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INDIA'S INFLATION
STORY THROUGH TIME

WORLD 9
OBAMA, CLINTON HELP BIDEN RAISE
\$26 MN FOR HIS RE-ELECTION

MONEY 10
FPIS MAKE REMARKABLE
COMEBACK

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RAHUL LED LSG EYE
ALL ROUND EFFORT
AGAINST PBKS
12 SPORTS

Congress stunned by IT slap



Congress leaders Jairam Ramesh, Ajay Maken and Pawan Khera during a Press conference in New Delhi on Friday

The Pioneer Photo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Opposition parties, the Congress and the CPI on Friday, accused the ruling BJP of indulging in "tax terrorism" to financially cripple the Opposition parties ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. While the grand old party said it has received fresh notices from the income-tax department, asking it to pay ₹1,823.08 crore, the Communist Party of India (CPI) received an IT notice

over "dues" of ₹11 crore for using an old PAN card while filing tax returns during the last few years. On the other hand the Congress alleged that the BJP is in "serious violation" of income-tax laws for which authorities should raise a demand of more than ₹4,600 crore from the saffron party. Addressing a Press conference at the AICC headquarters along with Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh, party treasurer Ajay Maken alleged that the BJP is in

serious violation of income-tax laws and said the I-T department should raise a demand of ₹4,617.58 crore from the saffron party for such violations. Maken said political parties have to fill up a proforma of Form 24A, in which two basic and important information have to be furnished — the names and addresses of their donors. "We have analysed all the submissions of the BJP to the Election Commission (EC). The party has faltered every

year," Maken claimed. Ramesh alleged that through the "electoral bonds scam", the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has collected ₹8,200 crore and used the route of "pre-paid, post-paid, post-raid bribes and shell companies". On the other hand, the BJP is engaged in "tax terrorism", he alleged. Maken alleged that the Congress and other like-minded Opposition parties are being selectively targeted by the I-T department, which he described as the BJP's

"frontal organisation". He said the Supreme Court will soon hear the Congress's plea on the I-T department's demands from it. Maken alleged that the "BJP-ruled I-T department" has so far forcibly taken out ₹135 crore from the Congress's bank accounts due to an alleged ₹14 lakh non-compliance demand against the party. "This amount was recovered by freezing more than ₹270 crore of the Congress's bank balance across several accounts," he said. During this period of several weeks, the bank accounts of the Congress were effectively "frozen" in an illegal attempt to paralyse the party's functioning during the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Maken alleged. In the history of India, why is the Congress, a tax-exempt political party like others, being "forced" to pay income tax during the 2024 Lok Sabha election, he asked. "Why have the BJP or its alliance partners not been dealt with similarly? Why has the I-T department not taken cognisance of the Yediyurappa diaries, Jain diaries, Sahara diaries, Birla diaries, Bangaru Lakshman convictions and penalised the BJP?" he asked. The CPI on its part said the Left party is consulting its lawyers to challenge the notice of the tax authorities.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates during a meeting at his residence in New Delhi on Friday

PTI

Modi vows to arm rural women with technology

ARCHANA JYOTI ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday highlighted the transformative potential of technology in critical sectors such as agriculture, education, and health and emphasised the Government's commitment to harnessing technological innovations to bridge the digital gap in rural areas to ensure inclusive development. During his conversation with philanthropist and Microsoft Co-founder Bill Gates, Modi also shared his vision of empowering rural women through access to technology and training, aiming to challenge traditional gender roles and foster economic independence. He emphasised the need for a

psychological shift, where villagers feel empowered to transform their communities through technology as was done by his Government through innovative programmes like 'Namoo Drone Didi'. "I want to give them technology in their hands and bring a psychological change. Everyone in the villages should feel that they are transforming their village," he said adding that "he wants to allocate funds to scientists for local research in cervical cancer to develop vaccines at a minimal cost and that his new Government will work to ensure vaccination, especially for all girls". Gates, in response, lauded India's proactive efforts to promote technology inclusion and empower women. The philanthropist

highlighted successful collaborative initiatives between the Government and organisations like his foundation in revitalising traditional practices and promoting women's participation in sectors such as agriculture. Gates said India brings out technology that can be made available for everyone and that helps uplift those who need it the most. The conversation extended to leveraging technology to enhance citizen services and improve ease of living. "Earlier, there was a push for stringent compliance requirements. But I advocated and ensured simplification, and made certain that data is uploaded to cloud (storage) with shared IDs, enabling us to access necessary information directly," Modi said.

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Bihar RJD president Jagdanand Singh and State Congress president Akhilesh Singh join hands with CPI-ML, CPM and other leaders after releasing Grand Alliance candidates' list for Lok Sabha elections, in Patna, on Friday

PTI

INDIA Bloc in a bind in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
PATNA/NEW DELHI

Ending speculations though mired with a controversy over one Lok Sabha seat in Bihar, INDIA Bloc Opposition partners on Friday announced that the RJD will contest 26, out of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in the State while the Congress will contest nine seats, followed by CPI(ML) 3 and CPI and CPI(M) one each. While seat sharing has already been done in Delhi with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bloc now awaits to share the deal in Maharashtra among the Congress, Uddhav Thackeray led Shiv Sena, Sharad Pawar-led NCP and other smaller parties where troubles are galore and stakeholders are making last minute efforts to salvage the alliance to contest in 48 Lok Sabha seats in the State. As per the announcement, the

Congress has been made to give up the Purnea Lok Sabha seat, which recent entrant Pappu Yadav, husband of Rajya Sabha MP Ranjeet Ranjan, was hoping to contest, claiming that he had received assurance of the Congress ticket from Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi.

The seat will be contested by the RJD, which recently gave the party ticket to JD(U) turncoat Bima Bharti, but stopped short of announcing it formally. The Mahagathbandhan's seat-sharing announcement comes a day after the filing of nomination papers for the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls was over. The RJD has fielded its candidates in all four seats going to polls in the first phase, in what has been resented by allies as a "unilateral move". Notably, the CPI and the CPI(M) have already announced their candidates for Begusarai and Khagaria respectively.

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Judicial probe in Ansari death

PREETAM SRIVASTAVA ■
LUCKNOW:

Following the completion of postmortem formalities on gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari by a panel of five doctors, the local administration has initiated a judicial probe into his death. The Chief Judicial Magistrate Banda has directed a three-member team to conduct the investigation and submit their findings within one month. All proceedings, including the postmortem, were recorded as per protocol. Judicial probes are customary in cases of deaths in judicial or police custody. During the postmortem examination, Mukhtar's younger son Umar Ansari, along with other family members and a few individuals from Ghazipur, were present. The procedure lasted over an hour, after which Ansari's remains were transported under heavy security to Ghazipur for the final rites. The convoy, comprising 26 vehicles, including Vajras and ambulances, was closely monitored with CCTV cameras. Despite efforts by Ansari's elder son Abbas Ansari, who is incarcerated, the High Court denied his request for parole to attend



An ambulance carrying the mortal remains of the jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari leaves for his native place in Ghazipur, from a hospital in Banda, on Friday

PTI

the burial. In anticipation of Ansari's arrival in Ghazipur, shops remained shuttered in Mohammadabad Yusufpur, his hometown. Security measures were intensified, with barricades erected outside his residence and restricted access to the premises. Ansari, a five-time MLA, passed away due to a cardiac arrest after being transferred from Banda jail to a hospital following deterioration in his health. Amidst Ansari's demise, his

family alleges foul play, accusing authorities of administering "slow poison." Umar claimed that his father had conveyed this suspicion to them and raised concerns with the court through legal channels. "We said this before also and even today we will say the same thing. On March 19, he was poisoned at dinner. We will move to the judiciary, we have full faith in it..." he said. In a petition filed by Mukhtar's advocate in the

High Court and the Supreme Court, it is alleged that he was poisoned twice during lunch in Banda jail, suggesting a concerted effort by the Government administration to eliminate him. However, officials have refuted these allegations, asserting that the truth will be uncovered through the ongoing judicial probe. As the investigation unfolds, the circumstances surrounding Ansari's death continue to spark debate and scrutiny.

UN steps on India's foot on its internal politics

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

A spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said the world body "hopes" that in India and any country that is having elections, people's "political and civil rights" are "protected" and everyone is able to vote in a "free and fair" atmosphere. Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric made these remarks on Thursday while he was responding to a question on the "political unrest" in India ahead of the upcoming national elections in the wake of the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and the freezing of the Opposition Congress Party's bank accounts. "What we very much hope that in India, as in any country that is having elections, that everyone's rights are protected, including political and civil rights, and everyone is able to vote in an atmosphere that is free and fair," Dujarric said at the daily Press briefing on Thursday. The response from the United Nations comes a day after the US also reacted to a similar question on Kejriwal's arrest and freezing of the Congress party's bank accounts.



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DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
DAMTA (TEHRI GARHWAL)

Unemployment is an issue and challenge being discussed within the sparsely accumulated locals of the villages nestled in interior terrains of Uttarakhand which the youths have termed it a "curse in Dev Bhumi". And now with the Lok Sabha elections around the corner, the discussion within the people has gained momentum and given rise to individuals like Bobby Panwar spearheading a movement on the subject so much that he has thrown a tough battle for the sitting three-time Tehri Garhwal Lok Sabha MP Maharani Mala Rajya Rani Shah from the BJP and her opponent Jot Singh Gonsola of the Congress. Shah is the Royal descendant of Kingdom Tehri and looking for a fourth straight victory.

Though Uttarakhand boasts for the first State to pass the Uniform Civil Code and the BJP hopes to retain all five Lok Sabha seats but the local issues like unemployment and health care is on top of the mind of voters and the Congress is attempting to regain the ground on the above subjects dominating the mind of youths to upset the ruling party here. Though the traditional voters will rally behind the Congress and the BJP, Panwar who is contesting the Lok Sabha as an Independent seems to have emerged the choice and voice of youths of Uttarakhand, particularly in the Garhwal (Tehri and Pauri) region and making inroads in Kumaon landscape above Ramnagar



Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami conducting road show campaign in Garhwal on Friday for party nominees for the Lok Sabha polls

Deepak Kumar Jha/Pioneer

Silent rumbling in Dev Bhumi

till Pithoragarh. "I jumped into politics after two of my elder siblings remained unemployed. I send my younger brother to Delhi where he is doing some job. In the absence of employment in all sectors, including defence and paramilitary, youth are left with no option rather than wait for tourism cycle like summer, char dhaam yatras to put their stalls of snacks and beverages. We do not have any complaints regarding infrastructure issue as we understand it's difficult in this tough terrain but employment is an issue now

deep into our heart," said Panwar, the Independent Lok Sabha candidate from the Tehri Garhwal Parliamentary constituency. The other four Lok Sabha seats in Uttarakhand are Pauri Garhwal which has sitting BJP MP Tirath Singh Rawat but the current contest is between BJP's chief media incharge Anil Baluni and Ganesh Gondyal of the Congress, Union Minister BJP's Ajay Bhatt and Prakash Joshi of the Congress in Nainital Udhamsingh Nagar, Ajay Tamta of BJP and Pradeep Tamta of Congress in Almora, Trivendra Singh Rawat of BJP and Virendra



Rawat of Congress in Haridwar, a constituency represented by former CM and former Union Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has also been an entity in the State with a sizeable vote share and has announced its candidates for all the five Lok Sabha seats which goes to polls in the first phase of April 19. In 2019, the BJP got a massive 61.01 per cent vote share, while the grand old party 31.40 per cent followed by BSP which stood third, with 4.48 per cent vote share. Every household of villages in Uttarakhand claims of one family member in metros like Delhi, Mumbai, to farthest like Chennai, Bengaluru or Kolkata. Similar is the case in nicely profiled cities of capital town Dehradun, Mussoorie, Almora, Haldwani and Nainital.

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Watchman among four held for house robbery

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the arrest of four accused, including a watchman, the Madehganj police claimed to have worked out a case in which a woman professor, who has served in the US, was held hostage at her house in the area and robbed. Those arrested were identified as Ziauddin aka Chhotu of Sitapur, Ghufuran Salim Sheikh of Thakurganj, Karan Gautam of Madehganj, and Karan Gautam of Aliganj. Watchman Karan Rawat, who was hired by the victim, Talat Fatima, did not enter the house at the time of robbery fearing disclosure of his identity. The police said Rawat tipped off Karan Gautam and others that robbery could easily be pulled off at the house of the woman who lives all alone since her return from the US where she was as a professor at a college. Talat Fatima has been living in the locality for about 10 years. On the fateful day, Karan Rawat and Ziauddin remained outside while Ghufuran and Karan Gautam entered the house with their faces covered. They overpowered Talat and tied her hands and legs with a rope. They also gagged her so that could not raise an alarm. They then collected the booty and fled the scene. Hours after the robbers left the scene, the woman wriggled herself free and called police. However, the police treated it as a case of theft while claim-

ing that the woman was making things up. However, media got to know about her grievance and it was only after that the police started a probe into the incident. In a CCTV footage, Karan Rawat was seen accompanying other accused and also spotted moving in a lane before the crime was executed. The police took Rawat as a prime suspect and kept a tab on him. He was rounded up and interrogated. He spilled the beans and others involved in the incident were also arrested. The police claimed that all the looted items were recovered.

MAN JUMPS OFF FOURTH FLOOR, SUCCUMBS

A 36-year-old man admitted in the Government Medical College in Budaun district allegedly committed suicide by jumping from the fourth floor of the building, an official of the college said on Friday. Sanju, an alcoholic, was admitted to the hospital on March 19 for a head injury that he had sustained earlier in an inebriated state, Dr NC Prajapati, Principal of the Government Medical College said. On Thursday night, Sanju, a native of Manpur Nagaria village in Kasganj district, Uttar Pradesh, allegedly jumped from the window of his fourth floor ward, Prajapati said. He died while he was being rushed to the emergency room, he said. Police have sent the body for post mortem and further investigation is underway, he added.

TWO ELECTROCUTED

Two men travelling in a tractor-trolley were electrocuted when they came in contact with a high-tension wire in Muzaffarnagar on Friday, triggering protests by villagers who blocked a road. The tractor-trolley was loaded with sugarcane bagasse and the two were sleeping on it when they came in contact with the wire, Circle Officer (Sadar), Raju Sav, said. Soon after the incident villagers blocked a road in Harinagar village. They were later pacified by the police, Sav said. The bodies of the two identified as Ankul (22) and Shekhar (20) have been sent for postmortem, he said. A case has been registered.

16-YR-OLD GIRL RAPED

A 16-year-old girl has been allegedly raped by a man of her village in Uttar Pradesh's Shahjahanpur district, police said on Friday. The incident took place on Wednesday and a case has been registered at the Meeranpur Katra police station, they said. The accused is at large and efforts are underway to apprehend him. Additional Superintendent of Police (Rural) Manoj Awasthi said. The case was registered on the basis of a complaint from the girl's family members on Thursday, the official said. She was dragged to a farm and raped there. It has also been alleged that the accused physically assaulted her when she resisted, Awasthi said.

Metro to operate till 12:30 am on LSG match days

Lucknow (PNS): To facilitate the Indian Premier League spectators going to Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Stadium, Lucknow Metro trains will operate till 12:30 am on all match days in the city. The last metro trains will depart at 12:30 am from CCS Airport Metro Station and Munshi Pulia Metro Station on March 30 (LSG vs PBKS), April 7 (LSG vs GT), April 12 (LSG vs DC), April 19 (LSG vs CSK), April 27 (LSG vs RR), April 30 (LSG vs MI), and May 5 (KKR vs LSG). Lucknow Metro has also tied up with Lucknow City Transport Services to provide feeder buses for to-and-fro journey between Transport Nagar and Ekana stadium and return journey from the stadium to Indiranagar metro station at night. "Feeder buses will, therefore, be available from Transport Nagar station to Ekana stadium and back from 9:30 pm till midnight," a metro official said. He said Lucknow Metro has also launched a photo contest where two LSG standees have been kept at Hazratganj and Charbagh stations. People have to click photos, selfies with these standees, upload the same on Instagram and tag @officialupmrc. The best entries will get a chance to win LSG gifts. UPMRC MD Sushil Kumar said, "This is the second consecutive year when we are offering this midnight facility to ensure safe travel to every cricket enthusiast going to watch the IPL matches. Our team is committed to making your experience hassle-free."

Solemnity marks Good Friday

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Good Friday was observed in different churches across the city. The Assembly of Believers' Church organised a 'Good Friday Service' at St Michael School in Aliganj. Dr Morris Kumar introduced the seven preachers who shared the seven words which Jesus spoke on the Cross. A small skit was presented based on Jesus crucifixion. Directed by Vartika, the skit made the congregation experience the agony of Lord Jesus Christ. A special prayer made for sick people was also delivered on the occasion by Dr Morris Kumar. Over 120 people worshipped together in the Good Friday service. Meanwhile, Father Donald D'Souza from St Joseph Church said Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion of Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross for the salvation of mankind. The main ceremonies included a 'Way of the Cross' and the 'Passion of Lord Jesus Christ'. He further said that Holy Saturday (March 30) is a day of silence, hope and expectation for the Christian community as it awaits Jesus's resurrection. "While the morning is spent in silent prayer, the solemn Easter Vigil will be held on Saturday night in all the churches across the city, especially at the St Joseph's Cathedral in Hazratganj. There will be divine services in various churches of the city on Easter Sunday (March 31)," he added. Meanwhile, the Catholic Bishop of Lucknow, Gerald John Mathias wished all the citizens of Lucknow the blessings of Easter.



(Top) Members of the Christian community taking part in the 'Way of the Cross' at St Joseph Cathedral in Hazratganj, and (above) a prayer service at Central Methodist Church on the occasion of Good Friday

Varsity improves SCImago ranking

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Among the 324 Indian institutions participating in the SCImago Institutions Rankings (SIR), 2024, released on Friday, Lucknow University has been ranked 91, a big jump from the 181st position in 2023. SIR is a classification of academic and research-related institutions ranked by a composite indicator that combines three different sets of indicators based on research performance, innovation outputs and societal impact measured by their web visibility. It has secured a very high ranking in societal impact category. LU had secured 21st ranking in the societal impact category as compared to 139th rank in 2023. Prof Alo Kumar Rai said, "As the vice-chancellor of the University of Lucknow, I am pleased to share that our institution has demonstrated commendable performance on SCImago. This academic achievement bodes well with

our other rankings for which we have been working consistently over the years. Through collaborative efforts and a commitment to excellence in education and research, we have consistently enhanced our standing in various disciplines."

TEAM OF AUDITORS TO VISIT LU

A team of 34 auditors from 23 countries will be visiting the University of Lucknow as part of the '159th International Training Programme on Performance Audit' being organised by International Centre for Information Systems and Audit (iCISA). iCISA is the premier training institute of SAI India which deals in capacity building of auditors across the globe primarily in areas related to IS audit and data analytics. "The 34 auditors from 23 countries shall visit the University of Lucknow to understand the journey to academic excellence being pursued by the university and the various initiatives that have paved the way for the current academic standing of the university," LU spokesperson Durgesh Srivastava said. During this visit, a presentation will be made to showcase the university's achievements and the processes that have led to the current status. The presentation will also include details of the financial, administrative and auditing processes undertaken by the university.

'More complicated surgeries can be performed with anaesthesia'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Dr PK Das, head of the anaesthesiology department of Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences (RMLIMS) and organising chairperson of the Postgraduate Refresher Course in Anaesthesia, which commenced on Friday, said anaesthesia as a medical branch has seen a huge leap in the last ten years. "More complicated surgeries can be performed with good anaesthesia and anaesthesia-related complications have come down drastically," he said, adding the course is

meant for MD students of anaesthesiology and is aimed at imparting training in anaesthesia. "During surgeries, anaesthesia-related complications are very important and if we can train the students well in this direction, we can cut down on these complications," he said. He added that the delegates and speakers are from premier institutes across the country. Talking about the complications which occur through anaesthesia, he said that through anaesthesia they have to take control of the patient's respiration. "Sometimes what happens is

that after administering anaesthesia, we are not able to take control of the patient's respiration. Then there are patients who have other issues like liver disease, kidney disease or heart disease. During the surgery which can be defined as a stress period, we have to maintain the organ functions and maintain their stability," he said. Explaining further, he said they also give muscle relaxants to the patients. "The spontaneous respiration is cut off and the patients are dependent on respiration given by the anaesthesia machine. Then there are those who have a history of

angina, heart attack. These patients have to undergo surgery. Again there are risks and hence the focus is on prevention," he added. Sharing further details, he said that in the open heart surgery, they stop the heart and during this the oxygenation of the vital organs and tissues is important. "We have to monitor whether this is being achieved or not," he said. The senior doctor said that availability of good hi-tech devices also help them in carrying out monitoring during the surgery. "We have NIRS to monitor whether the brain is getting good oxygen or not.

Similarly, we can do continuous echocardiography during an operation if we feel that the patient has a high risk of developing cardiac complications. Nowadays we have advanced equipment so that we can do the procedures under the guidance of these equipment," he said. He acknowledged that Covid played an important role in recognition of the importance of anaesthesiologist. "During Covid, the ICUs were manned by anaesthesiologists in most of the places. They were thought to be the best persons to take care of mechanical ventilation which was being carried out in

severe Covid patients," he pointed out. Dr Das said PG seats in Anaesthesia have increased three times. "The number of PG seats has increased but the teaching faculty has not increased proportionately. Through these refresher courses, we provide them a better opportunity to learn. RMLIMS has been organising the refresher course annually since 2017, except for the last three years due to Covid," he said. He added that 150 PG students from across the country were participating in the conference which will be held for the next three days.

CITYBRIEFS



SCHOOL BRANCH INAUGURATED

Red Rose Group of Schools inaugurated their fourth branch in Mohanlalganj, Gram Bhajanmau, on Friday. Equipped with world-class infrastructure, the school aims to provide students premium quality education. The school building was inaugurated by former DGP Dr Vikram Singh and his wife, founder-manager of Red Rose Group Of Schools, RC Mishra, managing director Dr Prashant Kumar Mishra, and chairperson Smita Mishra. The students took part in cultural programmes.

LDA gets over ₹70 crore from unsold properties

Lucknow (PNS): The Lucknow Development Authority has earned over Rs 70 crore by selling houses, flats, and commercial properties that had remained unsold for more than two decades. This achievement took place over a span of four months, from November 23 last year to March 24 this year, with a total of 211 properties being sold. Vice-Chairman Indramani Tripathi disclosed these figures during a recent announcement. Tripathi explained that a new initiative was launched to expedite the sale of unsold properties, marked by a 'Sampatti Mela' held in the premises of the Vasant Kunj housing scheme. This first-of-its-kind premises is scheduled to take place every second month of the year. Previously, such properties were sold through e-auctions. Tripathi, presiding over the event, noted the diverse participation from society, emphasising that attendees had the opportunity to select properties that suited their preferences and budgets. During the event, 50 individuals applied for properties and expressed interest in purchasing unsold properties. Engineers and staff will accompany them to selected properties at LDA's expense to provide information on their value, aiming to expedite sales and increase revenue. However, Tripathi expressed frustration during the event, particularly towards the computer department staff, when some entrepreneurs and homebuyers complained about delays in issuance of documents. He issued a directive to officials and engineers to ensure that all necessary documents and paperwork related to sales are issued within a fortnight. According to LDA records, there are over 1,100 such properties located in various parts of the city.

City to have 28 automatic weather stations, 82 rain gauge stations

Lucknow (PNS): Lucknow will soon have 28 automatic weather stations and 82 automatic rain gauge stations in 110 wards of the city shortly. Met director Manish Ranalkar said that with Lucknow having such a dense network, weather forecast of each ward would be possible. He said that tenders had already been issued and the weather stations and automatic rain gauge stations would be installed in 6-8 months' time. He pointed out that currently there are only two automatic weather stations in the city — one is at the airport office and the other at Integral University. Weather stations and rain gauge stations were proposed under the Urban

Meteorological Stations project of the UP government and Lucknow was among the 18 cities selected. "Due to urbanisation, a lot of variation in weather has been seen in the same district. For example, it may be raining at the airport but not in Ashiyana. The temperature may be different at the airport and Alambagh. Because of these variations, we have to ensure that the density of the weather stations is more. We cannot increase our manned stations because there is a limitation of manpower and that is why automatic weather stations are installed at close proximity," he said. The observations are taken at every three hours at

the manned weather stations, but the automatic weather stations can be programmed to do it every minute. "We will be observing minute-to-minute variations in weather patterns once the automatic stations are installed," Ranalkar said. The number of automatic rain gauge stations will be more because the rainfall variation has been much more as compared to the other weather parameters. "Wind, pressure are slow variants and won't change at every 5-10 kilometres but temperature and rain are continuous variants. Rainfall variation has been too high," he said, adding they would be able to forecast the weather of each ward.



NOTICE

I AMIT CHAUDHARY S/O ASHOK CHAUDHARY R/O Nathupur Bhulanpur Pac Varanasi Uttar Pradesh-221108 have changed my name to AMIT SINGH.

NOTICE

Myself Richa Dwivedi wife of Shri Vishwanath Dubey, address C-48, sector - A mahanagar Lucknow, my name in few documents is written Richa Dubey is wrong, correct name is Richa Dwivedi and I want that this name should be in future.

NOTICE

I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM SALAM BEGUM TO SALMA BEGUM. IN FUTURE I SHALL BE KNOWN AS SALMA BEGUM. SALMA BEGUM W/O MUNNA, 14/1, CIVIL LINES, GWALTOLI, KANPUR.

NOTICE

Original registry of my house having number 83/328B Juhi Kanpur Nagar have been lost.Any person using it for any purpose will be illegal.Tarun Makker,Gautam makker, Dhruv Makker 10/504 Khalasi Line, Kanpur Nagar Mobile number 9415129126



Security personnel stand guard outside Teele Wali Masjid in Lucknow in view of Friday prayers

Pioneer

Oppn attacks govt over Mukhtar's death

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The opposition parties on Friday trained guns on the Uttar Pradesh government over the death of gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari in judicial custody and demanded a high-level inquiry under a sitting judge of the Supreme Court or the High Court. Outraged over the death of the gangster-turned-politician, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, said that a government that "cannot protect life has no right to remain in power". From its official X handle, the SP posted, "Sad demise of former MLA Shri Mukhtar Ansari. May his soul rest in peace. May the bereaved family members get the strength to bear this immense sorrow. Humble tribute!" In a series of posts on X, former chief minister of UP, Akhilesh Yadav, said, "It is the first responsibility and duty of the government to protect someone's life in every situation and at every place. The death of a hostage or prisoner... will erode public confidence in the judicial process." "All such doubtful cases should be investigated under the supervision of a Supreme Court judge. The way the government bypasses the judicial process and adopts other methods is completely illegal," his post added.

*Uttar Pradesh is going through the worst phase of

'government anarchy'. This is 'zero hour' of law and order in UP," he added. SP leader Ameenque Jamai said, "We stand with the family of Mukhtar Ansari. Recently he said that he could be murdered anytime; why was he not given a proper medical facility... We will demand a thorough investigation of the incident." "Condemnable and regrettable," BSP supremo Mayawati posted from her X handle, "The persistent apprehensions and serious allegations made by Mukhtar Ansari's family regarding his death in jail require a high-level investigation so that the facts of his death can be revealed. In such a situation, it is natural for his family to be sad. May nature give them the strength to bear this sorrow." Akash Anand, nephew of Mayawati, also expressed his shock over the death of Mukhtar Ansari. He posted on social media that the law and order situation in UP is very bad. Murder in police custody, murder in court, murder in hospital and now the suspicious death of Mukhtar Ansari raises serious questions on the working style of the administration, he added. Congress leader Surendra Rajput said in Lucknow, "How accused Mukhtar Ansari died in jail raises serious questions on the BJP government of Uttar Pradesh... There should be a high-level investigation



into this incident and this investigation should be conducted under the supervision of a High Court judge." Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav posted, "Sad news was received about the demise of former UP MLA Shri Mukhtar Ansari. We pray to God to grant peace to the departed soul and strength to the bereaved family to bear the loss. A few days ago he had complained that he had been poisoned in jail, yet it was not taken seriously. Prima facie this does not seem justifiable and humane. Constitutional institutions should take suo motu cognisance of such strange cases and incidents." All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimin (AIMIM) leader

Asaduddin Owaisi posted from his X handle, "I pray to Allah to forgive Mukhtar Ansari and give patience to his family and his loved ones. The people of Ghazipur lost their favourite son and brother. Mukhtar Saheb had made serious allegations against the administration that he was poisoned. Despite this, the government did not pay any attention to his treatment." Similar allegations regarding the alleged poisoning have been made by the family of the dead gangster Mukhtar Ansari. His son Umar Ansari said, "I was not told anything from the administration side, I came to know about it through the media. But now the whole nation knows everything. Two days ago I came to meet him, but I was not allowed. We said earlier also and even today we will say the same about the allegation of giving slow poison. On 19th March, he was poisoned at dinner. We will move to the judiciary, we have full faith in it." The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) has demanded a judicial inquiry into the death of former MLA Mukhtar Ansari in Banda. CPI (ML) state secretary Sudhakar Yadav said in a statement that Mukhtar Ansari's death could also be murder hence a judicial inquiry was necessary to bring out the truth and to clear the cloud of suspicion.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) state unit said in a statement on Friday that the death of former MLA Mukhtar Ansari, imprisoned on various charges in Banda jail, had put the government and the administration in the dock. It termed the incident as tragic and demanded a high-level impartial investigation. Meanwhile, Bharatiya Janata Party leader Sidharth Nath Singh reacted on Mukhtar Ansari's death saying, "Mukhtar Ansari was a criminal; his post-mortem is underway and reports are yet to be out, despite that the way, political party, especially leaders of SP, Congress and BSP, are jumping now, shows how much pain they have for a criminal. Serious allegations have been made against Mukhtar Ansari and even the court sentenced him to life imprisonment but still their pain towards him indicates how they (SP, Congress and BSP) backed the protection of 'mafia raj'." Gangster Mukhtar Ansari was shifted to Banda Medical College Hospital after he complained of pain in the abdomen. As per the hospital, Ansari was admitted to the ICU after the hospitalisation. However, as his condition deteriorated, he was shifted to CCU. The hospital said that a team of nine doctors were attending him. However, he died during treatment after suffering a heart attack.

Yogi asks people to cast their votes judiciously



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressing intellectuals at JVS Resort in Bijnor on Friday

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday exhorted people to cast their votes in the Lok Sabha elections judiciously. Voting for the right candidates gives a new direction to the country and builds 'aastha' (faith) but spreads anarchy if wrong candidates are voted to power, the chief minister said while addressing a 'Prabuddhajan Sammelan' (meeting of the intellectuals) in Bijnor. Chief Minister Yogi emphasised the significance of intellectuals in urban communities, likening their roles to that of ancient sages who lead society in different areas. He underscored that these enlightened individuals ranging from doctors to businessmen, lawyers, teachers and environmentalists, serve as opinion leaders, offering guidance and leadership to the community. The chief minister interacted with intellectuals at JVS Resort in Bijnor. During this, he appealed to the people to vote for Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Lok Dal joint candidate Chandan Chauhan from the Bijnor Lok Sabha constituency and BJP candidate Om Kumar from the Nagina seat. "This is the land of Mahatma Vidur, so I want the blessings of 'prabuddhjan' to be bestowed upon both our candidates," he added. Chief Minister Yogi pointed out that the public trusts the words of this enlightened class, who lead in different areas of life. He further equated their role to that of ancient sages, recognising their profound impact on

shaping societal values and progress. The chief minister said that people used to say that one should not stay overnight in Bijnor, but he stayed here and also interacted with enlightened people. He mentioned that during his stay, he came to know that Bijnor district has a lot of potential. It is not just a place but is also the identity of India, he added. He mentioned that this is the land of Mahatma Vidur, who comes from the tradition of those sages who showed the courage to speak the truth even in the era of the Mahabharata. "Our public representatives here demanded a medical college for this place, which was immediately accepted, paving the way for a medical college in the name of Mahatma Vidur," Yogi added. The chief minister said that there was a lack of enthusiasm among the enlightened people. "We engage in big discussions, but become lazy when it comes to actual voting. This time, we must vote first ourselves and then encourage others to vote. We need to recognise the value of each of our votes," he said. "Your one wrong vote spreads lawlessness, puts the safety of daughters and businessmen at risk, and fosters terrorism and separatism. But with your right vote, faith and heritage are respected, and young people get means of livelihood," he added. Highlighting the importance of one right vote, the chief minister mentioned that the country develops rapidly and security enhances. He further said that with one right vote, Article 370 was abolished in Kashmir,

and 'Ek pradhan, ek nishan aur ek vidhan' had been implemented. After 500 years of waiting, Lord Ram is now seated in his magnificent temple, he added. Reflecting on the tenures of various political parties, including Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Congress, Chief Minister Yogi asserted that the most impactful period has been under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. He underscored Modi's commitment to ensuring the dignity and respect of every citizen, without discrimination, which extends to guaranteeing security and prosperity for all. Chief Minister Yogi said that for some people their family was important, but for Modi Ji, the entire country was his family. "The country is the same, the state is the same, only the government has changed," he added. He further remarked on the transformative changes in Uttar Pradesh under the current administration, with the absence of curfews and riots, ensuring safety for daughters and businessmen, and peaceful celebrations of festivals. "Festivals are being celebrated peacefully. The whole country is eager to come to Ayodhya and Kashi. The business of traders is flourishing. This is the message that we need to spread in society," he added. The chief minister said that if any politician recognised the true essence of India, it was Chaudhary Charan Singh, who said that the path to India's progress goes through the fields and farms of the country. He expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Modi for honouring Chaudhary Saheb with Bharat Ratna.

BJP unveils campaign for Lok Sabha polls in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With Uttar Pradesh gearing up for the Lok Sabha elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party has unveiled an innovative campaign plan designed to address the unique needs and requirements of each of the state's 80 constituencies. "UP BJP has meticulously drafted campaign plans for all 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. This strategy entails the deployment of prominent leaders from both the central and state levels to spearhead the electoral drive," announced BJP media in-charge Manish Dixit on Friday. The comprehensive strategy entails the organisation of three to four rallies per day across various constituencies. Additionally, the party has made arrangements for over a dozen chartered planes and

helicopters to streamline travel logistics for its star campaigners. Given the prolonged electoral process spanning approximately two months, the BJP has devised an assertive campaign strategy for every constituency. Helicopters and chartered planes will be at the disposal of prominent leaders enlisted as star campaigners, both at the central and state levels. As per the plan, arrangements have been made to provide aircraft for the chief minister, deputy chief ministers, BJP state president, and other senior leaders to reach rally or meeting venues. Sources reveal that following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inaugural rally in Meerut on March 31, a comprehensive schedule of rallies and meetings of senior leaders

will be finalised. Rallies of BJP president JP Nadda, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah, and other central leaders are slated to be announced soon, Dixit said and added that simultaneously, schedules for state ministers and leaders will also be outlined. To facilitate seamless transportation of star campaigners to event venues, an aviation team has been established at the party state headquarters, overseen by MLA and party's state organisation secretary Govind Shukla. The team will liaise with the campaigners and manage their transportation to and from rally venues. Nadda is expected to address over 12 public meetings in UP as part of the plan, although an official announcement regarding this is yet to be issued.

Rajeshwar: Karma leaves vindictive people broke, alone

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Sarojini Nagar MLA Dr Rajeshwar Singh reacted to the death of gangster Mukhtar Ansari in Banda, saying it was the result of his karma. Rajeshwar Singh pointed out that there was a natural law of karma that vindictive people who deviate from the right path to hurt others eventually become broken and alone. Referring to the criminal history of Mukhtar Ansari, Rajeshwar Singh said that a total of 61 cases were registered against the gangster-turned politician out of which 18 were of murder and 10 of attempt to murder. Mukhtar had been convicted in eight cases and was in jail for 10 years for the murder of former MLA Krishnanand Rai. He got life imprisonment in the fake document for licence case. The entire Purnvanchal was shaken by the kidnapping and murder of coal businessman Nand

Kishore Rungta. While in jail, eight cases were registered against Mukhtar for criminal conspiracy and extortion. His fear was so much that for the last one and a half years he was ready to take charge of Banda jail. He was running his empire from jail itself, the MLA added. Dr Singh said that these cases registered against Mukhtar showed what a dreaded gangster he was. "He murdered, maimed and terrorised many innocent people. Karma sets its own time. Therefore one should always be cautious of wrongdoings. Karma is unforgiving and always results in consequences," the MLA from Sarojini Nagar said.



Broadcast, publication of survey, exit poll banned till election ends

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Election Commission of India has said the ban on publication and broadcast of poll surveys and exit polls will remain in force till the end of the election process. The Lok Sabha elections are being held in seven phases and the last phase of polling will be held on June 1. Uttar Pradesh's Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said here on Friday that the ban on broadcast of the exit poll will remain in force till half hour after the end of polling across the country. He said violation of the direc-

tion of the poll panel would attract imprisonment for two years and fine or both. The CEO said the ECI was keeping close watch on fake news and paid news for ensuring free and fair elections. He said the ECI had formulated standard operating procedure (SOP) for the identification of the paid and fake news. He said intense monitoring of political advertisements, paid news and its reporting was being done by the ECI through the media certification and monitoring committees (MCMCs). He said all advertisements by the political parties could be published only

after the approval by the MCMC. The monitoring of the paid news by the ECI starts from the day of filing of nomination papers by the candidates of various political parties and independents. Navdeep Rinwa advised the Lok Sabha election candidates to take prior approval of the MCMC before inserting advertisements on cable TV, FM radio channel, cinema halls and social media sites. He said the advertisements carrying reference to caste and religion which hurt the sentiments of a community were prohibited.

Bus conductor, driver thrash passenger, held

Lucknow (PNS): A routine journey turned into a nightmare for Kuldeep Kumar of Sidhauri, Sitapur, as a dispute over seating arrangements on a UP Roadways bus escalated into a violent altercation, leaving him with severe injuries and financial loss. The incident occurred on Thursday on bus number UP34-79813 en route to Biswan in Sitapur from the Kaiserbagh bus station in Lucknow. Kumar recounted the harrowing experience, stating that the conflict arose when the conductor instructed him to vacate his seat. Upon questioning, Kumar was asked to disembark, sparking a verbal confrontation that quickly turned violent. According to Kumar, the situation deteriorated rapidly as the driver and his associates assaulted him, resulting in the loss of a portion of his left hand's little finger and part of his ear. Additionally, Kumar reported the theft of his gold chain and Rs 19,600 in cash during the attack. Despite sustaining injuries, Kumar managed to escape from the bus, saving himself from further harm. Law enforcement personnel swiftly intervened leading to the arrest of bus driver Sharan Mishra and conductor Mohammed Riyaz by Wazirganj Station House Officer Dinesh Mishra. The Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (UPSRTC) has taken note of the incident and issued a notice to the accused personnel, emphasising the gravity of the situation and the necessity for stringent action.

Vishakha Committee restructured

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a notable effort to curb exploitation and sexual harassment of female government employees at workplace, the Complaint Committee (Vishakha Committee) within the Uttar Pradesh Secretariat has been restructured as Internal Complaint Committee/Complaint Committee. Earlier, only the employees of the secretariat service were included in the scope of this committee. However, under the revised structure, the entire secretariat is considered a single unit, encompassing all officers and employees except those belonging to the IAS cadre. Principal Secretary (AYUSH and Stamp and Registration) Leena Johri has been appointed chairperson of the commit-

tee. This decision is expected to enhance the safety and security of women employed in the secretariat while also boosting their self-confidence. The Complaint Committee was constituted by the secretariat administration on February 4, 2021, with the aim of addressing instances of sexual harassment against women at workplace. Initially, its jurisdiction was confined solely to secretariat service personnel. However, the scope has now been expanded to encompass all officers and employees from various service cadres stationed in the secretariat, excluding IAS officers. This extension includes members from the Secretariat Service Cadre, Provincial Public Service, and Indian Forest Service. As per the office memorandum issued by the Secretariat administration,

Leena Johri, who serves as the Principal Secretary, AYUSH and Stamp and Registration Department, will assume the role of chairperson of the committee. Additionally, the convening member of the committee will be special secretary/joint secretary of the secretariat administration. Simultaneously, Special Secretary (Information) Jai Prakash Bharti has been named a member of the committee. Furthermore, the Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives (ALI) has been included in the committee as a non-governmental organisation (NGO). ALI is recognised as a feminist legal advocacy and resource group dedicated to women's causes. In 1997, during a case hearing, the Supreme Court had introduced guidelines aimed at preventing sexual harassment at the

workplace, commonly referred to as the Vishakha Guidelines. The apex court directed that these guidelines should be followed as law as per the Indian Constitution. Later, these guidelines became the basis of a de facto law called the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. In accordance with a government directive issued by the Uttar Pradesh Women and Child Development Department in 2014, the secretariat administration established a Complaint Committee on February 4, 2021, to address the issue of sexual harassment faced by women at workplace. At that time, Anita C Meshram was appointed as the chairperson of the committee. Subsequently, in 2022, Aparna U assumed the role of chairperson of the committee.

Young lovers end lives

Lucknow (PNS): Upset with the opposition by their family members to their affair, two young lovers of village Jaimai under Sirsaganj police station of Firozabad committed suicide by fitting in front of a speeding train. When their bodies were spotted early Friday morning, the villagers alerted the local police. According to reports, 22-year-old Gaurav Yadav of Jaimai village under Sirsaganj police station had completed his BSc and was preparing for police recruitment examination. Gaurav was in love with a girl named Shivani who lived in front of his house. Both wanted to get married, but their family members were not ready for their marriage. When the girl's family came to know about her relationship with Gaurav, they imposed restrictions on her movements. Besides, to get rid of Gaurav, Shivani's family found a boy for her and started preparations for the marriage.

Ayodhya gearing up for Ram Navami

PNS ■ AYODHYA

Following the consecration of Ram Lalla, fervent arrangements are underway in the temple of his birthplace for the upcoming celebration of Ram Navami. Acting upon the directives of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, both the chief secretary and the DGP are personally overseeing the meticulous preparations for the event scheduled on April 17 in Ayodhya. The government is diligently finalising arrangements for the anticipated large influx of devotees converging on Ayodhya, particularly for sacred baths in the holy river Saryu. Due to multiple instances of drowning in the Saryu while bathing, the authorities have implemented extensive measures for Ram Navami. Six more fiber motor boats will be deployed in the river Saryu to enhance safety and

security measures as part of these efforts. Thousands of devotees are expected to converge on Ayodhya from across the nation for pilgrimage, prayers and ceremonial baths in the holy Saryu during Chaitra Shukla Navami, also known as Ram Navami. This marks the first Ram Navami following the consecration of Ram Lalla in his new temple. With such a significant event, Ayodhya is bracing for potentially massive crowds. As numerous individuals seek spiritual rejuvenation through participation, stringent security measures have been implemented to mitigate potential risks. The fleet of fiber motor boats patrolling the river has been bolstered in light of this. Four boats were deployed initially during the Pran Pratishtha ceremony on January 22 this year, and now, in anticipation of increased footfall, an additional six fiber motor boats have been enlisted.



Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag Thakur speaks during a Viksit Bharat ambassador programme, in Lucknow on Friday

Man, woman commit suicide

Lucknow (PNS): A man and a woman in their twenties killed themselves by jumping before the Sadbhavna Express train in Bareilly, police said on Friday. Suraj (22) and Chhaya (20) jumped before the train on Thursday night. Bareilly's Superintendent of Police (Dehat) Mukesh Chandra Mishra said that according to the villagers, both were having an affair and used to talk to each other on the phone. On Thursday also, they talked on the phone before they left home without informing anyone in their family. Suraj was soon to get married and the prospect that the two would no longer be together once that happened drove them to jump before a train near the Revati railway station, Mishra said.

Goods worth lakhs stolen from shop

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Goods worth lakhs of rupees were stolen from a shop in Maharajpur police station area late on Thursday night. The miscreants committed the theft by breaking its wall. The police have started a probe in the matter. The miscreants stole goods worth around ₹4 lakh from the e-vehicles shop of Satyendra Sahu of Karbigwa in Sarsaul on Thursday night. On Friday when he opened the shop, he found a side wall broken and its bricks scattered. The bicycle

and other goods were also found missing. He informed the police which rushed to the spot along with the forensic team and carried out a probe. The forensic team got some solid clues from the spot. Station House Officer (SHO) Surendra Singh said investigation is on in the matter and claimed that the case will be worked out soon.

WOMAN RAPED: An 80-year old woman was allegedly raped by a 22-year old youth on Thursday night. DCP (West) Vijay Dhul said the accused

after consuming liquor with friends, raped the octogenarian living alone opposite his house. When she raised an alarm, he escaped. The police rushed to the spot and arrested the accused after a few hours of the incident. On the complaint of the victim, the police have lodged a report against the accused in this connection. The DCP (West) said the accused will be produced in the court and sent to jail on Friday.

In another incident the undertrial who had escaped

from police custody on Thursday was arrested from Babaghat, Civil Lines, on Friday. The police recovered a countrymade pistol and live cartridge from his possession. After producing him in the court, he was sent to jail. DCP (East) Shrawan Kumar Singh has awarded cash prize of ₹25,000 to the police team for arresting the absconding accused within 24 hours. He said the gangster Sonu Singh had escaped from police custody on Thursday prior to being produced in the Gangsters Court.

Dr Singh: Most prevalent UTIs predominantly affect women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) represent a widespread yet distressing condition impacting millions globally annually. Women, in particular, bear a significant burden, with over half encountering at least one UTI throughout their lives. Although UTIs are generally manageable, their tendency to recur underscores the importance of implementing reliable preventive strategies.

“The most prevalent UTIs predominantly affect women and target the bladder and urethra. Bladder infections, commonly triggered by Escherichia coli (E. coli), a bacterium commonly inhabiting the gastrointestinal tract, are the most frequent. However, alternative bacteria may also incite such infections. While sexual activity may elevate the risk of bladder infections, it’s important to note that all women are susceptible due to anatomical factors. The proximity of the urethra to the anus facilitates the ingress of bacteria from the surrounding area into the urethra and subsequently, the bladder”, said Dr Mansi Singh, Consultant (Nephrology), Regency Renal Sciences, Kanpur. She said to prevent urinary tract infections ensuring proper hydration, consuming six to eight-ounce glasses of water daily is essential.

MoU to advance hardware security technology

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

An MoU to advance Hardware Security Technology was signed between C-HERD and JISA Softech (JISA), an Indian Deep-Tech startup in collaboration with Prof Debapriya Basu Roy, Department of Computer Science & Engineering, IIT Kanpur. The signing of an MoU highlights a shared commitment to advancing the nation’s capabilities in hardware security technology and marks a significant step forward in India’s journey towards self-sufficiency in security chip development. JISA will be the first Indian company to build a complete HSM (Hardware Security Module) technology stack from bare metal to application, supporting both existing and post-quantum cryptographic capabilities.

Highlighting the impor-

tance of the partnership, Prof Debapriya Basu Roy said, “The collaboration with JISA will ensure that Indian technology stands at the forefront of global innovation in safeguarding data and privacy with advanced solutions. This partnership demonstrates our commitment to creating innovative Made in India data protection solutions. The partnership will develop advanced HSM technology for a more secure digital future and a strong cybersecurity framework for India.”

Hardware Security Modules (HSMs) are essential components that play a critical role in securely storing and managing cryptographic keys and sensitive data. They are specifically designed to safeguard digital keys, perform complex cryptographic operations and create formidable barriers against unauthorised access or manipulation of stored information.

Isha Oswal, CEO at JISA Softech, said, “Our mission is to empower India with Make in India data protection and data privacy solutions. Our advanced HSMs promise not only to enhance digital trust but also to raise the bar for data protection and privacy standards, thus ensuring a safer and more secure digital ecosystem.” By developing advanced HSMs with support for Post Quantum Cryptographic Algorithms, JISA Softech is aiming to enhance India’s technological infrastructure and strengthen the nation’s data security capabilities, preparing for the challenges posed by a post-quantum world. These HSMs, which can run on FPGA or proprietary ASIC platforms over RISC-V (RISC-V is an open standard instruction set architecture based on established reduced instruction set computer principles) or ARM architectures (It is a con-

tract between the hardware and the software, defining how they interact with one another), promise to future-proof our digital infrastructure while simultaneously raising the standards in digital trust, data protection and privacy.

Prof Debapriya Basu Roy, an Assistant Professor in Department of Computer Science and Engineering at IIT Kanpur, is a leading researcher in Hardware Security in India. His expertise includes FPGA-based hardware accelerators for cryptographic algorithms used in HSMs. He focuses on post-quantum cryptography, homomorphic encryption, side channel analysis, FPGA security, machine learning security and efficient HLS (High-Level Synthesis) designs. He is responsible for developing accelerators for multiple cryptographic algorithms integrated into the HSM.

KVT registers record increase in income

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

One of the Dwadasa Jyotirlingas, Kashi Vishwanath Temple (KVT) has registered a record increase of approximately 191 per cent in its income in the financial year 2022-23 in comparison to previous year — 2021-22 as during the last two years (in 2022 and 2023), around 13 crore devotees offered prayers at this famous temple. The record rise in number of visitors and income was mainly seen since the inauguration of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham (corridor) by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 13, 2021.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust Vishwa Bhushan Mishra said that in the financial year 2022-23, the highest offering has been made so far in the KVT which also includes many valuable items. According to him, this amount is more than ₹58.51 crore as there was an increase of about 191 per cent in the income of this financial year as compared to the last financial year. Apart from the divine and grandeur of the temple premises, the connectivity of this holy city with the whole world has improved and now it has become very easy to reach Kashi from every corner of the world.

The chief executive officer said 12,84,57,314 devotees have visited in the last two years, including 7,11,47,210 in 2022 and 5,73,10,104 in 2023.

Due to the development of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor and good connectivity of Varanasi with the country and the world, the number of tourists here is continuously increasing. There was a record increase in visitors since the inauguration apart from rise in the number of visiting tourists in Kashi and other business groups.



Christian devotees taking part in a religious procession on the occasion of Good Friday at St Joseph’s Cathedral Church in Prayagraj on Friday.

PTI

Study reveals genetic history of Ahom in Assam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Ahom dynasty, also known as Tai-Ahom, which migrated to India from Thailand in the 12th century (800 years ago), has long been a historical interest. They established a dynasty that ruled in present-day Assam for nearly 600 years, from AD 1228 to AD 1826. However, until now, no genetic study has explored their admixture with the local Indian population.

A recent study published in the reputed Human Molecular Genetics journal, co-led by BHU Professor Gyaneshwer Chaube and BSIP Senior Scientist Dr Niraj Rai, revealed the genetic history of the Ahom population in Assam. This team comprised researchers from Ancient DNA Lab, Birbal Sahni Institute of



Palaeosciences, Lucknow, India, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India, Mangalore University, Mangalore, Deccan College, Pune and Archaeological Survey of India. They genotyped 612,240 autosomal markers among the modern Ahom population residing in seven sister states of India.

“Our study revealed that

the Ahom dynasty mixed and assimilated with various trans-Himalayan populations inhabiting this region after their migration,” said Dr Sachin Kumar, the first author of the study. The high-resolution haplotype-based analysis has linked these Ahom individuals mainly with the Kusunda, a language isolated from Nepal and Khasi, an Austroasiatic population of Meghalaya, said Dr Niraj Rai the head of ancient DNA lab at BSIP, Lucknow.

The study also revealed that the Ahom population has significantly deviated from their ancestral homeland (Thailand) and assimilated with the local South Asian population. The Northeastern region of India has been a gateway for modern humans’ dispersal throughout Asia, and this study adds to the growing

body of genetic evidence supporting this idea.

The research team hopes that this study will contribute to a better understanding of the genetic history of India and the Northeast region in particular. The findings of this study could also have implications for the broader field of human population genetics and migration studies.

This study is a significant step forward in understanding the genetic admixture and assimilation of the Ahom dynasty in India. It highlights the importance of studying genetic history of populations to better understand their migration patterns and assimilation into their new environments, said Gyaneshwer Chaube, a professor and population geneticist at Banaras Hindu University.

Passengers being made aware to use separate dustbins

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

On the direction of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) and Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer (SDME), Environment and Housekeeping Management Department (EnHM), two coloured PVC (Poly Vinyl Chloride) dustbins (green for wet or organic wastes and blue for dry or inorganic wastes) of standard size have been installed at cent per cent food stalls and Jan Aahar Kendras located at all the 11 stations of Varanasi division of North Eastern Railway (NER). These were installed at a total of 123 stalls.

According to the SDME (EnHM), with the installation of these PVC dustbins, there will be a lot of improvement in cleanliness at food stalls and Jan Aahar Kendras and by installing dustbins with covers, there will be no flies on food stalls. This will be very beneficial from the point of view of health and hygiene as well as cleanliness of the stations. This will also help in maintaining

the quality of cleaning. These dustbins have installed at the food stalls and Jan Aahar Kendras at the stations of Varanasi division at Banaras, Varanasi City, Prayagraj Rambagh, Azamgarh, Mau, Ghazipur City, Ballia, Bhatni, Deoria Sadar, Siwan and Chapra with the efforts of department.

The EnHM has already installed dustbins of three colours (green for wet or organic wastes, blue for dry or inorganic wastes and yellow for hazardous wastes like electronic, glass/ mirror, paint etc) at different places in the station premises. The SDME (EnHM) said the passengers are constantly being made aware through banners/posters and announcements to put wet, dry and hazardous wastes in the designated dustbins. Along with this, stickers have been pasted on the respective dustbins for the information of the passengers. Besides, cleanliness is being strictly monitored and fines are also being imposed by health inspectors for spreading filth in the station premises, he added.

Centenary celebrations of Central Railway Hospital conclude

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The centenary celebrations of the Central Railway Hospital, Prayagraj, concluded with a grand colourful cultural evening at Gunjan DSA Ground on Thursday.

The programme was formally inaugurated by General Manager Ravinder Goyal by lighting the lamp. On the occasion the general manager congratulated everyone and said that it is a proud moment for the North Central Railway (NCR). He expressed happiness that the Centenary Medi Sangam 2024 was organised by the Medical department.

On the occasion Principal Chief Medical Director (PCMD) Dr JP Rawat elaborated on the achievements of the Medical department of the North Central Railway, the facilities available in Railway Hospital, Prayagraj, and the awareness campaign conducted throughout the month. He said during the month-long programmes around 10,000 people participated and bene-



fited from health awareness activities, baby shows, blood donation camps etc.

In the programme the welcome address was delivered by Medical Director Dr Sanjeev Kumar Handoo in which detailed information was given about the history of Railway Hospital, the facilities available and its achievements.

The series of cultural presentations organised in the

programme included Ganesh Vandana, Rajasthani Ghoomar group dance, Bihu dance of Assam by the team of Purnima, group dance “Jai Ho,” Sufi group dance, a presentation giving information about CPR by St John Ambulance Brigade, Prayagraj, a group song by the medical and paramedical staff of Railway Hospital besides the Holi dance by Ayushi.

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Branch Address : Dhiraj Baug, Building "A" Ground & 1st Floor, Beside Axis Bank, Opp. Monalisa Building, Aggra Road, Hari Niwas Circle, Naupada, Thane (West) - 400 602.			
DEMAND NOTICE			
Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited (PCHFL) under Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act). In exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with the notice hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to PCHFL, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to PCHFL by the said Borrower(s) respectively.			
Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date	Property address	
(LC No. M0239388 of Meerut Branch) Aslam (Borrower) Mohd Faraz (Co Borrower 1) Sarno (Co Borrower 2)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1531852 /- (₹ Fifteen lakh Thirty One Thousand Eight Hundred Fifty Three Only) NPA (04-02-2024)	HOUSE NO 581, Mohalla Ahsan Nagar Taluka Hapur Dist. Hapur GRAM ASODA Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh, India 245101	
(LC No. M0258257 of Meerut Branch) Manoj Kumar (Borrower) Babita Devi (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 2166341.82 /- (₹ Twenty one lakh Sixty Six Thousand Three Hundred Forty One Only and Eighty Two Paise) NPA (04-02-2024)	HOUSE NO 755 G Khasra No 611/612 Ekt Nagar Revenue Village Rohanpur Dorli Pargana Daurala Tehsil Sardhana Distt. Meerut Uttar Pradesh India 250001	
(LC No. HLSA000089C of Meerut Branch) Naman Chaudhary (Borrower) Sushma Singh (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1958396 /- (₹ Nineteen lakh Fifty Eight Thousand Three Hundred Ninety Six Only) NPA (04-02-2024)	Flat No. H-311 Supertech Green Village Near Petrol Pump Noor Nagar Nangla Sher Khan Urf Jain Pur Meerut Uttar Pradesh 250002	
(LC No. HLSA00008155 of Agra Branch) Mujammil (Borrower) Ilyas (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 2241238 /- (₹ Twenty two lakh Forty One Thousand Two Hundred Thirty Eight Only) NPA (04-02-2024)	Nagar Nigam No. 115 Gali No. 5 New Basti NR Jain Mandir TEHSIL AND DISTT FIROZABAD New Basti Firozabad Uttar Pradesh - 283203	
(LC No. M0077058 of Gorakhpur Branch) Arman Singh (Borrower) Savita Singh (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 3366839.66 /- (₹ Thirty three lakh Sixty Six Thousand Eight Hundred Thirty Nine Only and Sixty Six Paise) NPA (04-02-2024)	Arazi No 303 M Maui Jungle Nakhra No 1 Tappa Kasba Pargana Nawal Tehsil Sadar Near Sports College Distt Gorakhpur Uttar Pradesh 273004	
(LC No. M0111319 of Lucknow- Gomti Nagar Branch) Reeta Devi (Borrower) Sudhir Dikshit (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1078875 /- (₹ Ten lakh Seventy Eight Thousand Eight Hundred Seventy Five Only) NPA (04-02-2024)	Plot situated Nr National Inter College at Aladaadpur, Pargana Baadli, Tehsil Siddhaili, Distt Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh - 263101	
(LC No. M0107385 of Lucknow - MMM Marg Branch) Sheela M (Borrower) Praduman Yagra Sen (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1552948 /- (₹ Fifteen lakh Fifty Two Thousand Nine Hundred Forty Eight Only) NPA (04-02-2024)	A PLOT PART OF LAND OVER KHASRA NO 237 DA MES AREA 580 SQT SITUATED AT VILLAGE KALLI PASHCHIM PARGANA BINOUR TEHSIL SARONI NAGAR DISTRICT LUCKNOW UTTAR PRADESH - 226014	
(LC No. M0128292 of Noida Branch) Nabban (Borrower) Shabnam (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 125299.19 /- (₹ Eleven lakh Twenty Five Thousand Two Hundred Ninety Nine Only and Nineteen Paise) NPA (04-01-2024)	House No EWS-22/C-3rd Floor F-Block Madhuban Bapudham Colony Nr Power House Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 202002	
(LC No. M0150313 of Moradabad Branch) Ropes Kumar (Borrower) Savita urf Javiri (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1035710.4 /- (₹ Ten lakh Thirty Five Thousand Seven Hundred Ten Only and Forty Paise) NPA (04-02-2024)	ART OF GATA NO. 76/1, 79MIN., 89A & 91MIN., SURAJ NAGAR NR D.B.D. SCHOOL, DEHRAI AHATMALLI TEHSIL & DISTT. MORADABAD 244001	
(LC No. M0169389 of Meerut Branch) Shahvez Jabbar Khan (Borrower) Gulista (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1610070.82 /- (₹ Sixteen lakh Ten Thousand Seventy Only and Eighty Two Paise) NPA (04-02-2024)	No.20/2 B, Mohalla Rameela Tilla (Shabuddinpur) At Nagar Palika Tehsil & Distt. Muzaffarnagar Uttar Pradesh 251002	
(LC No. 1900000587 of Raj Nagar Branch) Praveen Kumar (Borrower) Sukpal Singh (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1144220 /- (₹ Eleven lakh Forty Four Thousand Two Hundred Twenty Only) NPA (09-01-2024)	Flat No- 703 A, 7th Floor Block- M, Delhi 99 Bhopura Tilla More Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201010	
(LC No. 2400000856 of Kanpur Branch) Manjesh Bajpai (Borrower) Baby Bajpai (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 407895 /- (₹ Four lakh Seven Thousand Eight Hundred Ninety Five Only) NPA (11-05-2023)	Private Plot No. 5, On Part Of Arazi No. 334, Mauja Sabari, Kanpur Kanpur Urban Uttar Pradesh - 208017	
(LC No. 25700001512 of Gorakhpur Branch) Ashok Kumar (Borrower) Sheela (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1221726 /- (₹ Twelve lakh Twenty One Thousand Seven Hundred Twenty Six Only) NPA (10-12-2023)	Plot Situated At Arazi No.403, Ward No.4 Mauza-Jungle Beni Madhav No.2, Tappa- Kasba, Pargana-Haveli, Sadar Gorakhpur Gorakhpur Uttar Pradesh - 273007	
(LC No. 26100000777 of Jhansi Branch) Rajveer Singh (Borrower) Rachnesh Devi (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 789057 /- (₹ Seven lakh Eighty Nine Thousand Fifty Seven Only) NPA (09-01-2024)	Arazi No 976 & 977 Mouza Gariva Gaon Near Pratham Kanya Govt School Gariva Gaon Jhansi Jhansi Uttar Pradesh - 284003	
(LC No. 28600001092 of Haridwar Branch) Parmod Kumar (Borrower) Meena Devi (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1045166 /- (₹ Ten lakh Forty Five Thousand One Hundred Sixty Six Only) NPA (08-06-2023)	Plot No. 383, Khasra No 33, milikana Wake Vill Chakherati Prg. Tehsil & Distt.-Sre Devar Nagar Colony Saharanpur Saharanpur Uttar Pradesh - 247001	
(LC No. 29100000014 of Bareilly Branch) Vinod Srivastava (Borrower) Manoj Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 2666680 /- (₹ Twenty six lakh Sixty Six Thousand Six Hundred Eighty Only) NPA (09-01-2024)	Part Of Khasra No. 1038 & 1039 Village Biharam Nagla Bareilly Bareilly Uttar Pradesh - 243001	
(LC No. 29300000066 of Moradabad Branch) Shobhit Shukla (Borrower) Kumkum Shukla (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 2337366.6 /- (₹ Twenty Three lakh Thirty Seven Thousand Three Hundred Sixty Six Only and Sixty Paise) NPA (08-01-2023)	Part Of Khasra No 454/1, Private Plot No 89, Poonam Vihar Shahapur Tigri, Moradabad Moradabad Uttar Pradesh - 244001	
(LC No. 196000041393 of Delhi- Safdourjung Branch) Abhishek Parashar (Borrower) Arvind Sharma (Co Borrower 1) Jai Shiv Gangra Steel Corporation (Co Borrower 2) Mahindra Sharma (Guarantor 1) Anil Sharma (Guarantor 2) Ravindra Sharma (Guarantor 3)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 360009 /- (₹ Three lakh Sixty Thousand Nine Only) NPA (09-12-2022)	Plot No Kb-97 Kavi Nagar Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201001	
(LC No. 06000000960 of Lucknow Branch) Anand Prakash Singh (Borrower) Ranjana Singh (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 2328576 /- (₹ Twenty three lakh Twenty Eight Thousand Five Hundred Seventy Six Only) NPA (10-12-2023)	Unit No 221, Type Of Villa D Eldeco City I I M Road Lucknow Lucknow Uttar Pradesh - 226001	
(LC No. HLSA00000CFA of Lucknow- MMM Marg Branch) Rohit Tripathi (Borrower) Yamini Tripathi (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 527380.7 /- (₹ Five lakh Twenty Seven Thousand Three Hundred Eighty Only and Seventy Paise) NPA (04-02-2024)	HOUSE BUILT ON PLOT OVER LAND AT MANAS NAGAR WARD-SARJOANAI NAGAR KRISHNA NAGAR ALI NAGAR SUNAHRU LUCKNOW UTTAR PRADESH - 226023	
(LC No. M0061515 of Lucknow - Gomti Nagar Branch) Rohit Tripathi (Borrower) Yamini Tripathi (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1916774 /- (₹ Nineteen lakh Sixteen Thousand Seven Hundred Seventy Four Only) NPA (04-02-2024)	HOUSE BUILT ON PLOT OVER LAND AT MANAS NAGAR WARD-SARJOANAI NAGAR KRISHNA NAGAR ALI NAGAR SUNAHRU LUCKNOW UTTAR PRADESH - 226023	
(LC No. 12000004193 of Varanasi Branch) Neelu Agarwal (Borrower) Gaurav Kumar Agarwala (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 1312005 /- (₹ Thirteen lakh Twelve Thousand Five Only) NPA (10-12-2023)	Flat No C - 3, 2nd Floor, Shree Shyam Kripa Apartment, Siddhagiri Nakhra Pargana - 221010	
(LC No. 12000004230 of Varanasi Branch) Neelu Agarwal (Borrower) Gaurav Kumar Agarwala (Co Borrower 1)	01-03-2024 / ₹ 779253 /- (₹ Seven lakh Seventy Nine Thousand Two Hundred Fifty Three Only) NPA (10-12-2023)	Flat No C - 3, 2nd Floor, Shree Shyam Kripa Apartment, Siddhagiri Nakhra Pargana - 221010	
If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to PCHFL as aforesaid, PCHFL shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of PCHFL. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.			
Date : 30-03-2024 Place: Uttar Pradesh		Sd/- (Authorised Officer) Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited	

44 per cent sitting LS MPs face criminal charges, says ADR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Out of the 514 sitting Members of Parliament in Lok Sabha, a staggering 44 per cent ie 225 have criminal cases against themselves with 29 per cent facing serious criminal cases, including allegations of murder, attempt to murder, promoting communal disharmony, kidnapping, and crimes against women, an analysis of self-sworn affidavits by the poll rights body Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) has found. Additionally, a noteworthy 5 per cent of these MPs are billionaires, with assets exceeding Rs 100 crore. The report further delves into the severity of these criminal cases, revealing that 29 per cent of elected representatives facing charges are embroiled in serious criminal allegations, including murder, attempted murder, promoting communal disharmony, kidnapping, and



crimes against women. Shockingly, nine sitting MPs face murder charges, with five belonging to the BJP. Moreover, 28 MPs have charges related to attempted murder, and 16 MPs face accusations of crimes against women, including three allegations of rape, as per the ADR. The report also sheds light on the financial aspects of these lawmakers. It has highlighted the disparity in wealth among these MPs, with some possess-

ing assets worth hundreds of crores while others have minimal assets. Among major parties, the BJP and the Congress have the highest number of billionaire MPs, though the analysis shows significant representation from other parties as well. Notably, the top three MPs with the highest declared assets are Nakul Nath (Congress), DK Suresh (Congress), and Kanumuru Raghu Rama Krishna Raju (Independent).

Regarding the distribution of criminal cases among states, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Himachal Pradesh stand out with more than 50 per cent of their MPs facing criminal charges. The analysis also sheds light on the educational background, age, and gender distribution among sitting MPs. As per the analysis by the organization, 73 per cent of MPs hold graduate or higher educational qualifications. However, political parties seem to be reluctant in giving tickets to the women as only 15 per cent are fair sex, indicating a significant gender disparity in parliamentary representation. Moreover, the distribution of criminal cases among states highlights Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Himachal Pradesh as areas with more than 50 per cent of their MPs facing criminal charges.

79,000 poll code violation complaints received through cVigil app: ECI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Friday said its C-Vigil mobile application has become an effective tool in the hands of people for flagging poll code violations and since the announcement of the Lok Sabha election, more than 79,000 complaints have been received. More than 99 per cent of the complaints have been resolved and close to 89 per cent of those were resolved within 100 minutes, the poll panel said. More than 58,500 complaints (73 per cent of the total number of complaints) received were against illegal hoardings and banners, the EC said, adding that over 1,400 complaints received pertained to money, gifts and liquor distribution. Close to 3 per cent of the complaints (2,454) were related to defacement of property. Of



the 535 complaints received for display of firearms and intimidation, 529 have been resolved, the poll panel said. A total of 1,000 complaints were for campaigning beyond the prohibited period, including those related to the use of

speakers beyond the permitted time. The EC pointed out that at the press conference to announce the Lok Sabha poll schedule, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar had urged citizens to be vigilant and use the app

to report Model Code of Conduct violations and distribution of any kind of inducements among voters. The seven-phase polls were announced on March 16 and voting will take place between April 19 and June 1.

BJP slams Opposition for criticising UP Government on Mukhtar death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday hit back at Opposition parties for criticising the Uttar Pradesh Government over the death of jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, saying they have the habit of emotionally exploiting every issue to vitiating communal harmony. While former Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi targeted Opposition parties, Alka Rai, a BJP leader and the wife of MLA Krishnanand Rai who was killed at the behest of Ansari, described his death as "divine justice". "I always had full faith in God," she said. Her son Piyush Rai rejected the suggestion from some opposition parties, including the state's main opposition Samajwadi Party, that there was a conspiracy behind Ansari's death. It is a wrong allegation levelled due to politics of appeasement, he said. "They (critics) are looking for religion in a criminal," he said. His mother said victims of Ansari's crime and their families will be happy at his end. Alka Rai had been elected to the Uttar Pradesh assembly



on the BJP ticket in the past. The BJP is yet to name its candidate for the Ghazipur Lok Sabha constituency which is currently represented by Ansari's brother Afzal Ansari. Naqvi, in his reaction, accused opposition parties of spreading "communal poison" despite the state administration's statement on his death. In a reference to the criminal past of Mukhtar Ansari, who had been an MLA for several terms, he said his history cannot be ignored. The region he came from used to be a citadel of the Left but turned into a hotbed of criminals, he said. Ansari, who was convicted in

several cases, died of cardiac arrest at a hospital in Banda in Uttar Pradesh on Thursday. He was brought to the Rani Durgavati Medical College in Banda from the district jail in "an unconscious state" and, according to its principal Suneel Kaushal, he died at the hospital following cardiac arrest. Samajwadi Party leader Shival Singh Yadav said the court should take cognisance of Ansari's death in "suspicious" circumstances. BSP supremo Mayawati said the allegations of Ansari's family regarding his death require a high-level probe to bring out the facts.

India holds wide ranging talks with Ukraine

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As Ukraine conflict continues, India and Ukraine on Friday here held "open and wide-ranging" talks as part of a bilateral engagement between its Foreign Ministers, with discussions focusing on the "ongoing conflict and its wider ramifications." Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba's two-day visit to India comes amid efforts to seek a peaceful resolution to the more than two-year-old Russia-Ukraine conflict. He arrived here on Thursday. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Kuleba at the Hyderabad House. After the meeting, Jaishankar in a post on X said, "An open and wide-ranging conversation with Ukraine FM @DmytroKuleba this afternoon". "Our discussions focused on the ongoing conflict and its wider ramifications. Exchanged views on various initiatives in that context. Spoke as well on global and regional issues of interest to both of us. Reiterated our commitment to strengthen the overall relationship, including bilateral cooperation," he said. Jaishankar also shared some photographs of



him shaking hands with his Ukrainian counterpart and the bilateral meeting. In his opening remarks at the meeting, Jaishankar welcomed Kuleba to India, and said he was glad to see that "some of our bilateral mechanisms have also met" which has created "a certain momentum in our bilateral relationship". "Welcome to India, to New Delhi. We have been looking forward to this visit, and I'm very glad that despite our - both of us have fairly heavy travel schedules, we have been able to match it and organise this meeting," he said. Jaishankar added that in recent months, "we've had actually interactions at various levels. I'm glad to see that some of our bilateral mechanisms have also

met. I think this has created a certain momentum in our bilateral relationship". "And today, after this discussion in the afternoon, we look forward also to the meeting of the Inter-Governmental Commission," he said. "Your visit gives us an opportunity, obviously, to understand the situation in your own region, and I look forward to hearing your perspectives on that. I think our teams have prepared a very substantial agenda of our discussions, and I would invite you to make your opening remarks," Jaishankar said. On Thursday, Kuleba had posted on X, "I began my visit to New Delhi upon @DrSJaishankar's invitation. The Ukrainian-Indian cooper-

ation is important and we will be reinvigorating ties. Building on the dialogue between @ZelenskyyUa and @NarendraModi, we will pay specific attention to the Peace Formula." During his weekly press briefing, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, in response to a query on Kuleba's visit, on Thursday said there will be a "bilateral engagement with the external affairs minister in which they will go over a gamut of issues that lie in the domain of bilateral relations". They will also "review the Inter-governmental Commission that was held earlier," he had said. The two leaders will also discuss regional and global issues of common concern, Jaiswal had said, adding that there are several other engagements also lined up for the Ukrainian foreign minister. "Our position is very clear on peace initiatives and how we look at the Ukraine-Russia conflict. We continue to encourage peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy and remain open to engaging all ways and means that would help achieve this objective," the MEA spokesperson had said on a query on India's position on the peace conference in

Switzerland. The peace formula proposed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in 2022 follows 10 principles aimed at ensuring a just and lasting peace in Ukraine. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 20 had held separate conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Zelenskyy and asserted that dialogue and diplomacy were the way forward for the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Modi had spoken to Putin over telephone to congratulate him for winning a fifth term in office in the recent elections, and followed it up with a phone call to Zelenskyy to convey India's "consistent support" for all efforts for peace and bringing an early end to the ongoing conflict. During the telephone conversation, the Ukrainian President had thanked India for its support for his country's sovereignty and said that it would be important for Kyiv to see New Delhi attend the inaugural Peace Summit in Switzerland. Zelenskyy had hailed India's continued humanitarian assistance for the people of Ukraine as the two leaders had discussed ways to further strengthen their bilateral partnership in various spheres.

Defence Secretary visits Coast Guard facilities in North West region

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane visited the Indian Coast Guard facilities in the North West Region on March 28-29 and inaugurated the infrastructure for the Hovercraft Maintenance Unit (HMU) at Okha, defence ministry said here on Friday. Giving details, officials said Coast Guard OTM and Married Accommodation at Inaz Village Veraval was inaugurated by Defence Secretary's wife Gayatri Aramane on Friday. The Defence Secretary was also briefed about the upcoming 200 mtr ICG Jetty Construction work at Okha. He appreciated the role played by ICG, in safeguarding national maritime interests in its area of responsibility. The hovercrafts are based at Okha and Jakhau for maintaining surveillance in 50 Islands in the Area of Responsibility (AoR), Gulf of Kutch, in the shallow water and marshy terrain along the coast of Gujarat. The field facility for HMU will enable timely technical support, upkeep maintenance of these hovercrafts which in turn will ensure optimum operational availability and keep them in ever ready state to meet any operational requirement. HMU facilities comprise of ACV parking for technical assistance, Office Building, Workshop and Maintenance Area. The Coast Guard Residential



Area (CGRA) at Inaz Village Veraval includes 60 Nos of Married Accommodations, an all-weather Helipad, living Accommodations for Subordinate Officers and Naviks, a Parade Ground, and a Mess. The presence of a helipad adds a strategic advantage to various operations in Veraval that includes addressing maritime emergencies, search & rescue missions, and surveillance activities. The ICG Regional Headquarters (North West) was established on December 16, 2009 at Gandhinagar. It executes ICG's mandated charter in maritime zones in Gujarat, Daman and Diu. The ICG is focused on the development of berthing and other infrastructure which underscores the commitment of equipping with facilities for operating advanced surface and air platforms. In addition to the recently inaugurated Jetty at Vadinar, ICG is also constructing 100 mtr jetty extension at Porbandar and 125 mtr jetty at Mundra in addition to the 200 mtr jetty at Okha.

Second edition of trilateral exercise concludes in Mozambique

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The second edition of India-Mozambique-Tanzania trilateral exercise (IMT-TRILAT) concluded at Nacala, Mozambique on Thursday, navy said here on Friday. The week-long exercise underscores the importance of enhanced maritime cooperation and interoperability between the Navies of India, Mozambique, and Tanzania. Giving details here, officials said Indian ships INS Tir and Sujata participated in IMT TRILAT 24 through a series of joint exercises, training sessions and collaborative activities, providing invaluable opportunities for all three Navies to exchange knowledge, enhance capabilities and bolster maritime security in the region. The IMT TRILAT 24 Exercise unfolded in two phases. The initial harbour phase from March 21 to 24 saw intensive training sessions concurrently held onboard INS Tir at Zanzibar and INS Sujata at Maputo. Activities included vital training on Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS), Damage Control and Firefighting Drills, communication procedures and medical lectures with CPR demonstration and casualty evacuation (CASEVAC). The sea phase commenced on March 24 wherein INS Tir and INS Sujata embarked sea riders from the Tanzanian and Mozambique Navies respectively. Joint operations with



Mozambique Naval ship Namatili and Tanzanian naval ship Fatundu showcased significant synergy and sustained efforts with the regional Navies in line with the vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region). The evolutions at sea involved simulated VBSS exercises and night manoeuvres. The sea riders were imparted training on bridge watch keeping, damage control and firefighting. The ships also undertook joint surveillance of EEZ off Tanzania and Mozambique in the area of operation. The closing ceremony, held onboard INS Tir and INS Sujata at Nacala, Mozambique featured representatives from all three navies. The closing remarks highlighted successful collaboration, understanding of maritime capabilities and shared

objectives achieved during the exercise. It emphasised continued collaboration towards maritime security and regional stability underlining India's commitment as the preferred security partner. In addition to IMT TRILAT, various official and training exchanges, cross deck visits, sport fixtures and Yoga were held as part of the long range training deployment of the ships. The ships were open to visitors at Zanzibar, Maputo and Nacala, wherein more than 1,500 people including school children, Indian diaspora and local populace visited the ship. Outreach activities were also conducted at Mizzizini orphanage center at Zanzibar and Obra Dom Orio Reception Centre at Maputo fostering bonds of friendship.

Modi promotes millets in interaction with Bill Gates

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst discussions spanning wide-ranging and serious topics such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), climate change, healthcare, and digital inclusion, Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his free-wheel conversation with philanthropist Bill Gates on Friday promoted his favourite cereal millets, also called as Shri Anna while giving tips on how to maintain well-being and inner peace in hectic times. Gates, Microsoft co-founder, had sought advice from him on how he manages to maintain high energy levels despite his demanding schedule. In response, the Prime Minister attributed his energy and sense of relaxation to a natural state of being. Despite working tirelessly, he said that he finds inner peace and calmness, which helps him navigate through hectic times. "I find my inner peace through a spiritual practice instilled in me by my teachers which energises me to a great strength. This energy does not stem from physical strength but my dedication and emotional connection to the mission at hand, focusing solely on it," Modi told Gates. "Additionally, my body has adapted to little rest. I sleep for less hours, work late into the night, yet wake up early, feeling refreshed. This resilience partly comes from a period spent in the Himalayas, where I followed the tradition of bathing in early morning hours which has conditioned my body over time," the Prime Minister explained.



"As a result, I don't need conventional methods to relax". When Gates asked Prime Minister Modi how millet is changing the way vegetarian food is looked at globally, he said that promoting millet can be a big way forward as switching to it can bring several health benefits. "Even within vegetarian options, some choices are harmful and switching to millet could bring significant benefits. I have seen a significant increase in millet production. Many reputable companies are now offering millet-based products, enhancing its value and making it both common and trendy. Even five-star hotels have introduced special millet menus. And it is improving the livelihoods of small farmers," said Modi. "Millet is a superfood. I celebrated 2023 as the Year of Millet with the UN. Millet has great benefits. It grows in barren land. It needs minimal water and does not require any fertiliser," the Prime Minister further explained. At this Gates shared his experience during his visit to Odisha where he was offered a millet. "When I went to

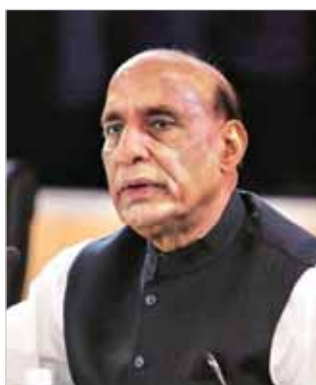
Odisha, I came to know that millet was a very popular food there a long time ago and now it is coming back in the market with the joint efforts of the government. They even took me to the shops where they offered me very nutritious foods and they tasted good to me," Gates added. In order to increase production and productivity of Shree Anna, the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (DA&FW) is implementing a Sub-Mission on Nutri-Cereals under National Food Security Mission (NFSM) in all districts of 28 States & 2 Union Territories viz. Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. The interventions such as formation of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) for Shree Anna, setting up Centers of Excellence (CoE) and seed hubs for Shree Anna have also been supported under NFSM. In addition, states such as Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh have initiated Millet Missions in the States to promote millets.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Responsive Govt

Rajnath defends Agnipath scheme but, ahead of polls, says it is not carved in stone

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, while defending the Agnipath scheme for recruitment of young defence personnel, has also expressed the Government's openness to alterations "if deemed necessary". The implications of the scheme stretch beyond national security, particularly concerning India's relations with its neighbour, Nepal. In June 2022, the Centre rolled out the Agnipath scheme for short-term induction of personnel into the armed forces to bring down the age profile of the three services. Under this scheme, all military recruitment transitions to an 'All India All Class' basis, wherein the selected youth, termed Agniveers, commit to four years of service, including a six-month training period. Following this tenure, 25 per cent of Agniveers transition to permanent service, while the remainder pursues alternative employment opportunities outside of the armed forces. Agniveers receive a starting monthly salary of Rs 30,000, escalating to Rs 40,000 in the fourth year, with a portion allocated to the Agniveer Corpus



Fund, matched by Government contributions, resulting in a substantial payout of Rs 11.71 lakh at the end of four years. Additionally, each Agniveer receives non-contributory life insurance cover of Rs 48 lakh for the duration of the engagement. However, there are no gratuity or pension benefits for Agniveers, with those opting for permanent service committed to a minimum additional 15-year tenure. The scheme aims to address military restructuring and modernisation needs while infusing technology-savvy youth into the armed forces. By selecting only 25 per cent of Agniveers for permanent service, the military seeks to ensure a high-quality pool for Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) while

curbing rising pay and pension expenses.

Despite the offered benefits, concerns have arisen regarding its potential impact on military ethos, professionalism and operational efficiency. Questions linger regarding the maintenance of unit cohesion, the readiness of inexperienced Agniveers for live operational scenarios and the long-term attractiveness of military service. Critics question the scheme's impact on the regimental system of the Indian Infantry and advocate for rigorous testing before full implementation. While some argue for gradual induction to mitigate adverse effects, others emphasise the need for empirical evaluation to safeguard military standards. Broadly speaking, the scheme has not gone down well with the aspiring youth. They feel that most of them would be left without a job in their prime. Moreover, the Gurkhas of Nepal have summarily rejected this scheme and are now looking for options in other countries. This seriously jeopardises India's defence muscle. It has been almost four years since the scheme was launched, and it is the first time the Government has shown its openness to make amendments. The Congress has already termed it an election gimmick. Whatever the reasons, it would be good if the Govt returns to the drawing board and reconsiders the various issues in national interest.



Christian devotees during a play on crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the occasion of Good Friday, in Hyderabad

PTI

India's green energy comes of age

India emerges as a frontrunner in the global shift towards green energy, with solar power leading the charge

Steadfast in its pursuit of becoming a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25, India continues to ascend to the position of a frontrunner in the global shift towards green energy. Solar power spearheads this transformative journey having contributed 53.2 per cent of the overall capacity addition to India's cumulative power generation capacity, which soared to 428.3 GW by the close of December 2023.

The solar industry statistics above do not just paint a bright picture; they aren't just a testament to its environmental stewardship, but rather one to its self-sufficiency and its contribution to the transformation of the global energy environment. What a remarkable journey this continues to be!

Of all RE sources, the versatility of solar energy renders it scalable and inclusive as a solution for implementing the green agenda. A plethora of other factors have, however, significantly contributed to charting India's path towards a shining energy-efficient future. The green pivot against the larger climate change battle and more par-



ticularly directed at plateauing power sector emissions has been driven by the synergy between Government initiatives, technological advancements, and increasing awareness of the benefits that accrue from RE, more particularly from the solar energy potential that India holds. When the goals were surpassed (the National Solar Mission that targeted 100 GW of solar power capacity by 2022), more ambitious targets (achieving 280 GW of solar capacity by 2030) were set. The goals were not just spelled out, but guided through a clear roadmap for RE integration via the declaration of trajectory for Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO) until 2029-30.

On one hand, utility projects were prioritised through

increased tendering and the implementation of the "Development of Solar Parks and Ultra Mega Solar Power Projects Scheme" which accorded approval to 50 solar parks across 12 states. On the other hand, decentralised generation was not left behind- the Rooftop Solar Programme launched in 2014 that aimed to install 40 GW by 2022 was extended to 2026 and has now been complemented by The Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana. To democratise solar energy access, such decentralised sustainable energy solutions are being actively recognised as complementary means to achieving India's green energy goals. From one of the largest importers to now one of those witnessing the highest dip in solar-related imports from China, India is well on its trajectory of breaking given India's compelling solar potential and the aforementioned factors. However, tackling challenges that crop up in its energy goals' implementation shall be rendered easy with the adoption of a holistic approach involving collaboration across diverse stakeholders, objectives, policies, and solutions.

(The author is an investment professional and specialises in green financing; views are personal)



HIMANI SABHARWAL

converging in the market including the emergence of credit-worthy commercial and industrial customers as demand drivers for RE, enhanced financial incentives, tax benefits and subsidies. Standards have been established for the manufacturing of solar PV systems and inputs, India is strategically aligning itself with global efforts to attain the SDGs, and very deftly so by nudging investments to their right use and their right IRRs. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of up to 100 per cent has been allowed through the automatic route, encouraging international investment. The solar sector remains at the forefront given India's compelling solar potential and the aforementioned factors. However, tackling challenges that crop up in its energy goals' implementation shall be rendered easy with the adoption of a holistic approach involving collaboration across diverse stakeholders, objectives, policies, and solutions.

(The author is an investment professional and specialises in green financing; views are personal)

India's inflation story through time

From the humble beginnings of the *pai* to the modern era of the rupee, the narrative of inflation paints a vivid picture of economic transformation



PRAFULL GORADIA

One way of knowing about inflation in India is to place a series of old coins on a table, and compare those coins with today's currency. Today, few would believe that well into the twentieth century, there was a *pai* which was 1/92nd of a rupee. 16 annas made a rupee; one anna was divided into four *pice*; one *pice* comprised three *pais*. One could, for example, buy puffed rice, gram or chana or peanuts for one *pice*. When that became impossible, the Government stopped minting the coin. The *pice* or three *pais* together continued to be minted until well after World War II. Today, a rupee is about the least required to buy anything; effectively ten rupees are required to acquire anything worthwhile, no matter how poor the buyer is. As a child of ten years, I ate my first chocobar made by a British company called Magnolias, delivered at one's doorstep by a dry ice-filled cart at 25 *paise*. Today, its minimum price is Rs.10, which makes inflation look benign, 40 times between say and 2024, i.e., 77 years.

The price of the cheapest variety of rice against a Government-issued ration card in 1945 was three annas per seer or say nineteen *paise* per 800 grams. Today in 2024, similar rice would cost say forty rupees per kilogramme, or 1,000 grammes, say twenty-five rupees per seer or 132 times. Food grains have become much more expensive than ice-cream! Tea, which was at the first point of wholesale, was two rupees for the equivalent of one kilogramme, which is Rs. 150 today or 75 times higher. Commenting on inflation, a small shopkeeper or a hawk, would say no matter the inflation, we people are much better off than our parents and grandparents. Inflation in the Western as well as other centuries is actually much higher than in India. This phenomenon does not show up because the exchange rates are adverse to the Indian rupee. The British pound is about Rs. 100 when exchanged, but its purchasing power in Britain is not



much better than Rs. 10. This is primarily because India imports more than exports. The message is eloquent; must times our economy to be able to export more even if the payment is in rupees as well as in the importers currency which is viable.

There seems to be a systematic policy by Government to meet its purpose of meeting the economy's money supply needs. Some more money has been provided for moderate growth so the path of prosperity and growth is steady. This is like a corporate house increasing its profit every year and an unemployed welcoming an increment annually.

To put it another way, the money or currency supply is increased moderately every year to enable the economy to grow and not shrink. The national or central bank of every country should manage its money. Another way of looking of inflation is creating money in advance of production is order to expand the economy.

It is like a loan without having to pay interest by the country's economy. But with it, the duty of the central bank to watch the production of

“THE PRINTING MONEY IS JUSTIFIED, BUT IF THERE ARE DELAYS IN EXPANDING THE FACILITIES FOR THE PRODUCTION OF GOODS AND SERVICES, INFLATION WOULD TAKE PLACE. THIS MEANS THAT PRICES WOULD GROW AND PEOPLE WOULD BEGIN TO DEMAND AN INCREASE IN THEIR INCOME”

goods and service is increased commensurately, with the extra money printed every year. It is like an interest-free loan strictly in order for the economy to be able to invest in the productivity of goods and services. This must be done efficiently, and in reasonable time.

The printing money is justified, but if there are delays in expanding the facilities for production of goods and services, inflation would take place. This means that prices would grow and people would begin to demand increase in their income. Since increasing taxation would bring further hardship on people's pocket, the Government would have no alternative but to print more money in order to satisfy people's legitimate demands.

This privilege of Governments of printing money at their discretion, is a luxury, but has cost quite a few countries, making them go virtually bankrupt. What else can one expect of an economy that is hit by inflation of say 80 per cent, year after year? Zimbabwe eventually grew tired of printing money, after doing it wantonly for a long time. It gave up the chase and declared the US

dollar to be the only legal tender in the country.

Pakistan at present is in the grip of an inflationary spiral. Even a much better organised country like Sri Lanka nearly went to the brink of being trapped in this spiral. Many others haven't fared any better; a large country like Turkey is in the grip of such a spiral. Not many years ago, Brazil found itself in a situation of having to reduce the value of its currency almost every morning. Hotels in Rio de Janeiro would quote their room rents in US dollars for the day, pasting the same on the room doors.

Contrast this financial jugglery with what William Pitt the Younger, who was Prime Minister of Britain at the turn of the 18th into the 19th century, did. He intended to make his tax collection exceed the national expenditure year after year, for a long enough time, so that Britain could be governed without raising taxes and the nation could run solely on the interest generated on treasury surpluses over the years.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EMPOWERING THE ELECTORATE

Madam — Apropos news article "One vote can change country's fate: UP CM Adityanath," published on March 28, this is my response. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasised the transformative power of a single vote during a conference organised by the BJP in Muzaffarnagar. Adityanath's remarks underscored the pivotal role citizens play in shaping the nation's destiny. He highlighted instances where one vote influenced the region's trajectory, emphasising the need for responsible voting to combat anarchy and safeguard faith.

Furthermore, Adityanath juxtaposed the BJP's commitment to national welfare against the opposition's alleged focus on familial interests. He credited the BJP-led Government for achievements such as the construction of the Ram temple and the cessation of extortion, contrasting it with the previous administrations' failures. Adityanath's call to prioritise the nation's interests resonates in a political landscape often clouded by divisive agendas. His message reinforces the significance of informed and conscientious voting for a brighter collective future.

Sneha Gupta | Delhi

BREAKTHROUGH IN BLAST CASE

Madam — Apropos news article "NIA arrests key conspirator in Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Cafe blast case," published on March 28, this is my response. The arrest of Muzammil Shareef marks a significant stride in the investigation into the Rameshwaram Cafe blast case. The coordinated effort by the NIA across multiple states underscores the gravity of the situation. Shareef's alleged involvement in providing logistical support to the main accused sheds light on the intricate web of this nefarious plot. The blast's aftermath, causing injuries and property damage, underscores the threat posed by such incidents. The ongoing raids and seizures of dig-

Political fallout of Kejriwal's arrest



Apropos Editorial "Truth travels freely," published on March 29, this is my response. The arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has not only stirred domestic uproar but has also garnered international attention. Kejriwal alleges political conspiracy behind his arrest, linking it to his anti-corruption stance and the ruling party's electoral bond donations. His wife's hint at crucial re-

lations adds intrigue to the unfolding drama. Amid accusations of being the mastermind of a multi-crore liquor scam, Kejriwal's arrest has ignited debates on political vendetta versus accountability. The international community's scrutiny, particularly the US State Department's remarks on India's internal affairs, underscores the global interest in this case.

However, the essence of justice lies in due process. While authorities assert a strong case, the lack of transparency raises concerns. Hastily orchestrated actions risk backlash, especially with elections looming. This saga underscores the perpetual struggle for transparency and justice in governance. Regardless of political affiliations, the public demands accountability. As events unfold, the nation awaits the resolution of Kejriwal's legal battle, cognizant of its broader implications on democracy and governance.

Khirabdi | Noida

ital devices signify a comprehensive approach to unravelling the truth. However, the fact that key suspects remain at large indicates the challenges ahead. As a concerned citizen, one hopes for swift justice and a thorough uncovering of the broader conspiracy. Such incidents remind us of the constant vigilance required to safeguard our communities against extremist threats.

Lavanya Dubey | Jind

WOMEN BREAKING THE STEREOTYPE

Madam — Beauty should not have any bars of religion or orthodox mentality, today women are no longer subjects of particular control and limits. Saudi Arabia's made a breakthrough while announcing their first Miss Universe Pageant. So far, Saudi Arabia has been caught in a gender divide debate, as their women are not been granted liberty and equal status like what they mentioned. But now Ms Romy Alqahtani will become the representative face of mil-

lions of Saudi women who are not only equivalent and capable like their male counterparts but also among the best. Her representation had been a historic moment as she is the face whose front run was made possible with the struggle of the struggle of thousands such women.

The era belongs to the women-led development and with Ms Romy Alqahtani's breakthrough from a society mostly targeted at the gender-divided country, hope that more such women representation like her will write new stories, and initiate more women's growth stories. Middle East in particular is facing a renaissance for women's participation and women's success, let's congratulate the women of the 21st century for breaking the stereotype and writing their success stories.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

HAPPINESS IS TO LIVE IN THE NOW

The kingdom of happiness is embedded in our thought processes, feelings and emotions




RAVI VALLURI

The country was Japan. It was the Meiji era. A professor was keen to learn the teachings of Zen philosophy. He approached an estimable master. The master offered him a cup of tea and poured it into a cup. The tea was filled up to the brim. However, the Zen master kept pouring in tea. Soon, the tea began overflowing. The professor requested the Zen Master not to pour any more tea into the cup. The friar replied that the professor would be able to learn the pristine tenets of Zen only if he cast away all the self-opinionated beliefs, thoughts and emotions like the overflowing cup of tea.

Past baggage and impressions need to be dissolved and a seeker needs to truly become hollow and empty to acquire knowledge, or else we remain shipwrecked our entire lives and stranded at a particular spot. If not, there is no progression in life.

To be genuinely happy and joyous, the human mind needs to live in the present and not oscillate between the past and the future. The past is full of regrets and unfulfilled desires and the future is gripped by anxieties and fears. True enlightenment is attained to remain only in the present moment. Happiness is a good habit. It increases our self-confidence and aura. William James, an American psychologist, once said, 'The greatest discovery was the power of the subconscious mind touched by faith.' Faith is the intellectual powerhouse that provides us with the supreme confidence to be in the present and become successful without being attached to the success.

'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things', PHIL 4:8.



Continuously dwelling on fear, worry, anger, hate and failure, makes an individual depressed and unhappy. Life is the projection of our thoughts. We are essentially what we think and a manifestation of our thoughts. We miss precious moments of happiness by harbouring antipathetic and demonic thoughts in our minds.

We are subsumed by negative emotions and thought processes. Febrile thoughts such as 'the world has conspired against me', 'I do not get the right breaks', 'I do not succeed', and 'everything goes wrong in my life' normally cannonade our minds. Such negativity drains us both physically and emotionally. Negativity, as a result, begets negativity.

The human mind also has an errant habit of postponing happiness. Often, we hear statements like - 'If I was made head of the organisation', 'if I featured on page 3 of the magazine', 'if I was married to a beautiful princess, then I would live like a king'. We end up daydreaming and living in an illusory world. Humans just need to live in the now. We all have clearly forgotten the power of NOW.

Apart from living in the Present Moment, humans need to make positive affirmations - 'I choose happiness today, I choose love today, I choose right action today and this can be done only now'. By being regretful, we do not count our blessings. It is paramount that we humans feel blessed, grateful, humble and blessed constantly. These imprints and footnotes should be etched deeply in the amphitheatre of our mind. The kingdom of happiness and true joy is embedded in our thought processes, feelings and emotions. We need to handle it with skill and dexterity and not be judgmental. The universe resonates with the positive vibrations in our minds.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Bridging the skill gap in labour-intensive industries



DINESH SOOD

As the spectre of automation looms large, proactive measures are imperative to equip the workforce with the requisite expertise



Amidst rapidly evolving technologies to stay globally competitive, the labour-intensive manufacturing sector has a significant opportunity to address the complex issue of unemployment in the country. The manufacturing sector has the potential to accommodate seven to eight million youths entering the labour force annually, as per the 'India Employment Report 2024', recently released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute for Human Development (IHD).

The report reveals that India's youth account for almost 83 per cent of the unemployed workforce and the share of youngsters with secondary or higher education in the total unemployed youth has almost doubled from 35.2 per cent in 2000 to 65.7 per cent in 2022. The unemployment rate among youths was six times higher for those with secondary or higher education (18.4 per cent) and nine times higher for graduates (29.1 per cent) compared to those who cannot read and write (3.4 per cent). The brimming challenge of unemployment is majorly due to the skill gap towards the adoption of evolving technologies. The ILO and IHD report warned of the growing uncertainties in the labour market due to rapidly changing technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), which will significantly impact the labour market.

AI presents a significant opportunity to enhance labour productivity and increase the incomes of workers. However, it also cautioned that disadvantaged states are less prepared for this, and active policies and programmes need to be formulated and implemented to skill youths.

A report by Nasscom-Zinnov says that India will face a shortage of 14-19 lakh tech professionals by 2026. As compared to the current tech workforce in the country, India needs 52 lakh tech professionals. By 2026, India is estimated to have 75-78 lakh tech professionals. However, the requirement is being



ENCOURAGING COLLABORATIONS AMONG GOVERNMENTS, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND INDUSTRIES IS CRUCIAL FOR DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING TARGETED TRAINING PROGRAMMES THAT DIRECTLY ADDRESS SKILL GAPS IN SPECIFIC SECTORS

pegged at 93-96 lakh techies, reflecting a gap of 14-19 lakh tech workforce. The skills gap is not solely due to the digital transformation of the industry; it is creating more job opportunities in operations. To bridge this gap, companies must diversify and expand their workforce to include workers with expertise in robotics, the Internet of Things (IoT), AI and analytics. Job openings for roles such as Robot Teaming Coordinators, Smart Factory Managers, Digital Twin Engineers, and Smart Quality Assurance (SQA) Managers are increasingly common. Companies must embrace these changes and take proactive measures to address the skills gap to stay competitive in the market.

Out of the 468 million people in the workforce, 92 per cent are in the informal sector. Shockingly, only 31 per cent are literate, with 13 per cent having only primary education and 6 per cent being college graduates. Moreover, only about 2 per cent of the workforce has formal vocational training, and just 9 per cent have non-formal vocational training. There is a need to increase the proportion of formally skilled labour from 5.4 per cent to at least 15 per cent of India's workforce by 2022-23. However, this goal has not yet been achieved, and it is crucial to re-evaluate our strategies to address this gap.

Given these discouraging realities addressing the challenges requires collaboration among stakeholders, including Governments, educational institutions, industries, and individuals to create a skilled and efficient workforce ecosystem. It is not enough to simply have degrees; we must prioritise inclusivity and eliminate divisions based on gender, location, and organised or unorganised work.

This requires a comprehensive approach. We must bring our skill development infrastructure up to global standards by creating National Occupation Standards (NOS) and Qualification Packs (QP) that meet international requirements for various job roles. It is imperative to act with urgency and determination to achieve these goals for globally competitive smart manufacturing.

Revisit the skill gap: The labour force from agriculture predominantly shifted to the construction and services sectors, highlighting a clear mismatch between job creation and the skill sets of the workforce. The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) should collaborate with industries to identify skill gaps. Establishing a District-level Skill Development Plan (DSDP) to create a state-level Skill Development Plan (SSDP) is crucial. The central and state Governments must share the financial burden of unskilled workers with employers for the first six months. Addressing the gap between the demand and supply of skilled workers through on-the-job training (OJT) is essential. Fostering a culture of continuous learning and upskilling within workforces is essential for maintaining competitiveness. Employers should provide access to training programmes and resources to enhance individual skill sets and foster adaptability and innovation within the organisation.

Public-private partnerships: Encouraging collaborations among Governments, educational institutions and industries is crucial for designing and implementing targeted training programmes that directly address

skill gaps in specific sectors. This collaborative approach ensures alignment between educational curricula and industry needs, promoting effective skill development and enhancing workforce readiness for the evolving demands of various sectors. Creating apprenticeship and mentorship programmes is integral, enabling experienced professionals to transfer their invaluable knowledge and skills to the next generation. These initiatives not only bridge the skills gap but also foster a culture of experiential learning and continuous improvement within the workforce.

Supportive Government policies that offer tax incentives to companies investing in employee training play a core role in progressive workforce development. These mechanisms encourage the private sector to prioritise continuous skill building, creating a resilient and adaptable workforce.

In conclusion, it is crucial to have proactive collaboration among stakeholders, make strategic investments in education and training, foster a culture of continuous learning, and promote diversity and inclusion. These factors are all essential in addressing the evolving challenges of the labour-intensive manufacturing sector. Ignoring any of these aspects would hinder our ability to build a strong and sustainable workforce for the future.

-The writer is a Co-Founder and MD, of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation(NSDC), Network Member, of India International Skill Centres, an initiative of GoI. Views expressed are personal.

India's Green Energy Revolution takes a leap forward

The launch of Open Access Rules 2022 heralds a significant turning point for India's renewable energy sector

The launch of the Electricity (Promoting Renewable Energy Through Green Energy Open Access) Rules, 2022, widely known as the Green Energy Open Access Rules (GOAR) 2022, marks a pivotal moment for the renewable energy sector in India. These regulations, designed to boost the generation, purchase, and consumption of green energy, are a cornerstone in the advancement of India's ambitious Renewable Energy programmes. Exploring the Key Features of the Green Energy Open Access Rules 2022

Central to GOAR 2022 is the establishment of a uniform Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO) across all entities within a distribution



KAVIRAJ SINGH

licensee's area. This requirement aims to ensure a collective push towards renewable energy procurement, thus forwarding India's green energy targets. Importantly, GOAR 2022 expands the scope of RPO to include Green Hydrogen and Green Ammonia, highlighting the Government's dedication to enhancing the renewable energy mix. One of the rule's primary ini-

tiatives is granting Green Open Access to all consumers, thereby facilitating unbiased access to electrical transmission and distribution systems for consumers, generators, and state distribution companies (DISCOMs). This initiative is instrumental in promoting the adoption of green energy across diverse sectors. Another remarkable feature of GOAR 2022 is the reduction of the Open Access transaction threshold from 1 MW to 100 kW for green energy consumers, making renewable power more accessible to a broader audience. Furthermore, under GOAR 2022, consumers have the right to request Green Power from their DISCOMs, which are then required to procure and supply such green energy,

ensuring the availability of affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy. The process for obtaining Green Open Access has been simplified, with a stipulated approval timeline of 15 days, thereby minimizing bureaucratic delays and fostering easier access to renewable energy. The rules also encourage Commercial and Industrial consumers to voluntarily purchase green power, supporting businesses in achieving their sustainability goals while potentially benefiting from cost reductions associated with renewable energy consumption. The Significance of Green Energy Open Access Rules 2022

The enactment of GOAR 2022 is a crucial step towards India's

transition to renewable energy and its broader climate change mitigation efforts. It encourages a shift among smaller industries, commercial consumers, and large households towards green energy, promoting the diversification of India's energy portfolio away from fossil fuels. Aligning with India's renewable energy targets, GOAR 2022 significantly contributes to the national goal of installing 250 GW of renewable capacity by March 2028 and 500 GW by 2030. These rules underline India's commitment to its renewable energy ambitions and climate objectives. Moreover, GOAR 2022's promotion of green energy is in harmony with India's commitment to reducing emissions by

45 per cent by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2070. This initiative is vital for mitigating climate change impacts and reducing carbon emissions. The renewable energy sector stands to gain from economic growth, job creation, and investment opportunities stimulated by the implementation of GOAR 2022. This progress is anticipated to drive innovation, technology development, and infrastructure investment within the sector. Lastly, diversifying the energy mix through the promotion of renewable sources under GOAR 2022 enhances India's energy security by reducing its dependence on imported fossil fuels. This strategic move strengthens India's energy indepen-

dence and shields it from global energy market fluctuations. Potential Advantages of Implementing Green Energy Open Access

The introduction of the Green Energy Open Access Rules 2022 offers numerous benefits, supporting India's climate commitments and facilitating a transition towards sustainable energy sources. By promoting the adoption of renewable energy, these rules contribute to reducing dependence on fossil fuels and lowering carbon emissions. Access to competitive green power pricing under GOAR 2022 could lead to cost savings for consumers over time, making renewable energy an economically attractive option. Moreover, by expanding access to clean energy, espe-

cially in regions with limited grid connectivity, these rules promote energy equity and inclusivity, improving energy access for remote and underserved communities. Furthermore, the shift towards renewable energy adoption encouraged by GOAR 2022 helps mitigate environmental impacts, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, and reliance on non-renewable resources. By fostering the generation, purchase, and consumption of green energy, Open Access Rules play a crucial role in achieving India's renewable energy targets, climate goals, and sustainable development objectives.

(The writer is founder of Earthood; views are personal)

Obama, Clinton help Biden raise record \$26 mn for his re-election

AP ■ NEW YORK

Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and some big names from the entertainment world teamed up Thursday night to deliver a rousing New York embrace of President Joe Biden that hauled in a record-setting USD 26 million-plus for his reelection campaign.

The mood at Radio City Music Hall was electric as Obama praised Biden's willingness to look for common ground and said, "That's the kind of president I want." Clinton said simply of the choices facing voters in 2024: "Stay with what works." Biden himself went straight at Donald Trump, saying his expected GOP rival's ideas were "a little old and out of shape."

Moderator Stephen Colbert, in an armchair conversation with the trio, called them "champion talkers" and joked that the three presidents had come to town "and not one of them is here to appear in court," a dig at Trump's many legal troubles.

The eye-popping fundraising haul was a major show of Democratic support for Biden at a time of persistently low poll numbers. "The president will test the power of his campaign cash as he faces off with Trump, who proved with his 2016 win over Democrat Hillary Clinton that he didn't need to raise the

most money to seize the presidency.

During the nearly hourlong conversation, Obama and Clinton explained just how hard Biden's job is. They spoke of loneliness and frustration over policies that work but aren't immediately felt by the public. They gave an insider's view of the office as they sought to explain why Biden was best for the job. "It is a lonely seat," said Obama, who had hitched a ride to New York on Air Force One with Biden.

The talk was by turns humorous and serious, ending with all three donning sunglasses in the mostly dark music hall, a nod to the trademark Ray-Ban sunglasses that Biden often wears.

The sold-out Radio City Music Hall event was a gilded exclamation mark on a recent burst of campaign travel by Biden, who has visited several political battlegrounds in the three weeks since his State of the Union address served as a rallying cry for his reelection bid. Thursday's event also brought together more than three decades of Democratic leadership.

The music hall's marquee advertised the big-dollar night as "An Evening with Joe Biden Barack Obama Bill Clinton." NYPD officers lined surrounding streets as part of a heavy security presence.



President Joe Biden, center, and former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton participate in a fundraising event with Stephen Colbert at Radio City Music Hall, Thursday in New York.

AP/PTI

Protesters angry at Biden's handling of the war in Gaza and strong support of Israel briefly disrupted the show, drawing a pledge from Biden to keep working to stop civilian deaths, particularly of children. But he added, "Israel's existence is at stake." Hundreds more protested outside in the drizzling rain, many demanding a cease-fire

and waving Palestinian flags.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., was up first to warm up the crowd of about 5,000 supporters. Entertainers, too, lined up to make the case for Biden. Lizzo belted out her hit "About Damn Time" and emcee Mindy Kaling joked that it was nice to be in a room with "so many rich people," adding that

she loved that they were supporting a president who openly promises to "raise your taxes." Obama laid out the choice for the audience, saying that "at the end of the day, you do have to make a choice about who sees you and cares about you. I'm pretty confident the other guy doesn't."

At one point, Colbert said he

suspected some Americans had forgotten some of the more concerning aspects of Trump's presidency, including January 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump supporters violently stormed the US Capitol in a failed effort to overturn the 2020 presidential election results.

Biden said concerns over the riot reverberated outside the US, with foreign leaders questioning the stability of the US democracy. That democracy is still fragile, he said.

The fundraiser had different tiers of access depending on a donor's generosity. Other participating celebrities included Queen Latifah, Ben Platt, Cynthia Erivo and Lea Michele. Tickets sold for as low as USD 225.

More money got donors more intimate time with the presidents. A photo with all three was USD 100,000. A donation of USD 250,000 earned donors access to one reception, and USD 500,000 got them into an even more exclusive gathering.

First lady Jill Biden and DJ D-Nice hosted an afterparty at the music hall with 500 guests, the campaign said. Obama and Clinton were helping Biden expand his already significant cash advantage over Trump.

Biden had USD 155 million in cash on hand through the end of February, compared with

USD 37 million for Trump and his Save America political action committee.

The more than USD 26 million tally for the New York City event includes money from supporters who handed over cash in the weeks before the fundraiser for a chance to attend. It raised USD 6 million more than Trump raised during February. "This historic raise is a show of strong enthusiasm for President Biden and Vice President Harris and a testament to the unprecedented fundraising machine we've built," said campaign co-chair Jeffrey Katzenberg. "Unlike our opponent, every dollar we're raising is going to reach the voters who will decide this election — communicating the president's historic record, his vision for the future and laying plain the stakes of this election."

Trump's campaign is expecting to bring in USD 33 million at a big fundraiser next week in Palm Beach, Florida, according to a person familiar with the details who spoke on condition of anonymity to confirm a number first reported by the Financial Times.

Trump has kept a low profile in recent weeks, partially because of courtroom appearances for various legal cases, the bills for which he's paying with funds from donors. His next political rallies are scheduled for Tuesday

in Michigan and Wisconsin.

Some Republican leaders have become concerned that his campaign doesn't have the infrastructure ready for a general election battle with Biden.

Trump was in the New York area on Thursday, attending the Long Island wake of a New York City police officer who was shot and killed during a traffic stop in Queens.

Republican Party Chairman Michael Whatley tried to framed the two candidates' whereabouts on Thursday as a demonstration of a "contrast in leadership." "On the same day President Trump attended the wake of slain New York Police Department officer Jonathan Diller, Joe Biden wines and dines with celebrities at a fundraiser with Barack Obama and Bill Clinton," he said in a statement.

The facts, said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, show that violent crime rose during Trump's tenure while Biden's administration has "done the polar opposite, taking decisive action from the very beginning to fund the police and achieving a historic reduction in crime."

The setting was an unusual opportunity for the two past presidents to talk frankly about how they did the job, helping explain Biden and his presidency.

Burned bodies of Easter pilgrims remain in crashed S African bus

AP ■ MMATLAKALA

Emergency workers in South Africa were searching Friday for the bodies of victims after a bus carrying pilgrims to an Easter gathering plunged off a bridge and caught fire. An 8-year-old child was the only survivor of the crash that killed at least 45.

Hours after the Thursday afternoon crash, smoke seeped from the mangled, burned wreck underneath the concrete bridge. Authorities said it appeared that the driver lost control and the bus ploughed into the barriers along the side of the bridge and then over the edge. The driver was among the dead. The crash happened in a mountainous region near the town of Mokopane, which is about 200 kilometres (125 miles) north of the South African capital, Pretoria.

The Limpopo provincial government said the bus, which was carrying pilgrims from Botswana, veered off the Mmamatlakala bridge and



The wreckage of a bus lies in a ravine a day after it plunged off a bridge on the Mmamatlakala mountain pass between Mokopane and Marken, around 300km (190 miles) north of Johannesburg, South Africa on Friday.

AP/PTI

plunged 50 metres (164 feet) into a ravine.

It said many bodies were burned beyond recognition and trapped inside the vehicle, while other victims had been thrown from the bus. "We were at the scene," said local

resident Simone Mayema, who said he was one of the first to arrive. "We tried to help (but) there was nothing we could do because there was flames."

Forensic investigators worked through the wreckage early Friday, but while some

bodies had been recovered, others were believed to be still inside what was left of the bus, which was almost crushed flat.

There was no new information on the status of the child who somehow survived the horrific crash. Officials at the hospital where the child was taken declined to give an update.

Government officials were expected to hold a press conference later Friday. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said the victims appeared to be all from Botswana and had been on their way to the town of Moria in Limpopo for a popular Easter weekend pilgrimage that attracts hundreds of thousands of worshippers from South Africa and neighbouring countries who follow the Zion Christian Church.

Ramaphosa had phoned Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi to offer his condolences and said the South African government would do all it can to help, according to

UK's Labour Party uses Holi message to connect with Indian diaspora

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK's Opposition Labour Party used Holi to reach out to the Indian diaspora, with party leader Keir Starmer tapping into the spring festival's message of ushering in the new in an election year.

During an event organised by British-Indian think-tank 1928 Institute in London this week, Starmer was joined by London Mayor Sadiq Khan and members of his Shadow Cabinet to celebrate the festival of colours.

Leader of the Opposition Starmer said the occasion offered the ideal opportunity for the party to highlight its message of "national renewal" as the country prepares for a general election, expected later this year.

"As we welcome the incoming spring, it's a time to celebrate new beginnings; to put the old to bed and welcome in the new. And, I have to say, in election year, that message has a real particular resonance with me," said Starmer, whose Labour

Party is leading in most pre-election opinion polls.

"It's a time for us to give thanks for the rich contribution of Hindus across this country, to the tapestry of our national life and recognise the strength of our shared values and our commitment to one another... the enduring themes of Holi of inclusiveness and hard work, of renewal, of reform, of celebration and compassion, are so important in a world where frankly there is such great uncertainty at the moment. It gives us not just joy together but hope for the future; hope that good prevails over evil, that light overcomes darkness," he said.

Wes Streeting, Starmer's shadow secretary of state for health and social care, echoed the message of renewal as he reached out to the British-Indian diaspora electorate, highlighting the India-UK collaboration in the health sector.

"I'm incredibly proud of the immense contribution that people of Indian heritage have

made to our National Health Service (NHS)," he said.

"As we look to the future, just as we celebrate so much of its past, we know that the contribution of our British-Indian community will be vital in the future of the NHS," he said.

The Holi celebration attracted diaspora representatives from diverse fields, including medicine, business and the arts.

Dr Nikita Ved, co-chair of the 1928 Institute, said, "Our research shows that more than half of British-Indians face barriers in accessing physical health care, with 76 per cent facing barriers in accessing mental health care. Many people here are healthcare professionals, inspired by 'sewa' (service), and choose to work in underserved communities to help address these inequities, which is truly inspiring."

She further said, "Whilst the journey hasn't always been easy, we are reminded of the legacy between the Indian community and our treasured healthcare system."

Israeli airstrikes near Aleppo inflict casualties

Beirut (AP): The Syrian army says Israeli airstrikes early Friday near the northern city of Aleppo have killed and wounded several people and caused material damage.

Syrian state media quoted an unnamed military official as saying that the Israeli strikes coincided with drone attacks by Syrian insurgent groups on civilians targets in Aleppo and its suburbs. It did not give an exact numbers for the casualties.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said Israeli strikes hit missile depots for Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group in Aleppo's southern suburb of Jibreen near the Aleppo International Airport. It added that dozens of soldiers were killed or wounded in the strikes.

The Observatory said explosions were still heard two hours after the strikes. There was no immediate statement from Israeli officials on the strikes.

Israeli frequently launches strikes on Iran-linked targets in Syria but rarely acknowledges them.

Cranes arrive to remove bridge wreckage

Baltimore (AP) The largest crane on the Eastern Seaboard was being transported to Baltimore so crews on Friday can begin removing the wreckage of a collapsed highway bridge that has halted a search for four workers still missing days after the disaster and blocked the city's vital port from operating.

As the sun rose Friday, a crane could be seen at the site. Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said the large crane, which was to arrive by barge and can lift up to 1,000 tons, will be one of at least two used to clear the channel of the twisted metal and concrete remains of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, and the cargo ship that hit it this week.

"The best minds in the world" are working on the plans for removal, Moore said. The US Army Corps of Engineers for the Baltimore District told the governor that it and the Navy were mobilizing major resources from around the country at record speed to clear the channel.

"This is not just about Maryland," Moore said. "This is about the nation's economy. The port handles more cars and more farm equipment than any other port in America."

He warned of a long road to recovery but said he was grateful to the Biden administration for approving \$60 million in immediate aid. President Joe Biden has said the federal government will pay the full cost of rebuilding the bridge.

"This work is not going to take hours. This work is not going to take days. This work is not going to take weeks," Moore said.

"We have a very long road ahead of us."

Thirty-two members of the Army Corps of Engineers were surveying the scene of the collapse and 38 Navy contractors were working on the salvage operation, officials said Thursday.

Jacob Zuma barred from running in elections

Johannesburg (AP) Former South African President Jacob Zuma is not eligible to run in upcoming elections, the Independent Electoral Commission has ruled.

The commission said at a media briefing on Thursday that it had upheld an objection against Zuma's candidacy in the May 29 elections.

In July 2021, Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in prison for defying a court order to appear before a judicial commission that was investigating corruption allegations during his 2009-2018 presidency. He was granted medical parole after two months and allowed to serve the rest of the sentence under house arrest.

South Africa's Constitution bars people convicted and sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment, without an option of a fine, from holding public office.

Zuma and his legal team stormed out of the judicial proceedings when he was asked about wide-ranging allegations of corruption during his rule, including the role of an Indian family, the Guptas, who allegedly had influence over his Cabinet appointments.

Zuma, 81, has until April 2 to appeal the commission's ruling.

He is now the face of a new political party, uMkhonto weSizwe Party, abbreviated as MK, that has emerged as a potentially significant player in South Africa's upcoming elections after he denounced the governing African National Congress, which he had previously led. The new party is named after the former military wing of the ANC which was disbanded at the end of white minority rule and racial segregation policies under the former apartheid regime.

Oscar winner Louis Gossett Jr, dies at 87

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Louis Gossett Jr., the first Black man to win a supporting actor Oscar and an Emmy winner for his role in the seminal TV miniseries "Roots," has died. He was 87.

Gossett's nephew told The Associated Press that the actor died Thursday night in Santa Monica, California. No cause of death was revealed.

Gossett always thought of his early career as a reverse Cinderella story, with success finding him from an early age and propelling him forward, toward his Academy Award for "An Officer and a Gentleman." He earned his first acting credit in his Brooklyn high school's production of "You Can't Take It with You" while he was sidelined from the basketball team with an injury.

"I was hooked — and so was my audience," he wrote in his



2010 memoir "An Actor and a Gentleman." His English teacher urged him to go into Manhattan to try out for "Take a Giant Step." He got the part and made his Broadway debut in 1953 at age 16. "I knew too

little to be nervous," Gossett wrote. "In retrospect, I should have been scared to death as I walked onto that stage, but I wasn't."

Gossett attended New York University on a basketball and drama scholarship. He was soon acting and singing on TV shows hosted by David Susskind, Ed Sullivan, Red Buttons, Merv Griffin, Jack Paar and Steve Allen.

Gossett became friendly with James Dean and studied acting with Marilyn Monroe, Martin Landau and Steve McQueen at an offshoot of the Actors Studio taught by Frank Silvera.

In 1959, Gossett received critical acclaim for his role in the Broadway production of "A Raisin in the Sun" along with Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee and Diana Sands.

He went on to become a star on Broadway, replacing Billy Daniels in "Golden Boy" with

Sammy Davis Jr. in 1964.

Gossett went to Hollywood for the first time in 1961 to make the film version of "A Raisin in the Sun." He had bitter memories of that trip, staying in a cockroach-infested motel that was one of the few places to allow Black people.

In 1968, he returned to Hollywood for a major role in "Compagnons in Nightmare," NBC's first made-for-TV movie that starred Melvyn Douglas, Anne Baxter and Patrick O'Neal.

This time, Gossett was booked into the Beverly Hills Hotel and Universal Studios had rented him a convertible. Driving back to the hotel after picking up the car, he was stopped by a Los Angeles County sheriff's officer who ordered him to turn down the radio and put up the car's roof before letting him go. Within minutes, he was stopped by eight sheriff's offi-

cers, who had him lean against the car and made him open the trunk while they called the car rental agency before letting him go. "Though I understood that I had no choice but to put up with this abuse, it was a terrible way to be treated, a humiliating way to feel," Gossett wrote in his memoir. "I realized this was happening because I was Black and had been showing off with a fancy car — which, in their view, I had no right to be driving."

After dinner at the hotel, he went for a walk and was stopped a block away by a police officer, who told him he broke a law prohibiting walking around residential Beverly Hills after 9 p.m.

Two other officers arrived and Gossett said he was chained to a tree and handcuffed for three hours. He was eventually freed when the original police car returned.



Lava erupt near the town of Grindavik, Iceland on Thursday.

AP/PTI

Filipino villager will be nailed to cross for 35th time to pray for world peace

AP ■ MANILA

A Filipino villager plans to be nailed to a wooden cross for the 35th time to reenact Jesus Christ's suffering in a brutal Good Friday tradition he said he would devote to pray for peace in Ukraine, Gaza and the disputed South China Sea.

Ruben Enaje, a 63-year-old carpenter and sign painter, said he and seven other villagers have registered for the real-life crucifixions, which have become an annual religious spectacle that draws hundreds of tourists in three rural communities in Pampanga province north of Manila.

The gory ritual resumed last

year after a three-year pause due to the coronavirus pandemic. It has turned Enaje into a village celebrity for his role as the "Christ" in the Lenten reenactment of the Way of the Cross.

Ahead of the crucifixions, Enaje told The Associated Press by telephone Thursday night that he has considered ending his annual religious penitence due to his age but said he could not turn down requests from villagers for him to pray for sick relatives and all other kinds of maladies.

The need for prayers has also deepened in an alarming period of wars and conflicts worldwide, he said.

"If these wars worsen and

spread, more people, especially the young and old, would be affected. These are innocent people who have totally nothing to do with these wars," Enaje said.

Despite the distance, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza have helped send the prices of oil, gas and food soaring elsewhere, including in the Philippines, making it harder for poor people to stretch their meagre income, he said.

Closer to home, the escalating territorial dispute between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea has also sparked worries because it's obviously a lopsided conflict, Enaje said.

"China has many big ships.

Can you imagine what they could do?" he asked.

"This is why I always pray for peace in the world," he said and added he would also seek relief for people in southern Philippine provinces, which have been hit recently by flooding and earthquakes.

In the 1980s, Enaje survived nearly unscathed when he accidentally fell from a three-story building, prompting him to undergo the crucifixion as thanksgiving for what he considered a miracle.

He extended the ritual after loved ones recovered from serious illnesses, one after another, and he landed more carpentry and sign-painting job contracts.

FPIs make remarkable comeback

Infuse ₹2 lakh crore in equities in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors made a strong return by injecting more than Rs 2 lakh crore into Indian equities in 2023-24, driven by optimism surrounding the country's robust economic fundamentals amidst a challenging global environment. Looking forward to 2025, Bharat Dhawan, Managing Partner at Mazars in India, said that the outlook is cautiously optimistic and anticipates sustained FPI inflows supported by progressive policy reforms, economic stability, and attractive investment avenues. "However, we remain mindful of global geopolitical influences that may introduce intermittent volatility, emphasising the importance of strategic planning and agility in navigating market fluctuations," he added.

The outlook for FY25 from an FPI perspective, continues to remain strong, Naveen KR, smallcase Manager and Senior Director at Windmill Capital, said.

In the current fiscal 2023-24, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have made a net investment of around Rs 2.08 lakh crore in the Indian equity markets and Rs 1.2 lakh crore in the debt market. Collectively, they pumped Rs 3.4 lakh crore into the capital market, as per data available with the depositories.

The dazzling resurgence came following an outflow from equities in the preceding two financial years.

In 2022-23, Indian equities witnessed a net outflow of Rs 37,632 crore by FPIs on



aggressive rate hikes by the central banks globally.

Before this, they pulled out a massive Rs 1.4 lakh crore. However, in 2020-2021, FPIs made a record investment of Rs 2.74 lakh crore.

The flows from foreign investors were largely driven by factors such as inflation and interest rate scenarios in developed markets such as the US and UK, currency movement, the trajectory of crude oil prices, geopolitical scenario, and the health of the domestic economy among others, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar

Investment Research India, said. "Investors increasingly favoured Indian equities, drawn by the market's demonstrated resilience during uncertain periods. Compared to other similar markets, India's economy stood out as more robust and stable amidst global economic turbulence, further attracting foreign investment," he said. Smallcase's Naveen said that economies like the UK and Japan have fallen into recession, Russia and Ukraine are still at war, the USA's inflation is running hot and the debate of soft versus hard landing still persists, while China has become the global anti-hero.

Therefore, India has stolen the spotlight and is delivering numbers with strong GDP growth even amidst a tough business environment.

After withdrawing funds in the preceding fiscal, FPIs poured a staggering Rs 1.2 lakh crore into the debt market too, marking a noteworthy shift in their capital flow. They took out funds to the tune of Rs 8,938 crore in FY23.

FPIs' debt investments have been extremely robust this fiscal due to attractive yields on Indian sovereign debt relative to the US treasury. This has been supported by strong macros in the form of the robust growth

outlook for the Indian economy, stable inflation and a stable currency, and the stated objective of the Government to improve its fiscal deficit, Nitin Raheja, Executive Director, Julius Baer India, said. Additionally, the upcoming inclusion of Indian bonds in JP Morgan's index has led to an inflow in advance into the Indian debt markets.

Further, the expected global tapering in policy rates should make bond yields in emerging economies look even more attractive to investors making this trend of inflows into Indian debt more sustainable, he added. In September 2023, JP Morgan

Chase & Co. Announced that it would add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024. This landmark inclusion, scheduled for June 2024, is anticipated to benefit India by attracting around USD 20-40 billion in the subsequent 18 to 24 months. This inflow was expected to make Indian bonds more accessible to foreign investors and potentially strengthen the rupee, thereby bolstering the economy, Morningstar's Srivastava said.

Overall, FPIs started the year 2023-24 on a positive note in April and incessantly purchased equities till August on the resilience of the Indian economy amid an uncertain global macro backdrop. During these five months, they brought in Rs 1.62 lakh crore. After this, FPIs turned net sellers in September and bearish stance continued in October too with an outflow of over Rs 39,000 crore in these two months.

However, FPIs became net investors in November and the optimism persisted in December too, when they purchased equity to the tune of Rs 66,135 crore. Again, they turned sellers and pulled out Rs 25,743 crore in January.

This could be on account of China opening up after the lockdown. This led FPIs to pull out their investments from other emerging markets like India and divert them toward China.

However, China struggled to sustain investor interest. Moreover, the fiscal year ended on a positive note as FPIs bought shares worth over Rs 35,000 crore in March.



Dalal Street minnows steal show in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BSE mid-cap and small-cap stocks have outperformed the benchmark Sensex in 2023-24 with about 62 per cent returns, reflecting buoyant investors' sentiment amid robust macroeconomic conditions in the country and impressive quarterly earnings reported by various firms.

As per an analysis, the BSE mid-cap gauge jumped 15,013.95 points or 62.38 per cent in the 2023-24 fiscal, while the small-cap index climbed 16,068.99 points or 59.60 per cent. In comparison, the 30-share BSE Sensex raked in a gain of 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent during the fiscal under review.

"The recent surge in interest towards mid and small-cap stocks among retail investors can be attributed to their remarkable earnings growth and the pursuit of high-growth opportunities. Highlighting this trend, investors have shown a clear preference for mid and small-cap schemes over large-cap ones, as evidenced by the net inflows in equity mutual funds.

"This shift in investor sentiment is bolstered by the robust macroeconomic conditions in India, which traditionally foster accelerated growth in mid and small-cap stocks during periods of economic expansion. Moreover, the impressive quarterly earnings reported by numerous mid and small-cap companies further validate their substantial growth potential, enticing retail investors in search of profitable ventures," said Suman Bannerjee, CIO of hedge fund Hedonova.

The broader market put up an impressive performance in the 2023-24 fiscal. The BSE midcap gauge reached its record peak of 40,282.49 on February 8 after slipping to its 52-week low of 23,881.79 on March 31, 2023. The BSE small-cap index jumped to its all-time high of 46,821.39 on February 7 after hitting its 52-week low of 26,692.09 on March 31 last year.

The 30-share BSE Sensex hit its all-time high of 74,245.17 on March 7 this year.

"The outperformance of midcap and small-cap stocks vis-a-vis the Sensex in the current fiscal year reflects the dynamic nature of the Indian equity market and the diverse opportunities it offers to investors," Sunil Nyati, Managing Director, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

The BSE small-cap index faced correction in March, falling 4.55 per cent. The midcap index declined marginally this month.

The correction observed in midcap and small-cap stocks during March is consistent with the assessment of heightened exuberance prevailing in the market, Bannerjee said.



Shakti Pumps raises ₹200 crore through QIP

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shakti Pumps (India) on Friday said that it has raised an amount of Rs 200 crore through qualified institutional placement route.

The Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) issue garnered significant interest from qualified domestic institutional investors and was fully subscribed by two large Mutual Funds - LIC Mutual Fund and SBI Mutual Fund, the solar pumps manufacturer said in a statement.

"Shakti Pumps (India) announces closure of Rs 200 crore QIP. With this fundraise, our balance sheet is placed well and will give us the opportunity to improve our market presence and consistently deliver strong results in the times ahead," the company's Chairman

Dinesh Patidar said.

As on December 31, the company had an order book of Rs 2,050 crore to be executed in the next two years, he said.

The solar pump industry has huge opportunities ahead as the government's PM-KUSUM scheme aims to install lakhs of solar pumps across the country, Patidar said.

Launched in 2019, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM) aimed at adding solar capacity of 30,800 MW by 2022 with total central financial support of Rs 34,422 crore, including service charges to the implementing agencies.

In February, the Centre extended PM-KUSUM scheme till March 2026 as its implementation was significantly affected due to the pandemic.

IIM Mumbai, Starburst collaborate to boost aerospace, new space,

PTI ■ MUMBAI

European accelerator Starburst has formed a strategic collaboration with the Indian Institute of Management-Mumbai for promoting aerospace, new space, and defence (ASD) startups in India.

Aimed at cultivating an ASD ecosystem centred around the prestigious B-School in India's financial capital, the alliance would provide vital support and resources to ASD startups across the nation, a statement said on Friday.

The partnership comes amid India seeing growth and transformation within the

aerospace, new space, and defence sectors, it added.

"This strategic collaboration signifies a crucial step towards nurturing and empowering the burgeoning ASD startup ecosystem in India," IIM Mumbai Director Manoj K Tiwari said.

Starburst founder and CEO Francois Chopard said the partnership aims to catalyse the growth of ASD startups by providing them with access to mentorship, funding opportunities, and international networks.

Starburst is a leading European Aerospace, new Space, and Defence (ASD) accelerator.

TCS says it trained 3.5 lakh employees in generative AI skills

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Country's largest IT services company TCS on Friday said it has trained 3.5 lakh employees in generative AI skills.

The company, which had in January announced that 1.5 lakh staffers are trained in the skill sets of what is said to be the biggest opportunity for IT services firm in the future, has now taken the number up to over half its employee base. "With over 350,000 employees trained on foundational skills in GenAI, TCS is well-poised to build one of the largest AI-ready workforces in the world," an official statement said.

In 2023, it had become the first technology company to create a dedicated business unit for AI and cloud to address the growing needs of customers for cloud and AI adoption.

TCS' work till now includes application of GenAI to enhance customer experience for airlines featuring natural



conversations with customers when their flight is delayed or cancelled, and alternative routing options. It has also tapped into GenAI capabilities to streamline and simplify the contract review process including identification and validation of clauses, the statement said.

On Friday, the Tata group company announced that Amazon Web Services (AWS) has recognised it with Generative AI competency partner status.

Banks GNPA's set to improve further to 2.1 per cent by FY25: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The gross non-performing assets (GNPA) of the Indian banking system are set to improve further to up to 2.1 per cent by the end of FY25, a report said on Friday. GNPA's are likely to come at 2.5-2.7 per cent in FY24 and will improve further to 2.1-2.4 per cent by the end of FY25, domestic rating agency Care Ratings said in the report.

It can be noted that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) began the comprehensive exercise in the middle of the last decade by instructing

banks to classify certain stressed assets as NPAs so that the balance sheets represent a true picture.

The rating agency also flagged a list of downside risks, which may result in its estimate not coming true, including a material weakening in asset quality due to the elevated interest rates, the impact of regulatory changes, a tighter liquidity environment and global issues.

It said GNPA's surged to 11.2 per cent in FY18 from 3.8 per cent in FY14 due to the AQR process of 2015-16, which pushed banks to recognise



NPAs and reduce unnecessary restructuring and added that the stress was emanating from the exposure to big-ticket wholesale advances.

Starting from FY19, GNPA's have been seeing an improvement and touched a decadal low of 3.9 per cent in FY23 and were at 3 per cent in the December quarter of

FY24. The asset quality has improved due to recoveries, higher write-offs by banks and much lower slippages, the report said, adding that selling dud assets to asset reconstruction companies has also helped.

From a sectoral perspective, the agriculture sector's GNPA ratio reduced to 7 per cent in September 2023 compared to 10.1 per cent reported in March 2020, while the industrial sector reported a 4.2 per cent GNPA ratio in September 2023 against 14.1 per cent in March 2020 and 22.8 per cent in March 2018.

The industrial GNPA's were down on corporate deleveraging, resolutions, and write-offs. However, it continues to remain elevated in gems and jewellery and construction sub-sectors.

The retail loan GNPA was 1.3 per cent in September 2023 against 2 per cent in March 2020, the agency said, adding that a bulk of the stress is due to unsecured loans, credit card receivables and education loans.

"The performance of unsecured personal loans and restructured accounts continues to be monitorable," the agency said.

Procurement through Government online marketplace GeM crosses ₹4 lakh crore so far this fiscal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The procurement of goods and services through government's portal GeM has crossed Rs 4 lakh crore so far this fiscal due to higher buying activities by various ministries and departments, a senior government official said on Friday.

The Government e-Market (GeM) portal was launched on August 9, 2016, for online purchases of goods and services by all central government ministries and departments.

"As of March 28, the procurement has crossed Rs 4 lakh crore. It is historic," GeM CEO P K Singh told reporters here.

In 2021-22 the procurement value stood at Rs 1.06 lakh crore and it crossed Rs 2 lakh crore last financial year. He said that procurement of services from the portal has jumped from Rs 66,000 crore in 2022-23 to Rs 2.05 lakh crore so far this fiscal. Similarly, goods worth Rs 1.95 lakh crore have been bought from the platform till March 28 this fiscal. GeM has over 63,000



government organisations and over 62 lakh sellers and service providers offering a wide range of products and services.

Currently, government departments, ministries, public sector units, state governments, and central armed police forces are allowed to carry out transactions through this portal.

The portal provides a wide range of products from office stationery to vehicles. Automobiles, computers and office furniture are some of

the major product categories. Services, including transportation, logistics, waste management, webcasting and analytical, are listed on the portal.

South Korea's KONEPS is the largest such platform in the world. GeM stands at the third position after Singapore's GeBIZ.

States/Union Territories such as Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Bihar, Assam, and Uttarakhand have placed significant procurement orders in the current fiscal.

ICICI Securities retail distribution head quits

NEW DELHI, MAR 29 (PTI)

ICICI Securities on Friday said Kedar Deshpande, head of retail distribution, has resigned from the brokerage firm to pursue alternate career opportunities. The resignation will take effect from the close of business hours on April 12, 2024.

"Kedar Deshpande, Head - Retail Distribution (within the category of senior management in the Company), vide letter dated March 28, 2024, has tendered his resignation from the services of the company,"

ICICI Securities said in a regulatory filing.

In his letter to ICICI Securities Managing Director and CEO Vijay Chandok, Deshpande said: "I wish to resign from the company to pursue alternate career opportunities outside the ICICI Group".

ICICI Securities is currently in the process of delisting itself from the stock exchanges. The brokerage firm would be merged with its promoter ICICI Bank after successful delisting. ICICI Bank currently holds a 74.77 per cent stake in ICICI Securities.

Amidst culinary delights like Varanasi chaat and Malaiyyo, the city's gastronomic offerings add flavours to the sensory tapestry of Kashi. Yet, as Varanasi embraces modernity, a call for collective responsibility echoes, urging all to preserve the city's pristine charm amidst its eternal embrace of divinity and tranquillity. **SHARMILA CHAND** experiences the city firsthand and captures its spirit

KASHI REVELS IN RIOT OF COLOURS AND ASH

I am standing at a height in one corner overlooking HarishChandra ghat and the day is Ekadashi. The site is eclectic with hundreds of devotees and tourists dancing to the tunes of the huge DJ set up. As the music pauses for a few seconds, the sound of damrus fills the air. Young boys are playing drums and damrus while sadhus and babas, dressed in various fancy ensemble, are lost in the revelries. And soon I see clouds of gulal and bhasm in the air. Traditionally, as the legend goes, it was on the day of 'Rang Bhari Ekadashi', Lord Mahadev brought Goddess Parvati to Kashi after performing Gauna (marriage ceremony) and played with gulal. From that day till Holi, the festival is celebrated with full gusto. On the second day of Rang Bhari Ekadashi, it is said, Mahadev played Holi with pyre ashes and that's how the tradition of 'Bhasm' or 'Masan' Holi has been going on which holds significant cultural and religious importance. I realise how the festival is deeply rooted in local traditions, it is indeed the celebration of culture, tradition and spirituality.

SHRI KASHI VISHWANATH TEMPLE
Early morning I went for darshan. The entry is well organised and I was happy to be there for my sojourn. Situated on the western bank of the Ganges, Kashi Vishwanath Temple is one of the 12

Jyotirlingas or temples dedicated to Lord Shiva. The main deity of Kashi Vishwanath Temple is Lord Shiva, also known as Vishwanatha or Vishweshwarar.

SANKAT MOCHAN HANUMAN TEMPLE
The Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple is situated by the River Assi and was built in the 1900s by the freedom fighter Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. It is dedicated to Lord Rama and Hanuman.

DURGA TEMPLE
Durga Temple dedicated to Goddess Durga is renowned for its vivid red color and intricate architecture. It houses an imposing idol of Goddess Durga and is one of the main temples in Varanasi. Close to the temple is a huge Durga Kund.

SUBAH E BANARAS
Early morning programme at Assi Ghat is my favorite of the immersive experience. As the first rays of the sun glow on the Ganges, there is chanting of mantras followed by Arati, Surya Namaskar and then Hindustani classical music. That's not all, there is one hour yoga after the music where tourists and the locals perform seriously. I thought that was the final event of the morning rituals but no, the moment yoga ends, a group of locals start bhajans and kirtan which goes on for another one hour. While all this is going on, tea vendors are busy making tea and

boatmen are busy at their job, tempting tourists for Ganges boat ride.

EVENINGS AT THE GHATS
Evenings are very eventful again. There is famous Ganga arati at different ghats. Then there is also Cultural programme at Assi Ghat. As dusk descends, the ghats of Varanasi come alive with the vibrant Ganga Aarti. Priests, clad in traditional attire, choreograph the ritual with synchronised movements, accompanied by the rhythmic ringing of bells and chanting of hymns. The magnificent ritual looks resplendent with huge brass lamps lit with oil and the priests chant the holy mantras that reverberate in the entire location.

KASHI FOOD TRAIL
One thing you cannot miss about Varanasi is its food. Every city has its own style of preparation and flavours. Varanasi chaat and Kachoris are no exception. Gol gappas taste totally different with lot of matra filling. Aloo tikki and samosa chaat comes loaded with curd, matra and chutneys. Tamatar chaat is of course unique to this city. There are several joints for kachoris. I tried at 'Chachi ki Kachori' kachoris-sabzi and jalebis. It is situated on the mall road in front of Banaras Hindu University gate. As per the locals, the shop was run by an old aunty chachi, who passed away handing over her legacy to her



sons, who now run the shop. Tamatar Chaat is a local version of aloo chaat and is made from a mashed mixture of boiled potatoes, tomatoes, onions, green chillies and fresh coriander leaves. Spices like pounded ginger, red chilli powder and garam masala are splashed into the dish making it deliciously fiery. It is served in a dona, a bowl made

with palash leaves. Deena Chaat Bhandar at Dashaswamedh Road is a good option. Head to Gopal Mandir Gali for Chooria Matar in the morning. Made of flattened rice soaked in desi ghee and cooked with spices along with green peas, raisins and saffron, Chooria Matar is a famous breakfast and evening time snack in Varanasi. Spices like black pepper, garam masala and hing are added to this dish to enhance its flavour.

MALAIYYO - UNIQUE SWEET OF BANARAS
Makhan Malaiyyo or Nimish is a



popular winter season street dessert in Varanasi. Influenced by Persian cuisine, Malaiyyo is prepared by churning the milk slowly to create a creamy texture. The milk foam is then flavoured with saffron and cardamoms and garnished with pistachios and almonds on the top, served in kulhad. You can have at Neelkanth and Kachori Gali. Lassi is one drink you will find everywhere in the city. Blue Lassi at Bangali Tola is quite famous though I had a very nice one at 'Pahalwan Lassi Bhandar' at Lanka and Chowk - made with malai cream and garnished with fruits and trimmed pistachios, it is truly delicious though very heavy.

PIZZERIA VAATIKA, ASSI GHAT
The day you feel like having continental, go to 'Pizzeria Vaatika' a simple cafe that serves amazing

authentic pizzas, pastas and yes, delightful coffee with a delightful view of the Ganges. Keshav Tambul, Ravidas Gate How can you not have paan ? Want to try the famous Banarasi paan? Keshav Taambul near Ravidas Gate offers one of the best paans in Banaras.

TEA IS NO MEAN DRINK!
Tea in kulhad is a special item in Kashi. You ask locals where to have tea, and you will get a whole lot of different tea stall names in which Pappu Chai wala will many votes. I found my favourite at Assi Ghat who would brew and boil the tea for good 15 minutes, after mixing a whole lot of ingredients. If you are in a hurry, you can move on because this fellow will not change his pace or style. For a tea finicky person like me, it was the best I've ever had and I thanked my stars for the extreme fulfillment I got. One day he didn't show up, I missed him (his tea, of course), the only reason he didn't put up his stall was "I didn't feel like making tea, so did something else." Well, what could I say, he was so right. To conclude, while the ghats have been given a face-lift, facilities (like Sulabh toilets) have been provided and there is regular cleaning done, it is the responsibility of visitors to maintain some civic sense. Unless the local communities, tourists, cafes and clubs come forward to adopt areas and maintain the aesthetics, it is not possible for the administration alone to do the needful. Conscientious efforts are needed to keep the ghats clean, that's the least we can do for such a spectacular city that reverberates divinity, calm and peace — forever embracing one and all!

FROM CONCEPT TO CREATION

India Design ID 2024, the most anticipated decor and design event of the year, came alive in the capital, showcasing the best in design. The four-day extravaganza was all about the fusion of creativity, innovation and trendsetting designs, captivating attendees from all walks of life. **PANKAJ KUMAR** captured the fine artworks with finesse



India Design ID is held once a year in the capital. Having completed 11 successful years, India Design brings together the best of Indian and international names from the design field under one place. It is an Ogaan Media initiative which brings a multitude of everything new in the fields of art, craft, design, decor, interiors and architecture. A treasure trove of luxury products and rare finds with over hundred exhibitors, ID Exhibit is a curated showcase of India's top luxury design brands. The exhibits also include display spaces by Indian architecture and interior firms as well as contemporary emerging talents.





Venkatesh's 50, Narine's cameo steer KKR to win over RCB

PTI ■ BENGALURU

A ruthless fifty by Venkatesh Iyer worked as the catalyst for Kolkata Knight Riders' smooth seven-wicket victory over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in their IPL match here on Friday. Venkatesh's 50 of 30 balls (3x4, 4x6) and stunning blitzes by openers Sunil Narine (47, 22b, 2x4, 5x6) and Phil Salt (30, 20b, 2x4, 2x6) propelled the Knight Riders past the 183-run target that the RCB set for them, which was built around Virat Kohli's skilful unbeaten 83. The KKR batters never got bogged down either by a slow pitch or RCB bowlers as they hunted down the target in just 16.5 overs. Their approach on the night was best exemplified by Venkatesh, who is trying hard to regain his relevance in white ball formats, who added 75 runs for the third wicket with skipper Shreyas Iyer (39 not out). The left-hander found his range from the word go, as pacer Alzarri Joseph suffered the brunt of his aggressive intentions. He baffled the West Indian quick for 20 runs in an over that contained two sixes over cover and mid-wicket and a steered four to third man, besides a leg-bye boundary.



Shreyas, who was dropped on five by Yash Dayal off highly impressive local pacer Vysakh Vijayakumar (1/23), just had the supporting role on this night. But for that crisp win, the KKR should profusely thank Narine and Salt, who subjugated RCB bowlers in the Power Play with astonishing power-hitting.

The visitors' chase began frenetically as Narine and Salt added 86 runs in just 6.3 overs through an array of dazzling shots. Salt started the carnage, smoking pacer Mohammed Siraj for 18 runs in the very first over, finding two sixes and a four. Narine followed suit. After smashing Joseph for two sixes

in the third over, the left-hander vandalised the figures of left-arm pacer Dayal, clobbering him for 21 runs, including a four and two sixes in three consecutive balls in the sixth over. There was a hint of sluggishness in the Chinnaswamy surface but there was hardly any effort by the RCB bowlers to exploit it

with slower balls like their Knight Riders counterparts. It required a yorker from left-arm spinner Mayank Dagar to break the opening wicket partnership as Narine failed to block the full-length delivery on the off-stump. But by then, he had done his job. Earlier, Kohli's skilful unbeaten fifty formed the



foundation of RCB's competitive 182 for six. Kohli (83, 59b, 4x4, 4x6) and Cameron Green (33 off 21b) milked 65 runs off 42 balls for the second wicket, the primary alliance in RCB innings, as the home side produced a two-faced effort on a track that was on the slower side. An archetypal Dinesh Karthik cameo (20, 8b, 3x6) added gravitas to the RCB total as skipper Faf du Plessis departed early as the Royal Challengers captain's attempt

to scoop pacer Harshit Rana ended in the hands of Mitchell Starc inside the circle. But a period of stability followed as Kohli and Green kept RCB on the track with a busy stand that saw them reach 61 for 1 in the Power Play segment. Kohli dished out drives and lofts over covers, a new addition to his batting, sweeps and slog-sweep to fetch his runs, but the shot of the night was a swat-flick off Starc that sailed for a six. In fact, no other shot really

encapsulates Kohli's batting like the swat-flick – a child of his desire to find newer ways to sustain the domination of bowlers. A simple snap of wrists and power emanating from a strong bottom hand can turn this traditionally gentle shot into a malevolent run-making option. Kohli brought his fifty in 36 balls whereas other batters, except Green, struggled for timing. But Green wasn't really bothered about such technical angles, as his batting was all about brute power. Narine, who was playing his 500th T20 match, was given a hammering as Green took 15 runs off the spinner's first over that included a sequence of 4, 4, 6 – a sweep, slap past cover and a hoick over long-on. However, the burgeoning alliance was snapped when Green's effort to play a pull off Andre Russell saw the ball crashing onto his stumps. Glenn Maxwell, who was dropped twice on 11 and 21, en route a 19-ball 28 could not exploit the largesse of KKR fielders as his luck finally ran out against Narine. A slash off the West Indian spinner ended in the hands of Rinku Singh at deep point, and Maxwell had to depart after adding 42 runs for the third wicket with Kohli.

Rahul-led LSG eye all round effort against PBKS

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Super Giants will aim for an improved all-round effort when they take on Punjab Kings in their second Indian Premier League match here on Saturday. K L Rahul-led LSG faltered in the opening game against Rajasthan Royals, losing by 20 runs in Chandigarh. Barring Krunal Pandya, all the LSG bowlers leaked runs and also looked ineffective. In the absence of Mark Wood and David Willey, LSG's pace battery looks thin with the likes of Mohsin Khan, Naveen-ul-Haq, and Yash Thakur expected to do the heavy lifting. Fighting for a place in the upcoming T20 World Cup squad, Ravi Bishnoi too looked ordinary in the team's tournament opener. Skipper Rahul, who has decided to play the wicketkeeper-batter's role keeping the T20 World Cup in mind, made 58 in his comeback game and would be looking to build on that. He would be hoping his opening partner Quinton de Kock returns to his belligerent best against Punjab after missing out against Royals. The team is also banking on the likes of Devdutt Padikkal Ayush Badoni, Deepak Hooda, and Krunal to deliver



down the order. LSG's success will also depend on the form of Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis, who was the leading run-getter for the team last year with 408 runs. PBKS, on the other hand, have a 50-50 record so far, winning one and losing one.

The Shikhar Dhawan-led side needs more fluency in the powerplay and that is bound to come if Jonny Bairstow gets going after failing in the first two games. Dhawan, who only plays IPL to IPL, needs to up his strike rate going forward. He himself admitted to batting a bit "slowly" against RCB.

Prabhsimran Singh, who came of age last season, has not been able to capitalise on his starts yet. While all-rounder Sam Curran has shown his prowess with the bat in the two matches, the left-arm seamer has been wayward with the ball. Vice-captain Jitesh Sharma, who is in the running for a World Cup berth,

needs to have a stellar season to convince the national selectors. In the pace bowling department, Kagiso Rabada will look for more support from Curran, Arshdeep Singh and Harshal Patel. Left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar has been impressive while leg-spinner Rahul Chahar needs to up his game.

TEAMS(FROM):

Lucknow Super Giants: KL Rahul (c), Quinton de Kock, Nicholas Pooran, Ayush Badoni, Kyle Mayers, Marcus Stoinis, Deepak Hooda, Devdutt Padikkal, Ravi Bishnoi, Naveen-ul-Haq, Krunal Pandya, Yuvraj Singh, Prerak Mankad, Yash Thakur, Amit Mishra, Shamar Joseph, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan, K. Gowtham, Shivam Mavi, Arshin Kulkarni, M Siddharth, Ashton Turner, David Willey, Mohd. Arshad Khan.

Punjab Kings: Shikhar Dhawan (captain), Matthew Short, Prabhsimran Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidwath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajann, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.



Last 3 days I was in bed, I was on painkillers: Parag

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Architect of Rajasthan Royals' win over Delhi Capitals, young batter Riyan Parag on Thursday revealed that he was not well for the last three days and had to take painkillers to recover in time for their IPL match here. Considered a precocious talent, the 22-year-old from Assam finally came off age as he slammed a blistering 84 not out off 45 balls to set up a 12-run win for Rajasthan Royals against Delhi Capitals. "I have worked very hard, the last 3 days I was in bed, I was on painkillers. I just got up today and I'm very happy," said Parag, who was adjudged the Player of the Match, during the post-match presentation. Despite his talent, Parag struggled to live up to the expectations and had underwhelming numbers to show in the last few seasons but his hard work paid off as he hit his highest IPL score to lift RR to 185 for 5 here. "I saw Sandy (Sandeep Sharma) was calm and Avesh (Khan) was also looking good, so I went with that," he added referring to the brilliant death bowling by the two pacers. Talking about his strategy going into the final over, Avesh, who defended 17 runs in the final over, said: "My plan is always clear. One side was longer, so my plan was to bowl wide yorkers. "I was giving myself five seconds and only thought about executing them. My focus is always on the execution and back my yorkers. "Enjoying myself here because we have Sandeep, Boult, Burger, all of whom have different skills. Samson gives me freedom to execute and only steps in if he sees I am struggling. "I try to improve myself everytime. In T20s I try to reinvent myself. I never think about selection and only practice what I want to bowl."

Wherever I go, people ask me about him. There is something very special he can give to Indian cricket," Samson said. RR had a disastrous start as they were 36 for 3 in the eighth over but Parag slowly constructed his innings before accelerating in the end to lift them to a good total. "The way we started, the first ten overs, we were like Rovman, be ready you might have to bat! The IPL is changing and we all have to be flexible," Samson said. RR's decision to bring in Nandre Burger as an impact player, replacing Shimron Hetmyer also reaped dividends as the South African pacer struck twice in the fourth over. "Earlier it was about 11 players, now it is about all 15 players. Me and Sanga had a lot of chat between 15th and 17th over before deciding the Impact Player. It's all about gauging in which zone they are. You have to look at that and take your decision. "I saw Sandy (Sandeep Sharma) was calm and Avesh (Khan) was also looking good, so I went with that," he added referring to the brilliant death bowling by the two pacers. Talking about his strategy going into the final over, Avesh, who defended 17 runs in the final over, said: "My plan is always clear. One side was longer, so my plan was to bowl wide yorkers. "I was giving myself five seconds and only thought about executing them. My focus is always on the execution and back my yorkers. "Enjoying myself here because we have Sandeep, Boult, Burger, all of whom have different skills. Samson gives me freedom to execute and only steps in if he sees I am struggling. "I try to improve myself everytime. In T20s I try to reinvent myself. I never think about selection and only practice what I want to bowl."

Nortje will take time to get better after injury layoff: Hopes

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Delhi Capitals bowling coach James Hopes feels that the team's under-fire pace spearhead Anrich Nortje will get better with time having recently made a comeback to competitive cricket after six months. Nortje was taken to the cleaners by Rajasthan Royals' Riyan Parag at the death as he went for 48 in his four overs on Thursday night. RR won the IPL match by 12 runs while defending 185 for 5. Nortje had been out of cricket since September and came into IPL having played just three domestic T20 games earlier this month and failed to nail the yorkers or bowl the hard lengths that he is known for. "I won't say too much bad about the bowlers. They just tried to execute. It was a good first half with the ball but got away from us a little bit in the last five overs," Hopes said after his team's 12-run loss to RR, where the complexion changed during the last part of their bowling innings.



"It's the first time that Nortje has been at this level in a while. He had a fair time out of the game, but if you look at all the numbers, he is one of the premier death bowlers in the game. We trust that he is going to keep getting better," Hopes, a former Australia medium pacer said defending the

Proteas pacer. Hopes also felt that just like bowling, the team's batting also came apart in the back-10 after a positive start. "With the bat, we started really well, we were in front of the game, and then fell away a little bit in the middle. They bowled 10 overs of death bowling

pretty much at us, and executed it well." Hopes assessed that the end game is a problem in both departments after the first two defeats. "We need to tidy at what we do at the end of the game. It's one game, I don't even count the first game because we had to take a bowler out to get an extra batter in and then Ishant (Sharma) went down, so I'm not going to judge us too harshly on one game." The batting in the middle overs will largely depend on how comeback man Rishabh Pant fares. "We need to tidy up our middle over batting too. We tend to get stuck a little bit in phases there. We know the fix for that is Rishabh Pant," Hopes said. "He has played two games after a long lay-off and I think you're going to see some pretty special things from him in the next few weeks," he concluded. DC will take on Chennai Super Kings in their next game at the ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

Execution wise, it was probably my best last over: Avesh

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan Royals pacer Avesh Khan feels the last over he bowled against Delhi Capitals in the ongoing IPL was probably his best effort in the death overs. The India pacer had to defend 17 runs in the last over on Thursday night and he was able to do that rather comfortably, landing one yorker after the other. Delhi could only get four runs from that over, ensuring a 12-run win for the home team. Going into the season, Lucknow Super Giants had traded Avesh to Royals. "It is not the first time I bowled the last over. Last year I defended against Rajasthan. When I played for Delhi (bowled the last over there also), execution wise this was my best over. All the balls were in the same spot, wide yorkers," said Avesh, who has played eight ODIs and 20 T20s. The 27-year-old also spoke about how his role has changed compared to last season when he turned up for LSG. "In Lucknow and DC, I used to bowl one over upfront or two overs in the powerplay. Here I



bowl two overs after powerplay and in the death as well I get to bowl. Team management and Sanju (Samson) give gull freedom to execute plans and that is helping. Sanju is a bowlers' captain. "There was also no dew factor tonight and that helped me being accurate. Dew may impact your execution at times," Avesh said. He gave due credit to Royals' new number four Riyan Parag, who singlehandedly kept his team in the game after an ordinary start, smashing an unbeaten 84 off 45 balls. "It was a match changing innings considering we had lost wickets early and run rate was on the lower side. He helped us post a fighting total. He is in good touch and showed that in this and the last game," Avesh added.