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

Late City Vol.160 Issue 84
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

LUCKNOW, THURSDAY MARCH 28, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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NO RELIEF FOR KEJRIWAL

RAJESH KUMAR ■
NEW DELHI

In a major setback to the AAP supremo, the Delhi High Court on Wednesday refused to interfere with the arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money laundering case linked to the excise policy 'scam'.

Meanwhile, Kejriwal is likely to be produced before a Delhi court on Thursday on the conclusion of his ED custodial remand on March 28.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma issued notice on the AAP leader's petition challenging his arrest and the subsequent remand to the ED's custody, and asked the agency to file its response to it as well as his plea for interim relief of release before April 2.

The judge, in the order, clarified the matter would be taken up for final disposal on April 3 and no adjournment shall be granted.

"This court deems it appropriate to issue notice of the main writ petition as well as application for grant of interim relief, returnable on 03.04.2024," the court said. "Further, any release order from custody will amount to enlarging the accused/petitioner on bail or interim bail, as an interim measure. The writ



File Photo: PTI

India summons US diplomat over Washington remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Taking strong objection to remarks by a US official regarding Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, India on Wednesday summoned a senior US diplomat and lodged a strong protest against Washington's remarks. On March 23, German diplomat was summoned by New Delhi over German Foreign Ministry's remark on Kejriwal. Ministry of External Affairs



(MEA) officials summoned Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Gloria Berbera of US at its office in South

Block here. The meeting lasted for more than 30 minutes. Reports had said a US State Department official had said Washington "encouraged a fair, transparent and timely legal process for Kejriwal". The MEA later in a statement said, "We take strong objection to the remarks of the Spokesperson of the US State Department about certain legal proceedings in India." "In diplomacy, States are expected to be respectful of

the sovereignty and internal affairs of others. This responsibility is even more so in case of fellow democracies. It could otherwise end up setting unhealthy precedents," the statement said. India's legal processes are based on "an independent judiciary which is committed to objective and timely outcomes," the MEA said in the statement while underlining that "casting aspersions on that is unwarranted".

jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution of India is not a ready substitute for recourse to the remedy of bail under Section 439 of the CrPC ordinarily.

"...the relief sought in prayer (C) in the main petition is dependent on the outcome of prayer (A) and (B).

"Therefore, any order passed in the application for interim release of petitioner, pending disposal of the main petition without calling for reply of the respondent, at this stage, would rather amount to deciding the main petition itself.

"This court remains conscious of the fact that to reach a conclusion as to whether the petitioner herein is entitled to immediate release or not, this court will necessarily have to decide the issues raised in the main petition, as those issues are the edifice of arguments of the learned Senior Counsel for the petitioner seeking immediate release of the petitioner," ordered the court.

"The ED will ensure that replies are filed to the main petition as well as the application for interim release of the petitioner by 02.04.2024 and copies of the same are provided in digitised form as well as hard copy to the learned counsel for the petitioner," the order said.

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Delhi Government will not be run from jail, says LG

STAFF REPORTER ■
NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Wednesday categorically said the Delhi Government will not be run from jail. His reply comes in the backdrop of statements by AAP leaders that Kejriwal will continue as Chief Minister even if he is behind bars.

Replying to a query at the media conclave, the Lieutenant Governor said, "I can assure the people of Delhi that the Government will not be run from jail."

In an apparent attack on the AAP dispensation, Saxena said, "As kids, we all have heard the proverb 'lohe ke chane chabana' (to face great difficulty). After coming to Delhi I actually realised the meaning of this proverb. In this city to get any work done it feels like 'lohe ke chane chabana'. Whatever you try to do, there are some forces that put their entire strength into stopping that work. And if you are able to successfully complete that work, then these forces try to take credit."

Clearing the clutter around the noises made by BJP regarding the President's rule, senior AAP leader and Minister in the Kejriwal



Cabinet Atishi unequivocally stated that no Constitutional provision bars 'governance from jail, citing the law of the land ie Representation of the People Act, 1951 and GNCTD Act. Atishi said the law of the land is very clear. "The President's rule can only be imposed when there is no other choice. Issue of Article 356 has gone to the Supreme Court multiple times and it has repeatedly ruled that President rule can only be implemented only when there is no other choice left for the governance of that state. So if today the President's rule is imposed, then it is very clear that it is a political vendetta. So as you can see that it is used by institutions after institutions to finish off the Opposition," she said.

Continued on Page 8

Political turmoil rattles Congress



DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI

As the Lok Sabha polls draw near, the Congress finds itself struggling to secure seat sharing with key alliances. Internal discord brews as party leaders depart, and tensions escalate in Karnataka as some MLAs threaten to quit over ticket allocation issues, casting shadows over the party's prospects.

The grand old party on Wednesday took offence to its partners Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and Lalu Prasad-led RJD in Bihar where the INDIA Bloc members have announced their respective Lok Sabha contestants.



Aurangabad, Begusarai, Katihar, Purnia, and Siwan in Bihar are the seats where disagreements have kept the Mahagathbandhan allies from reaching a seat-sharing arrangement. Sources said the RJD has distributed tickets to its candidates, leaving the Congress red-faced.

In Maharashtra, the Congress has objected to the Shiv Sena (UBT) announcing its candidates for the Bhiwandi, Mumbai South Central and Sangli Lok Sabha seats, saying MVA partners must stick to "coalition dharma".

While Congress Legislature Party leader Balasaheb Thorat

urged Sena (UBT) to reconsider its decision, his party colleague Sanjay Nirupam adopted a more belligerent stand, attacking Congress leadership for letting the Uddhav Thackeray-led outfit grab most of the seats in Mumbai. Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) constituents Congress, Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) have been holding seat-sharing discussions for the 48 constituencies in Maharashtra, where the Lok Sabha polls will be held in five phases starting April 19.

Amid the talks, Sena (UBT) released its first list of 17 candidates for the upcoming elections and said it will contest a total of 22 seats in the State. Thorat said his party's State unit has apprised the central leadership of the developments. The Congress also lamented that Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) leader Prakash Ambedkar had announced a separate list of candidates.

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Planes graze past each other at Kolkata airport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
KOLKATA

An IndiGo aircraft grazed the wings of an Air India Express plane at the Kolkata airport on Wednesday, leaving wings of both aircraft damaged, officials said.

The IndiGo flight was headed to Darbhanga, while the Air India Express plane was scheduled to leave for Chennai. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation promptly de-registered the two pilots and ordered an enquiry into the freak accident, DGCA sources said adding both the plane had returned to the bay.

"The wingtip of a taxiing aircraft of another airline grazed one of our aircraft, which was stationary and

awaiting clearance to enter the runway at Kolkata for a scheduled operation to Chennai," an Air India Express spokesperson said in a statement adding an investigation was on. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) said in a statement that the wingtip vortices of both planes were badly damaged. The incident happened at about 11 am, sources said, adding both the flights were delayed. IndiGo authorities said it was a "minor graze between a taxiing IndiGo aircraft and that of another carrier," adding "the aircraft returned to bay for inspection and necessary action, as per protocol." An "incident report will be submitted to DGCA in due course," the IndiGo authorities said.

83 per cent of unemployed Indians are youth: Report

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A staggering 83 per cent of unemployed individuals are youth, while only 17.5 per cent of rural youth in India are engaged in regular work, according to a joint report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute for Human Development (IHD).

This revelation has provided Opposition parties with ample ammunition to criticise the performance of the BJP-led Central Government amid the ongoing electoral battle.

The study 'India Employment Report 2024', released by Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran, paints grim job scenario, stating that youth employment and underemployment increased between 2000 and 2019 but declined during the pandemic years with educated youths experiencing much higher levels of unemployment in the country during the period. Thus, indicating lack of quality employment opportunities, especially among those who have achieved higher education.

Opposition parties, particularly the Congress, have seized upon the report's observations to attack the Government over the issue of



File Photo: PTI

joblessness, accusing it of neglecting the youths' future. While India's large young workforce is a demographic dividend, the report noted that they don't appear to have the skills to deliver — with 75 per cent of youth unable to send emails with attachments, 60 per cent unable to copy and paste files, and 90 per cent unable to put a mathematical formula into a spreadsheet, it said.

Further, the share of people employed in industry and manufacturing has remained the same since 2012 at 26 per cent of the total workforce. The percentage of youth involved in economic activities decreased from 42 per cent in 2012 to 37 per cent by 2022.

Also, "the number of the

educated, possessing at least secondary education, among the unemployed doubled from 35.2 per cent in 2000 to 66 per cent in 2022," said the report reflecting poorly on the Government's economic policies, particularly in addressing the challenges faced by India's labour market.

The report's revelation of stagnation in industry and manufacturing employment since 2012 points to the dismal growth in key sectors of the economy, as per the report which has come as an embarrassment for the Modi Government which is positioning itself as a job provider to the youth, particularly during the election season.

Continued on Page 8

Comic book sets stage to amplify support for Modi vision

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Election campaigning in India, hitherto confined to pages in periodicals, billboards, larger than life size posters and TV advertisements has taken a new turn with the publication of a comic book/graphic novel.

While his opponents have gone overboard ridiculing him for the slogan "Modi ki guarantee", a person who has studied the progress made by the Narendra Modi Government has come out with a graphic novel "101 Reasons Why I Will Vote for Modi". This is the first attempt of its kind of making use of a comic book for spreading a

political message.

"Graphic novels can be very powerful means to communicate political ideas to the masses. This book is written from a voters' point of view, whether s/he will vote for Modi back to power in 2024," Shantanu Gupta told The Pioneer.

The comic book that has hit the shelves across the country is not something to be laughed at. It is reminiscences, reflections and the change the country has seen in the last ten years. The seriousness of the book lies in the studies undertaken by author Gupta, seasoned journalist and author of two path-breaking books "The Monk Who Became Chief Minister" and



"The Monk who Transformed Uttar Pradesh". The books were based on the life of Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and how he changed "UP Waala Bhaiya" abuse to a badge of honour.

Those who read the two books had no doubt about the outcome of the UP Legislative Assembly Election held in 2022 because of Gupta's eyewitness account. He found out that UP has been liberated from the shackles of "BIMARU" States as entrepreneurs and investors were queuing up to make big time investments in the State.

The first five years of Yogi rule saw major infrastructure projects get going and UP emerging as a developed State under the watchful eyes of the Monk.

Gupta is experimenting with an innovation on the decade long Modi Government's performance.

What makes the graphic novel unique and distinct is that the protagonist remains off the pages most of the time. It is the beneficiaries who are villagers, residents of small and medium sized towns, students, youth and the aged who explain why they would vote for Modi in the

2024 Lok Sabha election. Our leaders are guided by the dictum 'all is fair in war and love'. Gupta's book is different in all respects as it is focused on the major achievements of the Modi Government that provided more than four crore houses to the homeless under the PM Awas Yojana, more than 11 crore toilets which have come as a boon to the villagers.

Women who had to depend on open fields to attend to nature's call and who were always under the threat of snakes, scorpions and goons are a relieved lot because of the national mission of building toilets.

Continued on Page 8

Cracks appear in SP over selection of candidates

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Cracks have appeared in the Samajwadi Party over the selection of candidates for the two Muslim dominated Lok Sabha constituencies – Rampur and Moradabad. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and senior party leader and former MP from Rampur, Mohammad Azam Khan who is presently lodged in Sitapur district jail, are at loggerheads over the selection of candidates for both the seats. Two SP candidates each in Rampur and Moradabad had filed their nomination papers. Wednesday was the last day for filing of papers for the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections for which polling will be held on April 19. Though Akhilesh Yadav has accepted the request of Azam

Khan for denying ticket to sitting SP MP from Moradabad ST Hasan and has fielded Ruchi Veera from there, the decision has caused deep resentment among the supporters of sitting MP. ST Hasan had filed his nomination papers on Tuesday while Ruchi Veera filed her papers on Wednesday. The SP has denied ticket to Asim Raza, a protégé of Azam Khan, from the Rampur Lok Sabha seat, once represented by Azam Khan. The SP has given ticket to Mohibullah Nadvi from Rampur seat. Nadvi is imam of a mosque on Parliament Street in Delhi. Asim Raza had unsuccessfully contested the bypoll to Rampur Lok Sabha seat in June 2022 and Ghanshyam Lodhi of Bharatiya Janata Party had wrested this seat from the SP. On the nomination of Ruchi



Ruchi Veera

Veera as Samajwadi Party candidate from Moradabad Lok Sabha constituency, ST Hasan said, “Akhilesh Yadav party ke malik hain. He can give ticket to any person. Ruchi Veera is the authorised candidate. I

have no objection to this. It is the party’s decision that they can field anyone... I have always criticised the politics of hate and will continue to move forward against it... I am with the ideology of Late Mulayam Singh Yadav and Akhilesh Yadav.” He, however, added, “The SP has denied ticket to a Muslim candidate from Moradabad when the Muslims are facing the worst time in India after Independence in 1947.” Akhilesh Yadav had met Azam Khan in Sitapur district jail last week for consultations over the party candidates for Rampur and Moradabad. Akhilesh Yadav, after meeting Azam Khan, had confirmed that the meeting was in connection with the selection of the candidates for Lok Sabha elections.



Maulana Mohibullah Nadwi

On Tuesday night it was speculated that the SP is likely to change its candidate for the Moradabad Lok Sabha seat by fielding Ruchi Veera, replacing Hasan. Sources in SP said Azam Khan

was behind the change of candidate in Moradabad. The sources said he was angry with the candidature of sitting MP Hasan. Veera is considered a prominent member of Azam Khan’s camp. One candidate in each of the Rampur and Moradabad Lok Sabha constituencies owes allegiance to senior party leader Azam Khan while the other has been named by SP president Akhilesh Yadav. In Moradabad, Akhilesh Yadav had renominated ST Hasan, the sitting MP, as the party candidate and the latter even filed his nomination. Azam Khan refused to accept ST Hasan’s candidature and made his views clear to Akhilesh Yadav who visited him in jail last week. He proposed the name of Ruchi Veera for the Moradabad Lok Sabha seat.

Ruchi Veera, on Wednesday, filed her nomination papers and told reporters that she had been asked by Akhilesh Yadav to do so. A similar situation prevails in Rampur where Akhilesh has named Maulana Mohibullah Nadwi, the imam of the Jama Masjid on Parliament Street, Delhi. On Wednesday, Asim Raza, a close aide of Azam Khan, also filed the nomination papers, saying that he was the official party candidate. The party workers in Rampur had even threatened to boycott the polls if they did not get a candidate of their choice. Meanwhile, the SP has drafted senior party leader Shivpal Singh Yadav for damage control. He will meet Azam Khan in Sitapur district jail and resolve the crisis.

Eager to serve Meerut, says Arun Govil

PTI ■ MEERUT

Actor Arun Govil, who has been fielded by the BJP from the Meerut Lok Sabha seat, said he has spent 17 years of his life in the city and was looking forward to serving the people there. The actor, who became a household name after essaying the role of Lord Ram in Ramanand Sagar’s “Ramayan”, reached Meerut on Tuesday evening and held meetings with the local BJP leaders and office bearers.



“I was born here (in Meerut) and spent my childhood here. The first 17 years of my life were spent in Meerut. I was a student of Saraswati Shishu Mandir School after which I joined the Government Inter college,” Govil told reporters after he arrived in the city. Asked what the people of Meerut can expect from him if he wins the election, he said, “Whatever I have done in my life till today was a form of service... This (MP) will be another form of service to the people.”

In response to a question regarding the Ram temple, Govil said after the consecration ceremony, the entire country and the world have become “rammy”.

He also praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his developmental work and said no one else can match him.

After he arrived in Meerut, Govil along with party officials also went to Augharnath Temple, where he performed Jalabishek of Lord Ashutosh. A large crowd gathered at the temple to catch a glimpse of Govil or take a selfie with him. Later, the BJP candidate reached the Martyrs’ Memorial and paid tributes to the fallen soldiers.

Govil, however, refused to comment on Congress leader Supriya Shrinate’s alleged offensive remarks against actor Kangana Ranaut who has been fielded by the BJP from Himachal Pradesh’s Mandi Lok Sabha seat.


“Don’t ask me... Ask her (Ranaut),” Govil said.

28 new ‘No Parking’ places identified in city

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Twenty-eight new places have been identified as ‘No- Parking’ places by the traffic police and they will become effective from April 1. Officials said that No Parking challan would be issued by the traffic police against vehicles parked outside the white line at the roadside. The newly identified 28 No Parking places are as follows: From Parivartan crossing to Mayfair, both sides of the road, in Hazratganj area. From Sikanderbagh crossing to Atal Chowk Square in Hazratganj area. Entire Lohia Path. From Yojana Bhawan to Annexe crossing in Hazratganj area. From SBI crossing to Moti Mahal crossing to Chiraiya Jheel crossing to Saharaganj crossing, on both sides of the main road, in Hazratganj. From Park Road crossing to Hazratganj crossing. From High Court Gate No. 1 and the road in front of IGP Gate No. 1 in Vibhuti Khand of Gomti Nagar. From High Court crossing to Kamta crossing, on service road and main road, in Vibhuti Khand of Gomti Nagar. Up to 100 metres around Kamta crossing.

CMS, Vishal Khand school gate Nos. 1, 2 and 3 on both sides of the main road in Gomti Nagar area. CMS Vardan Khand, Gomti Nagar on both sides of the main road. Jaipuria School, Husadia crossing to IG Range Office, on both sides of the main road. Up to 100 metres around Ahimamau crossing. From Chappan Bhog crossing to Sadar Police Chowki tiraha. From Telibagh crossing to Utretia tiraha on both sides of the road. 50 metres on all sides at Ashok Lat crossing in Kaiserbagh. From Ashok Lat crossing to Babu Bhawan crossing. 50 metres from Nishatganj crossing on all sides. 50 metres from Karimnagar-Dandaiya crossing. From Rahimnagar-Dandhiya crossing to Khurramnagar crossing, on both sides of the road. 50 metres from Wireless crossing on all sides. Up to 50 metres around Engineering crossing in Jankipuram area. From Medical College crossing to Shahmina trisection in Chowk area. Up to 50 metres on all sides at Chowk crossing. 50 metres on all sides at Balaganj crossing. The officials asked the general public not to park their vehicles at the new No Parking places and park them only at the designated parking places for the smooth flow of traffic.



NOTICE

My Original allotment letter of Property No 401 on Fourth Floor situated in tower Omaxe Palace- A(T-1) sec 7 Gomti Nagar Extension Lucknow has been lost, Mukesh Khandelwal S/o Sri Shyam Kumar Khandelwal and Mrs Seema Khandelwal W/o Sri Mukesh Khandelwal

NOTICE

Rajiv Agarwal & Rajeev Agrawal are the names of same person but the name Rajiv Agarwal is much true and correct. Rajiv Agarwal s/o Late Nand Kishor Agarwal r/o 201, Imperial Galaxy, 7/127, Swaroop Nagar, Kanpur - 208002

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Reetu Gera to Ritu Gera Now I should be known as Ritu Gera W/O Ajay Gera R/O 1082 SBI Colony Ratanlal Nagar Kanpur U.P. 208022

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Ajay Bhattia To Ajay Kumar Bhartia, Ajay Kumar Bhartia S/o Murari Lal Bhartia R/O 26/103 Birhana Road, Kanpur

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Manoj Singh to Ramanuj S/O Chandrabhan for all future purpose, R/O Village Gangarauli, Kanpur dehat

Embarrassing case of mistaken identity

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In an amusing yet embarrassing turn of events, Bharatiya Janata Party workers in Kanpur Nagar misidentified Rajya Sabha member Baburam Nishad as Ramesh Awasthi, their party candidate for the Kanpur Lok Sabha constituency. The incident unfolded at Kanpur Central railway station on Wednesday, causing a stir among bystanders and drawing attention on social media platforms. As the Shatabdi Express pulled into platform No. 9 of the railway station, enthusiastic BJP supporters gathered to welcome their candidate. Mistaking Nishad for Awasthi due to their similar attire, the workers erupted into cheers and began showering flowers on the unsuspecting MP.



BJP Lok Sabha candidate Ramesh Awasthi was extended a rousing welcome on Wednesday.

Pioneer

The scene was captured on video by a news agency and it went viral, showcasing the mix-up in full view. Ramesh Awasthi, hailing from Nagla Husa village in UP’s Farrukhabad district, was recently nominated by the BJP to contest the Kanpur Lok Sabha seat in place of Satyadev

Pachauri. Pachauri, who had replaced veteran BJP leader Murlu Manohar Joshi, withdrew from the race shortly before the release of the fifth list of candidates. Awasthi, a former media professional with a background in journalism, currently serves on the UP BJP working committee.

The incident at the railway station highlights the fervour surrounding the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections, scheduled to be held in seven phases from April 19 to June 1. With voting for the Kanpur constituency slated for May 13, such moments serve as a reminder of the intense campaigning and excitement that

accompany the democratic process. The votes cast across the nation will be counted on June 4, determining the composition of the next Lok Sabha. The embarrassed BJP workers later extended a rousing welcome to Ramesh Awasthi with garlands and bouquets. Awasthi then proceeded in a procession

on DCM with dozens of four-wheelers following it and after darshan at the ancient Ganesh temple at Ghantaghar and Anandeshwar temple in Parmat, he reached BJP North City office at Naveen Market where he was again extended a rousing welcome by party leaders. Speaking on the occasion, Awasthi said all the party workers were required to work unitedly for meeting the target of winning over 400 Lok Sabha seats set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He was confident of meeting the target with the help of various welfare schemes launched by Narendra Modi-Yogi Adityanath governments at the Centre and in UP. Prominent party activists present at the Central railway station included area president Prakash Pal, sitting MP Devendra Singh Bhole, MLA Neelima Katiyar, Navin Pandit, Prakash Vir Arya, Manish Tripathi, Ajay Kapoor, MLA Surendra Maithani, Shivram Singh, Raghunandan Singh Bhadauria, Jaspal Bhagat, Suresh Awasthi and party’s Kanpur Dehat president Manoj Shukla.

Sportswoman, friends attacked on Holi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 2010 Commonwealth Games bronze medalist was molested and she and her two sportsmen friends were assaulted in Sushant Golf City police station area on the day of Holi. The woman player, who was attacked with some sharp and pointed object, was admitted to a private hospital for two days and she filed a complaint of sexual harassment and murderous assault on Wednesday. On the other hand, a Bharatiya Janata Party worker who is vice-president of Khurdahi Bazar Gram Suraksha Samiti, Chandan Shukla, lodged a report against the woman player and her aides for rioting and threatening him and his friends who were on their jeep on the day of the incident. The police said after a verbal spat between two parties which later led to physical altercation on the day of the incident, a cross FIR was registered against both the groups in the Sushant Golf City area police station and an investigation was underway. As per the woman complainant, she along with her two male friends had gone to Khurdahi Bazar area for some work around 4:30 pm when Chandan Shukla and his other friends also reached the scene. The victim alleged that the men on the jeep passed lewd remarks on her and when she objected, the leader of the other group abused her and her two friends Shivpal and Tanveer objected to the eve-

teasing and called the police control room for help. She said before any help came, the men on the jeep alighted from the vehicle and started thrashing her and her friends. “One of the men, Pratyush Shukla, dragged me out of my car and hit me with some heavy and pointed weapon causing a deep cut in my skull and I began to bleed profusely,” she alleged, adding that she also received multiple injuries on her legs and other parts of the body. She further alleged she was molested by Pratyush. About the delay in reporting the matter to the police, she said she was rushed to a private hospital in Gomti Nagar and was not in a condition to report the matter to the police. “I was discharged on Wednesday and I have come to the police station to file a complaint,” she told newsmen. The police registered a case under sections 354 (d) (molestation) and under 307 (attempted murder) and other sections of the Indian Penal Code. On the other hand, Chandan Shukla, in his police complaint, he was sitting inside his car when another car with a girl and four boys in an inebriated state came and started thrashing him and his friends for no reason. While the police downplayed the incident as it involved a BJP leader, the photos of the bloodied face of the woman athlete went viral on WhatsApp after which the police went on the back foot and registered the case.

Eight booked in fraud case

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Eight persons, including former manager of a bank branch in Shamli, two executive engineers of PWD of Karauli district in Rajasthan, and a sub-contractor were booked in a case of fraud in which they used the bank account of a construction company to hoard their ill-gotten over Rs 1.32 crore. The case was registered at Gomti Nagar police station. Those named in the case are the former bank manager Sandeep Gupta, executive engineers of PWD Rajasthan, JI Meena and BS Meena, sub-contractor Jitendra Singh, Gaurav Singh, Hitesh Kamboj, Mohammed Tassvar and Ayush Goel. The FIR was registered on the complaint of Madhu Chauhan, who is director a company named Abhyudaya Construction Development Pvt Ltd of Gomti Nagar. In the FIR, Chauhan stated that her company deals in construction of houses, roads and other business all across the country and had got a tender for road construction between Gangapura and Sikandra at NH-8 in Hindon City of Rajasthan by the PWD but did not get the payment for the work. The director said following this they moved the High Court in Jaipur and

a retired judge was appointed as mediator to resolve the issue. “We were shocked to see the documents presented by the PWD Rajasthan on fake payment made to our company. They showed that over Rs 64 lakh was paid to our company. We did correspondence with the Bank in Shamli and were told that a total of Rs 1.32 crore was hoarded in the bank account which was in the name of a company which had nearly a similar name to our company. The miscreants used fake documents to open the account in the bank’s branch which was located in Shamli district and showed that the money was credited to our company. We do not have any accounts at the bank’s branch in Shamli. The above named persons withdrew the money and distributed it among themselves,” the complainant alleged. **FOUND DEAD:** A retired section officer of UP Secretariat committed suicide in Ghazipur police station area on Tuesday. He was identified as Jagdish Prasaad Tiwari (76) of Sanjay Gandhipuram. He retired from service in 2008 and was suffering from some incurable disease. Around 4:40 pm on Tuesday, he was found lying in a pool of blood in the bathroom and rushed to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead.

Teenage girl killed by parents in Hapur

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a shocking killing reported from Khudaliya village in Hapur district, the father and stepmother of a teenage girl murdered her and later fled from the house, police said on Wednesday. The body was found lying in the home of the victim and there were injury marks on her neck and face and blood was oozing out. The police sent the body for post-mortem and launched a hunt for the absconding parents. Saurabh Chaudhary, a resident of Tatarpur village in City Kotwali area of Bulandshahr district, informed the police that about 20-years-back, he had married his sister Laxmi to one Amit, a resident of Khudaliya village in Hapur district. He alleged that after a few years of marriage, Amit started beating Laxmi and killed her. Saurabh claimed that his parents did not inform the police, keeping in mind the future of his sister’s daughter Yogita.

According to Saurabh, a few days after the death of Laxmi, Amit got married to Chanchal for the second time. Chanchal, being the stepmother, neither liked Yogita nor behaved well with her. On Tuesday evening, Saurabh got information that the body of Yogita was lying inside the house and that Amit and Chanchal were missing. He rushed to the spot and subsequently informed the police. According to the police, Yogita had accused a neighbouring youth of molesting her two years ago. The police had registered a case and arrested the accused. According to Circle Officer Ashutosh Shivam, they got information on Dial 112 about the death of a girl. The police reached the spot and sent the body for post-mortem. Late in night, the deceased’s maternal uncle Saurabh filed a complaint in the police station and accused the parents of murder, on

the basis of which a case has been registered against father Amit and step-mother Chanchal. The accused couple has been absconding since the incident and the police are searching for them. The CO said that circumstantial evidence suggested that Yogita was strangled to death after stuffing cloth in her mouth. According to the police, the accused couple also tried to dispose of Yogita’s body but as some neighbours suspected foul play after the family did not come out till late Tuesday noon, so their plan failed. As the neighbours knocked at the door to enquire about the matter from Amit, the couple opened the door but fled from the scene of crime before anyone could see the body. Further investigations are on by the police. Meanwhile, a 20-year-old woman was found murdered under mysterious circumstances near the panchayat bhawan of a village under Tikaitganj police station of Barabanki on Tuesday

evening. Senior police officials said that the woman was missing from home since Tuesday morning. The victim’s mother, meanwhile, raised suspicion that her daughter was raped and murdered as she had spotted three men near the scene of crime when she was looking for her daughter when she did not return home. Police officials said one of the suspects was taken into custody and further investigations were on. The body was sent for post-mortem. Circle Officer of Ram Sanahi Ghat (Barabanki), JS Mishra, said the woman’s body was spotted lying near the panchayat bhawan by a local. The mother of the deceased had told the police that her daughter went missing after she went out to attend nature’s call on Tuesday morning. The mother suspects the involvement of a youth from the same village as her family had strained relations with him following which he was taken into custody.

पब्लिक नोटिस

मेरे मुकदमे M/S Anod Plasma Spray Limited की सम्पत्ति Plot No- 103 and 104 Industrial Estate Site No- 1 Panki Kanpur Nagar, जिसकी मूल चेतनी डीज 04-30-08-1984 registered at sub Registrar Kanpur at Book No-1 Zild 96 Pages 126/133 at Serial No- 1 on dt-04-09-1984 जो कि खो गये हैं। यह कि उक्त सम्पत्ति के संबंध में यदि किसी व्यक्ति संस्था अवस्था संबंधित का कोई भी दावा, स्वत्व अवस्था मार हो तो अकोहल्लाहकाली के सम्मत् इस नोटिस के प्रकाशन के 7 दिनों के अन्दर अपना लिखित दावा प्रस्तुत करें। अवस्था कुमार शुक्ला एडवोकेट Mob-9936861846 Ch- No- 42, Mottal Adhivakta Bhawan Court Compound Kanpur Nagar 208001

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that our Client intends to enter into a transaction in respect of land described herein as Schedule-A:situated at Village-Bendo Tehsil-Kulipahad, District-Mahoba, Uttar Pradesh ("Subject Lands"). Any entity / person including any Bank or Financial Institution having or claiming any right, title, claim, benefit, demand or interest with respect to the Subject Lands or has any objection to the intended above-referred transaction by our Client, such entity / person may inform us in writing with documentary proof on the address mentioned below within a period of 7 (Seven) days from the date of publication of this notice, failing which it shall be presumed that no adverse right, title, interest, share, claim or demand of any nature whatsoever exists into or upon or in respect of the Subject Lands.

Village	Sr. No.	Khata No.	Khasra No.	Area (Hectare)	Area (Acre)
Bendo	1	589	2116	0.64	1.58
	2	590	2118	8.633	21.33
	3	438	2128/2	4.319	10.67
	4	439	2128/1	4.319	10.67

Madhvesh Mishra (Advocate)
Flat no. 301-A-Cristal apartment
Dated: 24/03/2024 509/150 Old Hyderabad, Lucknow (M)9839896699

PUBLIC NOTICE

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Village	Sr. No.	Khata No.	Khasra No.	Area (Hectare)	Area (Acre)
Bendo	1	709	1291	5.941	14.68
	2	31	1294	5.455	13.48
			1309	0.474	1.17
	3	304	1307	0.073	0.18
	4	812	1303	0.356	0.88
	5	803	1302	0.478	1.18
Itwan	6	427	1299	0.38	0.94
	7	269	1298	0.312	0.77
	8	480	1282	6.5800	16.26
	1	58	166	1.348	3.33
	2	119	167	1.056	2.61
	3	2	168	0.138	0.34
	4	97	157	0.429	1.06
	5	76	158	0.21	0.52

Madhvesh Mishra (Advocate)
Flat no. 301-A-Cristal apartment
Dated: 24/03/2024 509/150 Old Hyderabad, Lucknow (M)9839896699

Yogi sounds poll bugle from Mathura

It is Modi's 'nation first' versus opposition's 'family first'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Delineating the stark contrast between the ruling National Democratic Alliance and the opposition parties, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Wednesday, said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'nation first' versus opposition's 'family first' was the main issue in the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls. Yogi emphasised the Modi administration's dedication to upholding the rule of law, prioritising national interests and adhering to zero tolerance policy towards corruption, juxtaposing it with the dominance of mafia and thriving corruption during opposition governments in the past. He contrasted the opposition parties' divisive politics based on appeasement, caste and religion with Modi's inclusive governance, aimed at extending the benefits of welfare schemes to all, regardless of background, under the banner of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas". Yogi described Prime Minister Modi as a leader who embraces all 140 crore citizens as part of his extended family, urging everyone to envision a new India within the folds of Modi's family. In his first public address following the announcement of the Lok Sabha election dates recently, the chief minister engaged with intellectuals, seeking support for MP and Bharatiya Janata Party candi-

date Hema Malini, while also presenting a comprehensive overview of numerous development schemes of the Modi government. The chief minister remarked that while the bhajan 'Holi khele raghubira...' is a familiar tune to many, it marked a historic occasion when, after 500 years, the revered Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram witnessed the unique Holi celebrations from his abode in Ayodhya. Besides, Holi celebrations in Mathura-Vrindavan, Barsana, Gokul, Govardhan, Nandgaon and Baldev have all grabbed headlines due to the presence of a large number of devotees, the chief minister added. The chief minister highlighted the remarkable grandeur and influence of the region, underscoring the Vaishnav Mahakumbh held along the banks of Yamuna maiya in 2021. He expressed gratitude for the immense blessings bestowed by Vrindavan Bihari Lal, noting that before the Vaishnav Kumbh, the presence of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was not acknowledged. It was only after the conclusion of the Kumbh that the onset of COVID-19 was recognized. The fervour exhibited during the event promised to infuse newfound vigour and resilience. Harnessing this energy, success was achieved in safeguarding the populace of Uttar Pradesh from the perils

of COVID-19, guided by the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, he pointed out. Chief Minister Yogi emphasised the transformative changes witnessed over the past decade, portraying a dynamic shift towards a new India, with fortified border security alongside significant infrastructural advancements under Prime Minister Modi's leadership. Developments span highways, railways, airports, medical colleges, universities, and various new institutions, while benefits of welfare schemes have reached the underprivileged without any discrimination, he added. "Prior to 2014, schemes were often tailored, based on considerations for caste and religion as part of vote bank politics. However, post-2014, adherence to the principle of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" ensures equal distribution of benefits among people without bias. Every stratum of society – be it the impoverished, entrepreneurs, women, youth or farmers – reaps the rewards, receiving security subsidies universally," he remarked. He added: "Prime Minister Modi's approach pivots on citizen satisfaction, prioritising inclusivity over appeasement. The blueprint for the new India encompasses job creation for youth, reverence for faith, and preservation of heritage, while fostering a connection between ordinary citizens and development endeavours.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and BJP leader Yogi Adityanath offers prayers at Sri Krishna Janamsthan temple in Mathura on Wednesday as Adityanath commences his poll campaign for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections from Mathura on Wednesday.

Safety assurances extend to daughters, sisters and businesswomen alike, with Modi's pledge centering on integrating farmers into the development narrative." The chief minister remarked that before 2014, the North

Eastern states grappled with heightened militancy and separatist sentiments, while Jammu and Kashmir faced the scourge of stone-pelting incidents, endangering security personnel. However, today, thanks to the resolve of Modi's

administration, stone-pelting has ceased in Jammu and Kashmir with the abolition of Article 370. This constitutional amendment, introduced by Congress in 1952, exacerbated extremism, yet it was effectively addressed by Modi, he

added. "The current administration has ensured that no intrusions occur along India's borders and terrorist activities are thwarted. This success in leadership has facilitated comprehensive development, including

infrastructure in border regions. Previously, soldiers had to traverse extensive distances with heavy luggage, but now, connectivity to border areas has vastly improved, alleviating logistical burdens and enhancing security measures," Chief Minister Yogi stated further. The chief minister remarked that upon Hema Malini's initial foray into Parliament as an MP, she pledged her allegiance to the Braj region, voicing its grievances. He assured that the issues raised by her in Parliament would be addressed and the aspirations of the people would be fulfilled. The chief minister lauded the active role being played by members from the world of art, such as Hema Malini, in raising issues of people in Parliament, pointing out that it was through such dedicated public representatives that solutions to challenges emerged. "The Braj region is renowned for its proactive approach, offering solutions rather than presenting problems," he asserted. Earlier on Wednesday morning, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath visited Lord Krishna's birthplace in Mathura and offered prayers at the temple for the well-being and prosperity of Uttar Pradesh. The chief minister visited the temple before taking part in the Prabuddha Sammelan to formally sound the poll bugle from the sacred city of Mathura.

Jitin Prasada files nomination from Pilibhit, MP Varun Gandhi remains absent

PTI ■ PILIBHIT

Uttar Pradesh Minister Jitin Prasada, who replaced party leader Varun Gandhi as the BJP candidate from the Pilibhit constituency, filed his nomination papers on Wednesday. BJP MLAs from all four assembly constituencies in Pilibhit — Sanjay Gangwar, Baburam Paswan, Vivek Verma and Swami Prakashanand — were the proposers in Prasada's nomination papers, the BJP candidate's lawyer Saroj Kumar Bajpai told PTI. Prasada has mentioned in his nomination papers that his total movable and immovable assets are worth Rs 15 crore, Bajpai said. Varun Gandhi was not in Pilibhit on Wednesday. According to his personal secretary Kamal Kant, the incumbent Pilibhit MP is in Delhi. Local leaders remained tight-lipped about Varun Gandhi's absence. Before filing the nomination papers, Prasada offered prayers at the Yashwanti Devi temple in Pilibhit and then addressed an election meeting on the temple premises. Exuding confidence about his victory from the seat, Prasada, the PWD minister in the Yogi Adityanath government, said, "I thank the national and the state leadership (of BJP) for fielding me in the election. I will work to strengthen (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi by winning the Pilibhit seat." The seat has been held by the BJP for the past four Lok Sabha elections. In the 2004 Lok Sabha polls,



Prasada won from Shahjahanpur on a Congress ticket. In 2009, he won the Dhaurahara seat and was made Union minister in the Congress government. Even though Varun Gandhi was dropped from the list of Lok Sabha candidates by the BJP, senior party leader and Uttar Pradesh minister Swatantra Dev Singh, at the public meeting said, "Varun Gandhi is our leader and the party will use him in some other place." The BJP's state president Bhupendra Chaudhary, while speaking to reporters in Sambhal on Tuesday, said, "Varun Gandhi is a senior leader and the party will soon give him some tasks." The Pilibhit seat has remained with Maneka Gandhi or her son Varun Gandhi since 1996. Maneka Gandhi won the seat on a Janata Dal ticket in 1989, lost in 1991, won again in 1996 and as an Independent candidate in 1998 and 1999. She won the seat in 2004 and in 2014 as a BJP candidate. Varun Gandhi won the seat in 2009 and 2019 as a BJP candidate.

Maneka, Varun missing from list of BJP star campaigners for UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Bharatiya Janata Party has revealed the list of its star campaigners for the first phase of Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh, comprising a prominent lineup of leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Union Minister Smriti Irani among 40 others. However, notable omissions from the list include Maneka Gandhi and Varun Gandhi, with Varun Gandhi's ticket from Pilibhit also being canceled. Additionally, the name of Kaiserganj MP Brijbhushan Sharan Singh is also missing from the list. In a surprising move, the list of campaigners features chief ministers from other states, including Mohan Yadav (Madhya Pradesh, Bhajan Lal Sharma (Rajasthan), and Pushkar Singh Dhama (Uttarakhand). The list also has names of 12

ministers from Uttar Pradesh, including Swatantra Singh, Dharampal Singh and Jaiveer Singh. Two Muslim leaders, former Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and UP Minister of State for Minority Welfare Danish Azad, have also been designated as star campaigners. Renowned actress and Mathura MP Hema Malini will also be part of the campaigning efforts. Further additions to the list include Agra MP SP Singh Baghel, Rajya Sabha member BL Verma and Muzaffarnagar MP Sanjeev Balyan, along with Duryojay Singh Shakya, who holds the position of party's regional president of the Braj region and is a candidate from Budaun. Additionally, MLC Subhash Yaduvansh has been named as a star campaigner. Conspicuously absent from the list are former deputy chief minister Dinesh Sharma, Satpal Maharaj, Trivendra Singh Rawat, Mahendra Nath Pandey and others.



One vote can alter fate of nation: Yogi

Engages with intellectuals in Ghaziabad

PNS ■ GHAZIABAD

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Wednesday, emphasised the profound impact of every vote, highlighting the pivotal role it played in recent historic decisions. Reflecting on the long-standing cultural narrative of 'Holi khele raghubira Awadh mai', he underscored how the collective power of individual votes has reshaped history. Yogi Adityanath credited voter participation for pivotal changes such as the removal of Article 370, bringing an end to insurgency in North-East India, and fostering peace in Jammu and Kashmir. In a separate engagement in Ghaziabad on Wednesday, Chief

Minister Yogi Adityanath engaged with intellectuals, urging support for Lok Sabha candidate Atul Garg. He stressed the significance of each vote, pointing out its potential to influence the nation's trajectory. Yogi Adityanath echoed the prevailing sentiment of confidence in the Narendra Modi government's leadership, as evident in the voices across the country expressing optimism for another successful tenure. Chief Minister Yogi noted the stark contrast in the state's environment pre-2014 and post-2017, highlighting significant improvements in security, infrastructure, healthcare, education and business opportunities. He reminisced about the reluctance to visit Ghaziabad during his tenure as an MP in 1998, citing its reputation for crime and disorder. "However, today, Ghaziabad stands as a shining example of urban development, ranking at the forefront among smart cities," he stated. Moreover, Ghaziabad has emerged as

a model for police reform, with builders now delivering homes promptly to buyers who had long awaited their residences, he added. Yogi Adityanath acknowledged past governmental shortcomings but emphasised the current administration's proactive approach in facilitating dialogue between builders and buyers, resolving previously pending issues. "This concerted effort has provided housing solutions to thousands and enabled many to realise the dream of owning their own homes," he added. The chief minister noted frequent instances of unrest leading to riots and prompting the enforcement of curfews during previous governments, contrasting it with the grand Kanwar Yatra taken out in the state today. "I emphasised our intention not to cause harm but to uphold societal faith, urging the importance of respect. A follower of Sanatan Dharma seeks only peaceful coexistence, striving for harmony. The

decision to proceed with the Kanwar Yatra was met with complexity, yet it was already finalised. Upon inquiry about the outcome of a meeting, it was conveyed that the Yatra would not proceed. I clarified our purpose was not mere celebration but governance with determination. Those willing to cooperate shall work alongside us, while dissenters may express their stance, and I shall grant them leave indefinitely. No finds no place in my vocabulary," he said. Chief Minister Yogi expressed the decision to proceed with the Kanwar Yatra in Uttar Pradesh, which was met with anticipation of millions converging. The chief minister highlighted how Ghaziabad, once overlooked, now holds allure, with residents reluctant to depart. Moreover, there has been a significant enhancement in road infrastructure, exemplified by the Ganga Expressway linking Ghaziabad to Meerut, promising a swift journey to Prayagraj within 7-8 hours, he added.

BJP sets eyes on Purvanchal region

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a turn of events reflecting the shifting political landscape in Uttar Pradesh, the Bharatiya Janata Party has set its eyes on the five seats it lost in Purvanchal. The five Lok Sabha constituencies which the BJP lost in 2019 were Azamgarh, Lalgaon, Ghosi, Ghazipur and Jaunpur. Of particular interest is Azamgarh, where Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav clinched victory in the 2019 general elections by an impressive margin of over 2.5 lakh votes. However, the BJP managed to secure a victory in the subsequent by-election in 2022,

with Dinesh Lal Yadav 'Nirahua' emerging triumphant. Similarly, Bahujan Samaj Party candidates claimed victory in Lalgaon, Ghosi, Ghazipur and Jaunpur during the 2019 elections, indicating a significant shift in the political landscape of these constituencies. Notably, BJP's historical dominance in some of these seats, such as Ghazipur and Jaunpur, faced a formidable challenge in recent years. In another Purvanchal Lok Sabha seat, Chandauli, the margin of victory also witnessed a notable decrease, with BJP's Dr. Mahendra Nath Pandey winning the seat in

2019 by a narrow margin of just 13,959 votes, compared to his resounding victory in 2014. This reduction in margin underscored the evolving dynamics and heightened competition in the region. The 2022 UP assembly election results further compounded concerns for the BJP strategists, despite Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath securing a second consecutive term in office. The party faced defeats on all five assembly segments of Azamgarh Lok Sabha constituency, as well as lost Lalgaon, Ghazipur, Ghosi and Jaunpur assembly constituencies, signaling a need for introspection and recalibration of political

approaches. In Ghazipur, where BJP stalwart Manoj Sinha had previously enjoyed electoral success, the party failed to secure victory in any of the five assembly segments, underscoring the challenges posed by shifting voter preferences and political alignments. As Uttar Pradesh gears up for the forthcoming elections, the BJP finds itself in a position necessitating a thorough reassessment of its strategies and outreach efforts, particularly in the crucial Purvanchal region, where recent electoral outcomes have signaled a changing political landscape.

155 candidates file papers for 1st phase

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The last date of filing of nomination papers for the eight Lok Sabha constituencies going to polls in the first phase ended in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday. Till Wednesday, 155 candidates, including 46 from different political parties had filed their nomination papers for the first phase polls in Uttar Pradesh. Chief Electoral Officer of UP, Navdeep Rinwa, said 46 candidates from different political parties had filed their nomination papers. Eight parliamentary constituencies – Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Nagina (SC), Moradabad, Rampur and Pilibhit – will vote in the first phase on April 19.

From the Saharanpur Lok Sabha seat, four candidates, including Imran Masood of the Congress and Bahujan Samaj Party's Majid Ali have filed their nominations. In Kairana constituency, seven candidates, including Iqra Chaudhary of the Samajwadi Party, SP's "supplementary" candidate Nahid Hasan and BSP's Shripal filed their nomination papers. From Muzaffarnagar seat, 11 candidates filed their nomination papers. Prominent among them are Union minister and Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Sanjeev Kumar Balyan, SP's Harendra Malik and BSP's Dara Singh Prajapati. In Bijnor, four candidates, including Vijendra Singh of the BSP, filed the nomination papers.

Five candidates have so far filed the nomination papers from Nagina (SC) Lok Sabha seat, with three of them filing their nominations on Tuesday. Five candidates have filed papers in Moradabad, including BJP's Sarvesh Kumar Singh and sitting MP ST Hasan of SP, taking the total count in the parliamentary constituency to six. From the Rampur seat, six candidates filed their nomination papers. Three candidates including Bhagwat Sharan Gangwar of the SP and Anis Ahmad (Phool Babu) of BSP are among the three candidates from Pilibhit who filed their nomination papers on Tuesday. So far, four candidates have filed their nomination papers from the seat.

Chief Electoral Officer Rinwa said adequate security measures were in place for the submission of the nominations and that the entire process was videographed. The Election Commission of India had issued the notification for the first-phase polls on March 20. Scrutiny of nomination papers will be done on March 28 and the last date for withdrawal of candidature is March 30. This time, the BSP has announced it would contest the elections alone, while the SP and the Congress – both members of the opposition INDIA bloc – are contesting the election in alliance. The Rashtriya Lok Dal has joined hands with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance.

इंडियन बैंक (भारत सरकार का उपक्रम)		 Indian Bank (A Govt. of India Undertaking)	
इलाहाबाद		ALLAHABAD	
Zonal Office: 10/379 Rameni (Tarauns), Hamirpur, Uttar Pradesh - 210301 Appendix-IV Under Rule - 8 (1)) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 POSSESSION NOTICE (Rule 8(1) for Immovable Properties)			
Notice is hereby given under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement (Security) Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under 13 (12) read with rule 3 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer issued a demand notice on the date 01.12.2023 against the borrower as mentioned hereinafter, calling them to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the under noted borrowers and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property/ies described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under section 13(4) of the said Act read with rule 8 of the said Rules on the dates mentioned against each Account. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property /ies and any dealing with the property/ies will be subject to the charge of the Indian Bank (e-ALLAHABAD BANK), Branch Belatal, Distt. Mahoba for the amounts and interests thereon mentioned herein below.			
The attention of the borrowers detailed hereunder is invited to the provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.			
Sl. No.	Name and address of the Borrowers/Mortgagores/Guarantors	Description of the Immovable Property	Date of Demand Notice outstanding Amt.
Branch: Belatal, Distt. Mahoba, Mobile No.: 7318184976			
1.	Borrower : M/s City Palace Marriage Home and Guest House, Proprietor & Mortgagor : Shri Ashok Kumar S/o Bhuiyadeen Alias Ram Pal, R/o Mohalla, Gandhi Nagar Opposite Jila Jail, Distt. Mahoba	Property situated at Arazi No. 1620, House No. 264, Ward No. 11 (Old)(6(New), Mohalla, Gandhi Nagar Opposite Jila Jail, Mahoba, in the Name of Shri Ashok Kumar S/o Bhuiyadeen Alias Ram Pal, Sale Deed No. 1- Deed Dated 28.06.1996, Registered at Sub Registrar Mahoba at Bahi No. 1, Volume No. 188, Page No. 337 to 356, Serial No. 1199, Boundaries: East: Road, West: Plot of Mohd Khalil, North: Plot of Mohd Khalil, South: House of Sagar, Sale Deed No. 2- Deed Dated 12.05.2000, Registered at Sub Registrar Mahoba at Bahi No. 1, Volume No. 400, Page No. 219 to 260, Serial No. 1049 Boundaries: East: Road, West: Plot of Mohd Khalil, North: Plot of Mohd Khalil, South: House of Ashok,	01.12.2023 Rs. 34,87,564.24 + intt. & Charges 22.03.2024 Rs. 34,87,564.24 + intt. & Charges
Date : 28.03.2024		Place: Hamirpur	Authorised Officer, Indian Bank

‘Vahan Yatra’ to make voters aware in 20 LS constituencies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In order to motivate people for ensuring 100 per cent voting in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, a six-day voter awareness campaign, ‘Vahan Yatra,’ has been organised under the joint aegis of the social organisation Asha Trust and Ek Desh Samaan Shiksha Abhiyan. The yatra was flagged off from Dr Ambedkar Park near District Court premises here on Wednesday. This yatra which started from Varanasi will reach Lucknow on April 1 via Bhadohi, Prayagraj, Banda, Chitrakoot, Hamirpur, Etawah, Auraiya, Kanpur and Unnao. Through pamphlets and posters, people are being appealed to come forward and vote 100 per cent in order to strengthen democracy. During this ‘Vahan Yatra,’ people of 20 Lok Sabha constituencies of 15 districts will be contacted.

Before leaving the yatra, explaining its objective, Asha Trust coordinator Vallabhacharya Pandey said that ground issues like education, health, employment, farming and justice related to the daily lives of common people should be discussed instead of politics of hatred, animosity and show off. For this, it is



‘Vahan Yatra’ being taken out for voter awareness in Varanasi on Wednesday.

necessary to have 100 per cent voting in the elections, he added.

Senior social worker Arvind Murthy said that today a large part of the common man's income is being spent on education and health and the youth are facing a big employment crisis. In such a situation, it is necessary that the government should provide complete education and health services so that these services can be

provided to everyone in a cheap and accessible manner, he said. Social activist Mahendra Rathore said a national employment law should be made which will ensure availability of means of livelihood to all the youth as per their qualifications and capabilities.

Coordinator of the yatra, Deen Dayal Singh said during the yatra we will also try to meet people from political par-

ties and urge them to clarify their policies on education, health and earnings.

On the occasion Jagriti Rahi, Nandlal Master, Ravi Shekhar, Ekta, Dr Anoop Shramik, Dr Anand Prakash Tiwari, Ram Janam, Manish Sharma, Dr Indu Pandey, Pradeep Singh, Jagannath Kushwaha, Rajkumar Gupta, Feroz Khan, Hemant Yadav, Urmla Vishwakarma, Om Mishra etc were also present.

Voters can produce alternative photo identity documents: Deputy DEO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Additional District Officer (Administration)/Deputy District Election Officer (DyDEO) Bipin Kumar said that as per the instructions of the Election Commission of India, in order to prevent impersonation regarding the option of voter photo identity card for the Lok Sabha General Election 2024, the voter will be required to prove his/her identity at the time of voting. The voters must present their voter photo ID cards, but those who are unable to present the same can produce one of the alternative photo ID documents to

establish their identity.

Optional photo identity documents include Aadhar cards, MNREGA job cards, passport with photo issued by banks/post offices, Health Insurance Smart Cards issued under the scheme of Labour Ministry, driving licenses, PAN cards, Smart Card issued by RGI under NPR, Indian passports, pension documents with photographs, Service Identity cards with photographs issued by Central/State Government/Public Administration/Public Limited Companies to their employees, Government Identity cards issued to MPs, MLAs/Legislative Council

Members, Unique Disability ID (UDID) cards, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India.

He further informed that in relation to EPIC, writing mistakes, spelling mistakes etc should be ignored, provided the identity of the elector can be ensured from the EPIC. If an elector produces a photo identity card, which has been issued by any other Assembly Constituency or Electoral Registration Officer, such EPIC will also be accepted for establishing identity, provided the name of the elector where he/she has come to vote is, should

be available in the electoral roll related to that polling station. If it is not possible to ensure the identity of the elector due to mismatch of photographs etc, then the elector will have to submit the above alternative photo document. Notwithstanding anything contained therein, the overseas electors who are registered in the electoral rolls under Section 20A of the Representation of the People Act, 1960, on the basis of particulars in their passports, shall be required to carry only their original passport (and any other identity document) at the polling station.

Stress on 100 pc achievement of revenue target

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

To ensure 100 per cent achievement of the revenue target set by the government during the financial year 2023-24 which is nearing its end, inspector General (Registration), Uttar Pradesh has issued instructions to generate maximum revenue by opening offices even during holidays.

Assistant Inspector General of Registration, Dharendra Kumar Saini said that in order to achieve 100 per cent target allotted to the Stamp and Registration Department in accordance with the instructions, all the Deputy Registrars of Varanasi district will do the registration work on holidays on March 29 (Good Friday) and March 31 (Sunday) by opening the offices. He said that even on these two holidays, the people can get their deeds registered like normal days.

Eight arrested

PTI ■ AURAIYA

Eight people were arrested for kidnapping and killing a jeweller's son for ransom, police said on Wednesday. On March 23 the body of Subhaan (12) was found inside a suitcase in Delhi, a day after he was abducted from Auraiya's Ervakatra town, they said. According to police, his neighbour Siraj alias Munna, along with others, had kidnapped the boy for a ransom of ₹50 lakh. They locked the child inside a suitcase and took him to Delhi.

The police traced the location of kidnappers to Delhi. During investigation, they recovered a suitcase from the car parked near Sai Temple. On opening it Subhaan's body was found inside tied with a rope, they said. Following this, Awadhesh was arrested and on his disclosure, Ashish Mishra, Jatin Diwakar and Ravi Kumar were also nabbed. When the police were returning from Delhi, the kidnappers' accomplices — Ankit, Riyaz Siddiqui, Deepak and Shobhan — started firing at the police party. Eight accused were injured in the retaliatory firing by the police, they said. SP Charu Nigam said prima facie Subhaan died of suffocation.

Varanasi ranked first in UP in solar scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal said that Varanasi has ranked first in Uttar Pradesh in the Solar Rooftop on Grid System Scheme. The government is running a mega campaign to make Kashi a solar city so that both money and electricity of the residents can be saved, as well as the environment can also be protected.

According to him, there is tremendous public interest in this campaign of the government. More than 28,000 people have registered for solar rooftop

on grid system in just two and a half months, surpassing the government's target of 25,000 connections under the Har Ghar Solar Scheme. “Due to which consumers are saving more than ₹31 lakh,” he said.

He said that under the Har Ghar Solar Scheme in Varanasi, the target was to have a solar rooftop on grid system in 25,000 houses, against which 28,423 registrations have been done. “Solar energy has started providing electricity in the homes of 1,045 people. Consumers taking advantage of the solar scheme have saved 4,70,250 units. Due to which

₹31.35 lakh have been saved so far,” he said.

According to him, a target of 25,000 solar rooftop on grid systems was set in the ‘Har Ghar Solar Scheme’. The target of which was later increased to about 72,000 under ‘PM Surya Ghar Yojana’. The CDO said that efforts will be made to meet the new target in the next three to four months. Under the scheme, the state government will provide electricity from 1 kilowatt to 10,000 kilowatts. Subsidy ranging from ₹45,000 to ₹1.08 lakh is being given for installing solar up to one kilowatt.

BLW GM lays emphasis on use of Hindi



The Rajbhasha department officials presenting shield to the GM at BLW in Varanasi on Wednesday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

General Manager of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) Basudev Panda called upon the employees to use Rajbhasha Hindi as much as possible in their day-to-day work. He was congratulating the BLW employees when the team of Rajbhasha department presented the Railway Minister Rajbhasha Shield to him here on Wednesday. The BLW received the shield as the first prize for excellent work

towards the use and promotion of Rajbhasha Hindi by the Ministry of Railways.

The BLW had received the shield at the 150th meeting of the Railway Board Rajbhasha Implementation Committee at Rail Bhavan, New Delhi, by the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Railway Board Jaya Verma Sinha had presented it to Trilok Kothari, Chief Rajbhasha Officer and Chief Material Manager (Loco) BLW, which was presented to the general manager.

On the occasion Trilok Kothari along with former Chief Rajbhasha Officer and Chief Mechanical Engineer, (Service Engineering) Neeraj Jain, Senior Deputy General Manager and Secretary Vijay, Senior Rajbhasha Officer Dr Sanjay Kumar Singh, Public Relations Officer (PRO) Rajesh Kumar, Senior Translator Vinod Kumar Srivastava, Vijay Pratap Singh, Amlesh Srivastava, Junior Translator S Gururajan and Alok Kumar Pandey were also present.

Fire in leather shoe factory



A fire broke out in a leather shoe factory in Dada Nagar late on Tuesday night.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Leather shoe factory caught fire due to a short circuit in Dadanagar under Govind Nagar police station area late on Tuesday night. The factory is engaged in the manufacture of leather shoe soles. The fire flared up after coming into contact with the raw leather stored in the unit. Shopkeepers informed the Govind Nagar police and the fire brigade. Immediately, one fire tender from Fazalganj fire station rushed to the spot and controlled the fire. Ravi Sharma of Panki owns the shoe sole manufacturing factory which suddenly caught fire late on Tuesday night. The firefighters took around one hour to extinguish the fire. CFO Deepak Sharma said short circuit was

suspected to be the cause of incident. Efforts are on to ascertain amount of loss caused to the factory owner. At the time of incident, nobody was present in the factory in view of holiday due to which there was no casualty in the incident, he said.

Meanwhile, an auto parts manufacturing unit also caught fire in residential Krishna Nagar locality of Chakeri police area on Tuesday afternoon. Five fire tenders rushed to the spot and controlled the fire. The three-story factory engaged in the manufacture of bike's visor is situated in Block-7. Due to ‘pareva’ on Tuesday, the factory was closed. Around 3 pm people saw fire in the factory and informed the fire brigade. In the absence of any entry to the factory, fire brigade

had to break the wall of neighbour's house and some other structure to pour water on the fire. It took around two hours to control the fire. Fire Officer of Jajmau fire station Rahul Nandan said the cause of incident was not clear. However, he suspected the short circuit as the cause of the incident.

LABOURER DIES: A labourer who had entered a septic tank to clean tannery waste died due to suffocation after inhaling toxic gas in Jajmau police station area on Wednesday morning. The police sent the body for autopsy. According to a report, Suresh (50) of Kazikheda, Chakeri, along with colleagues Sanjay of Shivkatra and one other had gone to clean septic tank on contract on Wednesday. After entering it he fell unconscious after inhaling the toxic gas. He was taken out by his colleagues who, along with tannery workers, took him to a hospital in Jajmau, where he was declared dead by the doctors. The kin alleged that Suresh died due to negligence of tannery owner and workers. The police have started a probe in the matter.

In another incident a farmer was killed while wife and son were seriously injured when his nephew along with accomplices allegedly attacked them with stick and iron rod

during a dispute in Kaitha village under Sajeti police station area on Tuesday. The farmer succumbed to his injury during treatment on Wednesday morning. In the attack Ramesh, his wife Chhiddan and son Shailu were seriously injured. All the assailants escaped from there. The injured were taken to the Ghatampur community health centre (CHC) from where Ramesh was referred to the Lala Lajpat Rai (LLR) Hospital in a critical condition. Later, Ramesh was admitted to a private hospital in Kanpur where he succumbed to his injuries on Wednesday morning. The police have started a probe in the matter.

AGITATION: Alleging lackadaisical attitude of the Kanpur Jal Sansthan authorities dozens of residents of C Block, Govind Nagar, agitated on Wednesday and handed over a memorandum to its general Manager seeking immediate solution to the choked/overflowing sewer lines in their locality. Earlier, they had also met the local Jalkal office incharge and apprised him of their problem. They said about 45 houses were mainly affected. Residents including Devesh Srivastava, SP Singh, Indra Prakash Agnihotri, Neeraj Mishra, Satish Mathur and Vivek Trivedi were present during the agitation.

Cleanliness drive at Assi Ghat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Under the auspices of Namami Gange (Ganga Vichar Manch), a cleanliness drive was launched at Assi Ghat on Wednesday on the initiative of National Clean Ganga Mission, Union Ministry of Jal Shakti. Cleanliness Fortnight is being going on under Namami Gange Scheme. The Namami Gange volunteers under the leadership of regional coordinator Rajesh Shukla put polluting materials in the dustbin.

Foreign tourists also carried placards with cleanliness slogans in their hands along with the members of Namami Gange and made everyone aware about maintaining cleanliness on the banks of Ganga. They also appealed to everyone to join the cause of clean Ganga. The oath of cleanliness was administered to the citizens present at Assi Ghat along with food and other vendors and priests. Shukla said the objective of National Clean Ganga Mission is to bring widespread public participation and awareness for the conservation of Ganga and its tributaries. Sarika Gupta, Vikas Tiwari etc were present to offer *shramdaan*.

IIT Kanpur invites applications for eMasters degree programmes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Following the success of previous cohorts, IIT Kanpur (IIT-K) is inviting applications for new batches of its eMasters degree programmes in Climate Finance, Business Finance, Fintech, and Quantitative Finance. These programmes are designed to create future-ready finance professionals and cater to the growing demand for skilled talent in the finance industry. The flexibility of completing the eMasters degree programmes within 1-3 years makes it a unique and preferred choice for working professionals. Selection into these programmes does not require GATE score.

The eMasters in Financial Technology and Management blends fintech with traditional finance, giving professionals a deep understanding of technology's impact on finance. The eMasters in Quantitative Finance and Risk Management focuses on improving risk management skills through research and practical training. The eMasters in Business Finance helps professionals advance in finance and economics, equipping them to make strategic decisions. The eMasters in Climate Finance and

Sustainability meets the rising demand for expertise in carbon management and ESG, offering specialised training in finance and environmental sustainability. The offered eMasters programmes equip professionals with modern skills needed to excel in these industries. India's economy, currently ranked fifth globally in GDP, is evolving rapidly with significant foreign investments and reforms driving growth. The banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) sector in India has seen substantial growth and is projected to continue expanding. Factors contributing to this growth with projections indicating a remarkable increase from \$59.66 billion in 2023 to a staggering \$66.61 billion in 2024 include increased internet usage, the rise of fintech companies, changing customer preferences and stricter regulations. Looking ahead, India's financial sector is expected to grow until 2035 due to rising incomes, government initiatives and digital integration. This positions India as a global hub for financial innovation.

These programmes are offered by the Department of Management Sciences and Department of Economic Sciences of IIT-K, providing a

high-impact learning experience featuring live interactive weekend classes and self-paced learning. As distinguished faculty and accomplished researchers from IIT-K lead the way, the programme's 60-credit curriculum, tailored for the industry, allows for seamless credit transfers towards higher education opportunities like MTech and PhD programmes at IIT Kanpur, with the potential for waiving up to 60 credits. Professionals enrolled in these programmes benefit from an immersive learning format that provides access to IIT Kanpur's incubation cell and alumni network. This leads to successful career growth and networking opportunities. Participants also have the chance to visit the IIT Kanpur campus, where they can interact with peers and faculty members. By joining these programmes, professionals gain a competitive advantage and enhance their career prospects. The applications for the July 2024 batches are open till March 31. These programmes represent a significant step towards shaping India's financial future and are ideal for those looking to make an impact in the finance sector.

SSM demands constitutional protection of water, land & culture of Ladakh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Sanjha Sanskriti Manch (SSM), a joint forum of some social organisations, took out a procession on Wednesday and handed over a memorandum to the district administration for forwarding it to the president demanding constitutional protection of water, land and culture of Ladakh. They also extended their support to the issues raised by Sonam Wangchuk's ‘Climate Fast’ and demanded full statehood for Ladakh. The SSM activists said the citizens of Ladakh are agi-



tating to save their environment. Ladakh is known for its biodiversity, natural beauty and local culture. After the abrogation of Article 370, they alleged Ladakh has been opened for big corporate houses which is adversely affecting the environment there and also affecting the livelihood of the locals. They also support-

ed the demands of Ladakh, including restoration of democratic processes by giving statehood to it, formation of a separate Public Service Commission in the state, declaration of Leh and Kargil as separate districts and protection of Ladakh under Schedule 6. Prominent among those present were Ram Janam, Vallabhacharya Pandey, Jagriti Rahi, Anup Shramik, Sister Florin, Nandlal Master, Indu Pandey, Dhananjay, Ekta, Pradeep Singh, Amrita, Janak Nandini, Anand Prakash Tiwari and Om Prakash.

4 of family killed as car overturns

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Four members of a family died when their car lost control and overturned in Bijnor district, the police said.

The incident happened in the Najibabad area when the car in which Meharchand (55), his sons, Pravendra (35) and Ratan Singh (30) and brother-in-law Devendra (58), all residents of Amroha, were travelling lost control and overturned, Circle Officer (CO) Bijnor Desh Deepak Singh said.

Crowd management drive launched

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

On the instructions of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vineet Kumar Srivastava, awareness and crowd management drive was launched by the members of North Eastern Railway (NER) Bharat Scouts and Guides District Association, Varanasi after the Holi festival from March 26 to 30 to control the extra crowd at the major stations of Varanasi Division of NER. In this campaign the Scouts and Guides helped in queuing up the passengers to pass through the entry and exit gates at Banaras, Varanasi City,



Mau, Azamgarh, Deoria Sadar, Bhatni, Chhapra and Siwan stations of Varanasi Division during their crowd control-cum-awareness campaign.

At these stations informa-

tion about the movement of seats, platforms, availability of seats and various passenger facilities available at the stations is being provided to the passengers by setting up help booths.

To control crowd at UTS booking counters, passengers were encouraged to queue up, book tickets through mobile app and get tickets quickly by paying through QR Code. The passengers are being made aware and motivated to prepare and buy tickets. Crowd control is being done on the platforms and foot over bridges of these stations and the disabled/ women/ old people/ children are being helped in boarding/

alighting the trains. Apart from this, assistance is being provided to the passengers in carrying their luggage, filling water, providing wheelchairs and calling porters and taxis as per their requirement.

In the same sequence, under the leadership of Senior Divisional Commercial Manager (SDCM) Sheikh Rehman, Operation SMART campaign is being run in Varanasi Division from March 26 to 31 and Raid and ICP teams are conducting ticket checking along with stopping any unreserved passenger or passengers without ticket from entering the reserved coaches.

Working to return money looted from poor in West Bengal: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said that he is working to ensure that nearly ₹3,000 crore "looted" from poor people in West Bengal and attached by the Enforcement Directorate is returned to them. Modi made this assertion in a telephonic conversation with Amrita Roy, a member of erstwhile royalty and BJP candidate against TMC's Mahua Moitra in Krishnanagar Lok Sabha constituency, and claimed that power and not country is the priority of Opposition parties. "PM Modi told 'Rajmata' Amrita Roy that he is exploring legal options to ensure that the money looted from the poor goes back to them through whatever assets and money the ED has attached from the corrupt," a BJP leader said. According to the details of the conversation shared by the party,

the Prime Minister put the amount of money, which was paid by people in the state as bribe for getting jobs, at Rs 3,000 crore. He told her to inform people about his stand and asserted that soon after coming back to power he will find a way, including making legal provisions if needed, to do so. Modi also took a swipe at the Congress for its support to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal following his arrest by the ED in a corruption case, saying those who made complaint against the AAP have now changed track to help it. He, though, did not name anyone. "This shows that their priority is not country but power," he said, asserting that the BJP-led alliance is fighting for a corruption-free country for the bright future of the youth while all the corrupt have come together on the other side to save each other. With Roy tracing her lineage to 18th century local king Krishnachandra Roy, Modi hit

back at those who have targeted the erstwhile royalty for its alleged support to the British after the BJP named her its candidate. She told Modi that her family is being called traitors and noted that Krishnachandra Roy worked for people and joined hands with other kings to save "Sanatan Dharma". He asked her to not take any pressure, saying that they (TMC) practice vote bank politics and will make all kinds of wild allegations. They do so to hide their sins, he said. On the one hand, they seek evidence of Lord Ram's existence while on the other they cite incidents dating back to two and three centuries to defame others, he said. "This is their double standards," Modi said, praising the king's legacy of social reforms and development and asking her to carry forward his legacy. Expressing confidence of her win, he asked Roy to be ready with the



agenda for the first 100 days for her constituency. He also expressed confidence that

West Bengal will vote for "Parivartan" (change) in the state. The alleged corruption of the

state's ruling Trinamool Congress leaders is one of the main planks of the BJP in the state, as it has highlighted the arrest of some of them, including former minister Partha Chatterjee, and recovery of large amounts of money and other assets from them to target its rivals. "You have the challenge to save Bengal's heritage," he told her. She said people have expressed their confidence in the Modi government's work and told her that Moitra, the incumbent TMC MP from the constituency, will go to jail, drawing laughter from the prime minister. Moitra is facing probe in a corruption case for allegedly allowing a businessman to use her parliamentary log-in in return of bribe and other favours. She has termed the businessman her friend and refuted the corruption charges, blaming the BJP for it. Roy told Modi that people during her campaign have spoken about corruption and unkept promises

of the state government. Later while speaking to reporters, Roy thanked the Prime Minister for his "encouragement". "It seems I now have a new josh (enthusiasm). His words were really very encouraging and inspiring. I will do my best to ensure the victory of the BJP from this seat," she said. The TMC dubbed the phone calls by the Prime Minister to BJP's women's candidates as a "well-scripted drama" ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. "It is nothing but drama on the part of the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. We would also like to hear similar telephonic conversations with the women in Manipur, and family members of the victims of Hathras in Uttar Pradesh," TMC leader Kunal Ghosh said. The BJP had won 18 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state in 2019 in what was seen as a surge in its fortunes and it is looking to boost its tally this time round.

Modi, Shah, Nadda, Gadkari among BJP star campaigners

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP chief Jagat Prakash Nadda, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and former BJP Chief Nitin Gadkari among the star campaigners list which was released by the party for Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand, for the Lok Sabha polls. In Madhya Pradesh, former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Uma Bharti is missing from the BJP's list of star campaigners. However, the party has picked Suresh Pachauri, who recently switched over from Congress, for the job. Uma Bharti, who had led the BJP to victory in the 2003 assembly polls, had also failed to make it to the BJP's list of star campaigners during the 2023 state polls. Earlier this month, the senior BJP leader had said that she would not contest elections for the next two years and instead work for the rejuvenation of the Ganga river, but also made it clear that she won't retire from politics. Besides MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, his counterparts Yogi Adityanath (Uttar Pradesh) Bhajanlal Sharma (Rajasthan), Bhupendra Patel (Gujarat) Himanta Biswa Sarma (Assam), Vishnu Deo Sai (Chhattisgarh) will promote



BJP candidates as star campaigners in MP. Former Union minister Pachouri, who joined the BJP from Congress earlier this month, has been included in the list. BJP chief JP Nadda, party's state unit president VD Sharma, Union ministers Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari, Faggan Singh Kulaste, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Smriti Irani and Virendra Kumar Khatik are among the 40 key figures chosen to campaign for its candidates. Polling on 29 seats of Madhya Pradesh will be held in four phases - April 19, April 26, May 7 and May 13. MP's deputy CMs Jagdish Devda and Rajendra Shukla and their peers Devendra Fadnavis (Maharashtra) and Keshav Prasad Maurya (Uttar Pradesh) are a part of the list, which also includes ex-CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan and MP cabinet ministers like Prahlad Patel, Kailash Vijayvargiya, Aidal Singh Kansana and Tulsi Silawat.

Former state ministers Gopal Bhargava and Narottam Mishra, and Union ex-minister Satyanarayan Jatia have also been picked for the task. Of the 29 seats in the state, the BJP had won 28 in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, with the remaining seat - Chhindwara - going to Congress' Nakul Nath. In the first phase on April 19, Sidhi, Shahdol (ST), Jabalpur, Mandla (ST), Balaghat and Chhindwara will go to the poll. In the list of Bihar star campaigners list, BJP has also named its chief JP Nadda, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and Union ministers Nitin Gadkari, Smriti Irani, Giriraj Singh and Nityanand Rai, besides Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav. Among the state leaders who found a place on the list are Deputy CMs Samrat Chaudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, Renu Devi, Mangal Pandey, Prem Kumar, Neeraj Kumar Singh, Syed

Shahnawaz Hussain and Sushil Kumar Modi. For the 40 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar, the BJP has come into alliance under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and will contest with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U), former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha, ex-Union minister Upendra Kushwaha's Rashtriya Lok Morcha and Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) as its ally. The BJP and JD(U) have declared candidates for 17 and 16 candidates for the seats they are respectively fighting. Manjhi's party has announced his candidature from Gaya. Upendra Kushwaha is likely to enter the fray from Karakat. In Uttarakhand, the star campaigners list includes the names of BJP president JP Nadda, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Union Minister Smriti Irani and Mathura MP Hema Malini. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, state BJP president Mahendra Bhatt and former chief ministers Trivendra Singh Rawat and Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank are also among the party's star campaigners. Polling for the five Lok Sabha seats in Uttarakhand is scheduled to be held in the first of the seven-phase election on April 19.

Lone AAP MP joins BJP in Punjab

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a major setback to the Arvind Kejriwal, the Aam Aadmi Party's MP and lone Lok Sabha member Sushil Kumar Rinku joined the BJP on Wednesday along with party MLA Sheetal Angural, dealing a blow to the party already facing a crisis following the arrest of its leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Rinku, the MP from Jalandhar in Punjab, and Angural, who was elected to the State Assembly from Jalandhar West, joined the BJP in the presence of Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and its national general secretary Vinod Tawde. The MP said he was joining the BJP for the development of Punjab, especially Jalandhar, and accused the state's AAP government of not helping him in development works. Last year, Rinku won in a by-poll in Jalandhar becoming the Lok Sabha MP with a significant



margin. He said he was impressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah and lauded the Union government for its development initiatives. The parliamentarian had quit the Congress to join AAP last year to fight the bypoll to the Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat. He had been vocal in criticising the BJP in the Lok Sabha. Rinku was even suspended from the House for his unruly protests. The BJP is likely to field him in

the Lok Sabha polls as the party inducts a number of influential leaders of different parties in Punjab to emerge as a strong force in the state with 13 constituencies. AAP Jalandhar West MLA Sheetal Angural on Wednesday announced he is quitting the party. "I am resigning from all responsibilities of the AAP (Aam Aadmi Party)," Angural said in a post on Facebook. Angural had won the Jalandhar West assembly seat in Punjab by defeating Sushil Kumar Rinku of the Congress during the 2022 assembly elections. Three-term Congress MP Rayneet Singh Bittu from Punjab joined the BJP on Tuesday and asserted that people have made up their minds to elect Prime Minister Modi to power again. Bittu is the grandson of former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh, a hero of the anti-terrorism campaign in the state who was assassinated in a terror attack while still in office.

AYUSH sector sees extraordinary growth: Kotecha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The AYUSH sector in the country has witnessed an extraordinary growth trajectory, surging from USD 3 billion to USD 24 billion in just eight years, positioning the sector as a sunrise industry, said Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha, Union Ayush Secretary here at the seventh CII AYUSH Conclave, organised recently by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), a prominent business chamber. Kotecha further emphasised that post Covid global acceptance and domestic demand for AYUSH products and services

has increased. He stated that the Ministry is working with different organizations and ministries to strengthen the research and evidence building in the sector. He said that the Ayush Ministry and ICMR has set up an Advanced Centre for Integrative Health Research across selected AIIMS in the country. "The Ministry is also collaborating with AIIMS to set up a Department of Integrative Medicine," he said at the conclave themed "Emerging trends in AYUSH: Unleashing the market potential". He also talked about the Ayush Grid platform for digitization of



service delivery across the six functional areas- health services, education, research, drug administration, medicinal plants, and capacity building and media outreach. Dr Rabinarayan Acharya, Director General, Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) mentioned that the Ministry will help develop three key botanicals while ensuring quality, safety,

and efficacy by 2030. Shashwat Goenka, Chairman, CII National Taskforce on AYUSH, and Director, PCBL Limited highlighted the concept of holistic well being given by AYUSH, a view endorsed by Dr Sanchit Sharma from AIMIL Pharma as he pointed out that the increasing demand for ayurveda products based on herbal formulations indicates the evolving preferences of consumers towards natural and traditional remedies. He also stressed on evidence-based scientific research on herbal formulations to compete in the global market and ensure holistic health to mankind.

Balakot showed aerospace power can be effectively used: IAF Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining the immense potential of air power, IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari on Wednesday here said "Balakot-like operations" have shown that given political will, aerospace power can be effectively used beyond enemy lines. In his address at a seminar on "Aerospace Power in Future Conflicts" here, he also said as nations increasingly rely on space-based assets for building strategic advantage, "militarisation and weaponisation of space has become an inevitable reality". "Through the annals of human history, the skies have

often been regarded as realms of wonder and exploration, where dreams take flight and boundaries dissolve into the vast blue expanse," he said. Yet, beneath this calmness lies a domain "fraught with competition where contest for aerial superiority" has shaped the destiny of many nations and decided the outcome of many wars, the chief of the Indian Air Force (IAF) said. "As we navigate these uncharted skies, air power being a key component of national power, would undoubtedly play a pivotal role and also serve as a symbol of national strength, a tool for peace and cooperation," he said. The IAF chief said, "We all need



to acknowledge that wars of the future will be fought differently." Future conflicts will be characterised by a blend of simultaneous application of kinetic and non-kinetic forces, high-levels of battle space transparency, multi-domain operations, a high-degree of precision, enhanced lethality, a com-

pressed sensor-to-shooter cycle, and of course, all under intense media scrutiny, he said. The air chief marshal also said, "Balakot-like operations have shown that given the political will, aerospace power can be effectively carried out beyond enemy lines, in a no-war, no-peace scenario, under a nuclear

overhang without escalating into a full-blown conflict." The IAF struck a Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist training camp in Pakistan's Balakot area on February 26, 2019, in response to the February 14 Pulwama terror attack in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed. The Pakistan Air Force had retaliated the next day by unsuccessfully targeting various military installations in Jammu and Kashmir. Chaudhari said space has also emerged as a "critical domain for conduct of military operations", wherein seamless communication, navigation and surveillance capabilities would enhance survivability of modern military forces.

LAC, preparedness on agenda in Army Commanders meet



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Situation at the border in Ladakh in the backdrop of persisting tension for the last four years and operational readiness to meet any challenge is likely to figure prominently during the five-day Army Commanders' Conference beginning Thursday. The Army top brass is also likely to take stock of its preparedness to fight a modern-day war in the context of ongoing Ukraine conflict besides review the situation in the Indian sub-continent. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will address the conference here on April 2 during which the senior military leadership will also assess the overall security situation. It will lay down key priorities facilitating important policy decisions, to chart the course for future direction, officials said. On March 28, the conference will be chaired by Army Chief General Manoj Pandey with army commanders participating in a virtual mode from their respective Command Headquarters, it said. The deliberation will be on a critical agenda impacting the field army and veterans' welfare. The conference will also feature talks by distinguished subject matter experts on the evolving geopolitical landscape and ramifications for national security, the officials said.

March 28 and thereafter in physical mode from April 1-2. The conference, with its wide scope, ensures the Indian Army remains progressive, forward-looking, adaptive and future-ready, it said. It serves as a "pivotal forum for apex leadership of the Indian Army to brainstorm conceptual issues, review and assess the overall security situation". It will lay down key priorities facilitating important policy decisions, to chart the course for future direction, officials said. On March 28, the conference will be chaired by Army Chief General Manoj Pandey with army commanders participating in a virtual mode from their respective Command Headquarters, it said. The deliberation will be on a critical agenda impacting the field army and veterans' welfare. The conference will also feature talks by distinguished subject matter experts on the evolving geopolitical landscape and ramifications for national security, the officials said.

On April 1, the Army's top leadership will engage in intensive brainstorming sessions. The sessions will be aimed at enhancing operational effectiveness, the importance of fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability and investing in training and development programmes to ensure readiness for future challenges. The brainstorming session will also encompass issues concerning the welfare of service personnel aimed at enhancing the quality of life for soldiers and their families, they said. This will be followed by a meeting of the Investment Advisory Committee of the Army Group Insurance, chaired by the Army chief, and attended by several experts in the field of financial management. The committee will deliberate on various welfare measures and schemes for the financial security of serving soldiers, veterans and their families, they added. The senior hierarchy of the Army will also be addressed by Chief of Defence Staff, General Anil Chauhan, Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar and IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari. On April 2, the defence minister will deliver a keynote address at the conference. He will also interact with senior military leadership during the conference. The event will also be attended by the defence secretary and other senior officials from the Ministry of Defence.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal issued directions from ED custody on ensuring that medicines and tests are available to people at all Government hospitals and mohalla clinics, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya questioned the AAP Chief's concerns, stating that had he really been worried he would have implemented the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme. He highlighted the potential benefits of these schemes, including substantial financial support and enhanced healthcare infrastructure, which could significantly improve healthcare access for the people of Delhi. Under the PM-ABHIM scheme alone, Delhi was allocated a substantial amount of Rs 2406.77 crore for the

Mandaviya questions non implementation of Ayushman Bharat scheme in Delhi

establishment of Urban Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, integrated public health labs, and critical care blocks. Mandaviya emphasised that despite repeated urgings, the Delhi Government had failed to sign the necessary Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to avail of this financial support, suggesting a lack of commitment to addressing healthcare challenges. Furthermore, Mandaviya pointed out that the non-implementation of the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) had deprived around 30 lakh people in Delhi of health coverage benefits.



"Delhi hosts a migrant population from across the country. They are generally the beneficiaries of AB PMJAY. To cater to the healthcare requirement of this migrant population, the Centre has empanelled 92

hospitals. However, the Delhi government run hospitals are not empanelled under the scheme. "Thus, these beneficiaries are facing challenges in availing healthcare services under the scheme. Further, the Delhi government hospitals would have also benefited from the claim amount reimbursed for providing services to the beneficiaries from other states," Mandaviya said. The NHA has written to non-implementing states for at least on-boarding their public hospitals for the benefit of beneficiaries from other states, he said. Mandaviya further alleged that in the last 10 years there has been no increase in the

number of hospital beds in Delhi. More than half of the beds are in the four Central Government hospitals- AIIMS, RML, Safadryung and Lady Harding. Also, medical colleges and seats are not being increased. TB cases are increasing in the national capital and effective steps are not being taken to combat the disease. The city is also lagging behind in immunization as compared to other UTs, he alleged. Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj had said on Tuesday that the latest directions from Kejriwal show that despite being in custody, he always thinks about the wellbeing of the people of Delhi.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Political zealotry

Leaders indulge in blabbering and frenzied talk as election fever grips the nation

An avoidable political controversy has erupted after certain derogatory remarks against Kangana Ranaut, the BJP nominee from Mandi, Himachal Pradesh, were attributed to two Congress leaders. Supriya Shrinete, one of the two offending Congress leaders, has pulled down the X post and apologised, pleading that somebody with access to her Meta account had written the “extremely inappropriate post”. Kangana, meanwhile, is breathing fire: “... Mandi is being used in sexual context everywhere, just because it has a young woman candidate...”. In response to the controversy, it is encouraging to see condemnation from across the political spectrum, with many leaders calling for restraint and civility. This collective outcry underscores the broader recognition of the need to uphold standards of respectful dialogue in politics. In the age of digital communication, words carry immense weight and have the potential to shape public perceptions; naturally, political leaders need to exercise caution and mindfulness. Therefore,



the leaders involved in making disparaging remarks against others must be held accountable. As public personalities, they bear the responsibility to uphold standards of decorum and refrain from engaging in language that is inflammatory or derogatory. Political differences should be debated based on ideas and policies, rather than resorting to personal attacks.

Though not the first such occurrence, the latest incident underscores the delicate balance between freedom of expression and the responsibility to maintain respectful dialogue, especially during poll campaigns. A quick recap of similar incidents will take us back to 2005 when the then Railways Minister Lalu Yadav

famously likened the good condition of roads in Bihar to Hema Malini’s cheeks (though he later claimed the simile was wrongly attributed to him!). During campaigning for the 2009 Rampur Lok Sabha elections, BJP candidate Jaya Pradha alleged that her former colleague and SP leader Azam Khan was circulating her morphed photos and proclaiming that she “wears khaki underwear.” His rebuttal: “Tell me, if I entertain this ‘naachne gaane wali’, how will I concentrate on politics?” In 2012, Congress leader Sanjay Nirupam had this to say to Smriti Z Irani during a TV debate: “Aap to TV pe thumke lagati thi, aaj chunavi vishleshak ban gayi!!!” Another senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh was praising his party colleague Meenakshi Natarajan in Mandsaur in July 2013: “Main puraana jauhari hu, ye 100 tunch maal hai.” During the 2018 Rajasthan elections, JD(U) leader Sharad Yadav fat-shamed the BJP leader: “Let Vasundhara rest, she is too tired. She has become fat.” Former Madhya Pradesh CM Kamal Nath said about then BJP Minister Imarti Devi during Dabra bypoll campaign in October 2020: “Yeh kya item hai!” So, the lesson is that while individuals have the right to express their opinion, such expression must remain within the boundaries of decency. Also, fostering a culture of empathy and understanding can contribute to a more conducive environment for political discourse.

PICTALK



People with disabilities take part in a voter awareness campaign rally, in Bengaluru

PTI

The dilemma of an arrested Chief Minister

The arrest of a Chief Minister presents a formidable challenge not only to the leader but also to the principles of democratic governance

The recent arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, has thrust into the spotlight a complex web of legal, constitutional and ethical considerations. As pundits dissect the ramifications of this unprecedented event, one question looms large: should an arrested Chief Minister resign? This inquiry delves deep into the heart of democratic governance, probing the delicate balance between legal accountability and executive authority. At the heart of this debate lies the presumption of innocence, a fundamental tenet of any democratic legal system. Yet, the recent legislative amendments in 2019, which shifted the burden of proof onto the accused, have muddied the waters of legal discourse. Amidst these changes, media attention has swirled around the fate of Kejriwal’s tenure, overshadowing discussions on the intricacies of his legal case and the broader issues of electoral integrity. Historical precedents offer some insight into this conundrum. The resignations of



Lalu Prasad and Hemant Soren in Bihar and Jharkhand, respectively, following legal proceedings, illustrate the complex interplay between executive authority and legal accountability. However, the absence of explicit constitutional provisions or precedents regarding the resignation of an arrested Chief Minister necessitates a nuanced examination of parliamentary conventions and legal principles. Central to this discussion is the concept of holding office at the pleasure of the appointing authority. In the case of NCT Delhi, where the Chief Minister is appointed by the President, Kejriwal’s refusal to resign may jeopardize the pleasure of the President, potentially leading to his removal from office. However, the possibility of legal reprieve through bail proceedings could mitigate the necessity for resignation,

albeit temporarily. Unlike the immunity enjoyed by the President and the Governor, a Chief Minister is not shielded from criminal proceedings during their term in office. This underscores the imperative for ethical conduct and accountability in public office, even in the face of legal challenges. The constitutional mechanisms available, including the appointment of a new Chief Minister by the President or the suspension of legislative functions, underscore the flexibility of our democratic framework in addressing such exigencies. Nevertheless, the overarching principle of constitutional propriety and democratic norms suggests that an arrested Chief Minister should consider resigning from office. While innocence, until proven guilty, remains a cornerstone of jurisprudence, the spectre of prolonged legal battles and the potential disruption to governance warrant careful consideration. The recent legislative amendments empowering law enforcement agencies necessitate vigilant judicial oversight to safeguard fundamental liberties and uphold the

rule of law. In conclusion, the resignation of an arrested Chief Minister reflects not only a commitment to democratic values but also a recognition of the practical challenges inherent in governing amidst legal controversies. As constitutional custodians, both the judiciary and the executive must uphold the principles of equality, liberty, and justice in such sensitive issues. In the broader context of democratic governance, the arrest of a Chief Minister poses profound questions about the interplay between legal accountability and executive authority. While the presumption of innocence must be upheld, the practical realities of governance demand a delicate balancing act. Ultimately, the decision to resign in the face of legal challenges is not merely a matter of individual choice but a reflection of our collective commitment to the rule of law and democratic principles.

(The author is a former Additional Secretary of Lok Sabha and a practising advocate, views expressed are personal)



DEVENDER SINGH ASWAL

rule of law. In conclusion, the resignation of an arrested Chief Minister reflects not only a commitment to democratic values but also a recognition of the practical challenges inherent in governing amidst legal controversies. As constitutional custodians, both the judiciary and the executive must uphold the principles of equality, liberty, and justice in such sensitive issues. In the broader context of democratic governance, the arrest of a Chief Minister poses profound questions about the interplay between legal accountability and executive authority. While the presumption of innocence must be upheld, the practical realities of governance demand a delicate balancing act. Ultimately, the decision to resign in the face of legal challenges is not merely a matter of individual choice but a reflection of our collective commitment to the rule of law and democratic principles.

(The author is a former Additional Secretary of Lok Sabha and a practising advocate, views expressed are personal)

Transforming Indian higher education

The proposed binary accreditation system is set to revolutionise the assessment, accreditation and ranking of higher education institutions

Indian education system saw a revolutionary change with the arrival of New Education Policy 2020 also known as NEP 2020. While the previous education systems i.e. Sarva Shiksha were based on numbers, the Samagra Shiksha gave more attention to inclusivity and equitability. Along with it highlighted quality over quantity thus extending its support towards universal and holistic education. The concept of “Access, Equity, Quality, and Affordability & Accountability” under this was also applied as a pillar for NEP 2020 for implementation in higher educational institutions (HEIs).

The motto is to enhance the quality of education in HEIs and to compete Indian HEIs with the best institutions in the world. Based on this notion another transformative reform has been done by the Ministry of Education, Government of India through the formation of Dr. Radhakrishnan’s committee for revisiting the NAAC accreditation.

Dr. K. Radhakrishnan who is the Former Chairman of ISRO and Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the IIT Council proposed a new binary accreditation system for assessing HEIs where the assessment will be more technology-driven. It is a trust-based, transparent, and integrated ‘Unified Elicitation Tool’ where higher academic institutions will provide their information on the “One Nation One Data” platform. It will reduce the annual visits of the teams in HEIs and validation of the data will be transparent over the digital portal.

A system of high penalties is also proposed for those providing wrong information. Besides, two major features of this accreditation report were Binary Accreditation and Maturity-Based Graded Accreditation. While the Binary Accreditation will segregate the HEIs based on “Accredited” “Awaiting Accreditation” and “Not accredited”, the Maturity-Based Graded Accreditation will customise it in five different levels i.e. Level 1 to Level 5 where the HEIs have to cross each level to go up to Level



4 “Institutions of National Excellence” and Level 5 “Institutions of Global Excellence for Multi-Disciplinary Research and Education”. It will also create a roadmap for aligning ranking and accreditation bodies like NAAC, NBA, and NIRF by providing them with a centralised database. The new accreditation system has suggested various categories of HEIs including Multi-disciplinary Education and Research-Intensive Institutions, Teaching-Intensive Institutions, Specialised Institutions, Vocational and Skill-Intensive Institutions, Community Engagement & Service related Institutions, Institutions of Rural & Remote location under its “one-size-fits-all model” where the levelling will be done on the orientation of the particular HEI. Further, the aim is to convert the present Score-based, Multiple Grade Accreditation with Binary Accreditation, Portal Self-Disclosure with Public Self-Disclosure, Single Accreditation institutions with Approved Accreditation institutions, One-Size-Fits-All Model with University-Type-Based process, and Input-Process-Limited-Outcome approach with Majorly Outcome-Based approach. All these actions will convert HEIs

“SINCE THE DR RADHAKRISHNAN COMMITTEE’S RECOMMENDATIONS WERE PUT TOGETHER TO IMPROVE THE CALIBRE AND REPUTATION OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, THEY REPRESENT A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

from a Generic policy to a Universal policy. Since the Dr. Radhakrishnan Committee’s recommendations were put together to improve the calibre and reputation of Indian higher education institutions, they represent a paradigm shift in the accreditation process. The Committee while preparing the report has gone through numerous procedures from putting the suggested draft on the ‘MyGov’ portal and ‘MoE’ website for soliciting public opinion/stakeholder engagement. The workshop featured 34 panellists, more than 250 diverse HEIs and 950 participants from HEIs around the nation.

This report discusses establishing criteria and policies for these accrediting organisations, choosing specialists, creating self-assessment report formats, and growing the Accreditation Network to reach the HEIs located in rural areas, remote areas, tribal areas, and other smaller territories. To achieve its goal the report has also done a comparative analysis of the existing accreditation system and the visions of NEP 2020. It has also studied the best global practices of education to understand their model of education and to establish the Indian education system on the same platform.

Based on the suggestions received while formulating the draft, the committee has also classified the accreditation system into three different parameters. They are Pre-Accreditation, Accreditation Process, and Results and Post-Accreditation Incentives. The Pre-Accreditation includes processes like training the institutions, data collection, uploading the self-disclosure guidelines, etc., the Accreditation Process and Results as the name suggests focuses on validation and credit given to the HEI by the peer team. The Post-Accreditation Incentives are important for providing priority status to the institutional body. Care has been taken for step-by-step reforms to ensure the credibility of the system. Thus, the vision is to implement the new accreditation policy proposed by Dr Radhakrishnan’s committee by December 2024. This new policy is aimed at creating futuristic universities for future generations. It will bring a transformative change in the HEI-Approval, Accreditation and Ranking System to make Bharat Vishwaguru.

(The writer is Vice-Chancellor at Central Tribal University of Andhra Pradesh; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

KEJRIWAL SHOULD RESIGN

Madam — Apropos editorial “Much ado about nothing,” published on March 27, this is my response. Kejriwal has been taken into custody by the ED in the Delhi Liquor scam. He was a crusader against corruption in the corridors of power. He participated with Anna Hazare many times. He ignored the latter’s advice to frame the liquor policy. ED had issued nine summons already. He kipped all. Two of his ministers and a BRS lady MLC are in Custody. Without any prima facie evidence, the ED cannot frame charges. Now he is officiating as CM of Delhi from jail. Is it not constitutional too? First Germany now the US had asked to give Kejriwal a fair trial. It is our internal affairs and law will take its course and they must restrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. This big brother attitude needs to be condemned. Secondly, Lalu and Jayalalitha resigned from their posts soon after being imprisoned. Decency demands his resignation. How long will he officiate from prison? In the best interest of things and upholding constitutional moral ethics, Kejriwal must resign from his post and prove his innocence.

N R Ramachandran | Chennai

CONGRESS CAN BE WIPED OUT

Madam — Apropos news article “A showdown of arch-rivals,” published on March 27, this is my response. Every general election is no-holds-barred election in the country but this one is going to be crucial because INDIA bloc has realised that if they do not succeed in throwing the BJP out of power on 4th June, then it is going to be a serious uphill battle for them going ahead. If Congress leader Supriya Shrinete’s obnoxious and misogynist remarks against BJP candidate from Mandi, Kangna Ranaut are any indication then we know that both sides will not know any boundaries in pursuit of winning the elections. The fact that Congress is no longer the glue around which opposition revolved and sadly it has not been able to keep region-

Mumbai beats Beijing



Apropos news article “Mumbai surpasses Beijing as billionaire hub,” published on March 27, this is my response. The report by Hurun Global Rich List 2024, brings evangelism for every Indian as two Indian cities book their place in the top 10 cities of holding the maximum billionaires. This time New York topped the list followed by London and Mumbai at the second and third position respectively. Mumbai managed to beat Beijing with just a small margin of one billionaire, as Mumbai held 92, whereas Beijing had a count of 91 billionaires. It is a moment of

extreme pride that Indians today are no longer afraid of putting their hand in entrepreneurship. The start-up ecosystem in India today is so supportive that Indian start-ups are ending up becoming unicorns and clinching worldwide popularity. Now that Mumbai has beaten Beijing and secured the third rank with the most number of billionaires, we can estimate us to be on the right path of economic development and entrepreneurial enthusiasm. New Delhi also stood at the month position with the most billionaires. This positive shift from an employment seeker population to an employment generator category will give a thrusting push to our economy. And we hope that more and more Indian cities add themselves to this Rich list ranking of billionaires. Meanwhile, the beating of Beijing by Mumbai despite a small margin is a point of celebration and pat for India, as we are facing better than China as well as other Asian partners.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

al parties tightly under the umbrella of the INDIA bloc and show a united front has not lost on anyone, TMC in West Bengal is the best example of this. Gandhis still seem to be living in the 80s when their surname used to attract voters in throngs. BJP is not called an electoral machine for anything, they are always ready to fight elections be it, local, state or national elections. It would not be an exaggeration if we say that for Congress this election is a battle for survival so they are up against a strong force and they will have to up their game to prove that they still have it in them to win.

Bal Govind | Noida

NARCISSISTS DON’T HAVE A SOUL

Madam — Narcissism is a matter often neglected, but it demands discourse and recognition. Narcissism is not only an individual concern; it influences a wider society. In the United States, the tendency of narcissism among adolescents saw a significant increase from 12 per cent to

80 per cent from 1962 to 1990, respectively. When someone starts perceiving themselves as incomparable and equates themselves to God, they are experiencing narcissistic disorder. A narcissistic person commonly starts with love bombing, then progresses to gaslighting. During this process, they induce unwarranted guilt in their partner and unjustly accuse them. If narcissism is in control of an individual and is related to social goals, it is healthy narcissism, but if a person has no sentiments for others, it becomes sadism. They are resistant to hearing anything about themselves when faced with criticism. “Narcissists don’t have a soul. That’s why they try to kill yours. Your beautiful personality is the very core of your being, and they will try to steal as much of it as they can.”

Shreeya Acharya | Ujjain

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FIRST COLUMN

CHALLENGES TO THE HOLISTIC IDEAL

We often overlook the crucial dimensions of social and moral well-being



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Since ancient times, the medical profession has been considered a noble profession, for its members render a valuable service to mankind by preventing, alleviating, controlling or eliminating disease, pain and suffering. Through the knowledge of the physical body and the laws of health and hygiene, doctors provide patients with measures of great relief and recovery when they are passing through a great physical or mental crisis, are facing the worst of physical troubles or mental tensions or are fighting for life. So, the members of the profession truly needed to be complimented by the society. However, it has been observed lately that many members of the medical profession in this era of increasing urbanisation and the spread of industrial civilisation and technological culture also face the great pressures of materialism and are hard-pressed for time. Being always in a hurry and with the object of providing medicine to the largest possible number of patients within the set time limits, they are now more and more preoccupied with only the physical well-being of their patients, almost overlooking the changes required in the outlook or personality traits of the patients. Even though they know that most diseases are psychosomatic and that the lifestyle, personality traits and behavioural patterns of a person also play a major role in causing stress or trauma or in aggravating the disease, they, for various reasons, do not or cannot pay adequate attention to the social and moral dimensions of health and disease.



The reason for this is that their main attention is on the symptoms and on prescribing suitable medicines. But, if we think deeper, we find that, without controlling, reducing or eliminating the psychic or the behavioural causes, there cannot be any lasting cure for many diseases. Another serious thing that occurs as a result of moral or social ill-health of a person but which is not given serious attention is that not only does the person himself suffer from its evil effects on his body but, as a result of these psychic factors, he causes ill-health to many others also who live with him, work with him or deal with him. For example, a person of an irritable nature, or one who easily loses his temper or is prone to anxiety, not only suffers from avoidable worry and tension but often causes mental tension and anxiety to others also. Worse still is the social strife, family turmoil or political upheaval the moral and social ill-health of a person creates. Hitler, for example, was socially and morally ill and mentally sick. Most of our present-day problems are due to the moral and social ill-health of our citizens, most of them generating a chain reaction and contributing peacelessness to the total atmosphere. So, while doctors talk of holistic health, hypertension, psychosomatic diseases, drug addiction or AIDS, we wish that due attention is also paid to the turmoil caused by one's moral sickness or social illness in the socio-political or socio-economic atmosphere of society.

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

Mechanisation needed to tackle farm issues



The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food Processing underscores the importance of mechanisation



The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Food Processing insists on the urgent need to increase the mechanisation of farms for small and marginal farmers in India. Their recent report highlights that wholesome mechanisation is not only essential but crucial to overcoming the multifaceted challenges faced by the farming sector, which plays a pivotal role in the country's economy. Despite India's accounts for only 2.4 per cent of the world's geographical area and 4 per cent of its water resources, its farming sector supports 17 per cent of the global population and 15 per cent of the livestock, contributing 20 per cent to the nation's GDP and creating employability to 65 per cent population. Therefore, there is a dire need to enhance productivity and profitability through increased mechanisation among small and marginal farmers and in low mechanisation areas to revitalise Indian agriculture and boosting farmers' incomes requires moving beyond traditional practices to advanced mechanisation.

Status of Mechanisation: Our country's agriculture mechanisation level is below 40 per cent lower than developing nations such as China 60 per cent and Brazil 75 per cent. It is worth noting that agrarian states like Punjab and Haryana had led the green revolution having mechanisation levels around 40 per cent, while in other areas such as the north-eastern states of India, it is negligible. The Committee has pointed out that 86 per cent of the total land holdings are in small and marginal size groups, which require special efforts for their mechanization. They have emphasized that small farmers face significant difficulties in purchasing machinery unless machines appropriate for small holdings are made available or farmland consolidation takes place. It is expected to take another 25 years to reach the level of 75 per cent mechanization. A Catalyst for Growth: The imperative

role of farm mechanisation is instrumental in reducing cultivation costs and enhancing productivity through efficient resource utilisation. Experts and committees have highlighted that agricultural mechanisation in India contributes to making judicious and cost-effective use of inputs, leading to savings in seeds by 15-20 per cent, in fertilisers, an improvement in germination rate by 7-25 per cent, savings in time by 20-30 per cent, in weed by 20-40 per cent, in labour by 20-30 per cent, an increase in cropping intensity by 5-20 per cent, and an increase in crop yield by 13-23 per cent. This also helps in the conservation of natural resources like water, soil nutrients, etc.

Farm Machinery Landscape: The agriculture and allied sectors like livestock farming demand continuous modernization. The diversity in farming, whether large scale or small scale and rural labour scarcity necessitates a broad spectrum of agricultural equipment. From basic tractors to sophisticated combine harvesters, the sector requires a nuanced understanding of the equipment's specific applications and requirements, spanning feeding equipment, poultry tools, corral systems for cattle and more attributed to the Indian agricultural machinery market is estimated to be worth a whopping US\$16.73 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach an impressive US\$25.15 billion by 2029.

Steps to Propel Mechanisation: First, Establishment of the Directorate of Agricultural Engineering: The parliamentary Committee recommends that to monitor and implement the Government's mechanisation policy effectively and efficiently, a Directorate of Agricultural

Engineering is needed in each state. Currently, it only exists in Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, but the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) is working towards establishing it in all states. Agricultural Engineers are also needed at Block and District Levels as there is no engineering manpower to demonstrate, train, help in repairs/maintenance and guide farmers at their doorstep. Second, Farm Machinery Banks: Since farm machinery is expensive, small farmers find it difficult to purchase it. To address this issue, the Government has introduced custom hiring centres and farm machinery banks in almost all states, where farmers can share machines. However, the benefits of these schemes have not reached the gram panchayat level. Third, Full-fledged Scheme: In September 2022, the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation was merged with Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, which diluted its mandate. Therefore, the Government should establish a full-fledged Agriculture mechanisation scheme to speed up the process. Fourth, Funding for R&D: The budget allocation for the Research and Development (R&D) of the Farm Mechanisation Scheme has been declining steadily over the past four years, with a significant decrease of 30 per cent from 2019-20 to 2023-24. Fifth, Tax and Duty Incentives: To promote low horsepower tractors, which are mostly used by small and marginal farmers and orchard growers, the tractor and its components attract 12 per cent GST. This means a small tractor costing about Rs 5-7 lakh leads the farmer to pay Rs 60-84 thousand as GST. GST can be reduced to nil or 5 per cent to make it more

affordable for small farmers. Tax and duty incentives are also essential to support manufacturing units in low-mechanisation areas for sustainable growth.

In conclusion we can only agree with the Standing Committee. The Parliamentary Standing Committee stresses the urgent need for enhanced farm mechanisation to support India's small and marginal farmers. Despite its significant agricultural contribution, India's mechanisation levels lag behind global counterparts, hindering productivity and profitability. With 86 per cent of land holdings in small and marginal categories, targeted efforts are crucial. Mechanisation not only reduces costs but also enhances productivity and conserves resources. To drive mechanisation, the committee recommends establishing agricultural engineering directorates, expanding access to farm machinery through banks, revitalising existing schemes, boosting funding for research and development, and offering tax incentives. These measures are essential for revitalising Indian agriculture, increasing farmers' incomes, and ensuring sustainable sectoral growth. By embracing comprehensive mechanisation, India can overcome multifaceted agricultural challenges and secure its position as a global agricultural leader while empowering its farming community.

-The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika ITL Group, Vice-Chairman (Cabinet Minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President, of Tractor and Mechanisation Association (TMA). Views expressed are personal.

From addiction to artistry: Painting a new future

Decorative wall painting is transforming the lives of substance users in Manipur and beyond, giving them a purposeful life to the fullest extent

Manglemba Ningombam was 29 when he started experimenting with drugs like many of his friends in his village in Imphal, Manipur. When it started to impact their lives, some of them were able to give it up. Ningombam wasn't one of them. Over the next 15 years, this addiction would spin his life into a vicious cycle of highs and lows. Personal crisis and the death of his parents exacerbated his loneliness, leading him to consider ending his life. Fortunately, a local NGO was able to reach out in time and admit him to a drug addiction and rehabilitation centre. This was to change his life forever. While admission to a reha-



libilitation centre provided the medical and counselling support to wean him off drugs, it was an innovative intervention conducted here that catalysed the transformation. Implemented jointly by Makers Foundation, a Manipur-based not-for-profit working to empower the alcohol and drug user community, and CADAP, a community-based organisation of drug users, the initiative

to provide training in decorative wall painting has opened new doors. This skilling has given them a source of livelihood and income and the confidence to overcome stigma, a big barrier to recovery. Most importantly, it has brought hope and belief that a meaningful life without drugs is possible, thus also reducing the chances of drug abuse relapse. Ningombam, who was a part of the first batch of 400 trainees of this decorative wall painting programme started in 2022, is now its salaried lead trainer. Just how life-saving this journey has been can be gauged by the fact that there are more than 1.2 lakh psychoactive substance dependants in

Manipur. The state's proximity to the Golden Drug Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam) and its large-scale poppy cultivation means easy availability of drugs. It has given Manipur the dubious distinction of having one of the highest prevalence rates in opioid use and an increasing number of drug addicts in the state's rehabilitation centres. Internal conflict and lack of employment opportunities have compounded the problem, leading to a high percentage of relapse among those undergoing rehabilitation. It was this challenge that led to the focus on skill-building as a means to break the chain. Makers Foundation began exploring ways to



build the capacity of the substance-dependent community to become economically empowered once they had completed the treatment course. It hit upon the idea of decorative wall painting and partnered with AkzoNobel, a leading paints and coatings company, to

provide the training. Besides providing the monetary resources for the programme, AkzoNobel, which also runs paint academies for training in decorative painting, joined hands to provide the necessary skills. At the end of the 16-day training in decorative wall

painting, those with potential are selected for an advanced course of 30 days at AkzoNobel Training Centre in Kolkata. It is not just the self-confidence that this intervention has been able to restore among the trainees. It has also been accepted by their families. For Bhimo, 37, learning a new skill and getting a job as a trainer at Makers Foundation helped him not only to stay off his addiction to alcohol but also helped regain the trust, respect and support of his family. When positive impacts like this and the encouraging feedback from the community led to the scale-up of the intervention to Assam last year, Bhimo was sent as a trainer. This

was also in keeping with their Therapeutic Community Model based on the premise that a rehabilitated alcohol/drug user was better equipped to inspire other users to achieve their potential. Though it has been challenging, with 44 per cent of the 6.7 million substance users being adolescents, the initiative has so far trained 200 persons admitted to rehabilitation centres in Assam's Tinsukhia district. Hopefully, this initiative will now be able to empower the many invisible substance-dependent women and girls in need of a helping hand.

(The author is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views expressed are personal)

Sena (UBT) LS pick from Mumbai North West gets ED summons

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday issued summons to Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Amol G Kirtikar to appear before it in connection with the investigations into “khichdi scam”, hours after his party named its candidate for the Mumbai North West Lok Sabha seat.

Confirming the summons issued to Kirtikar, Shiv Sena chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut came down heavily on the ruling BJP over the development dubbing it as a “pressure tactic” applied on his party candidate from Mumbai north-west constituency.

The “khichdi scam” - in which Kirtikar is being probed for money laundering



allegations, had earlier been investigated by the Mumbai Police’s Economic Offences Wing (EOW). “Immediately after Amol Kirtikar’s nomination as party’s candidate, the ED issued summons to him. It’s nothing but the BJP’s attempts to silence its political opponents through central

investigating agencies,” Raut said. The alleged ‘khichdi scam’ relates to the contracts awarded by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for the supply of nutritious fare to thousands of migrants stranded during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis during the

previous Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA government. After the MVA Government was unseated by the Opposition BJP-Shinde Sena, the EOW registered an FIR in September 2023 against several SS (UBT) leaders including Raut’s close aide Sujit Patkar, Sunil Kadam, Rajeev Salunkhe of a catering company and other outfits, some BMC servants and others over the alleged scam of Rs 6.37 crore.

During the investigations, Kirtikar’s name also cropped up. He was questioned by the EOW for over six hours in September 2023. After the money-laundering angle also emerged in the case, the ED stepped into the investigations in October 2023.

Having filed its own

complaint and arrested Suraj Chavan - a close associate of SS (UBT)’s ex-minister Aditya Thackeray, the ED attached his properties worth Rs 88 lakh. BJP’s former MP and “whistle-blower” Kirit Somaia has claimed that “Amol Kirtikar had received Rs. 1.65 crore in the ‘khichdi scam’.

Amol Kirtikar (52) is the son of a veteran Shiv Sena leader Gajanan Kirtikar, the sitting MP from Mumbai North West, who walked out of the Sena with rebel leader Chief Minister Eknath Shinde after the Shiv Sena party split in June 2022.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) has announced Amol Kirtikar as its candidate for the Mumbai north-west seat, ignoring its ally Congress’ claims over the seat.

Pathan misusing ICC World Cup pictures, Adhir informs ECI



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Behrampur Congress candidate Adhir Chowdhury has approached the Election Commission of India against his Trinamool Congress adversary and former India cricketer Yusuf Pathan for “misusing” during his election campaign the images of the 2011 ICC cricket World Cup featuring a host of Indian players.

Chowdhury who is also the Pradesh Congress president in his complaint alleged that

Pathan was using the pictures of the winning moments of the World Cup in the banners and posters where he is featured alongside the greats like Sachin Tendulkar.

“Using the photographs of World Cup winning event and that too with other cricketers is a gross violation of the model code of conduct,” Chowdhury said adding “winning a cricket match at the international level is something you do for your country and that has nothing to do with your political affiliations and your election campaigns which you do for yourself and for your own party ... besides the other players that feature in the posters and banners may not be the supporters of the TMC but you are using them for your campaign ... this must stop at once ...and so I have requested the ECI to look into the matter.”

When asked to comment on the issue TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said he was not aware of the things at Behrampur and that his party would do whatever the EC would say.

222 Bills passed in 17th Lok Sabha, 45 on day introduced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 222 Bills were passed in the 17th Lok Sabha and 45 of these were cleared the same day they were introduced in the House, according to an analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). A total of 240 bills were introduced.

Some of these bills that were passed were The Appropriation (Vote on Account) Bill, The Appropriation Bill, The Jammu and Kashmir Appropriation (No.2) Bill, The Central Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023 and The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

A report of the analysis, which was conducted by ADR and National Election Watch (NEW), was released on Tuesday. It sheds light on the performance of the 17th Lok Sabha and its members.

On average, an MP asked 165 questions and attended 189 of the 273 sittings. MPs from Chhattisgarh had the highest average attendance, with 11 representatives from the state attending 216 of the 273 sittings. Conversely, Arunachal Pradesh had the lowest average attendance, with two of its MPs attending only 127 sittings.

Thakur joins roadshow in support of MoS Singh in Udhampur

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Star campaigners of the Bharatiya Janta Party and Union Minister of Sports, Youth Affairs & Information and Broadcasting, Anurag Thakur, on Wednesday joined the road show in support of MoS PMO Dr Jitendra Singh in Udhampur.

Enthusiastic BJP supporters took out a motorbike rally from Amedbkar Chowk in Udhampur. After passing through different markets in Udhampur the rally culminated in the local BJP office. The motorbikers were led by Anurag Thakur along with senior party leaders in the absence of Dr Jitendra Singh.

During the roadshow, Union Minister Anurag Thakur also took a brief ride.

He also listed out the achievements of the Narendra Modi-led Union government before seeking votes in

support of Dr Singh. Without naming the congress candidate, Lal Singh, who recently rejoined the Congress, Anurag Thakur said on the one hand you have a candidate like Dr Jitendra Singh and on the other side you have a candidate who is out on bail and facing charges of corruption. Anurag Thakur said Dr Singh is aiming for a hatrick while his opponent is a turncoat and frequently shifting loyalties.

In Kathua, Congress candidate Lal Singh demonstrated his strength when filing the nomination papers.

Lal Singh took a vow in the presence of his supporters to expose all those leaders and political parties who took the people of Jammu and Kashmir for a ride and compounded the miseries of unemployed youth, businessmen, industrialists, farmers, and residents.

Shah AFSPA remarks trigger reactions from JK parties

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s statement on considering the removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in the wake of improvement in the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir Wednesday invited sharp reactions from mainstream political parties in the valley.

Two former chief ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti both expressed fears that it might be just a poll promise of Union Home Minister Amit Shah ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

Former chief minister and National Conference (NC) vice president Omar Abdullah said the promise of revoking the AFSPA has been made given the upcoming Lok Sabha polls as he feared that the people here would be cheated just like those in Ladakh were on the promise of the Sixth Schedule.

Another former chief minister and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti welcomed the Shah’s

statement but hoped it would not be a “Jumblebaazi” like the BJP promise of providing two crore jobs in the country every year.

In an interview given to a local news channel Amit Shah made a categorical statement that the removal of AFSPA can be considered as the situation is turning normal.

“I have been waiting for this day since 2011. We made a lot of efforts to remove the AFSPA (when he was the chief minister) as well, but I fear that the people of Jammu and Kashmir will be misled and cheated like the people of Ladakh were misled and cheated on the promise of the Sixth Schedule as elections are here,” Abdullah told reporters in Budgam district.

The NC leader said the law, which gives widespread powers and immunity against prosecution to security forces in disturbed areas, should be revoked right away given the statements made by central leaders about the restoration of normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir.

“As far as revoking the AFSPA is concerned, start from today. When they say the situation is normal and militancy has ended and there is no separatist thought left, then what are they waiting for?” he asked.

Meanwhile, in a post on X, PDP chief Mufti said, “As a first step, the Central government can release journalists and Kashmiris languishing in jail ‘without any charges.’”

“PDP has consistently demanded the revocation of draconian AFSPA along with a gradual removal of troops. It also formulated an important part of our Agenda of Alliance wholeheartedly agreed upon by BJP. Der aaye durust aaye.

“Better late than never but only if it isn’t jumblebaazi like generating two crore jobs every year or empty promises of depositing 15 lacs into bank accounts,” Mufti said.

The former J-K chief minister hoped that the government would fulfill its commitment in case of AFSPA revocation as it would bring relief to the people of the Union territory.

Comic book sets stage to amplify support for Modi vision

From Page 1

Kalavati of Jaipura, a village in UP and Rana didi whose harrowing experience of walking miles to fetch woods from the forest to cook the meals literally

make readers cry. “Cooking three meals a day by burning wood was equivalent to smoking more than 300 cigarettes,” says Kalavati who is one of the 10 crore beneficiaries of Ujjwala Yojana which helped them

to own LPG stoves and cylinders. This is just two or three schemes that saw bearing fruits in the last decade. There is a lot more. Each section of the Indian society, rural, urban, metro

residents, youngsters, women of all ages and students have benefited thanks to the foolproof programmes that took wings.

India has changed and changed for the better.

Interestingly, the challengers are tied up with just one agenda - to defeat the Government. For that they resort to all kinds of games. The other day saw a national spokesperson of the grand old party abusing and

humiliating a venerated film personality who is contesting the polls. The only option before the challengers is to provide the electorate with 102 reasons why one should vote for them.

Delhi Government will not be run from jail, says LG

From Page 1

Responding to Saxena’s statement, Atishi said if President’s Rule is imposed in Delhi in the aftermath of Kejriwal’s arrest, it would be a clear case of “political vendetta”. She cited The Representation of the People Act that disqualifies a lawmaker if s/he is convicted. “What is the constitutional provision he is drawing on? The law of the country is very clear. You have the GNCTD Act which is very clear that you cannot be the Chief Minister if you do not enjoy the majority of the House. These conditions do not apply. So, under what conditions will the President’s rule be imposed?” she said.

The Delhi Minister said it as a political conspiracy of the BJP-

led Central Government to undermine democratically elected Opposition Governments using the ED, suggesting that Opposition Chief Ministers could be coerced into resigning or face arrest under draconian sections of the PMLA.

Kejriwal was arrested by the ED on March 21 in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case and subsequently remanded in the agency’s custody till March 28 by a court here.

AAP leaders on several occasions ruled out Kejriwal’s resignation, insisting that he will run his Government from inside the jail.

Atishi said the arrest of Kejriwal will benefit the AAP electorally in the Lok Sabha

polls as the party is getting a lot of sympathy. Atishi termed the arrest of Kejriwal by the ED in an excise policy-linked money laundering case as an attack on democracy that was “never seen before” in the democratic history of the country.

“The good thing is that it has benefited us electorally,” she said, adding before the arrest of Kejriwal, the result of Lok Sabha polls was a forgone conclusion as people were of the view that the BJP was going to win.

“But after Kejriwal’s arrest, the level of public sympathy has gone up for us. There is just one sentiment that the BJP has gone one step too far. So, I would feel it has benefited us electorally,” Atishi said.

Political turmoil rattles Congress

From Page 1

Nirupam, who is keen to contest the Mumbai North West parliamentary constituency, said the party leadership hasn’t got in touch with him in the last fortnight.

“The leadership isn’t bothered that injustice is being done to its leaders and workers. Shiv Sena (UBT) is making us bend and we are doing it,” he said.

In Bihar, while RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav rushed to Delhi to stitch together the alliance after days of hiccups in the seat-sharing issue, former Lok Sabha MP Pappu Yadav, who merged his party with the Congress last week, asserted that he will not budge over his claim to the Purnea seat, which was contested by RJD. The latter had expressed uneasiness over Pappu joining the Congress.

Tejashwi and Congress leaders held talks on

Tuesday to sort out the differences that have emerged between the two allies over the seat-sharing arrangements in Bihar. The much-awaited meeting took place at senior Congress leader Mukul Wasnik’s official residence after a week of tussle. Wasnik is the convener of his party’s alliance committee. Bihar Congress chief Akhilesh Prasad Singh and AICC in-charge Mohan Prakash were also present.

Further, a day after the rebel and later suspended legislators joined the BJP in Himachal Pradesh and now all are candidates in the Assembly polls, in Karnataka five Congress legislators threatened to resign if senior party leader and Minister K H Muniyappa’s son-in-law Chikka Peddanna was given a ticket to contest from Kolar in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, bringing into open the divisions in the party.

83 per cent of unemployed Indians...

From Page 1

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge urged people to remember before voting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to provide 20 crore jobs in 10 years but “snatched more than 12 crore jobs from the youth”.

Kharge listed the guarantees of the Congress under “Yuva Nyay”, such as filling up nearly 30 lakh vacant Central Government posts. He also highlighted the right to apprenticeship law for degree/diploma holders, which will guarantee them apprenticeship with an assistance of Rs 1 lakh per year.

Notably, labour from agriculture primarily found opportunities in the construction and services sectors. Despite the growth in these sectors, the overall employment scenario remained complex, indicating a mismatch between job creation and the skill sets of the workforce.

There are widespread livelihood insecurities too, the report added, with only a small percentage being covered with social protection

measures, precisely in the non-agriculture, organised sector.

“Worse, there has been a rise in contractualisation, with only a small percentage of regular workers covered by long-term contracts,” the report said.

The country is also grappling with the substantial gender gap in the labour market, with low rates of female labour force participation. “The unemployment challenge among young women, especially those who are highly educated, is enormous,” the report said.

Talking about the growing social inequalities, the report said despite affirmative action and targeted policies, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes still lag in terms of access to better jobs.

“Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have greater participation in work due to economic necessity but engaged more in low-paid temporary casual wage work and informal employment,” it said. “Despite improvement in educational attainment among all groups, the hierarchy within social groups persists,” the report added.

No relief for Kejriwal

From Page 1

The order said, “This court is further of the opinion that the present petition raises several issues of legality and the validity regarding the arrest

and remand of the petitioner. Additionally, it questions whether the arrest may be politically motivated and mala fide. There are also serious concerns which have been raised by Abhishek Manu Singhvi, learned Senior Counsel on behalf of the petitioner, which relate to Article 21 of the Constitution of India and Section 19 of PMLA, as well as the validity of the statement of an approver.”

“The necessity and timing of the arrest of the petitioner and the motive behind it has also been argued at length by Singhvi. He has also raised serious and critical questions before this court that this court being a constitutional court must apply its mind to the motive behind the arrest which is patently illegal and has a direct bearing on the democratic process of impending elections in the

country.”

“In this court’s opinion, such important questions and issues cannot be summarily heard and decided, by giving opportunity to only one party to file petition, documents, short note of arguments and compilation of judgments relied upon by them, especially when copy of the petition was provided to the ED yesterday itself, and the short note of arguments and compilation

of judgments relied upon by them were provided to the court as well as the learned ASG during the hearing itself. It will be unfair to not give an opportunity to the ED to rebut the same by way of filing of a detailed response,” it said.

“This court also cannot presume that the respondent will have no reply to file and will remain bound only by the contentions raised before the learned Trial

Court. Moreover, since there may be some additional material in the possession of the investigating agency, collected during the custodial interrogation of the petitioner herein, which they may wish to place before this court, which may be crucial to decide the present case. Such material may also be crucial for the petitioner himself,” read the order.

Earlier, Senior Advocate

Singhvi, appearing for Kejriwal in the Delhi High Court, contended the arrest of a sitting Chief Minister on the cusp of elections was against the basic structure of the Constitution.

“Object of the arrest was not to find material but to disable me and my party. My prayer is, release me now,” he argued.

Singhvi also argued that it is a delaying tactic which is reflective of malicious intent

on the part of Directorate of Enforcement to stall or delay any order being passed on the release of the petitioner herein.

Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the ED, said the “bulky” petition was served upon them only on Tuesday, and time should be given to bring their stand on record. For interim relief as well, appropriate time should be given to respond, he said.

7 Lebanese, one Israeli killed in Lebanon-Israel border clash

AP ■ HEBBARIYE (LEBANON)

An Israeli airstrike on a paramedics centre linked to a Lebanese Sunni Muslim group in south Lebanon killed seven of its members early on Wednesday and triggered a rocket attack from Lebanon that killed one person in northern Israel, officials said. The strike on the village of Hebbariye came after a day of airstrikes and rocket attacks between Israel's military and Lebanon's Hezbollah group along the Lebanon-Israel border, raising concerns of further escalation along the frontier that has been active for the past five months of the Israel-Hamas war. The airstrike after midnight on Tuesday hit an office of the Islamic Emergency and Relief Corps, according to the Lebanese Ambulance Association. It was one of the deadliest single attacks since violence erupted along the border. The paramedics association list-



Paramedic workers search for victims in the rubble of a paramedic center that was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike early Wednesday in Hebbariye village, south Lebanon on Wednesday.

AP/PTI

ed the names of seven volunteers who were killed in the strike. It said the strike was "a flagrant violation of humanitarian work". Hebbariye resident Ali Nouredine told The Associated

Press that the seven dead were pulled out from the rubble before sunrise Wednesday. Muheddine Qarhani, head of the Emergency and Relief Corps, told reporters at the scene that

the centre that was struck was set up late last year, after the latest round of violence broke out. He said they were surprised that a paramedic group was targeted. "They were here waiting to respond to a rescue call and ended up getting hit by missiles that brought the building over their heads," he said. The Israeli military said it struck a military building in Hebbariye and killed a member of Lebanon's Sunni Muslim al-Jamaa al-Islamiya, or the Islamic Group, and several other militants. It said the man was involved in attacks against Israel. Hours later, Hezbollah said it retaliated against the airstrike by firing dozens of rockets on Wednesday morning on the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona and a military base there. Rescue services in Israel said that a 25-year-old man was killed when a direct hit sparked a fire in an industrial park in Kiryat Shmona.

Hunter's tax case heads to courtroom as his defence seeks to have it tossed out

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Attorneys for Hunter Biden are expected in court on Wednesday in Los Angeles, where he is accused in what prosecutors call a four-year scheme to avoid paying USD 1.4 million in taxes while living an extravagant lifestyle. President Joe Biden's son has pleaded not guilty to the nine felony and misdemeanour tax offenses. He's asking the judge to toss out the case, arguing that the prosecution was politically motivated, was tainted by leaks from IRS agents who claimed publicly the case was mishandled and includes some allegations from before he moved to California. He has also been charged in Delaware with lying on a federal form to buy a gun in 2018 by saying he wasn't using or addicted to illegal drugs, even though he has acknowledged being addicted to crack cocaine at the time. He has pleaded not guilty in that case, which also accuses him of possessing the gun illegally. Both cases are overseen by special counsel David Weiss and now have tentative trials scheduled for June, though defense attorneys are also trying to get the Delaware gun charges tossed out. The two sets of charges come from a

years-long federal investigation that had been expected to wrap up over the summer with a plea deal in which Hunter Biden would have gotten two years of probation after pleading guilty to misdemeanor tax charges. He also would have avoided prosecution on the gun charge if he stayed out of trouble. Defence attorneys argue that immunity provisions in the deal were signed by a prosecutor and are still in effect, though prosecutors disagree. But the deal that could have spared Hunter Biden the spectacle of a criminal trial during the 2024 presidential campaign unraveled after a federal judge began to question it. Now, the tax and gun cases are moving ahead as part of an unprecedented confluence of political and legal drama: As the November election draws closer, the Justice Department is actively prosecuting both the Democratic president's son and the presumptive Republican nominee, Donald Trump. Hunter Biden's original proposed plea deal with prosecutors had been pilloried as a "sweetheart deal" by Republicans, including Trump. The former president is facing his own criminal problems — 91 charges across four cases, including that he plotted to overturn the results of

the 2020 election, which he lost to Joe Biden. Hunter Biden's criminal proceedings are also happening in parallel to so-far unsuccessful efforts by congressional Republicans to link his business dealings to his father. Republicans are pursuing an impeachment inquiry into President Biden, claiming he was engaged in an influence-peddling scheme with his son. No evidence has emerged to prove that Joe Biden, as president or previously as vice president, abused his role or accepted bribes, though questions have arisen about the ethics surrounding the Biden family's international business dealings. In launching their Biden impeachment inquiry last year, the House Republicans relied in large part on unverified claims from an FBI informant released by Senate Republicans suggesting that payments totalling USD 10 million from Ukrainian energy company Burisma to the Bidens were discussed. The now-former FBI informant, Alexander Smirnov, was arrested last month in a case also overseen by Weiss. He has pleaded not guilty to charges that he fabricated the bribery allegations. If convicted of the tax charges, Hunter Biden, 53, could receive a maximum of 17 years in prison.

Police cleared traffic in seconds; 6 workers feared dead

BALTIMORE BRIDGE COLLAPSE

AP ■ BALTIMORE

It was the middle of the night when a dispatcher's warning crackled over the radio: A massive cargo ship had lost its steering capabilities and was heading toward the Francis Scott Key Bridge. Within about 90 seconds, police officers who happened to be nearby responded that they managed to stop vehicle traffic over the Baltimore bridge in both directions. One parked sideways across the lanes and planned to drive onto the bridge to alert a construction crew once another officer arrived. But he wouldn't get the chance. Powerless and laden with huge containers, the vessel smashed into a support pillar. "The whole bridge just fell down," a frantic officer said. "Start, start whoever, everybody... the whole bridge just collapsed." When the container ship Dali slammed into the pillar around 1:30 am Tuesday, it caused a long span of the bridge, a major link in the region's transport networks,

to crumple into the Patapsco River. The loss of the bridge is expected to snarl commuter traffic and disrupt a vital shipping port. At least eight people went into the water. Two were rescued but the other six, part of a construction crew that had been filling potholes on the bridge, were missing and presumed dead. A search for their bodies was underway Wednesday morning, according to Maryland State Police spokesperson Elena Russo. Among the missing were people from Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, according to diplomats from those countries. The Honduran man was identified as Maynor Yassir Suazo Sandova. Federal and state officials have said the crash appeared to be an accident. Investigators on Wednesday plan to collect evidence on the ship, including electronics and paperwork, said National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy. The US Coast Guard already boarded the vessel and downloaded the voyage data recorder



A Coast Guard cutter passes a cargo ship that is stuck under the part of the structure of the Francis Scott Key Bridge after the ship hit the bridge Tuesday in Baltimore.

AP/PTI

and sent it to the NTSB, which is putting together a timeline of what led to the crash, Homendy said. A preliminary report could be done in two to four weeks, she said. Ship traffic entering and leaving the Port of Baltimore has been

suspended indefinitely. Capt. Michael Burns Jr of the Maritime Centre for Responsible Energy said bringing a ship into or out of ports in restricted waters with limited room to maneuver is "one of the most technically challenging and

demanding things that we do." There are "few things that are scarier than a loss of power in restricted waters," he said. And when a ship loses propulsion and steering, "then it's really at the mercy of the wind and the current."

Video showed the ship moving at what Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said was about 9 mph (15 kph) toward the 1.6-mile (2.6-kilometer) bridge. Traffic was still moving across the span, and some vehicles appeared to escape with only seconds to spare. The crash caused the span to break and fall into the water within seconds, and jagged remnants were left jutting up from the water. Police said there is no evidence anyone went into the water other than the workers, though they had not discounted the possibility. A senior executive at the company that employed the crew, Brawner Builders, said they were working in the middle of the bridge when it fell. "This was so completely unforeseen," said Jeffrey Pritzker, the company's executive vice president. "We don't know what else to say. We take such great pride in safety, and we have cones and signs and lights and barriers and flaggers." Jesus Campos, who has worked on the bridge for Brawner Builders and knows members of the crew, said he was told they were on a break and some were sitting in their trucks.

Biden & Harris promote their healthcare agenda



AP ■ RALEIGH (NORTH CAROLINA)

President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris on Tuesday promoted their healthcare agenda in the battleground state of North Carolina, arguing that Democrats like themselves would preserve access to care while Republicans would reverse gains made over the past decade and a half. Fourteen years after President Barack Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law, the White House still sees health care as a winning issue during a campaign in which Biden has sometimes found himself on the defensive when it comes to immigration or the economy. Republicans have opposed Biden's signature initiatives to lower medical costs, and they've seized opportunities to restrict abortion rights after the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v Wade. "It's sick. Now they want to quote, his words, terminate the ACA, as my predecessor says," Biden said, referring to Republican former President Donald Trump. "If that were ever to happen, we'd also terminate a lot of lives as well. But we're not going to let that happen, are we? We're not going to let that happen." North Carolina was Biden's final stop on a tour of battleground states after his State of the Union address this month, which jump-started a frenzied travel schedule as the Democratic president makes his case for a second term in a likely rematch with Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee. The state is also a healthcare success story for the president. The American Rescue

Plan, a coronavirus pandemic recovery measure signed by Biden, included financial incentives for states to expand Medicaid coverage for low-income residents. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, a Democrat, used the money, which amounted to USD 1.8 billion, to persuade Republican lawmakers to support his plan. More than 600,000 residents are expected to qualify. Biden and Harris visited hours after the US Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case about access to mifepristone, a widely used abortion pill. The justices appeared inclined to preserve access to the medication. The White House has tried to make mifepristone more available as one of its few opportunities to protect women's ability to end their pregnancies. Afterward, Biden and Harris attended a campaign fundraiser in Raleigh that raised USD 2.3 million, said Cooper. Harris told supporters, "This is the most existential, consequential and important election of our lifetime." Biden asked, "Does anyone here want to go back to 2020?" and the crowd shouted, "No." Biden's approval ratings on health care are among his highest on a range of issues, but he trails there, too. According to a February poll from AP and the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 42 per cent of US adults approve of Biden's handling of health care while 55 per cent disapprove. KFF, a health policy research firm, found in its own poll in November that 59 per cent of US adults trust the Democratic Party to do a better job addressing healthcare affordability issues.

Indian crew sustained minor injury: Official

New York (PTI): One of the 22 Indian crew manning a crippled cargo ship which collided against a bridge in Baltimore has suffered a "minor injury" while the rest are all safe aboard the vessel, owners of the Singapore-flagged ship said on Wednesday. The 2.6km-long, four-lane Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River in Baltimore, came crashing down after Dali, a 984-foot cargo ship, collided against it in the early hours of Tuesday. Minutes before impact, there was a "total blackout" of the engine and electrical power on the ship, authorities said. "We confirm the safety of all crew members and two pilots aboard 'Dali', with one minor injury reported. The injured crew member has been treated and discharged from hospital," a statement by owners Grace Ocean Pte Ltd and ship manager of Dali,

posted on the website of ship management company Synergy Marine Group. The name and other details of the crew have not been released. Authorities from the US Coast Guard and National Transportation Safety Board boarded the vessel to carry out investigations, it said. Synergy had said in a statement Tuesday after the accident that Dali's crew is "All Indian, 22 in total." "All crew members, including the two pilots, have been accounted for and there are no reports of any injuries. There has also been no pollution," Synergy had said. Synergy and Grace Ocean noted that "unfortunately", the incident also impacted those who were on the bridge at the time. "As per the United States Coast Guard (USCG), the search and rescue operation has been called off for the night.

Presidents of France and Brazil announce \$1.1 billion investment plan for Amazon

AP ■ SAO PAULO

The Brazilian and the French presidents have announced a plan to invest 1 billion euros (USD 1.1 billion) in the Amazon, including parts of the rainforest in neighbouring French Guiana. The two countries' governments said in a joint statement the money will be spread over the next four years to protect the rainforest. It will be a collaboration of state-run Brazilian banks and France's investment agency. Private resources will also be welcomed, Brazil and France said. French President Emmanuel Macron and his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva are meeting this week to revive the relationship between the countries after years of frictions with former President Jair

Bolsonaro, deepen cooperation to protect the rainforest and boost trade. Macron started his three-day visit to Brazil in the Amazon city of Belem, where he met his long-time ally Lula. The French president then took a boat to the Combú island to meet with Indigenous leaders. Both Macron and Lula saw a protest by Greenpeace Brazil with banners that read "No oil in the Amazon." Brazil's government has contemplated allowing the tapping of oil in a region close to the Para state, where Belem lies. Lula said during a speech that Macron's visit is part of a global effort to beef up rainforest protections. "We want to convince those who have already deforested that they need to contribute in an important way to countries that still have their forests to keep them stand-

ing," Lula said in a speech next to the French president. Macron's office prior said to the trip that a potential European trade deal with the South American bloc Mercosur won't be on the agenda. The French president is an opponent of such an agreement as long as South American producers don't respect the same environment and health standards as Europeans, after farmers raised concerns during protests across France and Europe. The French president decorated Indigenous leader Raoni Metuktire with the prestigious Legion of Honor medal for efforts at conserving the rainforest. "You were in Europe and I promised to come here to your forest and be with your people in this forest that is coveted," Macron told the

Indigenous leader, according to French radio RFI. "President Lula and I have a common cause for one of our friends in this land that belongs to you." Lula and Macron will seek to "set a common course" to fight both climate change and poverty, Macron's office said, as Brazil is to host the summit of the Group of 20 leading economies in Rio de Janeiro in November and UN climate talks in Belem next year. On Wednesday, Macron and Lula will launch a diesel-powered submarine built in Brazil with French technology at the Itaguaí shipyard outside Rio de Janeiro. The French president will then head to metropolis Sao Paulo to meet with Brazilian investors. On Thursday, the French president will head to Brasilia to again meet with Lula.

Lawmakers approve same-sex marriage bill in Thailand

AP ■ BANGKOK

Lawmakers in Thailand's lower house of Parliament overwhelmingly approved a marriage equality bill on Wednesday that would make the country the first in Southeast Asia to legalise equal rights for marriage partners of any gender. The bill passed its final reading with the approval of 400 of the 415 members of the House of Representatives in attendance, with 10 voting against it, two abstaining and three not voting. Thailand has a reputation for acceptance and inclusivity but has struggled for decades to pass a marriage equality law. Thai society largely holds conservative values, and members of the LGBTQ+ community say they face discrimination in everyday life. The government and state agencies are also historically conservative, and advocates for gender equality have had a hard



time pushing lawmakers and civil servants to accept change. The bill now goes to the Senate, which rarely rejects any legislation that passes the lower house, and then to the king for royal endorsement. This would make Thailand the first country or region in Southeast Asia to pass such a law and the third in Asia, after Taiwan and Nepal. The bill amends the Civil and Commercial Code to change the words "men and women" and

"husband and wife" to "individuals" and "marriage partners." It would open up access to full legal, financial and medical rights for LGBTQ+ couples. Danuphorn Punnakanta, a spokesperson of the governing Pheu Thai party and president of a committee overseeing the marriage equality bill, said in Parliament that the amendment is for "everyone in Thailand" regardless of their gender, and would not deprive heterosexual couples of any rights.

Iraqi man who burnt Quran plans to seek asylum in Norway

Stockholm (AP): An Iraqi man who carried out several Quran burnings in Sweden told a newspaper on Wednesday that he would seek asylum in neighbouring Norway in the wake of a deportation order by authorities in Stockholm. Salwan Momika, 37, has staged several burnings and desecrations of the sacred book of Islam in Sweden over the past few years. "I am on my way to Norway," Momika said in an interview published Wednesday by Swedish tabloid Expressen. "Sweden only accepts terrorists who are granted asylum and given protection, while philosophers and thinkers are expelled." Videos of Momika's provocative Quran burnings got worldwide publicity and raised anger and criticism in several Muslim nations, leading to riots and unrest in many places. He is

currently being investigated by Swedish authorities for incitement against ethnic groups in Sweden. According to Expressen, Momika is one of the reasons why Sweden's NATO membership, which was finalized earlier this month, got delayed by months. Among other countries, his actions got wide publicity in NATO member Turkey, which vetoed Stockholm's bid to join the military alliance for a lengthy period. Sweden's migration authorities revoked Momika's residence permit in October, saying he had provided incorrect information on his application and he would be deported to Iraq. But his deportation has been on hold for security reasons, because according to Momika, his life could be in danger if he were returned to his native country.

Pope appears in better health, praises Israeli and Arab fathers

AP ■ VATICAN CITY



Pope Francis appeared in better health on Wednesday, walking into the Vatican audience hall on his own with a cane for his weekly general audience and delivering his prepared text with a clear voice. The encounter was Francis' first public event since Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square, when he decided at the last minute to skip his homily, avoiding the speech at the start of a busy Holy Week that will test his increasingly fragile health. In recent weeks, the 87-year-old Pontiff has often shown increased difficulties in walking, has asked an aide to read aloud his remarks and has been heard breathing heavily during public events. The Holy Week schedule is challenging for popes even under the best of circumstances. But that is especially

true this year for Francis, who has been battling on and off all winter what he and the Vatican have described as a case of the flu, bronchitis or a cold. As Francis discussed the virtue of patience during his Wednesday audience, he renewed his appeal for peace and an immediate stop in ongoing conflicts. The pope also noted that there were two people in the Vatican's Paul VI audience hall — "two fathers" — and that one was Palestinian, the other Israeli.

He said that both of them had lost their daughters over the course of the Middle East conflict, "and they are both friends." "They do not look at the enmity of war," Francis said. "They look to the friendship of two men who care about each other and have experienced the same crucifixion." The Vatican press office said Bassam Aramin's daughter Abir was killed in 2007 by an Israeli soldier as she left school; Rami Elhanan's daughter Smadar was killed in 1997 in an attack in Jerusalem. The two men's story of friendship was told in the novel "Apeiron" by Colum McCann, a winner of the Terzani Prize who met with Francis during an audience with artists on June 23, 2023. "Let us think of the beautiful witness of these two people who have suffered the war in the Holy Land in the loss of their daughters," the pope said.

India can push growth close to nine per cent: Panagariya

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India can realistically push its economic growth close to 9 per cent from the current 7 per cent or so, by implementing a few more reforms in the next five years, Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission Arvind Panagariya said on Wednesday. Panagariya said Prime Minister Narendra Modi worked hard over the past 10 years to make India a friendly place for businesses, so investment is coming in. "Today, the economy is open. In the next 2-3 decades, we can sustain a very rapid growth," he said, while speaking at the Times Now Summit.

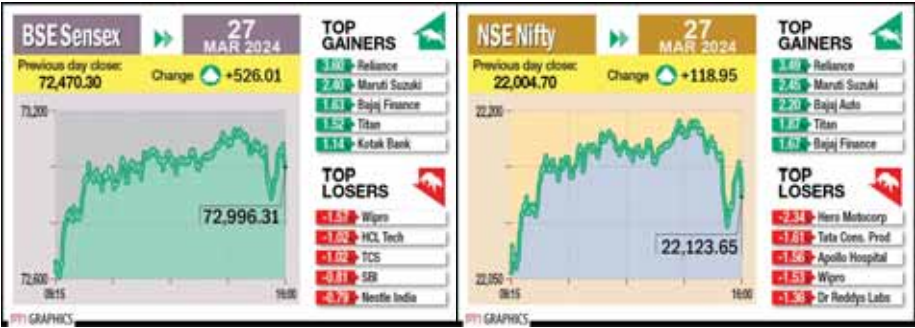


India's economy grew at better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the third quarter of FY24 — the fastest in the past one-and-a-half years. "India is currently growing in real rupees at about 7 per cent or so per year. "Certainly with a few more

reforms in the next five years, we can realistically push it to close to 9 per cent, certainly somewhere at 8-9 per cent and that can be sustained easily for a couple of decades," the economist said. Responding to a question on former chief economic adviser

Arvind Subramanian saying India's latest gross domestic product (GDP) numbers are 'absolutely mystifying' and difficult to comprehend, Panagariya said, "If you are mystified, then first you have to check, (whether) mist is on your own glasses... Or somewhere else." Panagariya said the methodological change for calculating GDP during the Modi government was recommended by bodies appointed by the previous administration (UPA government). "Nobody... Has questioned the integrity of those who actually do these (GDP) numbers. This is a new kind of phenomenon, which I don't understand," he

said. Panagariya said if critics are saying there is some fault with the methodology of calculating GDP, "they have to come in and point out the fault so that we can talk about how to make the improvements". Subramanian had recently said India's latest GDP numbers are "absolutely mystifying" and difficult to comprehend. "I want to be honest with you that the latest GDP numbers, I just simply can not understand them. "I say that with genuine respect and things. They are absolutely mystifying. They don't add up. I don't know what they mean," Subramanian had said.



Markets rebound on buying in banking, auto shares

Sensex rises 526 points, Nifty ends above 22,100 as auto, banking, energy shares support recovery

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex climbed 526 points while Nifty closed above the 22,100 level on Wednesday following buying in banking, auto and oil shares after positive macro data. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 526.01 points or 0.73 per cent to settle at 72,996.31 with 18 of its stocks advancing and 12 closing lower. During the day, it jumped 668.43 points or 0.92 per cent to 73,138.73. The broader Nifty of NSE rebounded by 118.95 points or 0.54 per cent to close at 22,123.65. As many as 22 Nifty shares gained while 27 declined and one closed unchanged. Auto, banking and energy shares supported the recovery while FMCG and IT shares declined due to profit taking. Among Sensex shares, Reliance Industries rose the most by 3.6 per cent, adding more than 312 points to the

upside. Maruti, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra and Larsen & Toubro were among the major gainers. Wipro, HCL Technologies, Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services and Tata Motors were among the laggards. "Stock-specific actions and positive undercurrents due to a healthy economic growth forecast led the market towards a positive closure. However, due to the holiday-led truncated week, investors are now focusing on US GDP data tomorrow and next week's RBI policy announcement to gauge market direction. "The mid- and small-cap space are outperforming as investors got bargaining opportunities, but volumes are low," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.70 per cent and midcap index went up by 0.01 per cent.

Among the indices, services jumped 1.01 per cent, capital goods climbed 1 per cent, consumer durables (0.98 per cent), industrials (0.97 per cent) and realty (0.93 per cent). Commodities, IT, utilities, metal and tech were the laggards. In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the positive territory, while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Tuesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned net buyers on Tuesday, as they bought equities worth Rs 10.13 crore, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.96 per cent to USD 85.42 a barrel. On Tuesday, the BSE benchmark declined by 361.64 points or 0.50 per cent to settle at 72,470.30. The NSE Nifty dropped 92.05 points or 0.42 per cent to 22,004.70



DPIIT plans to engage consultant to prepare logistics report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is planning to engage a research firm to prepare the Logistics Ease Across Different States and Union Territories (LEADS) report, ranking states and Union Territories (UTs) on the basis of their logistics ecosystem and highlights the key logistics-related challenges faced by stakeholders and includes suggestive recommendations. The index is an indicator of the efficiency of logistical services necessary for promoting exports and economic growth. The DPIIT has floated a request for proposal for the appointment of consultant for ranking of states on the basis of their logistics efficiency (LEADS report for 2024, 2025, and 2026). "The DPIIT intends to engage a research organisation/consulting or market research firm/academic institution (Consultant) with experience in preparing national/international level reports based on robust data based analysis in the logistics/

transport/infrastructure sector for the period of 36 months to prepare, LEADS reports for 2024, 2025, and 2026," according to the request for proposal document. The objective of the current assignment for the consultant is to prepare the reports taking into account the methodology developed in the previous versions of LEADS. The consultant, it said, is expected to review the LEADS methodology, identify potential enhancements, and propose a plan for data collection; and conduct perception-based surveys across the logistics ecosystem in India, developing a sampling frame, survey instruments, and objective data sets. It is also expected to analyse collected data using robust statistical methodologies, visualise findings using data tools and derive the LEADS Index; and draft a comprehensive LEADS report for each year, including actionable recommendations tailored for states/UTs. According to the fifth LEADS 2023 report, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Chandigarh, and Gujarat are among the 13 states and UTs that have again been categorised as "achievers".

NBCC sells 4.8 lakh square feet commercial space in South Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned construction firm SNBCC (India) on Wednesday said it has sold 4.8 lakh square feet of commercial space in South Delhi for Rs 1,905 crore on behalf of the government. In the 25th e-auction for commercial space at World Trade Centre (WTC) in Nauroji Nagar here, NBCC achieved the highest sale realization till date with the sale of 4.8 lakh square feet of commercial space for Rs 1,905

crore. "Power Finance Corporation Ltd, Security Printing and Minting Corporation of India Ltd and Solar Energy Corporation of India Ltd are the major organisations who bought space during this e-auction," it added. Out of the total area sold, around 4.38 lakh square feet having a sale value of about Rs 1,740 crore has been sold to public sector units (PSUs). The total number of successful

bidders was five, out of which three were PSU bidders and two private entities. As on date, NBCC has sold a total commercial space of over 30 lakh square feet through 25 e-auctions having a sale value of over Rs 12,100 crore. The WTC project, a landmark development, has attracted marquee buyers across various industries. The project is rapidly progressing towards completion with more than 94 per cent of physical progress achieved.

DLF plans to raise ₹600 crore through issue of debentures

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm DLF Ltd is raising Rs 600 crore through issue of non-convertible debentures (NCDs) to investors for refinancing of its existing debts. In a regulatory filing on Wednesday, DLF informed that the company's wholly owned subsidiary DLF Home Developers Ltd has raised this amount. The Securities Allotment Committee of the Board of Directors of DHDL has approved the allotment of 60,000 NCDs, having face value of Rs 1 lakh each, for an aggregate principal amount of Rs 600 crore on a private placement basis to eligible investors. DLF, the country's largest real estate developer in terms of market capitalisation, did not mention where the amount would be utilised. Sources said the amount will be utilised for refinancing its existing debts. DLF Group has 215 million square feet of development potential across residential and



commercial segments. The group has an annuity portfolio of over 42 million square feet. The company's sales bookings jumped two times annually to Rs 13,316 crore during the first nine months of this fiscal, mainly on high demand for its luxury housing properties in Gurugram. During the April-December period of the previous fiscal, the company's sales bookings stood at Rs 6,599 crore. In the 2022-23 fiscal, DLF's sales bookings stood at a little over Rs 15,000 crore. DLF plans to launch properties worth nearly Rs 80,000 crore over the next 3-4 years to tap rising demand for housing and commercial projects.

Tata Motors, HPCL join hands to install 5,000 charging stations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Passenger Electric Mobility on Wednesday said it has tied up with Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd to set up 5,000 public charging stations across the country by the end of the year. The collaboration will leverage Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL's) fuel station network and company's insights from over 1.2 lakh Tata EVs on Indian roads, to set up chargers at locations frequently visited by Tata EV owners, Tata Passenger Electric Mobility (TPEM), a unit of Tata Motors, said in a statement. Both entities have inked an Mou in this regard, it added. The companies are also exploring the introduction of a convenient payment



system through a co-branded RFID card, which will make the charging experience hassle-free.

HPCL has a nationwide network of over 21,500 fuel stations and aims to install 5,000 electric vehicle charging stations by December 2024. "This strategic partnership with HPCL emphasises our dedication to advancing India's EV ecosystem in which the growth of charging infrastructure plays a pivotal role. This collaboration is essential for facilitating infrastructure development to support the expanding EV customer base," TPEM Chief Strategy Officer Balaje Rajan noted. HPCL Chief General Manager (Retail Strategy & BD) Debashis Chakraverty said through the alliance the PSU shall leverage Tata Motors' vehicle base to enable its strategic expansion in EV charging infrastructure at places with higher charging demand.

Magcrete completes acquisition of majority stake in Maxlite

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Magcrete, which produces building product AAC Blocks, construction chemicals, and precast construction solutions, on Wednesday said it has completed the acquisition of a majority stake in Maxlite. The company did not disclose

the actual stake that it has acquired and also the deal value. In a statement, Magcrete said this strategic acquisition would enhance its total installed capacity of AAC (Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) blocks to 1.8 million cubic metres per annum.

Maxlite is an AAC Blocks manufacturer located in South India, headquartered in Bengaluru. It operates two AAC Blocks manufacturing facilities, one in Karnataka and the other in Tamil Nadu, boasting a combined annual capacity of 5,00,000 cubic meters. AAC Blocks serve as resource-

efficient alternatives to traditional red clay bricks, offering superior thermal insulation and reducing construction time and structural load. They are about ten times larger than clay bricks and are manufactured using waste fly ash, thereby consuming 70 per cent less energy.



RPower two subsidiaries settle ₹1,023 crore debt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Power on Wednesday said its two subsidiaries have settled debt worth Rs 1,023 crore with Authum Investment's arm Reliance Commercial Finance. Reliance Power Ltd's two subsidiaries — Kalai Power Pvt Ltd and Reliance Cleangem Ltd, have signed a debt settlement and discharge agreement with Reliance Commercial Finance Ltd (RCFL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Authum Investment & Infrastructure Limited, a regulatory filing said. In a stock exchange disclosure, the company informed that the value of total outstanding debt that has been settled stood at Rs 1,023 crore.

CCI conducting probe against some fintech firms: Kaur

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fair trade watchdog CCI is conducting enquiries against some fintech entities to check whether their ways of leveraging technologies are impacting competition, its chief Ravneet Kaur said and asserted that the regulator is taking necessary action to ensure a competitive digital market. With a slew of amended regulations, key rulings against anti-competitive practices in the digital market and advocacy efforts, the CCI is strengthening its efforts to curb unfair business

ways. In an interview to PTI, Competition Commission of India (CCI) Chairperson Ravneet Kaur said there is an increased sensitisation among entities about the competition law and stressed the focus is on "striking the right balance between regulation and freedom". According to her, the regulator is focused on big tech companies as well as various other sectors, including fintech and online intermediary service providers. "The CCI is conducting enquiries into some entities in the fintech sector. We are look-



ing into how technology is being leveraged by fintech players and whether they are impacting competition (in the market). The enquiries are going on," Kaur said. Without divulging specific

details, she also said the regulator is looking into some cases in the film industry, especially those related to film distributors. By addressing potential market distortions and promoting healthy competition, Kaur said that the CCI anticipates a positive impact on the economy, leading to enhanced consumer choice, innovation, and overall economic growth. "It is about striking the right balance between regulation and freedom, ensuring that the market remains contestable and operates fairly for all stakeholders," she noted. Emphasising

that the watchdog is expediting cases related to the digital market, Kaur said that companies are increasingly aware of the importance of adhering to competition laws, which will ensure a more transparent and fairer digital marketplace. "While legal challenges are part of the regulatory landscape, the focus remains on creating an environment where competition thrives. It is a continuous process, and we are committed to monitoring, assessing, and taking necessary action to ensure a competitive digital market," she added.

Maruti Suzuki announces senior management rejig

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki India on Wednesday said its board has elevated Partho Banerjee as the new head of marketing and sales function with effect from April 1, 2024. He is currently serving as Head - Service. Banerjee replaces Shashank Srivastava who is "transferred from the position of Head Marketing & Sales to Member Executive Committee", the auto major said in a regulatory filing. Similarly, Tarun Aggarwal has been named as Head of Engineering with

effect from April 1, 2024. He replaces CV Raman who also stands transferred to Member Executive Committee, it added. Aggarwal is presently working as Executive Officer and Head of Powertrain vertical, Maruti Suzuki said. The automaker also elevated Sandeep Raina as Head of Product Planning and Ram Suresh Akella as Head of service. MSI also transferred Rajesh Uppal, currently Head of HR & IT, to the Member Executive Committee. The automaker named Manoj Gautam as Head of Information Technology (IT) and Sail B Lal as Head of Human Resources (HR) with effect from April



1, 2024. Besides, the company transferred Sunil Kakkar from the position of Head — Supply Chain to Head — Corporate Planning. Deepak Thukral is designated as Head - Supply Chain while Rahul Bharti is des-

ignated as Head of Corporate Affairs, the automaker stated. The management rejig was approved by the Maruti Suzuki India board in its meeting held on Wednesday. The debt settlement with Reliance Commercial Finance came a few days after Reliance Power announced the sale of its 45 MW wind power project in Maharashtra to JSW Renewable Energy, for a consideration of Rs 132 crore. In December 2023, Kalai Power had sold the development rights of its proposed 1,200 Megawatt hydro-electric project in Arunachal Pradesh to THDC India Ltd for Rs 128 crore.



Gold rises ₹150; silver declines ₹250

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price rose Rs 150 to Rs 67,000 per 10 grams in the local market on Wednesday in line with firm trends globally, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 66,850 per 10 grams. However, silver prices declined by Rs 250 to Rs 77,250 per kg. In the previous close, it had settled at Rs 77,500 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 67,000 per 10 grams, up by Rs 150 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,180 per ounce, up by USD 7 from the previous close. Gold fluctuated within a range as traders

avoided fresh directional bets prior to the release of US inflation data later this week, which could potentially influence the country's trajectory towards monetary policy easing, Gandhi added. However, silver was quoted lower at USD 24.50 per ounce. In the previous trade, it had ended at USD 24.63 per ounce. "Gold traded steady, as expectations of interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve firm, while investors awaited data due later in the week for underlying inflation trends that will help gauge the timing of these cuts. "Focus this week will also be on the US GDP data and comments from Fed Chair Jerome Powell," Navneet Damani, Senior VP of Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

STIMAC OUSTER CRY GROWS AFTER SHOCK INDIA DEFEAT

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Former India footballers feel there is 'discord' in the changing room and demanded the ouster of head coach Igor Stimac following India's shocking 1-2 defeat to Afghanistan in the World Cup qualifiers. Talismanic Sunil Chhetri struck in his landmark 150th international fixture but the 117th-ranked India squandered the one-goal advantage at halftime to let in two second-half goals by the world No 158 Afghanistan in their return leg clash in Guwahati on Tuesday. Former India defender Gourmangi Singh feels something is "amiss" in the Indian dressing room, while former forward Dipendu Biswas slammed Stimac's skewed team selection for the disastrous show and demanded his immediate ouster. Echoing similar views, veteran Subrata Bhattacharya said that foreign coaches never brought laurels to the Indian team and called for an Indian coach to produce players of the calibre of "five-six" Sunil Chhetris. "Remember that these are the same players who got praise for their historic draw against Qatar (in World Cup qualifiers 2022)," Gourmangi told PTI. "Last year, they achieved greater heights, winning three tournaments including the SAFF Championships. For one year they were performing, earning everyone's praise so suddenly what happened? It was the same team, same players, so what happened suddenly?" he asked. "Even though I have been part of



the Indian changing room there must be something missing somewhere. We're not privy to what's happening there. I'm unsure about the players' relationship with Stimac." The All India Football Federation under Kalyan Chaubey has also made headlines for wrong reasons

in the recent past since the sacking of its secretary general Shaji Prabhakaran for "breach of trust" in November last year. This has coincided with India's Asian Games fiasco and a disastrous show in the Asian Cup. India struggled to make a team for the Hangzhou showpiece and

reached just hours before the continental showpiece. And, at the Asian Cup early this year, India failed to score a single goal from three outings, and extended their goalless run to six successive matches till Chhetri ended the drought in his 150th International appearance on

Tuesday.

'Get house in order'

Gourmangi further urged the stakeholders to get the "house in order". "I don't want to take names but the AIFF's recent incidents may have had an impact on the field too. It's

like if the parents are quarrelling then the effect will be seen on the kids. You need to get the house in order. If the players don't progress and continue playing the same, then of course, we can point fingers," said the FC Goa assistant coach. Former attacking midfielder Biswas, who is now the football secretary of Mohammedan Sporting, criticised Stimac for the over-reliance on Chhetri. He is of the view that not giving opportunities to young talents from tournaments like I-League, Santosh Trophy and Calcutta Premier Division, has impeded Indian football as India continue to bank heavily on Chhetri nearly two decades after he made his debut. "It's a very depressing situation that players who have performed well in Durand Cup, Kolkata League or I-League, which has more viewership than the top-tier ISL, don't catch any attention," Biswas said. "We keep saying why we don't have another Chhetri but if we don't give chances to these performing players how will the talents emerge?" he questioned. "Flawed selection proving detrimental" Biswas cited example of Manipuri forward David Lalhlansanga, who has 30-plus goals this season for Mohammedan Sporting. "But nobody knows David, thanks to Stimac's flawed selection policies. Earlier, players were not only picked from National League but Santosh Trophy and Kolkata League also got equal significance. Now these players' dreams are

dashed." Demanding immediate ouster of the Stimac, Biswas said: "The coach should not be spared after such a show. If he takes the credit for the win, he should be equally responsible for the defeat. "The likes of PK Banerjee, Nayeemuddin too were sacked after poor results then why not Stimac?" Former India defender Subrata Bhattacharya also echoed the same views. "Foreign coach never brought any laurels to Indian team. Be it Amal Dutta or PK Banerjee, it's the Indian coach who took India to greater heights." On the lack of a good striker to replace Chhetri, he said: "We must nurture, we must teach, and provide opportunities for practice. We have to develop him following this path. This is the only way. "You cannot win matches with just one Sunil Chhetri. You have to bring four or five more Sunil Chhetris. On average, you must have six good footballers on the pitch." He, however, hoped that the defeat against Afghanistan was an aberration and India bounce back soon. "Anything can happen in football. Didn't Mohun Bagan or East Bengal ever lose to Kalighat, or Rajasthan. Upset happens maybe because of miscommunication or by some mistake. "They have failed to utilise their chances and it's time to bounce back and they will surely. It's okay if they beat us once, but by beating them we cannot lift the standard of our football. We will bounce back for sure," he signed off.

Colsaerts team wins Pro Am event of Hero Indian Open

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Former Ryder Cup player Nicolas Colsaerts from Belgium led his team to victory at the Pro-Am event of the Hero Indian Open at the DLF Golf and Country Club here on Wednesday. Colsaerts, who has three DP World Tour wins against his name in a total of 10 pro wins, carried his team comprising three ladies -- Anjali Chawla, Meera Luthra and Kusum Anand -- to a fine win. They aggregated 37-under and were three better than the team lead by Romain Langasque, whose teammates were Masni Eriza, Prathmesh Moharil and Narinder Dagar, father of India's top women's pro, Diksha Dagar. Last year's runner-up Yannik Paul, also had a good look at the course, as his team finished third. His teammates were Golien Kipgen, Saurabh Uppal and Rohit Kapoor. The prizes were given away by Dr Pawan Munjal,



Executive Chairman, Hero MotoCorp. The prestigious event, which starts at the DLF Golf and Country Club on Thursday, is one of the strongest with almost a third of the players in 144-strong field having won on the DP World at some point. The tournament this year carries a record prize purse of USD 2.25 million with the winner set to receive USD 382,500.

Focus on comeback man Lahiri

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

His Olympic hopes hanging by a thread, star Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri's ambitious effort to make the Paris Games cut by ending a nine-year-long title drought will be a fascinating subplot as the prestigious Hero Indian Open tees off here on Thursday. A two-time Olympian, Lahiri, who will return to the national championships, finds himself in a tight spot as his ranking plummeted to 401 after he switched to Saudi-backed LIV golf, which is not recognised by the Official World Golf Rankings (OWGR), jeopardising his Paris chances. It will be a homecoming for the Indian, who won his last title at the same event way back in 2015 and is he hoping to regain the crown at the 57th edition of the tournament at the DLF Golf and Country Club this week. "You know the weight of, I don't know how many dozens of seconds, I've had, lays heaviest on my shoulders. So I need to get that off my back. I want to win, I am desperate to win," said Lahiri. "The driver is I have to prove to myself that I can win again. It's been a while and nobody feels that more than I do. So even though I've played 15, 16 years, I'm still as desperate to win this week as I was 10, 15 years ago, because I have to prove it to myself. I don't have to prove it to anybody else.



"I would love to go to Paris. So I need to focus on potentially eight rounds or 12 rounds that I have between now and Paris that will get me there. I will find those events on the Asian Tour, but it depends on a lot of variables. Olympics remains an unfinished business." Lahiri is currently the third Indian in the official rankings behind Shubhankar Sharma (202) and Gaganjeet Bhullar (240). The cut-off date for the men's competition of Olympic Games is June 17. Only 60 golfers each in the men's and women's categories make the field in

Olympics with the top 15 world-ranked players making the cut with a limit of four players from a given country. Countries with players, who are not ranked in the top 15, will get a maximum of two eligible players. Among Indian golfers, Sharma (48) and Bhullar (52) are inside the top-60 Games rankings created by International Golf Federation (IGF). Lahiri to make it to Paris, he will have to accumulate enough ranking points before June 17 to get inside top 60. The 36-year-old will have to compete with a total of 144 players

from over 25 countries as they vie for honours at the USD 2.25 million tournament. Almost a third of the players in the field have won on the DP World at some point, which underlines the level of competition that he will face this week. Among leading Indian players, DP World Tour Rookie of the Year Sharma and Bhullar -- who are frontrunners to make the Paris Cut, will be favourites to go deep into the tournament. It has been a while that an Indian has won the national championship with SSP Chawrasia claiming back-to-back titles at two different courses -- the challenging Delhi Golf Course in 2016 and Gary Player Course at the DLF Golf and Country Club in 2017. Since then Matt Wallace (2018), Stephen Gallacher (2019) and Marcel Siem (2023) won the trophy with the tournament being cancelled for three years from 2020 to 2022 due to COVID-19. Ryder Cup winner Rasmus Hojgaard, who will make his debut, will be one of the favourites this week, while the other top international stars include Yannik Paul, Rafa Cabrera Bello, former Ryder Cup star Nicolas Colsaerts, Matteo Manassero and Edoardo Molinari. Among Indians, Manu Gandas, Shourya Binu, Rashid Khan, Aman Raj, Yuvraj Sandhu, S Chikkarangappa, Karandeep Kochhar and Veer Ahlawat will be some exciting domestic players to watch out for during the week.



Bijay Chhetri signs for Latin American club Colon FC

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Indian defender Bijay Chhetri has joined Uruguayan football club Colon FC on loan until the year-end, his Indian Super League (ISL) club Chennaiyin FC said on Wednesday. Chhetri thus became the first Indian footballer to sign for a Latin American club. Colon is based in Montevideo, while the club competes in Segunda División Profesional (second division) of the country, where it is currently placed third on the Group B league table. "I feel so excited to get this opportunity for the new challenge in my professional career. I hope to put in good performances to enhance my game, repay the trust shown in me by Colon FC and to keep the Indian flag flying high," Bijay said in a release. "I am very well aware that if I do well, it can pave the way for future Indian players also to move abroad into these markets."

The 22-year-old Bijay from Manipur began his footballing career with Shillong Lajong in 2016 and made his senior appearance with Indian Arrows in 2018. Since then, he has played for clubs like Chennai City, Real Kashmir and Sreenidi Deccan before joining CFC this season, his maiden ISL club. Wishing Bijay luck on his move to Colon, CFC co-owner Vita Dani said, "We are extremely proud to see Bijay make his way to one of the world's biggest football nations. Uruguay are forever etched in the game's history, with four stars on their chest as winners of two Olympic gold medals in 1924 and 1928, the first World Cup in 1930, and then repeating in Brazil in 1950. "And, Colon Futbol Club are part of that heritage; founded even before the first World Cup. I wish Bijay the very best, and we are all hoping for his success as he makes history as the first Indian player to secure a contract with a Latin American club."

Shubhankar counting on experience

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

An experienced Shubhankar Sharma is hopeful that being in a relaxed mind space with an overall improvement in his game will help him break his title jinx at the Hero Indian Open and keep him firmly on course for a ticket to Paris Olympics. The 26-year-old Indian, a two-time DP World Tour winner, will be one of favourites. When the prestigious tournament begins at the DLF Golf and Country Club on Thursday. "I've been feeling very good about my game. Since 2018, I have come close many times, including last week when I was tied for the lead at one point on the final day. I'm glad that I'm in form coming into my home event," Shubhankar told reporters. The Chandigarh-born golfer, whose last win came at the 2018 Maybank Championship, had come close to clinching the title at the Porsche Singapore Classic when he shared the lead on the back nine of the final day before finishing tied-seventh on Sunday.



"This is our fifth major. And this is my second home DLF. This is where I played so much golf from 2012 to 2016, which was my first few years as a professional. "I'm feeling very, very confident this time. Feeling better than I've ever felt coming into the Indian Open. I have more experience on my side, thankfully, since 2018. And I'm looking forward to it this week." Shubhankar is currently in 48th position in the top 60 list based on Games rankings and is likely to make the cut for Paris.

"Olympics is always very exciting and nowadays in golf, every year is exciting because every other year you are trying to qualify for the President's Cup, there are majors. Olympics, obviously, golf being an addition now in the past two Olympics, it's become a big target of everyone to qualify for the Olympics," he said. The Arjuna awardee golfer said it will be a pure test of skills at the Olympics. "I am very excited also because I know the golf course, Big Golf National I have played there many times,

it's one of my favourite golf courses on tour. I think it's a true test," he said. "It's not a golf course which is a putting competition. You have to put on your big boy pants and hit shorts. Especially in August, it will be really cold also. It can be cold. So it will be a proper test and hopefully, I will be there. "I've been playing well and my goal right now is to just play well in every event that I play. And that should take care of everything else." "I've grown by leaps and bounds" Shubhankar, who turned professional in 2013, believes he has grown by leaps and bounds in the last decade and is in his best possible shape coming into the tournament. "I've pretty much spent my college years on tour. This is my 12th season as a pro, so it's been a long time, it's been a great time. I've made so many friends and travelled all around the world. I've just learned more about myself..." "And every year I've become a better player and a better person. I have a better understanding of the game and something that I'm proud of, the journey that I've taken

till now." Last year, Shubhankar achieved a remarkable feat, recording the best-ever finish by an Indian -- a tied 8th -- in The 2023 Open Golf Championship at the Royal Liverpool Golf Club in Merseyside, England. "I think everything feels really good now. I have become a lot better in pretty much every aspect from short games to putting to my ball striking and a testament of that was at the Open where I thought it was one of my best ball-striking weeks. "And I think, mentally I've just become more relaxed. I think after a while, it (remaining calm) I guess that's the difference between the top players. After a certain level, it is about how they manage their time off the course, their gym time, their meditation time or you know just time with the family. "Everything is planned properly and that is what gives them the excellence of consistency that they need. So in that aspect, I think I've grown leaps and bounds since last year and every year before that. So that has been my biggest strength."

Bopanna, Ebden reach Miami Open semifinals

PTI ■ MIAMI GARDENS (USA)

Indian tennis stalwart Rohan Bopanna and his Australian teammate Matthew Ebden advanced to their third men's doubles semi-final this year, defeating Dutchman Sem Verbeek and Aussie John-Patrick Smith at the Miami Open here. The duo, who had won the Australian Open earlier this year, overcame several unforced errors in the first set to win the gruelling quarterfinal 3-6 7-6 (4) 10-7. The victory for the 44-year-old Bopanna, currently ranked No. 2 in the world, will help him stay in the in top-10 in the ATP doubles ranking and ensure direct qualification for the Paris Olympics in July-August. The cut-off date for rankings to be considered for direct Paris qualification is June 10. The Bopanna-Ebden pair, seeded No.1 here, didn't enjoy a dominant first and second-serve percentage but came up with breaks at crucial junctures in the second set to take the match into the tie-breaker before winning it and drawing level. Bopanna, who won his maiden grand slam at the



Australian Open this year, had attained a career-high world No. 1 ranking following the success but has slipped to second spot after a quarterfinal loss at the Dubai Championships and a round-of-32 exit at the Indian Wells Masters. The Indo-Australian pair will meet the winners of the match between Marcel Granollers (Spain)/Horacio Zeballos (Argentina) and Lloyd Glasspool (UK)/Jean-Julien Rojer (Netherlands) in the last-four. Bopanna and Ebden had also reached the semifinal of the Adelaide Open in January this year and made the title round before losing to Rajeev Ram (USA) and Joe Salisbury (UK).



PANT AIMS TO SHAKE OFF RUSTINESS

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Skipper Rishabh Pant will look to overcome his rustiness as Delhi Capitals aim for an improved batting display in their bid for a first win of the IPL season when they take on Rajasthan Royals here on Thursday.

Pant's much-anticipated return to action 453 days after he suffered grievous injuries in a horrific car accident, lasted just 13 balls (18 runs) with Punjab Kings winning by four wickets at their new home ground in Mullanpur.

Pant, though, displayed his usual lively demeanour behind the stumps and also effected the stumping of Jitesh Sharma. Having overcome the early jitters and nervousness in his first game, Pant would be eager to regain his mojo quickly as his match-up against the likes of Trent Boult, Ravichandran Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal would be the highlight of the contest.

"It's exciting to have your captain back in the team. He is

our leader and heartbeat of this franchise and having him back is going to make this team a lot stronger," head coach Ricky Ponting had said of Pant ahead of the IPL.

Ponting chose David Warner and Mitchell Marsh to open the innings in the hope that the duo would score enough runs to take the pressure off Pant lower down the order. But the two failed to capitalise on good starts and the pressure soon came on Pant.

Wicketkeeper-batter Abhishek Porel's unbeaten 32-run cameo was the only bright spot in DC's batting, which lifted them to a respectable 174/9 from a precarious 138/7 at one stage.

Porel was used as an impact player as Delhi were a bowler short. The problem was worsened further after Ishant Sharma twisted his ankle. The lanky pacer could miss a few matches as well.

Delhi's spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel will have a bigger role to play after what was witnessed on a dry surface at the Sawai Mansingh



Stadium the other day when Rajasthan Royals' opening duo of Jos Buttler and Yashasvi Jaiswal faced some early hiccups against Lucknow Super Giants.

However, Sanju Samson struck an unbeaten 82 as the Royals won by 20 runs. By scoring a fifty in his team's first match of the season for the fifth successive time, Samson has become an early contender for the hotly-contested spot for the wicketkeeper-batter's slot in the upcoming T20 World Cup.

With Riyan Parag also among the runs, the Royals top-four will pose questions to the Delhi bowling lineup, and here's where Kuldeep and Axar's overs will be crucial in the middle.

The Royals' bowling has also hit the right notes with Trent Boult leading the charge with the new ball. Sandeep Sharma has also been superb in the death overs.

The rookie Indian dismissed KL Rahul at 58 in the 17th over and also stymied Nicholas

Pooran in the penultimate over as RR restricted Lucknow Super Giants to 173/6.

SQUADS:

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Abid Mushtaq, Avesh Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Donovan Ferreira, Jos Buttler, Kuldeep Sin, Kunal Singh Rathore, Nandre Burger, Navdeep Saini, Prasad Krishna, Ravichandran Ashwin, Riyan Parag, Sandeep Sharma, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dubey, Rovman Powell, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Trent Boult, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yuzvendra Chahal and Tanush Kotian.

Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Prithvi Shaw, Yash Dhull, Abishek Porel, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Mitchell Marsh, Pravin Dubey, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Kuldeep Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Khaleel Ahmed, Ishant Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Tristan Stubbs, Ricky Bhui, Kumar Kushagra, Rasikh Dar, Jhye Richardson, Sumit Kumar, Swastik Chikara and Shai Hope.

Records tumble as SRH batter Mumbai in six-hitting festival

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Records tumbled as Sunrisers Hyderabad went on a rampage to post the highest ever IPL total of 277 for 3 against Mumbai Indians before sealing a 31-run victory in a power-hitting contest that left bowlers on both sides befuddled.

SRH opener Travis Head (62 off 24) and number three Abhishek Sharma (63 off 23) came up with a sensational display of power-hitting that saw the latter snatching the franchise record for the fastest fifty from the Australian within minutes.

Heinrich Klaasen (80 not out off 34 balls) provided the fireworks in the end to help SRH break an 11-year-old record. The previous highest total in IPL was 263 for five achieved by Royal Challengers Bangalore back in 2013. It was also the highest total recorded in a T20 league.

Mumbai bowlers were left shell-shocked by SRH's six-hitting spree but their batters came out with a purpose and made a match out of what looked like a one way traffic at the innings break. Eventually, they ended at 246 for five in 20 overs.

A record 38 sixes were plundered in the game and it was the first time 500 runs were scored in a T20 match.

"The wicket was good but 277, no matter how good or bad you bowl, if the opposition get 277 that means they batted very well. It was tough out there for bowlers. Close to 500 runs were scored so the wicket was helping the batters," MI skipper Hardik Pandya said after the match.



Chasing a mammoth 278, Rohit Sharma (26 off 12), in his 200th game for the franchise, played some sublime strokes and was well complemented by Ishan Kishan (34 off 13) who got some much needed runs.

Tilak Varma (64 off 34 balls) took the game deep with a high-quality knock, comprising half a dozen sixes. At 182 for three in 14 overs and seven wickets in hand, Mumbai Indians were on course for something special before succumbing to constant scoreboard pressure.

Tim David (42 not out off 22) tried his best towards the end but it was not enough.

Earlier, it was raining fours and sixes as Head and Sharma toyed with the Mumbai Indians attack after being put in to bat.

Head, who was surprisingly left out of the playing eleven for the opening game, reinforced his status as one of the most dangerous batters in the game with a whirlwind effort.

He broke David Warner's record of the fastest fifty by a SRH batter with a 18-ball half-century before Sharma surpassed Head's feat 20 balls later by reaching the milestone

in 16 balls.

Head, who was dropped by compatriot Tim David at the start of his innings, opened his front leg and hit boundaries at will, collecting nine fours and three sixes in total.

The southpaw completed his fifty with an inside out four wide of mid-off before dispatching a bouncer from Gerald Coetzee for a six over deep midwicket, prompting opposition skipper Hardik Pandya to acknowledge the Australian's brutal assault.

When Head departed, Sharma went hammer and tongs, mostly targeting the cow corner region for his seven sixes and three boundaries.

It was a nightmarish start to the IPL for the 17-year-old South Africa pacer Kwena Maphaka, who made the Mumbai Indians squad at the back of his exploits in the U-19 World Cup.

He leaked as many as 66 runs in his four overs. The left-arm pacer could not recover from Head's onslaught in his second over in which he conceded 22 runs.

With the majority of the Mumbai bowlers taken to the cleaners, it was surprising that Mumbai Indians skipper Pandya waited till the 13th over to give Jasprit Bumrah his second over.

Following Sharma's dismissal, the in-form Klaasen ensured there was no stopping to the SRH's six hitting spree. Klaasen ended up with seven sixes with the maximum off a Bumrah bouncer standing out.

Klaasen had almost taken SRH over the line with his breathtaking knock against KKR at the Eden Gardens.

Dhoni advised me to play my natural game: Rizvi

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings batter Sameer Rizvi has credited Mahendra Singh Dhoni for his brief but impactful knock in his first IPL match, saying the talismanic former India skipper advised him to play his natural game when he went out to bat against Gujarat Titans.

Against GT here on Tuesday night, Rizvi played a cameo of six-ball 14-run knock, which included two sixes against Rashid Khan.

"Bhaiya (Dhoni) told me to play how I generally play since it is all about the actual gameplay. He (Dhoni) said, 'There is nothing different. Skills remain the same, and it's all just about mindset. Never take any pressure or be



nervous, and play as per the situation," he said in a video on IPLT20.Com.

Rizvi recalled the moment he was picked up by the franchise during the auction ahead of the season for a whopping Rs 8.4 crore, as he felt that his dream of meeting Dhoni will eventually come true.

"When I was picked up during

the auction by CSK, my greatest happiness was my dream to meet Bhaiya (MS Dhoni) would be fulfilled. We also had net sessions together and got to learn a lot from him and the (support) staff. I intend to learn more and perform to the fullest."

Having played cricket for Uttar Pradesh, he has decent T20 numbers, scoring 309 runs in 10 innings at a strike rate of 137.33, including two half-centuries.

Speaking about his jersey number, the 20-year-old Meerut batter said, "My jersey number is seven, which is currently worn by Bhaiya and I can't get it. So, I liked the number 1, and I took it."

Rizvi also talked about the positive atmosphere in the CSK dressing room.

Dube no longer ducks, defends against short ball

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings batting coach Mike Hussey is in awe of Shivam Dube for transforming into a batter who no longer ducks or defends when faced with the short ball, an improvement that has been monitored personally by former captain and team talisman Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

The 30-year-old Dube was the top-scorer for CSK on Tuesday, striking a 23-ball 51 that included two fours and five sixes at a strike rate of 221.74. The side won by 63 runs against Gujarat Titans.

"Got to give a lot of credit to Dube for working



given it back to the bowlers, forcing them to try something new. It will benefit him in the IPL, and also if he gets a chance to play for his country, it will do him a lot of good," said Hussey.

tirelessly against the short ball, an area he needed to improve on. Hats off to him, and he is playing with confidence now. He is also dangerous against the spin.

"As the teams bowled short balls at him a few years ago, he would only duck and defend. Now, not only he can play the short ones, but he is also able to find boundaries.

"So, that's a testament to the work that he has put in and has given it back to the bowlers, forcing them to try something new. It will benefit him in the IPL, and also if he gets a chance to play for his country, it will do him a lot of good," said Hussey.



Any team is bound to miss a bowler like Shami: Mohit

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Gujarat Titans pace bowler Mohit Sharma conceded it was hard to replace a bowler of the calibre of Mohammed Shami as his team succumbed to a massive 63-run defeat at the hands of reigning IPL champions Chennai Super Kings here.

India's premier pacer Shami is sitting out of the IPL as he is recuperating from an ankle surgery. He is expected to make his comeback with the home Test series against Bangladesh later this year after missing the five-Test series against England.

Shami will also miss the T20 World Cup to be jointly hosted by the West Indies and the USA in June.

"Any team is bound to miss a bowler like Shami, and you can't replace him with anyone. But injuries are uncontrollable, and you must see how to move ahead with it," said Sharma, who played for CSK between 2013 and 2015 and has been with the Titans since 2022, during the post-match press conference.

"As for GT, it's the first year for Spencer (Johnson) and Azmatullah (Omarzai). They haven't played much cricket yet. Therefore, we must be patient with them and not become too result-oriented.

"We must not bother about the runs leaked or the result of the contest, but how successful we are with our plans and how we are working on it backstage. These things would come in handy in the second half (of the event)," opined Sharma.

CSK posted a huge 206 for six, with openers Ruturaj Gaikwad (36) and Rachin Ravindra (46) being the stars alongside Shivam Dube (51). GT bowlers took a lot of beating with Umesh Yadav going for 27 in two overs, while the crafty Afghanistan ace spinner Rashid Khan went for 49 in four overs although he took a couple of wickets.

Sharma added that CSK milking runs in powerplay also contributed to the big loss.

"Not much of a difference (in CSK's strategy). It used to be the same when I used to play for CSK, and we usually tried to get the maximum out of the powerplay overs," he said. CSK were 69 for 1 after powerplay overs.

"We knew it was going to be a similar scenario, especially with Rachin (Ravindra's) batting of

late. However, we failed to execute our plans properly and also failed to judge the width and length during our bowling.

"We failed in executing our plans properly. We began to bowl the slower ones too early and too wide off the off stump, leading to them scoring freely. It happens that the plans always don't get executed properly every time.

"But it's a big tournament, and we have ample time to go back to the drawing board, rectify our mistakes and start afresh.

"We had a target of 200 as the par score on this wicket, and CSK played just the way we had thought. They were on course for 225-230 before settling for 206, but since we failed to implement our plans, we believed we gave away 15-20 runs extra."

Sharma also defended the visitors' decision to bowl first, stating that dew is always a factor in night games, though, interestingly, there was hardly any dew on Tuesday night.

"Don't think the pitch has a role to play. Generally, if we win the toss and decide to bowl, it's because we know that the dew might play a factor later during the game.

"But, there was no dew (Tuesday). As usual, we decided to bowl and restrict them to a par total, while dew would have been an added positive for us.

"Had the wicket been drier, CSK would have moved in with two spinners. But, had the (GT) pacers bowled in the right areas, it would have been tough for them to hit," he considered.

'WON'T SAY WE FAILED TO SCORE RUNS, BUT CREDIT TO CSK BOWLERS': Despite the 63-run loss, Mohit refused to blame the batters for the poor show. CSK bowlers implemented their plan to perfection to restrict GT to 143/8 with Sai Sudharsan (37) being GT's top scorer.

"I won't say we failed to score runs, but credit to the CSK bowlers for bowling brilliantly. Deepak (Chahar) started well, and at the end of the day, it all boils down to the number of variations you possess and when and how to use them.

"Don't think it was a pressure scenario for us. The wicket was good, and 200 was a gettable total here.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former India cricketer Manoj Tiwary expects Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya to be booed a "bit louder" when the team plays its first home IPL game here on April 1 but he feels that the flamboyant all-rounder has the temperament to deal with it.

Pandya, who replaced Rohit Sharma as MI captain before the start of the season, was booed by fans in Ahmedabad when the side played against his former franchise Gujarat Titans on Sunday.

MI lost the match by six runs and will take on Rajasthan Royals in their first home game at the Wankhede Stadium here on Monday next week.

"...You have to see how he gets welcomed here in Mumbai because I think he is going to get booed a bit louder here...Because as a fan, Mumbai fan or a Rohit Sharma fan, nobody expected that captaincy will be given to Hardik," Tiwary told PTI Videos in an interview.

"And despite Rohit giving five trophies to Mumbai Indians, he has to lose the captaincy. I don't know what are the reasons but I think it has not gone down well with the fans. And that is the reaction which you see on

Pandya will be booed louder in Mumbai but his temperament impressive: Tiwary

the field," he explained. Tiwary is, however, impressed with how Pandya has dealt with fan backlash.

"...Knowing him, whatever I have been observing of late through television, that despite getting booed, he kept his calm, he kept his nerve, which is the sign of a good temperament," he said.

The 38-year-old, who is the sports minister of West Bengal, said Pandya will have to cut out the noise and focus on his performance so that he is in good shape for the T20 World Cup starting June 1 in the Americas.

"I believe even if he was not booed, he has to perform well to get into the Indian team to play the World cup. Because it is important for all the players to perform well and be fit as well to be available for selection.

"And him being the number one all-rounder...Obviously he has to be in form and to be in form he has to perform," he said.

Tiwary competed for the Delhi



franchise in the IPL and he is keenly observing how his former team is handling Rishabh Pant's comeback from a life-threatening car accident in 2022.

He believes the big-hitter would be back to his devastating best very soon

thanks to the unflinching support of the franchise.

"First of all, he's not going to be any burden. In fact, it's going to be more positive impact which he brings along with him because as a player, he's one of the most talented cricketers in