajit Gupta Committees, the Law Commission, the National Commission to Review the Constitution, the Election Commission of India, and the Administrative Reforms

Commission, have proposed electoral reforms. They must be implemented urgently. Committees have proposed ways to solve the problem of undesirable people entering government positions. However, these suggestions still need to be implemented. The Election Commission has established a Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for political parties to adhere to during elections. The EC needs more power to enforce the MCC and ensure political parties comply. Another problem is the spread of Misinformation and fake news during elections. The Poll body needs to curb this further. The Misinformation and whispering campaign prevents a level playing field. Individuals, political parties, and the government must work together to maintain democratic principles. Parliament should implement policies to enhance political finance regulations and ensure that candidates with significant criminal cases cannot run for office. Additionally, the government must prioritise political transparency, accountability, and ethical behaviour. (The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TEACHERS GET RECOGNITION

Sir — It's truly great to know that the Maharashtra government in a recent resolution issued by the state school education department has permitted the teachers to use the prefix 'Tr' in front of their names on the lines of doctors and advocates. The resolution, besides introducing a dress code for school teachers has permitted teachers to use the prefix 'Tr' before their names. This noble and highly appreciative gesture is worth emulating as educators across the nation have been requesting the various governments for a prefix that can give significant recognition to those in the noble profession which is also considered to be the mother of all professions. The 'Tr' prefix can uplift the spirits of school teachers who despite being the very foundation of education go unnoticed. Besides 'Dr' for doctors and 'Adv' for lawyers a few years ago Chartered Accountants were bestowed with a 'CA' and architects gracefully adopted 'Arch' for their titles. This gesture of Maharashtra is sure to be emulated by other state governments as teachers in the various states have been seeking this to acknowledge their indispensable role. Bestowing 'Tr' to teachers can garner more respect and admiration for the teaching community. The introduction of the 'Tr' prefix no doubt will redefine the teaching profession rewarding those in the profession with societal recognition and also giving a morale boost for teachers whose hard work and dedication create a better future for the society, nation and the whole world.

M Pradyu | Kannur

AI AND ELECTIONS

Sir — Artificial Intelligence (AI) is significantly influencing the 2024 Indian elections, particularly in the realm of campaigning. AI technologies are being utilised to create a variety of content, including memes, deepfakes and simulated audio, to support specific narratives and influence public opinion. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been at the forefront of adopting AI for campaign purposes, such as

One nation, one election



Former President Ram Nath Kovind, who leads the high-level committee on 'One Nation, One Election' has submitted its report. It is for conducting simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies followed by elections to the local

bodies within 100 days. There are many questions that remain to be answered before the law takes shape. It is accepted that cost can be reduced considerably. In the case of the death of an elected representative in the midst of his term will a by-election be held or the post will be kept vacant? Secondly, our anti-defection law is not that stringent. Defection in single or in groups should be totally banned. Thirdly splitting a party after elections or changing sides by defection should cause a member to lose his post. In the case of a fractured mandate will a reelection be held again in a state? All disputes need to be resolved before a decision is taken.

Sravana Ramachandran | Chennai

translating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speeches into multiple languages to reach a wider audience. This use of AI extends to micro-targeting voters with personalised content, advertisements, and messages based on extensive datasets that analyse population, social media engagement, and online behaviour. However, there are concerns about the ethical implications of AI in elections, especially regarding the spread of misinformation and the lack of regulation over AI-generated content by party IT cells and social media operatives. The Election Commission of India monitors official social media accounts and ad spending but does not regulate the actions of these groups. Experts suggest that while AI can revolutionise campaign strategies and voter outreach, it also presents challenges that need to be addressed to ensure fair and democratic elections.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

PARENTS SHAPE CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Sir — In the labyrinthine web of child development, parents serve as architects, shaping not only the physical environment but also the psychological and emotional landscapes within which their children grow. The words they speak and the actions

they take echo deeply within the hearts and minds of their children, leaving lasting impressions that mould their very beings. Positive expressions of love, encouragement and nurturing support foster emotional resilience and self-esteem. Conversely, neglect, criticism or verbal abuse can lead to deep emotional wounds like low self-confidence, depression and anxiety. The quality of parent-child communication plays a pivotal role in shaping children's mental health. Open, supportive dialogue nurtures trust and emotional intimacy, providing children with a safe space to express their thoughts and feelings. On the contrary, communication barriers or conflicts within the family dynamic can aggravate emotional distress and strain relationships. Recognising the deep-rooted impact of their words and actions, parents must prioritise emotional support, positive communication and empathy to nurture their children's holistic development. By fostering a supportive and loving environment, parents encourage their offspring to thrive and flourish in every aspect of their lives.

Tanisha Gupta | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Surge in celiac disease calls for awareness

The gap between prevalence and diagnosis of celiac disease underscores the urgent need for heightened awareness and improved diagnostics

Traditionally thought to be uncommon in Asia, recent studies, including those conducted by AIIMS, have shed light on the prevalence of celiac disease in many Asian countries. In India alone, an estimated 6 to 8 million people are believed to be living with the condition, yet only a fraction have received a formal diagnosis. This alarming gap between prevalence and diagnosis underscores the urgency for increased awareness and enhanced diagnostic and treatment capabilities. Celiac disease, also known as celiac sprue or gluten-sensitive enteropathy, is a chronic autoimmune disorder that affects the small intestine. It is triggered by the ingestion of dietary gluten, a protein found in wheat and barley. When individuals with celiac disease consume gluten, their immune system responds by damaging the lining of the small intestine, leading to various gastrointestinal symptoms and potentially causing long-term health complications. Celiac disease affects approximately one per cent of the global population, although many



cases remain undiagnosed. The condition can manifest at any age, from infancy to late adulthood and can affect both genders. However, women are more prone to develop celiac disease. The first Asian Pacific Celiac Disease Symposium (APCDS 2024) commenced in New Delhi, focusing on the critical aspects of management, diagnosis and treatment of Celiac Disease. The symposium, organised by AIIMS in collaboration with the Asia Pacific Association of Gastroenterology (APAGE) and the International Society for the Study of Celiac Disease (ISSCD), marks a pivotal moment in the fight against this autoimmune disorder. APCDS 2024 serves as a platform for leading experts, healthcare professionals, and stakeholders to address the growing prevalence of celiac disease in the

Asia-Pacific region. Given the observed increase in cases across Asian countries. The establishment of timely diagnosis and management systems is crucial. Dr. Govind Makharia, Professor in the Department of Gastroenterology and Human Nutrition at AIIMS, highlighted the significance of the disease, "there is a need for concerted efforts to increase awareness and enhance diagnostic and treatment capabilities. Celiac disease knows no borders, and the symposium has emphasised the necessity for a united front in addressing this global health issue." Individuals with celiac disease may experience a range of symptoms, including: **Digestive Issues:** These can include diarrhoea, constipation, abdominal pain, bloating and nausea. **Malnutrition:** Damage to the small intestine can impair nutrient absorption, leading to deficiencies in vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients. This can result in fatigue, weight loss, anaemia and stunted growth. **Skin Problems:** Some individuals with celiac disease

may develop dermatitis herpetiformis, a skin rash characterised by itchy blisters. **Joint Pain:** Celiac disease has been associated with joint pain and inflammation. **Neurological Symptoms:** In some cases, celiac disease can cause headaches, numbness, and tingling sensations. The primary treatment for celiac disease is strict adherence to a gluten-free diet. Along with the scientific programme in APCDS 2024, a workshop for dietitians was also organised to create infrastructure for celiac disease. Since dietitians are central in the treatment of celiac disease, it is necessary to have dietitians with in-depth knowledge about celiac disease and gluten free diet. The aim was to sensitise them with different challenges faced by patients and how to overcome them. Also, a workshop for patients was conducted to educate them about the disease and treatment protocol. Group counselling sessions were conducted by a team of dietitians and patients queries were answered. (The author is consultant Celiac dietician, AIIMS; views are personal)



WAJIHA MEHTAB

FIRST COLUMN

THE INDISPENSABLE
ROLE OF MENTORS

From guiding individuals to fostering skill development, mentors play a pivotal role



SAKSHI SETHI

In today's dynamic and fast-paced world, the need for mentors is more critical than ever. Hardly anyone can think of a time when they have been influenced in a significant way apart from mentoring. With rapid advancements in technology and changing job requirements, continuous skill development is essential for staying relevant in the workforce. As the professional landscape is becoming more sophisticated, prospective specialists need mentorship and guidance to stay focused and motivated.

Mentoring is a dynamic relationship between a more experienced individual i.e. the mentor and a less experienced individual i.e. the mentee, wherein the former provides guidance, support and expertise to help the latter develop personally, professionally or academically. In a short sense, it is fundamental to professional growth and success and is nowadays a common finding with highly successful people. It comes in a variety of different forms and areas of life and includes several aspects such as training, accompaniment, boost and direction from people who have both – done it before and are generally independent of the mentee's current.

Change is highly inevitable, whether it's in the form of industry disruptions, organizational restructuring or personal life transitions. In an era marked by high levels of stress, anxiety and burnout, mentors play a crucial role in supporting their mental health and well-being. They offer a listening ear, provide coping mechanisms and encourage self-care practices to promote resilience and balance.



Along with professional guidance, they also support personal development by helping mentees in a variety of tasks such as setting goals, prioritising tasks, managing time effectively and even maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Mentoring is not only required in organisations but is also essential in schools and organisations as it fosters skill development, career guidance, personal growth, leadership development, diversity and inclusion, enhanced performance and well-being. It contributes to the overall success and health of educational institutions. Some of them and even seniors serving as mentors can pass on their knowledge, expertise and leadership skills and provide feedback on their strengths and areas for improvement and helping them progress in their careers thereby ensuring continuity and succession within the organisation.


Research has shown that employees who have access to mentorship programmes are more likely to feel engaged and satisfied with their jobs as they help them feel valued and supported thereby, increasing their loyalty to the organization and reducing turnover. Not only this, but they also even play a crucial role in promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace by supporting underrepresented employees, advocating for their advancement and fostering a culture of inclusivity. Overall, mentors serve as trusted advisors, guides and role models who contribute to mentees' success and fulfilment in both their personal as well as professional lives.

A good mentor can a new job applicant up to speed quicker and help with answers to questions that may arise. Mentoring can be that hand that reaches down and pulls an individual out of the pit. It can change lives forever and create permanent relationships. It can even help a child get on the right track if they do not have someone else to help them. Mentors are indispensable for guiding and supporting individuals through complexity, fostering skill development, facilitating networking, nurturing leadership and fostering personal growth. Their guidance and support are and will be highly invaluable in helping mentees navigate the challenges and opportunities of the modern world.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

From awareness to action: India's fight against thalassemia

Collaboration between the public and private sectors is crucial to create widespread national awareness about thalassemia



KIRIT P SOLANKI

through various initiatives. One key programme is the Thalassemia Bal Sewa Yojana (TBSY), launched in 2017 and recently extended into its third phase in May 2023. This Public-Private Partnership (PPP) initiative provides financial assistance to thalassemia patients eligible for bone marrow transplant treatment. Recognising the critical need for safe blood management, the National Blood

Transfusion Council (NBTC) has established guidelines ensuring free blood access for thalassemia patients across all states and territories. Furthermore, the government prioritises preventing Transfusion-Transmitted Infections (TTIs) by promoting voluntary blood donation and implementing world-class blood screening methods like Nucleic Acid Testing (NAT).

India, known as the thalassemia capital of the world, harbours over 1.5 lakh people living with thalassemia major (i.e., blood transfusion-dependent) and diagnoses approximately 10,000 new cases annually, despite its preventable nature. Living with thalassemia, a genetic blood disorder, is a constant struggle,

Gender bias in politics is a crude reality

The recent South Carolina primary victory of Donald Trump over Nikki Haley has reignited discussions surrounding gender biases in political elections



ARCHANA DATTA



Donald Trump has won the South Carolina primary, defeating Nikki Haley, the last major Republican candidate in the race for Presidential nomination. On the eve of the poll, one of the South Carolinian Republican supporters in her home State, reportedly commented that 'yes, Ms Haley did some fine things as governor, but, Donald Trump is the man', which perhaps reflected the predominant public mood. Now, is this a case of a perceptible preferential bias among voters in favour of male candidates compared to female candidates?

'Many voters seem to use gender as one of the ways to evaluate candidates, predict a candidate's beliefs and competency — and use it as a shortcut for information about the candidates — and these subtle biases in some electoral contests, put a candidate at a disadvantage because of his or her gender', said Kira Sanbonmatsu, a political science professor, Ohio University, who authored a 2000 study on 'gender and voter's preferences'. A study in French parliamentary elections across different polling stations found that votes for women are lower in municipalities with more traditional gender-role attitudes (Barbanchon and Sauvagnat, 2019). However, a 2018 research contended that 'gender, through which men and women identify with masculinity and femininity with sets of roles, traits and ideals, strongly conditions the impact of sex on the voting pattern, but, it differs from case to case, depending on where one places oneself on a masculinity/femininity continuum'.

Many men, who do not strongly identify with hyper-masculinity, are equally or more liberal than women on various



ON THE EVE OF THE POLL, ONE OF THE SOUTH CAROLINIAN REPUBLICAN SUPPORTERS IN HER HOME STATE REPORTEDLY COMMENTED THAT 'YES, MS HALEY DID SOME FINE THINGS AS GOVERNOR, BUT DONALD TRUMP IS THE MAN', WHICH PERHAPS REFLECTED THE PREDOMINANT PUBLIC MOOD

issues, while, many highly feminine women with very traditional gender identities, are more conservative on some issues, and thus, gender cannot be automatically treated as a 'first-order' or 'meta' identity, the study added. There is also a competing view that 'gender is not a strong pull on the vote or on political attitudes, and that there are few male-female gaps in attitudes in voting' (Amanda Bittner, University of Newfoundland & Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, Queens University, 2017).

A study in Spain, after it adopted a law in 2007, that obliged political parties to include at least 40 per cent of women on every list for every election, didn't find any evidence that it had either worsened women's relative electoral performance or voters' lower electoral support for exogenous reasons (Bagues and Campa, 2020). Nevertheless, in the 2018 midterms in the USA, sex and gender did play a prominent role, leading to large partisan gaps between men and women in casting their ballots. A study in India revealed that a 'woman voter' is more likely to vote for a male candidate, than a man to vote for a woman, as it is more about perception of society, than the candidates' suitability'. Sadly, women's under-representation in electoral politics is a reality! World Economic Forum's Gender Equality Report, underlined that so far only 25% of a hypothetical 100% gender gap has been closed in women's political

participation. Many political scientists explained the gap from the angle of supply and demand constraints, as there is 'a shortage of potential candidates', and also 'lower appeal of women politicians in electoral battles'. Several socio-economic and cultural barriers keep women away from politics, and create 'a higher opportunity cost of running for elections' (Fox et al., 2001).

Women also tend to be less in number in professions that become a conduit for a political career (Welch, 1977, Clark, 1994). Studies also mentioned the 'ambition deficit', as many women, despite having the requisite professional and economic credentials, often fight shy of entering competitive politics (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007 & Fox and Lawless, 2004). Family and relational considerations dissuade many of them, as recent research in Sweden found that female politicians in mayoral positions experienced a significant increase in the likelihood of divorcing their partner (Folke and Rickne, 2020). On the other hand, 'women are routinely demotivated by being told that they do not belong here, signifying a structured system of oppressive gender hierarchy in politics'. Sexism among party leaders is also rampant, more so, if they are aware of voters' bias against women, as a votes-maximising strategy.

While, India witnessed an increasing turnout of women voters, in the 2019 election, but, the number of women candidates

remained less than 9 per cent. Those who did get party tickets, mostly, have family political connections or are 'dynastic' politicians. The gender quota at PRIs 'hasn't created much larger candidacy responses at the state level'. However, a study (Bhalotra et al. 2018), analysing electoral data over three decades (1980-2007) found that a woman's electoral victory leads to an 18.5 percentage point higher probability of having a woman as a major party candidate in the next election.

Now, as of November 2021, gender quotas have been adopted in 132 countries, either in the form of voluntary party or compulsory legislative quotas. A study (1995-2012) disclosed that such measures enhanced women's representation from 11 percent to 21 percent. Some critics argued that it is 'anti-democratic', and 'manipulate voters' choices', while, a section of women's rights activists claimed, they are 'disrespectful in the assumption that women cannot get seats on their own', and are often negatively labelled as 'quota women'. Nevertheless, it brought women in many least-developed countries like Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania to the political front, and increased their substantive representation on issues that are traditionally seen as gendered. India has already passed the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023, its implementation cannot be put off to an uncertain date!

(The author is former Director General, Doordarshan & All India Radio, views are personal)

Thalassemia, characterised by an inherited blood irregularity resulting in insufficient haemoglobin production, impacts the functionality of red blood cells. Once unrecognised and daunting in India, thalassemia now faces resilience and has been acknowledged as a benchmark disability under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016. With advancements in medical research, increased awareness campaigns, and collaborative efforts between government bodies, healthcare professionals, and philanthropic organisations, India stands at the forefront of combating thalassemia.

Government Initiatives

The Government of India has actively addressed this issue

especially when ensuring a sufficient and readily available blood supply is a continuous challenge. However, the Government of India has been working to address this issue and continues to do so. In 2020, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare inaugurated a Thalassemia Screening and Counseling Center at the Indian Red Cross Society's National Headquarters (IRCS NHQ) Blood Bank to educate the public on the prevention of this disease. Additionally, there are currently 10 transplant centres in India. In 2023, Vinod K. Paul from NITI Aayog announced that the model used to screen people in tribal belts for sickle-cell disease would be applied to thalassemia screening as well, urging the Union Government

for a national mission to tackle thalassemia. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)'s decision to provide blood transfusion therapy to thalassemia patients free of charge is a welcome move that will significantly ease the patients' lives. On the research front, the ICMR National Institute of Immunohematology (NIIH) and the National Institute of Research in Tribal Health (NIRTH) are researching haemoglobin disorders such as thalassemia, engaging in field investigations, and enhancing diagnostic techniques. Furthermore, Dr Bharati Pravin Pawar, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, launched the third phase of the Thalassemia Bal

Sewa Yojana (TBSY) to commemorate World Thalassemia Day. The minister emphasised the importance of increasing awareness, screening, and treatment facilities for blood disorders like thalassemia and sickle-cell anaemia. The launch also included the unveiling of the Thalassemia Bal Sewa Yojana Portal and the release of Standard Treatment Guidelines for Sickle Cell Disease. Thalassemia can be prevented through early detection and intervention. Recognising this potential, the government has prioritised raising awareness and implementing screening programmes to reduce the national burden of the disease.

Lack of Public Awareness

A significant barrier to bridg-

ing the blood supply gap in India is the lack of public awareness about voluntary blood donation. Additionally, a lack of clear understanding about the donation process and accessible locations creates further barriers to participation. This, coupled with the continued practice of replacement donation in many hospitals and blood banks, despite government regulations, hinders the creation of a sufficient and diverse blood bank inventory, especially for emergencies.

Way Forward

Effective thalassemia management requires stricter enforcement of standardised blood screening guidelines. Collaboration between patient advocacy groups and healthcare providers can

address concerns about blood safety, transmission risks, and social stigma through accurate information dissemination. Implementing advanced screening methods is crucial, but robust implementation is also key.

Upgrading healthcare infrastructure, training healthcare workers, and investing in new technologies are essential for significant progress. Collaboration between patient advocacy groups like the Thalassemia Patients Advocacy Group (TPAG) and healthcare providers can address concerns about blood safety, transmission risks, and social stigma.

(The writer is a member of Parliament, views are personal)

Uddhav has discarded Balasaheb ideology by sitting with INDIA Bloc, says Shinde

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Monday charged that his predecessor and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray had discarded the ideology of late Sena chief Bal Thackeray by sharing a platform with the Opposition INDIA bloc leaders at Shivaji Park in Mumbai on Sunday. Taking a swipe at Uddhav a day after the latter shared the stage with Opposition leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, at the historic Shivaji Park where late Bal Thackeray founded the Sena in 1966, Shinde said that the INDIA bloc had no moral right to hold its rally at the Shivaji Park ground. "It was a black day for Shiv Sena because it was from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Park that Balasaheb Thackeray addressed the country. Now, the INDIA alliance rally is happening at the same venue. The INDIA Alliance has no moral right to hold a meeting in Shivaji Park," Shinde said. Maintaining that Uddhav had gone against the ideology of his late father by "sitting" with the Opposition leaders who had spoken against the Hindutva ideology, Shinde said: "Given



that Uddhav Thackeray sat with those against whom he fought, he should apologise to the late Balasaheb Thackeray. Uddhav shared platform with those who spoke against Hindutva ideology. Leaders of Shiv Sena (UBT) should bow before Balasaheb Thackeray and apologise." "The meeting was held in front of Veer Savarkar's memorial and Balasaheb Thackeray's memorial. Those who used foul language against Veer Savarkar and made unfounded allegations against him are gathered at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Park. This is unfortunate," Shinde said. Demanding to know as to why Uddhav his start address by greeting the people "Hindu brothers and sisters" which he

would normally do, Shinde said: "At Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Park late Balasaheb Thackeray always started his speech with 'all my Hindu brothers, sisters.' So why didn't Uddhav Thackeray's speech in yesterday's meeting start like this?" Shinde said his predecessor Uddhav Thackeray discarded Shiv Sena founder late Bal Thackeray's ideology. "You discarded the principles of Balasaheb for power, for the sake of chair. Balasaheb once said that he would not allow the Shiv Sena to become the Congress and if that happens, he will shut his shop," the chief minister said, while referring to a speech delivered by Uddhav Thackeray during the INDIA Alliance event.

Alleging that "Gandhi has insulted Hindus: and that the Congress was anti-Hindu, Shinde said:" How can we say that we are proud Hindus when some people even fear saying the words Hindu Hriday Samrat these days?" Heaping praise on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his contribution to the country during the last ten years. Shinde said: "What the Congress government did not do in 50-60 years, Prime Minister Modi has done in 10 years. The development of the country is in front of us." Shinde expressed confidence that since the work done by his government in two years is in front of everyone, the people would support "Maha-Yuti" in the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls. "All those who had run away from Uttar Pradesh. Bihar and Kashmir and settled in Mumbai had gathered yesterday at Shivaji Maharaj Park. The Opposition parties have lost hope and faith. All the leaders present at the rally did was to criticise Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The people have lost confidence in the Opposition leaders. How can you expect to repose their faith in them and support them in the polls?", the chief minister asked.

Administration sabotaged simultaneous LS, Assembly polls in JK, alleges Omar

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and Vice President of the National Conference Omar Abdullah Monday launched a scathing attack on the Jammu and Kashmir administration for 'sabotaging' the conduct of the Assembly polls alongside Lok Sabha polls in the region. Without mincing any words Omar took the administration to task claiming the current dispensation wants to rule Jammu and Kashmir like 'uncrowned kings'. "We wanted simultaneous elections along with Lok Sabha elections. But, it did not happen. The current government of Jammu and Kashmir sabotaged that because they do not want to hand over the power to the people again. They are ruling like uncrowned kings," Abdullah told reporters in the South Kashmir district of Kulgam. Omar visited the area to launch his party's election campaign for the Anantnag-Rajouri Parliamentary constituency. Before his media interaction, Omar also accused the bureaucracy of creating hurdles and delaying the assembly polls while addressing party workers at Damhal Hanjipora. "Our officers put the hurdles in holding the assembly elec-

tions by saying that they cannot make adequate security arrangements. On one hand, you say that the situation is better, normalcy has been restored, and there is no danger of guns now. "If there is no danger of guns, then you will not need much security deployment and if you do not need it, then you should have held elections. The reality is that they are getting spoiled," he said. The former J-K chief minister, however, said the Election Commission has to hold the assembly polls before the Supreme Court's deadline of September 30 this year which the top court gave while passing its order after hearing a batch of petitions challenging the revocation of Article 370. Interestingly, Omar added a new twist by claiming the Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) is still alive. When reporters asked him to comment on the status of the Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), Omar Abdullah said the alliance stands "What has happened to its status? We run our different parties... We have held press conferences together as well as individually. And today, I am talking to you individually, does that mean there is no PAGD? It stands and they will meet in a day or two," he said.

Kerala BJP workers allege of conspiracy by alliance partner to keep party weak in State

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The NDA in Kerala reminds one of an adage in Malayalam: "Pande Durbala, Pinne Garbhini" which means 'she is weak by birth, now she has become pregnant'. This sums up the BJP-led NDA in Kerala which never was a force to reckon with in the State. At the time of the crucial 2024 Lok Sabha election, the NDA is facing a severe revolt from within and this has put the fate of the alliance in doldrums. Hardcore BJP leaders are unanimous in their opinion that there is a conspiracy by the leaders of the party in Kerala to keep the Hindutva outfit weak eternally. Vellappalli Natesan and his son Tushar Vellappalli, the duo calling the shots in Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yoga, a movement launched by Sree Narayana Guru for the upliftment of the Eezhava community, has hijacked the organization with an eye to make sure that the community members do not vote for the BJP, according to veteran BJP leaders and Hindu activists in the State. Natesan, general secretary of the SNDP Yogam has been accused of financial embezzlement to the tune of hundreds of crores rupees meant for micro-financing start-up initiatives by the community members. Tushar is also charged with complicity in

the crime. Moreover, the last named was arrested by the UAE Police in connection with money laundering and it was the intervention of a West Asian based Malayali business baron that led to his release from police custody. The father-son duo is dancing to the tunes of the CPI(M) and chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan and it is shocking to note that the BJP's central leadership is not aware of these developments," said Jaiby Jose Kuruvithadam, a long time activist of the BJP. According to Jaiby, the father-son duo's mission is to keep the Christian community away from the BJP. "Tushar Vellappalli's statement that P C George, veteran law maker, joining the BJP would not make any impact in the election is highly deplorable. George is a seven time legislator while Tushar is yet to poll a respectable vote share," said Jaiby. Office bearers of SNDP and its political arm Bharatiya Jana Dharma Sena gave out startling disclosure that both the organizations have become the personal properties of the Vellappalli family. "The BJDS has fielded Sangeetha Viswanathan, a CPI(M) decoy leader as its candidate from Idukki. This woman was in the forefront of the CPI(M)-led renaissance rally justifying the entry of women into Sabari Mala shrine," said Jaiby.

Will return to power in Mizoram after 2028 Assembly polls: MNF

PTI ■ AIZAWL

Mizoram's main Opposition party Mizo National Front's (MNF) on Monday claimed that it will come back to power after the next Assembly polls due in 2028. "It appears that we are coming back to power after five years. Looking at the general attitude, our perspective will change as those in the literate states," MNF vice president Vanlalawma said while addressing a party meeting in Aizawl. Although the current Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government headed by Chief Minister Lalduhoma is "doing a good job as of now", people's attitude towards the government may change gradually, he said. In the state assembly polls held in November last year, the MNF suffered a heavy defeat against the ZPM and bagged only 10 seats, down from the 26 it had won in the 2018 assem-



blly polls. The ZPM had won 27 seats, while BJP and Congress bagged two and one seats, respectively, in the 40-member assembly. Vanlalawma told PTI that the MNF may announce the name of its candidate for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls this week. Polling for the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state will be held on April 19, and the counting of votes will take place on June 4. The last date for filing nomination is March 27, while the last date of withdrawal of can-

didature is March 30. The ruling ZPM, which is contesting the Lok Sabha polls for the first time on its own, has fielded 46-year-old entrepreneur Richard Vanlalhmangaiha. Congress spokesperson Dr Lallianchung said they will soon come out with the name of the party's candidate. The BJP will also contest the Lok Sabha polls and shortly announce the name of its candidate, the state party president Vanlalhmua said.

BJP leader Gowda expresses displeasure over ticket denial, says will share inner feelings soon

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Amid speculation that Congress has contacted him, former Karnataka Chief Minister and BJP MP D V Sadananda Gowda on Monday said he will share his "inner feelings" soon. The 71-year-old former Union Minister, who is celebrating his birthday today, expressed his displeasure over being denied the ticket to contest from Bangalore North again and said "there is nothing left to say that BJP is a party with a difference in Karnataka." BJP shifted Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Shobha Karandlaje, who is currently representing Udupi Chikmagalur Lok Sabha segment, to contest from Bangalore North. "It is true that I have been contacted by others, it is also true that our party leaders also contacted and discussed with me. Last night a predominant office bearer of



our party came to me and tried to pacify me. Various things are happening," Gowda, a former State BJP President, said in response to a question. Speaking to reporters here, he said today being his birthday he would like to spend time with family and well wishers. "After that, making a decision, I will come before you, and address the media...I have to share my inner feelings. I have to discuss with my family on

my decision, after my consciousness, I have to consult my family," he added. Claiming that BJP National General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Radha Mohan Das Agarwal had told him that out of 28 constituencies, Bangalore North was the only segment where there is no other candidate other than him, Gowda said he has information about certain developments that have happened in

Delhi and here in the party. "I had decided to stay away from electoral politics, but I was pulled back asking me to contest by all senior state leaders, but no one came to my rescue at the last minute, and have caused some embarrassment to me," he said. Further noting that ups and down and embarrassments are common in politics, the former Union Minister, however, said despite knowing things, sacri-

ficing someone for selfish motives "will hurt." "There is nothing left to say, (BJP is) a party with a difference in Karnataka, this has pained me. I will speak about it," he added. Gowda had earlier announced his decision to retire from electoral politics, but later backtracked saying that there is pressure on him to contest the election again. Meanwhile, Karandlaje, who met Gowda today and greeted him on his birthday, said Congress will not be successful in its attempts. "Congress is frustrated and confused without candidates, don't know who all they are contacting, Sadananda Gowda is a former Chief Minister, he had occupied several important ministries at the Centre. He is our senior leader, Congress will not be successful in this. Let them contact whoever they want, everyone will support Narendra Modi and will work towards making him PM once again," she said.

Modi, Rahul engage in...

From Page 1

"Modi, who is a slave of the same power, imposes GST on the poor of the country without controlling inflation and auctions the country's wealth to increase the strength of that power. "The PM is upset and the entire BJP is talking baseless things after Rahul attacked 'Asuri Shakti'. This election is between 'Asuri Shakti' and 'Daivik Shakti', Congress national spokesperson Pawan Kherra said. "Where was the Prime Minister's worship of the 'Shakti' when female wrestlers were being harassed and Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh was sitting inside their homes? Where was your 'shakti ki upasna' at the time," Kherra posed.

Some parties dodge...

From Page 1

"The scheme also does not require the details of the donor to be furnished to the donee. ... Be that as it may, following the directions of Supreme Court, we contacted our donors and we were able to collect the details from them," the DMK said. The Goa unit of the Congress reached out to its donor VM Salgaonkar and Brothers to get details of the electoral bonds worth Rs 30 lakh given by them to the party. The RJD said the details about donations worth Rs 1.5 crore were not readily available. The Nitish Kumar-led Janata Dal (United) has told the Election Commission that someone delivered to its office an envelope with electoral bonds worth Rs 10 crore in 2019, which were redeemed by the party. Earlier, during the hearing in the Supreme Court on Monday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said after the March 11 order (on SBI's plea time till June 30 to furnish details of electoral

bonds to the EC), those before the court started giving press interviews 'deliberately embarrassing the court' and as nobody can rebut that from this side. "Based upon the twisted and other statistics, any kind of posts are being made. I know your lordships cannot control that," Mehta said, appearing for the Centre. The CJ, however, said the court is only concerned about enforcing its directions issued in the verdict. "As judges, we decide according to the Constitution. We are governed by the rule of law. We are also the subject matter of comments in the social media and the press. But surely, as an institution, our shoulders are broad enough," the CJ said. "Our court has an institutional role to play in a polity which is governed by the Constitution and the rule of law. That is the only job," Justice Chandrachud said. The CJ said once the court delivers a judgement, it becomes the nation's property, open for debate.

Mehta said his purpose was to inform the apex court that there is "something else playing out" which neither the court intended nor the scheme intended. "I have something to share and I have been watching this very painfully outside the court. Your lordships sit in a kind of a silo. Your lordships are in an ivory tower, not in a negative sense of the term, but what we know here, your lordships never come to know," the solicitor general said. Mehta said the SBI's application, seeking an extension of time till June 30 to furnish the details of electoral bonds to the EC, came up for hearing on March 11 and the court clarified the position. "Thereafter, a series, a barrage of social media posts at least intended to cause embarrassment started during these two days...," Mehta said. The apex court told the SBI to make "complete disclosure" of all details related to the electoral bonds scheme by March 21.

BJP...

From Page 1

Acknowledging his success in securing the need of 5/6 seats to contest on Lok Sabha polls, Chirag expressed his happiness that his late father's legacy has been kept intact and that BJP kept with its commitment to empower him after Nitish realigned with BJP. Sources said Paras can now switch over to the Congress, RJD alliance of INDIA Bloc after resigning from the Cabinet soon.

EC removes top bureaucrats...

From Page 1

The Commission meeting chaired by Rajiv Kumar, comprising Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu was held on Monday at 12 pm, the sources said. IPS officer Vivek Sahay was appointed as the new DGP of West Bengal on Monday, shortly after Rajeev Kumar was removed from the position by EC. Vivek Sahay is a 1988 batch IPS officer of the West Bengal cadre. He has previously served as the Director General (DG), Provisioning and the Director General of Home Guards. Sahay was also in charge of Mamata's security, however, the Election Commission suspended him in March 2021 following an attack on the CM which caused her severe leg injuries. He was later reinstated to the post of Director of Security.

HC restrains OPS from using AIADMK party symbol, flag, letterhead



PTI ■ CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Monday restrained expelled AIADMK leader O Paneerselvam from using the official letterhead, reserved symbol "Two Leaves" and the flag of party. Justice N Sathishkumar passed the order on a suit and applications filed by AIADMK general secretary and former Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami. Originally, on a suit filed by Palaniswami, Justice Sathishkumar had on November 7, 2023 passed an interim order, restraining Paneerselvam from using the party letterhead, symbol and flag. Aggrieved, OPS, as Paneerselvam is known, had filed appeals. A division bench comprising Justices R Mahadevan and Mohammed Shaffiq had on

January 11, 2024 dismissed the three appeals filed by OPS. The bench however, granted liberty to the expelled leader to approach the single Judge by filing necessary applications seeking to vacate the order, if any, passed against him. On filing of such application, the Judge shall consider and pass appropriate orders, on its own merits and in accordance with law, the bench had added. Accordingly, Paneerselvam had approached the single judge. After hearing elaborate arguments from both sides, Justice Sathishkumar allowed the applications arising out of the suit filed by Palaniswami and passed the present order. In a power tussle between the top two leaders, Paneerselvam was expelled by a general council of the AIADMK in July 2022. Later, Palaniswami was elected as the top leader of the main opposition party.

3 more held for attack on international students at Gujarat University hostel

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Police on Monday arrested three more persons in connection with the alleged attack some international students in the Gujarat University hostel premises here for offering namaz near the hostel block, the crime branch said. The city crime branch on Sunday nabbed two persons - Hitesh Mevada and Bharat Patel - and handed over them to the Gujarat University police station for further legal process, it said in a release. On Monday, the crime branch arrested three more persons, Kshitij Pandey (22), Jitendra Patel (31) and Sahil Dudhatiya (21), all residents of Ahmedabad, and handed them over to the local police for further probe, taking the total number of the arrested accused to five so far, the release said. Students hailing from different foreign countries were assaulted on Saturday night by a group of persons in the Gujarat University hostel for offering namaz near the facility's block, according to the police. Two students — one from Sri Lanka and another from Tajikistan — were hospitalised after the incident which took place in the A-block hostel, police earlier said. Following the incident, an FIR

was registered against 20-25 unidentified persons under Indian Penal Code sections for rioting, unlawful assembly, voluntarily causing hurt, damage to property, criminal trespass, among others. Police Commissioner GS Malik rushed to the spot after the incident and said nine teams were formed to conduct a probe into it. Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi also held a meeting with police officers on Sunday and directed them to take strict and judicial action in the matter. "Some 20-25 people entered the hostel premises (on Saturday night) and objected to the international students offering namaz there, asking them to do so in a mosque. They argued over the issue, assaulting them and hurling stones. They also vandalised their rooms," Malik said earlier. There are around 300 international students enrolled at the Ahmedabad-based Gujarat University, including from Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Sri Lanka and countries in the African continent, the official said. Nearly 75 of the international students stay in the A-block hostel of the university where the incident occurred, he said. Several purported videos of the incident have also surfaced showing people pelting stones and vandalising vehicles of the

Israel launches another raid on Gaza’s main hospital

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli forces launched another raid on the Gaza Strip's largest hospital early Monday, saying Hamas militants had regrouped there and had fired on them from inside the compound, where Palestinian officials say tens of thousands of people have been sheltering. In a separate development, the European Union's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, accused Israel of continuing to hinder efforts to deliver aid to Gaza, saying the territory faces an "entirely man-made" famine as "starvation is used as a weapon of war". The army last raided Shifa Hospital in November after claiming that Hamas maintained an elaborate command centre within and beneath the facility. The military revealed a tunnel leading to some underground rooms, as well as weapons it said were found inside the hospital. But the evidence fell short of the earlier claims, and critics accused the army of recklessly endangering the lives of civilians. People sheltering in the hospital said Israeli forces backed by tanks and artillery had surrounded the medical complex and that snipers were shooting at people inside. They said the army raided a number of buildings and detained dozens of

people. "We're trapped inside," said Abdel-Hady Sayed, who has been sheltering in the medical facility for over three months. "They fire at anything moving. ... Doctors and ambulances can't move." Gaza's Health Ministry said the Israeli army was directing gun and missile fire at a building used for specialised surgeries. It said a fire broke out at the hospital's gate. The ministry said around 30,000 people are sheltering at the hospital, including patients, medical staff and people who have fled their homes seeking safety. Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the chief Israeli military spokesperson, said the army launched a "high-precision operation" in parts of the medical complex. He said senior Hamas militants had regrouped there and were directing attacks from the compound. The army released a grainy aerial video of what it said were militants firing on its forces from inside the hospital, as well as video of a rocket-propelled grenade striking an armoured vehicle. It said its forces had detained around 80 people. Hagari said the patients and medical staff could remain in the medical complex and that a safe passage was available for



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, left, delivers his speech after a meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Jerusalem, Sunday. AP/PTI

civilians who wanted to leave.

HOSPITALS OUT OF SERVICE

Israel accuses Hamas of using hospitals and other civilian facilities to shield its fighters, and the Israeli military has raided several hospitals since the start of the war, which was triggered by Hamas' October 7 attack into southern Israel. Most of Gaza's medical facilities have been forced to shut down for lack of fuel and med-

ical supplies, even as scores of people are killed and wounded each day in Israeli strikes. The Gaza Health Ministry said Monday that at least 31,726 Palestinians have been killed in the war, including 81 in the past 24 hours. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead. Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people in the surprise attack out of Gaza that

triggered the war, and took another 250 people hostage. Hamas is still believed to be holding about 100 captives, as well as the remains of 30 others, after most of the rest were freed during a cease-fire last year in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. The United States, Qatar and Egypt have spent weeks trying to broker another cease-fire and hostage release, but the gulf between the two sides remains wide, with Hamas demanding guarantees for an end to the war and Israel vowing to continue the offensive until it destroys the militant group. Israel's offensive has driven most of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes and the UN says a quarter of the population is starving.

HARSH CONDEMNATION FROM EU DIPLOMAT

Northern Gaza, including Gaza City, was the first target of the invasion and suffered widespread destruction. The military said late last year that it had dismantled most of Hamas' military infrastructure in the north and withdrew thousands of forces, but sporadic fighting has continued. The north is the epicentre of Gaza's humanitarian catastrophe, with many residents reduced to eating

animal feed. At least 20 people, mostly children, have died from malnutrition and dehydration in the north, the Health Ministry said earlier this month. Airdrops by the US and other nations continue, while deliveries on a new sea route have begun, but aid groups say it's essential that Israel open up more ground routes and ease restrictions to meet the mounting humanitarian needs. "We are in a state of famine, affecting thousands of people," EU foreign policy chief Borrell said at an international aid conference in Brussels. "Starvation is used as a weapon of war." He went on to call for greater efficiency at the two functioning border crossings and for Israel to open additional ones. "Israel has to do it. It is not a question of logistics. It is not because the United Nations has not provided enough support," he said. "The support is there, waiting. Trucks are stopped. People are dying, while the land crossings are artificially closed." Israeli authorities say they place no limits on the entry of aid and accuse UN bodies of failing to distribute it in a timely manner, saying aid piles up on the Gaza side of the crossings. Aid groups say distribution is impossible in much of Gaza because of ongoing hostilities, the difficulty of coordinating

with the military and the breakdown of law and order.

The international aid group Oxfam said Sunday that a "dysfunctional and undersized inspection system" snarls the entry of aid, with trucks stranded in long lines for 20 days on average. The group says it has an entire warehouse filled with goods that were rejected, including oxygen, incubators and water and sanitation gear. "Israeli authorities are not only failing to facilitate the international aid effort but are actively hindering it," said Oxfam Mideast director Sally Abi Khalil.

'FAMINE IMMINENT' IN NORTHERN GAZA

The UN food agency says "famine is imminent" in northern Gaza, where an estimated 70% of the population faces catastrophic hunger. The World Food Program on Monday released the latest findings of its Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, an international process for estimating the scale of hunger crises. It says virtually everyone in Gaza is struggling to get enough food, and around 210,000 people in northern Gaza are in Phase 5, the highest, which refers to catastrophic hunger.

Bulgaria's foreign min to form next government in power-sharing deal

AP ■ SOFIA

Bulgarian President Rumen Radev on Monday tapped the largest group in parliament, the centre-right GERB-UDF coalition, to form the country's new government. Radev handed the mandate to Maria Gabriel, the prime minister-designate under a power-sharing deal by the two main political parties, according to which each would hold the top job for nine months at a time. Earlier this month, Nikolay Denkov of the reformist coalition led by "We Continue the Change," stepped down after his nine months as prime minister, paving the way for Gabriel, a former European Commissioner who served as deputy head of Denkov's government and foreign minister. The two parties agreed to share power after elections last year in a bid to end a two-and-a-half-year-long political crisis, restore stability and spur economic development in the poorest member country of the European Union. Accepting the mandate, Gabriel said that she does it "with a sense of responsibility as Bulgaria needs stability."

Putin extends rule in preordained Russian election

AP ■ MOSCOW

President Vladimir Putin sealed his control over Russia for six more years on Monday with a highly orchestrated landslide in an election that followed the harshest crackdown on the opposition and free speech since Soviet times. While the result was never in doubt, Russians attempted to defy the inevitable outcome, heeding a call to protest Putin's repression at home and his war in Ukraine by showing up at polling stations at noon on Sunday. But from the earliest returns, it was clear Putin would extend his nearly quarter-century rule with a fifth term. With nearly all the precincts counted Monday, election officials said Putin had secured a record number of votes — an unsurprising development underlining the Russian leader's total control of the country's political system. Putin has led Russia as president or prime minister since December 1999, a tenure marked by international military aggression and an increasing intolerance for dissent. At the end of his fifth term, Putin would be the longest-serving Russian leader since Catherine the Great, who ruled during the 18th century. As early results came in, Putin hailed them as an indication of "trust" and "hope" in him — while critics saw them as another reflection of the preordained nature of the election. "Of course, we have lots of tasks ahead. But I want to make it clear for everyone: When we were consolidated, no one has ever managed to frighten us, to suppress our will and our self-consciousness. They failed in the past and they will fail in the future," he said



at a meeting with his campaign staff after polls closed. Any public criticism of Putin or his war in Ukraine has been stifled. Independent media have been crippled. His fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison last month, and other critics are either in jail or in exile. Beyond the fact that voters had virtually no choice, independent monitoring of the election was extremely limited. Russia's Central Election Commission said Monday that with nearly 100% of precincts counted, Putin got 87% of the vote. Central Election Commission chief Ella Pamilova said that nearly 76 million voters cast their ballots for Putin, his highest vote tally ever. Western leaders denounced the election as a sham, while President Volodymyr Zelenskyy particularly criticized voting in Ukrainian areas that Russia has illegally annexed, saying "everything Russia does on the occupied territory of Ukraine is a crime". Germany sharply criticized the vote with Chancellor Olaf Scholz's spokeswoman, Christina Hoffmann, saying that "in our opinion, it was not a democratic election." "There is no freedom of expression in Russia," she told reporters in Berlin.

8 killed in Pak airstrikes on Afghanistan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/KABUL

Pakistan on Monday said it carried out airstrikes on the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) affiliated militants in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, amidst a war of words between the two neighbours for a spate of recent terror attacks in restive Pakistani cities. At least eight civilians, including three children, were killed in the airstrikes carried out by Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban said while summoning the charge d'affaires of Pakistan's embassy in Kabul to lodge a strong protest. In a press release, Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO) said that rebels belonging to TTP's Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group were hit after the outfit claimed responsibility for the attack on Saturday at an army outpost that resulted in the killing of seven soldiers, including two officers. "This morning Pakistan carried out intelligence-based anti-terrorist operations in the border regions inside Afghanistan. The prime target of today's operation was the terrorists belonging to Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, which along with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), is responsible for multiple terrorist attacks inside Pakistan, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians and law enforcement officials," it stated. The FO said that over the past two years, Pakistan repeatedly conveyed its serious concerns to the Interim Afghan Government over the presence of terror outfits, including TTP, inside Afghanistan, who posed a grave threat to Pakistan's security as they consistently used Afghan territory to launch terror attacks inside Pakistani territory. It said terrorist groups like TTP were a collective threat to regional peace and security and Pakistan was aware of the challenge Afghan authorities faced in combating the threat posed by TTP.

Netanyahu snaps back at growing US criticism

AP ■ RAFAH

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu railed Sunday against growing criticism from top ally the United States against his leadership amid the devastating war with Hamas, describing calls for a new election as "wholly inappropriate". In recent days, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish official in the country and a strong Israel supporter, called on Israel to hold a new election, saying Netanyahu had "lost his way". President Joe Biden expressed support for Schumer's "good speech", and earlier accused Netanyahu of hurting Israel because of the huge civilian death toll in Gaza. Netanyahu told Fox News that Israel never would have called for a new U.S. election after the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001, and denounced Schumer's comments as inappropriate. "We're not a banana republic," he said. "The people of Israel will choose when they will have elections, and who they'll elect, and

it's not something that will be foisted on us." When asked by CNN whether he would commit to a new election after the war ends, Netanyahu said: "I think that's something for the Israeli public to decide." The US, which has provided key military and diplomatic support to Israel, also has expressed concerns about a planned Israeli assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where about 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering. The spokesman for the National Security Council, John Kirby, told Fox the U.S. still hasn't seen an Israeli plan for Rafah. The US supports a new round of talks aimed at securing a cease-fire in exchange for the return of Israeli hostages taken in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. The Israeli delegation to those talks was expected to leave for Qatar after Sunday evening meetings of the Security Cabinet and War Cabinet, which will give directions for negotiations.

Despite the talks, Netanyahu made it clear he would not back down from the fighting that has killed more than 31,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials. More than five months have passed since Hamas attacked southern Israel, killed 1,200 people and took another 250 hostage. Earlier Sunday, Netanyahu said calls for an election now — which polls show he would lose badly — would force Israel to stop fighting and paralyze the country for six months. Netanyahu also reiterated his determination to attack Hamas in Rafah and said that his government approved military plans for such an operation. "We will operate in Rafah. This will take several weeks, and it will happen," he said. The operation is supposed to include the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of civilians, but it is not clear how Israel will do that. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi reiterated his warning that an Israeli ground offensive

in Rafah would have "grave repercussions on the whole region." Egypt says pushing Palestinians into the Sinai Peninsula would jeopardize its peace treaty with Israel, a cornerstone of regional stability. "We are also very concerned about the risks a full-scale offensive in Rafah would have on the vulnerable civilian population. This needs to be avoided at all costs," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said after meeting with el-Sisi and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, after meeting with Netanyahu on Sunday, warned that "the more desperate the situation of people in Gaza becomes, the more this begs the question: No matter how important the goal, can it justify such terribly high costs, or are there other ways to achieve your goal?" Germany is one of Israel's closest allies in Europe and, given memories of the Holocaust, often treads carefully when criticizing Israel. Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, in

Washington for St. Patrick's Day, said during a White House reception that the Irish people were "deeply troubled" by what's unfolding in Gaza. He said there was much to learn from Ireland's peace process and the critical U.S. involvement in it. Varadkar said he's often asked why the Irish are so empathetic to the Palestinians. "We see our history in their eyes. A story of displacement, dispossession, and national identity questioned and denied forced emigration, discrimination and now hunger," he said. Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli consul-general in New York and an outspoken critic of Netanyahu, said that the prime minister's comments fit with his efforts to find someone else to blame if Israel doesn't achieve its goal of destroying Hamas. "He's looking on purpose for a conflict with the US so that he can blame Biden," Pinkas said. Both sides have something to gain politically from the dispute.

Economy turning corner: UK PM Sunak attempts optimistic reset

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Monday attempted an optimistic reset amid reports of growing unrest within his own Conservative Party ranks as he unveiled a new package of reforms for small businesses and insisted the UK "economy is turning a corner". The British Indian leader referenced his family-run pharmacy in the southern England port city of Southampton, where he was born and helped out as a schoolboy, as an example of his firsthand small business experience. In an indirect message for the rebels, he stressed that it was important to stick with the plan for the economy that was working after a tough couple of years. "There is now a real sense that the economy is turning a corner with all the economic

indicators pointing in the right direction," Sunak said during a Business Connect event in Warwickshire, in the Midlands region of England. "This year, 2024, will be the year Britain bounces back. ... Inflation has more than halved and is falling fast, growth is higher than anyone expected, debt is on track to fall; we are not there yet but we are absolutely moving in the right direction. So, let's stick to the plan and build a better, brighter future together," he said. Under the new package of measures, the UK government will fully fund apprenticeships in small businesses from April 1 by paying the full cost of training for anyone up to the age of 21 — reducing costs for businesses and delivering more opportunities for young people to kick start careers. The move is underpinned by an additional GBP 60

million of new government funding for next year to support apprenticeships and also cut red tape. "Growing up in my mum's pharmacy, I know first-hand how important small businesses are. Not just for the economy, but as a driver for innovation and aspiration, and as the key to building a society where hard work is always recognised and rewarded," said Sunak. In what was his first major speech on the economy since the Spring Budget earlier this month, Sunak insisted that the new measures will unlock a "tidal wave of opportunity" and make a real difference to businesses and entrepreneurs across the country. "Whether it's breaking down barriers and red tape for small businesses, helping businesses hire more young people into

apprenticeships and skilled jobs or empowering women to start up their own businesses — this government is sticking to the plan and leaving no stone unturned to make the UK the best place to do business," he added. The new measures aim to help small and medium enterprises (SMEs) hire more apprentices by reducing costs and enabling more employers to get the skilled workers they need. Taken together, the measures are targeted at enabling up to 20,000 more apprenticeships, primarily for young people. "Whether it's through cutting red tape, unlocking investment costs, today's announcements show that this government is committed to doing all it can to turbo-charge SMEs so that they can go further and faster than ever before," said UK Business and Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch.

First flight carrying US citizens from Haiti lands in Miami

Miami (AP): A charter flight carrying dozens of US citizens fleeing spiralling gang violence in Haiti has landed in Miami, US State Department officials said. More than 30 US citizens were on the government-chartered flight that landed on Sunday, officials said in a statement. It arrived at the Miami International Airport after the US Embassy in Port-au-Prince earlier this month urged US citizens to leave "as soon as possible" as chaos grips Haiti. Passenger Avlot Quessa, who lives in Boston, travelled from the centre of the country to board the charter flight after going to Haiti last month for what was supposed to be a weeklong trip to visit his mother. "It's just terrible ... The suffering, you can only imagine," Quessa told the Miami Herald of the nearby Caribbean nation. "Haiti is my homeland and it's very stressful to see the homeland going through this act of violence, destruction ... and they are our neighbours." Haiti's main airport in Port-au-Prince remains closed following gang attacks that have raged through Haiti in recent weeks, pushing many people to the brink of famine. Government and aid agencies this weekend reported looting of aid supplies as the situation worsened. The State Department announced on Saturday that it would offer limited charter flights for American citizens from the less chaotic northern city of Cap-Haitien. Officials said they could not provide ground transportation to Cap-Haitien and that US citizens should consider the charter flights "only if you think you can reach Cap-Haitien airport safely."

Indian student dies in US, probe rules out foul play

New York (PTI): In yet another tragic incident, an Indian student died in Boston and initial investigation has ruled out any foul play, officials said on Monday. "Deeply saddened to learn about the unfortunate demise of Mr. Abhijeeth Paruchuru, an Indian student in Boston," the Consulate General of India in New York said in a post on X. Paruchuru's parents are based in Connecticut and are in direct touch with detectives. Initial investigations rule out foul play, the consulate said. The consulate said it "rendered assistance in documentation and transportation of his mortal remains to India" and it remains in touch with local authorities as well as the Indian-American community in the matter. According to sources, 20-year-old Paruchuru's last rites have already been performed in his

hometown Tenali in Andhra Pradesh. US-based nonprofit organisation TEAM Aid had helped to bring his mortal remains to India. Since the beginning of 2024, there have been at least half a dozen deaths of Indian and Indian-origin students in the US. The alarming rise in the number of attacks has caused concern among the community. In March, Amarnath Ghosh, a 34-year-old trained classical dancer from India and a student of Washington University, was shot dead in St Louis, Missouri. Kuchipudi and Bharatnatyam dancer Ghosh migrated to the US from West Bengal last year "to follow his dancing dreams". He was shot several times near the border of St Louis' Academy and Central West End neighbourhoods. He died on the spot.



Ireland's Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, right, presents President Joe Biden with a bowl of Shamrocks during a St. Patrick's Day reception in the East Room of the White House, Sunday. AP/PTI

Colombia suspends ceasefire

Bogota (AP): Colombian President Gustavo Petro on Sunday suspended a ceasefire with one of a handful of armed groups with which he hoped to negotiate peace accords, saying its fighters violated the truce by attacking an Indigenous community. The government said that starting Wednesday it would resume military operations against Estado Mayor Central, a group of fighters who broke away from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia when it signed a peace pact in 2016. Indigenous leaders in the war-torn western region of Cauca said an attack by the dissident group Saturday wounded at least three people and a young student was taken away by force. In a post on the X platform, Petro said group was "violating the ceasefire agreement," adding that he believed it used peace negotiations as a cover to "strengthen itself militarily." The suspension of the ceasefire

was a political blow to Petro, a former rebel who became Colombia's first leftist leader promising to consolidate "total peace" in a country long ravaged by armed conflict. He has sought to rewire the way the country grapples with its decades of conflict, by addressing the poverty that underlies the unrest while simultaneously negotiating peace with armed groups to minimize bloodshed. Yet conflict continues to rage in many rural swaths of the South American nation. With implementation of the FARC accord's provisions lagging, a growing number of former rebels have rearmed against the government, joining a toxic slate of drug gangs and guerrilla groups to war for power. A report by a United Nations agency warned Friday that more than 8 million people in Colombia need humanitarian help, mainly because of the expansion of the country's armed conflict.

Insurance sector gets FDI worth ₹54,000 crore in last nine years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The insurance sector has received close to Rs 54,000 crore as foreign direct investment (FDI) in the last 9 years on the back of further liberalisation of overseas capital flow norms by the government, Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi has said.

The government increased the permissible FDI limit from 26 per cent in 2014 to 49 per cent in 2015 and then to 74 per cent in 2021, he told PTI in an interview.

However, he said, the permissible FDI limit for insurance intermediaries was increased to 100 per cent in 2019.

As a result, Rs 53,900 crore of FDI was received in insurance companies between December 2014 and January 2024, he said. During the period, Joshi said, the number of insurance players increased from 53 to 70 as of January 2024.

Insurance penetration increased from 3.9 per cent in 2013-14 to 4 per cent in 2022-23 while insurance density rose from USD 52 in 2013-14 to USD 92 in 2022-23, he said.

Insurance penetration and density are two metrics, among others, often used to assess the level of development of the insurance sector in a country.

While insurance penetration is measured as the percentage of insurance premium to GDP, insurance density is calculated as the ratio of premium to population (per capita premium).

Asset Under Management nearly tripled to



Rs 60.04 lakh crore as compared to Rs 21.07 lakh crore in 2013-14, while the total insurance premium more than doubled to Rs 10.4 lakh crore from Rs 3.94 lakh crore at the end of March 2014.

The insurance sector was opened for private players in August 2000 with the invitation for application for registrations. Foreign companies were allowed ownership of up to 26 per cent.

Since then, many foreign companies have invested in the insurance sector. The latest Zurich Insurance-Kotak General Insurance deal could be one of the major FDI flows in the insurance sector.

Last month, Zurich Insurance had said, it proposes to acquire a 70 per cent stake in

Kotak Mahindra General Insurance, for Rs 5,560 crore, in a single tranche.

In November 2023, Kotak Mahindra Bank had announced the sale of a 51 per cent stake in its general insurance arm to Zurich Insurance for Rs 4,051 crore through a combination of fresh capital infusion and share purchase, followed by a 19 per cent stake sale within a period of three years.

The proposed 70 per cent acquisition would be subject to fulfilment of customary conditions precedent, including the receipt of regulatory approvals from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai).

IT to see three to five per cent growth in FY25

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian IT sector's revenue growth is expected to come at a tepid 3-5 per cent in FY25, a domestic rating agency said on Monday.

The sector's hiring will "remain muted" in the near-term until the growth momentum picks up, Icra Ratings said.

However, the companies' profitability is expected to be resilient amid concerns on topline growth, it said, adding the operating profit margins for the USD 250 billion Indian IT sector will come at a healthy 21-22 per cent in FY25.

The agency said in the first nine months of the ongoing 2023-24, the industry has posted a revenue growth of just 2 per cent, as against 3-5 per cent it had estimated for the sector in the past.

The topline growth for the first nine months of FY23 had stood at a healthy 9.2 per cent.

Persistent macroeconomic headwinds in key markets of the US and Europe, which has led to lower discretionary IT spends by corporate has led to expectations of tepid revenue growth even in FY25, its sector head Deepak Jotwani said.

He, however, added that critical spending and cost optimisation deals continue to gain traction, supporting the



growth prospects for the Indian IT services companies to "some extent".

The agency expects pick-up in the growth momentum once the macroeconomic headwinds subside on strong order books and deal pipeline of most companies and tech spends becoming far more integral to overall capital allocation for corporate after the pandemic.

While it expects hiring activity to remain muted, the agency said the attrition levels will stabilise over the near term, inching closer to the long-term average of 12-13 per cent, as overall slowdown in growth momentum and strong hiring in the previous fiscal has corrected the demand-supply mismatch witnessed earlier.

The agency maintained its stable outlook on the sector for the new fiscal.



Markets close higher in volatile trade

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher in a highly volatile trade on Monday as investors turned cautious ahead of the US Federal Reserve interest rate decision.

After gyrating between gains and losses, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled higher by 104.99 points or 0.14 per cent at 72,748.42. As many as 14 Sensex shares closed in the green while 16 in the red. The index moved between a high of 72,985.89 and a low of 72,314.16.

The broader Nifty of the NSE rose by 32.35 points or 0.15 per cent, to close at 22,055.70 as 21 of its components advanced and 29 declined.

The gains were primarily led by metal, auto and commodity shares while IT and Tech shares capped the upside.

Reliance Industries which rebounded more than 1.5 per cent from the day's low was the major contributor to Sensex and Nifty gains. RIL settled higher by 1.45 per cent.

Tata Steel rose the most by 5 per cent among Sensex shares. Mahindra & Mahindra, JSW Steel, Tata Motors, Axis Bank, Sun Pharma, Reliance Industries and Maruti were the other biggest gainers.

IT shares on the other hand declined amid concerns over interest rates in the US market. Infosys fell the most by 1.99 per cent among Sensex shares. Tata Consultancy Services, Titan, Wipro, Hindustan Unilever and Nestle also declined.

"The Indian market followed the positive Asian peers with a mixed bias. Domestic issues, like mutual fund stress tests, hardly brought any negative views, but premium valuation remains as a concern. Midcap & small caps are attempting to scroll up, however consolidation persists," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Policy actions, this week, from global central banks, the US FED, BOJ, and BOE will dictate the market direction. Indication, by the FED, that rate cut may probably be in the latter half of CY24, should bring a mixed sentiment in the short term, he added.

The US Federal Open Market Committee meeting will commence on March 19 and the policy rate decision will be announced on Wednesday.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.04 per cent while the smallcap index dipped 0.07 per cent.

Among the indices, metal zoomed 2.88 per cent, auto jumped 1.08 per cent, commodities climbed 0.91 per cent, healthcare (0.88 per cent), realty (0.58 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.47 per cent). However, IT, consumer durables, tech, services and financial services were the laggards.

"European markets started Monday with modest gains ahead of policy decisions this week by Japan's central bank and the Federal Reserve," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

After the initial downtick, Nifty oscillated sharply in a range and finally settled at 22,050 levels. Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research at Religare Broking Ltd said. The recent price action in Nifty shows indecisiveness among the participants and frequent breakout failures on the stock-specific front further adding to their worries, he added.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled higher.

European markets were quoting in the green. The US markets ended lower on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 848.56 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.87 per cent to USD 86.08 a barrel.

New EV policy to help launch eco friendly premium SUVs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Vietnam's electric car maker VinFast Auto on Monday said India's new electric vehicle policy that provides import duty concessions for companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of USD 500 million will allow it to introduce a wide variety of eco-friendly premium-quality SUVs at inclusive prices.

The Indian government's new electric vehicle (EV) scheme aims to drive large investments in manufacturing, create competencies and upskilling, set up a robust supply chain and offer consumers world-class, zero-tailpipe emission vehicles, VinFast India CEO Pham Sanh Chau said in a statement. "This forward-looking policy helps us introduce a wide variety of smart, green, premium-quality SUVs, at inclusive prices, along with outstanding aftersales policies," he added.

Chau further said, "With a long-term growth commitment in India, we have pledged an expenditure of USD

500 million, which includes the electric vehicle manufacturing facility in Tamil Nadu."

In February this year, VinFast -- a major competitor to American EV had stated that it would invest Rs 4,000 crore over the next five years in the initial phase, which will generate 3,500 jobs in the Tuticorin region. The plant will have a capacity to produce 1.50 lakh vehicles once it becomes operational.

Ola Electric Founder and CEO Bhavish Aggarwal in a post on X, also lauded the new EV policy, saying it is a win for the Make in India initiative. "Great to see the Indian government's progressive decision to lower import duties on EVs for companies investing in India. This is a win for the #MakeInIndia initiative & strengthens our manufacturing ecosystem, propelling India towards a greener future. India will become the global EV hub of manufacturing and technology!" he wrote.

Commenting on the policy, Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) President Vinod Aggarwal



said a holistic view has been taken by the government of India in the best interests of the country. "The Indian automobile industry and

members of SIAM will adapt to this new policy and remain committed to bring new, innovative, and aspirational products and work

towards developing a robust EV ecosystem in the country," he added. Last week, the government approved an EV policy, under which import duty concessions will be given to companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of USD 500 million, a move aimed at attracting major global players like US-based Tesla.

The companies that would set up manufacturing facilities for EV passenger cars will be allowed to import a limited number of cars at lower customs/import duty of 15 per cent on vehicles costing USD 35,000 and above for five years from the date of issuance of the approval letter by the government.

At present, cars imported as completely built units attract customs duty ranging from 70-100 per cent, depending on the engine size and cost, insurance and freight value less or above USD 40,000.

The policy seeks to promote India as a manufacturing destination for EVs and attract investment from reputed global EV manufacturers.



Air India Express to operate 360 daily flights in summer

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India Express will operate more than 360 daily flights during the summer schedule, with international services set to rise by over 20 per cent.

The airline is in the process of completing the merger with AIX Connect (earlier known as AirAsia India) and the schedule includes flights of both carriers.

In a release on Monday, Tata Group-owned Air India Express said it will offer over 360 daily departures during the summer schedule.

Compared to last year's summer schedule, there will be an increase of over 25 per cent in domestic flights and more than 20 per cent rise in overseas services.

"This translates to an additional 55 domestic flights and 19 international flights, bringing the total to 259 domestic and 109 international departures," the release said.

Generally, the summer schedule is from the last Sunday of March till the last Saturday of October. In 2024, the summer schedule will be from March 31 till October 26.

Among others, the airline will be increasing its frequencies to destinations such as Abu Dhabi, Dammam, Jeddah, and Sharjah.

Currently, Air India Express operates over 360 daily flights with a fleet of 67 aircraft -- 39 Boeing 737s and 28 Airbus A320s.

Office leasing likely to rise 12 per cent this year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Demand for office space is likely to rise 10-12 per cent this year across major cities with foreign companies looking to set up Global Capabilities Centres (GCCs) in India, according to retail firm RMZ Group Chairman Raj Menda.

Bengaluru-based RMZ Corporation is one of the leading commercial real estate developers in the country. In an interview with PTI, Menda, Chairman of Supervisory Board at RMZ Corporation, said the absorption of office will grow by about 10-12 per cent this year across six major cities. He rued that the demand is still concentrated in these top six cities.

Gross leasing of office space stood at 58.2 million square feet in 2023 calendar year across six major cities namely Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Pune, according to a FICCI-Colliers report.

Menda, who is also Chairman of FICCI Committee on Urban Development and Real Estate, noted that the demand for



bigger spaces, starting from 5 lakh square feet to 10 lakh square feet, from foreign firms has tapered down and enquiries are more for 50,000 square feet to 2 lakh square feet office spaces.

"In pre-COVID, the bigger companies which were coming in used to commit and pre-lease large office spaces. So we would, at RMZ, get commitments of 5 lakh square feet to 10 lakh square feet, that has tapered down," Menda said.

Now, he said these companies are looking for 1-2 lakh square feet space space.

"But the good part of the story is... A lot of GCCs are coming in now to start their businesses here," he added.

India still provides low cost alternatives for these GCCs, Menda said, while emphasising on the availability of skilled talent and cheaper real estate in the country.

"So they are setting up offices and their requirements typically range between 50,000 to 1,00,000 square feet as they are starting business for the first time in India. But once they set up office here, then they tend to grow very rapidly," he observed.

Menda also mentioned that the demand for Grade-A office space is primarily emanating from six major cities -- Bengaluru, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune and Delhi-NCR -- because of the availability of skilled talent.

"What is currently happening, is happening only in the six cities. We are not getting any inquiries beyond these six main cities and still Bengaluru leads the way..." he said.

The RMZ Group Chairman also remained bullish about the growth of the flexible workspace segment in India. He said the new company entering the Indian market wants to test the market first. Therefore, initially they would prefer working from a managed office space.

"They prefer to work in a co-working space for a year or two, get the correct comfort and then decide how much to grow," Menda said. Regarding the RMZ Group business, he said the company has an ambitious expansion plan.

Menda said the group became debt-free after divesting a significant part of its commercial real estate portfolio in 2020.

In December 2020, RMZ Corporation completed the sale of its large commercial portfolio to Brookfield for USD 2 billion. The company had sold 12.8 million sq ft so far.

Venkatasubramanian P&G India new CEO



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leading FMCG maker P&G India on Monday announced the appointment of Kumar Venkatasubramanian as CEO, with effect from May 1, 2024. The current CEO, L V Vaidyanathan will leave the company to pursue personal interests after 28 years of service, a statement from P&G India said.

Kumar is currently leading the P&G business in Australia and New Zealand as CEO.

Before the Australia role, Kumar was leading sales team in P&G India until 2020, it added.

Kumar, an alumnus of IIM Calcutta started his journey with P&G in 2000 in sales team

in India, straight from the campus.

P&G owns popular brands such as Ariel, Gillette, Head & Shoulders, Oral-B, Pampers, Pantene, Tide, Vicks and Whisper.

P&G President, Asia Pacific, Middle East, and Africa Stanislav Vecera said: "The India business and people will immensely benefit from his (Kumar's) leadership and vision, and collectively I am certain they will take the India business to new heights while maintaining a balanced growth outlook."

On his new role, Kumar said: "We will focus on a portfolio of daily use products where performance drives brand choice and raise the bar on all aspects of our superiority strategy - product, package, brand communication, retail execution, and value."

P&G India operates here with four entities -- Procter & Gamble Hygiene & Health Care, Procter & Gamble Health, Gillette India and Procter & Gamble Home Products (non-listed).

AI supercomputer at KIET institute

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

North India can now boast to have a cutting-edge technology World's first 5petaFLOPS AI Supercomputer: NVIDIA DGX A100 at the "Centre of Supercomputing," run by the KIET Group of Institutions in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad under the State Government's supported initiative 'Start in UP' start-up policy.

Sunil Kumar Sharma, State Cabinet Minister, Electronics and Information Technology, hoped that such technologies will help students to create new products and ideas that can multiply economic growth and promote innovation and entrepreneurship.

Atul Garg, MLA Ghaziabad, said, "Through NVIDIA DGX A100 supercomputer, we want to provide new opportunities to our children to progress in the field of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning," while Dr. Rekha Kashyap, HoD CSE AI & CSE AIML talked about the technology.

"The NVIDIA DGX A100 is the world's first 5 petaFLOPS AI system, designed to unify training, inference, and analytics into a single, easy-to-deploy AI infrastructure. With unparalleled computational efficiency and versatility, the DGX A100 will accelerate research in areas such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, data analytics, climate science, genomics, and more," she said.

Dr. Manoj Goel, Joint Director and Mr. Adesh Pandey, Dean ITS were of the view that the "the DGX A100's integration will significantly enhance educational programs, providing students with hands-on experience using state-of-the-art AI technology."

Servotech to set up 20 EV charging stations in Nashik

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Servotech Power Systems on Monday said it has secured an order to set up 20 electric vehicles (EV) charging stations across Nashik Municipal Corporation area.

The objective of this contract is to meet the increasing need for convenient and accessible charging facilities for electric vehicles, thus facilitating the state's shift towards sustainable transportation solutions, a company statement said.



According to the statement, Servotech Power Systems, a prominent player in the EV charging and solar industry, has secured a substantial contract from the Nashik Municipal

Corporation (NMC). This contract involves Servotech supplying, commissioning, and constructing 20 electric vehicle (EV) charging stations throughout the Nashik Municipal Corporation area.

"This contract represents a major milestone for Servotech Power Systems, we are deeply committed to advancing India's electric vehicle revolution and fostering sustainable transportation solutions," Sarika Bhatia, Director of Servotech Power Systems said in the statement.

LAKSHYA, SINDHU SPEARHEAD INDIA CHALLENGE IN SWISS OPEN

PTI ■ BASEL (SWITZERLAND)

Star Indian shuttler Lakshya Sen is expected to continue his purple patch, while two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu will strive to regain top form at the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament, beginning here on Tuesday.

After first-round losses at the Malaysia Super 1000 and India Super 750 earlier in the year, Sen has gained momentum. The 22-year-old enters the USD 210,000 tournament on the back of semifinal appearances at the French Open and All England Championships. The seventh-seeded Indian will open his campaign against Malaysian Leong Jun Hao and is likely to cross paths with 2021 world champion Lee Zii Jia.

Former world No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth will face Asian Games bronze medallist Wang Tzu-wei of Chinese Taipei in the first round while young Priyanshu Rajawat will take on Hong Kong's fourth seed Lee Cheuk Yiu.



After making headway in the French Open earlier this month, Sindhu, who is on a comeback trail after recovering from a left knee injury, made an early exit from the All England Championship. She was guilty of

committing several unforced errors and the former world champion would look to improve on that aspect. The fourth-seeded Indian will once again meet Germany's Yvonne Li, who retired against Sindhu in the All

England Championship opener last week. She will face a tough customer in Busanan Ongbamrungphan in the quarterfinals and if she manages to tame the Thai shuttler, Sindhu is likely to face in-form reigning All England champion and nemesis Carolina Marin of Spain.

The other Indian in the fray in the women's singles, Aakrashi Kashyap has a tough draw. She will open her campaign against Canada's Michelle Li and if she emerges victorious, she will face the winner of the clash between Japan's Nozomi Okuhara and seventh seed Ratchanok Intanon of Thailand.

The sixth-seeded pair of Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto, who have been in good touch, will cross swords with the Indonesian combination of Meilysa Trias Puspitasari and Rachel Allesya Rose. Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who have been seeded eighth, will have to fight it out against the American duo of Annie Xu and Kerry Xu.

Akhil, Anish win gold

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paris Olympics quota winners Akhil Sheoran and Anish Bhanwala won a gold medal each as Indian shooters ended their Polish Grand Prix campaign with six medals. Sheoran won gold in the men's 50m rifle 3-positions Match 2 with a record score of 468.4. Patrik Jany of the Czech Republic was 2.2 points behind at second spot at the Grand Prix Wroclawia & Dolnego Slaska.

Both the scores were higher than the existing world record of 466.1, held by Jany's countryman Jiri Privratsky. Bhanwala won gold in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol at the Jozef Zapedzki Grand Prix held simultaneously. Some members of India's 50m rifle and 25m rapid-fire pistol squad are currently on an exposure tour to Europe to compete in various established international events in the build-up to the Paris Olympics. Navy shooter Niraj Kumar was



also impressive, finishing with two bronze in both the men's rifle 3P matches, becoming the only Indian to finish with two medals. Niraj also shot impressive scores of 595 and 594 in the two qualification matches. In the first match, he finished third behind Jany and Rio Olympic silver medallist Serhio Kulish of Ukraine. Swapnil Kusale also shot a solid 595 in Match 2 to top the

qualification standings, being more accurate than Niraj, but finished fourth overall. The two Grands Prix also saw another Paris quota winner Shriyanka Sadangi win bronze in the women's 3P and Ashi Chouksey pick up a silver in the second women's 3P. The Indian shooting contingent will now move to Germany for the ISAS Dortmund which begins on Tuesday.



IOA dissolves adhoc committee for wrestling WFI TO TAKE CHARGE

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association on Monday dissolved the ad-hoc committee for wrestling, saying "there is no further need" for it to continue after revocation of the suspension on the national federation, which now gets complete administrative control of the sport.

The IOA said that the decision was also guided by the successful conduct of the selection trials for next month's Olympic qualifying tournament for which the panel collaborated with the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI). The ad-hoc committee was formed in December last year after the sports ministry suspended the WFI, which got a shot in the arm when the suspension imposed on it by the global governing body — United World Wrestling — was lifted in February.

"The decision to dissolve the Adhoc Committee comes in light of the lifting of the ban on the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) by the United World Wrestling (UWW) and the successful completion of Selection Trials by the Adhoc Committee appointed by the IOA as per the directives of the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi," said the IOA order issued on March 10.

WFI chief Sanjay Singh thanked the Indian Olympic Association for giving his elected panel control of the national federation. "We thank IOA for giving us full-fledged control of the WFI. We will give all facilities to the wrestlers. We will soon organise a national camp and if the wrestlers want to train abroad we will facilitate that as well. The focus is now on the Olympics. We are hoping that 5-6 wrestlers will qualify," Singh told PTI. The three-member committee,

under the chairmanship of Bhopender Singh Bajwa was constituted on December 23 after the newly-elected WFI, led by Sanjay Singh, had allegedly flouted its own rules. Earlier this month, the ad-hoc panel organised the trials to select the teams for the Asian Championships and the Asian Olympic Qualifiers in Kyrgyzstan to be held next month.

The protesting duo of Vinesh Phogat and Bajrang Punia competed in the trials and the former made the cut for Olympic qualifiers in the 50kg category. Following the successful completion of the trials, the reins of the sport have now been formally handed over to WFI despite the continuing suspension imposed by the sports ministry. The IOA instructed WFI to appoint a "Safeguarding Committee" to address concerns of sexual harassment and other issues such as adherence to rules. "...As instructed by the UWW, it is imperative that the WFI appoint a Safeguarding Committee / Officer at the earliest to address the concerns of abuse and harassment and to ensure adherence to all rules, regulations, and guidelines set forth by the UWW and other relevant authorities," the IOA letter added. "Furthermore, the WFI is also directed to conduct the elections of the Athletes Commission in a time-bound manner, in accordance with the established procedures and guidelines.

"This step is essential to promote athlete representation and participation in the decision-making processes of the WFI." The order also instructed the WFI to "repay the loan" provided by the IOA to the ad-hoc panel for managing wrestling affairs when the national body was under suspension.

Kenny retires from cycling

AP ■ LONDON

Laura Kenny, Britain's most successful female Olympic athlete, announced her retirement from cycling on Monday because she wants to spend more time at home with her family.

The 31-year-old Kenny has won five Olympic gold medals and had been expected to compete at the Paris Games in July. She gave birth to her second child last year and told the BBC on Monday that being at home was proving more and more alluring to her.

"It's been in my head a little while, the sacrifices of leaving

the children and your family at home is really quite big and it really is a big decision to make," Kenny said. "More and more, I was struggling to do that. More people asking me what races was I doing, what training camps was I going on - I didn't want to go ultimately and that's what it came down to."

Her husband, Jason Kenny, is also a cyclist and Britain's most decorated Olympian. "I knew the minute I was getting those feelings. Once I said to Jase, I don't think I want to ride a bike anymore," I started to feel relief," she said. Laura Kenny won gold in the team pursuit and the omnium



at both the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games and the madison at the 2020 Olympics. She also won a silver medal in the team pursuit in 2020 and is a seven-time world champion

and 14-time European champion. Kenny said the "absolute highlight" of her career was the London Games in 2012, during which her relationship

with Jason Kenny became public. "I never thought I would go to a home games, let alone go on to win two gold medals," she said. "When I look back, I'm like, 'Wow, those two weeks did really change my life.'" Britain's team performance director, Stephen Park, described Laura Kenny as "one of the greatest sporting talents our country has ever produced."

"She has been a beacon of inspiration for so many, young and old," Park said, "and I'm sure that the entire British cycling community will join me in wishing her the very best in the next chapter of her life."



Trabzonspor fans invade pitch, attack Fenerbahce players in Turkey

AP ■ ANKARA (TURKEY)

Turkish police have detained 12 people after fans of top tier soccer club Trabzonspor invaded the pitch following the final whistle of the Turkish Superlig game in the Black Sea coastal city of Trabzon late Sunday.

Some Fenerbahce players hit back at fans who kicked or punched them, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported. Security staff later helped the Fenerbahce players down the tunnel into the locker rooms. The incident came just months after the president of top-flight club Ankaragucu was arrested for punching a referee following a match, prompting the Turkish Football Federation to briefly suspend league games.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced on X, formerly known as Twitter, on Monday that police detained 12 people in connection with the violence.

Yerlikaya said among those detained were a person who threw a projectile at Fenerbahce coach Ismail Kartal during the match, a man who was the first to invade the pitch, a fan who grabbed the corner flag and charged toward the players and a person who hit Fenerbahce goalkeeper Dominic Livakovic.

Earlier, Yerlikaya said an investigation was ongoing and that those who invaded the pitch would be identified. "The occurrence of violence on football fields is not acceptable," he wrote.

The Turkish Football Federation also condemned the incident and said those responsible would be punished following an investigation.



Superb 67 earns Diksha T 15 finish

PTI ■ LONGWOOD (US)

India's Diksha Dagar turned in one of the best rounds of the final day, a superb 4-under 67, to sign off at Tied-15 at the IOA Golf Classic at the Alaqua Country Club here.

The two-time Ladies European Tour champion and third on the Merit list in 2023, Diksha had eight birdies, a double bogey and another late bogey as she made a massive jump up the leaderboard on the Epson Tour event.

Diksha has been in fine form with two Top-10s on the LET so far and she will play another week on the Epson Tour, as she tees up at Atlantic Beach next week.

Diksha, who started the week with a modest 75, squeezed inside the cut with a second round 71. And then she produced a superb round at the challenging course. She birdied first, sixth and eighth but suffered a setback with a double bogey on Par-5 ninth. Four more birdies

followed on the back nine on 10th, 11th, 13th and 16th before she dropped a shot on Par-4 17th and closed with a par.

She found each fairway on the final day and needed just 27 putts as against 32 and 30 on the first two days. She also reached the green in regulation in 15 of the 18 holes, way better on the first two days.

Jessica Peng, who was sitting four shots behind second-round leader Lindsey McCurdy, shot a superb 67 with five birdies against one bogey to win the title.

In contrast, McCurdy, who ended second, scored 72 and lost by one shot. Jessica (66-69-67) totalled 11-under and McCurdy (66-65-72) finished at 10-under.

The victory for Peng came after being a professional for seven years, even though her rookie season with the Epson Tour was in 2022.

Korea's Kum-Kang Park (68-68-68) was third and Dewi Weber (66-66-73) was fourth.

Alcaraz defeats Medvedev to defend his Indian Wells title



AP ■ INDIAN WELLS

Carlos Alcaraz arrived at Indian Wells full of doubt about his twisted right ankle. He's leaving as a two-time champion.

He defeated Daniil Medvedev 7-6 (5), 6-1 for the second straight year in the BNP Paribas Open final on Sunday, earning his first title since winning Wimbledon last year.

Iga Swiatek beat Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-0 in just over an hour to win the women's title, with Swiatek losing just 21 games in six matches during the 12-day tournament - an average of 3.5 games per match.

Alcaraz sprained his ankle at the Rio Open in late February. His first practice at Indian Wells lasted 30 minutes without any movement. His first practice with his fellow pros "was really tough for me," he said in a Tennis Channel interview.

Alcaraz outlasted Jannik Sinner in a three-set semifinal after needing three sets to get out of his second-round match. "After every match I was feeling better," Alcaraz said. "I was getting more confident after every match. Winning a Master 1000 again, a really important tournament to win, gives you motivation to keep going."

Alcaraz became the first man to defend his

Indian Wells title since Novak Djokovic won three in a row from 2014-16. He beat Medvedev 6-3, 6-2 last year in the Southern California desert.

"It's definitely your court, you like it here," Medvedev told Alcaraz during the victory ceremony. "Hopefully you can one day let me play a little bit better here."

Medvedev led 3-0 in the first set while Alcaraz had eight unforced errors over those games. The Spaniard won three games in a row to tie it, 3-3. The players held serve the rest of the set, with Alcaraz serving a love game to get into the tiebreaker. He led 3-0 and 5-2 before Medvedev tied it 5-5. Alcaraz won the next two points to close it out.

Alcaraz got the only two breaks in the second set, when Medvedev had one winner and nine errors.

For the match, Alcaraz hit 25 winners and had 26 unforced errors, while Medvedev had 11 winners and 23 unforced errors.

Swiatek improved to 20-2 this year, with her wins leading the WTA Tour.

It was a repeat of the 2022 final, in which Swiatek beat Sakkari 6-4, 6-1. Sakkari hasn't defeated the Polish star since 2021.

Swiatek raced to a 3-0 lead in the opening set. Sakkari recovered to win three straight games, including a break of Swiatek. She served a love game to tie it, 4-4. Swiatek lost just two points on her serve the rest of the set, wrapping it up with a forehand winner in the corner.

Swiatek was more dominant in the second set, breaking Sakkari three times all in love games. She lost just five points in the set.

Swiatek hit 15 winners and had 11 unforced errors in the 1 hour, 8-minute match. Sakkari had eight winners and 18 unforced errors.

Alcaraz and Swiatek earned \$1.1 million each for their wins. That's less than the \$1.26 million the women's and men's champions received in 2023. This year more prize money was allocated to the earlier rounds, reducing the champions' prize money by nearly 13%.

PGA Tour player directors prepare for meeting with Saudi leader of LIV Golf

AP ■ PONTE VEDRA BEACH (US)

Players on the PGA Tour board negotiating with Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund have a meeting planned Monday with the Saudi leader backing rival LIV Golf, something Rory McIlroy said should have happened long ago.

He also said Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the governor of the Public Investment Fund, wants to be "productive" in golf, while Greg Norman and others involved in LIV are disruptive.

McIlroy won't be part of the meeting, and details remained vague on where it would be held and whether it would be anything more than an ice breaker with Al-Rumayyan. "I doubt we will get into anything substantive in the

first meeting," said Patrick Cantlay, one of six player directors on PGA Tour Enterprises, the new commercial venture that already has a minority investor in Strategic Sports Group, a consortium of U.S. Sports owners.

McIlroy gave up his seat on the board in November and was replaced by Jordan Spieth. The other four player directors are Tiger Woods, Adam Scott, Peter Malnati and Webb Simpson.

McIlroy met with Al-Rumayyan last year at the DP World Tour Championship in Dubai. In fact, he said on the start of the year that he had a part in the PGA Tour meeting with PIF in the first place, which led to the stunning June 6 announcement of a

proposed partnership. Cantlay confirmed there were "plans to have a meeting" on Monday at an undisclosed location.

"I think it should have happened months ago, so I am glad that it's happening," McIlroy said. "Hopefully that progresses conversations and gets us closer to a solution."

The solution ultimately would be patching together golf, with players like Masters champion Jon Rahm, Dustin Johnson, PGA champion Brooks Koepka and Bryson DeChambeau among those now with LIV and suspended from PGA Tour-sanctioned events except the four majors. The PGA Tour's deal with PIF was supposed to be completed by the end of last year. But with government inquiries, and interest from private equity



groups, the deal wasn't done. The tour aligned with SSG, and Rahm defected to LIV. SSG has pledged up to \$3 billion, including \$1.5 billion for a player equity program.

McIlroy drew a distinction between Al-Rumayyan and LIV Golf, particularly Norman, the CEO and commissioner of the rival league. McIlroy had said at the end of 2022 that Norman needed to "exit stage left" for there to be any meaningful conversations.

"I have spent time with Yasir and the people that have represented him in LIV I think have done him a disservice, so Norman and those guys," McIlroy said Sunday at The Players Championship. "I actually think there's a really big disconnect between PIF and LIV," he said. "I think you

got PIF over here and LIV are sort of over here doing their own thing. So the closer that we can get to Yasir, PIF and hopefully finalize that investment, I think that will be a really good thing."

Malnati said there was "massive resistance" to Saudi involvement because of the surprise June 6 announcement — PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan, with board members Ed Herlihy and Jimmy Dunne — were the only ones involved.

"As I've learned more, I think I understand better and I'm very open minded to learning what the involvement they want, what they want out of this and how they think they can help," Malnati said. "On the surface, I think there are players who have resistance to that relationship, for sure. So that's

why I do think it's important that maybe our next step is to meet at some point."

Among the potential obstacles are how to blend players when there is animosity over those who left for massive signing bonuses to join LIV, along with LIV's desire for team golf. Cantlay said without PIF investing in PGA Tour Enterprises, he could see golf going down a similar path of two rival leagues whose top players meet only four times a year.

"I don't think this is an overnight solution," McIlroy said. "But if we can get the investment in, then at least we can start working towards a compromise where we're not going to make everyone happy, but at least make everyone understand why we're doing what we're doing."



KOHLI JOINS RCB TRAINING CAMP

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Superstar Virat Kohli on Monday made his first appearance in the training session of his franchise Royal Challengers Bangalore ahead of the IPL beginning March 22. Kohli, who was out of the country for the birth of his second child, arrived in India

on Sunday. The former India and RCB captain was seen taking rounds of the Chinnaswamy Stadium as part of his warm-up. Skipper Faf du Plessis also attended the session. RCB, who have never won the IPL, begin their campaign against reigning champions Chennai Super Kings in Chennai on Friday.

Kohli's performance in the lucrative T20 league will be closely tracked as the event precedes the T20 World Cup in the USA and Caribbean. The 35-year-old played his first T20 since the 2022 World Cup back in January against Afghanistan. Skipper Rohit Sharma also made a comeback in that series

and is expected to lead India in the T20 World Cup beginning June 1. Kohli also missed the five-match home Test series against England due to his family commitments. The batting great had a memorable IPL last year, aggregating 639 runs including two hundreds and six half-centuries.



Pooran or De Kock to don keeping gloves in IPL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Lucknow Super Giants skipper KL Rahul is all set to play for his franchise from the opening IPL game after getting all clear from the National Cricket Academy but he has been advised against wicket-keeping in the first few games.

Rahul had once again suffered a strain in his quadriceps during the first Test against England in Hyderabad and even though he was expected to join the team by the third game, the stylish right-hander felt a tightness in his muscles and skipped all the remaining games.

Rishabh might find it very difficult to get back his fluency at IPL onset: Gavaskar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rishabh Pant will find it "very difficult" to be at his fluent best at the beginning of the IPL but Sunil Gavaskar expects that his knees will react better once he starts batting more and more in match situations. Having survived a horrific car crash in December, 2022, Pant will make a comeback to competitive cricket after more than 14 months as Delhi Capitals captain after an extensive rehabilitation programme. "It'll be very difficult. But the good thing is he (Pant) has played some cricket. So he has got some practice. To get fluency in batting is a little tough," Gavaskar told 'Star Sports'. He then explained his point of view. "When you talk of a knee injury, the pivoting that takes place. Wicket-keeping is difficult as well, but even in batting, the knee is quite important. So, maybe, in the beginning, we won't see the real Rishabh Pant that we are

used to," the maestro said. Pant's presence and his chatty nature also adds to the entertainment quotient, Gavaskar admitted. "To find a wicket-keeper like him who comments from behind the stumps, that's full-on entertainment because there are a lot of wicket-keepers who would like to disturb your concentration by saying different things." ".....But Rishabh Pant has the ability to say such a thing that whoever he is targeting, they also laugh, they also enjoy it. But when enjoying it, their concentration goes down a bit, right? The advantage is for his team then." Gavaskar is also interested in how Shubman Gill's maiden captaincy stint turns out. "That is going to be the most important thing: the way he can handle the captaincy. Will it affect and impact his batting? And the second thing is there is a commonality in our initials; both of us are SG's, and if we go even further, my initials are SMG, and he has Shubh-Man Gill in his name."

It is unbelievable batting with Virat: Du Plessis

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Faf du Plessis says Virat Kohli's infectious energy, which easily rubs off on everyone, is the secret of the brilliant on-field and an equally fulfilling off-field equation he shares with the Indian superstar. Du Plessis, who took over the team's captaincy after Kohli decided to step down at the end of the 2021 season, said batting with the prolific right-hander is an "unbelievable experience." "It's unbelievable batting with him. He is one of the favourite guys I like to bat with. He brings out so much energy in me, like sometimes, I feel I am fist bumping my glove though his hand because he gets so passionate being out there in the middle," Du Plessis told 'Star Sports'. "It's really infectious the way he gives that energy,... How this guy is always on and how does he manage it...On the field while catching balls, we both are very competitive and make sure we get those good catches for the team," the stylish right-hander said. He might not be the skipper anymore but Kohli's inputs and role in lifting the fielding



unit's energy is also something that Du Plessis admires. "He is really important to me in terms of field (placements) I think. He leads in so many things as far as a team is concerned but fielding is where he sets the tone and energy on the field," the former South African captain said. Off the field, Du Plessis, called Kohli, "a terrible influence" on him. "We both love food and we both really into our fashion that another things we spend a

Trying to hasten my recovery during WC led to prolonged rehab, admits Hardik

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Hardik Pandya's bid to hasten his comeback towards the business end of last year's ODI World Cup game actually aggravated his ankle injury and in the process delayed his possible return by five months. Pandya had twisted his ankle trying to stop the ball on his follow-through during India's fourth World Cup game against Bangladesh in Pune on October 19. Initially, he had eyed a comeback during home T20Is versus Afghanistan but after a prolonged rehabilitation, his comeback vehicle turns out to be upcoming IPL — a cash-rich league that catapulted the colourful Baroda all-rounder into instant stardom around a decade back.

"My injury was a freak one. It had nothing to do with my past injuries or my fitness. I tried to stop the ball and twisted my ankle. When I got injured, my injury from day one clearly showed that I would be out of the World Cup," Pandya said during a media interaction organised by Mumbai Indians here on Monday.

Pandya was itching to make a comeback by semi-finals but his desperation proved to be counter-productive in the long run.

"We pushed but it would have been an uphill task that I would be fit for the World Cup semifinals or the final. When we pushed, it kind of triggered the injury and my recovery took longer (than expected)," Pandya admitted that his urge to represent India half-fit during World Cup semi-final was unjustifiable.

"I had a recurrence. My injury kind of expanded more and the question was that 'do I want to represent India at 50 per cent?'. The answer was no, because India deserves better than that and I myself would not be able to justify the fact that I am coming (back) not completely ready," he said.



"From there, the whole focus was that that I will come back as soon as possible, but with injuries and something like the freak injury which I had, you have to give time.

"It is not something which goes away with physiotherapy, it is just natural body recovery which we need to do and obviously the whole MI thing came. I was sitting at home, working hard and this news came and it was even more special," Pandya added about his switch to MI from Gujarat Titans.

Pandya said he was back to full fitness around the time India played a three-match T20I series against Afghanistan at home, but did not have enough opportunities to play. The all-rounder was recently a

part of the Reliance One team at the DY Patil T20 tournament, which marked his return to professional cricket after a lay-off.

"When I got fit, the Afghanistan series (had) just started. I have been fit since then (but) there were no games to play," he said.

"When I got injured, I had no clue how bad it was. When I went for the scans, it just showed just a little niggle which would be fine. But as a couple of hours progressed, it showed the real picture - my ankle was swollen.

"I straight away went to the NCA next day to fasten my process and make sure that I come back. Again, we tried everyday making sure that I am available for the World Cup

(end) and we had to take a call after the 12th day," he added. Asked if Pandya will bowl in the IPL, the MI skipper replied in "affirmative".

WAITING FOR UPDATE ON SURYAKUMAR YADAV: Meanwhile, MI head coach Mark Boucher said the team is waiting to hear from the Indian cricket board on the fitness status of star batter Suryakumar Yadav.

"We are awaiting updates on Suryakumar from the BCCI. We have always been under a cloud of fitness issues but we have a world-class medical team. We may lose one or two in terms of fitness but we have to move on as it is sport," Boucher said.

It has already been reported by PTI last week that world's No.1 ranked T20 batter, who is recuperating from a sports hernia surgery, is likely to miss the first few games but his rehabilitation as far as World T20 is concerned is on track.

MI WON'T HAVE A POLICY OF RESTING PLAYERS: Boucher, however, said that there would be no policy of resting the players keeping this year's T20 World Cup in mind.

"As the coach of Mumbai Indians, I am going to be a little bit biased and hoping to see my best players play all games. I have a soft spot for my players and I do understand that they might have niggles and that's when I will fall back on my medical team and work with them accordingly," he said. Talking about Rohit Sharma, Boucher said the Indian skipper was "fantastic" against England in the recently-concluded Test series and hoped to have his rich form continuing in the IPL.

"Rohit has been in a fantastic touch. The way he was hitting the ball against England was fantastic. I am looking forward to seeing him go out and express himself. If he has a fantastic season, we will be there in the dying stages of the tournament," Boucher said.

Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka by four wickets

PTI ■ CHATTOGRAM (BANGLADESH)

Concussion substitute Tanzid Hasan hammered 84 off 81 balls to help Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka by four wickets in the third one-day international and seal a 2-1 victory in the series on Monday. Opting to bat first, Sri Lanka posted 235 all out in exactly 50 overs courtesy of Janith Liyanage's 101 off 102 balls for his maiden century. Soumya Sarkar, who felt neck stiffness and complained of a headache and vision difficulties after his head hit the ground while saving a boundary, was substituted by Tanzid and the replacement proved his worth with an innings laced with nine fours and four sixes to see Bangladesh home with 9.4 overs left. After Tanzid's fluent start, Rishad Hossain — one of the three changes made by Bangladesh for the match — struck an unbeaten 18-ball 48 containing five fours and four sixes to steer the hosts to 237-6.

Bangladesh won the first match of the series by six wickets before Sri Lanka leveled with a three-wicket victory, leaving a decider. Tanzid and Anamul Haque, who replaced the out-of-form Liton Das, added 50 runs for the opening stand, with Tanzid dominating the partnership. Pacer Lahiru Kumara, who grabbed a career-best 4-48, removed Haque (12) and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto (1) in consecutive overs to put the Sri Lanka on the front foot protecting an under-par score. Kumara also broke the 49-run partnership between Tanzid and Towhid Hridoy when he undid the latter with extra bounce after he scored 22 and then removed Mahmudullah (1) with a back-of-the-length delivery in his next over to leave Bangladesh at 113-4 in the 24th over. When legspinner Wanindu Hasaranga had Tanzid caught by Charith Asalanka at long-on after building pressure on him with a series of dot balls, Sri Lanka got a ray of hope with Bangladesh at 130-5.

Last year taught us a lot of things: Mandhana

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Smriti Mandhana said she got solid backing from the management after their failure to win the Women's Premier League last year, which went a long way in them lifting the title here on Sunday. She said the 2023 campaign "taught us a lot of things" as her team beat Delhi Capitals by eight wickets to land the title here. With this, RCB's spirited bunch has managed to achieve what their men's team could not do over 16 years, and Mandhana thanked their loyal fanbase for always supporting the side.

"Last year taught us a lot of things, as a player, as a captain and as a team. The management, the way they backed me during the review after the season...they have been through a lot and a big thumbs up (to them)," Mandhana said at the post-match presentation. On the title triumph, she said, "The feeling has not sunk in yet, maybe it will take time. Hard for me to come out with a lot of expressions. Only thing I want to say is I am proud of the bunch. "We have been through ups and downs but they have stuck at it, and the way we have gotten past the line (tonight), it was amazing. Our Bangalore leg was really

good. We had two tough losses (in Delhi). That is what we talked about. "The last league match was like a quarter, then the semi and then the final. In such tournaments, you have to peak at the right time." The spin pair of Shreyanka Patil (4/12) and Sophie Molineux (3/20) helped RCB bowl out DC for 113, and then, talismanic skipper Mandhana (31), Sophie Devine (32) and Elysse Perry (35 not out) saw them home with three balls to spare. The Royal Challengers made 115 for two in 19.3 overs, a far easier victory than that tight-looking final over finish.

lot of time talking about. The way we dress the way we wear style of clothes, we will send each other pictures of outfits. He has been a terrible influence on me when it comes to watches but he got real passion for watches. "But with this so many things obviously now its family, he got a daughter and I got two daughters, he got a second child now as well."

MAXWELL SHOWING HIS FULL POTENTIAL NOW: Du Plessis also spoke about Glenn Maxwell and how the

Mandhana added, "For them (management) to have this trophy, it is amazing for them. I am not the only one who has won the trophy, the team has won. For RCB as a franchise to win, it is really, really special. "This win is definitely one of the top five maybe. A World Cup (win) would top it. I have a message for all the RCB fans, the most loyal fan base. Nothing would have been possible without their support. Ee Sala Cup Namde (The Cup will be ours this time) always comes up, and now I just want to say Ee Sala Cup Namdu (The Cup is ours this time)." DC, led by Meg Lanning, will rue the missed chance of bettering

their runners-up position from WPL 2023, but she admitted that her team was outplayed on the day. Lanning said, "Disappointing to not get it done tonight. We played some good cricket through the tournament. But it was about not playing well on the day. Congratulations to RCB, they outplayed us. But we can be proud of our efforts throughout." On their batting collapse, she said, "It all happened relatively quickly, as it tends to do. Crazy things happen, and every game has been pretty close. You can never sort of rest and think it is under control because there are so many good teams.

