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Poll battle enters crucial Phase III

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With stakes being high for the BJP which had won an overwhelming majority of these seats, including all in Gujarat, Karnataka, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, in the 2019 general elections, political bigwigs Union Ministers Amit Shah, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Mansukh Mandaviya, Parshottam Rupala Congress stalwart Digvijay Singh, to NCP's (Sharad Pawar faction) Supriya Sule and Samajwadi Party's Dimple Yadav are amongst several others from ruling and Opposition side who are in the fray for the voting to be held in 93 constituencies spread over 12 States and Union Territories on Tuesday in the third phase of Lok Sabha polls.

Over 1,300 candidates, including around 120 women, are in the fray for the 93 parliamentary seats in 12 States and Union Territories. Modi and Shah will cast their votes at booths in Ahmedabad city that fall under Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat.

After the third phase of polling, more than half of India will be covered. A total 283 will be covered after the third phase of polling.

According to EC, over 17.24 crore voters will cast their vote in the third phase for 93 parliamentary seats. A total of 1,041 inter-State and 275 International Border check posts are keeping strict vigil on any illicit flow of liquor, drugs,



cash and freebies. Strict surveillance has been kept at sea and air routes. With the BJP bagging Surat unopposed, 25 seats in Prime Minister Modi's home State of Gujarat will go to polls on May 7, besides 11 seats in Maharashtra, 10 seats in Uttar Pradesh, the remaining 14 of the 28 in Karnataka, seven in Chhattisgarh, five in Bihar, four each in Assam and West Bengal, and all two in Goa. The Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (2 seats) and nine seats in Madhya Pradesh, including Betul where elections were deferred, will also go to polls on Tuesday and over 11 crore people will be eligible to vote. Campaigning for the third phase witnessed the

Constitution and reservation issue dominating the poll discourse. The stakes are significant for the BJP and its allies, which had, in 2019, won 75 of the 93 seats going to polls on Tuesday, while the INDIA Bloc parties had won only 11. Four seats had gone to the undivided Shiv Sena, two were won by independents, and one by the AIUDEF. With the first two phases registering a dip in voter turnout as compared to 2019, the question is whether the third phase will buck the trend amid hot weather and heat waves in these States. After the third phase, voting will be completed in 283 out of

243 seats in the Lok Sabha. The next four phases will be on May 13, May 20, May 25 and June 1. Counting of votes is on June 4. Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seats were also to vote in the third phase of polling. However, due to several connectivity issues, the Election Commission of India rescheduled it to May 25. During the campaign, the BJP had to face the ire of the Kshatriya community over a remark made by Rupala in Rajkot. He had claimed several rulers from the community had "roti and beti" (marriage and trade) relations with the British and other foreign invaders.

STARS IN FRAY

CONSTITUENCY	CANDIDATES	PARTY
Gandhinagar	Amit Shah	BJP
	Sonal Patel	Congress
	Mohammedanish Desai	BSP
Baramati	Supriya Sule	NCP (Pawar)
	Sunetra Pawar	NCP
Guna	Jyotiraditya Scindia	BJP
	Rao Yadvendra Singh	Congress
Rajgarh	Dhaniram Chaudhary	BSP
	Rodmal Nagar	BJP
Berhampore	Digvijay Singh	Congress
	Dr. Rajendra Suryavanshi	BSP
Vidisha	Nirmal Kumar Saha	BJP
	Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury	Congress
Dharwad	Yusuf Pathan	TMC
	Shivraj Singh Chouhan	BJP
South Goa	Pratap Bhanu Sharma	Congress
	Kishan Lal Ladiya	BSP
Mainpuri	Seema Sharma	SP
	Pralhad Joshi	BJP
Dhubri	Vinod Asotri	Congress
	Pallavi Dempo	BJP
Bhambal, Hathras (SC)	Capt. Viriato Fernandes	Congress
	Jaiveer Singh Thakur	BJP
Agra	Dimple Yadav	SP
	Shiv Prasad Yadav	BSP
Najafgarh	Badruddin Ajmal	AIUF
	Rakibul Hussain	Congress
Bhambal, Hathras (SC)	Zabed Islam	AGP

LG recommends NIA probe against Kejriwal

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Troubles seem to be mounting for the jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena recommended National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe against the AAP chief for allegedly receiving political funding from the banned terrorist organisation 'Sikhs for Justice' to the Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday. The LG claimed that Kejriwal "has received a staggering amount of \$16 million in funding from Khalistani groups between 2014 and 2022."

The move comes a day ahead of the Supreme Court considering granting Kejriwal interim bail in view of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. The AAP chief, who is in Tihar jail, was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with an excise policy linked money laundering case.

In a letter to the Union Home secretary, the Lieutenant Governor's secretary said Saxena had received a complaint that the Kejriwal-led AAP allegedly received USD 16 million funding from extremist Khalistani groups for facilitating the release of Devendra Pal Bhullar.

"Keeping in view, the sensitivity and seriousness of the allegations levelled in the complaint, the LG has desired that the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, may consider referring the matter to the NIA for conducting comprehensive investigation into



the matter," the letter to the Home Ministry read. Bhullar, who is in Amritsar Central Jail, was convicted in connection with the killing of nine people in a bomb blast in 1993 in Delhi. He was sentenced to death by a designated TADA court on August 25, 2001 and is undergoing life imprisonment after the Supreme Court commuted his death sentence. Reacting to the development, senior AAP leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj called it "yet another conspiracy against Kejriwal at the behest of BJP".

"They are losing all seven seats in Delhi and are rattled by the fear of defeat in Lok Sabha polls," he claimed, adding that the LG is the agent of BJP and the party had done something similar before also in Punjab elections. The complaint was filed by World Hindu Federation's National General Secretary Ashoo Mongia.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with NDA candidates and leaders at a public meeting ahead of Lok Sabha polls in Berhampore, Odisha, on Monday

Spotlight on Samajwadi Party's first family

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW

The stage is set for the third phase of elections in 10 Lok Sabha constituencies which will go to polls on Tuesday, with all eyes on the first family of Samajwadi Party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav who are in the electoral fray. While SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's wife Dimple is aiming to retain the Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat which she won in the bypolls following the demise of her father-in-law Mulayam, Akshaya Yadav, son of Ram Gopal Yadav, the national principal general secretary of SP, will try to reclaim the Firozabad seat, which he had won in 2014.



Besides, Aditya Yadav, the son of SP national general secretary Shivpal Singh Yadav, is making his electoral debut from the Budaun Lok Sabha seat which was represented by his cousin Dharmendra Yadav in 2014. The 10 constituencies in UP that will vote in the third phase on Tuesday are

Sambhal, Hathras (SC), Agra (SC), Fatehpur Sikri, Firozabad, Mainpuri, Etah, Budaun, Aonla and Bareilly. In the earlier two phases of elections, polling was held in 16 out of the total 80 Lok Sabha constituencies in UP.

Besides the Yadav family members, polling will be held to seal the fate of Union Minister SP Singh Baghel, UP Tourism Minister Jaiveer Singh, Minister of State for Revenue Anoop Pradhan Balmiki, Baghel, Jaiveer Singh, and Balmiki are

contesting from Agra (SC), Mainpuri, and Hathras (SC) Lok Sabha constituencies respectively. Rajveer Singh, son of former Chief Minister of UP and Bharatiya Janata Party stalwart Kalyan Singh, is looking to score a hat-trick from the Etah parliamentary constituency, which was also represented in 2009 by Kalyan Singh as a candidate of the Jan Kranti Party. In Bareilly, the main contest has narrowed down to the BJP's Chhatrapal Singh Gangwar and Praveen Singh Aron of the SP after the nomination paper of Bahujan Samaj Party candidate Master Chhotey Lal Gangwar was rejected.

BJD govt's 'expiry date is June 4', claims Modi

'New BJP CM to be sworn in on June 10'

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

Hitting out at the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in a political rally here ahead of the twin elections in Odisha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said the BJD government's "expiry date is June 4" and a new BJP Chief Minister would be sworn in on June 10.

"Today is May 6. BJP's CM candidate will be announced on June 6. The swearing-in ceremony of the BJP CM will be held on June 10. I invite all of you to the swearing-in ceremony," Modi said.

In Odisha, BJD 'Asth' he, Congress 'Pasth' he wor lok BJP par 'Aswasth' he'. The Congress has ruled the State for 50 years while 25 years are completed under the BJD government, but nothing happened in the State, he said. Despite Odisha being rich in water resources, fertile land, mineral resources, a long coast line, trade centres like Brahmapur, the people of the State are still poor.

"Why is migration of people so high in the Chief

Minister' home constituency? Why are the doctor posts lying vacant in many hospitals of the State? Why does the State have high school dropouts? Who is responsible for it?" asked Modi.

"The BJD is sinking while Congress is a spent force and the BJP is the only ray of hope for the people," he said.

He Modi said he has never compromised in allocation of funds to Odisha. The UPA government, in its 10 years tenure, had provided only Rs 1 lakh crore to Odisha while the Modi government has given more than Rs 3.50 lakh crore in the past 10 years.

The Modi government provides Rs 6,000 to pregnant women under the Janani Suraksha Yojana. But the BJD government is denying the women of this benefit by not implementing the scheme, he stated.

A person, who lives, understands and takes pride in Odia culture and tradition, can help resolve the problems of Odisha at a faster pace. Therefore, BJP CM should take over, Modi said.

He said his government gave Rs 10,000 crore to Odisha under the Jal Jeevan Mission, but the BJD government could not spend the

money properly.

Modi said the BJP has given the highest post of the country to a daughter of Odisha. "It is my good fortune that President Droupadi Murmu Ji regularly gives me feedback for the development of Odisha. I feel that I will be able to do a lot for the State under her guidance," he said.

The BJD government has not also implemented the Ayushman Bharat Yojana in the state because they don't bother about the treatment of poor people and those who migrate to other States.

"On the very day of the new BJP CM swearing-in ceremony on June 10, we will implement the Ayushman Bharat scheme. Modi government will provide free treatment to senior citizens of over 70 years, irrespective of their financial status. This son of Lord Jagannath will take care of all senior citizens under this scheme," he said.

"I urge you to allow BJP to serve you for once and it is Modi's guarantee that Odisha will be turned into the number 1 State in the next five years," he said, giving the example of BJP governments in Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Chhattisgarh and Assam.

Capital sees 67 per cent surge in wrong side driving prosecutions

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

A staggering surge of almost 67 per cent in the number of prosecutions for 'wrong side driving' was witnessed in the national Capital in 2024, during the period from January 1 to April 30, compared to the same period in the previous year. While in the earlier year, a total of 18,047 violators of traffic rules were caught by the traffic police in the city, the number saw a considerable jump, taking the total to 30,062 in 2024. A Delhi Traffic Police official said in response to the alarming increase in incidents of driving against the flow of traffic in the Capital city, the Delhi Traffic Police has launched a robust crackdown campaign to ensure road safety and discipline.

"Over the past few months, there has been a noticeable surge in the number of vehicles violating traffic norms by

driving against the designated flow of traffic. This reckless behaviour not only endangers the lives of the offenders but also poses a significant threat to other road users, leading to a rise in accidents and traffic congestion," said the official.

The police have intensified its measures in order to curb this dangerous practice. Special teams have been deployed across key intersections and thoroughfares to monitor traffic flow and identify violators. Strict legal action, including hefty fines and penalties, is being taken against individuals found driving against the established traffic direction," said the authorities. Further, top 10 traffic circles have been identified by the police with

Najafgarh area topping the list with 1,3289 violators. Sarita Vihar stands at the second number with 1,333 violators, followed by 1,133 in BhajanPura, 1,093 in Punjabi Bagh, 1,062 in Kalyan Puri, 1,056 in Kotwali, 1,041 in Dwarka, 998 in Sangam Vihar, 968 in Rajouri Garden and 966 in Kamla Market.

"The Delhi Traffic Police has also conducted a comprehensive analysis of the top ten traffic circles with the highest number of challans issued in 2024. This study makes it possible to target enforcement operations to improve road safety and adherence to traffic regulations by identifying the areas with the highest prevalence of these types of offences," a senior police

official said.

In a bid to raise awareness and make citizens understand the importance of adhering to traffic rules and regulations, the traffic police is collaborating with various stakeholders, including civic authorities and educational institutions. "Public outreach programmes, awareness campaigns, and educational initiatives are being conducted to instil a sense of responsibility and civic duty among all road users," the police said. Further, they urged citizens to prioritise safety and compliance with traffic laws while commuting on the city's roads. "It is imperative for every individual to respect traffic regulations, follow designated traffic flow directions, and contribute towards creating a safer and more orderly environment for all," the statement by the traffic police said.



'BJP daydreaming about forming govt'

Naveen pooh-poohs Modi's claim

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Dismissing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claim about the BJP forming government in Odisha after the upcoming polls, BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on

Monday said the saffron party "has been daydreaming for long" about coming to power in the State.

"BJP has been daydreaming since many days," said Naveen, responding to a question from his trusted aide V K Pandian on the BJP's claims to form government in Odisha this time.

Naveen's response came shortly after Modi asserted that



a BJP election rally in Brahmapur that June 4 is the expiry date for the Naveen Patnaik-led BJD government.

"I have come here to invite you for the swearing-in ceremony of BJP CM in Bhubaneswar on June 10," Modi said while addressing a rally at Kanisi under the

Brahmapur parliamentary constituency.

Naveen, who undertook whirlwind tours of Kalahandi and Nuapada district to address election rallies at Bhawanipatna and Kharia, was responding to Pandian's query while travelling. Pandian shared a video on the BJD chief's response on Instagram.

BJD govt to take oath on June 9'

CM addresses meeting in Bhawanipatna
BIKASH KHEMKA
BHAWANIPATNA

The Opposition is shedding crocodile tears. Odisha people are happy with the schemes implemented by the BJD government, said BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in an election meeting at Bhawanipatna on Monday.

Patnaik appealed to the people to cast their votes for the BJD. He also asked the voters about benefits of all the schemes asking, "Is it good or not?"



After citing BSKY, Mamata Yojana, Mission Shakti, Laxmi bus scheme 5T School, one by one, Patnaik asked, "Is it good" and in response to that the huge gathering replied 'Yes'.

Senior leader VK Pandian said the BSKY is like an ATM for poor people who can use it to be treated for any disease.

Attacking the Central Government, Pandian said the Ayushman

Bharat scheme is meant only for BPL families and the Centre is trying to stop the State-sponsored BSKY.

Pandian further said the BJP's double-engine government has collapsed in many States. "The economy of double-engine Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka governments collapsed while in Odisha our economy is improving," he said.

"Only the single-engine government will continue in Odisha; and if our party retains power, it is going to take oath on June 9. The Chief Minister had come here to urge the people to vote in favour of BJD's five MLAs and one MP nominee," Pandian said.

In Puri Cong, Independent candidate's supporters clash

Supporters of Puri Congress MLA candidate Uma Ballav Rath and Independent candidate Sujit Mohapatra clashed during nomination filing at the office of the Sub-Collector here in the presence of police on Monday.

Earlier on Sunday, Rath had allegedly been attacked and injured by some unidentified miscreants during campaigning.

The Congress had earlier named Sujit Mohapatra as its MLA candidate but replaced him with Uma Ballav Rath on Sunday. This triggered tension between the supporters of two leaders. The supporters of Sujit allegedly vandalised the party office in Puri.

The two leaders came to the Sub-

Collector's office to file their nominations when their supporters jostled with each other before exchanging blows.

Speaking to the media, Rath said, "I faced an unfortunate situation yesterday and I was attacked. We had never faced such an incident earlier even though I had contested from this seat five times. This is highly condemnable. If politicians indulge in these activities, such leaders cannot work for people."

Sujit said, "After getting a Congress ticket, I had filed my nomination. Later, my ticket was cancelled and injustice was meted out to me. It was Uma Ballav and Bhatka Das who struck a deal over the Vedanta land issue, leading to the cancellation of my ticket."

Thunderstorms bring temp down in Twin City

Nor'wester rains to occur in parts of State in next 4 days
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Nor'wester rains and strong winds on Monday afternoon brought respite from the severe heat wave prevailing in the State for the last few days.

The twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack were lashed by thunderstorms disrupting life for some time. In the morning, an overcast sky in the capital city had prevented the temperature from soaring.

The Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here predicted nor'wester rains to occur in parts of the State in the next four days.

As per the IMD, nor'wester rains

accompanying gusty surface wind and thunderstorm are likely to occur in parts of Odisha till May 9. The extent of rains would increase from Tuesday and there would be heavy rainfall till Wednesday.

On Tuesday, thunderstorm with lightning accompanied with gusty surface wind speed reaching 40-50 kmph and heavy rainfall is very likely to occur in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Baleswar, Ganjam, Gajapati and Kandhamal, said the IMD issuing an Orange warning.

On Wednesday, thunderstorm with lightning accompanied with gusty surface wind speed reaching 40-50 kmph and heavy rainfall is very likely to occur in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Baleswar, Ganjam, Gajapati and Kandhamal.

DSBM holds talk 'Role of G20 in Global Eco Governance'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The DAV School of Business Management (DSBM) conducted a seminar on the topic "Role of G20 in Global Economic Governance" wherein Director

HR, OHPC, Subash Chandra Jena participated as the chief guest.

Dr Madhubrata Satpathy, eminent academician, attended the seminar as the keynote speaker. Defining HR as the backbone of an organisation, Jena deliberated the importance of optimum utilisation of resources through proper resource management and inclusive growth. He also highlighted about the disaster preparedness of Odisha in the context to the Sustainable Development Goals. He appealed the audience to take utmost care of nature and always work in teams in order to foster talents.

Dr Satpathy commenced her discourse with the history and evolution of G20 forum. She discussed about poverty reduction, strength-



ening financial regulations, banking supervisions and climate change issues in

context to 2030 agenda of sustainability. In the seminar, the 1st Team consisted Ayush Modi and Roopsikha Dutta of BBA-2nd semester who

presented the theme, "An Analysis of the Impact of G20 in Curbing COVID-19 and Global Health Resilience", whereas the 2nd Team consisted Archita Mishra and Ayushman Panigrahi who presented the theme, "An Analysis of the Selected SDGs for Implementation by 2030 through G20 Summit."

Both the dignitaries highly appreciated the students' efforts for their presentations in the seminar. MM Panda, president, DSBM preached about the notion of doing all kinds of work with full dedication. Dr DN Mishra, Principal, DSBM delivered the welcome address and discussed about the F-to-F Model (Focus-to-Future). He opined that the market is highly volatile and apart from academics, presentation skills are highly essential for enhancement of employability skills. Debabrata Sahoo, faculty in Management organised the entire event.

CM's chopper fails to land in BBSR

Diverted to Jharsuguda for bad weather
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's helicopter was unable to make a landing at the Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) here on Monday due to adverse weather conditions.

The helicopter was diverted to Jharsuguda, from where it returned after the weather conditions improved in the capital city.

As per sources, after attending a meeting at Khariar, Patnaik was returning to Bhubaneswar by the chopper. "A helicopter carrying the Chief Minister was coming from Utkela airstrip to Bhubaneswar. It couldn't land here due to strong wind caused by nor'wester activity. So, they diverted it to Jharsuguda," said BPIA Director Prasanna Pradhan.

'Electoral bonds largest scam in independent India'

Prashant Bhushan demands SIT probe into shady deals
BIJAY MISHRA ■ BHUBANESWAR

Supreme Court lawyer and activist Prashant Bhushan has demanded an independent probe by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) into the details of the political funding and also find if there was a quid-pro-quo between the corporate and political parties.

Addressing a Press conference here, organised by the Lokshakti Abhiyan, Bhushan said, "Electoral Bond is the largest scam of independent India, which is even bigger than 2G and coal scams. In the case of 2G and coal scams there were no money trails. But in the present case there is a certain money trail."

To empirically establish the money trail and also the suspected quid-pro-quo between the corporate and the political parties, there should be an independent probe by an SIT, he said. "Only such an investigation can substantially estab-



lish our legitimate doubt about companies paying to political parties to get their jobs done in terms of policy, contract and otherwise," he said.

Bhushan said, "After doing a preliminary analysis of the data now available in public domain, it has been revealed that the BJP received Rs 1,751 crore in donation through electoral bonds from various companies and in turn those companies got Government contracts worth Rs 62,000 crore."

He also alleged that the total number of firms, which were raided and in turn they donated to the BJP, is 104 and out of which 30 are identified as shell companies. He said, "In at least 49 cases, Rs 62,000 crore in postpaid/project approval were given by the Central Government or State Governments by the

tract had been given to the companies that gave those donations," Bhushan said.

"For example, Megha Engineering gave Rs 140 crore bonds to the BJP in April 2023. In May 2023, they were given a Rs 14,000 crore contract for a tunnel work by the Maharashtra Government controlled by the BJP. For the Rs 16,000 crore bonds, probably Rs 16 lakh crore worth contracts have been influenced by bonds," he said.

He further said, "We need to find out the people in the Government, companies and agencies involved in the conspiracy. We need an independent agency constituted by the Supreme Court to probe this. We have filed a petition seeking a special investigation team. Hopefully it will come up for hearing soon."

Among others, national coordinator, National Campaign for People's Right to Information and Activists, "Common Cause" Anjali Bhardwaj and Lokshakti Abhiyan president Prafulla Samantaray spoke.

Interview of the week Odia writers should set their plays in light of global scenario



SUGYAN CHOUDHURY



SAROJ MISHRA

Saroj Mishra is one of the rarest of rare dramatists striding the world of drama like a mighty colossus. A silent litterateur, he follows his 'Saraswata Sadhana' (penance for literature and culture) like a sinking star beyond the utmost horizon of human thoughts.

After having the post-graduation from the Utkal University, he has spent more than three decades of his career in the Odisha Secretariat Service, with charity to all and malice to none. He has carved out a niche for himself leaving behind an indelible imprint on the psychic residue of the collective unconscious of Odia theatre aficionados. He has a tremendous knack for writing plays, stories, essays, features, radio talks, anchoring TV discussions besides being a columnist in local news dailies. He is author of 13 books published by the Cuttack Students Store and Vidyapuri publishing houses. As a forerunner of radio plays, he has produced 17 significant plays, which were also performed in stages by different organisations at Rabindra Mandap, Bhanjakala Mandap, Bhubaneswar, and in Kala Vikas Kendra, Cuttack. His widely-acclaimed teleplays are 'Octopus 2011', 'Parajita Kalidasa 2009', 'Vinna Eka Barnabodha 2000' and 'Samparka 1999' were telecasted by the Doordarshan Kendra, Bhubaneswar. Awards and accolades came cascading down upon him including 22 significant ones in recognition of his meritorious contribution to the domain of Odia drama. His work covers a wide range of poetry, stories, literary criticism, essays, plays, screen plays and writings of versatile cultural and human interest, for which legendary actors Gour Ghosh, Akshaya Mohanty and eminent writers like Manoranjan Das, Faturananda had extended their heartfelt cooperation in inspiring him on his literary journey. Legendary playwright Gopal Chhotray had his full-throated approval for him when he wrote "I had the rare privilege to meet loving Saroj Mishra, one of the

very promising playwrights of my mother language. May he flourish in his literary career".

In an interview to *The Pioneer*, Mishra spoke to *Sugyan Choudhury* from his house beside the meandering streams of river Daya.

How is it possible on your part to combine your uninterrupted half acentury of literary journey with that of your hazardous bureaucratic career?

I have discharged my governmental obligations very diligently while I used to be in my Secretarial jobs. Outside it, my literary pursuits followed suit to me as leaves come to a tree or simply as a flower blossoms. Literature aims at communications of emotions. When we tell a story, compose a song or paint a picture with the object of communicating to others, it all is called art. These emotions leap to the Olympian heights of great creation. The beauty of a work of art or literature is about the quality of effect it has on those who are brought into contact with it. It requires a vast reading of books and concentrating on writing through silence.

What is the difference of writing plays for stages and listeners for radios?

In radio, a writer comes first. Radio is a medium for telling stories and creating in the listener's mind. It is important and indispensable for a playwright to know the intricacies of the grammar. Otherwise, you can't lead up the story. Prior to writing, I always invent an interesting conclusion and then plan the events to lead up to it. There are three phases through which plays evolve through themes. The first one is the given circumstances followed by synthesis and finally comes the end. A complete radiogenic play is rare. Often, plays written for the medium suffers from craftsmanship. The crafty art of playmaking is the most significant structure. The structure of a good play is determined by the vitality of the theme in the author's creative imagination like a growing child. Before writing drama, I think

that the play must deal with human affairs performed by human beings. The radio provides a type of drama very different from the stage plays. Scenery is non-existent and actions can be implied only by comments or through sound effects and the audience may consist in one sense of one person in one room although the total audience for the radio is very large. Concentration, plot, characterisation, all applied with equal force to radio drama.

May we know the current trends of Odia stage plays?

Drama is the literature that walks and talks. The sole purpose of a playwright is not to take the viewers to a dreamland which is short-lived but to awake them from a deep slumber and make them aware about their own problems and predicaments - economic, social, political and cultural. The traditional legendary playwrights of yesteryears are now no more. Those who are alive are not in track. A new generation of playwrights with complicated issues have come up. The present-day Odia playwrights should take note of these developments meticulously and set their plays in the light of global scenario with a holistic approach. Odia dramas are fraught with serious problems. The developments are disappointing since one has to run for political and financial patronage. The political leaders of post-Independence India have turned selfish and never tried to mitigate the problems of common man. They are blind leaders for the blind and if the blind leads the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

What is your message for the future generation of playwrights?

Nowadays, the numbers of quality playwrights are gradually dwindling into extinction. This is because this is an uphill task to become a quality playwright. The present generation is averse to the grammar of plays and drama. There are ample scopes for the creative playwrights. The Odia language and literature is passing through a crisis accentuated by many sycophants and conspirators eating into the vitals of the literary domain, forcibly occupying higher echelons either through covert or overt means. All are making a beeline for conferment of literary awards by diluting and polluting the sacred literary ambience. The future generation of writers and playwrights should forsake the rat race for awards and should be lost in the pure and un-mixed delights of creative literature. They should emulate the architect Gopal Chandra Prabaraj, author of "Purna Chandra Bhasakosha", and Padmashree Binod Kanungo of "Jnana Madal" fame.

After attack on officials Nandankanan to deploy ex-Army personnel for security

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Following a serious attack on senior forest officials inside the Nandankanan Zoological Park, the Forest Department has decided for deployment of retired army personnel inside the zoo.

Speaking to the media here, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) Susanta Nanda informed that retired army officials will be deployed immediately. The armed personnel will roam inside the zoo to provide security inside the campus, he said.

Apart from that the Forest Department will also request the State Government to deploy Odisha Industrial Security Force (OISF) inside the zoo so that no one will feel insecure in the zoological park. The Forest Department will bear the

cost, the PCCF said. Besides, a plan is there to provide an alternative road to the inside village from Daruthenga, he informed.

Soon after the incident in which two miscreants attacked the senior forest officials, Chief Secretary PK Jena and ACS Forest and Environment, Satyabrata Sahu visited Nandankanan and reviewed the situation. The visits have enhanced the confidence of the forest officials working there.

PCCF Nanda said that the police have also taken strong action by arresting the two miscreants in just a day. Both were arrested and serious charges have been levelled against the duo, the PCCF said.

If any departmental official will be found involved in the attack, he/she will also face strong action, he warned.

In a very disturbing incident at the Zoological Park, two miscreants created a terror and damaged office equipment on last Monday evening. Both the criminals were arrested on Tuesday.

The two miscreants stormed into the office of Deputy Director with weapons. They unleashed a reign of terror in the office, especially in the chambers of ACF (SM), ACF (VM), and office corridor.

They manhandled Dr Rajesh Mahapatra, biologist, Dr Sudipta Kumar Panda, ACF (SBG), Dr Rashmi Ranjan Swain, ACF (SM), and Ashutosh Campa, audit officer in the F&E Department.

Numerous office assets, including computers, laptops, printers, TV, and furniture, were destroyed. They also destroyed the laptop and mobile phones of the officials.

Gajapati Cong leader Patnaik challenges Pandian

PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and BJD leader VK Pandian on their tour to Gajapati district on Sunday hit out at the opposition parties.

Pandian said the Opposition's number of seats would not touch double digits in the coming elections.

However, Paralakhemundi Congress candidate Bijay Patnaik in reply to Pandian said that if the BJD gets 140 seats, he would retire from politics. But if the BJD doesn't get 140 seats, would Pandian take retirement from politics, Patnaik questioned.



Patnaik said that this time, the BJD government's fall is imminent. So, Pandian is making these hollow claims.

Besides, a particular television channel is dragging his name into the Jagannath land scam by broadcasting fake news. He would take legal action against the channel.

He further said that due to his absence from campaigning due to his sickness, the opponents spread rumours that he has ran away from the battlefield. But in his absence, the Congress workers continued campaigning, for which he is thankful to them. The people would give a befitting reply on May 13 to those who are spreading rumours against him, said Patnaik.

Plumbers' assn holds annual fest in B'pur

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The Ganjam District Plumber Workmen's Association (GDPWA) celebrated its 13th annual function here on May 1. It was sponsored by ESSEL Bath Fittings Pvt Ltd, ORI - Plasat Pipes Fittings and Feriwere Pipes Fittings.

Association president Bikram Sahu presided over the meeting. On the occasion union leader and senior lawyer Santosh Kumar Mohapatra joined as chief guest, union leader Bhagaban Sahu as chief speaker, District Labour Officer Aakash Bisoyi as guest of honour, besides senior lawyer and advisor of the association

Pramod Kumar Sahu and social worker prasant Kumar Kar who joined as guests.

Chief guest Mohapatra said plumbers are sincerely serving the general public in various houses, hotels and hospitals etc. Among others, association vice-president B Arjuna Patro, acting president Santosh Sethi, general secretary Narayan Sahu, joint-secretary Tukuna Gauda, treasurer A Krishna Murty Patro, Subash Das, Aanand Sahu, U Laxmi Narayan and Prakash Chandra Sahu were present. Vote of thanks was offered by Narayan Sahu. A grand cultural programme was conducted after the meeting.

K'pada Mission Shakti prez violates MCC



BJP demands action against Sanjukta Satpathy for supporting BJD

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

Sanjukta Satpathy, president of Mission Shakti in Kendrapada, is accused of MCC violations by participating in BJD's campaign activities.

BJP's Krushnachandra Panda demanded action after alleging her involvement in urging votes for the BJD. Satpathy is the president of Mission Shakti Women's Mahasangh in Rajkanika block.

Panda lodged a formal complaint against her with the Kendrapada district Collector and demanded stringent ac-

tion against her as per the law. In his complaint, Panda alleged that Satpathy was accompanying BJD MLA candidate Pratap Deb for political campaigning and urging people to vote for the conch party.

Not only Satpathy, but Rajkanika Mission Shakti co-ordinator Sushant Mallick and Rakesh Rao, an employee of Aul Co-operative Bank, have also been accused of violating MCC by their involvement in political activities.

Recently, Satpathy was spotted in a BJD joining programme and asking people to vote for BJD. She was influencing the voters. "We demand action against her. We will resort to agitation if no action is taken against her," warned Panda.

No comments could be obtained from Satpathy in this connection.

Odisha Startup wins contest in Boston

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Anup Paikaray, Founder of startup Newrup Tech Solutions, emerged as one of the winners in the flagship business presentation event called, Pitchathon, held in Boston.

He competed against startups from some of the greatest universities in the world, including Harvard University and MIT Innovation Lab.

After a tough competition, he emerged as a winner, winning a cash prize of Rs 2 lakh and a trophy. Most importantly, he made India proud as he waved the Indian flag in front of all the foreign audiences, proving that Indian students are not inferior to anyone else.

Anup is a recent graduate from Odisha University of Technology and Research, with a degree in Electronics and Instrumentation.

He was the winner of the Smartideathon contest organized by GITAM University in August 2023, for which he had the chance to attend the Boston immersion program at Northeastern University from March to April 2024.

In the past, Anup and his startup have won many prestigious awards, such as Best student startup of the year 2023 by Startup Odisha under the Department of MSME, Green Bengal Innovation Contest, 3M Young Innovator's Award, Azim Premji Social Enterprise Award, and many more.

It's straight fight between BJD, BJP in Patkura



RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

The Patkura Assembly constituency is said to be an important Assembly seat in the district as stalwart leaders like late Biju Patnaik, Rajkishore Nayak, Bijoy Mohapatra, Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak and Bed Prakash Agrawalla earlier represented the seat.

The seat has remained an anti-Congress bastion since last 6 decades or so. The Congress had won the seat once way back in 1961. Since then the Congress has always been on the losing side. Non Congress leader Bijoy Mohapatra emerged victorious from the seat in 1980, 1985, 1990 and 1995 Assembly polls whereas late Bed Prakash Agrawalla got victory from the seat twice in 2009 and 2014 on BJD ticket. His widow, Sabitri Agrawalla won the by-poll in 2019 on a



BJD ticket too. In 2000 poll, Trilochana Behera, who contested from AITMC party, won the seat with the help of Bijoy Mohapatra.

Meanwhile, the Patkura seat is set for a straight fight between two greenhorns, who are going to throw their hats for the first time in the upcoming polls. Arabinda Mohapatra, son of stalwart leader Bijoy who recently started his political career by joining the BJD, has been nominated by the BJD for the seat. Though Bijoy is known as a sworn critic of Naveen Patnaik for the latter was responsible for his political career reaching a stage of uncertainty, Naveen choosing his son Arabinda by favouring him with ticket to contest this election was aimed at killing two birds with one stone. The masterstroke was meant to woo Bijoy and may be getting

his tacit support for the BJD in Patkura on the one hand, and fielding a new face to beat the anti-incumbency on the other.

Tejeswar Parida, who is a protégé of BJP vice-president Baijyanta Panda, is going to file nomination paper for the first time for the Patkura Assembly seat on BJP ticket. Tejeswar was former president of Odisha Khadi and Village Industries Board and in September 2022, he resigned from the BJD and joined the BJP with the help of Panda.

Congress has given ticket to Ratikanta Kanungo who had unsuccessfully contested as an Independent candidate in 2019 from Patkura.

According to political analyst Ganesh Samal, Arabinda has an edge over his rivals as his father Bijoy will be campaigning for him. So he has the twin advantage of the BJD

organisation as well as the organisation of his father which will work for him.

On the otherhand, Tejeswar was defamed earlier for allegedly involved in misappropriation of funds that was sanctioned for the development of Khadi industries and bee-keeping from 2014 to 2017. So that can work as a negative factor for him. Besides, he is not a popular BJP leader in the Patkura segment, Samal added.

Similarly, Ratikanta is an entrepreneur, builder, educationalist, media baron and film producer of Odisha.

But he was defamed in the locality as a financial fraudster. In May 2013 he drew media attention following the CBI's exposure of his involvement in a multi-million rupees scam involving fraudulent gold loan availed from the Odisha Gramya Bank by mortgaging fake jewellery.

In Bargarh Liquor worth Rs 2L seized from van



PNS ■ BARGARH

Police seized more than 43 cartons of Indian Made Foreign Liquor from a pickup van during pre-election checking in Bargarh district.

Police said they got inputs about the illegal transportation of IMFL in Bargarh town.

On the direction of Bargarh SP Prahalad Sahai Meena, a police team conducted a raid on the Krushak Bazaar and checked the vehicle. They found IMFL bottles of different reputed brands in 43 car-

tons. The estimated cost of the liquor was more than Rs 2 lakh.

The police seized the liquor bottles besides a refrigerator and a motorcycle from the spot. They also arrested three persons in this connection. All the arrested persons belong to Bargarh, said police.

Notably, on the direction of the Election Commission of India, police have been carrying out checking of the vehicles for illegal transportation of money, liquor, drugs, intoxication substances and other such materials before the elections.

Ticket cancellation Arundhati protests through social media post

Questions BJD's 'respect for mother' slogan

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Arundhati Devi has expressed her resentment over the cancellation of her ticket by the BJD for the Deogarh Assembly constituency through a social media post.

"Sita Mata had rightly said that there is no respect for women in this world," she posted with a crying photo of

the iconic figure from Ramanand Sagar's Ramayana.

The snatching of the ticket after she had begun campaigning in the Assembly segment has come as a humiliation for the royalty while also raises questions on the BJD's 'respect for mother' slogan.

Arundhati, who had earned a nomination for the seat a day after switching sides from the BJP to the BJD, was replaced with Romancha Ranjan Biswal on Thursday in what appeared to be a change in the BJD's

strategy for the Sambalpur Lok Sabha big battle where party organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das is contesting against Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan of the BJP.

The Deogarh Assembly seat is part of the Sambalpur Parliamentary constituency.

Arundhati is the wife of erstwhile Deogarh king and BJP's Sambalpur MP Nitesh Ganga Dev. Besides local resistance, she was facing problems at home with her husband openly

declaring that he was ready to campaign for the BJP candidate in Deogarh

Her nomination had also brought infighting in the regional party to the fore which made it difficult for Pranab to penetrate Deogarh, a stronghold of Dharmendra and BJP MLA candidate Subash Chandra Panigrahi.

The BJD brought back Biswal, who was BJD's candidate in 2019 as well but had lost to BJP's Subash Panigrahi by a margin of 7,106 votes.

A conscious judicial ruling on forest protection

A Bench of Justices MM Sundresh and SVN Bhatti, recently, came down heavily on some Government officials for being in cahoots with one Mohd Abdul Quasim, who had been attempting to convert forest land for his personal use since the 1980s in Kompally village in Warangal district of Telangana. The Supreme Court has ruled that Article 48A of the Constitution envisaging protection of environment and safeguarding of forests and wildlife has a direct nexus with citizens' right to life and asked the Governments to protect forests to save the country and the world from ill-effects of climate change. The ruling is in good spirit of upholding our Indian Constitution.



SUNDARA NARAYANA PATRO

The 1972 United Nations Conference on the 'Human Environment' in Stockholm (Sweden's capital) was the first world conference to make the environment a major issue. The participants adopted a series of principles for sound management of the environment including the Stockholm Declaration and

Action Plan for Human Environment and several resolutions. The Stockholm Declaration, which contained 26 principles, placed environmental issues at the forefront of international concerns and marked the start of a dialogue between industrialized and developing countries on the link between economic growth, pollution of air, water, and oceans and the well-being of people around the world.

A surfeit of international agreements dealing with environmental protection has been made following the conference. India being a signatory is under moral obligation to translate those provisions into action, in honouring the spirit in Article 51(c) of the Indian constitution that the

State shall foster respect for international law and the obligations of the treaties. India soon enacted Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972; Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974; Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, the comprehensive Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, etc.

In the year 1976, the Constitution was amended. With this amendment, Article 48-A was annexed to Article 48 stating that: "The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country." The same decree transferred wildlife and forests from State list to Concurrent list of the constitution, thus giving the Central Government the power to over-

rule State decisions on that matter. Such political and constitutional changes prepared the groundwork for the creation of a federal Department of Environment in 1980, turned into the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 1985. Later, in May 2014, it was renamed as the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

The broad objectives of the Ministry are conservation and survey of flora, fauna, forests and wildlife, prevention and control of pollution, afforestation and regeneration of degraded areas, protection of the environment and ensuring the welfare of animals. These objectives are well supported by a set of legislative and regulatory measures, aimed at the preservation,

conservation and protection of the environment. Besides the legislative measures, the National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement on Environment and Development, 1992; the National Forest Policy, 1988; the Policy Statement on Abatement of Pollution, 1992; and the National Environment Policy, 2006 also guide the ministry's work.

The Article 48 in India Constitution reads as "The State shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds, and prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle." Hence the Article 48

A was added to it. While Article 48-A speaks of environment, Article 51-A (g) enjoins it as a fundamental duty of every citizen to have compassion for living creatures, and includes therein forests, lakes, rivers and wild life. The protection and improvement of environment from time to time is now a fundamental duty under Constitution Act of 1976. The Government of India has set up a National Committee on Environmental Planning and Coordination to oversee.

Article 21 of the Constitution provides for the fundamental right of life. Right to life includes the right to have a dignified life and also the bare necessities of life like food, shelter, clean water and clothes. The right to live ex-

tends to having a decent and clean environment in which individuals can live safely without any threat to their lives.

The MoEFCC also serves as the nodal agency in the country for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the Global Environment Facility (GEF); and of regional bodies like Economic and Social Council for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) and South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) on matters pertaining to the environment.

(Dr Patro is president, Orissa Environmental Society; email: snpatro11@gmail.com, 9437190420)

Opposition echoing voice of Pakistan: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Monday highlighted a series of statements made by INDIA Bloc leaders that it said were against the nation's interest, as the ruling party accused the Opposition of echoing the voice of Pakistan and asked people to be wary of such "traitors".

BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi cited Maharashtra Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar's allegation that an RSS-affiliated police officer and not terrorist Ajmal Kasab killed the then anti-terrorism squad chief Hemant Karkare and former Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi's claim that the attack on IAF personnel in Jammu and Kashmir was a poll stunt to slam the party.

He cited five other instances, including Pakistan's leader Chaudhry Fawad Hussain's criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and praise of Rahul Gandhi, and Farooq Abdullah's reference to Pakistan having nuclear weapons, to allege that these INDIA Bloc leaders are echoing the neighbouring country's stand.

What the National Conference leader has said is very "astounding, revealing and shocking" as so far only a few Pakistani leaders considered reckless or radicalised religious leaders have made such comments, he claimed.

Replying to a question related to Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, the former J-K chief minister



had said that Pakistan is not wearing bangles and has nuclear weapons. Such remarks are also an insult to women, the BJP leader said. Noting that Congress leader Shashi Tharoor has written a column in a Bangladeshi newspaper slamming Modi while analysing the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, Rajya Sabha MP Trivedi said while elections are being in India he is building public opinion in another country.

The Congress leader has also referred to the Valley as India-administered-Kashmir, he alleged.

One INDIA Bloc leader is giving "cover fire" to Pakistan on Mumbai terror attack, another is speaking about its nuclear weapon while somebody is describing the martyrdom of a soldier as a poll stunt, he said. Modi had said the Congress manifesto carried Muslim League's imprints, he noted, adding that every work spoken by its leaders echoed Pakistan's stand. The Left parties want the country's nuclear stockpiles removed, he said.

All these development are not merely a coincidence but a deliberate and dangerous experiment, Trivedi said. "In whose hands these leaders are playing," he asked, telling people to be wary of "traitors" hiding within the country. Various kinds of powers outside are attempting to halt the rise of a proud and confident India, he said.

At the press conference, the BJP leader also took a swipe at Rahul Gandhi over the recovery of a huge amount of cash from the house of a domestic help allegedly linked to the secretary of Jharkhand minister and Congress leader Alamgir Alam.

He said Rahul Gandhi speaks about doing an economic survey and dividing the country's wealth and the Enforcement Directorate's raid has shown the way assets are being divided in Jharkhand when so much of money, between Rs 20 crore and 30 crore, is with the help of a minister's PA.

After looking at so much amount of money, nothing is left to explain, he added.

VCs, scholars slam Rahul for varsity appointment claims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 181 academicians, including Vice Chancellors (VC) and former VCs, have accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of spreading "falsehood" regarding the appointment process for university heads and sought lawful action against him.

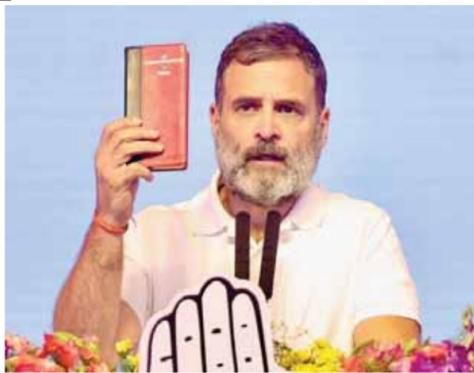
In an open letter, they said the Congress leader has alleged that vice chancellors are appointed solely on the basis of affiliation with some organisation rather than merit as they slammed his claims.

The process by which VCs are selected is characterised by stringent and transparent rigorous procedure grounded in the values of meritocracy, scholarly distinction and integrity, they claimed.

Jawaharlal University Vice Chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit, Delhi University VC Yogesh Singh and AICTE Chairman T G Sitharam are among the academicians who have signed onto the letter.

The selection has been completely based on academic and administrative prowess and with a vision to take universities ahead, they said. Though they did not quote Rahul Gandhi's specific claims, the Congress leader has in the past alleged that affiliations with the Hindutva organisation RSS is often the guiding factor in appointments to academia.

Among the signatories to the letter are Vinay Pathak, VC, CSJM University, Kanpur, Bhagwati Prakash Sharma, Chancellor, Pacific University,



Udaipur, N C Gautam, former VC, Mahatma Gandhi Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya, Chitrakoot, Alok Chakkarval, VC, Guru Ghasidas Central University, Bilaspur and Vinay Kapoor, former VC, BR Ambedkar National Law University, Sonapat. Universities in India have undergone a significant transition as evident in their ascent in global rankings, prominent accreditations, world class research and innovations, curriculum facelift narrowing the industry academia gap and higher placement prospects reaffirming their commitment to academic quality and societal relevance, they asserted.

They said, "The array of academic disciplines and professional experiences represented amongst us stands as evidence of the unbiased and inclusive nature of the selection procedure." It reflects their dedication to cultivating an atmosphere that values and promotes diversity, encourages inde-

pendent thinking, and supports scholastic achievement, they said.

"Rahul Gandhi has resorted to falsehood and has defamed the Office of the Vice Chancellors at large with the intent to derive political mileage out of it.

It is, therefore, earnestly prayed that appropriate action be taken against him forthwith in accordance with law," they said.

The academics said in their letter that as guardians of knowledge and administrators of academia, they maintain an unwavering commitment to maintaining the utmost levels of governance integrity, ethical behaviour, and institutional integrity.

Urging everyone involved to exercise discernment in distinguishing fact from fiction, to abstain from spreading unfounded rumours, they called for dialogue that is well-informed, constructive, and supportive of their shared goal of creating a dynamic and inclusive educational environment.

FIR against Nadda, Malviya in Karnataka over social media post

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

An FIR has been registered against BJP president JP Nadda, the party's IT cell head Amit Malviya and Karnataka unit chief BY Vijayendra in connection with a social media post allegedly intimidating members of SC and ST community not to vote for a particular candidate, police said on Monday.

On the other hand Congress alleged that professionals working for its social media department are being "harassed" and "intimidated" by police at the behest of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

The action on BJP leaders was taken following a complaint lodged by the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) with the Election Commission and police on Sunday alleging violation of model code of conduct, they said. They were booked under the sections of Representation of People Act and section 505 (2) (Statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes) of the Indian Penal Code, a senior police officer said.

In the complaint, the KPCC cited a video uploaded on the social media platform 'X' by the official account of Karnataka State BJP which, it alleged, is operated by Malviya, on instructions of Nadda, Vijayendra and Social Media incharge — Karnataka BJP, on May 4.

"The said video posted on social media featured animat-



ed characters of (Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi and (Chief Minister) Siddaramaiah. In the clip, the SC, ST and OBC community are portrayed as "eggs" in a nest and it also suggested Rahul Gandhi planting a big egg labelled as Muslim community. It is projected as though funds are being fed to the chick depicting the Muslim community, which then kicks out SC, ST and OBC communities," it alleged.

Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete alleged that people of the Congress' social media team are being "harassed". The opposition party's assertion came days after the Delhi Police's Special Cell arrested a national coordinator of the Congress' social media team for allegedly uploading and circulating online a doctored video of Shah.

"Professionals are being intimidated at the behest of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. These professionals are the people who chose the ideology of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Bose and stood with the Congress.

The BJP is scaring those who chose truth and justice and rejected your false worship," Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete said.

Rapid infrastructure development aiding destination weddings in India: Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Tourism Ministry on Sunday said the rapid infrastructure development happening across the country, especially improvement in accessibility due to number of airports getting doubled in last few years besides improvement in digital and physical connectivity are aiding destination weddings across the world.

Speaking during the inauguration of First Wed in India expo at Rambagh Palace in Jaipur, Manisha Saxena (IAS) Director General, Ministry of Tourism, said along with cultural aspects of India the holistic development is a boon for destination wedding which also is a booster to the economy as well as employment.

An initiative of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, the 'Wed in India' expo is being organised jointly with Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan and



Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) alongside the Great India Travel. It is also supported by Hotel and Restaurant Association of Rajasthan (HRAR), Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA) and Rajasthan Association of Tour Operators (RATO).

"With its unique blend of natural beauty and cultural traditions which can actually invoke magic in weddings, Rajasthan along with Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Haryana,

Kerala, and Goa are favourite destination for Wed-in-India. The Northeast is also fast emerging as a preferred destination especially the tea gardens of Assam, Darjeeling, Siliguri, Mizoram, and Manipur," Saxena added. Citing the experience of one of the G20 Tourism Group meetings held in Goa during India's G20 Presidency, Saxena said, "We catered to all the ministerial delegates in a 500-years old house which keeps its 200 years old cutlery. India has several such kinds

of assets. We, in the Ministry of Tourism, are in process of documenting this repository of assets both tangible and intangible."

Delivering her address in the inaugural session, Gayatri Rathore, IAS, Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan said, "Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan is delighted to hold first ever 'Wed in India' expo. Rajasthan has long been a preferred destination for celebrity weddings due to its luxurious and opulent settings. The state's magnificent palaces forts and havelis converted into luxury heritage hotels provide a regal backdrop for extravagant celebrations. Rajasthan's world-class hospitality, traditional cuisines and vibrant entertainment create unforgettable experiences for the couples and their guests. "Setting the tone of the expo, Chetan Vohra, Chair, FICCI Wedding Tourism Taskforce & Managing Director, Wedding

Line said, "Hospitality runs in the veins of every Indian and we were raised with one belief, to open our hearts and our homes to every guest as if they were God - something we call 'Atithi Deva Bhavo'. The Wed in India summit is a testament to our commitment in making this dream a reality." Dr. Jyotsna Suri, Past President, FICCI & CMD, Lalit Suri Hospitality Group said, "This expo is going to be a long way towards making it international. Besides Rajasthan, India has a lot of enticing wedding destinations which are equally beautiful and appealing."

Policymakers, key players from the tourism and hospitality industry and tour operators from over 50 countries are participating in the 'Wed in India' expo. Representatives of Tourism Boards from various states, including Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, too are participating alongside stalwarts from India's tourism, travel, and hospitality sectors.

Congress targets Modi Government over Chinese transgressions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday targeted the Modi Government on the issue of Chinese transgressions, and asked whether it has "surrendered" thousands of square kilometres in Depsang and Demchok to China or is it still trying to return to the status quo ante before May 5, 2020. On the fourth anniversary of the clashes between Indian and Chinese troops at Pangong Tso in eastern Ladakh that culminated in the fatal engagement in Galwan on June 15, 2020 in which 20 soldiers were killed, the Congress also asked the Prime Minister when he will take responsibility for the "abysmal failure" of his China policy.

"Has anyone been held accountable for India's biggest strategic and intelligence lapse in several decades," AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh asked in a post on X.



Posing questions to the Prime Minister, he asked, "Do you still believe your 19 June 2020 statement, made after 20 of our soldiers gave their lives in Galwan, that 'Na koi hamari seema mein ghus aaya hai, na hi koi ghusa hua hai' (No one has entered India nor has anyone occupied any post)". "Has your government surrendered to Chinese control over thousands of square kilometres in Depsang and Demchok for the foreseeable future or are you still trying to return to the status quo ante before 5 May 2020," he

asked. Taking on Modi, he charged that, "The PM's clean chit to China four days later when he said 'Na koi hamari seema mein ghus aaya hai, na hi koi ghusa hua hai' was a profound insult to our fallen soldiers and became the legitimisation of Chinese control over 2,000 square kilometres of land in eastern Ladakh."

Despite 21 rounds of military talks over four years, the situation remains unfavourable. Le's Superintendant of Police has clearly shown that our troops were unable to reach 26 out of 65 patrolling points that they could access prior to May 5, 2020, Ramesh claimed. China's aggressive build up and intrusions are not restricted to Ladakh, he said, adding that along Arunachal Pradesh, the Chinese continue to build forces and infrastructure that pose a direct threat to India's Siliguri Corridor, which connects northeast India with the rest of the country.

Baghel, Gehlot appointed AICC senior observers for Raebareli, Amethi constituencies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/RAEBARELI

Congress on Monday appointed former Chief Ministers Bhupesh Baghel and Ashok Gehlot as AICC senior observers for Rae Bareli and Amethi Parliamentary constituencies, respectively. Party leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra reached Uttar Pradesh to spearhead the campaign in Rae Bareli and Amethi, and camp in these Parliamentary constituencies from Monday to ensure the party's victory in the two high-profile seats.

She met party workers in Raebareli to bolster Rahul Gandhi's campaign from the family bastion. Rahul is pitted against BJP leader Dinesh Pratap Singh from Rae Bareli. Rae Bareli and Amethi will go to vote in the fifth phase of election on May 20. Priyanka Gandhi will be holding hundreds of 'nukkad sabhas', meetings and door-to-door campaign programmes, the sources said. "The centre will be Rae Bareli where she will be stationed at a guest house. From booth management to outreach, everything would be handled by her," the



source said. Strong foundations that Feroze Gandhi laid in Rae Bareli were later nurtured and strengthened by his wife and former prime minister Indira Gandhi, who won the seat in 1967, 1971 and 1980, followed by friends and members of the Gandhi family. In Amethi, a non-Gandhi family member is in the fray after 25 years to take on incumbent BJP MP Smriti Irani. Irani had defeated Rahul Gandhi by more than 55,000 votes in 2019 in Amethi, while in Rae Bareli Sonia Gandhi defeated BJP's Dinesh Pratap Singh by more than 1,67,000 votes. Sharma was the key person who had looked after the two prestigious constituencies and been a representative of the Gandhis in the two key seats.

Coast Guard detains Iranian fishing vessel with six Indians

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) detained an Iranian fishing vessel, with six Indian crew, west of Bepore off the coast of Kerala late Sunday, Defence Ministry said here on Monday adding the swift sea-air coordinated operation involved the ships and aircraft of the ICG.

After intercepting the boat, an ICG team boarded the vessel and thoroughly investigated it to check the involvement of any anti-national activity. Initial investigation revealed that the owner of the boat was an Iranian sponsor who had contracted these Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, and issued them Iranian Visas for fishing off the Iran coast. The crew alleged that the sponsor ill-treated and deprived them of basic living conditions, passports confiscating their passports. The crew said that they had decided to escape from Iran to India using the same boat. The detained vessel was safely brought to Kochi on Monday for further investigation.

NTA dismisses reports of NEET-UG question paper leak

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Even as the National Testing Agency (NTA) on Monday dismissed reports of a question paper leak in the NEET-UG medical entrance exam as "completely baseless and without any ground" on Monday, the main Opposition Congress party criticised the BJP-led Centre over the incident, denouncing it as a betrayal of students' aspirations and an indication of the government's incompetence. Taking the Government to task on the issue, the Congress on Monday said this trend has been going on for the last 10 years and that is why unemployment and corruption in jobs are the biggest issues of this election.

This criticism came in response to the NTA's assurance that every question paper had been properly managed and that images circulating on social media were unrelated to the actual exam paper.

"It has been ascertained from NTA's security protocols and Standard Operating Procedures that the social media posts pointing towards any paper leak are completely baseless and without any ground.

"To put rumours to rest, it is also stated that every single



question paper has been accounted for," said Sadhana Parashar, Senior Director, NTA. She added that no external person or agency can access the centres once the examination starts. "After the gates of the examination centres are closed, no one from outside is permitted access inside the halls, which are under CCTV surveillance."

However, taking the NTA clarification with a pinch of salt, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi said the news of the NEET exam

paper leak is a "betrayal" of the dreams of more than 23 lakh students and their families.

In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi said, "Be it the students who dream of getting admission in college after passing 12th or the promising youth who are struggling for government jobs, the Modi government has become a curse for everyone."

"The youth and their family, who have been paying the price of the BJP government's incompetence for the last 10 years with the destruction of

their future, have now understood that there is a difference between speaking and running the government," he said.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra took the X platform to criticize the government. "Once again there are reports of a NEET paper leak. The future of 24 lakh youth of the country was again at stake. This trend, which has been going on with crores of promising youth for the last 10 years, is showing no sign of stopping. Will the Prime Minister of the country say anything about this?" she said.

Noting that a law against paper leaks was passed in Parliament, the Congress general secretary asked where that law is and why it is not applicable.

Congress general secretary, in-charge communications, Jairam Ramesh, said news of NEET paper leak has come to light in Bihar. "Apart from this, there have also been complaints from Rajasthan about wrong sets of question papers of NEET exam being distributed at the examination centres," he said. "In the last 7 years, more than 70 papers have been leaked. Due to this, the future of more than 2 crore candidates has been ruined. Despite there being laws regarding

paper leaks in many states, papers are being leaked," he said.

Citing some examples, Ramesh said 3.75 lakh candidates had participated in the teacher recruitment examination in Bihar on March 15 but within a few days, the exam had to be cancelled due to paper leak. "60 lakh candidates took part in the UP Police examination on February 17 and 18 February. On February 24, the Yogi government had to cancel the examination due to paper leak," he said. Ramesh pointed out that one of the five 'Yuva Nyay' guarantees is 'Paper Leak Se Mukti'.

"Our laws will ensure the highest standards of honesty and fairness at every stage of the examination process -- from paper setting, printing, transportation, administration and inspection -- for paper-based and computer-based examinations," he said. The entrance exam was conducted on Sunday at 4,750 centres in 571 cities including 14 cities abroad.

The NTA had on Sunday claimed that the distribution of wrong question papers at an exam centre in Rajasthan led to some candidates walking out with the papers. The agency had denied any leak of the question paper.



Third phase of Assam polls to decide fate of 47 candidates in four seats

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The political fate of 47 candidates in four Lok Sabha seats will be decided on Tuesday when the third and final phase of the elections in the State will be held.

Polling will begin at 7 am and conclude at 5 pm in the four constituencies — Kokrajhar (ST), Dhubri, Barpeta and Guwahati.

All eyes will be on the prestigious Guwahati seat where both BJP and Congress have put up woman nominees — Bijuli Kalita Medhi and Mira Borthakur Goswami — respectively.

The other prominent candidates are AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal who is seeking re-election for the fourth successive term from Dhubri, Congress MLA Rakibul Hussain, eight time Asom Gana Parishad legislator Phanibhushan Choudhury and CPI(M) MLA Manoranjan Talukdar.

Barpeta has the highest of 14 candidates and Guwahati the lowest of eight in the fray while six women are contesting in the final phase. The BJP has put up only one candidate in this phase for the Guwahati seat, while its alliance partners AGP are contesting in two — Dhubri and Barpeta — and the UPPL in Kokrajhar.

The Congress and the Voters Party International (VPI) are fighting in all four seats, while the BPF, the Trinamool Congress, Bharatiya Gana



Parishad, SUCI(C) and Republican Party of India (Athawale) are contesting in two each. The AIUDF, CPI(M), Gana Suraksha Party, Hindu Samaj Party, Asom Jana Morcha, National Road Map Party of India, Rashtriya Ulema Council, Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal and Bahujan Maha Party are contesting in one seat each while 16 independents are also in the fray.

A total electorate of 82.11 lakh including 41.27 men, 40.84 women and 112 belonging to the third gender will be eligible to exercise their franchise in 9,516 polling stations.

Polling will be held amid tight security with 60 companies of security forces deployed across the five constituencies. In Guwahati, held by the BJP, a direct contest is on the cards between BJP's Bijuli Kalita Medhi and Congress candidate Mira Borthakur Goswami, both debutants in Lok Sabha polls.

The contest in Barpeta is expected to be triangular among NDA partner Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) candidate Phanibhushan Choudhury, CPI(M)'s Manoranjan Talukdar and Deep Bayan of the Congress. In Dhubri, 13 candidates are in the fray with AIUDF

strongman Badruddin Ajmal, seeking a fourth term, locked in a triangular contest with Congress MLA Rakibul Hussain and NDA partner AGP's Zaved Islam.

In Kokrajhar (ST), a triangular contest is also on the cards among UPPL's Jayanta Basumtary, Congress' Garjen Mushahary and Bodoland People's Front's (BPF) Kampa Borgoyary. The sitting independent Kokrajhar MP Naba Kumar Sarania, representing the seat reserved for Scheduled Tribes since 2014, had filed his nomination papers which was rejected following the striking down of his Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Assam Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel said that all arrangements have been completed for conducting the polls in a free, fair, safe and peaceful manner. In the first phase of polls held on April 19, 78.25 per cent of the electorate exercised their franchise to decide the fate of 35 candidates for the

Kaziranga, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur and Lakhimpur constituencies. In the second phase held on April 26, 81.17 per cent of the voters cast their votes to decide the fate of 61 candidates for Karimganj, Silchar(SC), Diphu (ST), Nagaon and Darrang-Udalguri. In the outgoing Lok Sabha, BJP held nine seats, Congress three, AIUDF and an independent one each from the state.

Polling in both LS seats in Goa today

PTI ■ PANAJI

More than 11 lakh voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in elections to both the Lok Sabha seats in Goa on Tuesday, where the Congress and BJP are locked in a straight fight.

The coastal state has two Lok Sabha constituencies — North Goa and South Goa. "We are all ready with all the required facilities at polling stations. I appeal to all the voters to cast their ballots from 7 am to 6 pm," North Goa district collector Sneha Gite said.

The polling booths are set up as per the Election Commission's guidelines. Considering the hot weather conditions, voters will be provided refreshments and water at polling booths, she said.

North Goa will see the BJP's sitting MP Shripad Naik take on Congress's Ramakant Khalap, while in South Goa, the saffron party has fielded entrepreneur Pallavi Dempo against Navy-veteran-turned politician Viriato Fernandes of the Congress.

The South Goa Lok Sabha seat is currently held by Congress' Francisco Sardinha. Sixteen candidates, eight each in North and South Goa Lok Sabha constituencies, are in the fray.

As per the data on the website of the office of Goa's Chief Electoral Officer, the state has 11,79,644 voters, including 5,80,710 in North Goa and 5,98,934 in South Goa, as on April 19. Of the total number of



voters, there are 5,71,617 men, 6,07,715 women and 12 members of the transgender community.

Besides, there are 300 service voters, including 133 in North Goa and 167 in South Goa, the data stated.

The run-up to the elections saw rallies by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for the BJP, and the Congress roped in its senior leaders Shashi Tharoor and Pawan Khera for campaigns in Goa. A total of 1,725 polling stations have been set up across the coastal state, including 863 in North Goa and 862 in South Goa, state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Ramesh Verma said in a media statement.

"Of these, 43 model polling booths have been identified in North Goa and 45 in South Goa. The move is aimed at streamlining the voting process and reducing the waiting time," he said.

Medical camps will be held at eight model polling stations in urban areas where there is a higher percentage of elderly voters, Verma said. "After casting their vote, senior citizens can avail health checks by doctors from the Directorate of Health Services," he said.

To empower women voters and promote gender equality, 40 dedicated polling stations, also known as 'pink booths', have been set up in both districts, the official said. "These polling stations will

be exclusively managed by women personnel, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for female voters to exercise their democratic right," he said.

Verma said environment sustainability has been prioritised, and 40 'green' polling stations have been set up.

"The eco-friendly booths are decorated using sustainable materials such as bamboo and coconut leaves sourced from local vendors, reflecting a commitment to reducing the ecological footprint of the electoral process," he said. Divyang polling stations have also been set up — five in North Goa and three in South Goa, he added.

Congress treated tribals as vote bank; BJP under Modi gave them respect: Arjun Munda

PTI ■ KHUNTI (JHARKHAND)

Union minister Arjun Munda on Monday claimed that the Congress and INDIA bloc converted tribals into "mere vote bank", while the BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi ensured that these people get due respect.

Attacking the Congress, the former three-time Jharkhand chief minister claimed that the party believed that tribals who lived in jungles were criminals by nature and the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government first took interest in their welfare.

"The Congress in its 60 years regime treated tribals as mere vote banks whereas the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is committed to ensure that they get due recognition and respect. This is why the Prime Minister chose Khunti to launch major schemes including a Rs 24,000 crore programme for PVTGs (Particularly

Vulnerable Tribal Groups) from Khunti," Munda said in an interview with PTI. Munda, Union tribal and agriculture minister, is contesting Lok Sabha elections from Khunti reserved seat that is identified with tribal icon Birsa Munda. In 2019, Munda won the Khunti LS seat, facing the problems of human trafficking, poverty, opium cultivation and Naxalism, with a slender margin of 1,445 votes, and is once again locked in a direct fight with Congress candidate Kalicharan Munda.

"This is true that tribal society has been used as a vote bank only. There were no schemes, no policies for them. When their rights and systems were adopted later, Congress ensured that tribal issues came under the Home Department. They believed that those who resided in jungles were criminal by nature," he claimed.

It was the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee

who took interest in their welfare and later Modi ensured justice to them, Munda said. He claimed the tribal society understood the game plan of Congress that it wanted to keep them away from development to reap the benefits of their innocence and now they are aware of their rights and understood who was working for them.

"They will vote for BJP under a dynamic and visionary leader like Prime Minister Modi. We are confident to cross the 400 mark this time and in Jharkhand, we will win all 14 Lok Sabha seats irrespective of tribal or non-tribal seats," Munda claimed. To a question, he admitted that Khunti and Simdega are known for human trafficking, particularly of girls.

"I have undertaken an innovative step to boost confidence and provide employment to girls here. I had initiated moves like learning while earning - a programme to ensure



employment for tribal girls. "I am happy that an unprecedented experiment is becoming successful as thousands of girls have been trained by Tata Electronics. Now mobile parts of mobile phones like Apple are being made by Khunti girls," he said. Massive horticulture initiatives are also being taken to bring youths engaged in drug trafficking and extremism to the mainstream, he said.

to this. But we are now committed to ensuring a sound agriculture infrastructure in the belt for cash crops and horticulture so that these can be sent to the national market. Jharkhand will be accorded special attention." On lac and tussar silkworm cultivation, he said steps were being undertaken to promote these in national and international markets, while a large laboratory is being set up at Khunti under Honey Mission.

On the opposition's promise to introduce MSP on all agro-produce, he said it may be a populist measure in the short term, but how much it will be beneficial in the long run is a matter of research.

"They are promising this on the eve of this election whereas they were in power for 60 years. They would have done it long back," the BJP leader said. On the BJP's promise of providing ration for 80 crore people for the next five years,

he said "We have sufficient stock and there is no need for imports."

Asked how confident he was of his win since the margin last time was only 1,445 votes, the minister said, "I accept the contest was close last time. But the people of Khunti are deciding the best for them."

He listed the development measures that have taken place at Khunti, such as setting up Eklavya Model Schools and raising the number of students and teachers in existing ones.

Hitting out at the JMM-led alliance in the state, Munda said that they deliberately delayed release of funds and implementation of central schemes to show the BJP in a bad light.

Countering JMM-led alliance's accusation that funds were not released under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna and hence the state had to launch Abua Awas Yojan from their funds, he said the ground reality is different as

they failed to utilise Rs 5,000 crore funds properly for water supply.

Likewise, the allotment of Adarsh Gram Yojana model project was pending for three years and was just released ahead of elections, he alleged. "Illegal transfer of tribal land is rampant in Jharkhand, it is a major issue and the state government should have checked it. Unfortunately, the former CM himself faces such charges of grabbing land," he said referring to an allegation against Hemant Soren.

People have no sympathy for him, Munda claimed. On the INDIA bloc's accusation that the Centre has been using CBI and ED to harass opposition leaders, he said if they felt so, they could seek justice from the court of law. Munda attacked the state government for keeping control over sand, saying that it was a minor mineral and Gram Sabha has rights over minor minerals in the traditional system.

Congress dream to win elections on false promises will be shattered: Anurag Thakur

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR (HP)

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur on Monday said the Congress leaders are living in a fool's paradise and their dream "to win the elections on false promises" will be shattered once the poll results are announced on June 4.

The BJP leader also took potshots at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, saying he has forgotten his own slogan "daro mat" and running from one seat to another while fearing defeat in the Lok Sabha elections.

"First he ran from Amethi to Wayanad and now he is contesting from Rae Bareilly and the Congress is sure to be wiped out from Rae Bareilly also," he told PTI.

Thakur, who is contesting from the Hamirpur Lok Sabha seat, claimed that the people of the constituency were with him and his victory margin this time would be more than the previous margin of about four lakh votes.

Thakur, a four time MP, expressed optimism that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would win more than 400 seats. Escalating his attack on the opposition, the BJP leader



said the Congress gave thousands of acres of India's land to foreign powers during its 60 years of rule.

They gave Katchatheevu Island to Sri Lanka, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi strengthened the army in the past 10 years, he said. Thakur alleged the hand of foreign powers is clearly visible in the Congress manifesto.

The limit was crossed when their evil eye fell on the ancestral property which belongs to your children and the Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge are yet to come out with a clarification on this issue, he said. Thakur further said the Congress leaders are spreading lies that the BJP would abolish reservation and the Constitution if it comes to power.

"But the people of the country know who imposed the emergency and who changed the Constitution of the country 62 times," he said.

Shivaji descendant hopes to breach Pawar fortress in Satara

PTI ■ SATARA (MAHARASHTRA)

One is a descendant of Chhatrapati Shivaji underplaying that emotive connection, the other a close aide of NCP founder Sharad Pawar banking on the formidable leader. Both contestants vying to be MP from Satara say what matters is the common person and ground level issues such as jobs and education.

The BJP has nominated Udayanraje Bhosale, the 13th descendant of the Maratha warrior king, to take on former MLA Shashikant Shinde of the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar). "I have never used Chhatrapati Shivaji's name in elections or in my life. I live in a democracy. If I am from that family, so be it. But I live as a common man," Bhosale told PTI.

According to Shinde, voters in Satara want a common person to represent them. He is banking on Sharad Pawar, who remains a formidable political player and is still capable of checkmating rivals. "The new generation needs an industrial hub, better education, an IT park and health infrastructure. We have thousands of sugarcane farmers but the ban on sugar exports by the Centre has made them angry," he told



PTI. The parliamentary constituency of Satara, which goes to the polls in the third phase on May 7, derives its name from the seven forts in the area. It covers the assembly segments of Karad North, Satara, Karada South, Patan, Koregaon, and Wai. Satara has deep historical connections as the capital of the Maratha Empire under Shivaji. The region was also the site of many battles between the Marathas and foreign invaders.

The past is glorious, the present troubling. Lack of jobs and poor industrial and educational infrastructure are key issues in the constituency, located in the state's sugar belt. Thousands of youth move to Pune or Mumbai for better education, say locals.

In 2019, Bhosale won the Satara seat for the third consecutive time as a

candidate of the undivided NCP, but resigned within a few months and joined the BJP. In the ensuing bypoll, he lost as a BJP candidate to NCP's Shrinivas Patil.

A photo of a rain-soaked Sharad Pawar, then 79, delivering a speech in Satara was said to have ensured Patil's victory and changed the NCP's fortunes in the Maharashtra assembly polls that year.

A lot has changed since then, with NCP seeing a vertical split. One section of the original party, headed by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, is now a constituent of the BJP-led Mahayuti, which also has a section of the original Shiv Sena.

Sharad Pawar, who now heads the NCP (SP), is a part of the opposition coalition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), which also comprises Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress.

Traditionally, Satara was a Congress stronghold, with Shiv Sena representing the seat for a few years. After Sharad Pawar broke ranks with the Congress and formed the NCP in 1999, it became his party's strong base.

Bhosale, currently a Rajya Sabha member, rejected the suggestion that the Sharad Pawar factor might be behind his past victories. "I had won on my own

strength and not on anyone's name. You can ask anyone here. People ensured my victory because of the work I have done."

He said he talks about the promises he has fulfilled when he meets people. "I have done work worth about Rs 10,000 crore in the last five years."

The BJP's campaign in Maharashtra has been led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who draws massive crowds, and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

A few voters questioned the work done by NCP, expressing hope that Bhosale would be able to solve their issues. Many were reluctant to express their views. Most, however, agreed that Satara has a huge tourism potential due to its historical links though it is yet to be tapped.

According to Shinde, a lot of people from Satara are in the armed forces.

"In some villages, every household has a member in the military. But no fresh recruitment is happening in the police or military. Our boys have no option but to enrol as Agniveers (who serve in armed forces for four years). So people are angry."

Shinde represented the Koregan assembly constituency in Sangli district in 2009 and 2014 as a member of the undivided NCP.

There will be jungle raj in country if INDIA Bloc comes to power: Shah

PTI ■ SAMASTIPUR (BIHAR)

There will be 'jungle raj' in the country if INDIA bloc partners - Congress and RJD - are voted to power, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said here on Monday.

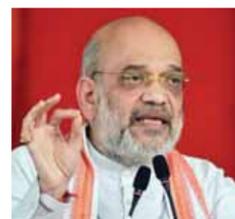
He also claimed that cash recovery in Jharkhand proves INDIA bloc leaders are corrupt.

Addressing an election rally in favour of senior BJP leader and Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nitayanand Rai, in Bihar's Samastipur district, Shah said, "The latest recovery of Rs 30 crore and more from the house of a minister in Jharkhand proves INDIA bloc leaders are corrupt."

He also said, "If they come to power, there will be a complete 'jungle raj' in the country as well as in Bihar."

Notably, the Enforcement Directorate on Monday claimed to have recovered a huge amount of "unaccounted" cash during searches at the premises of a domestic help allegedly linked to the secretary of Jharkhand minister Alamgir Alam.

"Who will be the PM of the INDIA bloc? Will Sharad Pawar be the prime minister? Will Mamata Banerjee become (the PM) or MK



Stalin or Uddhav Thackeray? I will take another name. Please don't laugh. Can Rahul baba become the PM?" Shah said.

He also alleged that leaders of the RJD and the Congress did not attend the consecration ceremony of the Ayodhya Ram temple because of vote bank politics.

RJD's Lalu Prasad and Congress always opposed the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya, he claimed.

Shah also said Congress has always opposed reservation to backward classes. Sarairanjan block comes under the Ujjairpur Lok Sabha constituency where Rai is seeking reelection.

Rai, who is the NDA nominee, is pitted against RJD's Alok Mehta, who is the candidate of Mahagathbandhan, the prototype of the INDIA bloc in Bihar.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Holding up the mirror

The roots of Khalistani extremism in Canada run deep; S Jaishankar just made it public

In a recent critique of the Trudeau administration, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar accused Canada of granting visas to individuals linked to organised crime, despite warnings from New Delhi, while also legitimising extremism, separatism, and advocates of violence under the guise of free speech. Regarding the escalation of pro-Khalistani activities in Canada and the recent arrest of three individuals in connection with the killing of India-designated terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, Jaishankar remarked that certain individuals have organized politically, influencing politicians to believe they hold sway over community support, thus carving out a space for themselves in the politics of democratic nations. This has been the Indian answer to Canadian charges of killing a Canadian Sikh on its soil. S Jaishankar has effectively retorted to the Canadian charges by saying that the Canada government gives visas to dubious people from India despite the Indian government's warnings. The roots of Khalistani separatism gained significant traction in the 1980s culminating in violence and the tragic events of Operation Blue Star and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. The wounds inflicted during this period continue to fester, providing fertile ground for extremist ideologies to thrive, particularly among Sikh diaspora communities. Canada, with its sizable Sikh population, became a hub for Khalistani activists and sympathisers, offering refuge to those fleeing persecution in India while inadvertently providing a platform for the propagation of separatist ideologies.



The liberal immigration policies and multicultural ethos of Canada provided a conducive environment for the Khalistani movement to gain momentum, with several prominent figures finding sanctuary and support within its borders. However, the issue transcends mere ideological sympathies and delves into the realm of organised crime and terrorism. Over the years, there have been numerous instances of Khalistani elements in Canada being implicated in activities ranging from fundraising for militant outfits to carrying out targeted attacks against perceived enemies of the movement. India has repeatedly raised concerns about Canada's perceived leniency towards individuals with ties to Khalistani extremism. Minister for External Affairs, S Jaishankar's criticism reflects India's growing unease over the role of certain segments within the Canadian establishment in enabling and even legitimizing Khalistani activities. He has done the right thing in showing the mirror to the Canadian government which had accused India of a Sikh Canadian on its soil. Canada, on its part, has taken some steps to address these concerns but the fact is Canada's Govt has been largely sympathetic to such elements. Only a couple of days back Khalistani slogans were raised in the presence of Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau. Canada must strike a delicate balance between upholding its commitment to freedom of speech and association while preventing its territory from being used as a staging ground for violence and terrorism.

PICTALK



Polling officials travel via a boat to reach their respective polling booths, a day before the voting, in Kamrup

Dynamic contours of electoral politics



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

In a nation where election season seems perennial, the traditional distinction between campaign fervour and governance blurs into a continuous political landscape

The election season is here. The reaction to the statement could well be that election season is now almost there around the year. There are some elections in some parts of the country going on constantly. In short, almost every season has become an election season. It would be tempting to ask oneself if this is a good thing or a bad thing. It's normal to be judgmental in matters which appear to be significant. However, it would not matter which way the judgment goes because the judgment would not affect the actual run of the situation.

That may be another matter. However, the present election fever is unique in its type because it affects every part of the country and is not confined to a small region or another. The concern of the day is national rather than regional, as it often is. This makes the issues of national significance to figure out a choice in the fray. National issues could come up in many areas, such as defence, taxation, education and interstate movements. The special entry provisions that govern certain regions of the country, or indeed the kind of inter-regional transportation structure, including waterways, as it affects human movement, trade, or commerce. The list enumerated itself is loud and can be added to. However, it makes a basic point. The issues in this election are issues that cut across states, have pan-India bearings, or affect the identity of citizens in the country. All this adds to the exclusivity of the election. Conceptually, what has been set in the preceding few lines is correct.

But operationally, there are many other shades and colours. A dominant theme affecting these elections seems to be religion, whereas worship is always a private thing. In India, methods of worship have often served as a method of aggregation of identity. This is a particularly unique gift of the way independence was achieved in this country. No country in the world in the post-colonial era was ever partitioned based on religion, as India was, as a prerequisite for independence. How this helped anyone or any



cause is not quite clear. If the basis of partition was religion, there was something strange about one country proclaiming its identity to be one religion and another country emphatically proposing that it would not have any religious identity. That, however, was the choice of August, 14 and 15, 1947, by the two countries that brought into existence freedom, or more technically, the withdrawal of colonial rule. The British were particular in pointing out that they were giving back power from where they had taken it when they started the rule of then-united India. The rest has to say is history. But post August 15, 1947, saw an experience throughout the subcontinent that was unique and has been termed by some historians as the 'unification of India'. There was a British India and a princely India. The British India territories would have elected government, yet the princely India would have their choice of secession to India or Pakistan. The rest, as they say, is history. Barring Multan, North West Frontier territory, Jammu and Kashmir, Junagarh and Hyderabad, the merger issues were largely smooth and without too much contention. Even the territories named above had a choice exercised sooner than what seemed most like-



THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN ELECTORAL PROMISES, THE ISSUES THAT WIN VOTES AND HOW THE ELECTED PARTY ACTUALLY GOVERNS AND IMPLEMENTS THEIR AGENDA ONCE IN POWER LEADS TO MANY UNEXPECTED AND PERPLEXING OUTCOMES

ly possible. The result was the emergence of a unified India and a unified Pakistan. Jammu and Kashmir remained the only state in which a deliberate contention was kept alive. Indeed, there was no contentious issue if the terms of the Freedom Act were followed, but in one way or another, the matter continues to evoke emotions, in a unique way, in several people. It is not just religion at play, there are several factors, including geopolitical ones. It is also possible not to recognize how the matter has been made increasingly complex by an unnecessary play of force, some of whom have no locus standee at all in the case. One would have thought that elections held at a national level, so often, so regularly and so fairly across the length and breadth of the country, would have rendered the whole issue of controversy in Jammu and Kashmir needless. Alas, that is not the case. Elections have a certain pattern in this country: give and take a few arguments here and there. However, choices have to be exercised and the numerical outcome of those choices determines how the country is governed. So the question arises as to what the net findings of the propositions thrown up as electoral issues are. In many states, local

issues seem to be inclined to determine the balloting that would take place for national representation. This appears to be the case, especially in Karnataka, Bihar, Manipur and some other states. The essence of the matter is that choices have to be exercised and the arguments of the choices need only to be communicable in terms of the strength that the community appears to endorse in the legislature. It is worth remembering that, at the end of the day, once the election results are announced, there is no accountability for the correlation between how choices made on issues during elections will be exercised when the party concerned, which wins the election, administers the issue. It may well be said that elections as a process still await better mellowing and maturing to make them an internally consistent one. At the moment, it is satisfying to note that by and large, the process of exercising choices, its panning out in the legislature and its administrative implementation are increasingly becoming worthwhile efforts and, a coherent method of administering, sensibly, a large country, such as India. (The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SAFFRON: A BLOSSOMING OPPORTUNITY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Saffron cultivation: Replicate Poonch's success story," published on May 4, this is my response. The story of saffron cultivation in Poonch, Jammu and Kashmir, is not just about agriculture; it's a narrative of resilience and transformation. Ajaz Ahmad's journey exemplifies a shift from traditional farming to embracing the potential of saffron. His vision of Poonch becoming a saffron hub reflects the region's evolving agricultural landscape. However, challenges loom large. Environmental shifts, like erratic rainfall and untimely snowfall, threaten saffron production in Kashmir. Such concerns emphasise the need for sustainable farming practices and governmental support, not just in terms of subsidies but also in ensuring security and mitigating wildlife threats. Yet, amidst these challenges, saffron's allure persists. Its medicinal properties and premium market value make it a lucrative venture for farmers. With initiatives like the National Saffron Mission, there's hope for revitalising saffron cultivation and uplifting Kashmir's socio-economic fabric. As saffron blooms in Poonch, it signifies not just a crop but a promise of prosperity for the region.

Virat Chatterjee | Pune

PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND HOPE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Narendra Modi introduces India to its Ashtalakshmis," published on May 4, this is my response. Reading about the political landscape and developmental challenges across India, especially in the neglected North East, evokes a mix of emotions. From the perpetual promises of politicians during election seasons to the persistent issues of floods, droughts and insurgencies, it's a reminder of the complex tapestry of our nation's journey. The failure to address fundamental issues like water scarcity and regional development highlights systemic shortcomings that transcend party lines. However, amidst these challenges, there's

Call for transparency



Apropos the news article, "Covishield's Shield in Question," published on May 5, this is my response. The unfolding saga surrounding the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine underscores a pressing need for transparency and accountability in vaccine distribution and oversight. Alex Mitchell's harrowing experience, alongside numerous others, sheds light on the gravity of poten-

tial side effects and the imperative of informed consent. As legal battles loom against pharmaceutical giants, questions mount regarding regulatory diligence and corporate responsibility. The admission of rare but severe side effects prompts reflection on the balance between vaccine benefits and risks. The petition, led by advocate Vishal Tiwari, encapsulates the public's demand for rigorous scrutiny and redress mechanisms. Calls for expert medical panels and a vaccine damage payment system underscore a quest for justice and safeguarding public health. Amidst the cacophony of voices, from grieving parents to sceptical netizens, one message resonates: transparency breeds trust. As the global vaccination campaign continues, robust surveillance, thorough investigation and proactive communication remain indispensable in navigating the complexities of vaccine safety.

Arnab Reddy | Hyderabad

a glimmer of hope. The efforts made by the current government, particularly in the North East, show a commitment to inclusive growth and infrastructure development. Modi's North East Story sheds light on the transformative changes underway, offering a narrative of progress and resilience. It's heartening to see dynamic leaders and policymakers taking proactive steps to uplift these regions while preserving their unique cultural heritage. The book's portrayal of the North East's beauty and potential serves as an invitation for all Indians to engage with and support the holistic development of these often-overlooked states.

Ishika Verma | Jaipur

BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Leveraging NCERT textbooks for CUET," published on May 4, this is my response. The Common University Entrance Test (CUET) stands as a significant milestone for students aspiring to secure undergraduate admissions in India. Amidst the rigorous preparation for CUET 2024, lever-

aging NCERT textbooks emerges as a strategic move. These textbooks, integral to classrooms nationwide, offer more than just academic aid. They serve as a robust foundation, aligning seamlessly with CUET syllabi and offering structured content presentations. From basic principles to advanced concepts, NCERT textbooks provide a roadmap. Their clarity, supplemented by visuals and practice exercises, enhances comprehension and problem-solving skills. Moreover, their standardised content ensures equitable access to quality education, levelling the playing field for CUET aspirants. To optimise CUET preparation, students should adopt a subject-wise study approach, leverage visual aids, prioritise practice and revision and supplement with additional resources. By harnessing the potential of NCERT textbooks, students can bolster their confidence and maximise success in the CUET 2024 Exam.

Sanya Khanna | Chandigarh

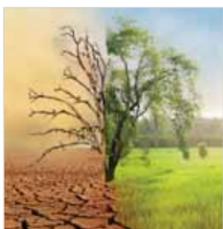
Climate startups: Innovative climate crisis warriors

Startups, pivotal in the shift to a net-zero future, can revitalise economies and communities while providing innovative solutions



SAIRAM SUBRAMANIAN

Deus ex machina is a technique often deployed by writers to solve a seemingly hopeless situation by external, magical and often unimaginable intervention. It is debatable if Deus ex machina exists in real life, nonetheless, Startups being creatures with innovation, disruption and problem-solving in their DNA can offer faster, creative and localised solutions, for the increasingly hopeless real-world crisis of Climate Change.



Be it a startup supplying an animal feed supplement that can cut down bovine emissions significantly, another one using Biotech and robotics technologies for developing GMO seeds and seaweeds that act as powerful carbon sinks, a climate tech company developing agro-forestry at a global scale or simpler everyday solutions that aim to greenify consumer finance or track individual efforts to reduce emissions, they can consolidate as a powerful force against climate change. World Economic Forum estimates that startups create value, nearly on par with the GDP of a G7 economy and the

OECD suggests that young firms create almost half of the new jobs, suggesting their burgeoning economic power and potential to create impact at scale. The race to net zero is propelled by energy and technology transition which on one hand is an opportunity for startups and a threat to local economies and livelihoods on the other. Take the case of coal being phased out; this might result in the currently bustling mining centres turning into silent junkyards. The modern world's triumphs in Silicon Valley or a Shanghai SEZ may guide the establishment of new climate innovation hubs. Brain port Eindhoven in the Netherlands is one such example showcasing the transition from conventional industries to futur-

istic setups. The questions on the proliferation of such a model 'Can' be addressed by a few suggestions of 'How': Blended Finance for Climate Innovation Hubs Practical experience suggests that 'Impact Capital' often expects social impact plus commercial returns. For startups social impact then becomes an additional responsibility and not an opportunity to improve margins or a business avenue to seriously pursue climate-positive opportunities over the long term. Blended finance can incentivise climate startups to agglomerate within the Climate Innovation Hubs. Monetising Sustainability — Startups should have opportunities to monetise their efforts on reducing emissions, either in the form of reduced taxes and lower cost of capital or claim premiums for climate-positive brand value. Reputation Capital — Unless climate-positive efforts are rewarded by markets in the form of valuations or additional capital or brand value, climate-positive behaviour will continue to be talk and no walk. Research &

Development (R&D) Support — While large corporations have reserves that can be deployed for R & D, startups have only access to highly demanding capital that usually funds sales for growth and rarely for investments for innovations (unless the startup is incubated in a technical university). While the existing carbon economy still grapples with the issues of just transition, the political economy of climate change signals shifts in geo-political equilibrium and technological leapfrogging in climate solutions is yet to emerge, startups as business organisations are only going to achieve greater proportions of power, prosperity and influence in the world. With focused support from policymakers, development finance institutions and international researchers, the global startup ecosystem can be geared up to take on threats of climate change head-on. Who knows we may have a Deus ex machina in the real world of climate change. The writer is a Chevening Scholar and an International Development expert; views are personal



FIRST COLUMN RETHINKING ECONOMIC GROWTH

Excessive consumerism contradicts our spiritual values ingrained in our heritage



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

The US economy is very often seen as the engine of the world economy, and that is why any sign of slowdown in the US raises serious concerns about harmful spillovers to the other economies. Any keen student of current economics would know well that the economic policies of America, especially during the last few years, have not worked well. In fact, the defeat of the most powerful leaders in the presidential elections that were held in the past few decades is attributed mainly to the failure of their economic policies which created many problems for the country. However, most people do not realise that the economic problems faced there, emanate not merely from wrong policies, adopted recently.

Their roots are hidden in some wrong economic, political and cultural concepts and the models built on them over a period of time. For example, the mounting unemployment and the huge foreign debts are not the phenomena that have sprung up overnight and the phenomenon of estimated 11.5% Americans, living in poverty, also has not arisen in the short period of only one or two years. The roots of their sad economic state go at least to as far a period as the end of the World War-II when they adopted a very lavish life-style and an utterly consumeristic attitude and built their economy on militarism, giant industries, transactional and multi-national business corporations, import of raw materials at cheaper rates from the undeveloped countries and export of their goods to such nations and economic capture of foreign markets through their multinational corporations. In short, they thrived on the basis of this economic system as long as other industrial nations did not come up strongly to stand up to them or the weaker nations did not stand up against



their economic exploitation or injustice. Nevertheless, their economic system was not, based on some morally sound and enduring economic principles. As mentioned earlier, it was based on commercialism, competition, consumerism and exploitation of weaker nations and on hot or cold war with an adversary nation, or on considering their nation as the strong military-man of the world, ready for hot or cold war. Now, when some other industrial nations have grown stronger, they cannot compete with them and have, therefore, to close down or to retrench workers as was done recently by many industrial giants. Also, now when there is no war—hot or cold—they are forced by economic reasons to sell their military hardware as they recently sold fighter jets to many Asian countries in order to keep the workers in employment. Their country has had either the ills of recession, or inflation, or heavy taxation, or it had to resort to deficit budgets, foreign debts, protectionist policies, etc. to keep the economy going. It would have, therefore, been appropriate if developing nations like India had learnt some lessons from the failures of the so-called developed models of economy and had, instead, kept in mind their own national ethos and ancient heritage which suggests that a right system of economy is one which is based on social justice, and on economising rather than borrowing and deficit-financing. We should also keep in mind our own national situation which necessitates national and regional self-sufficiency and affords opportunities of full employment to its citizens and promotes balance between rural and urban economy, equitable distribution of income and wealth and prevention of the growth of very wide disparities in income and wealth. We must remember that unbridled consumerism and commercialism and also large-scale borrowing are against the value-system which is embedded in our spiritual heritage and will, sooner or later, lead us to grave economic crisis. So, let us all learn to lead a life of simplicity and frugality and be honest and just to all.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

Reimagining Tagore's educational philosophy



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Rabindranath Tagore, the polymathic Nobel Laureate from Bengal, is celebrated not only for his literary brilliance but also for his visionary ideas on education

Rabindranath Tagore (May 7, 1861 to August 7, 1941), the polymathic Nobel Laureate from Bengal, is renowned not only for his literary brilliance but also for his progressive ideas on education. His philosophy of education, rooted in the principles of creativity, freedom, and humanism, continues to resonate with contemporary educational discourse. In today's rapidly changing world, where traditional educational paradigms are being challenged and redefined, Tagore's insights offer valuable perspectives for reimagining education in a manner that fosters holistic development and meaningful engagement with the world.

At the heart of Tagore's educational philosophy is the belief in the innate creativity and potential of every individual. He envisioned education as a process of nurturing this inherent creativity rather than imposing predetermined knowledge. In his seminal work, "Siksha: Herok Ek Jibon" (Education: A Continuum of Life), Tagore emphasized the importance of cultivating curiosity, imagination, and critical thinking skills in learners. He advocated for an education system that encourages students to explore, question, and construct their understanding of the world, rather than passively receiving information.

Further, central to Tagore's philosophy of education is the concept of "Shantiniketan," or the abode of peace - and later Sriniketan - which he established as an experimental educational institution in rural Bengal. Shantiniketan epitomized Tagore's holistic educational philosophy, integrating intellectual, artistic, and spiritual facets of human life. Education transcended traditional confines, embracing nature, arts, and community involvement. Tagore emphasized fostering reverence for nature, aesthetic sensibility, and interconnectedness with all life. He advocated for intellectual development through imagination, free thought, and perpetual curiosity. This personalized approach prioritized holistic growth, including physical development through exercises, yoga, and sports, echoing Tagore's belief: "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence."

According to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, "A teacher can never truly teach, unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp, unless it continues to burn its own flame". In his essay 'Ashram Shiksha' (Ashram's Teaching), Tagore extolled the virtues of patience in teaching, advocating that only those imbued with affection for their students deserve the mantle of a teacher. He rejected authoritarian teaching methods, viewing them as indicative of governance inadequacy. K M O'Connell (University of Toronto, Canada) had written that Rabindranath Tagore stands with the pioneering educators, like, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Dewey Malcolm Knowles, who have striven to create non-authoritarian learning systems appropriate to the surroundings.

Furthermore, Tagore's educational philosophy emphasizes fostering a love for humanity and advancing universal brotherhood through recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings and promoting empathy across cultures. Central to his approach is establishing harmony



HIS NOTION OF FREEDOM IN EDUCATION EMPHASISES LINKING NATURE, SOCIETY, AND LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES. HE ADVOCATES FOR LEARNING IN NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS TO NOURISH BODY AND SOUL, PRIORITISE CREATIVITY, AND ENGAGE CRITICALLY WITH TRADITIONAL VALUES AND BELIEFS

between individuals, nature, and the divine. Tagore advocates for freedom in education to unlock individuals' inherent potential and stresses the significance of moral and spiritual development alongside academic learning. His vision aims at cultivating well-rounded individuals capable of selfless service and social integration, ultimately contributing to a conscientious and harmonious society.

In today's context, characterized by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and environmental challenges, Tagore's emphasis on holistic education is more relevant than ever. The prevailing thought on standardized testing and rote memorization (read learning) often stifles creativity and critical thinking, leaving students ill-prepared for the complexities of the modern world. Tagore's philosophy, instead, calls for a shift towards a more student-centered, inquiry-based approach to learning that empowers learners to navigate uncertainty, think critically, and adapt to change. Tagore's educational philosophy, as elucidated in his essay "The Centre of Indian Culture," emphasizes the imperative for education to reflect and engage with the socio-cultural milieu in which it operates, asserting that genuine education must be attuned to its contextual realities to foster healthy growth.

This sentiment resonates in Sunil Banga's (Lancaster University Management School) analysis - in his paper "The global relevance of Tagore's cosmopolitan educational philosophy for social justice in a post-Westphalian world" published in Journal of Philosophy of Education (August 2023, Oxford) - which underscores Tagore's cosmopolitan approach to education as a potent instrument for social justice and equity in today's

world. Banga highlights Tagore's commitment to societal transformation through education, evident in his advocacy for women's empowerment, condemnation of oppression, and advocacy for India's independence (read freedom). Despite emerging from the colonial era, Tagore's philosophy remains pertinent, particularly his emphasis on education as a catalyst for moral and social development, aiming towards societal harmony and integration to address contemporary global challenges.

Moreover, Tagore's emphasis on the integration of arts, music, and literature into the curriculum offers a counterbalance to the narrow focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education prevalent in many educational systems today. Arts play a crucial role in fostering creativity, empathy, and emotional intelligence, which are essential for navigating the complexities of human relationships and societal challenges.

Sunil Banga underscores Tagore's educational paradigm as an early advocate of global interconnectedness. Tagore posited that education's primary objective was the attainment of self-realization, which he termed 'Atma Shakti,' wherein individuals harmonize with nature and society. Drawing from Hindu literature, Tagore envisions a 'universal man' embodying faith in universalism and humanity. He further advocates for personality development through arts and music, leading to a transcendent understanding of human nature. He contends that humans, upon achieving self-realization, unite with 'God' or 'Manav Brahma,' thereby becoming the 'complete man' and 'soul.'

Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy underscores the integral role of education in fos-

tering connections between individuals and humanity while promoting holistic development.

In essence, at the heart of Tagore's vision of cosmopolitan education is the idea of freedom - freedom to engage critically with traditional values and beliefs; and freedom to imagine citizenship in a globalized world, that enables an exploration and negotiation of multiple allegiances in sympathy with others. His notion of freedom in education emphasizes linking nature, society, and learners' experiences. He advocates for learning in natural environments to nourish body and soul, prioritize creativity, and engage critically with traditional values and beliefs.

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of education provides a compelling framework for reimagining education in the 21st century. His emphasis on creativity, freedom, holistic development, and social engagement offers valuable insights for addressing the multifaceted challenges of today's world.

By embracing Tagore's vision, educators can create learning environments that empower students to become compassionate, critical thinkers capable of shaping a more just, sustainable, and humane society and boosting student's morale.

On the occasion of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's 163rd Birth Anniversary, we may well reflect on his philosophy advocating for an education that transcends mere impartation of knowledge, rather instills a profound harmony with all existence. Revisiting Tagore's principles may serve as a guiding light for Indian educational institutions in this globalised age.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

Vision for India: A State-led roadmap for effective governance

Amid India's socio-economic shift, Karthik Muralidharan's new book shines as a guide for the nation's trajectory

It was during the mid-1960s that I had a first-hand experience with Kochi, popularly known as the Queen of the Arabian Sea. Other than Kochi Port, the small aerodrome and the star hotel of yore years Sea Lord and Malabar, there was nothing attractive about the city. Scavengers carrying night soil collected from homes and hotels on their heads were the first sight that welcomed people during the daybreak. Some discernible changes are there in Kochi and other cities in the State. Scavengers are gone and their places have been taken over by cycle rickshaws with the hoarding "For cleaning septic tanks, please contact us...". In the hinterland, farmers wearing loin-cloths plough their farmland with bullocks



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

despite India being one of the largest manufacturers of tractors of all kinds. The mention of the word farmer brings to mind the images of loin-clothed men beating their bullocks to force them to plough the fields. You go to Madurai in Tamil Nadu, which the DMK touts as a role model of Dravidian development. What welcomes you to the small towns and villages are thoroughfares and

ring roads being used as public comfort stations by the residents. Dravidian leaders do not like the idea of Swachh Bharat and insist that their followers use roads, rivers and beaches as public toilets.

It is in these contexts that a book for the economic and social development of India has hit the shelves. Karthik Muralidharan, renowned economist and Tata Chancellor's Professor of Economics at the University of California, San Diego, has authored a book "Accelerating India's Development - A State-led Roadmap for Effective Governance"; a blueprint for the Comprehensive Development of India. Productivity, competitiveness, the number of jobs created and the skill of the labour force are

some of the most important ingredients of the economic growth of a country. It is for the Central and State Governments to generate enabling conditions for speedy economic and social development, according to Muralidharan.

The author says that land, labour, capital, policies on taxation, bankruptcy, environmental regulation and promoting competition are the enabling services that ensure speedy economic and social development. Muralidharan, who has no love lost for the Modi Government at the Centre, says the present Central Government is always ahead in resolving issues that retard economic progress. "India's public discourse on growth

mainly focusses on Central Government actions to promote it, though many of the key issues above are in the domain of State Governments. It is critical to analyze and improve the effectiveness of State level actions for boosting productivity and job quality. State-led initiative and innovations followed by rapid replication of successful ones can play a key role in accelerating both growth and development in India," writes Muralidharan in the chapter "Jobs, Productivity and Economic Growth".

What makes the book interesting is Muralidharan's call for improving job quality rather than job quantity. It is not the number of jobs created but the quality of jobs that determines the welfare of the people, says

Muralidharan. "A job is not just a source of income. It also provides identity, dignity and social engagement. With over 95 per cent of India's population relying primarily on labour income for sustenance, improving job quality will directly improve the welfare of hundreds of millions of Indians," says the economist. This is an open call to finish once-and-for-ever jobs like scavenging, ploughing the land with bullocks and other mean works. The earlier we introduce Artificial Intelligence and robots for such jobs, the better. Instead of using this technology to deceive the public with deep fake videos and political rivals, it would be better if we use this technology to uplift the status of jobs. Millions of Indians are reliant

on casual wage labour for sustenance. An average income earner supports 2.7 dependents. "This is why improving living standards in India depends critically on improving worker productivity and creating more high-quality jobs to generate higher, more reliable incomes," Muralidharan writes. The skill development programme initiated by the present government should be invigorated and made compulsory for students and school dropouts.

The Agniveer scheme is an innovation that inspires the mind. One need not go to engineering colleges or medical colleges to emerge as a skilled professional in high-quality jobs. There is a severe shortage of electricians,

plumbers and mechanics with expertise in household jobs. Even as the central and State governments can increase the number of medical colleges, no stone should be left unturned in increasing the number of ITIs and technical schools. Equal priority should be given to increasing the agricultural productivity in which India lags behind China Vietnam etc. The situation is favourable to India. Skill development, Agniveer and increase in agriculture productivity should be implemented with full vigour. There is hope for India to become the world leader by 2047.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

Israeli army tells Palestinians to evacuate parts of Rafah

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The Israeli army ordered some 100,000 Palestinians on Monday to begin evacuating from the southern city of Rafah, signalling that a long-promised ground invasion there could be imminent and further complicating efforts to broker a cease-fire in Gaza.

The looming operation in the city — where more than 1 million Palestinians are sheltering and a high number of deaths is feared — has raised global alarm and Israeli's closest allies have warned against it. On Monday, the United Nations agency serving Palestinian refugees said it would not comply with the evacuation order.

Israel has described Rafah as the last significant Hamas stronghold after some seven months of war, and has repeatedly said the invasion is necessary to defeat the Islamic militant group, which unleashed the current conflict with an attack on Israel on October 7.

But Hamas and key mediator Qatar have warned that invading Rafah — along the border with Egypt — could derail efforts by international mediators to broker a cease-fire. Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, an army spokesman, said some 100,000 people were being ordered to move to a nearby Israel-declared humanitarian zone called Muwasi — a makeshift camp of tents where along the coast hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have sought safety and live in squalid conditions.

Shoshani said Israel was preparing a "limited scope operation" and would not say whether this was the beginning of a broader invasion of the city. Israel never formally announced the launch of its current ground invasion in Gaza.

Smoke could be seen rising from Rafah Monday afternoon, although the cause was unclear.

Tensions escalated Sunday when Hamas fired rockets at Israeli troops positioned on the border with Gaza near Israel's main crossing for delivering badly needed humanitarian aid, killing four soldiers. Israel shuttered the crossing — but

Columbia University cancels commencement amid ongoing protests

New York (AP): Columbia University is cancelling its large university-wide commencement ceremony amid ongoing pro-Palestinian protests but will hold smaller school-based ceremonies this week and next, the university announced Monday.

"Based on feedback from our students, we have decided to focus attention on our Class Days and school-level graduation ceremonies, where students are honoured individually alongside their peers, and to forego the university-wide ceremony that is scheduled for May 15," officials at the Ivy League school in upper Manhattan said in a statement.

Noting that the past few weeks have been "incredibly difficult" for the community, the school said in its announcement that it made the decision after discussions with students. "Our students emphasised that these smaller-scale, school-based celebrations are most meaningful to them and their families,"

Shoshani said it would not affect how much aid enters Gaza as others are working.

He would not say whether the upcoming operation was a response to that attack. Meanwhile, Israeli airstrikes on Rafah killed 22 people, including children and two infants, according to a hospital.

Shoshani said Israel published a map of the evacuation area, and that orders were being issued through air-dropped leaflets, text messages and radio broadcasts. He said Israel has expanded humanitarian aid into Muwasi, including field hospitals, tents, food and water.

Israel's army said on the social media platform X that it would act with "extreme force" against militants, and urged the population to evacuate immediately for their safety.

officials said. "They are eager to cross the stage to applause and family pride and hear from their school's invited guest speakers."

Most of the ceremonies that had been scheduled for the south lawn of the main campus, where encampments were taken down last week, will take place about 5 miles north at Columbia's sports complex, officials said.

Columbia had already cancelled in-person classes. More than 100 pro-Palestinian demonstrators who had camped out on Columbia's green were arrested last month, and similar encampments sprouted up at universities around the country as schools struggled with where to draw the line between allowing free expression while maintaining safe and inclusive campuses. The University of Southern California earlier cancelled its main graduation ceremony while allowing other commencement activities to continue.

Jan Egeland, secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, condemned the "forced, unlawful" evacuation order and the idea that people should go to Muwasi.

"The area is already overstretched and devoid of vital services," Egeland said.

About 1.4 million Palestinians — more than half of Gaza's population — are jammed into Rafah and its surroundings. Most of them fled their homes elsewhere in the territory to escape Israel's onslaught and now face another wrenching move or the danger of staying under a new assault.

They live in densely packed tent camps, overflowing U.N. shelters or crowded apartments, and are dependent on international aid for food, with sanitation systems and medical facilities infrastructure crippled.

pled.

Palestinians in Rafah said people gathered to discuss their options after receiving the flyers.

"So many people here are displaced and now they have to move again, but no one will stay here it's not safe," Nidal Alzaanin told The Associated Press by phone.

A father of five, Alzaanin works for an international aid group and fled to Rafah from Beit Hanoun in the north at the start of the war. He said people are concerned since Palestinians have said they were fired at during previous evacuations. Israel denies shooting at civilians.

Alzaanin said he has packed his documents and bags but will wait 24 hours to see what others do before relocating. He said he has a friend in Khan Younis whom he hopes can pitch a tent for his family.

The U.N. agency that has helped millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank for decades, known as UNRWA, warned Monday of devastating consequences of a Rafah offensive, including more civilian suffering and deaths. Juliette Touma, communications director for the agency, which has thousands of employees in the city, said it has not evacuated and has no plans to do so.

Egypt's Rafah crossing, a main transfer point for aid going into Gaza, lies in the evacuation zone. The crossing remained open on Monday after the Israeli order.

The war was sparked by an unprecedented Oct. 7 raid into southern Israel in which Hamas and other militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages.

The ensuing conflict has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials. The tally does not distinguish between civilians and combatants, but officials say at least two-thirds of the dead are children and women. It has left a swath of destruction in Gaza, and around 80% of the territory's population has fled to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave.

UK facing 'disaster' of hung Parliament, warns Sunak after local election debacle

PTI ■ LONDON

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak warned on Monday that an analysis of the local election results shows the country is headed for a hung Parliament led by the Opposition Labour Party, which "would be a disaster for Britain".

The 43-year-old British Indian leader told 'The Times' in the wake of a debacle for the governing Conservative Party, who lost hundreds of local council seats and key majorities across England in results over the weekend, that he was bitterly disappointed but determined to fight back.

He sought to paint a less bleak picture for party rebels, demanding a change of political course to win back voters in time for a general election, expected later this year.

"These results suggest we are heading for a hung parliament with Labour as the largest party," Sunak told the newspaper.



"[Labour Leader] Keir Starmer propped up in Downing Street by the SNP [Scottish National Party], Liberal Democrats and the Greens would be a disaster for Britain. The country doesn't need more political horse-trading, but action. We are the only party with a plan to deliver on the priorities of the people," he insisted. He went on to acknowledge the frustration of the voters because of a tough few years due to a

cost-of-living crisis and soaring household bills, which had made them less inclined to vote for Tory councillors and mayors in the polls last Thursday. "I know the last few years have been tough, and I understand why people are frustrated. Losing good Conservative councillors and a mayor as fantastic as Andy Street who has done so much good for the West Midlands is of course bitterly disappointing. But I am determined to show people that we are delivering for them, and standing up for our values," he said. After the final votes were counted on Sunday, the Tories had lost control of 10 councils and more than 470 council seats. They also lost 10 Police and Crime Commissioners, with most of the gains made by Labour and the Lib Dems who pushed the Tories to the third position. In an apparent message for the rebellious voices from the Conservative backbenches, being led by former home sec-

retary Suella Braverman who has demanded the Prime Minister move on from "managerialism" and show strong leadership, Sunak added: "There's work to do and more progress to be made and I am determined that we will come together as a party and show the British people we are delivering for them." Sunak's comments on a hung Parliament reflect analysis by leading psephologist Professor Michael Thrasher for 'Sky News', which suggested Labour would win 294 seats at a general election, short of the 326 for a majority.

The projection, which some other polling experts have dismissed, used the local election results to project a nationwide estimate of vote share at a general election.

It assumes everyone would vote the same way at a general election as in last week's local elections when smaller parties and Independent candidates tend to do better in local elections.

UN nuclear watchdog chief travels to Iran as its monitoring remains hampered

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The head of the United Nations' atomic watchdog travelled Monday to Iran, where his agency faces increasing difficulty in monitoring the Islamic Republic's rapidly advancing nuclear program as tensions remain high in the wider Middle East over the Israel-Hamas war. Rafael Mariano Grossi already has warned Tehran has enough uranium enriched to near-weapons-grade levels to make "several" nuclear bombs if it chose to do so. He has acknowledged the agency can't guarantee that none of Iran's centrifuges may have been peeled away for clandestine enrichment. Those challenges now find themselves entangled in attacks between Israel and Iran, with the city of Isfahan apparently coming under Israeli fire in recent weeks despite it being surrounded by sensitive nuclear sites. Grossi is likely to attend an Iranian nuclear conference there while

on his two-day trip to Iran.

"Problems will not disappear," Grossi told an International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors' meeting in March. "They will only get worse. So, we need to address this in a serious way."

In Tehran, Grossi and Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian shook hands in front of journalists before going into a meeting. Authorities offered no immediate comment on their discussions.

Grossi will travel to Isfahan on Tuesday before heading back to Vienna, where he plans to give an update to journalists. Tensions have grown between Iran and the IAEA since then-President Donald Trump in 2018 unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. Since then, Iran has abandoned all limits the deal put on its programme and enriches uranium to 60% purity — near weapons-grade levels of 90%.

IAEA surveillance cameras have been disrupted, while Iran has barred some of the agency's most experienced inspectors.

Meanwhile, Iranian officials have increasingly threatened they could pursue atomic weapons.

"For us, making the atomic bomb is easier than not building atomic bomb," said Mahmoud Reza Aghamiri, the chancellor of Tehran Shahid Beheshti University and a specialist in nuclear physics. Iranian media quoted Aghamiri acknowledging Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had previously said making an atomic bomb is forbidden.

"But if his fatwa and viewpoint is changed, we have ability to build atomic bomb, too," Aghamiri added.

Aghamiri's comments follow a drumroll of others by Iranian lawmakers, those in its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and a former head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran suggesting Tehran could

build the bomb.

Iranian diplomats for years have pointed to Khamenei's preachings as a binding fatwa, or religious edict, that Iran wouldn't build an atomic bomb.

We do not need nuclear bombs. We have no intention of using a nuclear bomb," Khamenei said in a November 2006 speech, according to a transcript from his office. "We do not claim to dominate the world, like the Americans, we do not want to dominate the world by force and need a nuclear bomb. Our nuclear bomb and explosive power is our faith." But such edicts aren't written in stone. Khamenei's predecessor, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued fatwas that revised his own earlier pronouncements after he took power following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. And anyone who would follow the 85-year-old Khamenei as the country's supreme leader could make his own fatwas revising those previously issued.

EU's executive decides to end legal standoff with Poland

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Brussels (AP): The European Union's executive decided on Monday to end its 6-year dispute with member state Poland, saying Prime Minister Donald Tusk has initiated the necessary changes to reverse what the bloc called the previous government's backsliding on democratic principles. The EU's decision to withdraw its case over rule of law complaints follows one in February to start releasing billions of euros that it had frozen in the dispute.

"Today, marks a new chapter for Poland," said EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, calling the breakthrough the result of the country's determined reform efforts. "The ongoing restoration of the rule of law in Poland is great for the Polish people and for our union as a whole."

Trump fined \$1,000 for gag order violation in hush money case

AP ■ NEW YORK

The judge presiding over Donald Trump's hush money trial has fined him \$1,000 for violating his gag order and sternly warned the former president that additional violation could result in jail time. The fine marks the second sanction for Trump for inflammatory comments about witnesses since the start of the trial last month. He was fined \$9,000 last week for nine violations. Judge Juan M Merchan warned Monday that additional gag order violations could potentially result in jail time, though he said that was "the last thing I want to do".

Prosecutors in Trump's hush money trial are moving deeper into his orbit following an inside-the-room account about the former president's reaction to a politically damaging recording that surfaced in the final weeks of the 2016 campaign. Hope Hicks, a for-



mer White House official and for years a top aide, is by far the closest Trump associate to have taken the witness stand in the Manhattan trial.

Her testimony Friday was designed to give jurors an insider's view of a chaotic and pivotal stretch in the campaign, when a 2005 recording showing Trump talking about grabbing women without their permission was made public and when he and his allies sought to prevent the release of

other potentially embarrassing stories. That effort, prosecutors say, included hush money payments to a porn actor and Playboy model who both have said they had sexual encounters with Trump before he entered politics.

"I had a good sense to believe this was going to be a massive story and that it was going to dominate the news cycle for the next several days," Hicks said of the "Access Hollywood" recording, first revealed in an October 2016 Washington Post story. "This was a damaging development."

The trial enters its third week of testimony Monday with prosecutors building toward their star witness, Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer who pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the hush money payments. Cohen is expected to undergo a bruising cross-examination from defense attorneys seeking to

undermine his credibility with jurors. Trump faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in connection with payments made to stifle potentially embarrassing stories. Prosecutors say Trump's company, the Trump Organization, reimbursed Cohen for payments to porn actor Stormy Daniels and gave Cohen bonuses and extra payments. Prosecutors allege that those transactions were falsely logged in company records as legal expenses. Trump has pleaded not guilty and denied sexual encounters with any of the women, as well as any wrongdoing. So far, jurors have heard from witnesses including a tabloid magazine publisher and Trump friend who bought the rights to several sordid tales about Trump to prevent them from coming out and a Los Angeles lawyer who negotiated hush money deals on behalf of both Daniels and Playboy model Karen McDougal.

US, Philippine forces stage combat drills near strategic channel off southern Taiwan

AP ■ ITBAYAT

US Marines and their Filipino counterparts darted out of Black Hawk helicopters during combat drills Monday in the Philippines' northernmost island town along the strategic Bashi Channel off southern Taiwan — a flashpoint in the military rivalry between Washington and Beijing.

The show of allied battle readiness in Itbayat in Batanes province is part of annual military exercises that started last month, dubbed Balikatan, Tagalog for "shoulder-to-shoulder," and involving more than 16,000 American and Philippine military personnel.

This year's exercises by the longtime treaty allies — the largest yet — are meant to deter possible aggression. They come against the backdrop of China's increasingly assertive actions in the disputed South China Sea, where Chinese and Philippine coast guards and accompanying ships have had several increasingly tense faceoffs since last year.

More than 250 French and Australian forces are also participating, along with observers from several allied and security partner nations, led by Japan and European nations. The drills, which began April 22, end later this week.

In Monday's mock battle scenario, American and Philippine forces took positions at the airfield, ringed by low-lying hills, as three Army CH-47 Chinook helicopters landed to deliver combat supplies. Renaissance and counter-reconnaissance drills were also planned in the far-flung region. The Associated Press was among a small group of journalists invited to attend the maneuvers. "We are absolutely battle-ready and that's what

we train for day in and day out," Marine Maj. Robert Patterson said. "It's important to enhance inter-operability with our Filipino counterparts."

Washington and Manila say the drills are not directed at any country and are crucial for improving the response to emergencies in the Philippines, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries.

However, this year's drills focus on territorial defense and are being staged mainly in two of the most sensitive fault lines in the regional rivalry between China and the United States: the disputed South China Sea and the Bashi Channel.

The critical waterway between Taiwan and the Philippines, an important trade conduit laden with international undersea cables, has been closely watched and guarded by Chinese and American forces. China considers Taiwan a part of its territory, to be annexed by force if necessary.

In a telephone call last month, Chinese President Xi Jinping stressed to President Joe Biden that Beijing will not tolerate separatist activities by Taiwan's independence forces, as well as "exterior indulgence and support," an apparent reference to Washington's support for the island.

Biden raised concerns about China's actions in the South China Sea, including efforts to impede the Philippines, which Washington is treaty-obligated to defend, from resupplying its forces on the fiercely disputed Second Thomas Shoal.

Derek Grossman, a senior defense analyst at RAND Corporation, said the message of deterrence was Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s decision to allow U.S. forces indefinitely access to

Activists in B'desh march through universities

AP ■ DHAKA

Thousands of activists in Bangladesh backed by the ruling party's student wing marched through universities around the country Monday to demand an end to the Israel-Hamas war and the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Activists of the Bangladesh Chhatra League marched through the campus of the prestigious Dhaka University chanting anti-Israel slogans, carrying Bangladeshi and Palestinian flags and spreading banners saying "Free Palestine, Stop Genocide." Many other students also joined the rally, organizers said. Bangladesh, a Muslim-majority nation of nearly 170 million people, maintains no diplomatic relations with Israel and has called for an independent Palestinian state.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, of the ruling Awami League, has slammed Israel over what she has alleged is genocide committed by its government. The student group said it organised the demonstrations in solidarity with protests in the United States and because of growing rage against the Israeli military action in Gaza.

It called for action "against atrocities, massacres and ongoing human rights violations". Student leaders cited Israel over what they described as brutal and indiscriminate attacks that killed women and children and damaged hospitals.

Meanwhile the children of Gaza aren't getting enough food and water, said Tamir Hasan Shaikat, an organiser. "We have never seen attacks on hospitals in any war, but we have seen that in Gaza," he said.

Other protesters said they joined the demonstrations to send a message to the world that they were against any oppression.

Sunita Williams set to fly into space for third time

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Indian-origin astronaut Sunita Williams is ready to fly into space for the third time on Tuesday as the pilot aboard Boeing's Starliner spacecraft in its first crewed test flight. Boeing's Starliner will blast off from the International Space Station from Cape Canaveral in Florida.

Starliner will carry Williams, 58, and Butch Wilmore to the International Space Station, marking what could be a momentous and long-awaited victory for the beleaguered Boeing programme.

The scheduled lift-off is set for 22:34 local time on Monday (8:04 am IST on Tuesday) "We are all here because we are all ready. Our friends and family have heard about it and they're happy and proud that we are



part of the process to fix it all," the BBC quoted Williams as saying. The mission has been delayed for several years because of setbacks in the spacecraft's development.

If it is successful, it will become the second private firm able to provide crew transport to and from the ISS, alongside Elon Musk's SpaceX. Such a scenario — with both SpaceX's Crew

Dragon and Starliner flying regularly — is one for which the US space agency NASA has long waited. "Design and development is hard — particularly with a human space vehicle," said Mark Nappi, vice president and Starliner programme manager at Boeing, during a Thursday news briefing. "There's a number of things that were surprises along the way that we had to overcome. ... It certainly made the team very, very strong. I'm very proud of how they've overcome every single issue that we've encountered and gotten us to this point," Nappi said.

"This is history in the making," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said of the upcoming Starliner mission during a March 22 news conference. "We're now in the golden era of space exploration." This is Boeing's second flight to the International Space Station

and third Starliner flight test overall, following a second Orbital Flight Test, the uncrewed mission also known as OFT-2, in May 2022. Boeing also completed pad abort demonstration in November 2019, according to NASA. As the final flight test for Starliner, NASA's Boeing crew flight test will validate the transportation system, including the launch pad, rocket, spacecraft, in-orbit operational capabilities, and return to Earth with astronauts aboard, it said. SpaceX and Boeing developed their respective vehicles under NASA's Commercial Crew Programme, a partnership with private industry contractors. From the outset, the space agency aimed to have both companies operating at once. The Crew Dragon and Starliner spacecraft would each serve as a backup to the other, giving astronauts the option to keep fly-

ing, even if technical issues or other setbacks grounded one spacecraft.

Williams received her commission as an Ensign in the United States Navy from the United States Naval Academy in May 1987. Williams was selected as an astronaut by NASA in 1998 and is a veteran of two space missions, Expeditions 14/15 and 32/33. She served as a flight engineer on Expedition 32 and then commander of Expedition 33. During her first spaceflight, Expedition 14/15, Williams was launched with the crew of STS-116 on December 9, 2006, docking with the International Space Station on December 11, 2006. While onboard, she established a world record for females with four spacewalks totalling 29 hours and 17 minutes. Astronaut Peggy Whitson subsequently broke the record in 2008 with a total of five spacewalks.

WESTERN OFFICIALS' INVOLVEMENT IN UKRAINE

Russia announces nuclear drills

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia said Monday it plans to hold drills simulating the use of battlefield nuclear weapons amid rising tensions following comments by senior Western officials about the possibility of deeper involvement in the war in Ukraine.

The announcement came on the eve of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inauguration to a fifth term in office and in a week when Moscow on Thursday will celebrate Victory Day, its most important secular holiday, marking its defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II. The drills are a response to "provocative statements and threats of certain Western officials regarding the Russian Federation," the Defence Ministry said in a statement. It was the first time Russia has publicly announced drills involving tactical nuclear weapons, although its strategic nuclear forces regularly hold exercises. Tactical nuclear weapons include air bombs, warheads for short-range missiles and artillery munitions and are meant for use on a battlefield. They are less powerful than the strategic weapons — massive warheads that arm intercontinental ballistic missiles and are intended to obliterate entire cities.

The Russian announcement was a warning to Ukraine's Western allies about becoming more deeply engaged in the 2-year-old war, where the Kremlin's forces have gained an upper hand amid Ukraine's shortage of manpower and weapons. Some of Ukraine's Western partners have previously expressed concern that the conflict could spill beyond Ukraine into a war between NATO and Russia. French President Emmanuel Macron repeated last week that he doesn't exclude sending troops to Ukraine, and UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron said Kyiv's forces will be able to use British long-range weapons to strike targets inside Russia. Some other NATO countries providing weapons to Kyiv have balked at that possibility.



The Kremlin branded those comments as dangerous, heightening tension between Russia and NATO. The war already has placed significant strain on relations between Moscow and the West.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday that Macron's recent statement and other remarks by British and US officials had prompted the nuclear drills.

"It's a new round of escalation," Peskov said, referring to what the Kremlin regarded as provocative statements. "It's unprecedented and requires special attention and special measures."

Russia's Foreign Ministry summoned both the French and British ambassadors. Sweden's Foreign Minister Tobias Billström said the nuclear exercises "contribute to increasing instability."

"In the current security situation, Russia's actions may be considered particularly irresponsible and reckless," Billström told Swedish news agency TT. Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council that's chaired by Putin, said in his typically hawkish fashion that the comments by Macron and Cameron risked pushing the nuclear-armed world toward a "global catastrophe."

It wasn't the first time Europe's military support for Ukraine has prompted nuclear saber-rattling. In March 2023, after the UK's decision to provide Ukraine with armor-piercing shells containing depleted uranium, Putin said he intends to deploy tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of Ukraine neighbor Belarus.

The ministry said the exercise is intended to "increase the readiness of non-strategic nuclear forces to fulfill combat tasks" and will be held on Putin's orders. The maneuvers will involve missile units of the Southern Military District along with the air force and the navy, it said. The Russian announcement stirred little reaction in Ukraine, where the spokesman for the Military Intelligence agency, Andrii Yusov, said on national television: "Nuclear blackmail is a usual practice of Putin's regime; it does not constitute major news."

Western officials have blamed Russia for threatening a wider war through provocative acts. NATO countries said last week they are deeply concerned by a campaign of hybrid activities on the military alliance's soil, accusing Moscow of being behind them and saying they represent a security threat.

Macron sets trade, Ukraine as top priority

AP ■ PARIS

China's President Xi Jinping arrived at the French presidential palace on Monday for a two-day state visit that is expected to focus both on trade disputes and diplomatic efforts to convince Beijing to use its influence to move Russia toward ending the war in Ukraine.

In Paris, Xi first joined a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen meant to address broader EU concerns.

Macron said in his introductory remarks the meeting would first address trade issues and how to ensure "fair competition," then the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

"We are at a turning point in our history" as the Europe-China relationship is faced with challenges, Macron said. The talks are aimed at sharing "both our shared positions and our concerns, to try to overcome them, because the future of our continent will very clearly also depend on our ability to develop balanced relations with China," he said.

Macron, a strong advocate of

Europe's economic sovereignty, wants to raise French concerns about a Chinese antidumping investigation into cognac and other European brandy, and tensions over French cosmetics and other sectors.

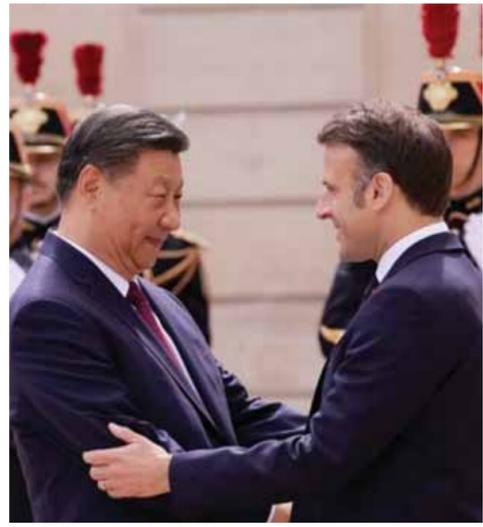
In a recent speech, he denounced trade practices of both China and the United States as shoring up protections and subsidies.

At the start of the meeting in Paris, Xi said "the world today has entered a new period of turbulence and change."

"As two important forces in the world, China and Europe should ... continuously make new contributions to world peace and development," he said. The EU launched an investigation last fall into Chinese subsidies and could impose tariffs on electric vehicles exported from China.

"The European Union and China want good relations," von der Leyen said. "We have a substantial EU-China economic relationship. ... But this relationship is also challenged, for example, through state-induced overcapacity, unequal market access and overdependencies."

Paris is the first stop on Xi's



European trip, seeking to rebuild relations at a time of global tensions. After France on Monday and Tuesday, he will head to Serbia and Hungary. France hopes the discussions will help convince China to use its leverage with Moscow to 'contribute to a resolution of the conflict' in Ukraine, according

to a French presidential official. Russian President Vladimir Putin recently announced plans to visit China this month.

Macron will press Xi over supplies from Chinese companies supporting the Russian war effort despite EU sanctions, he said. China claims neutrality in the Ukraine conflict. France

also wants China to maintain a dialogue with Kyiv, added the official, who was not authorized to be identified according to presidential policy. Last year, Macron appealed to Xi to "bring Russia to its senses," but the call was not followed by any apparent action by Beijing.

"French authorities are pursuing two objectives that are ultimately contradictory," said Marc Julienne, director of the Center for Asian Studies at the French Institute of International Relations. "On the one hand, to convince Xi that it's in his interest to help Europeans to put pressure on Vladimir Putin to end the war and, on the other hand, to dissuade the Chinese president from delivering arms to his Russian friend."

"In short, we think that Xi can help us, but at the same time we fear that he could help Putin," Julienne wrote. As France prepares to host the Summer Olympics, Macron said he would ask Xi to use his influence to make the Games "a diplomatic moment of peace." The discussions will also be closely watched from Washington, a month before President Joe Biden is expected to pay his own state visit to France.

Germany recalls envoy in Russia for a week

Berlin (AP): Germany said on Monday it recalled its ambassador to Russia for a week of consultations in Berlin following an alleged hacker attack on Chancellor Olaf Scholz's party.

Germany last week accused Russian military agents of hacking into the top echelons of Scholz's Social Democrats' party and other sensitive government and industrial targets. Berlin has joined NATO and fellow European countries in warning that Russia's cyberespionage would have consequences. The Foreign Office in Berlin said Monday that the government is taking the latest incident "seriously" and that Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock had decided to call back German Ambassador Alexander Lambsdorff. He would return to Moscow after a week, it said.

"The German government takes this event very seriously as behavior against our liberal democracy and the institutions that support it," Foreign Office spokeswoman Kathrin Deschauer said.

Baerbock said last week that Russian military cyber operators were behind the hacking of emails of the Social Democrats, the leading party in the governing coalition. Officials said the hackers had exploited Microsoft Outlook.

The German Interior Ministry said in a statement last week that the hacking campaign began as early as March 2022, a month after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with emails at the Social Democrat party headquarters accessed beginning that December. It said German companies, including in the defense and aerospace sectors, as well as targets related to the war in Ukraine were the focus of the hacking attacks.

Maldives urges Indians to 'be a part' of its tourism

PTI ■ DUBAI

With the number of Indian tourists visiting the Maldives dwindling amidst strained bilateral ties, the archipelago nation's tourism minister on Monday urged Indians to contribute to the country's economy which is dependent on tourism.

In an interview with PTI Videos here, Maldivian Tourism Minister Ibrahim Faisal emphasised on the historical relations between his country and India.

"We have a history. Our newly elected government also wants to work together (with India). We always promote peace and a friendly environment. Our people and the government will give a warm welcome to Indian arrivals. As the Tourism Minister, I want to tell Indians

to please be a part of Maldives' tourism. Our economy depends on tourism," he said.

A full-blown backlash was directed at the Maldives following derogatory remarks against India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on social media by three Maldivian officials after Modi posted photos and video of the pristine Lakshadweep Islands on India's west coast on January 6 on his X handle. Scores of Indians, including multiple celebrities, cancelled their reservations and dropped plans to visit Maldives. The tourism arrival statistics reflected how from being a top visitor country, India's position went down from topmost to sixth position after January.

According to a sun.my report published on Monday, the number of tourist arrivals from

India declined by 42 per cent in the first four months of this year compared to the first four months of last year.

At the start of this year, India was the top tourist market for the Maldives. Shortly into the year, India dropped to sixth place amongst the top tourist markets, the news portal reported. According to Tourism Ministry statistics, Maldives recorded a total of 43,991 tourist arrivals from India as of May 4. Between January and April of last year, Maldives recorded 73,785 tourist arrivals. This year, the number stands at 42,638. The report attributed the steep decline in Indian tourists to the strained relations between India and the Maldives after the new administration led by President Mohamed Muizzu assumed office in November last year.

Pak SC suspends HC verdict denying Sunni Ittehad Council reserved seats

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In a relief to jailed former premier Imran Khan's party, Pakistan's Supreme Court on Monday suspended a high court verdict denying the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) reserved seats for women and minorities in the national and provincial assemblies.

The Peshawar High Court (PHC) had rejected a petition of the SIC, which came to the fore after Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed independently elected lawmakers joined it, regarding its claim on reserved seats.

PTI was forced to take the cover of SIC because reserved seats are allotted to parties having members in the national and provincial assemblies. Since the PTI was deprived of its bat symbol before the election due to failure to hold intra-party elections as per law, it was not allowed to contest the February 8 general election as a party.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in March ruled that the SIC was not entitled to claim quota for reserved seats as none of its members contested the election from the party platform and it also failed to provide a mandatory party list for reserved seats.

There are 70 reserved seats in the 336-member National Assembly and 156 in the provincial assemblies which are allotted proportionally to the winning parties in the general elections.

The reserved seats were allocated to all political parties according to their strength in the assemblies except the PTI-backed SIC. The ECP in March also decided to distribute the seats among other parliamentary parties but the PTI rejected the verdict as unconstitutional and petitioned against it in the PHC, which rejected the plea. The SIC then filed a petition before the apex court against the PHC judgment in April.

A three-member bench of the Supreme Court led by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah and comprising Justices Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Athar Minallah took up an SIC appeal against the PHC order.

After hearing arguments, the court suspended the decision by the PHC. "We are accepting the case for hearing," Justice Shah said, adding that the PHC order upholding the ECP decision was suspended to the extent of the remaining reserved seats given to other parties.

Later, the court adjourned the matter for hearing until June 3. The final verdict whenever it comes will be a moral victory for PTI but may not have any impact on the government. The total number of PTI lawmakers would slightly increase in the assemblies but still, the party would not be in a position to challenge the government. Earlier, the SIC in its petition said that the PTI candidates joined the SIC after

their party lost its electoral symbol, adding that the ECP also raised no objections to the above independent returned candidates joining the SIC.

It contended that the fundamental premise of the proportional representation system for allocating reserved seats for women and non-Muslims, as outlined in Article 51(6)(d)(e) and Article 106(3)(c) of the Constitution, 1973, does not hinge on whether a political party submits candidate lists for reserved seats before the general election or whether the party contested the election.

Instead, the party asserted that the core constitutional basis for the right to reserved seats under the proportional representation system is determined by the "total number of general seats secured by each political party from the province concerned in the National Assembly" or the "total number of general seats secured by each political party in the provincial assembly."

Pak CJ slams panel for probe into extremist group-led sit-in

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Chief Justice Faez Isa on Monday slammed a fact-finding commission set up to investigate the extremist group Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan's 2017 Faizabad sit-in, saying that apparently, the committee's "mandate was to acquit" former ISI chief Faiz Hameed "by going out of the way".

Isa's remarks came as a three-member bench of the Supreme Court took up a set of review petitions filed against its 2019 judgement in the Faizabad sit-in case involving the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). The Faizabad Dharna Commission was formed in November last year to investigate the TLP's 20-day sit-in, which paralysed life in both Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

The extremist religious party was protesting alleged changes in the oath of lawmakers. A Supreme Court panel led by Justice Isa, years

before he took oath as the chief justice, in a landmark judgment in 2019 had ruled against the sit-in and directed action against those responsible for it. However, no action was taken to implement the judgment and instead, several review petitions were filed against it, while the then government led by jailed prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party filed a corruption case against Isa. The case was rejected by the top court and the review petitions remained pending until Isa became the Chief Justice last year and took them up for hearing.

Interestingly, the majority of the petitioners withdrew their review pleas. However, the bench insisted on the implementation of the original verdict and the government set up a commission to suggest fixing the responsibility and hold officials accountable.

A bench headed by Justice Isa and comprising Justice Irfan

Saadat Khan and Justice Naeem Akhtar Awan conducted the hearing on Monday after the report of the commission was submitted. The three-member commission was led by retired Inspector General Police Syed Akhtar Ali Shah with former Islamabad police chief Tahir Alam Khan and additional interior secretary Khushal Khan as its members.

Chief Justice Isa was not pleased with the report and said it was an effort to protect the former ISI chief, who had held talks with the protestors and also signed an agreement with them. "Why is this gentleman (Faiz) being acquitted in the report by going out of the way? Apparently, the commission's mandate was to acquit Faiz Hameed," the chief justice remarked during the hearing. He said it was very disappointing and a waste of the country's time because the commission failed to call anyone on behalf of the TLP who could have helped the commission.

Chad holds prez polls after years of military rule

N'Djamena (Chad): Voters in Chad headed to the polls on Monday to cast their ballot in a long delayed presidential election that is set to end three years of military rule under interim president, Mahamat Deby Itno. Deby Itno seized power after his father who ran the country for more than three decades was killed fighting rebels in 2021. Last year, the government announced it was extending the 18-month transition for two more years, which provoked protests across the country.

There are 10 candidates on the ballot, including a woman. Analysts say Deby Itno is expected to emerge among the front runners. The main opposition figure Yaya Dillo, the current president's cousin, was killed in February in circumstances that remain unclear. "For years now, we've had to cope with the high cost of living, without any solution," said Adoumadi Jean, a teacher at a state secondary school in Moya-Chari province, in an interview with The Associated Press.

'Gulf Kingdom considers Pak high priority biz opportunity'

Islamabad (PTI): A senior Saudi official on Monday said that the oil-rich Gulf Kingdom's government and companies consider Pakistan a high priority economic, investment and business opportunity. Saudi Deputy Investment Minister Ibrahim Almutairi made the remarks while addressing a two-day Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Investment Conference, which began here on Monday. A 50-member Saudi business delegation is in Pakistan to attend the event. Almutairi said his country "believes in the economic potential of Pakistan" including its demography, location and natural resources, state-run Radio Pakistan reported. He said Pakistan is a major strategic partner for Saudi

Arabia. Referring to the "fraternal ties" rooted deep in common faith, culture and shared values, the official said, "we want to see Pakistan as one of our leading international partners." The Saudi minister said that "the gathering provides an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the great opportunity available for investment in Pakistan."

He expressed his confidence that the public and private sectors of both the countries can take their partnership to the next level. Almutairi mentioned that Saudi Arabia is a home to about two million Pakistanis who have contributed significantly to the Gulf Kingdom's vision 2030. On his part, Finance Minister Muhammad

Aurangzeb expressed the government's "commitment to fully facilitate the private sector to take the country towards export-led growth".

The Pakistan government was focused on bringing foreign direct investment to uplift various sectors, he said. Giving an overview of the country's economic situation, the finance minister claimed it was on a positive trajectory. He said that the cash-strapped country's current account deficit will be less than a billion dollars during the ongoing fiscal year. He said the country's foreign exchange reserves have risen to \$9 billion, adding that the local currency was stable over the last ten months while the inflation was down to roughly seventeen percent.

New vaccine may be effective against all coronaviruses

PTI ■ LONDON

A team of scientists from the world's leading universities have developed a new all-in-one vaccine that they hope can protect humans against a broad range of coronaviruses, including ones that are yet to emerge.

The research published in 'Nature Nanotechnology' on Monday is based on a new approach to vaccine development called "proactive vaccinology", where scientists build a vaccine before the disease-causing pathogen even emerges, which has shown promising results in mice. The study by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK and Caltech in the US says the vaccine works by training the body's immune system to recognise specific

regions of eight different coronaviruses, including SARS-CoV-2 which caused the COVID-19 outbreak, and several that are currently circulating in bats and have potential to jump to humans and cause a pandemic. "Our focus is to create a vaccine that will protect us against the next coronavirus pandemic, and have it ready before the pandemic has even started," said Rory Hills, a graduate researcher in the University of Cambridge's Department of Pharmacology and first author of the report.

For example, the new vaccine does not include the SARS-CoV-1 coronavirus, which caused the 2003 SARS outbreak, yet it still induces an immune response to that virus. "We've created a vaccine that provides protection against a

broad range of different coronaviruses — including ones we don't even know about yet," said Hills.

Key to its effectiveness is that the specific virus regions the vaccine targets also appear in many related coronaviruses. By training the immune system to attack these regions, it gives protection against other coronaviruses not represented in the vaccine, including ones that haven't even been identified yet.

"We don't have to wait for new coronaviruses to emerge. We know enough about coronaviruses, and different immune responses to them, that we can get going with building protective vaccines against unknown coronaviruses now," said Professor Mark Howarth in the University of Cambridge's Department of

Pharmacology, senior author of the report.

"Scientists did a great job in quickly producing an extremely effective COVID vaccine during the last pandemic, but the world still had a massive crisis with a huge number of deaths. We need to work out how we can do even better than that in the future, and a powerful component of that is starting to build the vaccines in advance," he said. The new 'Quartet Nanocage' vaccine is based on a structure called a nanoparticle — a ball of proteins held together by incredibly strong interactions. Chains of different viral antigens are attached to this nanoparticle using a novel "protein superglue". Multiple antigens are included in these chains, which trains the immune system to target spe-

cific regions shared across a broad range of coronaviruses. The latest study demonstrated that the new vaccine raises a broad immune response, even in mice that were pre-immunised with SARS-CoV-2. The new vaccine is much simpler in design than other broadly protective vaccines currently in development, which the researchers believe should accelerate its route into clinical trials. The underlying technology that the scientific collaboration has developed also has potential for use in vaccine development to protect against many other health challenges. It is said to improve on previous work, by the Oxford and Caltech groups, to develop a novel all-in-one vaccine against coronavirus threats.

India's service activity growth in April among fastest in 14 years: PMI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's services sector growth leaped slightly in April but growth of new business and output remained sharp and among the fastest in 14 years amid favourable economic conditions and strong demand, a monthly survey said on Monday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services Business Activity Index fell from 61.2 in March to 60.8 in April, highlighting one of the strongest growth rates seen in just under 14 years. Survey members attributed the latest upturn in output to favourable economic conditions, demand strength and rising intakes of new work. In the Purchasing Managers'

Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. "India's service activity rose at a slightly softer pace in April, backed by a further rise in new orders, with a notable strength in domestic demand," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC. In addition to buoyant domestic demand, firms noted new business gains from several parts of the world, which collectively underpinned the second-quickest upturn in international sales since the series started in September 2014. On the job front, a few service providers in India showed an increased appetite for new hires



in April, amid rising inflows of new business. However, several companies indicated that payroll numbers were sufficient for current requirements, and the rate of job creation was marginal and softer than that seen at the end of the previous fiscal year. "In response to increased new orders, firms expanded their staffing levels, though the pace of hiring growth decelerated," Bhandari said. On the price front, wage pressures and higher food prices meanwhile led to another increase in cost burdens, which firms partially passed on to their customers. "Input costs continued to rise sharply, albeit slower than in March, but resulted in squeezed

margins for service firms, as only part of the price rise was passed on to clients through output charges," Bhandari said. Meanwhile, confidence among service providers towards the year-ahead outlook for business activity improved to a 3-month high. Marketing efforts and efficiency gains, alongside plans to price competitively and predictions that demand conditions will remain favourable, boosted optimism, the survey said. Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite PMI Output Index moderated to 61.5 in April, from 61.8 in March, the latest reading was one of the highest seen in close to 14 years and signalled a substantial rate of expansion

across the private sector. "In terms of overall activity, aggregate output across both the manufacturing and service sectors rose significantly in April, albeit at a slightly slower pace, indicating sustained health in these sectors," Bhandari said. During April, manufacturers continued to note a stronger increase in new business intakes than service providers. Aggregate sales rose sharply, and at one of the fastest rates since mid-2010. Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices. Weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors according to official GDP data.

Sensex closes flat, Nifty slips on profit taking by investors



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex closed almost flat in a range-bound trade on Monday as investors booked profits in index heavyweights amid high valuation concerns. The 30-share BSE Sensex edged up 17.39 points or 0.02 per cent to settle at 73,895.54. The barometer hit a high of 74,359.69 and a low of 73,786.29. The broader NSE Nifty declined 33.15 points or 0.15 per cent to close at 22,442.70. From the Sensex basket, Kotak Mahindra Bank jumped 5 per cent after the company reported a 25 per cent growth in its March quarter net profit at Rs 5,302 crore, limited by a drop in the core income due to narrow interest margins. Tata Consultancy Services, Hindustan Unilever, Mahindra & Mahindra, Sun Pharma, Tech Mahindra and IndusInd Bank were among the other major gainers. Titan tanked 7 per cent after its March quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. State Bank of India, NTPC, Power Grid, Bajaj Finance and Larsen & Toubro were the other laggards. The domestic indices traded in a range-bound manner, said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. "The broader indices also witnessed major selling

pressure due to valuation concerns and profit-booking," he added. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.80 per cent to USD 83.62 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,391.98 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory. Japan and South Korea's markets were closed for the holidays. European markets were trading with gains. Wall Street ended with significant gains on Friday. Billionaire investor Warren Buffett said that the Indian market has "unexplored" opportunities which his conglomerate holding company, Berkshire Hathaway, would like to explore "in the future." Buffett's remarks came at Berkshire's annual meeting on Friday when Rajeev Agarwal of DoorDarshi Advisors, a US-based hedge fund that invests in Indian equities, asked him about the possibility of Berkshire exploring in India, the world's fifth-largest economy. The BSE benchmark dropped 732.96 points or 0.98 per cent to settle at 73,878.15 on Friday. The NSE Nifty also declined 172.35 points or 0.76 per cent to 22,475.85.

FADA, Frost & Sullivan team up for study to analyse domestic PV segment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile dealer's body FADA on Monday said it has joined hands with Frost & Sullivan for a study to analyse various aspects of customer journey, encompassing sales, after-sales and product quality across the domestic passenger vehicle industry. The Customer Experience Index (CEI) study will target various segments like hatchbacks, sedans, SUVs, EVs and luxury vehicles, utilising a detailed questionnaire to capture insights from 8,000 participants across 26 cities. The study would include seven metropolitan areas, 16 tier-2 cities and three tier-3 locations, ensuring a broad and inclusive data set that spans the diverse Indian landscape.

"By incorporating this customer experience index survey, we are broadening our analytical scope to encompass all facets of the Indian automobile ecosystem, thereby providing a comprehensive voice and strategic vision for all stakeholders," FADA President Manish Raj Singhania said. The insights garnered from this expansive survey will directly inform and refine OEM strategies, facilitating tailored customer experiences that foster brand loyalty and satisfaction, he added. FADA Research & Academy Chairman Vinkesh Gulati said by integrating detailed assessments of sales, after-sales and product quality experiences from various vehicle categories, the body aims to provide OEMs and dealers with the insights necessary to elevate their service standards and product offerings. The results of the study are expected in September this year. "India is poised to witness exponential growth in the automotive industry driven by the rising middle-income and youth population, adoption of electric vehicles, increased investment in the Indian automotive industry and government policy impetus," Frost & Sullivan Global Managing Partner & Executive Board Member Aroop Zutshi stated.

BSNL to launch 4G services across India in August

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned BSNL will start rolling out 4G services across the country from August, using completely indigenous technology in line with the government's "Atmanirbhar" policy, according to official sources. BSNL officials claimed to have recorded peak speed of 40-45 megabit per second on the 4G network which has been rolled out in the premium spectrum band of 700 megahertz (Mhz) as well as in 2,100 Mhz band during the pilot phase. The company has rolled out 4G services in Punjab using indigenously developed technology by IT company TCS and State-run telecom research organisation C-DoT-led consortium and onboarded around 8 lakh subscribers. "The 4G core developed by C-DoT is performing very well in the BSNL network in Punjab. It was installed in July last year. It takes 12 month to prove the success of such complex technology but the C-DoT core has stabilised within 10 months. BSNL will launch atmanirbhar 4G technology across the country in

August," a senior government official, who did not wish to be named, told PTI. The core network is a collection of network hardware, devices, and software that provides fundamental services in a telecommunication network. Telecom regulator Trai in a recent paper explained core as part of a network that offers the functionality of aggregation, call control, switching, authentication, charging, gateway functionality, etc. TCS, Tejas Networks and government-owned ITI have bagged orders worth about Rs 19,000 crore from BSNL for deploying 4G network which is upgradable to 5G. In a recent earnings call, Tejas Networks Executive Director and chief operating officer Arnob Roy said BSNL's mobile network is getting deployed across zones. He said that wherever the C-DOT core is not available on the BSNL network, the equipment is getting integrated to the existing core. "When the C-DOT core gets deployed in those circles, in those zones, they will get parented to the C-DOT core as well. Tejas Networks Limited," Roy said.

Brand India more mature, fearless brand than it used to be

PTI ■ SANTA CLARA

India has made its mark as the startup capital of the world and "Brand India" has emerged as a more mature and fearless brand than it used to be two decades ago, a top marketing leader has said. India has made its mark in the startup nation category. So many great startup companies have come out of it and they have gone on to become mature businesses, Ajay Mangalani, a seasoned marketing leader in the rapidly evolving technology and SaaS industries, told PTI in an interview. "Brand India is passionate. Brand India is still hungry to make things, to build things, to create things. Brand India is also much more mature now..." said Mangalani, also the chief marketing officer of TIE Silicon Valley, on the sidelines of the TIECon, the largest gathering of tech entrepreneurs in the world. As many as 30 Indian startups participated in the recently concluded TIECon, organized by TIE Silicon Valley. "I envision the next generation of Indian entrepreneurship will be much more focused around research and will be risk takers... That level of grit and passion that the Indian community has, I have no



doubt that it is going to move in that direction of strong leadership as a startup nation," Mangalani said. An award-winning marketing leader, Mangalani for over two decades has helped Fortune 500 giants and high-growth pre-IPO AI and B2B SaaS companies break the scale barrier, crafting data-driven marketing strategies. Responding to a question, he said the world is taking note of India. "The world is taking note... India has become a value driven country as we have always been in terms of standing with our core values of trust, support, honesty, insight, and all of that. The world really appreciates where we are today," Mangalani said. India has done tremendously

well under the current leadership, especially in terms of development and digital transformation on the ground, which was crucial for the growth of both startups as well as traditional companies. Lauding Anita Manwani, the new president of TIE Silicon Valley, Mangalani said "She has a very clear vision about TIE, and she's a phenomenal operator and executor". TIE Silicon Valley, he said, is a bridge to the knowledge, the insights, the experience, and the power that comes with it. "... I think that the next generation of TIE is going to be focused on bringing in new blood, the new talent, the next generation of entrepreneurs and providing them the connectivity and growing them from there," Mangalani said.

Rupee falls 5 paise to close at 83.50 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee pared its initial gains and settled for the day 5 paise lower at 83.50 (provisional) against the US dollar, weighed down by elevated crude oil prices. Forex traders said a weak trend in domestic equities also dented investor sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 83.43, then touched an intra-day high of 83.42 and a low of 83.50 against the greenback. The rupee finally settled at 83.50 (provisional) against dollar, registering a fall of 5 paise over its previous close. On Friday, the rupee inched up 1 paise to settle at 83.45 against the US dollar. Forex traders said US dollar demand



from importers and a recovery in crude oil prices weighed on the rupee. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on the rise in risk appetite in global markets. However, any recovery in crude oil prices may

cap sharp upside. Any renewed geopolitical tensions in the Middle East may also weigh on rupee at higher levels," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 83.70, Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent higher at 105.09. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.80 per cent to USD 83.62 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 17.39 points, or 0.02 per cent, to settle at 73,895.54 points. The Nifty fell 33.15 points, or 0.15 per cent, to close at 22,442.70 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Friday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,391.98 crore, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, India's forex reserves dropped USD 2.412 billion to USD 637.922 billion as on April 26, in the third consecutive weekly decline in the reserves, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had declined USD 2.28 billion to USD 640.33 billion. On the macroeconomic front, the seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services Business Activity Index fell from 61.2 in March to 60.8 in April, highlighting one of the strongest growth rates seen in just under 14 years.

Indian airlines to have 50 per cent market share in international passenger traffic by FY'28: CRISIL

PTI ■ MUMBAI

As much as half of the country's international air passenger traffic is expected to be catered by Indian airlines by financial year 2027-28, credit ratings agency CRISIL said on Monday. The share of Indian airlines in international passenger traffic, including originating or terminating as well as the traffic transitioning through the country, is seen surging 700 basis points to around 50 per cent by 2027-28, from 43 per cent in the previous fiscal, it said. The improvement would be driven by Indian airlines deploying additional aircraft and adding new routes in the international segment, as well as their inherent advantage of superior domestic connectivity compared with foreign carriers, CRISIL Ratings said in its report.



The report noted that business profiles of Indian carriers will strengthen as a result of their rising share in international traffic, which is more profitable than the domestic segment. India's international passenger traffic grew to around 70 million in fiscal 2024, from a low of 10 million in pandemic-hit fiscal 2021, and has surpassed the pre-pandemic level, according to CRISIL.

The share of Indian airlines, which was rising steadily earlier, picked up pace since the pandemic, it said. "A noticeable shift in spending patterns has emerged after the pandemic, as evident in the increasing inclination of Indians towards international leisure travel. "Increasing disposable incomes, easing visa requirements, growing number of airports and enhanced air travel

connectivity are boosting international travel," said Manish Gupta, Senior Director and Deputy Chief Ratings Officer at CRISIL Ratings. The government's focus on making India a hub for tourism is also expected to provide a fillip to inbound traffic. Thus, international passenger traffic is likely to clock a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10-11 per cent over the next four fiscals, against a mere 5 per cent CAGR in the four years prior to the pandemic, he added. Indian airlines have added 55 new international routes over the past 15 months, taking their tally beyond 300, it said. These include direct flights originating from additional cities to popular long-haul destinations in the United States, Europe and Australia, effectively reducing flying time and eliminating layovers, CRISIL said.

P note investments surge to near six years high at ₹1.5 lakh crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investments through Participatory notes in the Indian capital markets reached Rs 1.5 lakh crore at the end of February, making it the highest-level in nearly six years, driven by a strong performance of the domestic economy. The latest data includes the value of P-note investments in Indian equity, debt, and hybrid securities. Participatory notes (P-notes) are issued by registered foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) to overseas investors who wish to be part of the Indian stock market without registering themselves directly. They, however, need to go through a due diligence process. According to the latest data from markets regulator Sebi, the value of P-note investments in Indian markets — equity, debt, and hybrid securities — stood at Rs 1,49,517 crore at the end of



February compared to Rs 1,43,011 crore at the end of January. The amount has reached the highest-level since June 2017, when investment through the route stood at Rs 1.65 lakh crore, data with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) showed. The growth in P-notes generally aligns with the trend in FPI flows. When there is a global risk to the environment, investment through this route increases, and vice-versa.

Market experts said that influx in February can be attributed to robust corporate earnings and positive economic growth trends observed during the December quarter. India's economic growth accelerated to 8.4 per cent in the third quarter of 2023-24, mainly due to good performance by the manufacturing, mining & quarrying and construction sectors. Of the total Rs 1.5 lakh crore invested through this route till February, Rs 1.27 lakh crore was invested in equities, Rs 21,303 crore in debt, and Rs 541 crore in hybrid securities. In addition, assets under custody of the FPIs grew to Rs 68.55 lakh crore in February-end from Rs 66.96 lakh crore in the preceding month. Meanwhile, FPIs invested a net sum of Rs 1,539 crore in the Indian equities and Rs 22,419 crore in the debt market in February.

Indonesian delegation appreciates The Cottage



New Delhi: Retired Air Marshal Donny Ermawan, Ministry of Defence, Republic of Indonesia led a delegation to "The Cottage" at Janpath and appreciated the diverse range of ethnic crafts of India under one roof. While going around the highly impressive wide variety of product categories, he expressed his keen interest in evolving models for growth of cottage industries of both the India & Indonesia. Seen in the picture is Anil Rajak, Addl. General Manager, the Cottage explaining the importance and intricacy of Filigree Craft from Orissa to the delegates. PMS

Rublev overcomes fever and praises doctors after winning Madrid Open for the 1st time

AP ■ MADRID

Despite sleepless nights struggling with a fever, Andrey Rublev found a way to fight back and win the Madrid Open for the first time. Rublev was feeling sick all week but rallied to beat Felix Auger-Aliassime in three sets on Sunday and clinch his second Masters 1000 title. Rublev won 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 after Auger-Aliassime double-faulted on the last point of the final at the clay-court tournament in the Spanish capital. "I would say this is the most proud title of my career," Rublev said. "I was almost dead every day. I was not sleeping at night. The last three, four days I didn't sleep." Rublev gave "full credit to the doctors," who were "doing some tricky things" just to make sure he could play. "I have no words," the eighth-ranked Rublev said. "If you knew what I had been through in the past nine days you would not imagine that I would be able to win a title." The 26-year-old Russian won his first Masters 1000 title at Monte Carlo last year. Auger-Aliassime was playing in his first final at this level. Rublev entered Madrid on a four-game losing streak after early exits at Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo and Barcelona. One of his victories in



Madrid came in the quarterfinals against home-crowd favorite Carlos Alcaraz. He now has 16 career titles, and two this season after Hong Kong in January. He had arrived with a 5-1 record against Auger-Aliassime, including a win in their sole matchup on clay.

Auger-Aliassime's path to the final saw second-ranked Jannik Sinner withdraw because of an injury ahead of the quarterfinals, and Jiri Lehecka retired against the Canadian in the first set of the semifinals. Other injuries hit the men's draw in Madrid, starting with Novak Djokovic's withdrawal before

the tournament. Daniil Medvedev retired in the quarterfinals, while Alcaraz was hampered by a sore right arm and Rafael Nadal bowed out of what was likely his last appearance in his home country. Iga Swiatek won the women's title for the first time in her career on Saturday.

Klopp keeps the drama going to end as Liverpool beats Spurs 4-2

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

The smile is back on Jurgen Klopp's face - even if his Liverpool players seem intent on testing his nerves right to the end.

The Premier League title may be all but beyond the Merseyside club, but that doesn't mean the drama is over for Klopp, who will step down at the end of the season.

Last week he was arguing on the sideline with Mohamed Salah as Liverpool effectively dropped out of the title race. And while Salah opened the scoring in a 4-2 win against Tottenham at Anfield on Sunday, it was Harvey Elliott who appeared to bring the broadest smile to Klopp's face with a wonderful long-range goal in what looked like being a cakewalk for Klopp's team.

"What a goal," the Liverpool manager said. "In the game you only see it flying in and I thought, That was a good shot." The goal I saw afterwards, there was not a lot of space left or right. It went exactly where it should be. Top goal!"

Elliott's strike, after goals from Salah, Andy Robertson and Cody Gakpo, fired Liverpool into a 4-0 lead before the game had even reached the hour mark. What followed was the unlikeliest of fightbacks from Spurs that might have made this another frustrating day in what has ultimately been a disappointing finale for Klopp at the end of nearly nine trophy-filled years.

Goals from Richarlison and Son Heung-min made it a much closer contest than it had ever looked like being. And it needed two outstanding saves from Alisson, a goal-line clearance from Joe Gomez and a VAR call to prevent it from being closer still.

"It's a little bit of a mirror of the season. Really, really, really, good until we were really rubbish and then, we were okay again," Klopp said. A nervy finish didn't stop the home fans from beckoning Klopp to produce his trademark post-match triple fist pump to the crowd after his penultimate home game in charge, with Feyenoord coach Arne Slot set to take over next season.

Mathematically, at least, it is not over for third-place Liverpool, which sits five



points adrift of leader Arsenal with two games remaining. But, in reality, a late-season slump has killed Klopp's hopes of walking away with a second Premier League crown of his reign.

His team had been heavily rebuilt over the past two seasons and was not expected to contend at the top so soon. But this season at one point offered Liverpool the hope of a quadruple of trophies. Now it feels like it is ending on an underwhelming note.

Still, Klopp, who delivered the English League Cup in February, will walk away from a team that is on the up and leave his successor with plenty of young talent to work with. The 21-year-old Elliott is a prime example and he showcased his ample potential with an assist and a goal as Liverpool threatened to run riot.

His perfectly placed curling cross provided Gakpo with the simple task of heading in Liverpool's third and then he swept an unstoppable shot from around 20 yards (meters) into the top corner and beyond Tottenham goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario.

"Harvey is exceptional. Still so young. So exceptional," Klopp said. "In the midfield position, it was probably one of the top three performances from him today. The goal was exceptional. Everyone needs moments to gain more confidence. It was a good moment. That helps definitely."

VILLA SLIPS: A bad week for Aston Villa got worse after a surprise 1-0 loss at Brighton. Unai Emery's team lost 4-2 at home to Olympiakos in the first leg of their Europa Conference League semifinal on Thursday. And on a day when it could have secured its

place in next season's Champions League, it suffered another setback when Joao Pedro headed home a rebound in the 87th after seeing his penalty saved by Robin Olsen. Only Spurs' loss at Anfield prevented it from being a bigger blow after the result at the Amex Stadium had given Ange Postecoglou's team hope in its pursuit of Villa in fourth. But Villa still missed out on the chance of making certain of a top-four finish.

CHELSEA ROUTS WEST HAM: Chelsea's troubled season could still end on something of a high after Mauricio Pochettino's team boosted its chances of European soccer next season with a 5-0 rout of West Ham. The win at Stamford Bridge moved Chelsea up to seventh in the standings and two points behind sixth-place Newcastle. Only the top six teams in the Premier League will be guaranteed a place in Europe next season.

"We need to keep this momentum and belief going," Pochettino said.

While Chelsea's exorbitant spending under U.S. Owners Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital was supposed to put the 2021 Champions League winner back in contention for the biggest prizes, qualification for Europe would represent progress after finishing in the bottom half of the table last year and another season of struggle this term.

After a morale-boosting 2-0 win against Tottenham on Thursday, Chelsea followed it up by thrashing West Ham. Nicolas Jackson scored twice in the second half after Chelsea had raced to a 3-0 lead by the break through goals from Cole Palmer, Conor Gallagher and Noni Madueke.

Mbappé plays his final CL game in Paris with PSG; defence back in spotlight

AP ■ PARIS

Mbappé plays his final CL game in Paris with PSG. But it's the defence that is back in the spotlight. No doubt Kylian Mbappé will be greeted with loud cheers and applause when he takes to the Parc des Princes pitch on Tuesday night. It will be his final Champions League match in the French capital in a Paris Saint-Germain shirt. Mbappé is leaving the club this summer after a seven-season stint, hoping the journey concludes with a Champions League triumph in Wembley on June 1. But first things first, as Mbappé tries to engineer a fightback in the second leg of their semi-final against Borussia

Dortmund, trailing 1-0 from the first leg in Germany last week.

The France striker was a disappointment in the first leg and PSG now expects a strong reaction from the club's all-time leading scorer to overturn the deficit, especially after he failed to score in his last two appearances against Dortmund.

"We're confident we'll come back from that score and qualify for the final," Mbappé said on Sunday, as quoted by French media.

In support of Mbappé, PSG has plenty of firepower upfront, with Ousmane Dembele, Bradley Barcola, Gonçalo Ramos or Randal Kolo Muani available.

Coach Luis Enrique has more worries in defence after former



Bayern Munich defender Lucas Hernandez was ruled out for the remainder of the season with an anterior cruciate ligament rupture that required surgery.

The injury was a tough blow for PSG, which has conceded 14 goals in the competition this season but finally stabilized the heart of its defence with the

pairing of Marquinhos and Hernandez.

After Hernandez came off injured last week against Dortmund and was replaced by Lucas Beraldo, the Brazilian substitute's lack of experience was obvious.

Luis Enrique will, however, have to consider giving him a starting role or put his trust in

Milan Skriniar, who is back from injury and lacks both competition and rhythm.

Another option would be to pair Danilo Pereira with Marquinhos to add strength and presence in the air, particularly on Dortmund's set pieces.

Solid defending will again be crucial for PSG, which faces a team with great attacking qualities and 11 different scorers on the European stage this season.

The winner will play Real Madrid or Bayern Munich in the final in London. The old rivals drew 2-2 in their semi-final first leg in Germany. PSG, which enjoyed a rest day over the weekend after wrapping up the Ligue 1 title, has never won Europe's top club competition.

AP ■ LONDON

Arsenal needs a favour from Tottenham in title race

Four straight losses — the team's worst run of results for 20 years. Two clean sheets since the end of October. Those looking at Tottenham Hotspur to provide a late twist in the Premier League title race are, given the current evidence, going to be disappointed.

Manchester City's May 14 trip to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, for its next-to-last game of the season, appeared to many the last possible stumbling block for the champions in their bid to reel in Arsenal and secure an unprecedented fourth straight title.

After all, not only have Spurs plenty to play for — they're still just about fighting for Champions League qualification — but they haven't lost, or even conceded a goal, against City in their four league meetings at Tottenham's new stadium

since it opened in 2019.

Arsenal, though, is surely losing hope of a favour from its north London neighbour. Similarly, Tottenham fans might be starting to lose hope that Ange Postecoglou is the man to bring a winning culture to the club without a trophy since 2008.

It all started well for the first-ever Australian to coach in the Premier League. Tottenham was top of the league in early November, unbeaten and playing the attacking football its supporters always crave.

No manager had ever taken 26 points from his first 10 games in the Premier League before Postecoglou came along with a high defensive line and an aggressive, front-foot style.

Postecoglou, it seemed, was the perfect antidote to Jose



Mourinho and Antonio Conte, pragmatic and defence-first coaches whose spells in charge of Tottenham

promised so much but ended so sourly. Fast-forward six months and it feels like the season cannot

end soon enough for Spurs, who are limping to the finish line, and Postecoglou, who is beginning to understand the

size of the task he took on almost a year ago.

"We need change. Change has to happen," Postecoglou said ahead of Tottenham's 4-2 loss at Liverpool on Sunday. It was a fourth defeat in a row, something that hasn't happened since those grim final days of Jacques Santini at Spurs in late 2004.

Over the past month, there has been a 4-0 loss at Newcastle, a 3-2 home loss to Arsenal when Tottenham was three goals behind at halftime, a 2-0 loss at Chelsea and then a defeat at Anfield that saw a lethargic-looking Spurs fall 4-0 down after 59 minutes.

And, this is the team Arsenal hopes can halt the City juggernaut next week?

Tottenham should still seal fifth place, and qualification for the Europa League,

because either side of the visit of City are matches against Burnley and already-relegated Sheffield United - the bottom two teams in the league.

Spurs are seven points behind fourth-place Aston Villa and four ahead of sixth-place Newcastle.

It raises the question of whether the first season under Postecoglou has been a success.

Spurs fans likely would have taken a fifth-place finish after seeing England captain and record scorer Harry Kane leave for Bayern Munich last August.

With Hugo Lloris and Eric Dier also departing during the season, a huge amount of experience was lost and it's in these tough final weeks of the season where that lack of senior leaders in the squad has been exposed.

It also seems that, as a whole, the fan base is still behind Postecoglou and his refreshing outlook, even if his insistence on sticking to his attacking principles can come across as naive as it is bold.

"I believe what I believe down to my core. I'll stand on the highest ground, die a noble death, believing in what I believe," he said.

"Maybe, the Premier League is a step too far. Who knows? Maybe, maybe - but I will still be on that hill, wounded, my dying breath saying, I believe, I do believe."

Whether Postecoglou will bring more balance to his managerial philosophy next year remains to be seen.

For the moment, Arsenal will just be praying that Tottenham - the team it wants to see lose any normal week of the season - can pull off an improbable victory over City to change the course of the title race ahead of the final round on May 19.



Frank Nsubuga set to become oldest player at this year T20 World Cup

PTI ■ KAMPALA (UGANDA)

Uganda off-spinner Frank Nsubuga is set to become the oldest cricketer to play in the upcoming T20 World Cup at the age of 43. On Monday, the Uganda Cricket Association announced a 15-member squad for the marquee event set to be held in the Americas from June 2, the nation's first-ever appearance in the main round of the competition.

Riazat Ali Shah will lead the side, while Riazat Ali Shah has been named his deputy. Reserve players: Ronald Lutaaya and Innocent Mwebaze.

Namibia, to seal their berth.

They will get their campaign underway versus Afghanistan on June 3 in Guyana, having been clubbed in Group C, which also includes New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and hosts West Indies.

Uganda squad: Brian Masaba (c), Riazat Ali Shah (vc), Kenneth Waiswa, Dinesh Nakrani, Frank Nsubuga, Ronak Patel, Roger Mukasa, Cosmas Kyewuta, Bilal Hassun, Fred Achelam, Robinson Obuya, Simon Sesazi, Henry Ssenyondo, Alpesh Ramjani and Juma Miyaji.

Reserve players: Ronald Lutaaya and Innocent Mwebaze.

India's first ever hybrid pitch unveiled in Dharamsala

PTI ■ DHARAMSALA

India's first-ever 'hybrid pitch' was unveiled at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association (HPCA) stadium in a grand ceremony here on Monday.

The event was attended by IPL Chairman Arun Dhumal and cricket dignitaries including Paul Taylor, a former England cricketer and SIS's international cricket director.

"The introduction of hybrid pitches is set to revolutionize cricket in India, following their success in iconic venues like Lord's and The Oval in England," said Dhumal, who hails from Himachal Pradesh.

The hybrid pitch, which combines natural turf with synthetic fibres, promises enhanced durability and consistent playability, reducing the strain on ground staff and maintaining quality playing conditions.

With only 5% synthetic fibres, the pitch ensures that the natural characteristics essential for cricket are preserved.

Taylor expressed gratitude towards the HPCA for their collaboration on this pioneering project.

"With the ICC's approval, we're excited to see the positive impact these pitches will have on the sport, starting with



installations in Mumbai and Ahmedabad next," he said.

The 'Universal Machine', a critical component in installing the hybrid surface, was developed by SISGrass in 2017 and has been instrumental in the rollout of similar pitches across England's county cricket grounds.

This innovation aligns with the ICC's recent sanctioning of hybrid pitches for

T20 and one-day international matches, with plans to expand their use in four-day county championships starting this year.

The integration of technologies like SISAir, a root aeration system, further underscores the commitment to enhancing cricket infrastructure in India. This system improves the pitch's health and resilience, benefiting players with better and safer playing conditions.

Premier League referee to wear camera to offer insight into demands of being a match official

AP ■ LONDON

The referee for Monday's Premier League match between Crystal Palace and Manchester United will wear a camera on his head for a program that will be broadcast later this year offering an insight into the demands of being a match official.

The league said the head-mounted device — or "RefCam" as it is being called — worn by Jarrod Gillett at Selhurst Park will be integrated into the referee's usual communications system.

The technology is being used on a one-off basis, the league said, as part of filming for a short program promoting match officials. The footage will not be broadcast live.

"Fans will be able to view it later in the year as part of a program ... Aimed at offering further insight and education into the demands of officiating in the Premier League," the competition said.



MUST WIN GAME FOR DC

Delhi Capitals would require Rishabh Pant's killer instinct and Jake Fraser-McGurk's unbelievable flair in their bid to stay alive in the IPL playoff race when they square off against a rampaging Rajasthan Royals in a must-win game here on Tuesday.

The Capitals have been inconsistent so far, winning five and losing six of their last 11 games. While winning the remaining three games is a must for Pant's men, even that will only take them to 16 points which might not be enough to qualify for the last four stage of the tournament.

Apart from KKR (16 from 11 games) and RR (16 from 10 games), there are at least three teams, namely Chennai Super Kings (12 from 11), Sunrisers Hyderabad (12 from 10 games) and Lucknow Super Giants (12 from 11 games), who can go beyond the 16-point mark.

Given the situation, DC's best

All eyes on Fraser-McGurk and Pant against rampaging Royals



have new Aussie sensation Fraser-McGurk, who has gone off the boil in the last couple of games.

These two batters can individually change the complexion of a game, but DC will be wary of the Royals' bowling attack, which will pose a very different challenge at the Kotla compared to Sawai Man Singh.

Facing spinners of Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravichandran Ashwin's calibre isn't easy, and in veteran Sandeep Sharma, RR has a bowler, who can take pace off the deliveries.

The Rajasthan bowling attack has been able to maintain a decent economy rate but for DC, only Axar Patel (ER of 7.24) and Kuldeep (ER 8.45) have shown the wherewithal to stop opposition batters on their tracks.

It is time that Khaleel (ER 9.47) and Mukesh Kumar (ER 11.05) also show more consistency. South African pacers Lizaad Williams (ER 12 in 2 games) and Anrich Nortje (ER 13.36) have simply not looked the part.

The last time the two teams met was in Jaipur in March and DC then had lost control during the second half of their bowling innings with Riyan playing a superb innings.

The Royals batters would be licking their lips after having a look at the surface which can't get flatter than what it is right now.

Riyan, skipper Sanju Samson, the dashing Yashasvi, along with finishers Rovman Powell, Shimron Hetmyer and Dhruv Jurel give Royal a very scary look and DC bowlers can only pray that it doesn't turn out to

be 'Nightmare 2.0' for the hosts.

TEAMS:

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

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

We are focussed on following template set by Gambhir: Harshit Rana

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Young pacer Harshit Rana feels Kolkata Knight Riders are reaping the rewards by following the winning template set by two-time IPL winner and current mentor Gautam Gambhir as they continued their sensational run to grab the top position in the IPL points table.

Gambhir had led KKR to the IPL crown twice with the team also qualifying for the playoffs five times during his stint from 2011 to 2017. He had also guided KKR to the finals of the now-defunct Champions League T20 in 2014.

However, in the last seven years, KKR could reach the playoffs only twice.

Gambhir's return to the KKR camp as a mentor this year turned things around as the Kolkata-based franchise moved to the top of the table with 16 points following a dominating 98-run over Lucknow Super Giants — 8th win in 11 games — on Sunday



night. "Not only this match, this entire season we have been focussing a lot on the style of cricket that Gautam Gambhir wants us to play. He has a lot of knowledge on how to turn games in our favour and it helps us a lot in the middle," Rana said during the press conference.

"Like today he gave the bowlers a free hand, to find the length to bowl depending on the wicket, and not to try too many things," he added.

Rana (3/24 in 3.1 overs) played a crucial role in the win by taking three wickets while defending a target of 235.

"KKR read the wicket very well. The areas we had to bowl, we targeted the right places," Rana said.

IPL's biggest buy Mitchell Starc has proved expensive this season but Rana said the team management is not at all bothered about his economy rate and has faith on the Australian speedster.

"We have not cared even for a bit on how expensive Mitchell Starc has been in IPL 2024. We have full faith in him and he won us the last game and we have no doubts on him whatsoever.

"He has such a great influence on the younger players, he has such a huge wealth of knowledge," Rana said.

Rana said his dream is to play for India and is focussing on his performance.

"My aim is to play for India but whatever franchise I play for I try to give my best on the day of the match. I will be selected based on my performance and performance alone," Rana said.

We'd our plans but everything went Narine's way: Naveen: It was yet another sparkling fifty by Sunil Narine (81 off 39) which helped KKR post a massive 235 for six and LSG fast bowler Naveen Ul Haq conceded that all their plans failed against the star West Indian all-rounder.

"I think he played quite well. We had a plan of bowling

bouncers and yorkers and mixing it up and not being predictable against him. We did that but he played quite a brilliant innings to be honest," he said.

"It wasn't like he was slogging and everything was going top edge or anything like slicing the ball. He was properly middling it and that's the case like from the beginning of the season.

"He's been middling it. Everything going his way. So yeah, it was a great knock by him."

The Afghan seamer said LSG could have produced a better show with the bat but they can't dwell on defeat too much as they need to focus on the next game.

"The amount of games that we have played in Lucknow, I think this was the best wicket to bat on. We did not do the things in the chase that we did - say in the game at Chepauk, where the target was very high. It was not like bad or anything, there was nothing for the bowlers," Naveen said.

"Pressure is always there on whatever score you are chasing. Every team has a bad day, and we cannot keep focusing on that, we have to move on."

Versatility of Jadeja makes him class act, says Finch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

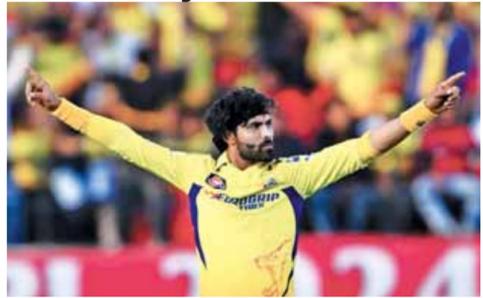
Former Australia skipper Aaron Finch has termed India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja a "class player" because of his versatility which brings in a lot of balance in all the teams that he represents.

Jadeja scored 40-odd runs and took three wickets in Chennai Super Kings' victory over Punjab Kings on Sunday.

"Ravindra Jadeja is such a versatile player, which makes him so effective. With the ball, he would have loved more wickets," Finch told Star Sports. "He's been economical, going at under eight per over throughout the tournament. Leading with three wickets today (Sunday), he showed he is an absolute class player."

Finch was impressed that Jadeja returned with fine figures of 3/20 in his full quota of four overs while defending a not-so-big total of 169.

"Three wickets for just 20 runs when the Punjab Kings were chasing a total of 170 odd runs



is just superb. It just shows why he's one of the best players in the world," the Australian said.

Finch also spoke highly about Kolkata Knight Riders' Sunil Narine. The 2021 World T20-winning Australian skipper feels that it is extremely difficult to contain Narine for a long period of time.

"It's truly remarkable, isn't it? I mean, seeing Sunil Narine stride out to open the batting. "Before this season, you're thinking, if we can just keep him quiet for a couple of balls,

he'll try and do something and play a big shot. But this season, he's not only getting off to explosive starts but also batting smartly and seizing control of the innings," Finch said.

The 35-year-old Narine smashed 81 off just 39 balls to power KKR to a comfortable 98-run win over Lucknow Super Giants on Sunday night.

In the process, Narine also became the fourth player to score more than 450 runs and take 10 plus wickets in a single IPL edition.

OTHER SPORTS

Indian women and men 4x400m relay teams qualify for Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NASSAU (BAHAMAS)

The Indian men's and women's 4x400m relay teams qualified for Paris Olympics after finishing second in their respective second-round heats at the World Athletics Relays here on Monday.

In the women's competition, the quartet of Rupal Chaudhary, M R Poovamma, Jyothika Sri Dandi and Subha Venkatesan clocked 3 minutes and 29.35 seconds to finish second behind Jamaica (3:28.54) in heat number one to book a Paris Games ticket.

Later, the men's squad of Muhammed Anas Yahya, Muhammed Ajmal, Arokia Rajiv and Amod Jacob finished with a collective timing of 3 minutes and 3.23 seconds to also finish second in their heat, behind USA (2:59.95). The top two teams in each of the three heats in the second round were to qualify for the Olympics to be held



from July 26 to August 11.

It was a sort of a surprise that the women's 4x400m team qualified for the Olympics as the focus was more on the men's 4x400m team which has broken Asian record in back-to-back global events — Tokyo Olympics and 2023 World Championships — as well

pulled out midway due to cramps. Arokia Rajiv took the place of Ramesh in the team and he ran the third leg after Anas and Ajmal.

The Indian men's 4x400m team was on third position when anchor-leg runner Jacob took the baton from Arokia but the Delhi boy ran a fantastic race to overtake his Mexican opponent and finish second.

It was not about the timing but more about Olympics qualification for the Indian men's team which ran 3:00.25 at the Tokyo Olympics for the then Asian record before bettering it during the 2023 World Championships with yet another Asian record of 2:59.05. Monday's timing was well below the team's best.

India had even given a mighty scare to formidable USA during the heat race at the 2023 Budapest World Championships before settling for the second place.

Meanwhile, India pulled out of the

mixed 4x400m relay second round heat races on Monday as Ramesh was not available after suffering muscle cramps while running the men's 4x400m first round heat on Sunday.

Ramesh had run both the mixed 4x400m and men's 4x400m races on Sunday. India had featured in mixed 4x400m relay in the Tokyo Olympics where the event made its debut.

The Indian women's 4x400m relay team will be returning to Olympics after missing out in Tokyo Games. The Paris participation will be the eighth time for the Indian women's 4x400m team, the first being in 1984 Games. For the men's 4x400m, this will be the fourth time India will be taking part in the Olympics, the first being in the 2000 Sydney Games.

With this, India now have at least 19 Paris-bound track and field athletes and the list includes defending javelin throw champion Neeraj Chopra among others.

The athletics events at the Games will begin on August 1.

A total of 70 teams have qualified for relay events at the Paris Olympics following two days of thrilling action at the World Athletics Relays Bahamas.

Jyoti to lead Indian junior women hockey team for Europe tour

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Defender Jyoti Singh was named the captain of the Indian Junior Women's team by Hockey India with midfielder Sakshi Rana as her deputy in a 22-member squad which will tour Europe from May 21 to 29.

India will play six matches across three nations against Belgium, Germany and two club teams in the Netherlands — Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push and Oranje Rood — from May 21 to 29.

"There's great camaraderie in the squad. All of us have gotten to know each other pretty well during the camp. Everyone here is very skilful and talented," Jyoti said in a HI release.

"It will be fun and a good learning experience playing abroad against other top-quality teams."

India will play their first match on May 21 against Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push in Breda before taking on Belgium at the same venue on May 22.

India will then play Belgium a second time but with the

latter playing host on this occasion on May 24. This will be followed by consecutive games against Germany on May 26 in Breda and May 27 in Germany respectively.

India will then return to Breda to play their final game of the tour on May 29 against Oranje Rood.

"Playing against good teams from other countries helps in developing an understanding of different approaches to the game. An exposure tour like this provides all of us with a tremendous opportunity to take our game to the next level," vice-Captain Sakshi Rana said.

TEAMS:

GOALKEEPERS: Aditi Maheshwari, Nidhi

DEFENDERS: Jyoti Singh (C), Lalanthluingi, Anjali Barwa, Puja Sahoo, Mamita Oram, NirruKullu

MIDFIELDERS: Kshetrimayum Sonia Devi, Rajani Kerketta, Priyanka Yadav, Khaidem Shileima Chanu, Sakshi Rana (VC), Anisha Sahu, Supriya Kujur

FORWARDS: Binima Dhan, Hina Bano, Lalrinpui, Ishika, Sanjana Horo, Sonam, Kanika Siwach.

AP ■ MILAN

Roma draws 1-1 against Juventus

The capital side took the lead just four minutes later in somewhat chaotic circumstances. Paulo Dybala pulled the ball back from the byline and Bryan Cristante's shot was blocked by Juventus defender Federico Gatti on the line but went straight to Lukaku for the tap in.

It was his first goal against Juventus from open play after netting from the spot against the Bianconeri for Inter.

Juve leveled in the 31st minute when Federico Chiesa whipped in a cross from the right and Bremer headed it in at the back post.

Chiesa came close to firing his team in front right at the start of the second half but his effort went off the right post and across the face of goal.

MILAN PROTEST: AC Milan's hardcore fans protested during the team's 3-3 draw against Genoa.

There was a strange atmosphere



at San Siro as the Milan ultras - who also unveiled banners calling for more ambition, communication and a clear transfer strategy — remained silent during the match and left 10 minutes before the final whistle.

Milan was leading 3-2 by then, after recovering from Mateo Retegui's early penalty, but conceded a comical third goal as Morten Thorsby's cross ricocheted off Retegui and home defenders Fikayo Tomori and Malick Thiaw. It went down as an own-goal by Thiaw. It was a sixth straight match without a win for Milan, which

nevertheless is second and mathematically assured of Champions League soccer next season.

RELEGATION BATTLES: Hellas Verona boosted its chances of Serie A survival with a 2-1 win over Fiorentina as fellow strugglers Empoli and Frosinone played out a disappointing 0-0 draw.

All three teams had been locked on 31 points ahead of the weekend, just two points above the relegation zone.

Verona was helped by Fiorentina coach Vincenzo Italiano opting to rotate his team ahead of the second leg of

the Europa Conference League semifinal on Wednesday. Fiorentina beat Club Brugge 3-2 in the first leg last week.

And the visitors gifted Verona the opener Sunday in the 13th minute when, in a mix-up with Fiorentina defender Luca Ranieri, goalkeeper Oliver Christensen failed to gather an innocuously seeming long ball and instead brought down Tijjani Noslin. Darko Lazovic converted the resulting penalty.

Gaetano Castrovilli, who had earlier hit the post, leveled shortly before halftime for his first goal since returning recently from a knee injury that had sidelined him for almost a year.

Verona restored its lead in the 59th when Nikola Milekovic could only send Darko Lazovic's cross as far as Noslin, who thumped it into the roof of the net.

Verona moved five points clear of 18th-place Udinese, which hosts Napoli on Monday.

Sassuolo was level with Udinese after surprisingly beating newly crowned Serie A champion Inter Milan on Saturday.

Cagliari inched four points clear after it conceded a late goal to draw 1-1 against Lecce after playing the entire second half with 10 men. Winger Gianluca Gaetano was shown a straight red card for a dangerous tackle on Lecce midfielder Ulber Ramadani shortly before halftime.

Cagliari had been leading through Yerry Mina's strike but Lecce laid siege to the goal after the break and Nikola Krstovic eventually leveled with six minutes remaining.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Farah Ghatrang holder of Indian Passport No: M5666154 issued at Bhubaneswar on 25/02/2015 and Permanent Resident of AT Motijhara Near Forest Colony Dhankanda Sambalpur PIN 768001 Odisha India and presently residing at Flat No 1004 Abou Jumeiza 2 AL Mareija ST Rofla Sharjah do hereby change my name from Farah Ghatrang to Farah (Given name) Siddiqui (Surname) with immediate effect