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BHUBANESWAR, WEDNESDAY MAY 1, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

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Covishield cure comes with serious side effects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Sparkling criticism and raising concerns, British-Swedish multinational pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca has for the first time acknowledged in court documents in the UK that its Covid-19 vaccine, which is known as Covishield in India, has the potential to cause Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), a rare side effect associated with blood clotting. This condition involves the formation of blood clots accompanied by a low platelet count, which is critical for blood

clotting. As per media reports in the UK, the pharma giant is facing up to 51 litigations, being sued in class action over claims its vaccine caused death and serious injury in dozens of cases. In India, it was one of the widely administered Covid vaccines to reduce severe Covid-19 complications. Developed in collaboration with University of Oxford, AstraZeneca's vaccine was manufactured in India by Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII). As many as 1,749,417,978 doses of Covishield vaccine have been administered in India, in what was the world's largest vaccination programme from January 2021, according to the vaccine dashboard of the

government's web portal CoWIN as on April 29, 2024. Taking cognizance of the development, Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said the Indian Government should work to urgently address the alleged side-effects of the Covishield vaccine as millions of people in India were administered the shot during the Covid pandemic. Bharadwaj expressed concern over the alleged link between the vaccine's side-effects and a series of sudden deaths in India, claiming that Covishield was banned in several European countries, including Germany, France, Spain, Finland, Norway and Denmark, at the beginning of



2021 due to apprehensions about its safety. Speaking about complications related to the Covishield vaccine, Bhardwaj told a news agency,

"We have seen numerous videos on social media recently showing people collapsing and dying immediately after performing activities, which was not observed before the pandemic. Many people speculate a connection to the coronavirus vaccine and such reports are a matter of concern as they escalate tension." However, in India, the doctors said there was no need to worry. They said that if a person has received the AstraZeneca vaccine, known as Covishield in India, two years ago, the likelihood of experiencing any adverse effects now is extremely low. "Adverse effects, if they occur, typically manifest within a few weeks of vaccination," said Dr Sudhir

Kumar, Neurologist, Apollo Hospital, Hyderabad. Dr Rajeev Jayadevan, Co-Chairman of the National Indian Medical Association, added that this particular outcome is reported only in the first month following the first dose, not afterwards. In India, Dr Kumar added that the incidence of TTS after the vaccine is not known. "Only isolated case reports have been reported. So, TTP is extremely rare after Covid vaccination, considering millions of vaccine doses have been administered," the expert said. "TTS is thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome, which is basically clot in blood

vessels of the brain or elsewhere, along with a low platelet count. It is known to occur in very rare instances following certain types of vaccines and also from other causes. According to the WHO, adenovirus vector vaccines in particular have been rarely associated with this condition," Dr Jayadevan asserted. Dr MV Padma Srivastava, Chairperson - Neurology, Paras Hospitals, Gurugram, however, told a news agency, "I have read the recent report which states that TTS (Thrombocytopenia Syndrome) is happening. In rare events, I can say that the vaccine has caused certain consequences and TTS."

Amit Shah deepfake video sings the Congress Sex scandal plot thickens

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AHMEDABAD/NEW DELHI

The Gujarat police on Tuesday said they have arrested a Congress leader and an Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) functionary for allegedly sharing Union Home Minister Amit Shah's deep fake video, in which he is purportedly seen announcing the curtailment of reservation rights of the SCs, STs and OBCs. The arrest comes a day after Delhi Police initiated a probe and summoned several persons including Telangana chief minister Revanth Reddy for questioning in the case. A few arrests have already been made in this case as Mumbai police too registered FIRs against the Maharashtra Youth Congress social media platform and 16 others. Police in other BJP-ruled States also swung into action making the first arrest in Assam in connection with the case on Sunday. In his first reactions pertaining to the matter, Home Minister Amit Shah said the Congress' frustration and disappointment have reached such a level that it made and circulated it on social media and even chief ministers and state unit chiefs also forwarded



Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses a Press conference at Vajpayee Bhawan, in Guwahati, on Tuesday. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and State BJP president Bhabesh Kalita are also seen

it. Shah alleged that since leader Rahul Gandhi assumed leadership of the Congress, its level of politics is sinking and the attempt to create confusion and mislead people is condemnable. "They should contest elections on the basis of their principles, programmes and manifesto and not by circulating a fake video," he said at a Press conference in

Guwahati when asked on the arrest of a Congress functionary of Assam for allegedly circulating a fake video of the BJP leader. The Ahmedabad Cyber Crime Cell arrested the two persons, including one who was working as a Personal Assistant (PA) of Congress MLA Jignesh Mevani since the last six years. Another has been serving as the AAP's

Dahod district president since the last four years and third belongs to the Dalit community, also serves as the general secretary of Banaskantha district Congress. The duo was booked under section 153A (promoting enmity between different groups) and 505(2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The police release said the duo had uploaded the

edited video of Amit Shah's speech with an intention to create enmity between reserved castes and unreserved castes in view of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. "Both of them had shared this edited video of Amit Shah on their Facebook pages. They received this video on their WhatsApp and investigations are still on to nab the person who had edited this video," said a Gujarat police official. BJP on Monday lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against the Congress, alleging that it circulated a "deep fake and morphed" video of Amit Shah to derail the poll process, and demanded strict action against the party. The Special Cell of the Delhi Police had on Sunday registered an FIR after the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), which is under the Ministry of Home Affairs, filed a complaint about the doctored video of Shah where his statements indicating a commitment to abolish quota for Muslims on religious ground in Telangana were changed to make it seem that he was advocating scrapping of all reservations.

JD(S) on Tuesday suspended Jits Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna from the party with immediate effect over an alleged sex scandal involving him. Prajwal is the BJP-JD(S) alliance's candidate from Hassan, which went to the polls in the second phase on Friday. While Home Minister Amit Shah sought to know why the Congress Government in the State did not take any action against Prajwal for alleged sexual abuse of women, the National Commission for Women sought a report within three days from the Karnataka police over allegations of sexual abuse involving Prajwal. The 33-year-old is the son of HD Deve Gowda's elder son HD Revanna, who is an MLA and a former Minister. Prajwal's uncle H D Kumaraswamy is State president of JD(S). The suspension came minutes after the party core committee that met in Hubballi recommended his suspension to its national president and former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, who is also Prajwal's grandfather. "Videos of Hassan MP Prajwal



NSUI members hold a poster of JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna during a protest against his involvement in the alleged sexual abuse case in Bengaluru on Tuesday

Revanna were circulated in Hassan over the last few days. Police on Sunday booked Prajwal Revanna and his father H D Revanna on charges of sexual harassment and criminal intimidation based on a complaint from a woman, who worked in their household. BJP welcomed the JD(S) decision to suspend MP Prajwal Revanna over allegations of sexual abuse, asserting that it will push for the full might of law against him, and launched a fierce counter-attack on Congress for "delayed" action by the Karnataka Government.

MEA debunks WaPo report claiming RAW hand in murder plan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after *The Washington Post* named an Indian official for allegedly plotting to eliminate Sikh extremist Gurbatwint Singh Pannun, India on Tuesday said the report made "unwarranted and unsubstantiated" imputations on a serious matter. The newspaper, citing unnamed sources, named a Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) officer in connection with the alleged plot to assassinate Pannun. "The report in question makes unwarranted and unsubstantiated imputations on a serious matter," External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "There is an ongoing investigation of the high level committee set up by the Government of India to look into the security concerns shared by the US government on networks of organised criminals, terrorists and others," he said. Jaiswal was responding to media queries on the report. "Speculative and irresponsible comments on it are not helpful," Jaiswal said. The report in *The Washington Post* claimed that a man referred to as 'CC-1' in the indictment filed on the alleged murder plot to kill Khalistani terrorist Gurbatwint Singh Pannun was a RAW officer, Vikram Yadav. Yadav forwarded details about Pannun to the hired hit team, the report said. Vikram Yadav, an officer who allegedly worked with the Research and Analysis Wing, had hired a hit team and plotted an attack on Pannun on American soil, the report said. According to the report, Vikram Yadav, who is allegedly working with a different government organisation now, forwarded details about Pannun, including his New York address, to the hit team. The *Washington Post* claimed that the Ministry of External Affairs declined to respond to its article. In November last year, US federal prosecutors charged Indian national Nikhil Gupta with working with an Indian government employee in the foiled plot to kill Pannun. He is wanted in India on terror charges.

EC confirms voter fatigue in first two rounds

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Days after suspense over the low voter turnout, the Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday came out with official data showing low voting percentage in the first two phases that concluded recently. A voter turnout of 66.14 per cent was recorded in the first phase and 66.71 per cent was recorded in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections. In 2019, the voter turnout was recorded at 69.43 per cent and 69.17 per cent in the first and second phases, respectively. The voter turnout in the two phases of the recent Lok Sabha elections experienced a decline compared to the 2019 polls. The first phase of polling was held on April 19 across 102 constituencies and the second phase was held on April 26

for 88 constituencies. "In the ongoing general elections, voter turnout of 66.14 per cent has been recorded in phase 1 for 102 PCs (Parliamentary Constituencies) and 66.71 per cent in phase 2 for 88 PCs that went for polls in the two phases," the EC said in a statement. Generally, a higher voter turnout is considered an indication of change, while a low turnout suggests continuity. However, there is no clear correlation or trend evident in the data. Analysts say the lower turnout marked a clear lack of enthusiasm among people. Officially sharing the turnout figure, the EC said in phase one of the elections, 66.22 per cent of male and 66.07 female electors turned up to vote. The turnout for registered third-



gender voters stood at 31.32 per cent. In the 2019 polls, the turnout in the first phase stood at 69.43 per cent. In the second phase of elections held on April 26, the male voter turnout was recorded at 66.99 per cent, while the female turnout stood at 66.42 per cent.

As many as 23.86 per cent of the registered third-gender voters came out to vote. The data showed that Bihar recorded 49.26 per cent voter turnout, less than 50 per cent while Meghalaya and Uttar Pradesh recorded 56.87 per cent and 57.22 per cent respectively. Three parliamentary constituencies recorded less than 50 per cent voting percentage, which include Nawada in Bihar 43.17 per cent; Karauli-Dholpur in Rajasthan 49.59 per cent, a decline from 55.18 per cent in 2019 and Almora in Uttarakhand 48.74 per cent, a decline from 52.31 per cent in 2019. In the first phase of polling, Lakshadweep (84.1 per cent) recorded the highest voter percentage while Bihar (49.26 per cent) recorded the lowest voter turnout of the twenty-21 States and Union Territories that voted on April 19.

India squad for T20 World Cup

RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced the Indian squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup which will be hosted in the West Indies and the USA from June 2. The Senior Selection Committee chairman Ajit Agarkar and Captain Rohit Sharma picked India's 15-member squad on Tuesday. However there are many surprising inclusions in the team and shocking omissions which created buzz among the cricket fans. In a 15-member squad opener Yashasvi Jaiswal found a place with opening partner Rohit (captain) followed by Hardik Pandya who is newly appointed vice captain for the upcoming World Cup which raises eyebrows about his poor

form. In the much awaited race of wicketkeepers who are named in the squad are Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson. KL Rahul was ignored in the selection with many questions arising despite his seniority and experience in the game and Ishan Kishan due to his form and inconsistency. Virat Kohli and Suryakumar Yadav will be seen batting at number three and four positions. The new all-rounder Shivam Dube, who is getting praises for his swashbuckling batting in the IPL for the CSK, will further strengthen India's bowling attack with Ravindra Jadeja. Yuzvendra Chahal is making a comeback in this year's World Cup. The four spinners in the team are Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Ravindra



Jadeja and Axar Patel. Right-arm leg break spinner Ravi Bishnoi has been axed in this year's World Cup. The pace attack will be headed by Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh, and Mohammed Siraj. India will begin their World Cup campaign against Ireland in Group A on June 5 in New York. **SQUAD:** Rohit Sharma (Captain), Hardik Pandya (Vice Captain), Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant (WK), Sanju Samson (WK), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Suryakumar Yadav, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Arshdeep Singh, Mohd Siraj, Jasprit Bumrah, Yuzvendra Chahal. **Reserves:** Shubman Gill, Khaleel Ahmed, Avesh Khan and Rinku Singh.

Baripada again hottest in State at 46.4 deg

BBSR 45.4 degree; Cuttack 44 degree

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The heat wave conditions intensified in the State with the mercury at 46 degree Celsius in some places on Tuesday. Baripada continued as the hottest place for the second day recording a temperature of 46.4 degree. Baripada was followed by Baleswar at 46 degree. Bhubaneswar recorded a maximum temperature of 45.4 degree, as per Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here. It was for the first time this season that mercury crossed the 45-degree mark in the capital city. The temperature in other places was Angul 44.7 degree, Jharsuguda 44.2 degree, Cuttack 44 degree, Chandbali 43.6 degree, Rourkela 43.2 degree, Sambalpur 43.2 and Keonjhar 43 degree. Earlier, the IMD had issued a Red alert for Bhubaneswar and Cuttack for the day. As per the IMD, there would be no large change in maximum temperature (day temperature) during next four to five days at many places o-in-the districts of the State. Red warning for heat wave to severe heat wave conditions has been issued for several districts as well. Heat wave to severe heat wave condition is very likely to prevail in the districts of Angul, Dhenkanal, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Cuttack, Khordha, Nayagarh, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sunabapur and Boudha. **May 1, International Labour Day, being a holiday in the offices of The Pioneer, Bhubaneswar, the next issue of the paper will appear on May 3, 2024.**

Naveen files nominations for Hinjili seat

PNS ■ CHHATRAPUR
BJD supermo and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Tuesday filed nomination papers for the Hinjili Assembly constituency in Ganjam district for the sixth time in a row. Patnaik visited the Maa Taratarini Temple and took blessings from the presiding deity of Ganjam district before filing nomination papers before the Returning Officer at the Sub-Collector's office at Chhatrapur in the presence of 5T Chairman VK Pandian and many senior BJD leaders and MLA and MP candidates of the district.



Like the last elections held in 2019, Patnaik is also contesting from two Assembly seats this time. Apart from

organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das also filed his nominations for the Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat. Holding a mega procession of supporters, he submitted the nomination papers before the Returning Officer at the Sambalpur Collectorate. BJD leaders and MLA candidates Rohit Pujari and Nalini Kanta Pradhan were present when Das filed the nominations. Das, a three-time MLA, is contesting for Lok Sabha for the first time and he is fighting for the seat against senior BJP leader and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Hinjili, he is also contesting from Kantabanji in Balangir district in western Odisha. Meanwhile, BJD

All the best Bobby', wishes Naveen

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has wished party's candidate for the Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat Pranab Prakash Das victory in the upcoming elections. Naveen wished Das, popularly known as 'Bobby', before the BJD organisational secretary filed his nominations. "All the best Bobby, I am sure you will win," the BJD chief said in a video message to Das, who has been pitted by the ruling party against Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in Sambalpur. Das, who filed his nomina-



tion papers for Sambalpur Lok Saba constituency, shared Naveen's video message in a post on his X handle. He said he feels inspired after getting the party president's encouraging message. With the blessings of the CM and the affection of the people of Sambalpur, his resolve for building a developed and prosperous Sambalpur has been further strengthened, said Das.

Sammilani demands Bharat Ratna for Madhubabu



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Utkal Sammilani Central Committee paid floral tributes at the statue of Utkalgaurab Madhusudan Das on his 176th anniversary here on Sunday. In a meeting presided over by Sammilani general secretary Radhanath Prahara, former District Education Officer Pitabash Tripathy said there is no second thought that for Madhubabu Odisha got the status of a State. Despite the noncooperation of the then Indian National Congress leaders, Madhubabu managed to get the British Government's

nod for formation of Odisha, which speaks volumes about his leadership qualities and talent. A proposal was passed for presenting the Bharat Ratna to the iconic leader. Prof Kashinath Rath, Trinath Samantraj, Nikhil Prasad Das, Jugal Kishore Nayak were among others present. On the occasion, a new signage of the Utkal Sammilani Central Office was inaugurated. Sammilani State president Ananta Prasad Jena, vice-president Surendra Mishra and general secretary and Mancheswar branch president Dilip Dashsharma were present.

In city

Rs 75L cash seized from 2 passengers at airport

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Security officials on Tuesday seized Rs 75 lakh in cash from two passengers who arrived at the Biju Patnaik International Airport in Bhubaneswar. Reports said Rs 28 lakh was recovered from the luggage trolley of a passenger who arrived from Delhi while the remaining amount was seized from the luggage of another passenger from Chennai. Sources said a team of Income Tax (IT) had some information regarding the passenger travelling from

Chennai and subsequently he was frisked. Similarly, CISF personnel detected Rs 28 lakh during luggage scanner of the passenger who arrived from Delhi. As it is election period, a detailed investigation has started to ascertain the source of the cash. Whether the cash is meant for business purposes or elections, it would only be ascertained after the completion of the probe. Notably, CISF personnel have been instructed to step up vigil in view of the upcoming election in Odisha.

BJP's Sambit Patra files papers for Puri LS seat



Sunil, Sanjay, Asrit also file nominations
SAROJ KUMAR MISHRA ■ PURI

On the first day of filing nomination on Monday ahead of May 13 elections, BJP national spokesperson Dr Sambit Patra filed his papers for Puri

Lok Sabha constituency before the district Collector and Returning Officer Sidharth Sankar Swain. Leading a huge rally of thousands of supporters from Utara Chawk on Puri-Bhubaneswar national highway, he reached Puri Gundicha Temple. From there, he began a road show along the Badadanda and reached the Collector office. With some MLA candidates

and senior workers, Patra tendered two sets of papers to the Returning Officer. After nominations, he talked to the reporters that he is very much hopeful of winning even with a higher margin against his opponent. MP candidate Patra is first to file nomination in Puri ahead of the May 13 polls. All the 7 Assembly segments in Puri, Kordha and Nayagarh districts

under the parliamentary region will go to poll on the same day also. Meanwhile Sunil Kumar Mohanty, son of former Cabinet Minister late Maheswar Mohanty, and former Brahmagiri MLA Sanjay Dasburma have filed their papers for Puri Sadar and Satyabadi legislative segments respectively on BJD ticket. Besides, Zilla BJP president Asrit Patnaik and independent candidate Harekrusna Singhari deposited their candidatures for the 110-Pipili and 109-Satyabadi legislative segments respectively under the Lokasabha. On Tuesday, one Subash Chandra Bhoi filed his nomination papers as an MP candidate. Besides Manoj Kumar Rath for Satyabadi and Yudhistir Rath and Dinabandhu Parida both for Pipili MLA constituency submitted their papers.

Cyber Security Online Training Applications invited from Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The National Academy of Cyber Security has invited online applications for admission into the Government of India Certified Cyber Security Courses Online Training. Interested 10+2 pass, Degree, Diploma, Engineering and PG candidates can apply online from all over Odisha for the respective courses for the training. Courses offered: Cyber Security Officer, PG Certificate in Cyber Security Management, PG Certificate in Cyber Security & Ethical Hacking, Master Program in Cyber Security & Ethical Hacking. The duration of the Courses is three months to one year. The National Academy of Cyber Security offers a 50% fee subsidy in the form of concession in the course fee to SC, ST, BC, EBC, OBC, Minority, PH, women candidates, ex-Serviceman and their children under the Swarna Bharat National Level Skill Development Program. After completion of the course, a Government of India Certificate will be issued. As per the Cyber Crime Magazine, Big technology companies and IT/software companies have a US skill shortage in Cyber Security with 3.5 million job openings in cyber security in 2025. After successfully completing the courses in Cyber Security, the candidates will get opportunities in the job profiles like Cyber Security Officer, Information Officer, Information Analyst, Security Architect, IT Security Engineer, Systems Security Administrator, Information Risk Auditor, Security Analyst, Intrusion Detection Specialist, Computer Security Incident Responders, Cryptologists, Vulnerability Assessors, Trainer/ Teacher in Educational Institutions. Job opportunities are good for these candidates in India as well as abroad. Online Application website: www.nacindia.org Last date for online application: 14/05/2024 For details contact Phone number: 7893141797

On the first day of filing nomination on Monday ahead of May 13 elections, BJP national spokesperson Dr Sambit Patra filed his papers for Puri

BJP slams Atanu for 'misleading' remarks

Says Kendrapada got rail link due to Baijayant
PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

Hitting out at BJD leader Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak over his remarks on the Haridaspur-paradip railway line, the BJP on Tuesday accused the ruling party of being in the habit of hijacking and branding Central schemes as its own. Addressing a Press meet, BJP's Kendrapada district vice-president Sanjay Rath said the BJD and its leaders are trying to take full credit for railway projects in the State. Accusing Atanu of trying to

mislead people, Rath said BJP national vice-president and party Kendrapada Lok Sabha candidate Baijayant Panda's contribution to the Haridaspur-Paradip railway line is immense. Because of Baijayant's continuous efforts, the dream of the people of Kendrapada has been fulfilled, he said. Stating that Baijayant had placed a demand for rail connectivity in the region way back in 2009, Rath said Baijayant sincerely pursued the demand and worked in coordination with senior officials in New Delhi to make the people's dream a reality. Baijayant, a former

Kendrapada MP, was instrumental in implementation of the rail line project as he worked sincerely right from the project's sanction, land acquisition to other processes, he said. Slamming Atanu for claiming that the project was possible because of efforts of the Odisha Government, the BJP leader said Atanu was MLA from Mahakalpada for 15 years and also a Minister. However, because of his inefficiency and apathy, people are depending on boats to cross river due to lack of proper connectivity and lack of bridges, he claimed.

Despite being in power for the last 25 years, the BJD has done nothing for the people of Mahakalpada, said Rath. He said the State Government has done little to ensure establishment of industries in the region. Though Atanu was Health Minister in the past, not a single good hospital has been set up in Kendrapada for critically ill patients, who are forced to go to Cuttack for treatment, Rath said. And though Atanu was also Energy Minister in the past, the power outage situation in Kendrapada is dismal and many areas are yet to get electricity supply, he said.

2 accused held in midnight raid

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Police in a midnight operation arrested two persons, who had created a reign of terror in the Nandankanan Zoological Park here on Monday. The duo had damaged office equipments and manhandled officials. The armed miscreants barged into the Nandankanan Deputy Director's Office and unleashed a state of terror in the office especially in the chambers of ACF (SM), ACF (VM) and office corridor. They manhandled biologist Dr Rajesh Mahapatra, ACF (SBG) Sudipta Kumar Panda, ACF (SM) Rashmi Ranjan

Swain, ACF and Audit Officer Ashuthosh Campa. Numerous office assets, including computers, laptops, printers, TV sets and furniture, were destroyed. They also destroyed the laptop and mobile phones. Later, the Nandankanan PS IIC was informed. The police PCR team arrived; however, they did not intervene immediately. Later, on the intervention of Commissioner of Police Sanjeeb Panda, a midnight raid was launched and the two miscreants were nabbed. The zoo was closed on Monday and the reason behind the miscreants going there and attacking the officials was yet to be ascertained, police officials said.

Community literary event 'KLF Corner' re-launched

"The Heartbreak Club" by Novoneel unveiled
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Kalinga Literary Festival, in collaboration with Oxford Bookstore Bhubaneswar, unveiled the rejuvenation of its monthly community literary event with an electrifying book launch of Novoneel Chakraborty's latest masterpiece, "The Heartbreak Club," published by Westland Books. The event, held at Oxford Bookstore Bhubaneswar, saw an enthusiastic gathering of literary enthusiasts eagerly awaiting the opportunity to engage with one of India's foremost thriller authors. Sharing his insights and happiness, founder and director of Kalinga Literary Festival Rashmi Ranjan Parida said, "The KLF Corner, in collaboration with Oxford Bookstore,



embarks on a journey to rekindle the essence of literary dialogue within our community. Originally launched in 2019, the initiative was paused by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, with the resounding book launch of 'The Heartbreak Club' by Novoneel Chakraborty, the KLF Corner proudly recommits to nurturing the literary

spirit. In partnership with esteemed publishers like Penguin India, Harper Collins India, Westland Books, Bloomsbury, Rupa, and more, we aspire to curate enriching experiences that celebrate the power of words and ideas." Speaking to a captivated audience, Novoneel shared, "In that crowd, my thrillers worked because it was differ-

ent. Any memorable piece of art is about the character, not the plot. It's not about the person but about the journey you make." His profound reflections on the essence of storytelling resonated deeply with attendees, sparking lively discussions and introspection. The evening continued with an illuminating discussion and Q&A session moder-

ated by Panchami Manoo Ukil, educator and VC of DN Wisdom Tree Global School, Bhubaneswar. Debamitra Mishra (Festival Coordinator, Kalinga Literary Festival), Ved Prakash Nayak (Member, Kalinga Literary Festival), Jagadish Behera (Store Manager, Oxford Bookstore Bhubaneswar) organised the event of the evening.

'Madhubabu launched battle against untouchability before Gandhi'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
A thinker who was ahead of his times, Utkalgaurab Madhusudan Das, widely referred to as the architect of modern Odisha, had started his battle against untouchability much before Mahatma Gandhi launched his mission to eradicate the social evil, a researcher has said. Madhubabu became a pioneer industrialist when he set up the Utkal Tannery at Cuttack in 1905 to manufacture shoes and other leather products which became a famous enterprise at that time. The industry primarily recruited workers from among dalits but Madhusudan also engaged people from the upper castes like Brahmins in the unit who worked together in rare harmony, said Prof Jugal Kishore Mishra, Utkal Gaurab Madhusudan Das Chair Professor at the Kalinga Institute

of Social Sciences (KISS) while delivering a lecture on the subject 'Madhusudan Das and His Vision of Modern Odisha' at a programme organised to mark the great leader's 176th birth anniversary on Sunday. Prof Mishra said that when Mahatma Gandhi visited Odisha in 1925, he made it a point to visit Utkal Tannery to have a firsthand experience about Madhubabu's industrial venture. When he found that people of different castes and religions including people from higher castes were working together in the industry, he saw it as an example of great social unity. Both Mahatma Gandhi and BR Ambedkar held Madhusudan in high esteem and praised his rational and modern outlook, he said. The programme, which was jointly organised by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Bhubaneswar and St Thomas Fellowship, was also

guided by Prof Deepak Kumar Behera, Vice-Chancellor of KISS. Prof Mishra, referring to Madhubabu's decision to embrace Christianity, said the concept of 'forgiveness' and 'humility' in the Christian religion influenced him greatly leading to his conversion. Madhusudan explained his thoughts about Christianity in a letter to his adopted daughter Sailabala Das when she was in England for higher studies. Madhusudan stood firm in his decision to become a Christian in the face of stiff opposition from family members including his father, Prof Mishra said. Prof Behera spoke about Madhusudan's emphasis on women's emancipation, saying he ensured that his adopted daughters were highly educated. His daughter Sudhansubala Hazra became the first woman lawyer of India, he said.

Parjang again set for close fight between Nrushinga, Bibhuti

Vote margin between them has been very negligible in last 3 elections

SRIKANTA K TRIPATHY
■ BHUBANESWAR

Parjang has been a non-descript Assembly constituency with its endemic backwardness and agrarian economy since it was carved out from Pallahara constituency in 2009 by delimitation. Sitting MLA Dr Nrushinga Sahu has been winning from the seat repeatedly since 2009.

Dr Sahu is facing strong anti-incumbency in the area with his low-key performance level. The area has not witnessed any spectacular development in any sector in the last one and a half decades under his leadership. Except for some infrastructural projects, the area is far from witnessing any key industrial projects or State or national level educational institutions or hospitals. Joblessness among the youths is all-time high while not much has been done to boost the agriculture of the area though maximum people depend on farming as their prime source of livelihood. The Rengali canal system is in a shambles

without being able to provide irrigation facilities to the farmers. Cold storage is also a day dream for the farmers.

The constituency comprises Parjang block, Kankadahada block and five gram panchayats such as Kusumajodi, Kantapal, Tumusinga, Kantiokateni and Kantioputasahi of Kamakshyanagar block. OBCs constitute a majority of the population in the area while the Kankadahada block has a considerable chunk of tribal population. Cast and nativity factors remained a key element in deciding the outcome of the elections. Dr Sahu who has been representing the area

since 2009 has both the advantages as he belongs to the Chasa community and is a native of Parjang proper.

The BJD and BJP have strong organizations in the area. After Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had his debut term as MLA of Pallahara from 2000 to 2004 with Parjang a part of it, he had showed his dynamic leadership by wooing the youths that helped him lay the foundation of a strong BJP base for the first time in Parjang. Until then Parjang was a stronghold of Congress and Janata Dal. While Bibhuti Pradhan Pratap Das was MLA Pallahara in 1980-1985, 1985-1989, 1995-

2000, Dr Sahu was elected from Pallahara in 1990-1995 (JD) and 2004-2009 (Cong) and from Parjang in 2009-2014, 2014-2019, and in 2019 on BJD ticket. After Bibhu Das went to political wilderness, Congress failed to project a credible leader in the area, with its vote share going downhill. Its nominees have been getting changed since 2000 too. On the other hand, the Congress votes have gone to the BJD and BJP with the latter emerging a force to reckon with and throwing a close fight to the BJD. Bibhuti Pradhan of BJP who lost elections thrice in 2009, 2014 and 2019 gave a tough fight to Dr Sahu as the

vote margin between them has been very negligible. In 2019, Bibhuti lost the election to Dr Sahu by just 740 votes. While Dr Sahu scored 78,747 votes, Pradhan got 78,007 votes.

Both the BJP and the BJD have re-nominated Bibhuti and Dr Sahu, respectively, from the seat this time, while Congress is yet to make its choice open. The BJD repeated Sahu considering his experience and the long period he has been representing the area. He has his pocket votes as well. Pradhan is likely to encash the public resentment against the BJD for misgovernance, scams, corruptions and nepotism.

IN BRIEF

MLA JENA OFFERS PUJA BEFORE FILING NOMINATIONS

Brahmapur: Congress' firebrand leader and business-turned politician Sanakhemundi MLA Ramesh Chandra Jena performed Puja at the Maa Bagala Mukhi temple at Chikiti on Monday and sought Her blessings just before filing of his nomination as the Congress nominee for the Sanakhemundi Assembly seat. He had won the elections in 2009 and 2019.



ASST RI HELD TAKING BRIBE IN BALANGIR

Cuttack: The Vigilance police on Tuesday apprehended Reshma Majhi, Assistant Revenue Inspector and in-charge Revenue Inspector of Belgaon RI Circle in Balangir, while accepting a bribe of Rs 10,000. Majhi was caught while accepting the bribe money to forward an inquiry report in a mutation case in favour of a complainant's relative to tehsil office, Sainatala, for issuance of ROR (land Patta). Searches were also being conducted at two locations linked to Majhi to ascertain whether she had accumulated assets disproportionate to her known sources of income.

NREGA ASST GETS 4-YR RI IN KEONJHAR

Keonjhar: The Special Vigilance Court on Tuesday sentenced a former NREGA Assistant of Saharpada block in Keonjhar district to four years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) in a trap case. The court also asked the convict Lalit Kumar Mohanta to pay a fine of Rs 2,000. In default, he has to undergo further RI for two months. On February 26, 2016, Lalit was caught accepting a bribe of Rs 10,000 from a person to facilitate issue of work order in his favour for execution of a work under the NREGA scheme. Later, he was sent to jail custody after failing to get bail.

21 KIDS FROM BIHAR RESCUED FROM TRAIN IN B'SWAR

Baleswar: As many as 21 minors were rescued from an express train on Sunday evening at Baleswar station and lodged in a Balashram here. The Child Welfare Committee was probing the matter. However, preliminary reports said these minors from Ara district of Bihar were going to an education institute in Jajpur district and on information, the RPF de-boarded them from the train. As per the guidelines, the minors can't travel without the consent of their parents and escorts. As in this case, both the conditions were compromised, they were held, said a child rights activist.

FRETBEX TRANSFORMS CAMPUS LIVING AT TOP UNIVERSITIES

Bhubaneswar: Odisha's top universities are transforming campus living with FretBox, a cutting-edge proptech solution. FretBox, a SaaS-based company, meets the growing demand for digital experiences in student housing. This innovative solution aims to elevate students' overall living experience by providing a seamless digital platform tailored to their diverse needs.



In Subarnapur Rs 1.95L cash seized from biker

PNS ■ SONEPUR

Police seized around Rs 2-lakh unaccounted cash from the side-box of a motorcycle at Misrapalli Chhhack in Binka town of Subarnapur district on Tuesday.

A police team was carrying out checking of vehicles as part of election exercise when they intercepted the motorcycle. On checking the bike, the police found Rs 1.95 lakh in cash.

On being questioned about the sources of money, the biker

could not give a satisfactory reply. He also could not produce any document in support of the cash.

Subsequently, the money was seized and would be deposited in the district treasury. It would be returned to the rightful owner after valid documents are produced with the authorities, said an official.

Notably, police had seized more than Rs 55 lakh from a car during checking at Binka College Square in this district on April 6.

'Sabar tribe to play key role in ensuing polls'



They are excited as their long demand for ST status fulfilled

PNS ■ DHENKANAL

About 10,000 Sabar tribals of Angul, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Keonjhar and Dhenkanal districts felicitated Er Debashisha Hota at Samal village under Ishwarnagar panchayat as they got ST status in February this year after

11 years of continued struggle led by Hota.

A rally was started by the tribals, dressed up in their traditional attires, who also danced and sang all along. They were by mistake acknowledged as Saara and denied ST status for long. The current development has created a wave of excitement among them.

The Sabar tribals who are about 7 lakhs in number residing in three Parliamentary Constituencies like Sambalpur, Keonjhar and Dhenkanal are

likely to play a key role in the ensuing elections, claimed Hota. He further said that the felicitation programme was a proof of the support he enjoys among the tribals.

He said the Sabar tribals were long denied the ST status despite demonstrations and rallies for long years. Whereas in some cases, the father's caste is recorded as Saara, son's caste is recorded as Sabar. Due to the mistake in the official records, the father was not recognized as ST, whereas son was recog-

nized as ST. 15 years ago, a demand letter with a proposal of rectification of all land RORs from Saara to Sabar had been submitted to the State Government urging to delegate the power of Member of Board of Revenue to the Collectors. Unfortunately, the demand had been ignored.

However, under the leadership of Hota the Saara tribe got united and held demonstrations at many places including at Member, Board of Revenue at Cuttack.

Madhu Jayanti, Lawyers' Day held in Baripada



Lawyers felicitated

PNS ■ BARIAPADA

The 176-th birth anniversary of Utkal Gaurav Madhusudan Das and the Lawyers' Day were observed here on Sunday in a colourful atmosphere. The Mayurbhanj District Bar Association (DBA), on the occasion, felicitated three eminent lawyers of Baripada for their distinguished performance in the legal profession.

Baripada Vigilance Judge Prasanna Kumar Panda was the chief guest at the function, while eminent human rights activist Praveer Kumar Das was the chief speaker. Both spoke elaborately on Madhubabu and the sanctity and nobility of the legal profession. While DBA president Bibhuprasad Das delivered the

welcome address, DBA secretary Biplab Kumar Barik gave the secretarial speech and DBA vice-president Sujata Mishra offered the vote of thanks.

Three eminent lawyers Himanshu Kumar Panigrahi, Binapani Mohanty and Banamali Barik were felicitated on the occasion. They were honoured for their professional excellence and their long-distinguished service in the legal line.

Others who were found active in making the programme a success include DBA joint secretary Swarup Kumar Mishra, treasurer Padmalochan Panda, joint secretary (Administration) Pankaj Mahakud and senior lawyer Abhinna Patnaik. The meeting was followed by cultural programmes which were coordinated by lawyer Sujata Mishra. Vedic hymns were recited at the very outset.

Protest to trees' felling in mango orchard in K'jhar

Locals meet DM, demand probe into public land transfer to pvt party

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

When the temperature in the district is above 40 degree C, instead of planting and protecting trees, the Forest Department has allowed an influential person of Ward No. 11 near Gobindpur village of Keonjhar district headquarters town to cut down about 12 very valuable and old fruit growing trees with machines.

However, the local people protesting the act have lodged a complaint with Collector Vishal Singh, seeking protection of the trees existing in Government land, that was allegedly transferred to a private person illegally.

About 60 people, especially tribals, filed a written complaint to protect the trees and urged an inquiry into the land title change. Earlier, the Forest Department had clarified that permission was given to cut down the trees. After receiving the complaint, the Collector has ordered the local tehsildar to investigate the case, the villagers said.

Kalia Munda, a local, said that the mango orchard is a public place. But how did the Government change the kismal land is a matter of suspense. He demanded that the issue be investigated. "Since childhood we have been using the orchard. The mango trees provided shade and people used to take shelter in summer and eat the mangoes. Unfortunately, it is now under possession of a private person," he added.

Sources alleged that several valuable Government as well as Devotrar lands in the locality have been illegally transferred to private persons without verifying the past record, thanks

to some corrupt Revenue department officials. Local residents have raised questions about how the Forest Department has shown urgency to cut down all the trees when many trees lying in very unsafe conditions in the town are not cleared. "When there is a need for trees for shade during severe hot conditions, how cutting of trees is being promoted for commercial gain instead of protecting them," asked environment lover Bhakta Batsal Mohanty. There are allegations that the land has not been properly identified and transferred through illegal documents, he added.

In Sundargarh UTP dies in hosp; kin allege torture

PNS ■ ROURKELA

An under-trial prisoner (UTP) died while undergoing treatment at the Rourkela Government Hospital (RGH) on Tuesday.

The deceased was identified as Debabrata Singh, a resident of Barasuan under the Lahunipada police station in Sundargarh district.

As per the reports, excise officials had arrested Singh on the charge of selling liquor and sent him to the Special Jail at Bonaigarh. As he fell sick, he was rushed to a hospital. Later,

he was shifted to the RGH after his condition deteriorated.

But he died on the day. Doctors claimed brain haemorrhage caused by high blood pressure to be the reason behind the death.

However, the deceased's family members alleged Singh was subjected to torture in the jail, leading to his death.

"There are injury marks on his body as he was tortured. We demand action against the guilty jail officials and compensation for the deceased's family," demanded Singh's relatives.

BJP workers resent party's Sonepur nominee choice

SRIKUMAR MAHANTA
■ SONEPUR

As the countdown to nominations commences, unrest within the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Subarnapur district has come to the fore, with strong protests lodged by the party workers in key Assembly constituencies.

The dissatisfaction revolves around party's choice of Pramod Mohapatra in Sonepur Constituency.

Including this time, Mohapatra has been nominated for the second consecutive time from Sonepur but he is opposed from within his party ranks. His previous defeat in the last 2014 election with a margin of more than 50,000 votes has raised doubts among the BJP workers.

Mohapatra had polled 42,049 votes in the 2014 elec-

tion, which is about 23.24 per cent of the total votes polled in the constituency. Subsequently, in the 2019 elections, Ashok Pujari, who came from Congress, was fielded by the BJP but he could secure 73,347 votes against BJD's Niranjan Pujari, polling 36.11 pc votes.

The initial murmurs of resentment over Mohapatra's candidature became obvious and came out in the open in social media after some local party workers shouted a slogan 'Sonepur BJP bachao' in Sonepur a few days ago. A senior worker of BJP, requesting anonymity, said, "We are not in favour of the decision taken regarding the candidate in Sonepur. The party had already tried him once in 2014 and he had lost by a huge margin. Since, we are working at the grassroots level, we are aware of the agony of people."

Breakthrough surgery at KIMS 2kg diaphragmatic tumour removed sans chest incision



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A team of medical professionals led by Senior Surgical Oncologist, Dr Sabyasachi Parida, achieved a remarkable feat at the KIMS Cancer Center. They successfully operated on a young man with an unusually large left-sided massive 2 kg diaphragmatic tumour, marking a significant milestone in surgical oncology.

The diaphragm, a crucial muscular partition separating the chest from the abdomen, underwent meticulous surgery for the massive tumour, which

measured approximately 24x17 cm and weighed over 2 kg. The exceptional case, where the tumour hindered the individual's ability to consume solid food, presented unique challenges.

Traditionally, accessing such tumours used to require invasive procedures, including opening of both the abdomen and chest, often causing considerable discomfort for patients. However, Dr Parida's innovative approach avoided the need for a chest incision or a chest drain, significantly reducing postoperative pain

and enhancing the patient's recovery process.

The surgical team, consisting of Dr Monika Dabgotra, Consultant Anaesthetist, Bibhas Prasad Barik, OT Technician, Kalpana Ojha, Senior OT Suster, Mikina Pradhan, Senior OT support staff, along with Nursing Officers and other dedicated staff, demonstrated exceptional skill and teamwork throughout the six-hour procedure. The patient, who woke up comfortably on the operating table, recovered swiftly without the need for intensive care or respiratory support.

Forest fires add to heat woes of S'pal villages



As many places in sanctuary forests on fire

PNS ■ BARIAPADA

For the last eight days, forest fires have been raging in various parts of the eco-sensitive Similipal Sanctuary in Mayurbhanj district amid a severe heat wave. This has made life miserable for the

people living in the surrounding areas.

Worryingly, the fires have been spreading from one hill to another with the blaze reported from three points in the Podadiha area. Columns of smoke billowing out from the fire points have enveloped many parts of the sanctuary.

Though the Forest Department has been carrying out fire-fighting exercises, it has not been able to contain the

blaze. However, coupled with the relentless rise in the mercury, the heat generated by the raging forest fires has made life miserable for the people living in the villages surrounding Similipal.

Many observed that people setting fires to forests should understand the danger posed to animals and humans in the vicinity. However, no comments were received from the Forest Department.

BJP claims its performance in South India will be historic

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Tuesday claimed that its performance in South India, a region where it has traditionally struggled outside Karnataka, will be historic and accused the Congress of running a campaign full of blatant lies and misinformation.

BJP leader and Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, who contested against incumbent MP and Congress candidate Shashi Tharoor from Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, said history will be made on June 4 when votes for the Lok Sabha polls are counted. The BJP has performed extremely strongly in Kerala and Tamil Nadu and its overall tally from south India will be closer to 60 this time, he claimed.

The region has a total of 131 Lok Sabha seats. The BJP had won 29, including 25 in Karnataka, of those in 2019, drawing a blank in Andhra



Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Polling in Kerala and Tamil Nadu are over.

The BJP is in a tight fight in nine seats in Kerala and people will witness a dramatic change in the political landscape in Tamil Nadu as it will emerge as a principal second pole there, he said.

He also accused the Congress of running a campaign full of blatant lies, misinformation, deepfake videos and bizarre economic proposals. It has become so desperate that it is misleading voters that the BJP will change the Constitution, he said. Such a claim has come from a party that has

amended the Constitution the maximum number of times, he added.

Amid police action by several BJP-ruled states besides the Delhi Police, which reports to the Centre, in the case of morphed videos of Home Minister Amit Shah to give the impression he promised to end the reservation for disadvantaged Hindu communities, the Union minister blamed the Congress for it and said the party is doing what Prime Minister Narendra Modi had warned about deep-fakes long ago. Law has stringent provisions against promoting deepfakes, he said.

Admiral Dinesh Tripathi takes charge as new Navy chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy should remain operationally ready at all times to deter potential adversaries at sea, Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi said on Tuesday shortly after taking charge as the 26th chief of the Naval Staff.

Tripathi, who is a communication and electronic warfare specialist, assumed charge of the force following the retirement of incumbent R Hari Kumar. The new chief took charge of the Navy at a time various strategic waterways, including the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, are witnessing security challenges, especially in view of Houthi militants targeting various merchant ships in the region.

“Over the years, our Navy has evolved into a combat-ready, cohesive, credible and future-proof force,” he told reporters. “The existing and emerging challenges in the maritime domain mandate that the Indian Navy should remain operationally ready at all times to deter potential adversaries at sea in peace and to win war at and from the sea when asked



to do so,” he said. “This will remain my singular focus and endeavour,” Tripathi added.

The new Navy chief also said boosting the Navy’s ongoing efforts to enhance self-reliance will be one of his priorities. “I will also strengthen the ongoing efforts of the Indian Navy towards ‘Aatamnirbharta’, towards introducing new technologies and becoming an important pillar of national

development towards our collective quest for a ‘Viksit Bharat’ (developed India),” he said.

Before taking charge, Admiral Tripathi paid tributes to the fallen heroes at the National War Memorial. He was also accorded a ceremonial guard of honour at the lawns of the South Block at the Raisina Hills here. He took blessings from his mother Rajni Tripathi

before taking charge as the chief of the Indian Navy.

An alumnus of the Sainik School Rewa, Admiral Tripathi was serving as the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff before taking the reins of the force.

Born on May 15, 1964, Admiral Tripathi was commissioned into the executive branch of the Indian Navy on July 1, 1985.

A communication and elec-

tronic warfare specialist, he has had a long and distinguished service spanning nearly 39 years.

Prior to taking over as Vice Chief of Navy, he had served as Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Naval Command.

Admiral Tripathi has commanded Indian Naval Ships Vinash, Kirch and Trishul. He has also held various important operational and staff appointments which include fleet operations officer of the Western Fleet, director of naval operations, principal director, network centric operations and principal director, naval plans. As Rear Admiral, he served as flag officer commanding of the eastern fleet. He also served as Commandant of the prestigious Indian Naval Academy, Ezhimala.

An alumnus of National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla, Admiral Tripathi has undergone courses at the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Naval Higher Command Course, Karanja and Naval Command College in the United States.

Admiral Hari Kumar retired following superannuation after a career spanning four decades.

Congress slams Modi for ignoring farmers plight in Marathwada

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of ignoring the plight of farmers in Marathwada, and also asked about his vision to address water scarcity in that region.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh posed questions to the prime minister ahead of his rallies in Marathwada region of Maharashtra.

“Why has the PM ignored the plight of Marathwada’s farmers? What is the PM’s vision to address water scarcity in Marathwada? Why has the

export ban only been lifted on Gujarat’s white onions?” Ramesh said in a post on X.

Elaborating on what he said were “jumla” details, Ramesh said that in the first half of 2023, the Marathwada region accounted for the highest number of farmer suicides in Maharashtra.

“As many as 685 farmers took their own lives in Marathwada and the State Agriculture Minister’s home district, Beed, reported the highest number of deaths at 186. Now, after suffering from drought conditions for the last four months, the Marathwada region has been hit by unseasonal rains and hailstorms, causing severe

crop losses. The ruling BJP government has not declared this event a national disaster or announced any relief measures,” Ramesh said.

This is no surprise from a government that has also “failed” to care for the Godavari river, which is considered the lifeline of Marathwada, he said. “Although 88 crores were allocated for the cleaning of the river in 2022, there has been no tangible improvement in water quality. Similarly, Manjra river that passes through Latur has also been neglected,” he claimed.

“What are PM Modi and the BJP doing to protect Marathwada’s farmers from



drought and natural disasters? What is their vision to prevent farmer suicides?” he said.

Ramesh further said that more than 600 villages and 178 hamlets in Marathwada have

worst affected with drinking water reservoirs only at 19 per cent capacity, compared to 40 per cent last year,” he said. In Latur, water availability has come down to once in 15 days, he noted.

“Instead of trying to address this catastrophe, BJP leaders have shirked responsibility, played the blame game, and failed to address allegations of widespread corruption in the implementation of relief and support schemes,” Ramesh alleged. What is the PM’s vision to tackle water scarcity in Marathwada, he asked.

He also raised the issue that since December 2023, onion farmers in Maharashtra have

been reeling from the Modi government’s ban on onion exports.

“During the cultivation season, the state was hit with unsatisfactory rainfall and water crises, and most farmers were only able to produce 50 per cent of their usual crop. When onions were finally harvested, farmers were faced with an arbitrary export ban which led to devastatingly low sale prices,” Ramesh said. As a result, farmers have racked up significant losses in the last five months, he said.

“To add insult to injury, yesterday, the Modi Sarkar allowed the export of white onions which are primarily grown in

Gujarat. Maharashtra farmers, who primarily grow red onions, have been left out.

Can PM Modi explain why his government is playing favourites? Why have they so callously neglected Maharashtra’s onion farmers?” Ramesh said.

The Congress Nyay Patra promises a stable, predictable import-export policy to prevent such catastrophic last-minute policies being imposed on farmers, he said.

“What is the Modi Sarkar’s vision to assure farmers of policy stability?” Ramesh said and asked the prime minister to break his “silence” on these issues.

Army Chief underlines importance of technology infusion in Armed forces

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Army chief General Manoj Pande said here on Tuesday the Indian Army is alive to the imperative of transformation, and it is with a progressive outlook, that it intends, to not only change, but to change at a good pace too.

The Army chief especially underlined the importance of “technology infusion” and “self-reliance” in the armed forces, saying both are distinct yet interconnected. Making this point while paying tributes to former Army Chief General K Sundarji, he also said the holistic transformation of the Indian Army “we put into effect two years ago, is part of our efforts to give shape to a modern, agile, adaptive, technology enabled and self-reliant future ready force.”

The 4th General Sundarji Memorial Lecture was organised by the Indian Army in



Manekshaw Centre to commemorate the legacy of one of India’s foremost military thinkers General K Sundarji. The lecture was conducted under the aegis of Mechanised Infantry Centre and School (MIC&S) and Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS). The event was attended by serving and retired officers of the three Services as well as literati and various think tanks. The lecture remembered the dynamic and visionary General K Sundarji, the 13th Chief of

the Army Staff, who is also fondly called as the ‘Father of the Mechanised Infantry Regiment’. General Manoj Pande delivered the keynote address and underscored the foresight of General Sundarji. He highlighted Sundarji’s vision in the fields of digitisation of the battlefield, Information Warfare, technology infusion, conventional strategies and force structure, reflected in his work ‘Vision 2100’.

The eminent speakers NN Vohra, former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, shared his experiences with General Sundarji and also expressed his thoughts on ‘Need for National Security Policy’ while Lieutenant General Subrata Saha (Retired), former Deputy Chief of Army Staff and Member National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) delivered a talk on, “Modernising India’s Armed Forces: Lessons from Gen K Sundarji”.

Manipur cops drove two Kuki Zomi women to mob: CBI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Manipur Police personnel allegedly drove the two women from the Kuki-Zomi community, who had sought refuge in their official gypsy, to a mob of around 1,000 Meiti rioters in Kangpokpi district, the CBI charge sheet has said.

The two women were subsequently stripped naked and paraded before being sexually assaulted during the ethnic violence in the state, the charge sheet added.

The women, one of whom was the wife of a Kargil war veteran, desperately asked the police personnel to drive them to a safe location but were allegedly told by them that “there was no key” (of the vehicle) and did not provide any help, the officials giving details of the charge sheet said.

A video showing two women being paraded naked surrounded by a mob of men went viral last year in July, nearly two months after the



ethnic violence broke on May 4.

The CBI filed its charge sheet against six accused and a report against one Child in Conflict with the Law (CCL) before the Special Judge, CBI Court at Guwahati on October 16 last year.

It has alleged that the two women were running away

from a mob of around 900-1,000 persons carrying sophisticated weapons like AK rifles, SLR, INSAS and .303 rifles. The mob had forcefully entered their village in Kangpokpi district, about 68 km south of Saikul police station, it said.

The women, along with other victims, ran into the forest to

escape from the mob but were spotted by the rioters who had separated the victims. Some members of the mob told the women to reach the police vehicle parked on the roadside to seek help, officials in the know of the development said.

The two women managed to get inside the vehicle, in which two police personnel and the driver were sitting. Three to four personnel were outside the vehicle.

One of the male victims, who also managed to make his way inside the vehicle, kept pleading with the driver to drive them to a safe place but was told “there was no key”. The husband of one of the victims had served the Indian Army as a subedar of the Assam Regiment. The police also did not help the father of the man sitting in the vehicle from being assaulted by the mob, the CBI alleged.

Later, the driver of the police gypsy drove the vehicle towards a mob of around 1,000 people and stopped it in front of them. The victims

desperately asked the police personnel to drive them to safety, but no help was provided to them.

The mob had already killed the father of one of the male victims who was sitting in the gypsy along with the two women, the agency has said.

The violent mob came towards the gypsy when the police personnel fled from the scene, leaving the victims at the mercy of the crowd.

The rioters dragged the women out, stripped them of their clothes and paraded them naked before sexually assaulting them, the charge sheet has said.

The CBI has charge sheeted Huirem Herodas Meitei, who was nabbed by Manipur police in July, and five others, and a report has been filed against a juvenile.

The accused have been charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including those pertaining to gang rape, murder, outraging the modesty of a woman and criminal conspiracy, the CBI has said.

Above normal rain predicted over South Asia in 2024

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Above-normal rainfall is expected during the 2024 southwest monsoon season over most parts of south Asia, the South Asian Climate Outlook Forum said on Tuesday.

The forecast follows the prediction of above-normal rain in the monsoon season in India on the back of favourable La Nina conditions, expected to set in by August-September.

“Above normal rainfall is most likely during the 2024 southwest monsoon season (June-September) over most parts of south Asia, except some areas over northern, eastern, and northeastern parts of the region, where below-normal rainfall is most likely,” the South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF) said.

Above-normal maximum and minimum temperatures are predicted over most parts of south Asia during the season,



except a few areas over the southeastern part of the region where normal temperatures are most likely. This regional climate outlook for the 2024 southwest monsoon season has been developed by all nine National Meteorological and

Hydrological Services (NMHSs) of south Asia with support from international experts at the 28th session of SASCOF-28, conducted online.

The SASCOF said moderate El Nino conditions are prevailing at present. ENSO (El

Nino-Southern Oscillation) neutral conditions are expected in the first half of the monsoon season. Thereafter, La Nina conditions may set in by the second half.

El Nino conditions — periodic warming of surface waters in the central Pacific

Ocean — are associated with weaker monsoon winds and drier conditions in India.

La Nina conditions — the antithesis of El Nino — are the dominant factor in the likelihood of “above-normal” rainfall during the monsoon season, DS Pai, a senior scientist at the India Meteorological Department (IMD), told PTI. Positive Indian Ocean Dipole conditions, favourable for the Indian monsoon, are predicted in the later part of the season. Additionally, the snow cover in the northern hemisphere is low.

The northern hemisphere winter and spring snow cover extent generally have an inverse relationship with the subsequent southwest monsoon rainfall over south Asia. Earlier this month, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) said the seasonal rainfall in India will be on the higher side of ‘above-normal’ and pegged it at 106 per cent of the long-period average (87 cm).

Rahul urges party candidates to carry Constitution copy during nominations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday urged all party candidates to carry a copy of the Constitution with them during nominations, public meetings and outreach programmes, and tell the people that as long as the Congress is there, let alone the BJP, no power in the world can snatch away the Constitution.

The former Congress chief has been carrying a copy of the Constitution in his public meetings. He did so in Gujarat’s Patan and Chhattisgarh’s Bilaspur on Monday and in Madhya Pradesh’s Bhind on Tuesday.

“A boon for the poor, respect for the deprived and pride of every citizen — our Constitution! I request all Congress candidates and leaders to keep the sacred



Constitution with them during nominations, meetings, speeches and public outreach,” Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X. “Announce it in every village and every street that as long as the Congress is there, let alone BJP, no power in the world can snatch away the Constitution of India,” the former Congress chief said.

In a post in Hindi on X, Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said, “Even today, Rahul Gandhi reached

the public meeting in Madhya Pradesh with Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar’s Constitution. This election is between those who save the Constitution and those who destroy it.”

“This is the most important election of our lifetime,” Ramesh added.

The Congress has been alleging that the BJP wants “more than 400 seats” so that it can amend the Constitution and fulfil the “conspiracy” of the RSS to abolish reservation.



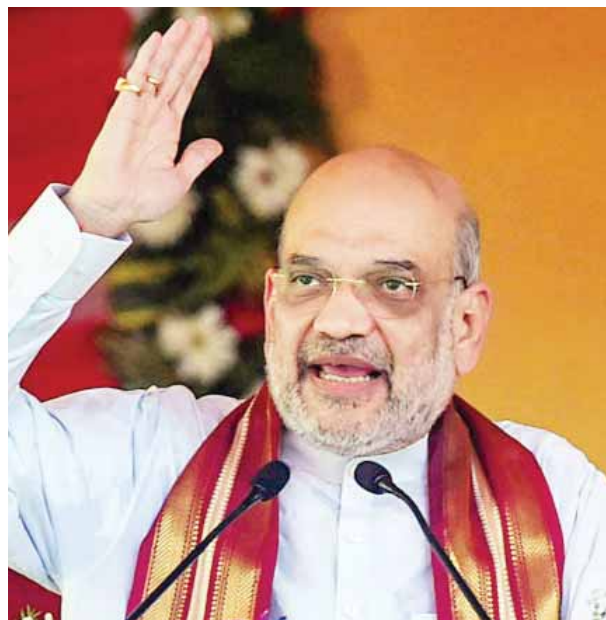
Congress spreading lies about BJP changing Constitution: Shah

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday alleged the Congress was spreading lies that the BJP intends to change the constitution and end reservations if it returns to power for a third term. Shah also said the BJP is heading towards its goal of 400-plus Lok Sabha seats with the blessings and support of people.

"The Congress is spreading lies about the saffron party changing the constitution and ending reservations... We do not see voters as minority or majority; the BJP will win 12 of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam," he told a press conference here.

The senior BJP leader slammed the Congress for practising the "politics of appeasement since the very beginning", and said it wants to save "the little of what is remaining of their support base".



"The BJP does not believe in reservations on the basis of religion... We are also in favour of implementing the Uniform Civil Code across the country and ensure that there is one law for people of all religions," the home minister said. In a secular country, it is not

right to have laws based on religion, and this is against the spirit of the constitution, Shah said.

The BJP condemns the Congress' promise to bring back the Muslim Personal Law as mentioned in its manifesto, he said.

Commenting on the "fake video" of Shah on reservations that was circulated on social media platforms, he said all kinds of methods were being employed by the opposition to misguide people.

A Congress functionary of Assam was arrested on Monday for allegedly circulating the video, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said.

To a question, the home minister asserted that the BJP was getting a "very good response" from voters in the southern states.

Shah had arrived here on Monday evening and held a roadshow for the party's Guwahati candidate Bijuli Kalita Medhi.

81.16 per cent voter turnout recorded in repolling in Outer Manipur LS seat



PTI ■ IMPHAL

A voter turnout of 81.16 per cent was recorded at six polling stations in Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seat, where repolling was held on Tuesday, election officials said.

No untoward incident was reported and voting, which commenced at 7 am, was held peacefully under tight security arrangements, they said.

A voter turnout of 81.16 per cent was recorded till the end of polling at 4 pm, the officials

said.

Repolling was necessitated as unidentified persons had damaged EVMs and VVPATs before the completion of voting at four of these six polling stations on April 26, while EVM malfunctioning was reported at one polling station, and voting could not be completed at another due to "threat and intimidation by unknown miscreants", they said.

Voting at four polling stations in Ukhrul assembly segment, and one each in Chingai assembly seat in Ukhrul and Karong in Senapati was

declared null and void, a notification issued by the office of Manipur's chief electoral officer had earlier said.

Five of the polling stations are in Ukhrul district and have a total of 4,156 voters.

Around 76.06 per cent of 4.84 lakh voters exercised their franchise during polling in 13 of 28 assembly segments of Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency on April 26.

Voting was held in the remaining 15 segments, along with the entire Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat, in the first phase on April 19.

Haryana to rope in musical bands to encourage young voters

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana will rope in musical bands to play election-theme songs for encouraging young voters to exercise their franchise, Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Agarwal said.

These bands will encourage people to cast their vote on the day of polling and also promote awareness and education regarding the election, Agarwal told PTI.

"Soon we will be doing the first band play, hopefully in Panchkula. The band will perform and election-theme music will be played," he said.

Later, these bands will be engaged districts having a higher percentage of young voters, he said.

Notably, 1,99,81,982 voters across the state are eligible to cast their votes when polling will be held on May 25 in 10 Lok Sabha constituencies of the state in the sixth phase of general elections.

Developments in Surat, Indore show people affection for BJP: Rajnath

PTI ■ INDORE

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday termed the Congress a "sinking ship" and said the developments in Surat and Indore showed the people's affection for the ruling BJP.

Several Congress candidates had been elected unopposed in the past, he said at a rally at Mandhata in Madhya Pradesh in support of BJP candidate from Khandwa and sitting MP Dnyaneshwar Patil.

"This time there was a miracle in Lok Sabha elections. The BJP candidate from Surat won unopposed, and the Congress



candidate in Indore withdrew his nomination and extended support to the BJP. This shows people's deep affection towards the BJP which is increasing all the time," Singh said. Countering Congress' claim

that such developments were a threat to democracy, the Union minister said its candidates had been elected unopposed on 20 occasions. "I want to ask the Congress, was there no threat to democracy then?" he said.

The Opposition party was a "sinking ship with a hole," and no power in the world can save it, the BJP leader further said. On Monday, Congress candidate from Indore, Akshay Kanti Bam, withdrew his nomination and joined the BJP. Earlier, the BJP scored its first victory in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections on April 22 after the nomination of

Congress' Surat candidate Nilesh Kumbhani was rejected for technical reasons and the other candidates dropped out of the race, leading to the BJP's Mukesh Dalal being elected unopposed.

"Mahatma Gandhi had said the Congress should be dissolved after independence. But Congress leaders did not listen to him. Now the people of India are bent on finishing Congress as per Gandhi's wishes," Singh further said.

"If you were to ask a child ten years down the line if he knows Congress, he would say, 'what Congress'. This is the condition of the

party," he added. Singh also attacked Rahul Gandhi's statement about conducting a "wealth survey" and Indian Overseas Congress chief Sam Pitroda's remarks about inheritance tax.

Such proposals were not acceptable to the people of the country and global economists too have termed them a "very dangerous game", the BJP leader said.

The BJP's was determined to hold simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in future and necessary amendments would be made to existing laws and rules, Singh said.

Congress having vicious, divisive design: BJP president Nadda

PTI ■ SHIVAMOGGA (KARNATAKA)

Accusing the Congress of supporting the idea of religion-based reservation, despite the fact that it cannot be done as per the Constitution, BJP President J P Nadda on Tuesday charged the grand old party with having "vicious and divisive designs".

He said this while speaking at "professionals meet" organised here as part of the BJP's campaign for Shimoga Lok Sabha candidate B Y Raghavendra.

"In the Constitution, it is very clearly written that there is no place for religious reservation, but what they (Congress) did -- 4 per cent reservation to Muslims, from OBC quota (in Karnataka). Who is against the OBC? They are neither friends of Muslim brethren nor sympathisers of OBC," Nadda said.

Addressing the gathering, he noted that in undivided Andhra Pradesh, Congress came out with a law four times, where they tried to take reservation of SC/ST and OBCs, to give it to the Muslim community.

"We are not against the Muslim community, but we have to understand that the Constitution clearly says that there will be no reservation based on religion, and it is a very deep thought... But these people (Congress) the kind of vicious and divisive designs they have. Are we going to support them?" he asked.

Veteran BJP leader B S Yediyurappa, Raghavendra and other party leaders were present.

Accusing opposition parties of indulging in 'divisive politics', Nadda said, "a few days ago there was a video and they were trying to create an impression and environment that BJP is



against SC/ST and OBC, and if we (BJP) come to power the reservations for these communities will go."

"They came out with a fabricated video... People and media exposed the INDI Alliance's deep fake video. The sad part of it is that the fake video was uploaded on social media from Telangana CM Revanth Reddy's phone, and all partners of the INDI Alliance tried to make it viral... They are in deep depression about BJP and NDA crossing 400 seats under PM's leadership. This shows their mentality," he added.

Noting that on one hand there is BJP, which is being led by PM Modi, under whom India is becoming stronger day-by-day and things have changed, the BJP chief said, but it is very sad to note that on the other hand the INDI Alliance, which has got "no perspective, no objective and no direction."

"They (INDIA bloc) are so frustrated that they are trying to build divisive forces and encourage divisive forces, they want to create a north and south divide. When PM speaks about 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas Sabka Prayaas', they talk about division of north and south," he added.

Chandrababu Naidu confident of regaining Andhra Pradesh

PTI ■ KURNOOL

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu has said the anti-incumbency wave coupled with failure of all institutional frameworks will ensure his party sweeps both assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Andhra Pradesh as people have 'realised' the ruling YSR Congress has failed to live up to all its promises.

The former Chief Minister who is fighting to regain power in the state, expressed confidence that the TDP-BJP-Jana Sena Party (JSP) combine will win 24 out of 25 Lok Sabha seats and 160 of the 175 assembly seats comfortably in the simultaneous elections to be held on May 13.

Naidu (74) said the YSRCP came to power on the promise of getting a special status to AP but the issue has been relegated to the background as people are struggling to deal with alleged mismanagement of every government department. The state has gone into huge financial debt to an extent that



people have not received salaries and pensions, he added. "There is a tremendous anti-incumbency. YSR Congress has destroyed the ecosystem of development in Andhra Pradesh," Naidu told PTI in an interview. The YSR Congress has not only failed to get a special status for the state but also not been able to build a proper capital even after 10 years of the state bifurcation, he said. He alleged that the current government has 'destroyed' all government institutions. There

is total "chaos" in the state as every sector is in "doldrums". "Morale of all officers is very low. Nobody is willing to work. This is the scenario today in the state," he said.

People were suffering due to lack of development.

"There is no water in the villages. There is no power in the villages, no proper roads. In fact, the income of an ordinary man is far less compared to his expenditure. This is very bad. Total living standards for everybody has gone down," he said.

Naidu further claimed the people have seen the false promises made by the YSR Congress without doing any iota of work on the ground. This has boosted the anti-incumbency wave and people have made up their mind to vote for TDP.

On tying up with BJP despite the saffron party not having enough presence in AP, he said it was done to end the sufferings of the people under the "misrule" of Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan

Reddy and bring normalcy in the state.

"At that time, we were very keen on the special status issue. Now, the YSR Congress Party has made the special status a non-issue. Now, if I fight also, nothing will happen," he said.

Due to bifurcation in 2014, Andhra people had to suffer. But they suffered more under the YSR Congress rule.

"We don't want people to suffer any more. And we have to revive, rebuild Andhra Pradesh. That's why we joined together — BJP, TDP and Jana Sena under the NDA umbrella," he said.

"We will fight, we will restore total normalcy, and also we will create a better future for the people of Andhra." Asked if alliance with actor-turned politician Pawan Kalyan's Jana Sena Party will benefit TDP, since film actors are generally good crowd pullers but do not turn fans into voters, Naidu said, "Pawan Kalyan is different as he is a party head. He has a vote bank. That's why we joined him."

Modi targets Sharad Pawar

PTI ■ MALSHIRAS (MAHARASHTRA)

A day after terming Sharad Pawar as a wandering soul, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday continued his attack on the NCP leader, saying he did not do much for farmers while being the Union agriculture minister.

"When a big Maharashtra leader was Union agriculture minister, farmers used to make rounds of sugarcane commission for their arrears," Modi said at a rally in Malshiras of Solapur district in Maharashtra.

"There is a 'bhakti' (wandering soul) in Maharashtra. If it does not manage success it spoils others' good work. Maharashtra has been a victim of it," Modi had said at a rally on Monday, hitting out at Sharad Pawar without taking his name.

"This game was started by the same leader 45 years ago. It was just for his own ambition

that Maharashtra has always been an unstable State. As a result, several chief ministers could not complete their full term," Modi had said.

At the Malshiras rally Tuesday, Modi asked voters not to waste their vote by giving it to Congress and other Opposition parties.

"Why waste your vote by giving it to those who are not contesting even the minimum number of seats needed for a simple majority in Lok Sabha," he said.

He asserted that when there is a strong government in the country, its focus is on the present as well as the future.

Modi said people are seeing the difference between his government's 10 years and Congress rule of 60 years. Congress leaders kept talking about eradicating poverty in every poll but would not do anything after that, he said.

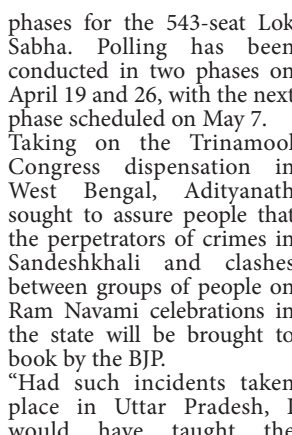
Modi said that in the last 10 years, his Government was able to bring 25 crore people out of poverty and 80 crore are getting free ration.

Polling held in 191 LS seats so far indicate third term for Modi Government: Yogi

PTI ■ BAHARAMPUR/SURI/ASANSOL (WB)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday asserted that polling held in the 191 Lok Sabha seats so far indicate another term for the Narendra Modi government, with 400 seats for the BJP-led NDA. He claimed that Uttar Pradesh would "gift" all 80 constituencies in the northern state to Modi.

"Polling held in 191 Lok Sabha seats so far indicate another term for the Modi government, with 400 seats for NDA," Adityanath said, while addressing an election rally in Baharampur Lok Sabha seat in West Bengal in support of BJP candidate Nirmal Kumar Saha. Elections are being held across the country in seven



phases for the 543-seat Lok Sabha. Polling has been conducted in two phases on April 19 and 26, with the next phase scheduled on May 7. Taking on the Trinamool Congress dispensation in West Bengal, Adityanath sought to assure people that the perpetrators of crimes in Sandeshkhali and clashes between groups of people on Ram Navami celebrations in the state will be brought to book by the BJP. "Had such incidents taken place in Uttar Pradesh, I would have taught the perpetrators such a lesson that their next seven generations would not have dared to even think of doing any such thing," he asserted. He said that hundreds of rallies were held in Ayodhya on the occasion of Ram Navami sans any incident. "West Bengal also needs a model like UP," he said.



great personalities, "has been destroyed by Congress, communists and Trinamool Congress". Claiming that neither Rahul Gandhi nor any other leader of the Congress or TMC "would come to the aid" of people of the state if they are in a crisis, he alleged, "Didi's affection is for the mafias that

are looting Bengal and putting to crisis the state's identity."

He asserted that only the BJP and Narendra Modi stand by the people in all situations.

Stating that there has not been any communal tension or curfew in Uttar Pradesh in the last seven years during his tenure as the chief minister, he said that everyone, irrespective of caste or creed, gets the benefits of welfare projects in the northern state.

"In Uttar Pradesh, both daughters and businessmen are safe," he said, asserting that no one can browbeat any other person in his state.

Speaking at another election rally in Birbhum seat in support of BJP candidate Debanu Bhattacharya, he asserted that since he took over as the chief minister seven years ago, all gangsters in Uttar Pradesh have "either left the state or the world".

"We have not only constructed Ram temple in Ayodhya, we have also arranged for 'Ram Naam Satya Hai' (funeral) of many big gangsters," he said.

He claimed that the large-scale influx of illegal immigrants into West Bengal, which shares a long border with Bangladesh, is changing the demography of the state.

Adityanath alleged that the perpetrators of crimes in Sandeshkhali and during Ramnavami celebrations were being "protected" by the ruling party in West Bengal.

Adityanath accused the Congress and other members of the opposition INDIA alliance of "trying to divide" the country and resorting to "religious appeasement" in a bid to win the elections.

"I have come to give the guarantee of development without any discrimination," he added.

He claimed that terrorism and Naxalism have been contained under the Modi government.

"Now if even a cracker is burst, Pakistan comes forward to clarify that it does not have any hand in it, because our neighbouring country knows that even if something happens by mistake, it will have to pay a heavy price," he said.

"This is the new India under Modi ji. We do not tinker with anyone, but if anyone dares to do so with us, we do not leave them unscathed," Adityanath asserted.

He said that infrastructural projects such as highways, railways and educational institutions are flourishing under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi but the TMC government is preventing the implementation of such initiatives in West Bengal.

He said that along with an

'Atmanirbhar Bharat', West Bengal will also become self-reliant if the BJP comes to power.

Speaking at another election rally in Asansol Lok Sabha seat, where the BJP has fielded S S Ahluwalia, Adityanath alleged that West Bengal has come under the grip of violence, lawlessness and corruption.

Stating that this election is for creating a new India, he said that good and efficient people should be elected to the Lok Sabha.

He claimed that what the Modi government has achieved for the development of the country in the last 10 years could not be done in 65 years by the Congress.

Stating that 50,000 Durga Pujas are held in Uttar Pradesh, he said there has not been a single incident of violence during the festivities in his State.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Repeat offenders

Pro-Khalistan slogans raised again at Toronto event in front of Trudeau; India hits back

Yet another event which saw pro-Khalistan slogans being raised, this time in Toronto, has triggered diplomatic tensions between India and Canada. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was also present in the programme, which made it look like the Canadian Government was condoning the act. It prompted India to summon in New Delhi a Canadian diplomat and express strong disapproval. The event, celebrating cultural diversity and inclusivity, took an unexpected turn when a group of individuals began chanting slogans in support of Khalistan, a separatist movement. The unfortunate incident is indeed a setback to ongoing discussions between the countries on various issues. For India, the incident struck a sensitive chord as it perceives the Khalistan movement a threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Indian authorities view any display of support for Khalistan, especially in the presence of heads of State, with utmost seriousness. The Indian Government, therefore, wasted no time in conveying its concerns to Canadian authorities. The summoning of their diplomat serves as a clear signal of India's displeasure and underscores the gravity with which it views the matter. Meanwhile, in Canada, the incident has sparked discussions about the limits of freedom of expression and the implication of such incidents on diplomatic relations.



ASHOK K MEHTA

While Canada may uphold the principles of free speech and assembly, the chanting of pro-Khalistan slogans on its soil in the presence of its Prime Minister raises questions about the appropriateness of such actions, particularly in a diplomatic context. Trudeau, who has been an advocate for multiculturalism and diversity, has yet to publicly comment on the incident. However, it is expected that he will address the matter in due course, considering the diplomatic ramifications and the need to maintain constructive relations with India. Given the history of the roots of Khalistanis in Canada, it was a foregone conclusion that something of this sort might come up. The Canadian Prime Minister should have ensured in advance such a thing would not happen as it reflects badly on his Government and strains relations with India. Indeed, pampering Khalistanis on its soil is going to be a problem for Canada as history repeats itself and all those regimes that once harboured such elements have paid a heavy price for it. The incident also underscores the complexities of managing diaspora politics, particularly when it intersects with sensitive geopolitical issues. Canada is home to a significant Sikh population, many of whom have strong ties with India and hold varying views on the Khalistan movement. Ultimately, the Toronto incident highlights the interconnectedness of global politics and the need for vigilance in safeguarding the principles of sovereignty, unity and respect for diverse perspectives. It is a stark reminder that actions and words uttered in one corner of the world can have far-reaching implications, shaping the course of international relations for years.

PICTALK



Fireworks light up the sky at the Golden Temple on the birth anniversary of Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur, in Amritsar

Why is the BJP avoiding China in campaigning?

The BJP's election focus has shifted away from recent China tensions, opting instead to highlight Nehru's actions during the 1962 conflict

China has been generally missing from election manifestos and campaigning so far. Former Army Chief Gen Naravane at a literary festival in Ajmer recently called China India's primary threat adding confrontation along LAC was a good thing as it exposed this ground reality that Delhi was shy to admit. EAM S Jaishankar and especially Defence Secretary Giridhar Armane have made unkind references to Beijing. In his book Four Stars of Destiny Naravane has written extensively about the India-China confrontation which started under his watch. It was a serious failure of intelligence which allowed the Chinese PLA to occupy nearly 2000 square km of territory on the Indian side of LAC corresponding to their 1956 claim line. The avoidable tragedy at Galwan and the refusal of the Chinese to restore the status quo ante April 2020 even after 21 rounds of military dialogue (the last round on 21 February) place India at a serious disadvantage. In 1998 India gave China as the reason for conducting nuclear tests which incensed the Chinese, requiring then foreign minister Jaswant Singh to travel to Beijing to "untie the knot". I was witness to the repair exercise in Beijing even as then our Army was retaking Tololing Heights, Kargil. Singh had to say that China was not a threat. Later then defence minister George Fernandes called China the number one threat though it was misreported as "No 1 enemy". This caused a diplomatic furore as China is acutely sensitive to being seen as or worse a threat by any country. The Government is careful in its articulations on China as it hopes to secure full disengagement diplomatically. But the gloves came off Feb /Mar. Jaishankar speaking at the Raisina dialogue said that China should not be allowed to play mind -games to counter which India must use other means (implying US help) to seek better equilibrium. His comments came a day after Armane at the INDUS-X FORUM in Delhi unprecedentedly called Beijing a bully adding "we expect our friend US will be



there in case we need their support". Not since 1962 have we sought unequivocally US military support. This is bound to have upset China. Worse, no Indian official had ever called China a bully. Surprisingly China has not reacted. Naravane's book and excerpts have been withheld by the Government in damage control after publishers circulated excerpts of Operation Snow Leopard Night 29/30 August 2020 which belittle the Government's political control in war and explosive comments on Agniveer. Armed with material from the horse's mouth, the opposition is targeting the Government in China and Agniveer — during election rallies where foreign policy is an issue. How Army intelligence cleared the book for publication is a mystery. In parliament on 10 Feb 2021, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had informed Parliament about withdrawals in the North Pangong Tso Lake Fingers area. But he made no mention of vacation from Kailash Heights, which presumably was implied in 'mutual withdrawal'. But Singh added: "Chinese side is aware of our resolve not to allow an inch of territory to be taken". Former NSA, Shiv Shankar Menon in his writings has observed: "we don't know what happened in South Bank (Kailash heights) as we know

FORMER ARMY CHIEF GEN NARAVANE RECENTLY HIGHLIGHTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S CAUTIOUS ARTICULATIONS ON CHINA AIM TO SECURE FULL DISENGAGEMENT DIPLOMATICALLY, DESPITE THE SERIOUS INTELLIGENCE FAILURE ALLOWING CHINESE OCCUPATION OF INDIAN TERRITORY ALONG THE LAC

about North Bank (Pangongtso Lake)". Recently Congress leader Jairam Ramesh cited an X post by Chushul Councillor Konchok Stanzin of autonomous Ladakh Hill Development Council that the Rezangla battle 1962 memorial was dismantled as it fell in the 'buffer zone' negotiated with China during the vacation of Kailash Heights. That undisputed Kailash Heights in Indian territory had been made a buffer zone is a revelation that the Government never even informed parliament. In the critical operational situation replete with vertical and horizontal escalation that developed at Kailash Heights that critical night, no political guidance had been provided by CCS/RM/PM to Naravane which became clear from his conversation with Singh urgently seeking orders. With Naravane's book and excerpts embargoed for release, the book may never materialise as it showed the political direction of a war-like situation in poor light. But Naravane will know why he didn't become CDS even as critical Kailash heights are lost for perpetuity. In the election campaign, no BJP leader has so far mentioned Galwan or Kailash heights which were examples of valourous use of force against China as it could open a can of worms. Keeping Naravane out of the fray, the opposition is attacking the Government for losing 2000 sq km of land as well as 26 of 65 patrolling points. Campaigning in Pune and speaking to the media on 12 April, Jaishankar emphasized "there was no encroachment by China; it has not occupied any of our land; but the situation is sensitive, competitive and challenging." The PM, HM and RM have all also denied loss of territory. In his interview with Newsweek in response to a question on China, PM Modi's terse reply was: "New Delhi ties with Beijing are important and the prolonged situation at the border should be addressed urgently, for peace and tranquillity to be restored and sustained at the borders". The Chinese welcomed the statement adding sound and stable ties were in common interest. Restoring the LAC to April 2020 as sought by India, the Chinese will never do. It's tough to conceive of a compromise formula. Consequently, the C word is almost missing from the BJP election discourse, cleverly diverted to Nehru's follies in 1962. But Naravane deserves praise. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CHALLENGES FOR NEW GOVERNMENT

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Challenges loom ahead of the July Union Budget," published on April 30, this is my response. The forthcoming union budget already stirs anticipation, underscoring the critical juncture India faces. Economic discourse dominates electoral debates, eclipsing divisive issues. However, the electorate's focus on core economic woes signals a paradigm shift. Spiralling inflation, mounting household debts and sluggish job creation demand urgent attention. Yet, electoral promises veer towards populism rather than pragmatic solutions. The fiscal landscape is daunting, with staggering debt repayments curtailing budgetary flexibility. Amid global economic headwinds, India's export slump exacerbates trade deficits. Addressing structural issues like low productivity and high taxation is imperative for sustained growth. Furthermore, infrastructural development must align with socio-economic welfare, assuage rural discontent and foster inclusive growth. A judicious blend of public and private sector involvement and prudent fiscal policies can steer India towards its lofty economic aspirations. Ultimately, the onus lies on the new Government to navigate these challenges deftly, prioritising the populace's wellbeing over partisan agendas. Neha Iyer | Pune

ENGAGING YOUTH IN POLITICS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Why are the young not joining politics?" published on April 30, this is my response. Witnessing the apathy of young voters towards participating in the political process is disheartening. While some may feel disillusioned with the quality of politicians, others might believe their voices won't make a difference. However, by abstaining from voting, they relinquish their right to shape the nation's future. On the other end of the spectrum, the

State Assembly sessions



Apropos the news article, "Delhi, other state legislative meetings dwindle," published on April 29, this is my response. As someone who follows daily news, the pattern of state assembly sessions raises concerns. The data compiled by PRS Legislative Research reveals a significant disparity in the number of days assemblies convene. While some states meet

the constitutional mandate of at least one session every six months, others fall drastically short. The emphasis on budget sessions, evident from the majority of sittings concentrated within these periods, indicates a rushed legislative process. Such haste might compromise the quality of debate and scrutiny essential for robust policymaking. Moreover, the prolonged sessions in some states, stretching beyond a year in extreme cases, question the efficiency and accountability of legislative bodies. The instances of bills being passed swiftly after introduction raise doubts about thorough deliberation and stakeholder consultation. Efforts to streamline legislative processes and ensure meaningful engagement during sessions are imperative to uphold democratic principles and deliver effective governance. Nisha Menon | Bhopal

lack of interest among older individuals in entering politics is concerning. The decline in ethical and social values, coupled with the high cost of electioneering, deters many from pursuing political careers. Addressing these issues requires systemic changes, such as the delimitation of electoral constituencies and measures to reduce election expenses. Compulsory voting could also enhance participation and diminish the influence of vote-bank politics. Moreover, curbing the distribution of freebies is crucial to prevent elections from devolving into mere transactions. True democracy demands active engagement from all citizens, irrespective of age or background. Meera Patel | Ahmedabad

NUTRITION FOR ORAL HEALTH

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Diet, Mint, Ginger Impact," published on April 29, this is my response. Maintaining oral health extends beyond brushing and flossing; it's about what we eat too. Sugary and starchy foods can

feed harmful mouth bacteria, leading to gum disease. A balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, protein, calcium-rich foods and whole grains not only supports a healthy body but also promotes a bright smile. Opting for natural foods over processed ones is key to oral and overall wellbeing. Remember, oral health impacts your entire body; bacteria from the mouth can spread, increasing the risk of various diseases. Mint and ginger offer natural remedies for oral care. Mint's antiseptic properties combat bacteria, freshen breath and prevent cavities. Meanwhile, ginger, with its gingerol compound, fights infections and inflammation, strengthening teeth. Incorporating these ingredients into a refreshing drink like Mint & Ginger Healthy Drink adds flavour and health benefits to your routine, promoting a radiant smile and robust health. Arjun Reddy | Hyderabad

Recognising workers' resilience and struggle

On International Labour Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to worker welfare and advocate for fair, empowering policies

On May 1st, as we celebrate International Labour Day, these words of Karl Marx resonate with renewed significance. May Day is not merely a day of rest; it is a powerful reminder of the resilience and collective strength of workers worldwide. It is a day to honour the countless individuals who have fought for the rights and dignity of labourers and to recognise the ongoing struggle for justice in the workplace.



Every year on May 1st, International Labour Day serves as a poignant reminder of the struggles, sacrifices and triumphs of workers worldwide. It is a day to honour the contributions of labourers across various countries and industries, while also acknowledging the ongoing battle for labour rights and social justice. As we commemorate International Labour Day on May 1, 2024, let us reflect on the significance of this day and recommit ourselves to advocating for the rights and welfare of workers. The roots of International Labour Day trace back to May 1, 1886, when workers in

Chicago staged a massive protest demanding an eight-hour workday. This pivotal event led to the establishment of International Workers' Day, symbolising the collective struggle for fair labour practices. Since then, May Day has evolved into a global movement, with workers from all walks of life coming together to advocate for their rights. May Day holds immense significance in highlighting the importance of workers' rights. It serves as a platform to address issues such as fair wages, equal opportunities, maternity benefits, healthcare and safe working conditions. By amplifying the voices of workers, May Day fosters solidarity and empowers individuals to strive for better living standards and dignity in labour. In India, May Day was first celebrated in 1923 by the Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan in Madras (now Chennai). Led by visionary leaders like Singaravelu Chettiar, this event marked the beginning of a movement to champion the rights of workers. Since then, May Day has been observed with fervour across the country, with various labour organisations leading rallies and campaigns to advocate for workers' welfare. Dr BR Ambedkar, a towering figure in India's labour movement, played a pivotal role in advocating for the rights of marginalised labourers. He emphasised the principles of equal pay for equal work, maternity benefits, eradication of discrimination and fair treatment of workers.



SANTOSH MATHEW

Through his leadership and advocacy, Dr Ambedkar laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and equitable society. While we have made significant strides in advancing labour rights, challenges persist. Many workers, especially those in the informal sector, continue to face exploitation and lack of protection. We must address these issues and work towards creating a more just and equitable working environment for all. As we celebrate International Labour Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to the welfare of workers. We must advocate for policies that promote fair labour practices, empower workers and ensure their wellbeing. As International Labour Day dawns upon us once again on May 1st, 2024, let it serve not just as a commemoration of past struggles, but as a beacon lighting our path towards a future where every worker's dignity is honoured, every voice is heard and every dream finds its fulfilment in a world of equality and justice. (The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Visual storytelling can promote sensitivity and empathy



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

A scared figure crouching in a corner, a large hand covering a mouth trying to muffle a scream, outstretched arms pleading for help, tattered clothes. More often than not, images like these accompany media reports of sexual violence against women. As a survivor of sexual harassment, Ankita Anand felt insulted looking at these images. She didn't want to be depicted this way.

What upset her most were drawings meant to represent the survivors and create awareness that served to titillate. She decided to take matters into her own hands. The activist-turned-journalist started a campaign with a Change Org petition and directed her attention to one of the major news channels to set an example by not using disrespectful images of women in sexual violence reporting. What was needed to transform the way society perceived women was images that were not about helplessness but about the rage that challenged the oppression. Pictures that showed that women are "doers," not always the "done upon-s." were shared by Anand in her piece about her innovative campaign for the Network of Women in Media, India.

While her 2018 petition garnered over 47,000 signatories and also helped to spotlight an earlier Redraw Misogyny campaign by Breakthrough, an organisation working to end violence against women, many media platforms continue to churn out images that strip the victim of agency and perpetuate shame and stigma attached with rape and sexual harassment, creating a biased perception of women who have experienced sexual violence.

But now Anand and the many survivors in India and the region, no longer have to be depicted in this disempowering way thanks to the just-launched free-to-use image bank reframing visual narratives around women and sexual violence in South Asian media.



Conceptualised by the Hri Institute for Southasian Research and Exchange, Kathmandu and developed with the help of a team of artists and photographers from India and Nepal, the image bank re-imagines visual depiction of women and sexual violence to address the wide spectrum of women's experiences. It is an outcome of a unique collaborative effort to explore the role images play in forming perceptions around sexual assault, women and gender equality. The project 'Challenging Visual Depiction of Women and Sexual Violence in Southeast Asia' led by Laxmi Murthy and Pawas Manandhar united researchers, activists, filmmakers, and artists to redefine visual portrayals of gender-based violence in cinema, media, and popular culture across Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

The one-year project focused on challenging problematic imagery and promoting more meaningful depictions of violence and trauma. South Asian artists utilised textiles alongside illustrations and photos to narrate stories of injustices against women. It is an important artistic medium of expression, especially for those who have suffered violence, repression and discrimination as textiles are inextricably linked to the lives of people, particularly women. "I Never Ask For It," a campaign by Blank Noise, a Bengaluru-based volunteer-led project, has been working to generate awareness of gender-based violence and end victim shaming/blaming by building testimonies of clothing. Images from this campaign can also support survivors of violence to feel heard and believed.

A picture is worth a thousand words. It can transform the way sexual violence against women is framed in the media when used sensitively and appropriately. It just needs the will to do it.

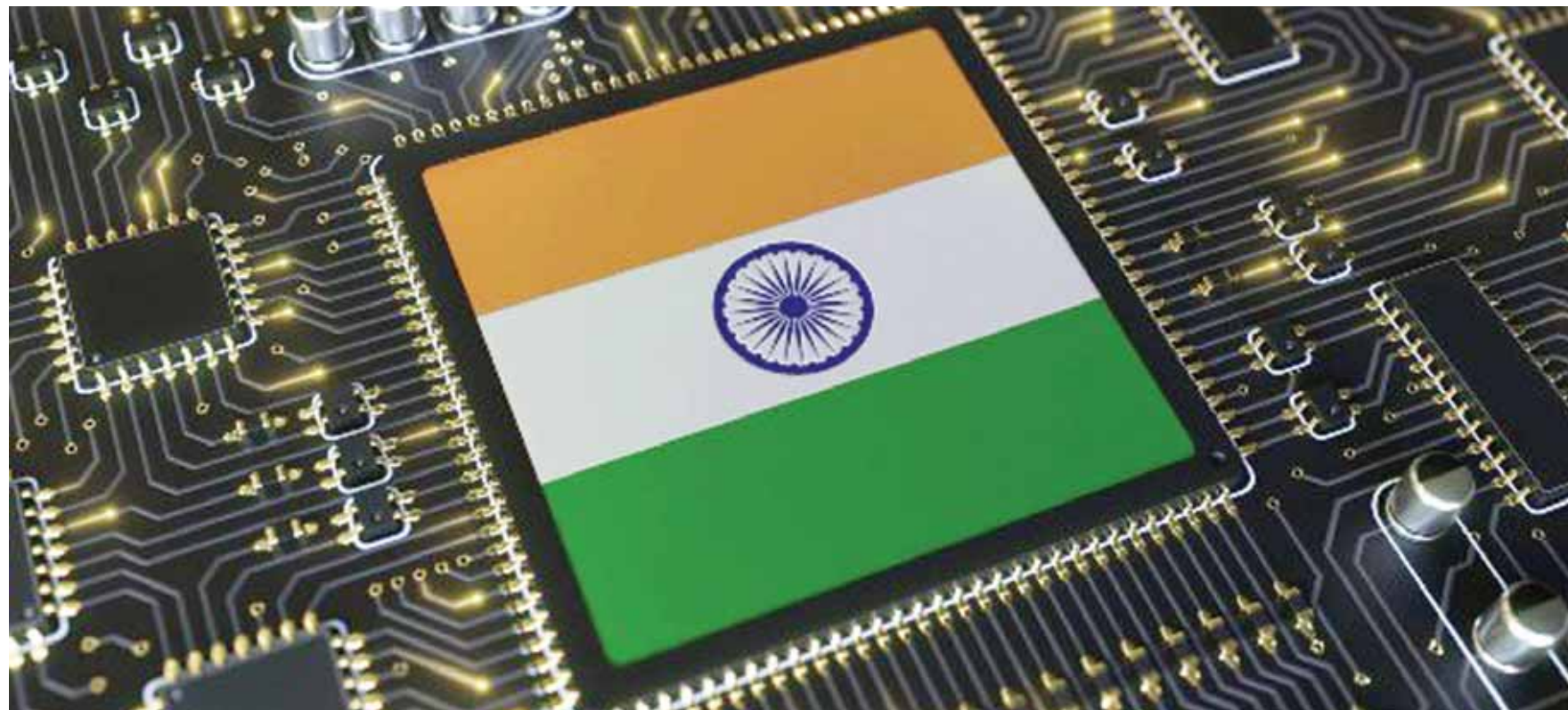
(The author is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views expressed are personal)

Semicon ecosystem: A revolution in India



A S MITTAL

India's talent, resources and infrastructure position it to excel in the semiconductor sector and becoming a global leader



As our lives become increasingly reliant on technology, semiconductors have become the essential foundation of society. These tiny chips are the powerhouses behind our electronic devices, communication systems and even the functioning of our agricultural implements medical equipment and vehicles. India has recognised the enormous socio-economic potential and strategic importance of this silent revolution of technology and is taking the lead in building a robust semiconductor ecosystem and developing a talented workforce.

India's goal of becoming self-sufficient and a global leader in semiconductors is supported by the fact that the semiconductor industry is expected to generate over one million job opportunities for semiconductor design engineers, manufacturing engineers, R&D scientists, operators, technicians and skilled workers in chip design and semiconductor fabrication, packaging and sales facilities over the next five years. "Around 30 per cent of the new global capability centres established in India during the December quarter of last year were in the semiconductor space, indicating a growing interest in leveraging the local talent pool in areas such as front-end design, performance testing and post-silicon validation", according to the National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom) and Zinnov latest report. The world's leading chip design companies, including Intel, Texas Instruments, AMD, Nvidia and Qualcomm, have design and R&D centres in India. AMD recently inaugurated its largest global design centre in Bengaluru. In March, an event- 'India's Techade: Chips for Viksit Bharat', witnessed the foundation stone of three semiconductor projects worth Rs 1.25 lakh crore.

Tata Electronics in partnership with Taiwan's Power Chip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC), set up the country's first semiconductor fab plant in Dholera (Gujrat) with an investment of Rs 91,000 crore and another plant in Morigaon (Assam) with investment of Rs 27,000 crore, with the first chips to



INDIA'S SEMICONDUCTOR MARKET IS VALUED AT AN ESTIMATED \$15 BILLION AND IS EXPECTED TO REACH \$55 BILLION BY 2026. SMARTPHONES AND WEARABLES, AUTOMOBILE COMPONENTS, COMPUTERS AND DATA STORAGE ACCOUNT FOR MORE THAN 60 PER CENT OF THE MARKET

begin coming off the production line in 2026. US-based semiconductor manufacturer Micron India plant with an investment of Rs 22,500 crore in Sanand (Gujarat), is expected to roll out the first "Made in India" memory chips by December. It is contributing its bit to the Chandrayaan-3 mission Semiconductor Corporation of India (SCL) proposed to update and expand its chip facility in the Mohali plant with an investment of Rs 20,000 crore, to enhance its contribution to ISRO and other space research organisations globally.

95 Percent Import Dependency: Despite the upward trajectory of India's current semiconductor chip ecosystem, the country remains dependent on the US, Taiwan, China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea, with over 95 per cent of semiconductors imported from these countries.

To reduce this dependency on imports, India recognised the strategic importance of a robust domestic semiconductor industry. It unveiled the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) offering 50 per cent capital expenditure support to new entrants, production-linked incentive (PLI) and design-linked incentive (DLI) schemes with an outlay of Rs 76,000 crore, as well as state Government incentive support, international partnerships and a focus on talent development. The Electronic and IT Ministry plans to train over 85,000 engineers in chip design over the next five years to address the skill gap. Such focused efforts aim to steer the ecosystem through nurturing policymaking to develop a self-sufficient ecosystem.

Moreover, the geopolitical uncertainties involving the China-US trade war have compelled companies to seek alternative production bases or sourcing locations outside

China. Amid this relocation in the industry, India and Southeast Asian nations like Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia have been preferred for front-end manufacturing in the future. India's entry into this ecosystem is timely and strategically important for diversifying the global supply chain and positioning India as a global hub for semiconductor design, manufacturing and technology development, fostering the creation of employment opportunities for the nation's youth.

Present Landscape and Scope of Growth: Bengaluru and Hyderabad together host about two-thirds of India's semiconductor global capability centres (GCCs), which is over two-thirds of the total 55 semiconductor GCCs in the country. With more than 95 GCC units and a specialised workforce of 50,000, this demonstrates India's strong commitment to the semiconductor industry. Presently, India's semiconductor market is valued at an estimated \$15 billion and is expected to reach \$55 billion by 2026. Smartphones and wearables, automobile components, computers and data storage account for more than 60 per cent of the market.

Challenges: Semiconductor manufacturing is an extremely complex process that requires precision at the smallest level. Since the global chip world is closely connected, Indian companies need to collaborate with countries like Taiwan and South Korea to gain access to advanced technology that will enable them to support emerging applications with more chip content, such as autonomous machines, smart medical devices, futuristic communications at 6G onward and AI across electronics. Bridge the skill gap: India needs to bridge the skill gap, especially for advanced chip design and fabrication. The global semiconductor

manufacturing industry has a talent pool of 2.3 million, with nearly 25 per cent of senior talent being Indian.

To attract and retain this talent, Indian companies are holding roadshows in Taiwan's chip manufacturing centre of Hsinchu. Communications and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw says, "The engineers who have decided to return to India from the US are younger, while those from Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia are generally over 45 years and with more experience. We expect many of them to come back to participate in India's high-tech manufacturing revolution."

Road Ahead: The future of the semiconductor industry in India holds immense promise. It will play a crucial role in shaping the country's advanced technological landscape, driving economic growth and positioning India as a global leader in innovation. The semiconductor industry will also generate opportunities for an entrant and Indian talent working in this sector globally, many of whom wish to return to their roots.

India's ambition to become a self-reliant and dominant player in the semiconductor industry is clear. With the talent, resources and infrastructure in place, India is poised to make significant strides in the semiconductor sector and establish itself as a global leader in the years to come.

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

Driving innovation: Role of intellectual property in India

India can emulate Japan's post-Meiji transformation by harnessing innovation, embracing change and cultivating a risk-taking culture

In the 76th Independence Day speech on August 15, 2022, the Prime Minister called for innovation with a focus on indigenous innovations highlighting "Jai Anusandhan". Innovation is the key to India realising a self-reliant, competitive and USD 30 trillion economy by 2047. Innovation has the potential to unlock major productivity gains and will allow the nation to leapfrog towards higher value-added products and services across sectors.

In the last few years, globally we have witnessed a fundamental and rapid shift from a knowledge economy to an era of artificial intelligence (AI) and virtuality. During the same time, the unprecedented nature and



KRISHNA SARMA

scale of the pandemic affirmed the importance of having an innovation ecosystem for finding new cures — vaccines, medicines and diagnostics.

For a country with a legacy of scientific and technical knowledge base, the private sector in India has previously made modest investments in research and development (R&D). India has taken a different approach to innovation

to meet its unique challenges. The transformational digital public infrastructure, starting with the Aadhar platform, is a case in point.

Similarly, against the backdrop of concerns regarding public health, access and affordability of medicines and protecting the domestic industry, India's approach to innovation in the biopharmaceutical sector is primarily based on public-sector-led collaborative innovation, where the private sector has merely been 'encouraged' to invest in R&D in priority areas.

While in many cases, publicly supported research provides a wellspring of initial discovery, it is the private sector that must develop new technologies and bring them to the

market. To be a leader in a rapidly changing marketplace across sectors, private sector innovation is critical. How does one measure innovation? One way could be to determine how much a company spends on R&D as a percentage of its revenue annually. As patents secure exclusive rights to an invention, the innovative index of a company can be additionally judged by the number of granted patents, patent applications filed, whether the filings are in multiple countries, the quality of the patents and so forth.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce's 161st Report on IPR Regime in India (July 2021) expresses concern that the rate of increase in the number of

patents in India in the last four years has been very low compared to the US and China. It goes on to say that this is co-related to the microscopic spending on R&D which is a meagre 0.7 per cent of India's GDP. Globally, companies with the highest R&D spend are big tech US companies like Amazon, Meta, Alphabet, Microsoft, Intel Corp. and bio-pharmaceutical companies like Roche, J&J, Pfizer, Bristol-Myers Squibb and Merck & Co. This list also includes three companies from China — Huawei, Tencent Holdings and Alibaba; Samsung from S. Korea; and European automobile manufacturers like Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz.

Regarding the biopharmaceutical sector, the removal of product patent protection for drugs in 1970 allowed reverse engineering, which led to the exponential growth of the domestic generic industry and helped India be 'the pharmacy of the world'. At the same time, however, the lack of effective patent protection profoundly impacted corporate investment in R&D and the discovery of new molecules. Zydus Cadila's Saroglitazar, launched in 2013, remains so far, the only compound that was entirely indigenously discovered.

India has the potential to spur its innovative spirit by leveraging its strengths, embracing change and fostering a risk-taking culture.

Japan's transformation after the Meiji Restoration from being an importer and imitator of foreign technologies, to a global powerhouse in innovation that has defined the world's technological landscape exemplifies that necessity is the mother of invention.

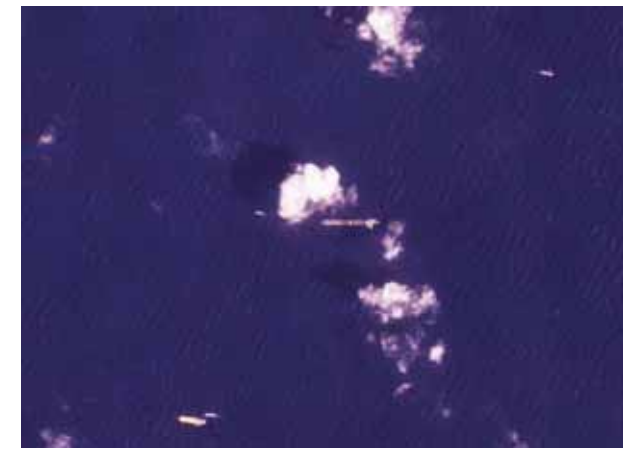
There is no silver bullet for creating an enabling environment for innovation. Bryce Hoffman in his book Red Teaming shows how disruptive innovation requires critical and contrarian thinking. So, to inculcate the scientific temper and risk-taking and entrepreneurship spirit, there is a dire need to shift the emphasis of our education system from rote memorisation and conformity. Second, we must vigorously

pursue closer collaboration between academia and industry to commercialise innovation. It is a matter of great pride that Prof. Rahul Purwar, IIT Mumbai obtained marketing approval for the first indigenously developed cell and gene therapy for the treatment of cancer.

Last but not least, a robust, meaningful and predictable intellectual property rights system can most optimally provide economic incentives to inventors and investors to invest risk capital in inventive activity — a very high-risk undertaking.

(The author is Managing Partner, Corporate Law Group, a New Delhi-based law firm; views are personal)

US military ships working to build pier for Gaza aid



This satellite photo from Planet Labs PBC shows the USNS Roy P. Benavidez, center, in the Mediterranean Sea off shore from the Gaza Strip on Monday. AP/PTI

AP ■ JERUSALEM

A US Navy ship and several Army vessels involved in an American-led effort to bring more aid into the besieged Gaza Strip are offshore of the enclave and building out a floating platform for the operation that the Pentagon has said will cost at least USD 320 million. Sabrina Singh, Pentagon spokeswoman, told reporters the cost is a rough estimate for the project and includes the transportation of the equipment and pier sections from the United States to the coast of Gaza, as well as the construction and aid delivery operations.

Satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press on Tuesday show the USNS Roy P Benavidez about 11 kilometers (6.8 miles) from the port on shore, where the base of operations for the project is being built by the Israeli military. The USAV General Frank S Besson Jr, an Army logistics vessel, and several other Army boats are with the Benavidez and working on the construction of what the military calls the Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore, or JLOTS, system.

Satellite images from Sunday and Monday by Planet Labs PBC showed pieces of the floating pier in the Mediterranean Sea, alongside the Benavidez. Measurements of the vessel match known features of the Benavidez, a Bob Hope-class vehicle cargo ship operated by the Military Sealift Command. A US military official confirmed late last week that the Benavidez had begun construction and that it was far enough off shore to ensure that the troops building the platform would be safe. Singh said on Monday that next will come the construction of the causeway, which will then be anchored to the beach.

The US military's Central Command early Tuesday published images of the floating pier's construction online, after the AP's publication of the satellite photos.

"The pier will support USAID and humanitarian partners to receive and deliver humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza," the statement on the social platform X said.

US and Israeli officials have said they hope to have the floating pier in place, the causeway attached to the shore and operations underway by early May. The Pentagon said on Monday the operation will cost at least USD 320 million. The cost was first reported by Reuters. Under the plan by the US military, aid will be loaded onto commercial ships in Cyprus to sail to the floating platform now under construction off Gaza. The pallets will be loaded onto trucks, which will be loaded onto smaller ships that will travel to a metal, floating two-lane causeway. The 550-meter (1,800-foot) causeway will be attached to the shore by the Israeli Defense Forces.

The US military official said an American Army engineering unit has teamed with an Israeli military engineering unit in recent weeks to practice the installation of the causeway, training on an Israeli beach just up the coast.

Antony Blinken presses Hamas to accept new proposal for Gaza ceasefire

Cairo (AP): The United States stepped up pressure Monday for a cease-fire deal in Gaza as the secretary of state said a new proposal had been put to Hamas, whose officials were in Cairo talking to Egyptian mediators. Israeli airstrikes killed 26 people in Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah, according to hospital records.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, ahead of a visit to Israel this week, urged Hamas to accept the latest proposal, calling it "extraordinarily generous" on Israel's part.

The terms were not made public. But according to an Egyptian official and Israeli media, Israel has softened its position, lowering the number of hostages it demands that Hamas free during the initial six-week phase of the cease-fire in return for the release of hundreds of Palestinians from Israeli prisons.

One question is whether that will be enough to overcome Hamas concerns over the cease-fire's second phase.

Hamas has demanded assurances that an eventual release of all hostages will bring a complete end to Israel's nearly seven-month assault in Gaza and a withdrawal of its troops from the devastated territory. Israel has offered only an extended pause, vowing to resume its offensive once it is over. The issue has repeatedly obstructed efforts by US, Egyptian and Qatari mediators during months of talks.

Some Israeli commentators depicted Israel as at a crossroads: Go for a deal with a potential end to the war, bringing benefits that could include normalisation of ties with Saudi Arabia, or push ahead with plans including an attack on Rafah in the hope of crushing Hamas and risk international isolation.

Protesters take over Columbia University

AP ■ NEW YORK

Dozens of protesters took over a building at Columbia University in New York early Tuesday, barricading the entrances and unfurling a Palestinian flag out of a window in the latest escalation of demonstrations against the Israel-Hamas war that have spread to college campuses nationwide.

Video footage showed protesters on Columbia's Manhattan campus locking arms in front of Hamilton Hall early Tuesday and carrying furniture and metal barricades to the building, one of several that was occupied during a 1968 civil rights and anti-Vietnam War protest on the campus. Posts on an Instagram page for protest organizers shortly after midnight urged people to protect the encampment and join them at Hamilton Hall. A "Free Palestine" banner hung from a window. "An autonomous group reclaimed Hind's Hall, previously known as 'Hamilton Hall,' in honor of

Hind Rajab, a martyr murdered at the hands of the genocidal Israeli state at the age of six years old," CU Apartheid Divest posted on X, formerly known as Twitter, early Tuesday.

The student radio station, WKCR-FM, broadcast a play-by-play of the hall's takeover — which occurred nearly 12 hours after Monday's 2 pm deadline for the protesters to leave an encampment of around 120 tents or face suspension.

Representatives for the university did not immediately respond to emails requesting comment early Tuesday but the Public Safety department said in a statement that access to the Morningside campus has been limited to students living in the residential buildings and employees who provide essential services, such as dining, public safety and maintenance staff. There was just one access point into and out of campus.

"The safety of every single member of this community is paramount," the advisory said.

In the X post, protesters said they planned to remain at the hall until the university conceded to the CUAD's three demands: divestment, financial transparency and amnesty. Universities across the US are grappling with how to clear out encampments as commencement ceremonies approach, with some continuing negotiations and others turning to force and ultimatums that have resulted in clashes with police. Dozens of people were arrested Monday during protests at universities in Texas, Utah, Virginia and New Jersey, while Columbia said hours before the takeover of Hamilton Hall that it had started suspending students.

The nationwide campus protests began as a response by some students to Israel's offensive in Gaza after Hamas launched a deadly attack on southern Israel on October 7.

Militants killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took roughly 250 hostages. Vowing to stamp out Hamas,

Israel has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the local health ministry.

Israel and its supporters have branded the university protests as antisemitic, while critics of Israel say it uses such allegations to silence opponents. Although some protesters have been caught on camera making antisemitic remarks or violent threats, organizers of the protests, some of whom are Jewish, say it is a peaceful movement aimed at defending Palestinian rights and protesting the war.

At the University of Texas at Austin, an attorney said at least 40 demonstrators were arrested Monday. The confrontation was an escalation on the 53,000-student campus in the state's capital, where more than 50 protesters were arrested last week.

Later Monday, dozens of officers in riot gear at the University of Utah sought to break up an encampment outside the university president's office that went

up in the afternoon. Police dragged students off by their hands and feet, snapping the poles holding up tents and zip-tying those who refused to disperse. Seventeen people were arrested. The university says it's against code to camp overnight on school property and that the students were given several warnings to disperse before police were called in.

At Princeton University, 13 people were arrested Monday night including 11 students, after briefly occupying a building that houses its graduate school. They received summons for trespassing and have been barred from campus, President Christopher Eisgruber said in a statement.

"The plight of students who have been arrested has become a central part of protests, with the students and a growing number of faculty demanding amnesty for protesters. At issue is whether the suspensions and legal records will follow students through their adult lives.



Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, left, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, right, and other officials attend a Joint Ministerial Meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council and US to discuss the humanitarian crises faced in Gaza, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia Monday. AP/PTI

Netanyahu vows to invade Rafah with or without deal

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged Tuesday to launch an incursion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are sheltering from the 7-month-long war.

Netanyahu said Israel would enter Rafah to destroy Hamas' battalions there "with or without a deal." Israel and Hamas are negotiating a cease-fire agreement meant to free hostages and bring some relief to the Palestinians in the besieged enclave.

"The idea that we will stop the war before achieving all of its goals is out of the questions. We will enter Rafah and we will eliminate Hamas' battalions there — with a deal or without a deal, to achieve the total victory," Netanyahu said in a meeting with families of hostages held by militants in Gaza, according to a statement from his office.

Netanyahu has vowed to achieve "total victory" in the war and has faced pressure from his nationalist governing partners to launch an offensive in Rafah, which Israel says is Hamas' last major stronghold.

Hopes have risen in recent days that the sides could move toward a deal that would avert an Israeli incursion into Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population are sheltering. The international community, including Israel's top ally, the US, have raised an alarm over the fate of civilians in Rafah if Israel invades. Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected stopping the war in return for hostage releases, and says an offensive on Rafah is crucial to destroying the militants after their Oct. 7 attacks on Israel triggered the conflict. His government could be threatened if he agrees to a deal because hard-line Cabinet members have demanded an attack on Rafah.

King Charles III returns to public duties with cancer centre visit

London (PTI): Britain's King Charles III, who was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year, on Tuesday resumed his public-facing duties with a planned visit to a cancer centre in London where he held hands with a number of patients. The 75-year-old monarch, still undergoing treatment which Buckingham Palace earlier said has been rated as "very encouraging" by his medical team, was also named Cancer Research UK's new patron as he joined wife Queen Camilla at the Macmillan Cancer Centre at University College Hospital. Smiling and cheerful Charles and Camilla spoke to staff and patients at the centre where the King was overheard saying it was important to get enough people diagnosed early. "This visit will be the first in a number of external engagements His Majesty will undertake in the weeks ahead," Buckingham Palace has said. "His Majesty's treatment programme will continue, but doctors are sufficiently pleased with

the progress made so far that the King is now able to resume a number of public-facing duties. Forthcoming engagements will be adapted where necessary to minimise any risks to His Majesty's continued recovery," the palace said.

The royals also handed out presents to children and received some flowers in return. The King, who is also patron of Macmillan Cancer Support, said he was "much better" when people shouted out to ask how he was feeling. The royal couple were introduced to clinicians to hear more about all the new technology at the hospital, including CT scanners which are being used to help with the early detection of cancer. The King met Cancer Research UK's chief clinician, Professor Charlie Swanton, who has led a project called TRACERx — a collaboration with 250 researchers and clinicians based at 19 centres across the UK, to investigate how lung cancer evolves.

Man arrested after stabbing spree in London, teen dies

PTI ■ LONDON

A sword-wielding man on Tuesday smashed a vehicle into a home and then went on a stabbing spree in a "serious incident" near an east London Tube station, killing a 13-year-old boy and wounding four people, before being arrested, the Metropolitan Police said. The police said the incident did not appear to be linked with "any act of terrorism" and that of the five people injured, a boy has died from his injuries and the others, including two police officers, remain in hospital after the attack in Hainault area of the city.

"A 13-year-old boy was taken to hospital after being stabbed and sadly died a short while after. The child's family are being supported by local officers and are now with some specialist officers," said Met Police Chief Superintendent Stuart Bell in a statement. He confirmed the 36-year-old suspect was tasered within 22



Police talking to members of the public at the scene in Hainault, north east London, Tuesday after reports of several people being stabbed at a Tube station. AP/PTI

minutes of the first call and remains in custody. "I cannot even begin to imagine how those affected must be feeling. My thoughts are with the injured, their families and the wider community as we all begin to come to terms with what has happened and try to understand what has happened

here. "I know that there will be clearly and understandably a desire for answers and an explanation to what happened. Our investigation is in its very early stages and my officers are working right now to establish the full facts as a priority," he added.

Judge holds Trump in contempt, fines him \$9k in hush money trial

AP ■ NEW YORK

Donald Trump was held in contempt of court Tuesday and fined \$9,000 for repeatedly violating a gag order that barred him from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and some others connected to his New York hush money case. If he does it again, the judge warned, he could be jailed. Prosecutors had alleged 10 violations, but New York Judge Juan M Merchan found there were nine. The ruling was a stinging rebuke for the Republican former president, who had insisted he was exercising his free speech rights. Merchan wrote that Trump "is hereby warned that the Court will not tolerate continued willful violations of its lawful orders and that if necessary and appropriate under the circumstances, it will impose an incarceration punishment."

Trump stared down at the table in front of him as the judge read the ruling, frowning slightly. The ruling came at the start of the second week of testimony in the historic case. Manhattan prosecutors say Trump and his associates took part in an illegal scheme to influence the 2016 presidential campaign by burying negative stories. He has pleaded not guilty. Trump must pay the fine by the close of business on Friday, Merchan said in a written ruling. He must remove seven offending posts from his Truth Social account and two from his campaign website by 2:15 pm EDT, Tuesday, Merchan said. Merchan is also weighing other alleged gag order violations by Trump and will hear arguments Thursday. Court was resuming Tuesday with Gary Farro, a banker who helped Trump's former attorney Michael Cohen open accounts, including one that Cohen used to buy the silence of porn performer Stormy Daniels. She alleged a 2006 sexual encounter with Trump, which he denies. For his part, the former presi-

dent and presumptive Republican nominee has been campaigning in his off-hours, but is required to be in court when it is in session, four days a week. Outside the courtroom, Trump criticized prosecutors again. "This is a case that should have never been brought," he said.

Jurors so far have heard from two other witnesses. Trump's former longtime executive assistant, Rhona Graff, recounted that she recalled once seeing Daniels at Trump's office suite in Trump Tower and figured the performer was a potential contestant for one of Trump's "Apprentice"-brand shows. Former National Enquirer publisher David Pecker laid out how he agreed to serve as the Trump campaign's "eyes and ears" by helping to squelch unflattering rumors and claims about Trump and women.

Through detailed testimony on email exchanges, business transactions and bank accounts, prosecutors are forming the foundation of their argument that Trump is guilty of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in connection with the hush money payments. The prosecution is leading up to crucial testimony from Cohen himself, who went to federal prison after pleading guilty to campaign finance violations and other crimes. Trump has denied any wrongdoing and pleaded not guilty. It's unclear when Cohen will take the stand; the trial is expected to go on another month or more. And with every moment Trump is in court as the first of his four criminal trials plays out, he's growing increasingly frustrated while the November election moves ever closer.

"Our country's going to hell and we sit here day after day after day, which is their plan, because they think they might be able to eke out an election," Trump declared last week in the courthouse hallway.

Missile attack by Houthi rebels damages ship in Red Sea

Jerusalem (AP): A missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels damaged a ship in the Red Sea on Monday, authorities said, the latest assault in their campaign against shipping in the crucial maritime route. The attack happened off the coast of Mokha, Yemen, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said. The ship was damaged in the attack, the UKMTO said, though its crew was safe and heading to its next port of call. The agency urged vessels to exercise caution in the area.

There was "an explosion in close proximity to a merchant vessel," the UKMTO said. "Vessel and crew are reported safe."

The US military's Central Command identified the ship damaged as the Cyclades, a Malta-flagged, Greece-owned bulk carrier. The military separately shot down a drone on a flight path toward the USS Philippine Sea and USS Laboon, the military said Tuesday.

Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree claimed the attack on the Cyclades and targeting the US warships in a statement early Tuesday.

Meanwhile Monday, the Italian Defence Ministry said its frigate Virgino Fasan shot down a Houthi drone that morning near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

"A missile exploded in the water in the vicinity of the escorted vessel, causing only minor superficial damage," the Italian Defence Ministry said, not identifying the commercial vessel being escorted. "The frigate Fasan and the protected merchant vessel are continuing their southward route as planned to exit the Red Sea." Saree did not acknowledge that attack, though he claimed the Houthis also targeted a ship in the Indian Ocean.

There was no immediate report or evidence to support that claim.

COVID sequencing scientist protests eviction from lab

Shanghai (AP): The first scientist to publish a sequence of the COVID-19 virus in China staged a sit-in protest outside his lab after authorities locked him out of the facility — a sign of the Beijing's continuing pressure on scientists conducting research on the coronavirus. Zhang Yongzhen wrote in an online post Monday that he and his team had been suddenly notified they were being evicted from their lab, the latest in a series of setbacks, demotions and ousters since the virologist published the sequence in January 2020 without state approval.



widely on Chinese social media and Zhang told a colleague he slept outside the lab — but it was not clear Tuesday if he remained there.

"I won't leave, I won't quit, I am pursuing science and the truth!" he wrote in a post on Chinese social media platform Weibo that was later deleted.

In an online statement, the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Center said that Zhang's lab was being renovated and was closed for "safety reasons." It added that it had provided Zhang's team an alternative laboratory space.

But Zhang wrote online that his team wasn't offered an alternative until after they were notified of their eviction, and that the lab offered didn't meet safety standards for conducting their research, leaving his team in limbo.

Zhang's latest difficulty reflects how China has sought to control information related to the virus: An Associated Press investigation found that the government froze meaningful domestic and international efforts to trace it from the first weeks of the outbreak. That pattern continues to this day, with labs closed, collaborations shattered, foreign sci-

entists forced out and Chinese researchers barred from leaving the country.

When reached by phone on Tuesday, Zhang said it was "inconvenient" for him to speak, saying there were other people listening in. In an email Monday to collaborator Edward Holmes seen by AP, Zhang confirmed he was sleeping outside his lab after guards barred him from entering.

An AP reporter was blocked by a guard at an entrance to the compound housing Zhang's lab. A staff member at the National Health Commission, China's top health authority, said by phone that it was not the main department in charge and referred questions to the Shanghai government. The Shanghai government did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Zhang's ordeal started when he and his team decod-

ed the virus on Jan. 5, 2020, and wrote an internal notice warning Chinese authorities of its potential to spread — but did not make the sequence public. The next day, Zhang's lab was ordered temporarily shut by China's top health official, and Zhang came under pressure by Chinese authorities.

Around the time, China had reported several dozen people were being treated for a respiratory illness in the central city of Wuhan. Possible cases of the same illness had been reported in Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan involving recent travelers to the city. Foreign scientists soon learned that Zhang and other Chinese scientists had deciphered the virus and called on China to release the sequence. Zhang published it on Jan. 11, 2020, despite a lack of government permission.

'4 law officers killed, 4 hurt in North Carolina home shootout'

AP ■ CHARLOTTE

Four police officers serving a warrant for a felon wanted for possessing a firearm were killed and four other officers were wounded in a shootout Monday at a North Carolina home, police said. Some of the officers who rushed to the Charlotte neighbourhood to rescue the first wave of downed officers were wounded as a second shooter began firing on them after they killed the wanted man, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief Johnny Jennings said. "Today we lost some heroes who were out simply trying to keep our community safe," Jennings said at a news conference. After a three-hour standoff, the suburban Charlotte home was torn open. Armoured vehicles smashed into it, ripping off windows and entire doorways

that were left broken. Several armoured vehicles were parked across yards, some with tree branches dangling off them. The US Marshals Task Force was fired on by the wanted suspect as they approached the house and the man was killed in the front yard, Jennings said. His name was not released, but the chief said he was wanted as a felon illegally possessing a weapon. A second person then fired on officers from inside the home where a high-powered rifle was found, Jennings added. A woman and a 17-year-old male were found in the home after the standoff. The two are being questioned, Jennings said. The Marshal's Service confirmed one of its agents was killed. Two officers from the state Department of Adult Correction also were killed, said North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper. The governor was in

Charlotte and was speaking to the families of the officers killed and hurt. Their names have not been released. Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officer Joshua Eyer died a few hours later at the hospital, Jennings said. Eyer was named the officer of the month for the force for April a few weeks ago, the chief said. "He certainly gave his life and dedicated his life to protecting our citizens," Jennings said. One other member of the task force, which is made up of federal agents and other officers from across the region was injured. Three other Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officers who responded to the scene were shot while trying to rescue the wounded officers. Neighbors said gunfire lasted for several minutes. WSOC-TV said their helicopter captured an armoured vehicle driving through yards and

knocking over recycling bins before officers removed a person with blood on their shirt who was then loaded into an ambulance. After the home was cleared, the helicopter pilot said he couldn't show the front lawn of the home because the scene was too graphic and disturbing. "A lot of the questions that need to be answered, we don't even know what those questions are now," Jennings said, somberly briefing reporters less than four hours after the shooting. "We have to get a full understanding of why this occurred and also uphold the integrity of the investigation." Many roads in the area including Interstate 77 were closed so ambulances could get to hospitals faster. TV footage showed ambulances speeding to hospitals escorted by vehicles both in front and behind with their sirens wailing.

IMF approves immediate disbursement of \$1.1 bn loan tranche to Pakistan

AP ■ WASHINGTON/ ISLAMABAD

The IMF has approved an immediate disbursement of the final tranche of USD 1.1 billion to Pakistan as part of a bailout package, emphasising that the cash-strapped country needs to take tough measures to bring its economy back on track. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Executive Board's decision on Monday came after the global lender completed the second and final review of Pakistan's economic reform programme supported by the IMF's Stand-By Arrangement (SBA). With this development, the disbursements under the SBA reached around USD 3 billion. All board members favoured the release of the last instalment. India, however, abstained from voting. "Given the significant challenges ahead, Pakistan should

capitalise on this hard-won stability, persevering — beyond the current arrangement — with sound macroeconomic policies and structural reforms to create stronger, inclusive, and sustainable growth," said IMF's Deputy Managing Director Antoinette Sayeh. Continued external support will also be critical, she said. Achieving strong, long-term inclusive growth and creating jobs require accelerating structural reforms and continued protection of the most vulnerable through an adequately financed Benazir Income Support Programme, she said. She said that advancing the reform of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and ensuring that all SOEs fall under the new policy framework, strengthening governance and anti-corruption institutions, and continuing to build climate resilience will be the priority. The IMF official said Pakistan will receive the loan payment

this week. Sayeh emphasised Pakistan needed to adhere to "a market-determined exchange rate to absorb external shocks and broadening of structural reforms to support stronger and more inclusive growth". "Moreover, stronger action to address undercapitalised financial institutions and, more broadly, vigilance over the financial sector are needed to ensure financial stability," she said in a statement. The development came a day after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. In his first meeting with the IMF chief since his re-election as premier, Sharif also discussed Pakistan's demand for another IMF programme as the country still needs the global lender's crutches to wobble on to get its economy back on track. An IMF team is expected to visit Pakistan in May to initiate talks

for a new long-term Extended Fund Facility (EFF) ranging between USD 6 to USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing. However, the exact size and time frame will only be determined after evolving consensus on the major contours of the next programme in May 2024. If secured, it would be Pakistan's 24th IMF bailout. Separately, former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said all indicators of the economy were negative and the government's decision to seek another bailout from the IMF was an admission of their "failure", The Express Tribune newspaper reported. "Economic growth stalls and inflation rises due to such agreements with the IMF," he said, adding that the IMF "keeps you alive, but your economic condition deteriorates on every parameter."

Japan's PM denies he will step down over his party's loss in special polls

AP ■ TOKYO

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Tuesday his governing party's major defeat in last weekend's by-elections was largely due to a political fundraising scandal and that he would not step down or replace party executives to take responsibility. Instead, Kishida said he will push anti-corruption measures and political reforms. "As I take the results seriously, I believe as president of the governing party we must tackle the challenges we face one by one and achieve results, and this is the way I will take responsibility," Kishida said. "By doing so, I will regain the people's trust." Kishida said the scandal dealt "a big and heavy hindrance" to the party. The scandal centres on dozens of lawmakers in Kishida's Liberal Democratic Party who allegedly pocketed profits from ticket sales to political events by falsifying accounting reports.



Asked if he would take responsibility for the election loss, Kishida denied he would step down or replace top LDP posts, and pledged to pursue party and political reforms, including a revision to the political funds laws. He also vowed to tackle economic issues. The conservative Liberal Democratic Party lost all three seats in Sunday's parliamentary by-elections in Nagasaki, Shimane and Tokyo. Kishida's party only fielded its own candidate in Shimane, a conservative stronghold, while the liberal-leaning main opposition

Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan clinched all three seats previously held by LDP. The loss is seen as a punishment by voters for the governing party's scandal, which erupted last year and has undermined Kishida's leadership. The party is unlikely to lose power because the opposition is fractured. But Sunday's defeat marks a further setback for Kishida, who will seek reelection as his party's leader in the fall. Political analysts say Kishida was hoping to call a snap election possibly after the current parliamentary session ends in late June, seeking to receive a public mandate, and then win another term in the party presidential vote in September. Kishida's state visit to the US earlier this month was perceived as a success, but Sunday's losses could erode his clout and LDP lawmakers may try to bring him down in favor of a fresh face ahead of the next general election.

Mexico taking Ecuador to top UN court

AP ■ THE HAGUE

Mexico is taking Ecuador to the top UN court on Tuesday, accusing the nation of violating international law by storming the Mexican Embassy in Quito to arrest a former vice president who had just been granted asylum by Mexico. The April 5 raid, hours after Mexico granted asylum to former Vice President Jorge Glas, spiked tensions that had been brewing between the two countries since Glas, a convicted criminal and fugitive, took refuge at the embassy in December. Leaders across Latin America condemned the raid as a blatant violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Ecuador said Glas was wanted on corruption convictions and not for political reasons, and has argued that Mexico granting asylum to a convicted criminal was itself a violation of the Vienna convention. Two mornings of preliminary hearings at the International Court of Justice

are focused on Mexico's request for interim orders known as provisional measures to be put in force while the case progresses through the court — a process likely to take many months. Among the measures Mexico is seeking are for the world court to order Ecuador to take "appropriate and immediate steps to provide full protection and security of diplomatic premises" and prevent any further intrusions. It also wants Ecuador to let Mexico clear its diplomatic premises and the homes of its diplomats in the country. In its case filed April 11, Mexico also asked the court to award reparation and suspend Ecuador from the United Nations. On Monday, Ecuador also filed a case at the International Court of Justice, accusing Mexico of using its embassy to "shield Mr. Glas from enforcement by Ecuador of its criminal law" and arguing that the actions "constituted, among other things, a blatant misuse of the premises of a diplomatic mission".

Chinese coast guard fires water cannons at Philippine vessels

AP ■ MANILA

Chinese coast guard ships fired water cannons at two Philippine patrol vessels Tuesday near a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, damaging both in the latest flare-up in an increasingly tense territorial conflict. There were no immediate reports of injuries in the incident off Scarborough Shoal, one of two hotly disputed areas where confrontations between China and the Philippines have flared on and off since last year. A Philippine coast guard ship and an accompanying fisheries vessel were patrolling the waters off Scarborough Shoal when four Chinese coast guard ships, backed by six suspected militia ships, executed dangerous blocking maneuvers. Philippine coast guard spokesman Commodore Jay Tarriela said. A Chinese coast guard ship used a water cannon against

the fisheries vessel, the BRP Bankaw, and two other Chinese coast guard ships hit the Philippine coast guard ship, the BRP Bagacay, simultaneously from both sides, damaging part of its deck railing and a canopy, Tarriela added. "China's coast guard and maritime militia vessels harassed, blocked and rammed vessels of the Philippine coast guard and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources," a Philippine government task force dealing with the territorial disputes said. The Philippine fisheries vessel sustained damages, including to its electrical, navigation and radio systems, the task force said. A number of journalists who were invited to join the patrol witnessed the hostilities, it added. "China's latest illegal and irresponsible behaviour highlights its egregious disregard for the Philippines' lawful exercise of its rights and entitlements in our own

Exclusive Economic Zone," the task force said. The Philippine vessels pressed on with their patrol despite the Chinese coast guard's actions, according to the Philippine coast guard. "They were not deterred and would persist in carrying out their legitimate operations to support Filipino fishermen and ensure their safety," it added. China called its action Tuesday a "necessary measure". "The Philippines has violated China's sovereignty with its actions," said Gan Yu, spokesperson for China's coast guard. "It will continue to carry out actions to defend its rights in the Chinese waters according to law, and will resolutely uphold our country's maritime rights," he insisted. The Chinese coast guard has also re-installed a floating barrier across the entrance to the shoal's vast fishing lagoon. The Philippine coast guard removed a similar barrier in the past to allow Filipinos to fish there.

Microsoft will invest \$1.7 bn in AI, cloud infrastructure in Indonesia

AP ■ JAKARTA

Microsoft will invest USD 1.7 billion over the next four years in new cloud and artificial intelligence infrastructure in Indonesia — the single largest investment in Microsoft's 29-year history in the country — Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said Tuesday. Microsoft runs one of the world's largest cloud computing operations and has taken a significant step into artificial intelligence by incorporating an AI chatbot into its search engine, Bing. Its earnings report Thursday said profit rose 20 per cent for the January-March quarter as it tries to position itself as a leader in applying artificial intelligence technology to make workplaces more productive. "This new generation of AI is reshaping how people live and work everywhere, including in Indonesia," said Nadella, in Jakarta on the first stop of a tour of Southeast Asia. "The investments we are



Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella speaks as the logo of GitHub, a subsidiary of Microsoft Corp, is displayed on the screen during an event titled "Microsoft Build: AI Day" in Jakarta, Indonesia, Tuesday. AP/PPTI

announcing today — spanning digital infrastructure, skilling, and support for developers — will help Indonesia thrive in this new era," he said. Microsoft sees Southeast Asia

as a growing market and potential location for more AI product development. The rise of AI in the region is expected to significantly impact its economic landscape. A study held by Kearney, a global consulting firm, said that AI could contribute nearly USD 1 trillion to Southeast Asia's GDP by 2030, of which Indonesia is expected to capture USD 366 billion. The investment announced Tuesday will include AI training for 840,000 people, as well as support for Indonesia's growing community of tech developers. Indonesia is home to the third-largest developer community in the Asia-Pacific region after India and China. More than 3.1 million developers in Indonesia use GitHub, a Microsoft-owned platform for software development, collaboration, and innovation. It is projected to be one of the top five developer communities on GitHub globally by 2026. Apple CEO Tim Cook met Widodo on April 17 and said the company would "look

at" manufacturing in Indonesia. Indonesia, under President Joko Widodo's administration, has emphasised development of digital technology and information sectors, aiming to achieve the government's Golden Indonesia 2045 Vision, which projects Indonesia becoming one of the world's top five economies with GDP of up to USD 9 trillion, exactly a century after it won independence from Dutch colonisers. Nadella met Widodo on Tuesday in the Presidential Palace. During the meeting, Widodo proposed building an AI research centre in Indonesia, and a Microsoft data centre based in Bali or Nusantara, the country's new capital city on Borneo island, according to Indonesia's Minister of Communication and Information Technology, Budi Arie Setiadi. The CEO's regional visit began in Indonesia and will be followed by Thailand and Malaysia over the next two days.

Facebook, Instagram face EU scrutiny

AP ■ LONDON

The European Union said Tuesday that it's investigating Facebook and Instagram over a range of suspected violations of the bloc's digital rulebook, including not doing enough to protect users from foreign disinformation ahead of EU-wide elections. The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said its opening formal proceedings into whether parent company Meta Platforms breached the Digital Services Act, a sweeping set of regulations designed to protect internet users and clean up social media platforms under threat of hefty fines worth up to 6% of annual revenue. Brussels has been cracking down on tech companies since the DSA took effect last year, opening investigations into social media sites TikTok and X, formerly known as Twitter, and e-commerce platform AliExpress. TikTok bowed to EU pressure last week and halted a reward feature on its new app after the Commission started demanding answers about it. The investigation includes an urgent request for Meta to provide information about its move to discontinue a key tool for monitoring elections. "We have a well established process for identifying and mitigating risks on our platforms," Meta said in a statement. "We look forward to continuing our cooperation with the European Commission and providing them with further details of this work." European Commissioner Thierry Breton said in a social media post that the bloc is probing Meta "for suspected breach of DSA obligations to protect integrity of elections." The EU is stepping up measures to safeguard elections as citizens of the bloc's 27 nations prepare to vote in June for European Parliament lawmakers, amid widespread fears that the latest generative AI systems



could be used to disrupt the many votes around the world this year. The Commission said it's looking into whether Meta is doing enough to curb the spread of "deceptive advertisements, disinformation campaigns and coordinated inauthentic behaviour" that could pose a risk to "electoral processes" and consumer protection. Officials said they suspected the Meta's content moderation system for advertisements was inadequate, allowing ads made with generative AI including deepfakes to be exploited by malicious foreign actors seeking to meddle in elections even as the company makes money from them. The EU also suspects that Facebook and Instagram might be reducing the visibility in recommendation feeds of political content from accounts that pump out a lot of it - a practice known as shadow-banning - and not being transparent about it with users, which would violate the DSA. A third concern is Meta's decision to phase out Crowdtangle, a tool used by researchers, journalists and civil society groups for real-time monitoring of trending social media posts including during elections. The Commission is giving Meta five days to respond with information on how it will remedy the lack of such a tool. The Commission is also investigating whether Meta's mechanism for users to flag illegal content is good enough under the DSA, because it suspects it's neither easy to access nor user-friendly.

Taliban working to woo tourists to Afghanistan

AP ■ KABUL

Around 30 men are crammed into a Kabul classroom, part of the debut student cohort at a Taliban-run institute training tourism and hospitality professionals. It's a motley crew. One student is a model. Another is 17 and has no job history. They're all men — Afghan women are banned from studying beyond sixth grade — and they don't know anything about tourism or hospitality. But they are all eager to promote a different side of Afghanistan. And the Taliban are happy to help. Afghanistan's rulers are pariahs on the global stage, largely because of their restrictions on women and girls. The economy is struggling, infrastructure is poor, and poverty is rife. And yet, foreigners are visiting the country, encouraged by the sharp drop in violence,

increased flight connections with hubs like Dubai, and the bragging rights that come with vacationing in an unusual destination. The numbers aren't huge — they never were — but there's a buzz around Afghan tourism. In 2021, there were 691 foreign tourists. In 2022, that figure rose to 2,300. Last year, there were 7,000. Mohammad Saeed, the head of the Tourism Directorate in Kabul, said the biggest foreign visitor market is China because of its proximity and large population. Afghanistan also has advantages over some of its neighbours. "They've told me they don't want to go to Pakistan because it's dangerous and they get attacked. The Japanese have said this to me also," Saeed said. "This is good for us." But there are disadvantages, too. Visas are difficult and

expensive to access. Many countries severed ties with Afghanistan after the Taliban returned to power, and no country recognizes them as the legitimate rulers of the country. Afghan embassies either closed or suspended their operations. There's an ongoing power struggle between Afghanistan's embassies and consulates staffed by people from the former Western-backed administration, and those under the Taliban administration's full control. Saeed concedes there are obstacles for Afghan tourism to develop but said he was working with ministries to overcome them. His ultimate aim is to have a visa on arrival for tourists, but that could be years away. There are problems with the road network, which is half-paved or non-existent in some parts of the country, and airlines large-

ly avoid Afghan airspace. The capital Kabul has the most international flights, but no Afghan airport has direct routes with major tourist markets like China, Europe, or India. Despite the challenges, Saeed wants Afghanistan to become a tourism powerhouse, an ambition that appears to be backed by the Taliban's top leaders. "I have been sent to this department on the instructions of the elders (ministers). They must trust me because they've sent me to this important place." The students also have aspirations. The model, Ahmed Massoud Talash, wants to learn about Afghanistan's picturesque spots for Instagram posts and its history for media appearances. Business school graduate Samir Ahmadzai wants to open a hotel but thinks he should

know more about tourism and hospitality first. "They hear that Afghanistan is backwards, poverty and all about war," said Ahmadzai. "We have 5,000 years of history. There should be a new page of Afghanistan." Classes include Afghan handicrafts and anthropology basics. An unofficial subject is how to interact with foreign women and how their behaviour or habits could clash with local customs and edicts. Examples might be women smoking or eating in public, to mixing freely with men who are not related to them by blood or marriage. The Taliban have imposed a dress code for women and requirements for them to have a male guardian, or mahram, when they travel. Dining alone, travelling alone, and socialising with other women in public have become harder. With gyms closed to women and

beauty salons banned, there are fewer places where they can meet outside the home. In a sign that the country is preparing for more overseas visitors, the country's only five-star hotel, the Serena, has reopened its women's spa and salon for foreign females after a month-long closure. Foreigners must show their passport to access services. Women with "born in Afghanistan" on their ID are barred. The restrictions on Afghan women and girls weigh on overseas travel companies, who say they try to focus on the positive aspect of cultural interactions by making donations, supporting local projects or only visiting family-run businesses. Shane Horan, the founder of Rocky Road Travel, said visiting Afghanistan should not be seen as an endorsement of any particular government or political regime.

Indian economy likely to grow over 7 per cent in 2024-25: NCAER

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian economy could grow more than 7 per cent during the current fiscal amid a benign global outlook and expected above-normal monsoon, economic think tank NCAER said.

In its April 2024 issue of Monthly Economic Review (MER), NCAER said a range of high-frequency indicators reflect the resilience of the domestic economy with the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for manufacturing at a 16-year high and UPI, the leading digital payments system, touching the highest volume since its inception in 2016.

"Projected acceleration in both global growth and trade volumes, as well as a forecast of an above-normal monsoon, indicate that the Indian economy can again attain growth rates higher than 7 per



cent during the current fiscal year," said NCAER Director General Poonam Gupta.

According to NCAER, Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections reached Rs 1.8 lakh crore in March, the second best since its rollout in 2017, while UPI recorded 13.4 billion transactions (in volume) in March 2024, the highest since its introduction, registering a growth of 55.3 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

"These high-frequency indicators, coupled with a more benign global outlook

projected by the IMF and WTO bode well for the Indian economy during the current year," Gupta added.

According to the report, Consumer Price Index (CPI) headline inflation was down to 4.9 per cent in March from 5.1 per cent in February, while core inflation came down to 3.2 per cent during the same period.

The report said employment indicators again showed mixed trends, with an increase in the number of net new subscribers under the Employees'

Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) on a year-on-year basis.

However, the overall online hiring activities, as per the Naukri JobSpeak Index, moderated year-on-year, it added.

While the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Fitch Ratings have estimated India's growth at 7 per cent, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), S&P Global Ratings and Morgan Stanley projected a 6.8 per cent growth rate for FY25.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to keep the policy rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept projections for India's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth for FY2024-25 at 7 per cent and Consumer Price Index (CPI) headline inflation at 4.5 per cent, in line with their previous projections.

Central Bank of India Q4 profit jumps 41 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Central Bank of India on Tuesday reported a 41 per cent jump in its net profit to Rs 807 crore for the March quarter, helped by a decline in bad loans and a rise in interest income.

The Mumbai-based lender had earned a net profit of Rs 571 crore in the year-ago period.

During the quarter, the bank's total income increased to Rs 9,699 crore as against Rs 8,567 crore a year ago, Central Bank of India said in a regulatory filing.

Interest income grew to Rs 8,337 crore during the period under review from Rs 7,144 crore in the corresponding quarter a year ago.

On the asset quality side, the bank's gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) were reduced to 4.5 per cent of gross advances as of March 31, 2024, compared to 8.44 per



cent by the end of March 2023.

Net NPAs also came down to 1.23 per cent of the advances over 1.77 per cent at the end of 2024.

The fall in bad loans ratio helped cut the provisions towards NPAs for Q4FY24 to Rs 509 crore compared to Rs 789 crore a year ago.

The board also approved raising of capital up to Rs 5,000 crore through a Follow-on Public Offer (FPO) or

rights issue, Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) issue, or any other mode or through issue of BASEL III Compliant Tier I and Tier II bonds or such other securities as may be permitted under applicable laws etc, it said.

Provision Coverage Ratio stood at 93.58 per cent as on March 31, 2024.

The bank's capital adequacy ratio declined to 15.08 per cent from 14.12 per cent at the end of FY23.

Sterlite Power bags projects worth ₹2,500 crore in Q4

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sterlite Power on Tuesday announced securing new orders worth Rs 2,500 crore during the quarter ended March 31.

This takes the company's cumulative order wins in FY24 to Rs 7,000 crore, up 35 per cent year-on-year (YoY) over FY23, Sterlite Power said in a statement.

"Sterlite Power has capped off a successful fiscal year FY24 with new orders worth Rs 2,500 crore for its Global Products and Services (GPS) business unit in Q4. This growth underscores the growing global and domestic demand for robust power transmission infrastructure, particularly to support the integration of renewable energy sources critical for a net-zero future," the company said.

Pratik Agarwal, Managing Director, Sterlite Power, said, the company's GPS business is experiencing significant growth. These products are essential in driving the sector's expansion over multiple decades, spurred by the global shift towards energy transition and decarbonization.

In Q4, some of the projects secured by the company are for conductor supply to green energy power transmission projects in Rajasthan including the Farhad Transmission line project. The company also bagged export orders for OPGW (Optical Ground Wire) in Africa and CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) markets.

Besides, Sterlite Power has secured multiple orders to supply Extra High Voltage (EHV) & High Voltage (HV) cables for large-scale infrastructure projects that are underway in Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Karnataka, Odisha, and Gujarat.

The company's specialized EPC services unit signed a turnkey project contract with Odisha state transmission utility to upgrade its existing 132 kV Pratapsasan-Kesura-Ransinghpur transmission line using high performance conductors (HPC).

Sterlite Power is a leading private sector power transmission infrastructure developer and Global Products and Services provider.

Markets wipe out early gains on fag end sell off

Nifty slips from record

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Tuesday as a fag-end sell-off wiped out early gains, with IT and power stocks playing spoilsport amid a mixed trend in global markets.

Snapping its two-day winning run, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 188.50 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 74,482.78. During the day, it had jumped 404.11 points or 0.58 per cent to 75,111.39.

The NSE Nifty dipped 38.55 points or 0.17 per cent to finish at 22,604.85. In the late afternoon trade, the benchmark hit its all-time peak of 22,783.35, up 139.95 points or 0.61 per cent.

From the Sensex basket, Tech Mahindra, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, HCL Technologies, Tata Consultancy Services, Larsen & Toubro and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the biggest laggards.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Power Grid, Bajaj Finance, IndusInd Bank and Maruti were the major gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul,



Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower.

European markets were mostly trading lower. Wall Street ended with gains on Monday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.21 per cent to USD 88.59 a barrel.

"Global markets remained mixed ahead of the US FED policy meeting, as markets appear to have already factored in the slim chance of a near-term rate cut. Profit booking ensued towards a close given the sharp rally in the last couple of days and a holiday-led truncated week,"

said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Monday after continuous offloading. They bought equities worth Rs 169.09 crore, according to exchange data.

In the previous session, the BSE benchmark jumped 941.12 points or 1.28 per cent to settle at 74,671.28 on Monday. The NSE Nifty went up by 223.45 points or 1 per cent to 22,643.40.

Domestic equity markets will remain closed on Wednesday on account of Maharashtra Day.

India's oil import bill could swell in FY25: ICRA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's net oil import bill could widen to USD 101-104 billion in current fiscal from USD 96.1 billion in 2023-24 and any escalation in the Iran-Israel conflict could impart an upward pressure on the value of imports, ICRA said on Tuesday.

The domestic rating agency said based on its analysis, lower value of Russian oil imports is estimated to have led to savings of USD 7.9 billion in 11 months (April-February) of 2023-24, up from USD 5.1 billion in 2022-23.

"With India's oil import dependency expected to remain high, if the discounts on purchases of Russian crude persist at the prevailing low levels, ICRA expects India's net oil import bill to widen to USD 101-104 billion in FY2025 from USD 96.1 billion in FY2024, assuming an average crude oil price of USD 85/bbl in the fiscal," ICRA said.

Additionally, any escalation in the Iran-Israel conflict and an associated rise in crude oil prices could impart an upward pressure on the value of net oil imports in the current fiscal year, it added.

As per ICRA's calculations, a USD 10/barrel uptick in the average crude oil price for this fiscal pushes up the net oil



imports by USD 12-13 billion during the year, thereby enlarging the current account deficit (CAD) by 0.3 per cent of GDP.

Accordingly, if the average crude oil price rises to USD 95/barrel in FY2025, then the CAD is likely to widen to 1.5 per cent of GDP from ICRA's current estimate of 1.2 per cent of GDP for 2024-25.

CAD, which is the difference between value of India's imports and exports, is estimated at 0.8 per cent in 2023-24.

India is more than 85 per cent dependent on imports for its needs of crude oil, which is converted into fuels such as petrol and diesel at refineries. ICRA said the value of India's

imports of petroleum crude and products declined by 15.2 per cent YoY during April-February of last fiscal, even as volumes rose slightly in this period.

This was supported by the fall in average global crude oil prices as well as savings from stepped up purchases of discounted Russian crude.

In volume terms, the share of crude petroleum imported from Russia jumped to 36 per cent in April-February FY2024 from 2 per cent in FY2022, while that from West Asian countries (Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait) fell to 23 per cent from 34 per cent, respectively.

ICRA estimates that the lower imputed unit value of imports of Russian oil, compared to imports from West Asia, has led to savings in India's oil import bill amounting to USD 5.1 billion in 2022-23 and USD 7.9 billion in 11 months of 2023-24, thereby compressing India's CAD/GDP ratio by 15-22 basis points in FY2023-24.

However, the extent of monthly discounts relative to price narrowed sharply over the fiscal, to 8 per cent on an average in September-February FY2024 from 23 per cent in April-August FY2024. Consequently, the savings related to purchase of Russian crude are likely to have dipped to USD 2 billion in September-February FY2024 from USD 5.8 billion in April-August FY2024, ICRA said.

Post the Ukraine war, some Western nations shunned Russian oil, leading to Moscow offering discounts. This led to Indian refiners lapping up the discounted oil. The recent conflict in the Middle East also poses threat to crude oil import route. Earlier this month, Iran first launched drone and rocket attacks on Israel, which retaliated by firing a missile.

India imports oil from Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the UAE as well as liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Qatar through the Strait of Hormuz, which is a narrow sea passage between Oman and Iran.

Gold slumps ₹150; silver plunges ₹750

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Extending the losses for the second straight session, gold prices on Tuesday slumped Rs 150 to Rs 72,600 per 10 grams in the national capital amid fall in precious metal rates in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities.

The yellow metal had closed at Rs 72,750 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver prices also plunged Rs 750 to Rs 83,750 per kg. In the previous close, it had ended at Rs 84,500 per kg.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 72,600 per 10 grams,

down Rs 150 taking bearish cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,320 per ounce, down USD 13 from the previous close. "Gold prices continued to weaken... As this sell-off was attributed to the anticipation of a hawkish stance from the US Federal Reserve in the upcoming interest rate policy announcement scheduled for May 1.

"Additionally, the week ahead is expected to see continued

volatility in gold prices, driven by key data releases such as the Nonfarm Payroll and Unemployment data," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst — Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

Silver was also quoting lower at USD 26.80 per ounce. In the previous session, it had finished at USD 27.22 per ounce.

Investors will await for the key data, including the US consumer confidence due to release later on Tuesday, which if is reported lower than expectations then it could support bullion prices on the lower end, Navneet Damani,

RITES completes 50 years

PNS ■ GURUGRAM

RITES Limited, a leading engineering consultancy firm in India, celebrated its milestone 50th anniversary on Friday.

The month-long Foundation Day celebrations, 'Marking The Gold', that were carried across work sites culminated with a cultural evening at Shikhar, RITES' Corporate Office, Gurugram.

Members of RITES' cultural team 'Sankalp' presented RITES Anthem at the 50th anniversary celebrations.

On the occasion, Chairman & Management Director Rahul Mittal launched RITES' coffee

table book — Atulya, a compilation tracing the organisation's illustrious journey of becoming 'The Infrastructure People'. Also, it marked the unveiling of 'RITES Dhara', a novel initiative to treasure the organisation's legacy and encapsulate the essence of its core values — Integrity, Professionalism and Excellence.

Addressing the gathering and paying gratitude to the founding fathers, Mittal said, "From pioneering projects to fostering sustainable practices, RITES' five-decade journey has been glorious.

Rupee recovers 4 paise to 83.41 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee recovered 4 paise to 83.41 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, tracking foreign capital inflows and a strengthening greenback against major crosses overseas.

According to forex analysts, the domestic currency initially faced resistance from a strong greenback and upward momentum in the crude oil prices but recovered the lost ground

during the session on the back of a sharp rally in equities in the late afternoon trade.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.46 and traded between 83.41 and 83.52 against the greenback during the session.

The domestic currency finally settled at 83.41 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 4 paise from its previous closing level.

The rupee had settled 7 paise

lower at 83.45 against the US dollar on Monday after losing 10 paise in the preceding session on Friday.

Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst — Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said: "Volatility in the capital market kept the rupee range-bound. Participants are closely monitoring the upcoming interest rate decision in the US for potential price action in the rupee. Weakness persists in the rupee, albeit in a stable manner."

US tile industry seeks import tariff on India

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A coalition of US ceramic tile suppliers has urged the federal government to impose tariffs on ceramic tile imports from India as it is impacting domestic industry due to subsidised imports by the Indian government.

The Department of Commerce has instituted an investigation into this matter.

Import of ceramics and tiles from India has increased significantly over the past few years, an association of the US ceramic and tiles industry has claimed alleging that these are impacting their domestic industry as the imports are subsidised by the Indian government.

In a petition filed before the US International Trade Commission of the

Department of Commerce, the Coalition for Fair Trade in Ceramic Tile (TCNA), which claims to represent more than 90 per cent of US tile production, seeks the imposition of tariffs estimated between 408 per cent to 828 per cent, alleging that there is ongoing massive and widespread dumping from India.

"American tile manufacturers have always welcomed fair competition from imports. In fact, US manufacturers have plentiful deposits of clay and feldspar, an efficient and well-respected labour force, local community support, state-of-the-art equipment, and affordable energy - so much so that major exporters from Italy, Spain, Brazil, Mexico, and China have built facilities in the US from



which to compete on a global scale," stated Tile Council of North America executive director, Eric Astrachan.

"However, Indian tile producers enjoy substantial government subsidies, which in conjunction with selling excess capacity at dumped prices, has allowed them to flood the US market. Over the last 10 years, sales of tile from India have increased from a mere 344,000 square feet in 2013 to nearly 405 million square feet by the end of 2023," he alleged.

"Our domestic manufacturers had no alternative but to petition the federal government for relief from these unjust trading practices. The vitality of the US industry and the livelihoods of thousands of employees and their families within our member

companies depend on it," Astrachan said.

US International Trade Commission last week issued a federal notification giving notice of the institution of investigations and commencement of preliminary phase antidumping and countervailing duty investigation to determine whether there is a reasonable indication that the imports of ceramic tile from India impact US industry. June 10 is the last date for responses.

According to Barnes & Thornburg, trade counsel for the Coalition for Fair Trade in Ceramic Tile, if the US finds that Indian imports are unfairly traded and have injured or threatened to injure US tile manufacturers, the Government will impose tariffs on Indian tile imports.

The Government would first impose preliminary tariffs in a few months and would impose final tariffs at the conclusion of its investigation in approximately 16 months, with the calculation of such final tariffs applied retroactively to the date of preliminary tariffs, and possibly to the date of initiation, he said.

In its filing, the Coalition for Fair Trade in Ceramic Tile (FTCT) claimed that India is engaged in unjust trading practices by allowing low-priced ceramic tile imports into the United States, which undercut domestic manufacturers.

The scope of the investigation includes various types of ceramic tile, such as flooring tile, wall tile, paving tile, hearth tile,

porcelain tile, mosaic tile, and more.

These ceramic tiles are articles containing a mixture of minerals, including clay, that are fired to produce a finished product less than 3.2 cm in actual thickness. The investigation covers both glazed and unglazed tiles, regardless of end use, surface area, weight, or other factors.

The members of the Coalition for Fair Trade in Ceramic Tile include American Wonder Porcelain, Crossville, Inc., Dal-Tile Corporation, Del Conca USA, Inc., Florida Tile, Inc., Florim USA, Landmark Ceramics, and StonePeak Ceramics.

The US Department of Commerce has initiated investigations in response to the petition filed by the Coalition for Fair Trade in Ceramic Tile.



Vishvanath, Akash, Preet storm into semis at ASBC Asian U 22 & Youth Boxing Championships

PTI ■ ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN)
Vishvanath Suresh, Akash Gorkha and Preet Malik advanced to the men's U-22 semi-finals after convincing wins in their respective bouts at the ASBC Asian U-22 and Youth Boxing Championships here on Tuesday.

Reigning youth world champion Vishvanath (48kg) led the charge for India as he beat Iran's Hassani Seyedarsham 5-0 in a one-sided quarterfinal bout.

Senior national champion Akash (60kg) outclassed Ebad Arman of Iran with an identical 5-0 scoreline. Preet (67kg) also didn't take much time before finishing the bout with a Referee Stopping the Contest (RSC) decision in the first round itself against Vietnam's Nguyen Duc Ngoc. Kunal (75kg), however, bowed out after losing 0-5 against Iran's Mahshari Mohammad in the quarter-finals. Jugnoo (86kg), Rhythm

(+92kg), Tammana (50kg), Preeti (54kg) and Priyanka (60kg) will have their U-22 quarter-final bouts later on Tuesday. The U-22 semi-finals will be played on Saturday. On Monday night, Rahul Kundu (75kg), Lakshay Rathi (+92kg), Laxmi (50kg), Tamanna (54kg), Yatri Patel (57kg) and Shrusthi Sathe (63kg) emerged victorious to enter the semi-finals in the youth category. On Wednesday, nine youth Indian boxers will compete in

US and Mexico drop bid to host 2027 World Cup

AP ■ NEW YORK

The U.S. Soccer Federation and its Mexican counterpart dropped their joint bid to host the 2027 Women's World Cup and said they instead will focus on trying to host the 2031 tournament. The decision left a proposal from Brazil and a joint Germany-Netherlands-Belgium plan competing to be picked for 2027 by the FIFA Congress that meets May 17 in Bangkok. The USSF said the 2031 bid will call for FIFA to invest equally in the men's and women's World Cups. FIFA said last year it planned to spend \$896 million in prize money for the 2026 World Cup in the U.S., Mexico and Canada. The governing body devoted \$110 million in prize money for last year's Women's

Brazil and joint German-Dutch-Belgian bids remain



World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. "Hosting a World Cup tournament is a huge undertaking — and having additional time to prepare allows us to maximize its impact across the globe," USSF President Cindy Parlow Cone said in a statement. "I'm proud of our commitment to provide equitable experiences for the

players, fans and all our stakeholders. Shifting our bid will enable us to host a record-breaking Women's World Cup in 2031 that will help to grow and raise the level of the women's game both here at home as well as across the globe." In detailing the bid in December, the USSF proposed U.S. Sites from among the

same 11 to be used in the 2026 men's World Cup. Mexico listed Guadalajara, Mexico City and Monterrey - its three sites for the men's World Cup - and in addition for 2027 listed as possibilities Leon and Querétaro. "We feel that moving our bid back to 2031 will allow us to promote and build up to the most successful Women's World Cup ever," MFF President Ivar Sissneg said in a statement. "The strength and universality of our professional women's leagues, coupled with our experience from organizing the 2026 World Cup, means that we will be able to provide the best infrastructure as well as an enthusiastic fan base that will make all the participating teams feel at home and to put together a World Cup that will contribute to the continued growth of women's football."

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona survived a tricky first half to beat Valencia 4-2 with the help of a second half hat trick from Robert Lewandowski and a red card to Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili. On a rainy night in Catalonia, the home side dominated possession but was behind at the break due to two defensive errors. Fermin López put Barcelona ahead with a lovely glancing header midway through the first half. Valencia levelled just five minutes later thanks to a powerful intervention from keeper Marc Ter Stegen. He intercepted a long ball 25 yards from his goal but he tried to be too fancy and Hugo Duro easily dispossessed him and ran the ball into the empty net. Before halftime, Valencia took the lead thanks to another elementary mistake. Ronald Araújo's mistimed tackle felled Peter Federico in the box and Pepelu coolly converted the spot kick.

Lewandowski hat trick gives Barcelona comeback victory over Valencia



The balance of the match changed moments before the break when

Mamardashvili used a hand outside the box to thwart a scoring chance by Lamine Yamal and was red-carded. Lewandowski headed an equalizer from a corner kick after 50 minutes. However, it took Barcelona until the 82nd to regain the lead from another Lewandowski header after Valencia failed to clear another corner. The hat trick came in the third minute of stoppage time from a 25-yard free kick. "It wasn't easy," Lewandowski said. "In the first half we didn't find any space in attack." Barcelona replaced Girona in second place and was 11 points behind Real Madrid. Madrid needs five from its last five matches to guarantee a 36th Spanish league title.

Nadal tested in 3 hours win over Cachin at Madrid

AP ■ MADRID

After spending more than three hours on the court and earning a hard-fought victory, Rafael Nadal led the charge for Spain as he beat Argentina's Pedro Cachin on Monday. He didn't show any signs of physical limitations in a victory that earned him a spot in the round of 16 at the clay-court tournament where he is the record five-time champion. "It's positive, now I don't feel that something went wrong on my body, but I need to wait until tomorrow, being 100% honest," he said. "I am trying my best to keep dreaming. Tomorrow is another day to keep dreaming. To keep playing in front of this amazing crowd and, to me, that means

everything." Nadal will next face 31st-ranked Jiri Lehecka. He said he needs "to find a way to be able to play days in a row and still be competitive." "I don't know if I am in that moment yet," the 22-time Grand Slam champion said. "Let's see what can happen tomorrow." The 37-year-old Nadal is trying to get in shape for next month's French Open. Since his latest injury layoff, he's had two matches in Barcelona and was pessimistic about his physical condition after arriving in Madrid. But he's won three more times in the capital. Nadal again looked comfortable early on against Cachin. The Argentine rallied in the second but was broken twice while serving for the set before eventually prevailing in the tiebreaker.

Nadal didn't look as loose in the final set, but did look tired. He wasn't as consistent with his shots but picked up three breaks to seal the victory to the delight of the local crowd in the Caja Magica. "I took more risks in the third set, but it's hard after so many months without competing," Nadal said. "I hadn't played a match like this in a long time. I don't know how I'm going to wake up. But I'm already happy for having won three matches in a row." Cachin asked for Nadal's shirt after congratulating him at the net, and received the gift moments later. Top-seeded Jannik Sinner was not at his best but had enough to defeat Pavel Kotov 6-2, 7-5. Sinner, who has been dealing with a hip issue, will face 16th-seeded Karen Khachanov. "I have been struggling a little bit with my right hip," Sinner



said. "We're trying to find a solution and I don't think it's anything serious. Sometimes I feel it more like today and some days are a little bit better."

Third-seeded Daniil Medvedev was two points from defeat before he rallied to beat Sebastian Korda 5-7, 7-6 (4), 6-3.

Fifth-seeded Casper Ruud beat Cameron Norrie 6-2, 6-4. **KEYS DOWNS GAUFF:** Madison Keys rallied after trailing in the first and second

sets to beat Coco Gauff 7-6 (4), 4-6, 6-4 in an all-American fourth-round meeting. It will be the 20th-ranked Keys' first quarterfinal appearance in Madrid. She lost in the first round in seven of her nine previous trips to the Spanish capital. The third-seeded Gauff undermined herself with 38 unforced errors, including 13 double faults. Keys will face eighth-seeded Ons Jabeur, who eased past Jelena Ostapenko 6-0, 6-4. **SWIA TEK ADVANCES:** Top-ranked Iga Swiatek remained on track for a first Madrid title with a 6-1, 6-0 win over Sara Sorribes Tormo. Swiatek dropped just five points in the second set en route to the quarterfinals of the only high-profile European clay tournament she is yet to win. The 27th-ranked Sorribes

Tormo was the last Spanish woman in the draw. Swiatek, who lost last year's Madrid final to Aryna Sabalenka, will next face 11th-seeded Beatriz Haddad Maia, who defeated fifth-seeded Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-4. Sabalenka, the champion in Madrid in 2021 and 2023, advanced by beating No. 15 Danielle Collins 4-6, 6-4, 6-3. The result ended Collins' 15-match winning streak, and sent Sabalenka into her first WTA 1000 quarterfinal of the season. Mirra Andreeva celebrated her 17th birthday with a 7-6 (2), 6-4 win over 12th-seeded Jasmine Paolini. The Russian teenager rallied from 5-2 down in the first set to reach the quarterfinals, a round further than she managed in Madrid a year ago. Fourth-seeded Elena Rybakina defeated teenage qualifier Sara Bejlek 6-1, 6-3.

Indian women blanked 0-5 by China in Uber Cup

PTI ■ CHENGDU (CHINA)

Teenage sensation Anmol Kharb left the badminton court in tears owing to an ankle injury as an under-strength Indian women's team suffered a 0-5 defeat to the mighty China in its final group A fixture of the Uber Cup here on Tuesday. Having already qualified for the quarterfinals by picking up successive wins against Canada and Singapore, Ashmita Chaliha sat out the contest against the 15-time champions. The team is competing without double Olympic-medallist P V Sindhu, who opted out of the tournament. It was a reality check for the young Indian team as it could not take a single game from the Chinese during

the five-match tie. To add to India's woes, 17-year-old Anmol was forced to retire after twisting her ankle during the second singles contest. Olympic champion and world no.2 Chen Yu Fei started off the proceedings for China with an easy 21-12 21-10 win over 83rd ranked Isharani Baruah. "A little disappointed in my game because I made too many errors, I thought I would play good with her but it was an easy win for her...The pace was really high, I had to increase my speed," Isharani said after her match. "Her variations were good, and all her strokes were going in the third court and it wasn't comfortable to hit well. It

was a tough game but it was a good experience," she added. National champions Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra, ranked 67, were no match for reigning world champions Chen Qing Chen



and Jia Yi Fan, who doubled China's lead with a 21-13 21-12 win. After losing the first game 9-21 and trailing 1-4 in the second against Han Yue, Anmol rolled her right ankle while trying to defend a point. She received medical attention but the pain didn't seem to subside and the ankle looked swollen, forcing her to retire from the match giving China a 3-0 unassailable lead. In the next two matches, Liu Shen Shu and Tan Ning defeated Simran Singh and Ritika Thaker 21-9 21-10, while Tanvi Sharma lost 7-21 16-21 to Wang Zhi Yi as China completed the 5-0 drubbing of India. India will end the group stage proceedings in second place behind China.

MESSI TO MIAMI:



Soccer star, and a few teammates, show up for Heat Celtics game

AP ■ MIAMI

Lionel Messi took a night off to watch the Miami Heat. The Inter Miami star and eight-time Ballon d'Or winner as the world's best player - along with teammates Jordi Alba, Sergio Busquets and Luis Suarez - arrived just before tip-off of the Heat playoff game with the Boston Celtics on Monday night. Messi's group — some clad in Heat attire and Busquets wearing a Heat hoodie — arrived in the players' parking garage, then were brought in through a VIP entrance before making their way to their seats in a suite atop the lower level. Messi has been to the arena before for at least one other event, but never before had arranged to be at a Heat game since moving to Miami last year.

Inter Miami is 6-2-3 so far this season in Major League Soccer play, sitting in first place in the Eastern Conference and with the most points of any team in the league. Messi had two goals and an assist in Miami's 4-1 win at New England on Saturday, and has multiple goal contributions in five straight matches - the first MLS player ever to do that. He has nine goals and seven assists in seven matches with Inter Miami this season. Messi, who led Argentina to the World Cup title in 2022, has more than 800 goals in his career for club and country, making him one of the greatest scorers in soccer history. He scored twice in the 2022 World Cup final against France, a match that ended 3-3 with Argentina prevailing 4-2 on penalty kicks.

Real Madrid coach Carlo apologises for forgetting German on his Bayern Munich return

AP ■ MUNICH

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti has apologized upon his return to Bayern Munich for not remembering his German. "Ich habe vergessen Deutsch (I have forgotten German)," the Italian coach said on Monday in his only words in that language, albeit with the word order mixed up, before the teams meet on Tuesday for the first leg of their Champions League semifinal. Ancelotti coached Bayern for just over a year during 2016-17 and won the Bundesliga, but the league title alone is not always enough to sate ambitions at the Bavarian powerhouse. Bayern had won the previous four Bundesligas. After Ancelotti made it five in a row, Bayern won the next six.

Ancelotti was forced out after a shaky start to the 2017-18 season. Losing to Paris Saint-Germain 3-0 was the final straw for club chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. "Unfortunately, we weren't as successful back then as he is now at Real," Bayern midfielder Joshua Kimmich said on Monday. Under Ancelotti, Bayern's Champions League ambitions were ended by Madrid in the quarterfinals. Borussia Dortmund knocked his team out of the German Cup, leaving just the Bundesliga. "One title is a bit scant for us," Bayern president Uli Hoenes said at the time. Ancelotti departed the club that September, his reputation tarnished after failing in the previous season in the Champions League, a competition he had won three



times before. But Ancelotti said on Monday he had only fond memories of

his time in Munich. "I was fortunate to be coach of this club. It could have been for

longer, yes, but otherwise it was a nice time," he said. "I have fantastic memories and

remember it with a lot of affection." The Italian, who led Madrid to the 2014 Champions League title, returned to the Spanish giant in 2021 after stints in charge of Napoli and Everton. He won the Champions League again in 2022, his fourth success as coach including the two titles won with AC Milan in 2003 and 2007. "He's been successful almost everywhere he's been," Kimmich noted. Ancelotti has won domestic honors with Milan, Madrid, Chelsea, Paris-Saint-Germain and Bayern. Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel also praised his counterpart on Monday. "What Carlo has done for football as a player and as a coach is at the highest level. Yet he's always very polite and humble, it's extraordinary," Tuchel said.



CSK EYE ALL ROUND STABILITY AGAINST UNPREDICTABLE PBKS

PTI ■ CHENNAI

An inconsistent Chennai Super Kings will have to display all-round solidity when they face an unpredictable Punjab Kings in their Indian Premier League match here on Wednesday. The Super Kings have 10 points from nine matches, similar figures as that of Lucknow Super Giants, Sunrisers Hyderabad and Delhi Capitals, and the defending champions would certainly like to breakaway from that mid-table gridlock with a win. However, the defending champions will be a worried lot as Punjab Kings, who have six points from nine games, are coming to this match after scaling down 262 against Kolkata Knight Riders, the highest chase in the history of T20 cricket. But the Chepauk deck is a different beast, offering a semblance of assistance to the bowlers and it was evident in CSK's impressive 78-run win over SRH in their previous match. There was no dew in Chennai on that night, and the CSK bowlers defanged SRH's potent batting unit with their

accuracy and variations after their batters put on board a 200-plus total. They need an encore against Punjab, and all eyes will be on skipper Rituraj Gaikwad, who is on a hot streak. Gaikwad has registered scores of 108 and 98 in his last two innings and New Zealand man Daryl Mitchell too seemed to have regained his touch at just the right time with a 32-ball 52 against Hyderabad. However, the real storm-force in the CSK line-up is Shivam Dube, who has pulverised the opposition bowlers while coming as an Impact Sub. While Dube has always been a spin-basher, the left-hander has now added another angle to his batting with his effective tackling of pacers. Dube so far has made 350 runs, second highest for CSK behind Gaikwad's 447, and those runs came at a strike-rate of 172.41, second only to MS Dhoni's 259.45. However, the CSK opening combination continues to be a bit iffy. Gaikwad has been a solid presence but both now-dropped Rachin Ravindra and Ajinkya Rahane have not been able to play the support role to



their skipper. Rahane's last four outings as opener produced scores of 5, 36, 1, 9, and those numbers don't reflect his experience or skill-level. However, CSK in all likelihood will continue to back him. Batting coach Michael Hussey had remarked that the 35-year-old was close to getting a big knock under his belt. On the other hand, PBKS will be desperate to carry the momentum after that record chase and climb up the ladder from the current eighth place. For that, their batters need to fire in unison once again and the onus is on Jonny Bairstow, who made a hundred against KKR, Shashank Singh and Prabhsimran Singh. But they will eye a more impact outting from wicketkeeper batter Jitesh Sharma. However, PBKS' bowling department looks a bit shaky despite having experienced campaigners such as Kagiso Rabada, Harshal Patel, Arshdeep Singh and Sam Curran in their ranks. The visitors will also require a much-improved effort from their spinners — Harpreet Brar and Rahul Chahar - as they

have scalped just seven wickets among them this season. **TEAMS (FROM):** CSK: Rituraj Gaikwad (c), MS Dhoni (wk), Aravelly Avani, Ajinkya Rahane, Shaik Rasheed, Moeen Ali, Shivam Dube, RS Hangargekar, Ravindra Jadeja, Ajay Yadav Mandal, Daryl Mitchell, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Nishant Sindhu, Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, Mukesh Choudhary, Mustafizur Rahman, Matheesha Pathirana, Simarjeet Singh, Prashant Solanki, Shardul Thakur, Maheesh Theekshana and Sameer Rizvi. **PBKS:** Shikhar Dhawan (c), Matthew Short, Jonny Bairstow (wk), Prabhsimran Singh (wk), Jitesh Sharma (wk), 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 Thyagarajan, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.



This IPL is different, need to mentally accept challenge, says Varun Chakravarthy

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Kolkata Knight Riders spinner Varun Chakravarthy said the teams have understood the concept of Impact Player better in this iteration of IPL and now bowlers will have to find ways to counter the ultra-aggressive approach of batsmen to make an impact on the game. Chakravarthy's spell of three for 16 played a vital role in KKR's thumping seven-wicket win over Delhi Capitals on Monday. "The Impact Player rule was there last year also. The teams have now understood how to use the impact player rule better. So, they know that there is extra batting and they want to charge from the first ball. That's how it's going," Chakravarthy said in the post-match press meet. "However much the bowlers cry, that's how it is. We've to accept that this IPL is different and mentally accept that challenge. You can't change the side of the ground or you can't change anything." Chakravarthy also said the Eden Gardens pitch offered a good amount of help to the bowlers against Delhi. "The last two matches before this, we didn't defend that well because the wickets have become very placid in the second innings. But this pitch was a little bit more turning." "That was the difference. The length is basically the same for all the matches. It's just how the wicket behaves." Chakravarthy said the KKR players and management went into a huddle to find solutions after Punjab Kings managed to chase a record 262 in their previous match. "Definitely, the last match (vs PBKS) was a very hard pill to swallow. We had many conversations with the management, everyone chipped in. We spoke with the coaches Carl Crowe, Bharat Arun sir, (Gautam) Gambhir, Chandrakant (Pandit) sir, Abhishek Nair." The 32-year-old said even the KKR owner Shah Rukh Khan pepped them up with a quick motivational talk. "Even Shah Rukh bhair, he came up to us yesterday and

spoke to me a lot he said 'don't take it personally, whatever is happening this IPL is just going at a crazy rate, just don't self-doubt yourself'." **DC OPTIMISTIC TO MAKE PLAYOFFS:** After their defeat against KKR, Delhi have slipped to sixth with three matches left for them, and bowling coach James Hopes said they are optimistic of making the playoffs. Delhi next face Rajasthan Royals at home on May 7, before travelling to Bengaluru (May 12). Their last fixture in the league is against Lucknow Super Giants at home on May 14. "We have a week off now. Our destiny is still in our own hands, you might say," Hopes said. "If we can win three games and get to 16 points, that should be good enough. But we do have a week off now where we can readjust and see if we need to think a little different about anything." "Yeah, tonight was a missed opportunity, and we won't hide behind any excuses there," he said. Hopes said they could have recalibrated the target on a slow pitch. "This has been a high-scoring venue, and even though we'd lost three wickets in the power play, we had no reason to really think it wasn't going to be anything other than that." "We were still going 11 and half an over. So, we were still thinking 200-220. But I think once the spinners started to grip the ball, we saw it in Sunil (Narine) first over, it gripped a bit for him in the sixth over." "So our mistake probably lay in that we didn't recalibrate our sights on something slightly lower. I think everyone assumed that it was going to be a 240 game." "The trick is understanding that it's not that way sometimes, and you have to actually put a defendable score on the board and not go too hard." Crediting the KKR bowling, Hopes said: "You saw a slight shift in (bowling) tactics today. Mitchell (Starc) almost tried yorkers every ball. I think he (Jack Fraser-McGurk) only faced yorkers, bouncers and slower balls."

MI camp divided, they are not performing as a team, says Clarke

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Winning major tournaments hinges on teamwork rather than individual brilliance, according to former Australia captain Michael Clarke, who reckons the Mumbai Indians camp is divided into groups, hindering players from functioning cohesively. After the sudden pre-season change in captaincy when Rohit Sharma was unceremoniously replaced by Hardik Pandya, the five-time champions are in descension. They need to win all their remaining five matches to even have a shot at qualifying for the playoffs. "Yeah, I don't know (they will make it

to the playoffs). I think it's wishful thinking for Mumbai this entire IPL." "I think there's a lot more going on than what we are seeing on the outside and you can't have that many good players and perform this inconsistently. So, I think there are different groups inside that changing room and something is not working, they are not gelling together, they are not playing as a team," Clarke said on Star Sports Cricket Live. Despite having proven match winners like Rohit, Suryakumar Yadav, Pandya, Tim David and Jasprit Bumrah, MI have found it difficult to find victories this season, slumping to six losses from nine outings. Their three wins can be attributed to



the individual brilliance of pacer Bumrah and the big-hitting Romario Shephard. "Individual brilliance can get them over the line, if Rohit Sharma comes in and gets another hundred or Hardik does something with the bat or Bumrah bowls like a genius again, you never know," Clarke said. "I think to win big tournaments you need to be a team and not just have individual performances and unfortunately they haven't played well as a team so I hope they turn it around, but I can't see them winning this game," he added. MI, who occupy the penultimate spot on the points table, take on Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday in Lucknow.

T20 WC bound England players to leave IPL in time to play series against Pakistan: ECB

PTI ■ LONDON

The upcoming T20 World Cup-bound England players who are currently fulfilling their IPL commitments will "return in time" for a preceding four-match T20I series against Pakistan, the country's cricket board said on Tuesday. England on Tuesday named a 15-member squad for the T20 showpiece, which will be held across June in the USA and the West Indies, with Jofra Archer returning to international cricket after a hiatus of more than 14 months. The same squad has been selected for the T20I series against Pakistan, which will commence on May 22 in



Bengaluru), Moeen Ali (Chennai Super Kings), Sam Curran, Jonny Bairstow and Liam Livingstone (Punjab Kings). The most affected teams will be Royals and Knight Riders as they are poised to make the playoffs at this stage of the tournament. The English stars' departure though may not hamper teams such as Punjab Kings and RCB as they are unlikely to qualify for the playoffs. The league matches of the IPL conclude on May 19. The England World Cup squad will fly to the Caribbean on May 31 ahead of England's opening group match against Scotland at the Kensington Oval, Barbados, on June 4.

Dube lot more complete player, will make an impact in T20I World Cup: Stephen Fleming

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Shivam Dube's enhanced game understanding and completeness have impressed Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming who is confident in the lefthanded allrounder's ability to make an "impact" in the upcoming World Cup. The 30-year-old, who is the second leading run-scorer for the defending champions in the ongoing IPL, made the cut to the 15-member Indian squad for the T20 global showpiece in the USA and West Indies beginning on June 1. "He is a lot more complete in terms of what he is trying to do, understanding his game, and that comes from experience," Fleming said ahead of their match against Punjab Kings. "We have worked hard on areas he wasn't so strong, but also continuing to develop his strength. So, if that form continues, he is going to be an impactful player for India (at the World Cup)." Dube has 350 runs in nine outings at a strike rate of 172.41, including three half-centuries. "He has been fantastic. He has proven this year that there is a lot more to him than just playing spin (better)," said the former Kiwi skipper. CSK skipper Rituraj Gaikwad, who is their leading scorer with 447 runs including one century and three fifties, missed out in the squad.



Asked if it was harsh to Gaikwad, Hussey said: "No... I understand the quality of players India have to try and select, (it) is very difficult. Rituraj has done what he can, and he must be close," he said. "We hold him in the highest regard. I love the craft that he shows, and his (last) two performances have been quite majestic. "It's not just wham-bham, but he has displayed the mastery of batting. And the form that he is right now and the control that he has, it's quite outstanding. "It's not now, but there will be another

change for him. If he continues his form and keeps playing well throughout the year, I will be very surprised if he is not called in." Commenting further on his batting and leadership, Fleming said: "His batting has continued from what it was. He has been spectacular the last few years. "As for captaincy, he has taken it up in his stride as he has also led his domestic team. He is very much in the mould of CSK. Very understated, lowkey and incredibly calm." The Impact Player rule continues to be a topic of debate in this IPL, with some experts expressing their apprehensions about it, remarking that it could affect team selections. Asked if the overseas T20 league also should embrace it, he said: "No, I wouldn't (take it overseas)." "I like the challenge of picking all-rounders to get a bit more balance in your team across departments. The way I see it now, you could hardly bowl a team out as the batters just keep coming. "The challenge here is entertainment. If you want fours and sixes, it's (Impact Player rule) a tick. But, from the purest cricketing point of view, it's shifted the balance too far in favour of batting. "It also hides selection issues, rather than having the subtle challenge of getting your selections right and nurturing all-rounders, who are an important part of the game," he concluded.



Rana suspended for one match, fined 100 per cent match fees

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Kolkata Knight Riders seamer Harshit Rana was on Tuesday fined 100 per cent of his match fees and suspended for one match for breaching IPL Code of Conduct during their seven-wicket win over Delhi Capitals here. Rana, who was fined 60 per cent of his match fees for giving a flying-kiss send off to Sunrisers Hyderabad batter Mayank Agarwal in an earlier match, almost repeated the same offence when he knocked over Abhishek Porel in their game against Delhi on Monday. Rana was seen pointing his hand towards Porel, indicating him to go back to pavilion and was about to give another flying kiss before he stopped short of doing that. He was also seen appealing excessively after hitting Rasikh Salam high on his pads. "Rana committed a Level 1 offence under Article 2.5 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. He admitted to the offence and

accepted the Match Referee's sanction. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding," the IPL said in a statement. "The player was earlier penalised under the same level and article of the IPL Code of Conduct," it added. Rana will now miss KKR's next match against Mumbai Indians in an away game on Friday. Article 2.5 of the IPL Code of Conduct addresses offences related to "Using language, actions or gestures which disparage or which could provoke an aggressive reaction from another player in the match." In KKR's IPL opener against SRH on March 23, Rana committed two Level 1 offences under Article 2.5 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. He was fined 100 per cent and 50 per cent of his match fees for the two respective offences. Rana is KKR's joint leading wicket-taker with the spin duo of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy. The trio have 11 wickets each.