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VOTER FATIGUE DEEPENS IN PHASE IV

VOTER TURNOUT OVER 63 PER CENT IN PHASE IV POLLS SRINAGAR IMPROVES THREE DECADES VOTERS SCORE

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The intense voters' awareness programmes for increasing the turnout remained futile as the phase four general elections on Monday saw the average plummeting to over 63 per cent till 8.30 pm on Monday. The voter turnout in the first three phases was 66.14 per cent, 66.71 per cent and 65.68 per cent, respectively. Interestingly the good news came in from Jammu and Kashmir which saw voting after abrogation of Article 370. Srinagar recorded 36.88 per cent voter average. This figure is higher than Srinagar's turnout in 2019 when it saw a turnout of 14.43 per cent. The figures for 2014, 2009, 2004 and 1999 are 25.86 per cent, 25.55 per cent, 18.57 per cent and 11.93 per cent respectively. Elections were held in 96 constituencies spread over 10 States and UTs amid incidents of violence between Trinamool Congress and BJP workers in West Bengal, while YSRCP and TDP cadres came to blows at multiple locations in Andhra Pradesh as well as reports of poll boycott in some Uttar Pradesh villages. Besides, there were also reports of EVMs malfunctioning at some booths in West Bengal and Odisha. This schedule was a critical round for the Congress and not much for the BJP. According to the Election Commission, polling was held smoothly and peacefully. With the fourth phase, the polling for the 379 out of 543 parliamentary constituencies has been completed. Interestingly, amid the Congress demand to vote for NOTA, voter turnout in Indore was recorded 56.53 per cent, lowest in Madhya Pradesh where the Congress nominated candidate withdrew from the polls. West Bengal witnessed over 76.02 per cent turnout, the highest among all States polling. Among other States, Andhra Pradesh recorded



Voters display identity cards while standing in queue to cast their votes during the phase IV of general elections, in Berhampur, Odisha, on Monday

PTI

68.16 per cent polling, Bihar 55.92 per cent, Jharkhand 63.50 per cent, Madhya Pradesh 68.90 per cent, Maharashtra 52.93 per cent, Odisha 63.85 per cent, Telangana 61.54 per cent and Uttar Pradesh 58 per cent. In Telangana, Hyderabad which is considered a stronghold of Asaduddin Owaisi, witnessed 39.17 per cent polling which is lowest in the State. In Bengal, where violence marred previous rounds of voting, a Trinamool Congress worker was killed in a crude bomb attack. The incident took place in the Bolpur Lok Sabha constituency, mere hours before polling was scheduled to begin. Amid claims of West Bengal CEO that voting has been peaceful so far, clashes broke out between supporters of TMC and BJP in Monteswar's Susunia area of Bardhaman-Durgapur seat around noon, as BJP candidate Dilip Ghosh was on his way to a polling booth following complaints of booth jamming. Ghosh was allegedly heckled by the TMC activists. BJP candidate in Telangana's Hyderabad Lok Sabha seat K

Madhavi Latha was booked by election authorities after a video clip surfaced online in which she was purportedly seen asking burqa-clad women voters to show their faces to compare with the photo identity cards. Latha and Owaisi are facing off in Hyderabad, which the latter won by a sizeable margin in the last Lok Sabha elections. The YSRCP alleged that party agent Suresh Reddy was stabbed at Mandi Krishnapuram village in Chittoor's Gudipala mandal. It also alleged that TDP supporters attacked party member B Anji Reddy at Aravallipadu in the Darsi constituency. Polling for 175 Assembly seats and 25 Lok Sabha constituencies in the coastal state is taking place simultaneously. TDP MLC Mohammed Ahmed Shariff wrote a letter to Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena, complaining about alleged attacks by YSRCP cadres on TDP supporters at Rentala village in Rentichintala mandal of Palnadu district. In Jharkhand, security forces

thwarted an attempt by Maoists to obstruct voter access to polling booths by felling a tree and blocking a road leading to remote Sonap and Morangpanga areas of West Singhbhum district. Khunti in Jharkhand recorded highest voter turnout of 68.40 per cent followed by Singhbhum at 68.00 per cent while Palamau recorded lowest at 60.59 per cent Samastipur seat in Bihar recorded highest voter turnout of 58.32 per cent followed by Ujaipur at 57.50 per cent while Munger recorded lowest at 53.41 per cent. Voting was progressing peacefully in Jammu and Kashmir where three generations of the Abdullah family cast their vote in the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency. However, a number of displaced Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu were unable to cast their vote as their names were missing from the electoral rolls. Even as KPs lined up across special polling stations in Jammu amid tight security, several of them had to return without casting their vote.

THE PIONEER REPORTS FROM GROUND ZERO WEST BENGAL

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Stray incidents of violence marked the fourth-phase polling in West Bengal's eight constituencies that went to the polls on Monday, with a little more than 75 per cent voter turnout reported by the Election Commission of India. The EC said the polling percentage could increase by a few percentage points in the final count. While Behrampur — from where Pradesh Congress president Adhir Chowdhury is contesting against TMC's Yusuf Pathan — Krishnagar, Ranaghat and Burdwan East was comparatively peaceful with a couple of incidents of "stick-fighting" being recorded from Krishnagar. Some areas of Burdwan-Durgapur seat from where former BJP State president Dilip Ghosh is contesting against TMC's Kirti Azad witnessed sporadic violence, sources said. A Trinamool Congress supporter at Monteswar in Burdwan-Durgapur seat was hurt after he was allegedly beaten up by the Central forces guarding the booth. A similar incident took place at Burdwan city when Ghosh rushed to a polling booth hearing that the booth had been blocked by the TMC men. After he was returning from the area, local TMC workers resorted to brick-battling. In the melee the back windshield of one of the vehicles in his convoy got smashed and a CAPF jawan sustained injuries, sources said. He was rushed to the hospital. "The TMC goons do it every year... they capture booths and chase away voters... they do not allow people to vote year after year... as they are being stopped from doing so this year they are getting hostile," Ghosh said.

MAHARASHTRA



TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid a complaint by the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) about the alleged use of money to "purchase" votes in three constituencies, an average 52.75 per cent of 2.28 crore voters exercised their franchise till 5 pm in eleven Lok Sabha constituencies in the fourth phase of polls held on Monday. Except that the tribal-dominated constituency of Nandurbar constituencies in north Maharashtra witnessed 60.60 per cent voting till 5 pm, the polling in other ten constituencies ranged from 43.80 per cent to 58.65 per cent, a percentage that was in line with similar pattern of voting witnessed in the first three phases of Lok Sabha polls in the State. Apart from Nandurbar where high polling percentage was expected considering that the constituency had witnessed 66.77 per cent 68.65 per cent polling respectively in 2014 and 2019 polls, the other ten constituencies recorded the following polling percentages till 5 pm: Ahmednagar (52.27), Aurangabad (55.38), Beed (58.37), Jalgaon (51.98), Jalna (59.44), Maval (46.03), Pune (44.90), Raver (56.16), Shirdi (55.27) and Shirur (43.89).

In Odisha Polling for 4 LS, 28 Assly seats held peacefully

- 3 Presiding Officers suspended; arrest order issued against 2
- State records 63.85% voters' turnout by 6 pm



NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

The first phase of polling in Odisha for four Parliamentary constituencies and 28 Assembly seats passed off peacefully except a few incidents of violence in Ganjam and Nabarangpur districts. According to the Election Commission of India (ECI), 63.85% of voters exercised their franchise by 6 pm. The figure was most likely to go up significantly after the final computation. The ECI, meanwhile, found evidence of dereliction of duty by three Presiding Officers, two in Chhatrapur and one in Gopalpur Assembly constitu-

encies in Ganjam district, and suspended them. According to State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Nikunja Dhal, arrest orders against two of the suspended Presiding Officers were issued for "serious dereliction" of duty. The CEO did not elaborate the nature of "dereliction of duty" of the two officers. Sources said they were forcing voters to cast their ballots for the candidates of a particular party. The four Lok Sabha constituencies which went into the polls were Koraput, Nabarangpur, Kalahandi and Brahmapur. The major candidates who are in the LS fray include Koraput's Congress Lok Sabha member Saptagiri Ulaka, Pradeep Majhi of BJD (Nabarangpur) and Malavika Devi of BJP (Kalahandi seat). Despite being a sensitive area in Maoist-infested Sunabeda sanctuary, the Katingpani booth coming under the Nuapada Assembly constituency recorded 85% voter turnout.

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PUBLISHED BY DR SASMIT PATRA, GENERAL SECRETARY, BIJU JANAKA DAL

Naveen holds marathon campaigning in W Odisha

■ Urges people to bless BJD
■ Pandian says Odisha is ahead of Gujarat in various parameters

PNS ■ BARGARH

BJD supremo and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik along with his close aide VK Pandian on Monday conducted marathon campaigns at different places in western Odisha, including his second seat Kantabanji in Balangir district.

The Chief Minister addressed large gatherings at Bangomunda, Muribahal, Balangir and Bargarh throughout the day.

Addressing the gatherings, Patnaik said the people have no need to pay electricity bills from July 2024.

Hitting out Opposition BJP and Congress, Patnaik said, "The Opposition is lying. BJP leaders are shedding crocodile tears. Vote for me and BJD candidates. Bless me."

He spoke about his government's flagship schemes, including the Biju Swasthya Kalyana Yojana (BSKY), Mission Shakti, Mamata Scheme, LAccMI bus services, Yuba 'O' Scholarship scheme for students, school transformation under 5T,

Kalia Yojana for farmers and Madhu Babu Pension Scheme, among others.

The Chief Minister's posers like if the schemes are good or not and he and his party are good were met with thunderous applause from the audience. He urged people to vote for the BJD.

Pandian said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has visited Odisha after five years. He had visited the State in 2019 and now in 2024, hinting that the PM is visiting the State only during election time.

"The PM had promised to double paddy MSP. Is he doubling the paddy MSP?" he asked.

The Prime Minister is saying that the Ayushman Bharat scheme has not been implemented in Odisha. But you people will continue to get free health services under the State's BSKY scheme, the BJD leader said.

Targeting Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Pandian said Pradhan has disrespected the CM. He is fighting the elections climbing on the shoulders of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He would lose



his deposits, if he fights without the support and backing of Modi. "We will win 90 per cent seats in the first phase election being held on May 13," claimed Pandian.

Pandian claimed that Odisha is ahead of Gujarat in various parameters. He shared statistics, comparing various indices of Gujarat and Odisha with a comment, "Look who wants to make Odisha number one."

The BJD leader said it is ironic that even after two-and-a-half decades of the BJP rule in Gujarat, the situation there as compared to Odisha is quite dismal. In terms of malnutrition (children under five years who are underweight), he said, the rate is 30 per cent in Odisha whereas it is 40 per cent in Gujarat.

Pandian cited the National Health Family Survey data to say that the prevalence of anaemia

among women is 65 per cent in Odisha while it is 69 per cent in Gujarat. Whereas 64 per cent of children in Odisha are anaemic, the percentage is 80 in Gujarat.

He said Odisha fared much better than Gujarat in terms of immunisation with 90 per cent of children having been vaccinated compared to only 76.3 per cent in Gujarat.

"In terms of vaccination, while Odisha has seen more than 90 per cent of its population vaccinated, in Gujarat it is in a very pitiable state of record of 76.3 per cent," it stated.

In terms of bank account penetration for women in both States, the document mentioned that Odisha has over 86 per cent of women who have a bank account while in Gujarat, only 70 per cent of women have a bank account.

In Keonjhar ABDO's body recovered from rly tracks

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

The Government Railway Police (GRP) recovered the dead body of Harichandanpur ABDO Bidhubhans Jena (50) from the railway tracks near the Harichandanpur railway station in Keonjhar district on Monday morning.

Local residents had reported to the police about the mutilated body lying on the train line.

Though the exact cause of death was yet to be ascertained, locals suspected that someone killed the ABDO and dumped the body on the railway tracks.

A Harichandanpur police team arrived at the spot and informed the GRP, who reached there and seized the body in presence of the local Tehsildar and started an investigation.

However, when the mobile and sandals were found near the body, after the police examined them, it was found to be the ABDO of

Harichandanpur block, sources said.

Harichandanpur police station IIC Prafulla Barla said, "The body has severe injury marks on the head and other parts. As the body was found on the railway tracks, we informed the matter to the GRP for probe"

"The body was recovered and sent to the Anandpur Sub Divisional Headquarter Hospital for postmortem. No complaint from any one so far received. After post-mortem and inquiry the exact cause of death could be clear," said GRP official Sushant Kumar Sethy.

According to the preliminary investigation of police, the ABDO had boarded the Visakhapatnam-Tata Express at around 1.25 am on Sunday to go to Keonjhar. However, the discovery of his body on the railway tracks, just a short distance from the station, has shocked everyone.

Naveen, Pandian under sharp attack by BJP

Baijayant, Aparajita, Pratap, Manmohan, Dharmendra raise issues

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha BJP chief Manmohan Samal, party's national vice-president Baijayant Panda, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, former Union Minister and Baleswar MP candidate Pratap Sarangi and Bhubaneswar MP candidate Aparajita Sarangi on Monday fired salvos by raking up key issues-Odisha Asmita, deep fake videos, Parikrama project, Odisha governance and others.

Pratap Sarangi alleged that there is a big conspiracy behind the murder of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and CM Naveen Patnaik is to be blamed as the Home Department had withdrawn the security cover of Swamiji just before he was assassinated.

Aparajita Sarangi said the BJD is telling one thing that some BJP leaders including her opposed the

Jagannath Parikrama project. "I want to make it clear that BJP never opposes development. Rather, the party opposed the process and the State Government went on the back foot," she said. Sarangi also asked why Bhoomi Putra, a south Indian firm with no prior expertise, was entrusted by the Odisha Government to undertake the Parikrama project worth Rs 4,200 crore.

Making a veiled attack on VK Pandian, she said it has been five years that a person has hijacked the governance in Odisha. "We have respect for our CM but this Sana (younger) babu has isolated the CM from others. Be it Chief Secretary, DGP and others, nobody is allowed to meet CM without the younger babu's permission," said Sarangi.

Baijayant Panda said the government has been outsourced in Odisha. "The person, whom they (people of Odisha) had elected for 5 years, is being controlled like a puppet. Whenever we see the CM, we only see one person around him-be it in a helicopter or on the dais," said Panda.

Poll official killed in mishap Ex-gratia of Rs 15L announced by CEO

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) on Sunday announced an ex-gratia of Rs 15 lakh to the family of a government employee who was killed on election duty in Nabarangpur district.

Alekh Randhari, a Class-IV employee of a government school, was killed in a road accident near the Swami Vivekananda Vidyamandir in Nabarangpur on Saturday while he was on the way to a polling station for the first phase of the elections on Monday.

In another incident, a bus carrying polling personnel and EVMs overturned near Pitatali in Ganjam district on Saturday. The bus was transporting polling personnel along with EVM machines to Kharriaguda in the Chikiti Assembly segment in the district.

Brahmapur SP Sarthak Sarangi said that all the polling personnel and the EVMs were safe. The polling personnel were sent to their allotted booths by another vehicle.

NBW issued against Anubhav in Varsha's case

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Cuttack JMFC (MP, MLA) Court has issued a Non-Bailable Warrant (NBW) against Kendrapada MP Anubhav Mohanty.

The court's direction came in connection with the allegations levelled by his estranged wife actress Varsha Priyadarshini at the Purighat police station in the city on December 19, 2020.

In her complaint, Varsha has alleged that three persons, Anubhav Mohanty and his staffs Khagendra Sahoo and Sujit Dalai, were entering her room and were recording her pictures, videos and making objectionable remarks.

Based on the complaint filed by Varsha, a case under Sections 498 (A), 354, 509, 109 and 34 was registered and the court had accepted the case.



Subsequently, Anubhav had then filed a discharge petition stating that the allegations were false. After hearing, the court ruled that the matter would continue and time was fixed to frame charges against Anubhav and his two associates on May 10.

Anubhav did not appear and sought time for appearance owing to elections. The matter was to be heard on Monday (May 13); and as Anubhav did not appear and filed petition through his advocate, the court ordered the Purighat police station IIC to produce Anubhav and execute warrant by May 23, 2024.

Interview of the week

Buddhism originated in Odisha, not that Ashok brought it with him



SUGYAN CHOUDHURY



DR AJIT KUMAR TRIPATHY

Dr Ajit Kumar Tripathy, former Chief Secretary of Odisha, is a multifaceted personality with a knack for creative endeavours. He held key positions like Development Commissioner, CS and State Election Commissioner. After having had his Post Graduation in Political Science from the Utkal University, he had earned a PhD on "Empowerment of Tribals through Education". Later, he was conferred with a D.Lit. from the North Odisha University. His creative ensembles include short story collections like 'Ardushya Posaka', 'Sakala Nischaya Asiba', 'Akuha Itihaas' and 'Satya Ardhasatya'. Another popular book 'Gotie Nadi ra Duiti Dhara' is co-authored by popular writer Saroj Mishra. The dramatic rendering of his short stories 'Ocotopus' and 'Parajita Kalidas' were widely telecasted and broadcasted by Doordarshan and AIR. His spiritual creations comprise 'Jayadeva O' Srichaitanya', 'Srimad Bhagabat Geeta Bani' in five volumes. His contributions in English include 'Meghadootam of Kalidas' (verse), 'Gita Govindam of Sri Jayadev', 'Gautam Buddha and Kalinga', 'The Real Birth Place of Gautam Buddha' and 'New Horizons of Buddhism in Odisha'. He has also authored the entire Ramayana in 'Ramayana Katha' in two volumes, which has been widely acclaimed by readers. He has struggled, hoped and endured the struggle to prove that Jayadev of Gita Govindam fame and Gautam Buddha belong to the Odishan soil. He has also continued his epic struggle to rename the Souchana Bhawan as Jayadev Bhawan and to make Balipatna as 'Jayadev Constituency'. Immortalising the faded memory of Jayadev and making him a household name in Odisha is the singular contribution of Dr Tripathy besides conducting State-level celebrations on 'Akhaya Tritiya' on the very birthday of Jayadev that culminates after a memorable itinerary commencing from the Ananta Basudev temple to Puri via Kenduli, Kakatpur and Konark. He still follows writing and reading, which are his principal occupations now besides contributing articles regularly to various local news dailies and periodicals.

In an interview to **The Pioneer**, Dr Tripathy spoke to Sugyan Choudhury from his residence at Bhubaneswar.

How could you combine your literary pursuits with that of the hazards of your chequered administrative career?

Honestly speaking, I cannot be called as a prolific writer. I have only a few literary creations and not achievements. From the beginning, I was interested in writing short stories as it is my cup of tea. I have five collections of short stories during my entire career. I am not writing short stories now and have shifted to writing on philosophy and metaphysics, religion and on culture as these things will be useful for the younger generations. You should know that I have never compromised my service career for writing. Writing came to me when I was inspired by real life situations with the spontaneity to writing as and when the occasions arrived.

Could you tell us some major evidence by which you proved beyond doubt that Jayadev belongs to Odisha?

The first and foremost evidence is that Jayadev has mentioned in his book written by himself that the village where he was born is Kenduivilva. That Kenduivilva is none other than the village Kenduli of Baliaanta Balipatna area of Khordha district. Secondly, Jayadev's birthplace is beside the river Prachi with descriptions of nature which is depicted in the lyrical outburst in his book 'Geetavindam'. Legends lace the lands of the Prachi valley and temples dot her landscape. The innumerable references and allusions to these temples like Niali Madhab temple unmistakably point out that Jayadev's 'Geetavindam' was composed by the poet here at present-day Kenduli. Besides the above, we have invited prominent Bengali scholars and historians like Dr Satyakanta Sengupta and others who visited Kenduli of Odisha and the so-called claimed birthplace of Jayadev in West Bengal. Ultimately, the scholars of West Bengal along with the scholars of Dr Ashutosh Mukherjee museum candidly admitted at a New Delhi national seminar that Jayadev belongs to Odisha.

How could you prove that Gautam Buddha was born in Odisha?

There was no name of any place called Kapilavastu either in India or in Nepal before 1890. A man who was serving as a surveyor, who was neither an archaeologist nor a historian could manipulate things to create a name called Kapilavastu which came into vogue in books and records since those days after 1890. A German scholar who knew Brahmilipi could point out the mistake committed earlier. In reality, Kapileswar, a village near Bhubaneswar, is termed as Kapilavastu in later times. From old revenue records, it is revealed that Bhubaneswar, Balipatna, Baliaanta were called as LIMBAYAT PRAGANA, from which the word Lumbini was derived later on. Hence, Kapilavastu, i.e., Kapileswar and Limbayat Pragana, i.e., Lumbini are the real birthplace of Gautam Buddha which is very much adjacent to Bhubaneswar. Moreover, the Radhanagar excavations and such other excavations point out to the fact that Gautam Buddha was not born in Nepal and was born in Odisha. My books co-authored by historian Prafulla Tripathy and archaeologists Late Chandrabhanu Patel unmistakably proves beyond doubt that Gautam Buddha was born in Odisha. These books are 'Goutam Buddha and Kalinga', 'The Real Birth Place of Gautam Buddha' and 'New Horizons of Buddhism in Odisha'. Buddhism originated from Odisha and not that Ashok brought Buddhism with him.

Restoration of 3,000 acres of land at Sipasarubali in Puri was a resounding success in your administrative career. What is your opinion about it?

I was Settlement Commissioner, Commissioner of Consolidation and finally the Chief Secretary of the State. I had a thorough knowledge of the details of the land and was aware of the conundrums of Sipasarubali perpetuated by land grabbers and influential officers. I have taken it personally to rescue the land from the land grabbers and eventually succeeded without yielding to pressure and temptations and did my job to my fullest satisfaction without fear or favour, which resulted in restoration of 3,000 acres of land to the State Government. I should say this was all possible owing to the providence, power and sanction of the divine.

What is your message to the young generations of IAS officers?

I should say that they must keep their backbones straight. They must not bend or crawl. Here is only a service, the dismissal of which can only be done by the President of India. Hence, the service conditions and the rules provide all that is needed to maintain one's integrity without choosing to crawl when asked to bend. They should value integrity and honesty as the sinequonone for an ideal civil servant.

KLF Corner unveils book on Nandini

Eminent personalities discuss life, achievements, enduring impact of ex-CM

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Oxford Bookstore, Bhubaneswar was abuzz with literary enthusiasts and admirers alike as it hosted the much-anticipated book launch and discussion on

"Nandini Satpathy: The Iron Lady of Orissa" penned by acclaimed author Pallavi Rebbapragada. The event, organised by the Kalinga Literary Festival's (KLF) monthly community literary event, KLF Corner, marked a poignant tribute to the indomitable spirit and legacy of Odisha's first woman Chief Minister, Satpathy. The discussion was moderated by educationist and VC of DN Wisdom Tree Global School Panchami Manoo Ukil.

Eminent personalities, includ-

ing Nandini's son Tathagata Satpathy, and numerous others, graced the occasion with their presence, lending an aura of reverence and intellectual fervour to the proceedings. The insightful discussion delved deep into the life, achievements, and enduring impact of the formidable leader, shedding light on her unparalleled contributions to the socio-political landscape of Odisha and beyond.

Founder and director of Kalinga Literary Festival, Rashmi

Ranjan Parida expressed heartfelt sentiments on the occasion. "Her dedication to Odisha is unmatched, and through this book, we aim to immortalize her remarkable journey and unwavering commitment to public service," he said.

The event was executed and managed by coordinators, Kalinga Literary Festival, Debamitra Mishra and Ved Prakash Nayak and Oxford Bookstore Bhubaneswar manager Jagadish Behera.

Rahul to visit Balangir on May 15

PNS ■ BALANGIR

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi would visit Balangir and address a public meeting at Kosal Kalamandal here on Wednesday (May 15). This was announced to the media by Congress spokesperson Ajaya Bali here on Monday.

"Rahul Gandhi's visit will encourage youths and Congress workers to work hard further in the elections," says District Congress president Ashok Nanda. "People in Balangir are eagerly awaiting visit of Rahul Gandhi to listen from him. He is an inspiration for youths and his visit will motivate the Congress cadres to work hard for the party," said he.

Among others, Telangana Deputy CM Mallu Bhatti would also be present at Rahul's rally, said party Odisha in-charge Dr Ajoy Kumar.

2 Polling Officers suspended

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Two Polling Officers were suspended by the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) for dereliction of duty during the first phase of elections in the State on Monday.

Polling Officer Tejansu Shah engaged for voting in the Narla Assembly constituency under the Kalahandi Lok Sabha constituency was suspended.

Besides, another Polling Officer of the Brahmapur Parliamentary constituency was put under suspension for dereliction of duty, said CEO Nikunjia Bihari Dhal. Dhal also said that an incident of political violence was reported from the Chikiti Assembly constituency and police were alerted. The District Collector and the SP have been asked to take immediate action.

"We are monitoring the entire voting process from our webcasting room," he said.

Mamata never gave true respect to mother, sisters

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Monday addressed election meetings in West Bengal in support of BJP candidate from Medinipur Lok Sabha, Agnimitra Paul, BJP candidate from Ghatal Lok Sabha constituency. Hironmoy Chattopadhyay and BJP candidate from Shirampur Lok Sabha, Kabir Shankar Bose. During this, Chouhan lashed out at West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her party TMC, saying that this is a country where mothers, sisters and daughters are respected. This is the country of mother Kali. This is from the country of Durga Maiya. It is said in our place 'Yatra Naryastu Pujyante, Ramante Yatra Devta' meaning where women are

worshipped. Gods and Goddesses reside there. But Mamta Didi never gave true respect to mothers, sisters and daughters. Chouhan said that Mamata Didi should be ashamed that she has committed the sin of tarnishing the land of Bengal. Incidents like Sandeshkhali are happening here. People like Sheikh Shahjahan are playing with the honor and dignity of mother, sister and daughter and Mamata Banerjee is working to save them. The former Chief Minister said that this is not affection, this is cruelty. Affection is full of affection, love and intimacy, this is cruelty. If any wrongdoing is done against the daughters then they start saving the accused. The former CM said that TMC has come to mean break, kill, cut. The STD code here has

become syndicated, appeasement and polarization. Former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said in his address that I have brought the message of revolution for the people of Bengal. TMC has come to mean appeasement, mafia and corruption. Mamata Banerjee and TMC have ruined West Bengal. The land of West Bengal is the land where Maharishi Aurobindo Ghosh, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose were born. This is the land of Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Rabindranath Tagore. This is the land of the immortal revolutionary Khuridaram, who accepted the gallows to liberate Mother India. There is a need for a new revolution in West Bengal and that revolution is to uproot TMC. Mamata didi's peace will be

snatched away on 4th June. The public has decided that Mamata Didi is not going to come back. On June 4, we will work on the resolve to overthrow the TMC government in the state. Chouhan said that Bengal is known for its sweetness, but Mamata Banerjee has worked to poison the sweetness of Bengal. Mamta Didi is running a government of money, mafia and murder instead of mother, soil and manush. Sindoor Khela is a sacred festival in Bengal which is celebrated with enthusiasm by all the people, but Mamata government has done the work of destroying the demand of many sisters. While calling upon the public, the former CM said that they should raise their voice to uproot the government of mafias, corruption, murder and

the government which plays with the honor of mother and sister. Chouhan said that Lord Shri Krishna has said in Geeta that no matter how close a relative the person committing injustice is, it is the religion to kill him, today we can overthrow this government by killing him with the blow of vote. The former Chief Minister said that Mamata Didi and the TMC government have made West Bengal an identity of scams. I am amazed - SSC scam, Municipality scam, Lottery scam, Cycle scam, Saradha scam, Narada scam. Send rice to Modi ji and eat it, Mamata Didi! One who eats public money should not remain in the government. There are piles of notes in their houses. Mamta ji is tarnishing and ruining Bengal.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, his wife Seema Yadav and sons show their finger marked with indelible ink after casting their vote for the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh on Monday. Pioneer photo

Revolutionary change in cancer care at AIIMS Bhopal

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

AIIMS Bhopal in the battle against cancer, interventional radiology offers hope and newer avenues for treatment. The cutting-edge technique gaining momentum is liver tumor ablation, a minimally invasive procedure that is transforming the landscape of cancer care. With its ability to effectively target and eliminate tumors while sparing healthy tissues, tumor ablation stands as a major hope for patients and families facing this formidable disease.

Radiology procedure, a small needle (Electrode/ Antenna) was inserted directly into the liver tumour under image guidance. Activation of microwave energy destroyed the liver cancerous lesion and the entire treatment was completed in less than 30 minutes. The procedure was done by Dr. Aman Kumar, Associate Professor and Interventional Radiologist, under the guidance of Dr. Rajesh Malik, Professor, and Head of the Department of Radiology, AIIMS Bhopal. Unlike traditional surgery, which requires large incisions and lengthy recovery times, the tumour ablation procedure is minimally invasive, involving small punctures in the skin, through which specialized instruments are guided to the tumor site using imaging guidance by ultrasound or CT scans. This has less trauma to the body,

reduced risk of complications, and faster recovery for patients. Despite its remarkable benefits, awareness of tumor ablation remains relatively low. Raising awareness is therefore equally important to sensitize and to ensure that patients have access to the newly available better treatment options in cancer management. The Interventional Radiology Treatment Center at AIIMS Bhopal is providing specialized minimally invasive treatments for various complex vascular and nonvascular diseases and for advanced Interventional Oncology treatment. Executive Director and CEO AIIMS Bhopal Prof. (Dr.) Ajai Singh congratulated the treating team of interventional radiology and reemphasized the need for widespread awareness regarding the modern treatment facilities available at AIIMS Bhopal.

Alankrita Shukla gets 97.4 percent



STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Alankrita Shukla of DPS Bhopal scored 97.4 percent in the CBSE Higher Secondary examinations. She is from humanite stream. She scored 99 marks in History and Psychology out of 100 and 98 marks in political science out of 100.

Rewa police successfully recovers abducted 6-month-old boy

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Rewa police have succeeded in finding the six-month-old boy who was kidnapped from the college intersection on the night of May 7 and handing him over to his family. Police have arrested 11 accused in this case, while one accused is still absconding. Earlier on the night of May 7, a six-month-old child was sleeping near his parents at the college intersection when two accused picked him up and fled on the motorcycle. In this case, the child's family had informed Rewa police and lodged a complaint. Civil Line Police, showing promptness, registered a case under section 363,370,34 and started searching for the accused. Rewa police caught the accused from Mauganj and Kalyan in Maharashtra within five days and safely returned the

On the night of May 7, a six-month-old child was sleeping near his parents at the college intersection when two accused picked him up and fled on the motorcycle

child to his parents. To arrest the accused, the police took immediate action as soon as the information was received and blocked the city as well as the entire district. The teams arrested the motorcycle riding kidnappers Mohammad Salim and Atul Jaiswal residents of Mauganj were identified through CCTV. After identifying the accused, the police raided Mauganj and caught Salim from a deserted place. Salim revealed the entire incident upon interrogation. Investigation found that accused Nitin Soni had come to Mauganj with his wife Swati. Who along with his friend Mohammad Haroon, Mohammad Salim along with Muskaan Rawat, Devesh Jaiswal and Guddu Gupta planned the kidnapping. As part of the plan, they kidnapped a 6-month-old child and took him to Mumbai city in Maharashtra where Nitin and Swati sold the child to Amol Madhukar, Arvi alias Sejal and Pradeep Kolambay for Rs 8 lakh. Amol Madhukar and Sejal sold the same child to Shri Krishna Santram Patil for Rs 29 lakh. Amol works as an attendant in a well-known hospital in Mumbai, while his wife Arby works for a share trading company. Krishna Sant Ram Patil is a resident of Raigarh, Maharashtra. Even after many years of marriage, she did not have any child, so she along with the accused finalized a deal for the child for Rs 29 lakh. In the case of Rewa Police, Mohammad Salim Angari alias Aslam (19) resident of Mauganj, Mohammad Harun alias Mungeri (24) Mauganj, Diweesh Jaiswal alias Dada (24) resident of Mauganj, Muskaan Rawat alias Parvati alias Paro (19) resident Mauganj, Nitin Soni (26) of Kalyan Maharashtra, Swati Soni (24) Kalyan Maharashtra, Amol Arunkar, Arbi alias Sejal (32) resident of Kalyan, Pradeep Kolambe of Kalyan, Shri Krishna Santaram Patil (53) of Raigarh Maharashtra, Guddu father Govind Prasad (22) resident of Mauganj were arrested while the police is searching for Atul's (25), resident of Mauganj.



Women wait in a queue to cast their vote during the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections in Indore, Madhya Pradesh on Monday. Pioneer photo

68.01 percent polling till 5 pm in fourth phase

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan has said that in the fourth phase of Madhya Pradesh Lok Sabha Elections-2024, voting is going on from 7 am in all the polling centres of eight Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies of the state. Voting will take place here till 6 pm. Rajan said that till 5 pm, 68.01 percent voting took place in all the eight Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies. He said that 71.53 percent voter turnout was recorded in Lok Sabha Parliamentary Constituency No. 21 Dewas (SC), 70.44 percent in No. 22 Ujjain (SC), 71.76 percent in No. 23 Mandasaur, 70.61 percent in No. 24 Ratlam (SC), 67.55 percent in No. 25 Dhar (ST), 56.53 percent in No. 26 Indore, 70.80 percent in No. 27 Khargone (ST) and 68.21 percent voting has been recorded in No. 28 Khandwa.

Girls surpass boys in both 10th, 12th exams in CBSE

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) declared the results of class 10th and 12th on Monday. In Bhopal, girls stood first in both the classes. Aashmi Rai of Delhi Public School (DPS) has secured 97.40% marks in class 12th. Ashmi stood number one in commerce whereas, Saanvi Rai has got 96.40% marks in PCB-Mathematics. Students Vanshika Saxena secured 95.80%, Pranjal Patel secured 95.40%, Aditi Gupta secured 95.40%, Juhi Ojha secured 95.20%, Tanushree Vijayvargiya secured 95.20%, Yash Sharma secured 94.80% and Pranam Bharil secured 94.80%. Ashmi Rai of Bhopal scored 97.40% marks. Children of Campion School, Bhopal have also achieved success. Ridham Saxena and Aditya Pratap Singh Baghel were toppers in class 12th with 95 percent marks. Similarly, Shikab Akhtar scored 94.20%, Anvish Thakur scored 93%, Tanay Srivastava scored 92.80%, Parth Agarwal scored 92.80%, Parth Nalge scored 92.6% and Kabir scored 92.6%. Navya Sharma, a class 12 student of St. Joseph's Co-ed School, Arera Colony, stood

first. Navya has scored 96.4% marks in Humanities. Father Manoj Sharma said that the whole family is happy on Navya's success. There is a festive atmosphere in the house. Navya's mouth was sweetened by her grandmother and other family members who fed her sweets. The result of class 12th in International Public School, Bhopal was 100%. Ishika Garge scored 97.4% marks. Aditya Sahay, who stood second, scored 97.2% marks. Similarly, Vidushi S. Solanki got 96.8%, Vainya Saxena got 96.6%, Pragna Jain got 96.4%, Sarthak K. Jain scored 95.2% marks. Ishita Garge of International School, Bhopal topped in class 12th. Aditya Sahay, who stood second, scored 97.2% marks. Ishita Garge of International School, Bhopal topped in class 12th. Aditya Sahay, who stood second, scored 97.2% marks. St. Joseph's Navya Sharma topped, scored 96.4% marks. Navya Sharma, a class 12 student of St. Joseph's Co-ed School, Arera Colony, stood first. Navya has scored 96.4% marks in Humanities. Babandep Singh Ahuwalla was at second place. Babandep scored 95.8% marks in commerce subject. Mudit Yadav of

the same school stood second. He got 93.6 percent marks in PCB exam. Similarly, Vaishnavi Dubey got 93.6 percent marks in PCM subject. From the same school, Ardhya Pandey got 95.2%, Bhumika Sharma got 95%, Soumya Chaturvedi got 92%, Gauri Chaubey got 91.2%, Manya Charupa got 90.8%, Anjali Sharma got 90.6%, Riddhi Jain got 90.4%, Ashvi Namdev got 89.6%, Navya Sharma got 96.4%, Arushi Sahu got 94.6%, Safa Fatima got 93.8%, Karunya Mishra got 93.4%, Rakshika Pandagare got 93.2%, Siddhi Malviya got 92.8%, Mehak Maheshwari got 92%, Pulak Dwivedi got 92%, Niharika Dubey scored 91.2%, Zainab Owais Khan 91%, Divyaraj Singh 90.6%, Palak Arora 92%, Mugdha Yadav 90.8%, Harsh Sharma 93.4%, Mansi Pillai 93%, Simrandeep Singh 92.4%, Disha Patel She scored 91.4%, Harsh Patel scored 91.4%, Ishani Jockerkar scored 91%, Anushka Nande scored 89.8%, Atharva Acharya scored 89.9%, Annika Subhash scored 89.9% and Ishita Patria scored 89.6%. Parth Aggarwal, a class 12 student at Sage School, Ayodhya Nagar, Bhopal, secured 94.80% marks. Parth received these marks in commerce stream.

Nurses are teachers of doctors: Dr Jitendra Shukla

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A program was organized on Monday, 13th May 2024, on the occasion of International Nurses Day at Bhopal Memorial Hospital and Research Center (BMHRC). Dr Jitendra Shukla, Director, Nursing education and Paramedical was the chief guest, while Dr. Manisha Shrivastav was present as the special guest of the program. Dr. Anurag Yadav, Medical Superintendent, and Nursing Superintendent Shiba Rani Kalesh were also present during the program. On this occasion, BMHRC's nursing staff, excelling in various fields, were also honored. During the program, Dr. Jitendra Shukla congratulated the entire nursing staff of



BMHRC for choosing this sacred profession. He said that imagining any hospital without a nurse is impossible. The reputation of any hospital is established because of its nursing and paramedical staff. Nurses also

remember many nurses from my student life from whom I learned a lot. Dr. Manisha Shrivastav, Director of BMHRC, said that the progress of BMHRC owes a great deal to its nursing staff. The nursing staff of BMHRC is highly skilled in their work, and such highly trained staff are rarely found in many hospitals. Medical Superintendent Dr. Anurag Yadav also congratulated BMHRC's nursing staff on International Nurses Day and said that nurses act as a bridge between patients and doctors. Organization of Blood Donation Camp: A blood donation camp was organized on International Nurses Day on 12th May 2024. In this camp, nursing officers of BMHRC donated blood.

St Mary's girls outshine boys

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

St Mary's Convent Sr Sec school, excelled in class X and XII examination. Girls swept the top positions in all the streams except Commerce in class XII. The school toppers Latika Sharma, Vidyanshi Jain from the Science stream and Kartik Joshi from Commerce stream have scored 94.6. Disha Bharadwaj topped the Humanities stream with 94.4. Other toppers are Shivanshi Singh 94.2%, Anupriya Alava 93.8%(Humanities), Garima Gupta 93% and Janhvi Khatri 91%(Commerce) and Ziya Mansoori 91%(Commerce). In class X also the girl toppers exceeded the boys. The top three positions are bagged by girls. Ekta Tiwari with an aggregate 97.2% is the school topper. The second toppers are Aditi Mathur and Kashish Borkute who secured 95%. Akshara Sindhu and Kritika Sharma won the third place with 94.2%. The principal Sr Maria Jagtap and the teachers congratulated the students for their awesome performance and wished them all success for their future endeavours.

Polling concludes peacefully in Madhya Pradesh

PNS ■ INDORE

Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan has expressed his gratitude to all voters, political parties, officials, employees, security teams and media representatives of the state for peaceful completion of the voting process in all the 29 parliamentary constituencies of

Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh. He has said that everyone played an important role in conducting peaceful voting in the state. Rajan appreciated the role of social and business organizations who cooperated in providing necessary facilities to the voters in all the polling stations. He also expressed his gratitude to other people who directly

and indirectly helped in successfully conducting the voting process.

It may be noted that peaceful voting was held in the state in four phases on April 19, April 26, May 7 and May 13. Rajan expressed hope that with everyone's cooperation, the process of counting of votes to be held on June 4 will also be completed peacefully.

Indore District Collector Ashish Singh and his wife show their finger marked with indelible ink after casting their vote for the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh on Monday



Indore District Collector Ashish Singh and his wife show their finger marked with indelible ink after casting their vote for the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh on Monday. Pioneer photo



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Plea in SC seeks review of EVM VVPAT verdict

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking review of its April 26 judgement by which it had rejected the demand for reverting to the old paper ballot system and the complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). The review petition was filed by Arun Kumar Agrawal, who had filed the PIL on the issue earlier, through lawyer Neha Rathi.

The review plea filed on May 10 said, "There are mistakes and errors apparent on the face of the impugned order... and as such there are sufficient reasons which require review of the impugned order/judgment..."

"The petitioner respectfully seeks review on the following issues as have been dealt with in judgment dated April 26, 2024: i) Feasibility of count-

ing of all VVPAT paper slips in terms of time to be taken and additional manpower, ii) Vulnerability of SLU (symbol loading units) and iii) Percentage of VVPAT slips counted for tallying with EVM votes after Chandrababu Naidu... Judgment."

The plea dealt with the feasibility of counting of all VVPAT paper slips in terms of time to be taken and additional manpower and referred to the relevant portion of the judgement.

"During the course of hearing, it was suggested that instead of physically counting the VVPAT slips, they can be counted by a counting machine. This suggestion, including the suggestion that bar-coding of the symbols loaded in the VVPATs may be helpful in machine counting, may be examined by the ECI," the top court had said in the judgement.

Seeking physical counting, the plea said the counting of all VVPAT slips can be done "accurately with a fraction of the employees and at a fraction of cost and within five to eight hours".

It said the VVPAT paper is of the same size as the thermal print out received when a credit or debit card is swiped on making a payment.

"The counting of the slips after they have been sorted candidate-wise, is in fact easier than counting normal paper because the VVPAT paper slip is slightly curled on account of being thermally printed from a roll. The curling makes the picking up of the paper slip from the surface of a table easy."

"Each slip can be counted while being picked to make bundles of 25 slips as mandated under instructions given in the ECI's Manual on EVM and VVPAT, 2023," the plea said.



It said EVMs do not allow voters to verify that their votes have been accurately recorded. "Furthermore, given their

very nature, EVMs are especially vulnerable to malicious changes by insiders such as designers, programmers, manufacturers, maintenance technicians, etc. Therefore, in light of the above there are apparent errors on the face of the impugned order dated April 26, 2024 and the impugned judgment, is liable to be reviewed," it said.

On April 26, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta had termed the suspicion of manipulation of the EVMs "unfounded" and trashed the demand for reverting to the old paper ballot system.

The bench had said that the polling devices were "secure" and eliminated booth capturing and bogus voting.

However, the judgement had opened a window for aggrieved unsuccessful candidates securing second and third places in poll results and allowed them to seek verification of micro-controller chips embedded in five per cent EVMs per assembly constituency on a written request upon payment of a fee to the

poll panel.

It had directed that from May 1, the symbol loading units should be sealed and secured in a container and stored in a strongroom along with the EVMs for a minimum period of 45 days post-declaration of results.

By the judgement, the top court had dismissed the PILs which had also sought a direction to return to the ballot paper system.

"A voting mechanism must uphold and adhere to the principles of security, accountability, and accuracy. An over complex voting system may engender doubt and uncertainty, thereby easing the chances of manipulation. In our considered opinion, the EVMs are simple, secure and user-friendly. The voters, candidates and their representatives, and the officials of the ECI are aware of the nitty-gritty of the EVM system. They also check and

ensure righteousness and integrity," the bench had said. It had said the possibility of hacking or tampering with the agnostic firmware in the burnt memory of EVMs to tutor or favour results is "unfounded".

"Accordingly, the suspicion that the EVMs can be configured or manipulated for repeated or wrong recording of vote(s) to favour a particular candidate should be rejected," the bench had said. It had said the incorporation of the VVPAT, an independent vote verification system which enables electors to see whether their votes have been recorded correctly, fortifies the principle of vote verifiability, thereby enhancing the overall accountability of the electoral process.

The seven-phase Lok Sabha polls began on April 19 and will conclude with the announcement of results on June 4.

SC notice to Himachal HC on plea of two district judges who question HC Collegium decision

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday sought a response from the Registrar General of the Himachal Pradesh High Court on a plea of two senior most district and sessions judges alleging that their merit and seniority were not considered by the High Court collegium in selection of names for HC judgeship.

A bench comprising Justices Hrishikesh Roy and Prashant Kumar Mishra took note of the submissions of senior advocate Arvind Datar, appearing for the two district and sessions judges, that the judicial officers, who are junior to them, had been recommended for the high court judgeship under the in-service quota.

The petition was filed by Chirag Bhanu Singh and Arvind Malhotra, who are presently serving as the district and sessions judges at Bilaspur and Solan, respectively in the state, alleging non-consideration of their names by the high court collegium for the judgeship.

The senior lawyer referred to a collegium resolution of January 4, 2024 of the apex court and the subsequent communication of the Union Ministry of Law and Justice to the Himachal Pradesh High Court and said that as per these, the names of the petitioner judicial officers should have been considered by the high court collegium.

"The petitioners are the senior most judicial officers in the state and they have unblemished records," Datar said. The plea questioned the selection process of the judicial officers by the high court collegiums for elevation to as HC judges and said their merit and seniority were ignored despite the issue being specifically referred to in the apex court collegium's resolution.

The plea said the apex court collegium's decision to send their names for reconsideration by the HC collegiums was followed by a communication from Union law minister to the Chief Justice of the high court urging him to reconsider the names of the petitioner judicial officers.

Congress guarantees will change circumstances of people: Sonia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress Parliamentary party chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Monday assured people that the "guarantees" listed by the party in its Lok Sabha poll manifesto will change their circumstances in this "difficult time".

In a video message, which was shared by the Congress on social media, she said women of the country are facing tough times in the wake of a "severe crisis" and the party's 'Mahalakshmi scheme' for them will help change their lives.

"My dear sisters, women have made a huge contribution, from the freedom struggle to the creation of modern India. However, today our women are facing a crisis amid severe inflation. To do justice to their hard work and penance, the Congress has come up with a revolutionary guarantee," Sonia Gandhi said.

"The Congress' 'Mahalakshmi' scheme guarantees that we will give Rs 1 lakh every year to a



woman from a poor family," she said in her message, an appeal to people voting in the ongoing fourth round of the seven-phase general elections to support the Congress. Sonia Gandhi said the Congress' "guarantees" have already changed the lives of crores of families in Karnataka and Telangana, where it has also implemented the scheme. The Congress is in power in these two southern states. "Be it MGNREGA, Right to Information, Right to Education or through schemes like Food Security, the Congress party has empowered millions of Indians. The 'Mahalakshmi' is the latest guarantee to take our work forward," Sonia Gandhi said.

"In this difficult time, I want to assure you that the hand of Congress is with you and this hand will change your circumstances. Thank you. Jai Hind," the former Congress president said, referring to her party's symbol.

Her appeal was shared by Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, former party president Rahul Gandhi and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on their X handles.

Rahul Gandhi, while sharing his mother's message, said, "Women from poor families remember — your one vote is equal to Rs 1 lakh annually in your account." "The Congress' 'Mahalakshmi' scheme is going to be a lifesaver for women struggling amid terrible inflation and unemployment. With Rs 8,500 being deposited directly into bank accounts every month, women of India will become free from financial dependence and will be able to write their own family's destiny," he said. "So vote and change your circumstances," Rahul Gandhi said while sharing Sonia Gandhi's message.

Seventh edition of exercise Shakti between India, France begins in Meghalaya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The seventh edition of the 'Exercise Shakti' between India and France began in Meghalaya on Monday with an aim to enhance joint military capability of both sides to undertake multi-domain operations in a sub-conventional scenario, the defence ministry said.

The joint military exercise also seeks to enhance the level of defence cooperation between the two friendly nations and boost their bilateral ties. Exercise Shakti, being held from May 13-26, will enable the two sides to share their best practices in tactics, techniques and procedures of conducting joint operations, the Ministry of Defence said in a statement.

Tactical drills to be practiced during the exercise will include response to a terrorist action of capturing a defined territory, setting up of a joint command post, establishment of an intelligence and surveillance centre, securing a helipad or landing



site, small team insertion and extraction, special heliborne operations, cordon and search operations besides employment of drones and counter-drone systems among others, it said.

Exercise Shakti is a biennial training event conducted alternatively in India and France. The last edition was conducted in France in November 2021.

The seventh edition of the exercise commenced on Monday at Umroi, in a fully developed and modern foreign training node in Meghalaya.

"The joint exercise will facilitate developing inter-operability, bonhomie and camaraderie between armed forces personnel of the two countries. This will also enhance the level of defence cooperation, further fostering bilateral relations between the two friendly nations," the statement said.

The opening ceremony of the joint exercise was attended by Thierry Mathou, Ambassador of France to India and Major General Prasanna Sudhakar Joshi, General Officer Commanding 51 Sub Area, the ministry said.

Indian masterpieces find place in UNESCO register

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's literary masterpieces 'Ramcharitmanas', 'Panchatantra', and 'Sahdayaloka-Locana' have earned a prestigious place in UNESCO's Memory of the World Asia-Pacific Regional Register, a significant acknowledgment of their cultural and historical importance.

Authored by Kashmiri poet Acharya Anandvardhan, Pandit Vishnu Sharma, and Hindu saint and poet Goswami Tulsidas respectively, these trio iconic Indian literary works have left an enduring impact on readers and artists in India as well as worldwide.

In what is a proud moment for India, their inclusion in prestigious UNESCO register also adds a feather in the cap of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) which had played a crucial role in securing their inclusion at the 10th meeting of the Memory of the World Committee for Asia and the Pacific (MOWCAP) in Ulaanbaatar.

Significantly, this is the IGNCA's first achievement at



40 observers and nominees, said an official from the IGNCAs. After undergoing rigorous deliberations and receiving recommendations from the Register Subcommittee, all three nominations secured inclusion, highlighting their significance in India's literary legacy.

Gaur added that their inclusion in UNESCO's register reaffirms India's rich literary heritage and underscores the importance of preserving and promoting such cultural treasures for future generations.

Authored by Goswami Tulsidas, 'Ramcharitmanas' is an epic poem that narrates the life of Lord Rama, a revered figure in Hindu mythology. It is written in the Awadhi dialect of Hindi, and is one of the most renowned works of devotional literature in India.

'Ramcharitmanas' is not only a religious text but also a cultural symbol, influencing art, music, and literature across India.

"These we never had... this is for the first time that Likewise, 'Panchatantra' which is tradi-

tionally attributed to writer Vishnu Sharma is a collection of ancient Indian fables and moral stories.

It is renowned for its wisdom and practical teachings, imparted through animal characters and their adventures. The 'Panchatantra' has been translated into numerous languages and has had a profound impact on storytelling traditions worldwide.

Authored by Kashmiri poet Acharya Anandvardhan, 'Sahdayaloka-Locana' is a significant literary work in the field of aesthetics and literary criticism. It provides insights into the principles of Sanskrit poetics and analyzes various aspects of literary composition.

It has contributed to the understanding and appreciation of Sanskrit literature and aesthetics.

"By honouring these literary masterpieces, the world not only paying homage to the creative genius of their creators from India but also ensures that their profound wisdom and timeless teachings continue to inspire and enlighten future generations," added Gaur.

literature and culture," Professor Ramesh Chandra Gaur, Dean (Administration) and Head of the Department, Kala Nidhi Division at IGNCAs told The Pioneer. He had presented these three entries from India, effectively defending the nominations at the UllanBatar convention.

At the gathering in Ulaanbaatar 38 representatives from member states convened alongside

Measles jab single dose 2.6 times more likely to be ineffective in kids born via C section: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A single dose of the measles vaccine is up to 2.6 times more likely to be completely ineffective in children born via C-section, compared to those born naturally, a study has said, emphasising the importance of tailoring vaccination strategies to address the differences in vaccine effectiveness based on birth method.

Measles is a highly infectious disease preventable by vaccines. However, failure of the jab can significantly increase the risk of an outbreak.

The study led by a team of researchers from the universities of Cambridge, UK, and Fudan in China, showed that a second measles jab is vital and induces a robust immunity against measles in children born via C-section.

The study, published in the journal Nature Microbiology, found that the vaccine's effect is linked to the development of the child's gut microbiome —



the vast collection of microbes that naturally live inside the gut. Vaginal birth is known to transfer a greater variety of microbes from mother to baby, which can boost the immune system. "We've discovered that the way we're born — either by C-section or natural birth — has long-term consequences on our immunity to diseases as we grow up," said Professor Henrik Salje in the University of Cambridge's Department of Genetics.

"Infants born by C-section are

Over 9,600 children wrongly incarcerated in adult Indian prisons between 2016-2021: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

More than 9,600 children were wrongly incarcerated in adult prisons across India between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2021, a new study has found. The data for the study -- "Incarceration of Children in Prisons in India" -- was obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

The study by legal rights body iProbono sheds light on a deeply concerning issue affecting the juvenile justice system in India. The data indicates that at least 9,681 children were wrongly incarcerated in adult prisons between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2021.

"This means an average of over 1,600 children were transferred out of prisons across the country every year," the study said, referring to the children identified by Juvenile Justice Boards (JJB) and moved to juvenile homes from adult jails.

This figure was ascertained on the basis of responses to RTI requests by 285 district and central prisons out of a total of 570. "This also does not include the 749 other prisons from which we did not request data, including sub jails, women's prisons, open prisons, special prisons, borstal schools and other prisons. It also, as previously mentioned, only includes those who were successfully identified and transferred,

not all those who were juveniles at the time of their alleged offence, including those identified by prison visitors, families or through self-identification," it said.

Several states failed to adequately respond to enquiries, with notable non-compliance from Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Nagaland and the Union Territory of Ladakh. Among the states that responded, the study said the figures reveal alarming patterns.

With a response rate -- jails that provided data -- of 71 per cent, Uttar Pradesh reported that 2,914 children were transferred from prisons to juvenile homes. However, the data indicates discrepancies, with some prisons showing



high numbers of detained children despite no visits from JJBs. In Bihar, where 34 per cent of prisons responded, 1,518 children were transferred out of adult jails. Instances were noted of more children being identified by JJBs than those transferred. Madhya Pradesh

provided no data despite repeated appeals under the RTI Act. West Bengal also provided no data.

Responses from 35 per cent of prisons in Maharashtra revealed that only 34 children were transferred, significantly lower than those identified by JJBs. The study found that Delhi demonstrated a highly organised approach to juvenile justice, with clear directives from Delhi High Court aimed at preventing the incarceration of children in adult facilities.

Haryana -- where data was provided by 90 per cent of prisons -- transferred 1,621 children, correlating well with the number identified during JJB visits. In Rajasthan, 108 children were transferred,

according to data from 51 per cent of its prisons, with a notable lack of information on children identified during JJB visits.

Chhattisgarh transferred 159 children, data from 44 per cent of its jails showed, revealing disparities in JJB visitation patterns across prisons. Jharkhand transferred 1,115 children, also highlighting discrepancies in JJB visitation and identification practices, with 60 per cent of its prisons responding to RTI queries for the study.

Prisons in Odisha and Tamil Nadu demonstrated extremely low response rates to the queries, with no children reported to have been transferred from prisons to juvenile homes. The report relied

on data obtained under Section 6 of the RTI Act, which pertains to the Request for Obtaining Information.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, 124 RTI applications were filed across 28 states and two Union Territories, primarily directed to Prison Headquarters, except for Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, where applications were filed in each district and central jail at the directions of the Prison Headquarters.

The data excludes the Union Territory jurisdictions of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, and Lakshadweep due to the absence of district and central jails there.



INDIA Bloc leaders scared of Pakistan's nuclear power: Modi

PTI ■ MUZAFFARPUR/HAJIPUR/SARAN (BIHAR)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday lashed out at the opposition INDIA bloc, calling its leaders "cowards" who were "scared of Pakistan's nuclear power". Addressing three back-to-back rallies in Bihar's Hajipur, Muzaffarpur and Saran Lok Sabha constituencies, Modi made an apparent reference to a recent statement of National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, without mentioning him by name. "The INDIA bloc seems to have leaders who are scared of Pakistan and have nightmares of its nuclear power," he said. The remarks come in the backdrop of comments by Abdullah about Pakistan having atom bombs and not

wearing bangles. "If Pakistan does not wear bangles, we will make the country wear these. I knew they did not have foodgrains. Now, I come to know they do not even have adequate supply of bangles," the PM said. "But, we must look carefully at the opposition which seems to be full of cowards and timid people, who give a clean chit to Pakistan on terrorism, raise doubts on surgical strikes... their Left allies even want our nuclear arsenal to be dismantled," he said. Modi maintained that the INDIA bloc had worked out a formula, which would allow five of its leaders, if the coalition came to power, to enjoy a year of premiership each. "Just imagine what type of a mess we would get to see if



the bloc's plan to have a different PM, every year, for five years, succeeds. However, they are a motley group that is bound to fail," he said.

"The current elections are for having a government that will give a further boost to the standing and clout enjoyed by the country," the PM said.

Modi also said the money recovered in raids against politicians "belonged to the country's poor". "I will tell you why they are

crying hoarse against the action of agencies like the ED. During the previous Congress regime, the ED seized only Rs 35 lakh, which could be contained in a school bag. Ever since we took over, the agency has recovered Rs 2,200 crore, which would require 70 small trucks to be carried," said Modi. The prime minister said unlike his opponents, who were concerned about promoting their offspring, "I have no 'warris' (successor). The common people are my warris". He reiterated the charge that parties like the Congress and RJD will "give away reservations" to Muslims "to pursue their vote bank politics", but added that "as long as I am alive, I will not let this happen". "Kidnapping and extortion flourished during the RJD

rule in Bihar... NDA fights for social justice, 60 per cent Union ministers from OBC/SC/ST categories," he asserted. "It has been several days since I challenged the Congress-led opposition to give it in writing that it will not give reservations on religious lines. They are yet to respond," Modi said. The PM also alleged that the opposition had plans to impose "inheritance tax" but "Modi would stand like a wall in their way, thwarting attempts to rob people of their wealth". He accused the opposition parties of "deliberately hurting people's sentiments by making obnoxious statements about the Ram temple in Ayodhya". Targeting RJD leaders Lalu Prasad and his son and heir

apparent Tejashwi Yadav, mentioning neither by name, Modi referred to the fodder scam, the "land for jobs scam" and "attempts to take credit for work done by our ally (Chief Minister and JD(U) president) Nitish Kumar". Speaking on a day when the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections were underway, he urged the people to turn out in large numbers and vote for the NDA to enable formation of a strong government. In his speech, Modi also touched upon his government's track record on development, citing construction of highways at a rapid rate and underscoring commitment to social justice and empowerment, while accusing the opposition of trying to put hurdles in the way of measures like women's reservations.

Rahul did not visit Ram temple for fear of losing vote bank, says Shah

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi did not visit the Ram temple in Ayodhya as he feared losing his vote bank. Addressing a rally in Maharashtra's Dhule district, Shah also said Gandhi opposed the abrogation of Article 370, which provided special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and sought to know the views of Shiv Sena (UBT) head Uddhav Thackeray on the Congress leader's stand. The Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) are constituents of the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in the state and the INDIA alliance at the national level. The consecration of Lord Ram's idol was held at the Ayodhya temple in January this year. Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi not only helped in the resolution of the Ram temple issue but also facilitated its construction. "Rahul Gandhi was invited (for the Ram temple



inauguration), but he did not visit because he feared losing his vote bank. The BJP does not have any such fear," he said. The Congress did not remove Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir because of the same appeasement politics, the

senior BJP leader said. "Gandhi opposed the abrogation of Article 370. I want to ask his ally Uddhav Thackeray what are his views on Gandhi's stand. Gandhi and Congress insulted (Hindutva ideologue) Veer Savarkar. What does

Thackeray have to say about it?" he asked. "I also want a clarification from Uddhav Thackeray. One of the constituents of the opposition INDIA bloc is DMK led by M K Stalin, and his son Udhayanidhi Stalin has insulted Sanatan Dharma. Does Uddhav agree with them?" Shah sought to know. Further targeting the Congress and the Wayanad MP, the Union minister said 20 attempts were made to "launch and relaunch" Rahul Gandhi as a leader. "How can he (Gandhi) even launch Chandrayaan to the moon? Can he or his government ever give a befitting response to Pakistan? Can they end Naxalism or terrorism in the country? Can they make India prosperous?" he asked. Shah was campaigning for BJP's Dhule Lok Sabha seat candidate Subhash Bhamre, the former Union Minister of State for Defence. The Congress has fielded former MLA Shobha Bachhav against Bhamre in Dhule, where polling will be held on May 20.

Congress holding PM responsible for Nehru's mistakes: Jaishankar on China issue

PTI ■ MUMBAI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday said the Congress holds Prime Minister Narendra Modi accountable for the mistakes made by first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru when making comments on China while believing the party has no culpability for the past acts. On Chinese belligerence in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, Jaishankar said Indian land was taken by China between 1958 and 1962, and some of it before 1958 as well. Attacking Rahul Gandhi, Jaishankar said it is "very very sad" to "gun down your own forces". "When you keep saying land taken by China, it was lost in 1962. I see efforts made to mislead the country," he said in response to a question at a news conference here. China and India have been witnessing an unease in ties, especially after the Galwan Valley incident of June 2020 when Chinese and Indian soldiers clashed, resulting in



casualties on both sides. Since then India-China relations have been in an "abnormal state", with both sides amassing its troops along the LAC. The External Affairs Minister said people are saying Chinese are building villages on the border, but it is in a place called Longju (along Line of Actual Control in Arunachal Pradesh), which the Chinese attacked and occupied in 1959. "If you look at the Google map, please look at that village and triangulate it with what Nehru said to the

Parliament in 1959," Jaishankar said. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and his party talk about a bridge being built by China in Pangong Tso in Ladakh but the bridge is being built at a place where the Chinese came in 1958 and then retook in 1962, Jaishankar asserted. A Congress spokesperson recently said the Chinese have built a road in Shaksgam Valley and claimed this has created concerns for Siachen, the EAM said. "Possibly it has concerns for Siachen. Shaksgam Valley was

Only Ramdrohis opposing Modi, claims Yogi



PTI ■ RAE BARELI/BARABANKI (UP)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said Monday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will again form the government, asserting that even Lord Ram wants his "ardent devotee" to win. He was addressing rallies in Barabanki and Rae Bareli, from where Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is contesting the Lok Sabha elections. "Only 'Ramdrohis' or Pakistanis are opposing Modi ji," Adityanath said at a public meeting in Rae Bareli constituency. "I cannot understand what is Rahul Gandhi's relationship with Pakistan. He lives in India, seeks votes in Rae Bareli and gets support from Pakistan." He alleged that the voices from Pakistan and that of Ramdrohis have become similar. "A Pakistani minister was supporting the incident in which soldiers were martyred in Pulwama... Now he has made a statement in support of the Congress candidate from Rae Bareli, Adityanath said. Taking a dig at Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi who has sought to know from PM Modi what he has done for Raebareli in the past 10 years, the Uttar

Pradesh chief minister asked, "What has the Congress done in 65 years (of rule)?" In Barabanki, Adityanath said under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, everyone, irrespective of their caste and community, benefitted from the development schemes. "Our beloved Lord Ram also wants his ardent devotee to take over the reins of the country once again," the Uttar Pradesh chief minister said. With the fourth phase of voting underway, the "Modi wave has now turned into a tsunami," he said. Hitting out the Congress and Samajwadi Party, he said, "They have a history of scams. These people are making big claims, but the truth is that during their time people used to die of hunger, farmers used to commit suicide and youth used to migrate." "But we are all witnesses to the change that took place in the last 10 years under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. For the last four years, 80 crore people have been getting free ration, 12 crore farmers have got the benefit of Kisan Samman Nidhi," Adityanath said. Voting in Barabanki and Rae Bareli Lok Sabha seats will be held in the fifth phase on May 20.

Electors cast vote fearlessly for first time at former Maoist hotbed Budha Pahad booth

PTI ■ BUDHA PAHAD (JHARKHAND)

Thirty-seven-year-old Halkan Kisan on Monday exercised his vote for the first time at his own booth at 'Budha Pahad'—a former Maoist hotbed, which falls under Palamu Lok Sabha constituency. Located along Jharkhand's Latehar and Garhwa districts, Budha Pahad was freed recently from the red rebels' control by security forces after over three decades. The Kisan cast his vote at booth no 420 in government's Upgraded middle school, Hesatu, along with hundreds of voters from different villages fearlessly. "I have exercised my vote at my own booth for the first time in my life. Earlier, our booth used to be relocated,

around 13 km from my village, due to impact of the Maoist in the locality. Very few voters used to go to vote in relocated place. Now, the area has become free from Maoist activity and people are enthusiastically exercising their votes," Kisan, a resident of Hesatu village under Bargarh block, told PTI. Medininagar sub-divisional officer (SDO) Anurag Tiwary said that the voting at the polling station is being conducted amid deployment of heavy security. "The polling officials and security personals were air dropped on Sunday at Budha Pahad to conduct the polls," Tiwary told PTI. A total of 771 electors are eligible to exercise their votes at the booth. By 1 pm, the booth has registered 68 per cent polling.



Vikram Yadav, 50, another voter, told PTI, "I have given my vote without any trouble.

I came to the booth walking around 5 km from my village Saurat and I found no

security issue even on the way as there are deployment of security forces. Block programming officer, Bargarh, Md Hashim Ansari told PTI, "Several arrangements have been made for voters such as shed, drinking water and ambulance. Besides, vehicles have also been arranged for the elderly and physically challenged voters. The polling was conducted at booth no 420 after the visit of Jharkhand Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) K Ravi Kumar along with senior police officers on April 20. Kumar had then said that the voters here would exercise their franchise for the first time at their places after many decades. He gave credit to security forces for making this place terror-free.

However, excluding booth no 420, other three booths in Budha Pahad have been relocated due to security reasons, a senior official said. Voting is being held in four Lok Sabha constituencies in Jharkhand — Singhbhum, Lohardaga, Khunti and Palamu on Monday. The exercise to free Budha Pahad from left-wing extremists was carried out through three special operations that were launched since the beginning of April 2022. A total of 14 Maoists were killed, while 590 others were either apprehended or had surrendered during these operations, the officials said. Earlier attempts to drive out the red rebels from 'Budha Pahad' did not materialise due to its difficult terrain, another police officer said.

Union Minister Anurag Thakur, Congress candidate file nomination papers in HP

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR/SHIMLA (HP)

Union Minister Anurag Thakur and Congress candidate Vinod Sultanpuri filed their nominations for Hamirpur and Shimla (SC) Lok Sabha seat, respectively on Monday. Thakur was accompanied by senior BJP leaders and his brother Arun Dhumal, the chairman of the Indian Premier League as he submitted nomination papers. The senior BJP leader is seeking a fifth term in the Lok Sabha from the Hamirpur seat in Himachal Pradesh. Before filing his nomination, Thakur paid obeisance at the temple of Maa Awahdevi and addressed people at several places. Hundreds of party functionaries and locals greeted him with garlands and wished him luck. The Congress has fielded



Satpal Raizada, a former MLA of Una, as its candidate against Anurag Thakur. In Shimla, sitting MLA from Kasauli Vinod Sultanpuri filed his nomination from Shimla (SC) Lok Sabha seat. The Congress candidate was accompanied by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, party's state unit chief Pratibha Singh and Cabinet

Minister Harshwardhan Chauhan, among others. Talking to media person after Sultanpuri submitted his papers, Sukhu said all four Congress candidates contesting Lok Sabha polls in the state have filed their nominations. "This is not a normal election. It is an election to save democracy and give the politics of the country a direction," the chief minister said and alleged that the BJP used money power to try to topple the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh. Polling in all four Lok Sabha seats in Himachal Pradesh will be held in the last of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections on June 1. Bypolls to six assembly seats in the state, which fell vacant following the disqualification of rebel Congress MLAs, will be held simultaneously.

EC suspends two polling officials for dereliction of duty in Odisha

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Election Commission (EC) has suspended two polling officials in Odisha for dereliction of duty, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Nikunjia Bihari Dhal said here on Monday. One polling official from Narla assembly constituency in Kalahandi district and another polling official in Ganjam district have been suspended for dereliction of duty, he said. "We are monitoring the poll process in our webcasting room. A minor group clash-like incident was reported from Chikiti area in Ganjam district. I have personally spoken to SP Berhampur and Ganjam Collector and asked them to ensure that the polling goes on smoothly in Berhampur LS constituency especially in the Chikiti area," Dhal told media persons. As voter turnout was a little low in the Berhampur Lok Sabha constituency, the CEO appealed to the voters to come out in large numbers and exercise their franchise. Some technical glitches were reported in EVMs in some places during initial hours. However, the situation has stabilised, the CEO said. Voting started at 7 am in Berhampur, Koraput,

Nabarangpur, and Kalahandi parliamentary constituencies along with 28 assembly segments within the jurisdiction of these Lok Sabha seats. Till 11 am around 23.28 per cent of the 62.87 lakh voters have exercised their franchise, officials said, adding that the highest voter turnout was recorded in tribal-dominated Kalahandi Lok Sabha seat at 25.38 per cent followed by Koraput (24.43 per cent), Nabarangpur (24.3 per cent) and Berhampur (18.99 per cent), he said. Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are being held simultaneously in Odisha.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

Frenemies

India seeks to neutralise China's economic hold but it beats US to become India's biggest trading partner

In the realm of global economics, the dynamics of trade relationships often override geopolitics. India's growing trade affinity with China is a living example of that: China has become India's largest trading partner in 2023-24. This development brings little joy to the nation aspiring to become an alternative to China and striving to bolster its manufacturing sector, with the Prime Minister's 'Make in India' call. Despite the Indian Government's rhetoric urging caution in dealings with China, economic imperatives seem to be reshaping the contours of bilateral trade. Their trade relationship has long been characterised by a mix of competition and cooperation. Both nations are regional powerhouses with vast consumer markets and burgeoning manufacturing sectors, though China is much ahead of India in terms of economy and infrastructure size. Over the years, China has emerged as a crucial supplier of goods to the world, including India, ranging from electronics and machinery to pharmaceuticals and textiles. Concurrently, India has also found a receptive market for its exports in China, particularly in sectors like raw materials, agricultural products and IT services. But the real problem is the lopsidedness of the trade. We are a net importer of Chinese goods, that too at the cost of our local industry.



Most traders take the easy import route, often sub-standard but cheap, and make decent profits. This leads to job losses and closure of several MSME manufacturing units. Besides, the nations are not the best of neighbours; relying on China in this scenario is indeed fraught with danger. But where wealth flows, interests follow and that explains India's rising trade ties with China. The trajectory of bilateral trade has been influenced by several factors. One, the sheer size and harmony of their economies create natural synergies to drive trade volumes. Despite occasional border disputes and geopolitical issues, economic pragmatism often prevails, fostering trade ties. Two, China's manufacturing prowess and cost competitiveness have made it an attractive destination for Indian importers, especially in sectors where domestic production struggles to meet demand. Moreover, the persistent trade deficit with China underscores India's reliance on their goods and highlights the challenges in achieving more equitable trade ties. The geopolitical dimension of India-China trade cannot be overlooked either. The Indian Government must emphasise the need for strategic autonomy and self-reliance in key sectors. Initiatives such as 'Make in India' and Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) must be given further fillip. Additionally, efforts to diversify trade partnerships by nurturing ties with countries like the US, Japan and Australia must be accorded priority and a diversified trade portfolio maintained. Achieving a fundamental rebalancing of India-China trade dynamics is a multifaceted challenge that requires nuanced handling and necessitates a calibrated and pragmatic policy approach.

PICTALK



Flamingoes at the Thol Bird Sanctuary in Mehsana district

Regime change on cards in Nepal?



ASHOK K MEHTA

Amid strained India-Nepal relations, speculation swirls around a potential regime change in Nepal

Nepal's late Foreign Minister Rishikesh Shah would say that Kathmandu is the rumour capital of the world and also the fount of speculation. Our own Madhuri Dikshit once hailed Nepal as a beautiful country adding: "We're lucky it is part of India". This created a furor but the story appeared with tasteful embellishments in Nepal. Delhi's Chief Minister Madan Lal Khurana waxed eloquent about the sterling qualities of Nepalis working in India and what great servants they made. This led to fireworks in Nepal and bush telegraphy produced several ugly distortions. Hrithik Roshan never said he did not like Nepalese but Indian films were banned and other collateral damage followed. India is usually at the receiving end of Nepal's woes and wrath. China has begun to feature negatively only recently. India-bashing was at its peak following the economic blockade in 2015 and the rekindling of border dispute when Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura were incorporated into Nepal's map after India included Kalapani in a new map. Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanxi who made her mark rough-shodding Nepalese politicians was targeted by the Indian media. Yanxi became central to a duel between Indian and Nepalese media. How poorly informed political class, celebrities and even the media about Nepal were apparent. This longish backgrounder is a necessary prelude to describe last week's rumour and speculation about another attempt at regime change in Nepal. The report about the split in JSP (N) took place when its supremo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Health and Population Upendra Yadav was visiting the US. The story goes that NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba attempted to topple the Left coalition led by Prachanda by drawing out Yadav (12 lawmakers) and Madhav Nepal of Unified Socialists (10 lawmakers). 20 plus lawmakers are necessary for the NC-led Democratic Alliance to make a comeback. The attempt failed as UML's KP Oli preempted the plan by splitting JSP(N) by



getting former colleague and lawmaker Ashok Rai to walk away from Yadav with seven of 12 lawmakers. The inside story is different: Yadav had plans to overwhelm numerically the Hill Nepalese with Madhesis in the approaching party national convention. This upset the Hill and Madhesis members unhappy with Yadav. Rai approached the Election Commission and registered a new party JSP sans N for Nepal. Yadav has decided to fight the Rai faction in court. Rai has pledged support for Prachanda. Reports about Deuba's deal vary: offering Yadav Premiership and/or a shared term with Madhav Nepal. This deal too fizzled out as Unified Socialists were already divided between two former PMs, Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal. India figured in the regime change as having backed Deuba. Operation Topple requires either RSP (21 lawmakers) or JSP(N) and Unified Socialists together to desert the ruling dispensation. The king-maker for this great game is the CPN Maoists with 31 lawmakers that both NC and UML would need to stay in power. The threat to the Prachanda-led coalition will lurk in the nooks and corners of Parliament posed by parties with double-digit strength. NC, the single-largest party is



MIND GAMES ARE REGULARLY PLAYED IN BOTH COUNTRIES AS UNILATERALISM HAS CREPT INTO NEIGHBOURHOOD DIPLOMACY. WHILE NEPAL HAS DONE A TIT-FOR-TAT OVER THE MAP, CHINA HAS UNILATERALLY CHANGED THE LAC

licking its wounds but will not declare a truce to infuse a modicum of political stability. It has been blocking parliamentary proceedings for more than a month over the cooperative fund fraud in which Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane, RSP is involved. It has demanded a parliamentary probe into the alleged wrongdoings of Lamichhane. Prachanda has agreed to an enquiry in which others involved in the scam are also investigated. Parliament resumed after a short recess but NC is not allowing it to function. The budget has to be passed shortly and maybe the government will be forced to take the ordinance route. In India too it is time for regime change but through the world's longest election process. The BJP excels in toppling opposition governments with Operation Lotus. India has played a pivotal role in introducing democracy and its restoration in Nepal. Foreign Minister Jaishankar who has become a rock star in the election campaign is sharing pearls of wisdom on every conceivable subject, especially India's Neighbourhood First Policy. He said that politics may go up or down in the neighbourhood but India is regarded as a friend by the people. Later, he admitted that in diplomacy as in business there are setbacks

— it's part of the game. The latest setback in India-Nepal relations is the resurfacing of the festering border dispute. Having incorporated it in its state emblem the government has ordered the new map to be printed on Rs 100 bank notes about which Jaishankar observed that Nepal unilaterally took some measures but they can't change reality on the ground, adding 'discussions are ongoing through an established platform'. As far as is known, no discussion has taken place. For Prachanda and Oli, nationalism is the magic mantra. When Prachanda came to India on an official visit last June during the joint press statement, PM Modi said that the border dispute would be resolved through a joint mechanism. Strangely this fact was not mentioned in the press release of the joint statement. Mind games are regularly played in both countries as unilateralism has crept into neighbourhood diplomacy. While Nepal has done a tit-for-tat over the map, China has unilaterally changed the LAC with India (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Every vote counts



Amidst the dynamic political landscape, where elections have been completed in some places and others are still pending, it's crucial to acknowledge that not all leaders hoist the banner of public welfare. Merely casting a ballot doesn't guarantee the orchestration of effective governance. Instead of succumbing to the illusion that voting alone resolves everything, let's dispel such notions. The real-

ity often reveals a different narrative, where power dynamics favour those with deep pockets and questionable tactics, leaving trust and resources in disarray. If you're still clinging to the belief that all politicians are solely motivated by altruism, it's a precarious innocence to maintain. However, rather than consigning voting to oblivion, let's approach it with discernment. Let's seek out candidates who sway to the tune of integrity and genuinely prioritize the welfare of the people. And let's not overlook the importance of advocating for electoral reforms, weaving a fabric of transparency, accountability, and fairness in the political sphere. Your vote, fellow citizens, carries weight, especially when interwoven with others who aspire to a more just and equitable society. Remember, in the intricate tapestry of democracy, every thread contributes to a brighter future for us all

Imdadullah | Hyderabad

KEJRIWAL'S ELECTIONEERING

Madam — This is with reference to your Editorial "Wild card" (May 13). The national convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Arvind Kejriwal will campaign in favour of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) candidates across the country, Sandeep Pathak, the party's national general secretary said in a statement on Sunday, 12 May. Kejriwal will campaign in Lucknow on May 15, in Jamshedpur on May 16 and in Mumbai on May 17, he added. Kejriwal, who came out of Tihar Jail earlier this week, said he will work tirelessly and campaign across the country to end the "dictatorship" of the Modi government at the Centre. All the INDIA bloc constituents want Kejriwal to visit their states and campaign for them. The Supreme Court has granted interim bail to the AAP leader to participate in the Lok Sabha poll campaigning.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SC judgments have strengthened democracy

Democratic spectacle owes its strength and boldness to a series of landmark legal judgments that have fortified its foundations



AKSHAT KHETAN

Elections, serving as the cornerstone of democracy, offer a platform for citizens to voice their opinions, hold leaders accountable, and actively engage in shaping the future of their nation. In India, elections transcend mere political proceedings; they evolve into grand festivals, embodying the collective will and aspirations of over a billion people. India's electoral odyssey, marked by its vast scale, diversity, and intricacy, has been fortified by a series of seminal legal rulings. These decisions have been instrumental in shaping and reinforcing the democratic framework of India, ensuring fairness, transparency, and inclusivity in the electoral process. Among the plethora of cases that demonstrate the resilience of the legal system, five stand out as pillars that have fortified India's electoral journey.



Fundamental Right to Vote: At the core of India's electoral democracy lies the fundamental right to vote, enshrined in the Constitution. Over time, the judiciary has steadfastly upheld and safeguarded this right through various legal pronouncements. In the landmark 1977 case of Mohinder Singh Gill v. The Chief Election Commissioner, the Supreme Court of India unequivocally affirmed that the right to vote is sacrosanct and any arbitrary deprivation of this right is unconstitutional. The crux of this case revolved around assessing the constitutional validity of electoral laws that might encroach upon the fundamental right to vote.

Electoral Reforms and Transparency: Ensuring transparency and accountability in the electoral process has been an ongoing endeavour, guided by judicial interventions aimed at curbing malpractices and fostering electoral integrity. The 2002 case of Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India marked a significant milestone in this journey. This case presented the chal-

lenge of reconciling the right to privacy of political candidates with the public's right to information, necessitating a delicate balance between transparency in electoral processes and individual privacy rights. **Inclusive Representation and Minority Rights:** The diverse social fabric of India underscores the necessity for inclusive representation and safeguarding minority rights in the electoral arena. Legal judgments have played a pivotal role in upholding these principles and ensuring equitable participation for all segments of society. The 1991 case of Indra Sawhney v. Union of India, commonly known as the Mandal Commission case, stands as a testament to this commitment. This case grappled with the challenge of affirmative action and reservation policies, striking a balance between equitable representation of marginalised communities and the principles of meritocracy enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The landmark judgment underscored the commitment to inclusive representation, empowering

marginalised communities and fostering social justice in the electoral process. **Effective Electoral Disputes Resolution:** Efficient resolution of electoral disputes is indispensable for upholding the sanctity of elections and fostering public trust in the democratic process. This judgment bolstered the credibility of the electoral process, ensuring expeditious and impartial resolution of disputes. **Safeguarding Electoral Rights and Freedoms:** Preserving electoral rights and freedoms is paramount for the integrity of the electoral process. Legal judgments have been instrumental in protecting these rights and holding authorities accountable for any infringements. The 2015 case of Mohd. Sattar v. State of Rajasthan serves as a poignant example. The judgment reaffirmed the principle of universal suffrage, ensuring that every citizen's voice is heard. (The writer is corporate and legal advisor and founder of AU Corporate Advisory and Legal Services; views are personal)

ELECTION GUARANTEES

Madam — This election season in India is filled with a plethora of extended guarantees from different political parties and their renowned leaders. Initially, it was only PM Narendra Modi who extended oral guarantees termed as 'Modi ki Guarantee'. Now, to compete with him, recently released Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal has also presented his list of 10 guarantees to script a 'new India'. However, Mr. Arvind made it clear that he didn't want to be the Prime Minister of India. Nevertheless, his support for the INDIA bloc has grown stronger, especially after he was sentenced to Tihar Jail by the apex court. Elections have a historic relationship with political guarantees and promises. But we all already know how many of these guarantees are actually fulfilled. The irony is that people don't need guarantees to survive and ensure their well-being; instead, we need commitment and actions for the actual general welfare of every section of our society. Since Mr. Kejriwal is on interim bail until June 1st, considering the short duration of time he is outside the jail, he is trying his best to reach out to the maximum public with his statements, social media posts, press conference conversations, and other personal interactions with the countrymen to challenge the BJP in general and PM Modi in particular for his arrest during this peculiar time of elections. Now that it is a fight between the guarantees of the two biggest political parties, it is up to the people to decide whom they will choose in the tough fight of the Lok Sabha elections.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

CONTROVERSIAL CONTEST

Madam — The Eurovision Western Music Contest has been held in various countries across Europe for the last 68 years. The youth there enjoy this competition, and spectators and music lovers are often seen in a dancing mood throughout the event. However, this year's event, which concluded late on Saturday night, can be termed as the most political, controversial, chaotic-

ic, discriminatory, and tense event in its history. For this, we have to thank the security personnel of Sweden and the officials of Malmö city, who were ultimately successful in bringing this event to its destination. As a result, Swiss singer Nemo was declared the winner for his song 'The Code'. Otherwise, as soon as people came to know that Israeli singer Eden Golan had also been included in this competition, a round of protests started in the venue. It seemed as if Malmö, Sweden's third-largest city, had been divided into two parts, with 70 percent of people against Israel and 30 percent in favor of the Israeli singer. In the context of the ongoing war in Gaza, Dutch singer and contender Joost Klein was expelled from the competition due to a backstage dispute. The world seems to be deeply divided due to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Russian attack on Ukraine. England's daily 'The Telegraph' rightly ran the headline 'This is the most poisonous Eurovision in history'.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur



FIRST COLUMN

THE RISE OF ROBOTS

Robots are emerging as the next frontier, but can they replace humans?



SHAINY SHARMA

Various research and studies have shown that the next frontier in Artificial Intelligence is the Robots. Much more added to it are the big names- Jeff Bezos, Microsoft and many others who are investing in human robots according to people with knowledge of the situation, as part of a scramble to find new applications for the so-called AI Technology. Undoubtedly, robots have increasingly become an integral part of our lives in this century, impacting various aspects of society, industry and everyday activities. The robots have revolutionized in many key sectors be it industrial, healthcare, agricultural, transportation or any other. The science of robots is revolutionizing day by day and scientists are making innovations in robots. Research studies show that by 2050, robots will overcome human beings as they will develop strong intellects.

Many developing nations are involving the use of robots. In the industrial sector robots are performing the tasks such as assembling, welding, painting and packaging in factories thereby increasing efficiency, precision and productivity. In the healthcare sector, robots can perform tasks such as surgery, patient care, rehabilitation and medication dispensing with great precision and even provide support and assistance to elderly or disabled individuals. Talking about the automobile industry, autonomous vehicles- including cars, drones and delivery robots, are transforming transportation and logistics while self-driven car makers are promising to make transportation safer, more efficient and accessible to people who are unable to drive. In the agricultural sector, agricultural robots such as drones



and automated harvesters can help optimise farming practices by monitoring crops, applying fertilizers and pesticides precisely and thereby harvesting crops efficiently which ultimately improves yields, reduces labour costs and minimizes environmental impact. Not only these but the robots are doing jobs and servings in restaurants too. The robots have taken down the responsibility of the pizza boy in pizza shops and even are performing tasks such as customer service, cleaning, and inventory management. They enhance operational efficiency and provide novel experiences for customers.

Robots are indeed reshaping various aspects of everyone's lives, from how individuals work to how they interact with technology and each other. Today, educational robots are gaining an advantage in classrooms over teachers, engineering, and other STEM concepts in a hands-on manner.

Overall, robots are transforming the way we live, work and interact with the world around us. With advancements in robotics technology continuing to expand their capabilities and applications, the question of whether robots will replace humans in various tasks and roles is a complex one. While robots and automation have the potential to replace humans in some repetitive and routine tasks, they also create new opportunities and roles for humans in other areas. However, many tasks and roles require human creativity, empathy, and problem-solving skills, which are difficult for robots to replicate.

There is no denying the fact that the evolution of robots will profoundly impact society, offering new opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and improving quality of life. However, it will also raise the important ethical, social and economic considerations that must be carefully addressed with time. As robotics technology continues to advance, it will further transform society and open new possibilities for innovation and human-machine collaboration.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

The plight of unwed mothers of Kolam tribe

The stigmatisation of 'Kumari Matas' in the Kolam tribe highlights their struggle for social acceptance and economic empowerment



TV KATTIMANI



Kolam, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of the Dravidian race is known for its unique culture, language, indigenous knowledge and matrilineal society. They reside predominantly in the Yavatmal, Chandrapur, some parts of Amravati, Wardha and Nanded districts of Maharashtra and in some parts of Adilabad of Telangana. They have historical roots in Andhra Pradesh and later migrated to the regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada. This Proto-Australoid tribe is often highlighted for its unwed mothers. As per the reports of The Indian Express, there are at least 45 registered unwed mothers and over 450 unregistered unwed mothers only in the three blocks named Maregaon, Pandarkawada and JhariJamini of Yavatmal. Being a matriarchal society, the Kolams of Yavatmal have always celebrated womanhood. They celebrate the first mensuration of girls; they worship 'Gabhuri', the mother Goddess as their main deity to uphold their matriarchal societal roots.

However, the situation is changing. Though the unwed mothers have been renamed as the 'KumariMaata' due to their assimilation with mainstream society yet due to their rising inclination towards the male-dominated society, patriarchal tenets are growing in these traditions. Therefore, the position of women is also declining consequently and those unwed mothers who used to live a normal life previously are now considered 'Bad character women'. There are various case studies and stories of women of the Kolam tribe where the elite in the society or financially stronger like contractors, outsiders visit the areas for work purposes, establish physical interactions with the women in their communities and refuse to marry them when they are expecting a child. Women are frequently conned by marriage promises because they are socially, emotionally and economically vulnerable. The woman is held liable for the premarital pregnancy, whereas the responsible males are excluded



THE KOLAM TRIBE, CLASSIFIED AS A PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUP (PVTG), IS GRAPPLING WITH A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE OF UNWED MOTHERS, EMPHASISING THE URGENCY FOR INTERVENTIONS TO TACKLE THEIR COMPLEX SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL STRUGGLES

from this process.

Most of these Kolam women work as agricultural labourers, construction labourers and other low-wage activities due to which it becomes very easy for the traders and other outsiders to abuse them physically. For example, according to Deshpande (2016) "border districts of Maharashtra, such as Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Buldhana, Amravati, Nagpur and Gondia too have unwed mothers, the numbers in Yavatmal are higher because of its proximity to the chilli fields of Telangana, where work (for the poor) is available throughout the year. A number of unwed mothers say they were lured by neighbouring state's men who promise marriage but left when they became pregnant."

Some of them get pregnant while being a minor whereas others are due to their backwardness. Though in most tribal societies, giving birth to a child is a biological phenomenon and hence considered pious but yet due to the assimilation with the conventional societies they are also recognizing childbirth as a structural process where the consent of society, kin and kith is necessary. These structural changes are pushing unwed mothers toward various other socio-cultural and economic problems.

The most important among these is that unwed mothers are not accepted within the community nor do they find any other groom, as they are considered obscene. As a result, for the entire period of life, they serve as a single mother due to which the pressure of childbearing increases among them. The problems are more serious as being unwed mothers they often face disgrace in the newly constructed norms of patriarchal society. Sometimes they need to

leave the village and stay in the outskirts whereas in many cases the other women are not allowed to talk to them or join them for any occasion, as they are believed to be malignant due to their premarital physical relations. The consequences are economic and occupational also. As a daily wage labourer, their leisure time is very little but being single mothers they need breaks for breastfeeding and childcare due to which they face pay cuts. Sometimes they need to pay a fine to the panchayats also for their "misconduct".

These unknown pregnancies among the women of Kolam are a crucial issue.

These indicate the lack of awareness about contraceptive measures, education, economic weakness and social vulnerability that often attract these women to fake marriage conversations and other luring proposals. As per the report of Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University (2018-2019) in Yavatmal, "28.84 per cent Kumari Matas are in the age range of 26 to 30 years, 36 per cent Kumari Matas having education up to Fourth standard, 67.30 per cent Kumari Matas are belonging to 'Kolam' caste, 82.69 per cent are homeless. 51.09 per cent are pregnant due to outsiders, 82.07 per cent children of Kumari Matas are admitted in the school by furnishing the name of mother only, 92.30 per cent had delivery at home, 61.63 per cent getting help from Government schemes".

The subject is more critical as many of them are uncounseled because most of them do not come forward to speak due to socio-cultural stigma and thus their stories remain untold. This has again a negative impact on them as their complete family details are not mentioned in the Government records like ration cards, Aadhar

cards, etc. which deprives them of getting the benefits of many Government schemes that can make their life easier.

As per the report of Pune Times Mirror, "a survey of such victims is conducted every year by a woman and child development (WCD) officer with the help of Anganwadi workers and a junior protection officer at the taluka level." Further, the Anganwadi workers help these unwed mothers by teaching them the methods of nutrition and hygiene. The Bombay High Court has already directed the state to the need for the rehabilitation of young unwed mothers among the Kolam tribe. The Government of Kerala is also running a similar kind of scheme called "Snehasparsham" which offers unwed mothers ₹1000/- per month to lessen the financial burden of these economically vulnerable unwed mothers. The need of the hour is to initiate some projects and schemes for them so the Kumari Matas of Yavatmal can be included in the parameters of Government benefits at a large scale.

The infrastructural facilities like schools and primary health care centres, are the basic needs of these regions. Endeavours should also be taken to open basic schools and training centres for vocational courses like sewing, beautician, etc. The awareness about Self-Help groups can make them financially independent through various micro-level businesses like horticulture, bee-keeping, jelly-making etc. Further, documentation of unwed mothers can give them a social identity and make them live a life of dignity and self-respect.

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

Kejriwal's bail: Unveiling political prophecies post-release

The Delhi CM's release sparks controversy with ominous predictions and bold political statements, fuelling nationwide debate on democracy's future

Persons accused of criminal cases getting arrested and the courts granting them bail is nothing new. Even if the person happens to be the reigning chief minister of a State or a former union minister of finance, the bail does not absolve the accused of the charges. The Supreme Court order that released the Delhi Chief Minister on bail from the custody of the Enforcement Directorate says it is a provisional arrangement so that he could participate in the election campaign as the Lok Sabha poll comes once in five years.

So far, so good. But what came after the Delhi Chief Minister was released on bail needs to be analyzed threadbare. On Saturday, he worshipped at Lord Anjaneya



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Temple and addressed a press meeting. What he said during the press meeting is shocking and capable of causing fear in the minds of the people. He said if the BJP wins the 2024 Lok Sabha election and comes back to power, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will send all Opposition leaders to jail. Kejriwal also claimed that Amit Shah is being groomed as the next Prime Minister as Modi is likely to retire in 2025

when he turns 75. Yet another disclosure made by the Delhi Chief Minister was that Yogi Adityanath would be removed as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh within two months of the BJP coming back to power.

The national and international media are celebrating Kejriwal's bail and his prophecies. A major section of the media forgot the fact that they were the ones to give running commentaries of Live events without joining the game as players. The media in Kerala and Tamil Nadu are on Cloud Nine reporting that there is going to be a change of Government at the Centre after 4 June 2024. Well, let's leave it to the voters who are in the process of electing their representatives. It is good to see

that doubts about tampering the electronic voting machines have taken a stage and the Opposition leaders have started working on the modalities of Government formation. Saturday's press meeting by the Delhi Chief Minister took one to 2019 when the same had claimed that if the BJP wins the General Election and returns to power, there would not be any more elections in India. "The 2019 General Election would be the last poll the country will see if Narendra Modi returns to power," these were the words of Kejriwal in 2019.

After the 2019 general election, Narendra Modi returned to power with a larger majority and the country saw regular elections to all the State assemblies that completed their

mandatory five-year tenure. Though the claim fell flat on all fours, neither the media that flashed Kejriwal's warning about the "last" general elections nor our political pundits remembered the same.

Once the results were announced and the BJP was returned to power, that became the news, and everything else was forgotten (at least till 2024).

Yet another battlefield has been opened by the Opposition and that is the One Nation, One Leader concept, the brand new slogan coined by Kejriwal. Wasn't it George Santayana, the Spanish-American philosopher who said in 1863 that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"? Narendra Modi, I am sure

does know this adage quite well and hence there is no possibility of following the slogan coined by Kejriwal. The entire media in the country is unanimous in their opinion that elections are the festivals of democracy. But the festivals will certainly lose their charm if they are fueled by half-lies and full lies. One is at a loss to understand the logic behind the claim by certain leaders that the BJP government would subvert the Constitution!

Who derailed the Constitution much against the order of the Supreme Court that the basic structure of the Constitution should never be tampered with. It was in 1976 that then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi altered the preamble of the Constitution by incorporating

the words secularism, socialism etc. India survived as a nation from 1947 to 1976 without the terms secularism and socialism in its Constitution. B R Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, was totally against the inclusion of these terms when it was drafted for the first time. It was after the introduction of these terms that communal riots and terrorism peaked in India.

Accusations and allegations are fine because they add to the intensity of the campaigning. But baseless allegations rob the beauty of the election process. Interestingly, the leaders named by the Delhi chief minister as potential victims of the Modi regime are not saints or beatified ones. Reports from Delhi say that Kejriwal

was summoned eight or nine times by the ED for questioning in connection with money laundering. The Chief Minister chose to ignore the same with contempt. He might not know the truth that the reigning Prime Minister cooperated with the Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigation Team under the chairmanship of R K Raghavan, a former CBI director to grill him about the Gujarat riots. For 19 hours, the then Gujarat Chief Minister sat through the grilling and answered all the queries they asked. That is what we call honesty and integrity. People still hope that Kejriwal too is honest.

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

Pro-Palestinian protests dwindle on campuses

Some US college graduations marked by defiant acts

AP ■ CHICAGO

A tiny contingent of Duke University graduates opposed pro-Israel comedian Jerry Seinfeld speaking at their commencement in North Carolina Sunday, with about 30 of the 7,000 students leaving their seats and chanting “free Palestine” amid a mix of boos and cheers. Some waved the red, green, black and white Palestinian flag. Seinfeld, whose namesake sitcom was one of the most popular in US television history, was there to receive an honorary doctorate from the university. The stand-up comic turned actor, who stars in the new Netflix movie “Unfrosted,” has publicly supported Israel since it invaded Gaza to dismantle Hamas after the organization attacked the country and killed some 1,200 people in southern Israel on October 7. The ensuing war has killed more than

35,000 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which doesn’t distinguish between civilians and combatants. The small student protest Sunday at Duke’s graduation in Durham, North Carolina, was emblematic of campus events across the US Sunday after weeks of student protests resulted in nearly 2,900 arrests at 57 colleges and universities. Students at campuses across the US responded this spring by setting up encampments and calling for their schools to cut ties with Israel and businesses that support it. Students and others on campuses whom law enforcement authorities have identified as outside agitators have taken part in the protests from Columbia University in New York City to UCLA. Police escorted graduates’ families past a few dozen pro-Palestinian protesters who tried to block access to Sunday



Smoke rises following an Israeli bombardment in the Gaza Strip as seen from southern Israel, Monday. AP/PTI

evening’s commencement for Southern California’s Pomona College. After demonstrators set up an encampment last week on the campus’ ceremony stage, the small liberal arts school moved

the event 30 miles (48 kilometres) from Claremont to the Shrine Auditorium in downtown Los Angeles. Tickets were required to attend the event, which the school said would include additional security mea-

sures. In April, police wearing riot gear arrested 19 protesters who had occupied the president’s office at the college with about 1,700 undergraduates. Demonstrator Anwar Mohamed, a 21-year-old Pomona senior, said the school has repeatedly ignored calls to consider divesting its endowment funds from corporations tied to Israel in the war in Gaza. “We’ve been time and time again ignored by the institution,” Mohamed said outside the Shrine on Sunday. “So today we have to say, it’s not business as usual.” At the University of California, Berkeley, on Saturday, a small group of pro-Palestinian demonstrators waved flags and chanted during commencement and were escorted to the back of the stadium, according to the San Francisco Chronicle. There were no major counterprotests, but some attendees voiced frustra-

“I feel like they’re ruining it for those of us who paid for tickets and came to show our pride for our graduates,” said Annie Ramos, whose daughter is a student. “There’s a time and a place, and this is not it.” This weekend’s commencement events remained largely peaceful. At Emerson College in Boston, some students took off their graduation robes and left them on stage. Others emblazoned “free Palestine” on their mortarboards. One woman, staring at a camera broadcasting a livestream to the public, unzipped her robe to show a kaffiyeh, the black and white checkered scarf commonly worn by Palestinians, and flashed a watermelon painted on her hand. Both are symbols of solidarity with those living in the occupied territories. Others displayed messages for a camera situated on stage, but the livestream quickly shifted to a

different view, preventing them from being seen for long. Chants during some of the speeches were difficult to decipher. Protests at Columbia University, where student uprisings inspired others at campuses across the country, led the school to cancel its main graduation ceremony in favour of smaller gatherings. The University of Southern California told its valedictorian, who publicly backed Palestinians, that she could not deliver her keynote speech at its graduation ceremony because of security concerns. It later cancelled its main graduation ceremony. At DePaul University in Chicago, graduation is more than a month away. But as the academic year closes, school leaders said they had reached an “impasse” with the school’s pro-Palestinian protesters, leaving the future of their encampment on the Chicago campus unclear.

3 charged under UK’s National Security Act

London (PTI): Three men in the UK have been charged under the National Security Act with assisting the Hong Kong intelligence service and foreign interference. All three will appear in custody at Westminster Magistrates’ Court later, the BBC reported on Monday. The Metropolitan Police said the Hong Kong investigation was not related to a separate case involving Russia. As part of the investigation, 11 people were detained under Section 27 of the National Security Act. The three men charged are Chi Leung (Peter) Wai, 38, of Staines-upon-Thames; Matthew Trickett, 37, of Maidenhead; and Chung Biu Yuen, 63, of Hackney. Commander Dominic Murphy, head of the Met’s Counter Terrorism Command, said, “I want to reassure the public that we do not believe there to be any wider threat to them.”

Trump’s hush money trial arrives at pivotal moment

AP ■ NEW YORK

The star prosecution witness in Donald Trump’s hush money trial, Michael Cohen, took the stand on Monday, and his testimony could help shape the outcome of the first criminal case against an American president. Cohen, Trump’s former lawyer and personal fixer, is by far the Manhattan district attorney’s most important witness in the case, and his appearance signals that the trial is entering its final stretch. Prosecutors say they may wrap up their presentation of evidence by the end of the week. Cohen is expected to testify about his role in arranging hush money payments on Trump’s behalf during his first presidential campaign, including to porn actor Stormy Daniels, who told jurors last week that the USD 130,000 that she received in 2016 was meant to prevent her from going public about a sexual encounter she says she had with Trump in a hotel suite a decade earlier. It also matters because the reimbursements he received form the basis of the charges — 34 felony counts of falsifying



business records — against Trump. Prosecutors say the reimbursements were logged as legal expenses to conceal the payments’ true purpose. Defence lawyers have teed up a bruising cross-examination of Cohen, telling jurors during opening statements that the fixer-turned-foe is an “admitted liar” with an “obsession to get President Trump.” The testimony of a witness with such intimate knowledge of Trump’s activities could heighten the legal exposure of the presumptive Republican presidential nominee if jurors deem him sufficiently credible. But politically, prosecutors’ reliance on

a witness with such a checkered past — Cohen pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the payments and to lying to Congress — could be a boon for Trump as he fundraises off his legal woes and paints the case as the product of a tainted criminal justice system. Either way, his role as star prosecution witness further cements the disintegration of a mutually beneficial relationship that was once so close that Cohen famously said he’d “take a bullet for Trump.” After Cohen’s home and office were raided by the FBI in 2018, Trump showered him with affection on social media,

praising him as a “fine person with a wonderful family” and predicting — incorrectly — that Cohen would not “flip.” Months later, Cohen did exactly that, pleading guilty to August to federal campaign-finance charges in which he implicated Trump. By that point, the relationship was irrevocably broken, with Trump posting on the social media platform then known as Twitter: “If anyone is looking for a good lawyer, I would strongly suggest that you don’t retain the services of Michael Cohen!” Cohen later admitted lying to Congress about a Moscow real estate project that he had pursued on Trump’s behalf during the heat of the 2016 Republican campaign. He said he lied to be consistent with Trump’s “political messaging.” Prosecutors are expected to elicit detailed testimony from Cohen about his past crimes in hopes of blunting the impact of defence lawyers’ questioning and showing that they’re not trying to hide his misdeeds. But it’s unclear how effective that will be, given that defence lawyers will be prepared to exploit all the challenges that

accompany a witness like Cohen. Besides painting Cohen as untrustworthy, they’re also expected to cast him as vindictive, vengeful and agenda-driven. Since their fallout, Cohen has emerged as a relentless and sometimes crude critic of Trump, appearing as recently as last week in a live TikTok wearing a shirt featuring a figure resembling Trump with his hands cuffed, behind bars. The judge on Friday urged prosecutors to tell him to refrain from making any more statements about the case or Trump. “He has talked extensively about his desire to see President Trump go to prison,” Trump attorney Todd Blanche said during opening statements. “He has talked extensively about his desire to see President Trump’s family go to prison. He has talked extensively about President Trump getting convicted in this case.” No matter how his testimony unfolds, Cohen is indisputably central to the case, as evidenced by the fact that his name was mentioned in the jury’s presence during opening statements more than 130 times — more than any other

person. Other witnesses, including former National Enquirer publisher David Pecker and former Trump adviser Hope Hicks, have testified at length about the role Cohen played in arranging to stifle stories that were feared to be harmful to Trump’s 2016 candidacy. And jurors heard an audio recording of Trump and Cohen discussing a plan to purchase the rights to a story of a Playboy model, Karen McDougal, who has said she had an affair with Trump. During a massive rally on Saturday in the southern New Jersey resort town of Wildwood, Trump revived his criticism of the case, wrongly blaming President Joe Biden for orchestrating the New York charges, calling the case a “Biden show trial.” That argument ignores the reality that the hush money case was filed by local prosecutors in Manhattan who do not work for the Justice Department or any other White House office. The Justice Department has said the White House has had no involvement in the two criminal cases against Trump brought by special counsel Jack Smith.

False narratives being created about India in West: Barai

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Misinformation and false narratives are being created about Indian democracy in the West in the middle of an election cycle in India, a prominent Indian-American oncologist has said, observing that some people in the West continue to have a colonial mentality. Chicago-based Dr Baharat Barai, in an interview on Sunday, hit out at Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for not taking action against Sikh separatists who are “openly planning and supporting violence inside India and Indian leaders.” “The Khalistan problem is only in Canada, maybe a little bit in the US. If the US government wants to give them a piece of land, let them be happy. After all, they’re foreign citizens. They’re either citizens of the US or citizens of Canada. What right do they have to interfere in what is happening in India?” Dr Barai told PTI in an interview here. “If they want a separate land for them, let (Canadian Prime Minister Justin) Trudeau give it to them. If the US thinks that that’s a good idea (let them do



so)...we are standing right in front of Abraham Lincoln (memorial in Washington DC). What did he do when the South (US) wanted to secede? We had a civil war. In Washington DC, he is being celebrated as the father of the nation,” he said. “This (Khalistan) is not a problem of India. Indian Sikhs don’t want to have anything to do with it. It is the foreign-born or foreign-living Sikhs and only a very tiny fraction of them,” Dr Barai said. Referring to the number of news articles and commentaries appearing in the Western press, including that of the US, raising questions about democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights in India,

More bodies found after flash floods kill dozens in Indonesia

AP ■ PADANG

Rescuers recovered more bodies Monday after monsoon rains triggered flash floods on Indonesia’s Sumatra Island, bringing down torrents of cold lava and mud, leaving 43 people dead and another 15 missing. The heavy rains, along with a landslide of mud and cold lava from Mount Marapi, caused a river to breach its banks. The deluge tore through mountain-side villages along four districts in West Sumatra province just before midnight Saturday. The floods swept away people and submerged hundreds of houses and buildings, while forcing more than 3,100 people to flee to temporary government shelters in Agam and Tanah Datar districts, said National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari. Cold lava, also known as lahar, is a mixture of volcanic mate-



rial and pebbles that flows down a volcano’s slopes in the rain. Rescuers on Monday recovered more bodies, mostly from villages that were worst hit in Agam and Tanah Datar districts, bringing the death toll to 43, Muhari said in a statement. At least 19 people were injured in the flash floods and rescuers were searching for 15 villagers reported missing, he said. Television reports showed relatives wailing as they

watched rescuers pull a muck-caked body from a devastated hamlet. It was placed in an orange and black bag and taken away for burial. Authorities struggled to get tractors and other heavy equipment to the area over washed-out roads after flash floods brought mud and rocks onto the hilly hamlets, said Abdul Malik, who heads the search and rescue office in Padang, the provincial capital.

Judge lifts ban on video of church stabbing

Melbourne (AP): An Australian judge Monday lifted a ban on the social media platform X showing Australians a video of a bishop being stabbed in a Sydney church. The temporary ban was put in place April 22, but the judge rejected the application from Australia’s eSafety Commission to extend the court order that would have expired Monday. Australian Federal Court Justice Geoffrey Kennett said he would publish his reasons for imposing and lifting the order later. The decision was a win for the company rebranded by billionaire Elon Musk when he bought Twitter last year. X was alone among social media platforms in refusing to remove video of Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel being stabbed. Musk has argued that he is standing up for a freedom of speech principle. Australian lawmakers have accused him of arrogance and of lacking a sense of social responsibility.

“Not trying to win anything. I just don’t think we should be suppressing Australian’s rights to free speech,” Musk posted on X after the ruling. X is also taking a separate court action against eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant, a former Twitter employee, that challenges the validity of her notice requiring the platform to remove video of the April 15 attack in an Assyrian Orthodox church. The judge is expected to consider setting a hearing date Wednesday. Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones said the government might consider changing Australian law after reading Kennett’s reasons for removing his order that required X to hide the video from users. “There’s a fundamental principle at stake and that is, if you’re a company or anybody operating in Australia, then you’ve got to abide by Australian laws,” Jones said.

‘Fires used as weapon of war in Sudan destroyed 72 villages’

AP ■ CAIRO

Fires resulting from the fighting in Sudan destroyed or damaged 72 villages and settlements last month, a UK-based rights group said Monday, highlighting the use of fire as a weapon of war in the conflict in the African country. Investigators from Sudan Witness, an open-source project run by the non-profit Center for Information Resilience, say that more blazes than in any other month since the war started in mid-April 2023. The number also brings to 201 the total number of fires in Sudan since fighting broke out between Sudan’s military and the rival paramilitary force. The analysis didn’t provide any casualty figures from the fires. In the war in Sudan, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces have often used fire, setting

entire villages ablaze, especially in Sudan’s western Darfur region. The war has wrecked the country and pushed its population to the brink of famine. More than 14,000 people have been killed and thousands have been wounded. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced. The Center for Information Resilience said the number of fires surged particularly in the north and west of el-Fasher, the capital city of North Darfur state that faces an imminent attack. El-Fasher saw intense fighting on Friday between the Sudanese military and the paramilitary RSF and their allies. At least 27 people were killed and dozens injured, said the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA. More than 800 were displaced. Sudan’s military launched an

airstrike the next day that hit close to a pediatric hospital in el-Fasher, killing two children and a caregiver, according to Doctors Without Borders. In its analysis, the Center for Information Resilience estimated that 31 settlements — villages and towns — were affected by fires in April, with an over 50 per cent destruction rate. “We’ve documented the patterns of numerous fires and the continuing devastation to settlements around western Sudan, large and small,” Anouk Theunissen, Sudan Witness project director, said in a news release. “When we see reports of fighting or airstrikes coinciding with clusters of fires it indicates that fire is being used indiscriminately as a weapon of war. The trend is worsening and continues to lead to the mass displacement of Sudanese people,” Theunissen said.

Amazon’s self-driving robotaxi under investigation

Detroit (AP): Amazon’s self-driving robotaxi unit is being investigated by the US government’s highway safety agency after two of its vehicles braked suddenly and were rear-ended by motorcyclists. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in documents posted on its website Monday it will evaluate the automated driving system developed by Zoox. Both crashes happened during the daytime hours and the motorcyclists suffered minor injuries. In both cases, the agency confirmed that each of the Amazon vehicles was operating in autonomous mode leading up to the crashes.

Thousands protest in Georgia

AP ■ TBILISI

Georgia’s parliament green-lit a final vote on a proposed law that critics see as a threat to media freedom and the country’s aspirations to join the European Union on Monday, a day after police dispersed the latest protests against it. The bill would require media and non-governmental organisations and other non-profits to register as “pursuing the interests of a foreign power” if they receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad. The opposition denounces the bill as “the Russian law” because Moscow uses similar legislation to crack down on independent news media, non-profits and activists critical of the Kremlin. The bill is nearly identical to one that the governing Georgian Dream party was pressured to



withdraw last year after street protests. Renewed demonstrations have rocked Georgia for weeks, with demonstrators scuffling with police, who used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds. The government says the bill is necessary to stem what it deems as harmful foreign influence over the country’s politics and to prevent unspecified foreign actors from trying to destabilise it.

Huge crowds marched through Europe Square in the capital, Tbilisi, on Saturday, with demonstrators wrapped in Georgian and European Union flags and chanting “Georgia!” On Sunday, the protesters gathered in front of parliament for an overnight rally and tried to block entrances into the building, where a committee of lawmakers were expected to discuss the bill once again on Monday.

Cellphones of Indian crew on board seized as part of probe: Non-profit organisation

PTI ■ NEW YORK

The FBI has seized the cellphones of the mostly Indian crew on board a crippled cargo ship in Baltimore as part of the investigation into the deadly bridge accident in the US city, a non-profit organisation in touch with the personnel said. The 2.6-km-long, four-lane Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River came crashing down on March 26 after the 984-foot ship “Dali” collided against it. The crew on board Dali included 20 Indians and one Sri Lankan. The crew has been on the ship since the accident and has been cooperating with the investigation. Executive Director of the Baltimore International

Seafarers’ Centre The Rev. Joshua Messick told PTI that he is working with all of the relevant organisations to make sure the crew has what they need and that their rights are being upheld. “They are well cared for with the sole exception that their cellphones were seized as part of the FBI’s investigation and have not been returned,” he said. Messick said he is in “contact with the crew to purchase some SIM cards for them and to plan trips ashore when they are able to have shore leave”. The Baltimore International Seafarers’ Centre is a non-profit organisation serving seafarers that call on the Port of Baltimore from all over the world. The mission of the organisation is to “facilitate the well-being of crew

members by offering transportation ashore,” according to information on its website. Last month, US authorities opened a criminal investigation into the Baltimore bridge collapse incident that killed six construction crew workers, who were repairing potholes on the bridge when the collision occurred. The Washington Post had said that the FBI opened the criminal investigation “focusing on the massive container ship that brought down the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore last month — a probe that will look at least in part at whether the crew left the port knowing the vessel had serious systems problems”. The Key Bridge Response Unified Command is sched-

uled to use precision cuts made with small charges to remove a large section of the Francis Scott Key Bridge wreckage from on top of the Dali. For safety reasons, the controlled demolition to remove the bridge section resting on the deck of the Dali has tentatively been scheduled for Monday. Due to weather conditions producing lightning within 10 miles of the M/V Dali, remaining daylight, and rising tide, Unified Command has moved the demolition to Monday. The Key Bridge Response Unified Command said in a statement that the safest and swiftest method to remove the bridge piece from on top of the Dali is by “precision cuts made with small charges.”

Situation remains tense in PoK as strike enters fourth day

Pak PM allocates Rs 23-bn grant to quell protests

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The situation remained tense in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as the total strike against high prices of wheat flour and inflated electricity bills and taxes entered its fourth day on Monday, forcing the Pakistan government to allocate Rs 23 billion for immediate release to the region to quell a simmering unrest.

The disputed region witnessed clashes on Saturday between the police and activists of a rights movement, leaving at least one police officer dead and injuring over 100 people, mostly policemen. A complete strike has also been observed in the territory since Friday, bringing life to a halt.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who said he was "deeply concerned" about the situation, on Monday approved Rs 23 billion for immediate release to the region after the negotiations between the protesters and the regional government ended in a deadlock. Ruffled by the unexpected protest and its sensitivity, Prime Minister Sharif chaired a special meeting here on Monday which was attended by PoK "prime minister" Chaudhry Anwarul Haq, local ministers, and top political leadership, the PM's Office (PMO) said in a statement.

Prime Minister Sharif approved the immediate provision of Rs23 billion to solve the problems of the people of PoK, it said. Federal ministers and leaders of the coalition parties also took part in the meeting, where a detailed review of the situation was taken, it added. Kashmir leaders and all participants appreciated Shehbaz for his decision, the PMO said.

The protest is led by the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), which has traders at the forefront in most parts of the region, who have been seeking the provision of electricity as per hydropower generation cost in the region, subsidised wheat flour and an end to the privileges of the elite class.

A long march led by the JAAC



The situation remained tense as strike in PoK entered fourth day

left for Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, on Monday as the wheel-jam strike entered its fourth day.

The movement announced its march on Muzaffarabad after the talks between the JAAC core committee and Chief Secretary of the region Dawood Bareach ended in a stalemate. A protest leader from Rawalakot accused the government of resorting to evasive tactics.

Protestors have already staged sit-ins, closing Kohala-Muzaffarabad Road at several locations, the Dawn newspaper reported. The road stretches 40 kilometres and links Kohala town with Muzaffarabad in PoK. Heavy contingents of police have been posted at roundabouts and sensitive locations. Markets, trade centres and educational institutes remain closed, while transport is suspended, reports said. The so-called government called in the Rangers after clashes between the police and protesters erupted in Mirpur during demonstrations on Saturday.

Expressing deep concern over

the violent clashes between the police and the protesters, Prime Minister Sharif on Sunday said that there should be "absolutely no tolerance for taking the law into one's own hands."

"I urge all parties to resort to a peaceful course of action for resolution of their demands. Despite the best efforts of detractors, the matter will hopefully be settled soon," he said. As part of his efforts to calm down tensions, President Asif Ali Zardari urged all the stakeholders to exercise restraint and resolve the issues through dialogue and mutual consultation.

He stressed that the political parties, state institutions and the people of the region should act responsibly so that hostile elements do not exploit the situation to their benefit. The president highlighted that the demands of the people in the region should be addressed as per law, adding that he would take up their grievances with Prime Minister Sharif to find a way out of the current situation. The president regretted the current situation and offered condolences over the unfortu-

nate death of the police officer and prayed for the swift recovery of all those who were injured in recent clashes.

On Saturday, the violent protesters damaged multiple vehicles, including a magistrate's car on the Poonch-Kotli road. Moreover, markets, trade centres, offices, schools, and restaurants remained closed across the region.

Police also launched a crackdown against the protesters after the violence, arresting dozens of individuals in Muzaffarabad.

A day earlier, the government also suspended mobile phone and internet services in different parts of the region. According to a report by Dawn, on May 9 and 10, around 70 activists were arrested by police in a bid to prevent a long march - announced by the JAAC to press the government to comply with an agreement reached between the two in February this year - triggering serious clashes in Dadyal and a "shut-down strike" call.

In light of the protests, government offices and educational institutions remained closed on Monday.

Dar set to meet top Chinese leaders in Beijing

Beijing (PTI): Pakistan's newly-appointed Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar on Monday reached here for a four-day official visit during which he will meet top Chinese leaders and co-chair a bilateral strategic dialogue between the two all-weather friends. Dar, who is also the foreign minister, was received by Director General Ambassador Wang Fu Kang and Pakistan's Ambassador to China Khalil Hashmi, state-run Associated Press of Pakistan reported. Dar will meet top Chinese leaders and comprehensively review bilateral relations, including the upgradation of the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement before his visit. He will co-chair the 5th Pakistan-China Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, it said. The two foreign ministers are expected to discuss the possibility of Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to Beijing.

Shehbaz quits as PML-N chief; Nawaz set to assume post

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday resigned as the President of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), paving the way for his elder brother and former premier Nawaz Sharif to retake the helm of the ruling party amid internal strife.

In his resignation letter addressed to the PML-N secretary general, Shehbaz cited the tumultuous events of 2017, which resulted in the "unjust" disqualification of Nawaz from the Prime Minister's Office and the presidency of the party, and said he was entrusted with the responsibility of assuming the presidency of the party. Shehbaz said that his brother had entrusted him with the responsibility of assuming the party presidency in the face of adversity and added that it was a duty he had "upheld with utmost dedication and sincerity".

"However, I am cognisant that this role has always been viewed as a trust ... bestowed upon me by our revered leader," the 72-year-old said. Nawaz, 74, returned to Pakistan in October last year, ending nearly four years of self-imposed exile in London.

"I am heartened by recent developments that have exonerated our leader with dignity, affirming his unblemished integrity and commitment to the service of our nation," he said, referring to the Islamabad High Court ruling on November 29 that acquitted Nawaz in the Avenfield reference. The next month, on December 12, the PML-N supreme was acquitted in the Al-Azizia reference by the high court.

"In light of these developments and the steadfast guidance of our beloved leader, I believe the time has come for Mohammad Nawaz Sharif to resume his rightful place as the president of the PML-N,"

Shehbaz said. "It is with a deep sense of duty and reverence for our party's principles that I tender my resignation as the president," he said.

In 2017, the Supreme Court disqualified Nawaz as premier and party president for his alleged corruption in cases related to the Panama Papers revelations about his illegal wealth stashed abroad.

He relinquished his position within the party following his disqualification, which also led to his departure from the prime minister's office. Nawaz was all set to become prime minister for the fourth time but his party failed to get a clear majority in the National Assembly on its own in the February 8 general elections. In a surprise move, he allowed his younger brother and the incumbent party president Shehbaz — who is considered the favourite of the military establishment — to lead a six-party coalition government at the Centre.

India extend USD 50 million budgetary support to Maldives as goodwill gesture

PTI ■ MALE

In a goodwill gesture, India has decided to extend vital budgetary support to the Maldives with the rollover of a USD 50 million Treasury Bill for another year at the Maldivian government's special request, it was announced on Monday.

The State Bank of India has subscribed for one more year to the USD 50 million Government Treasury Bill, issued by the Ministry of Finance of Maldives, upon maturity of the previous subscription, the High Commission of India said in a brief statement on Monday.

The Indian government took this decision despite the bilateral ties experiencing turbulence since Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, a pro-China leader, assumed office six months back. These Government Treasury Bills are subscribed by SBI under government-to-government, a

unique arrangement at zero cost (interest-free) to the Government of Maldives. The continuation of subscription has been made at the special request of the Government of Maldives to secure budgetary support from the Government of India, the statement said.

Under the terms of special government-to-government arrangement, SBI has been subscribing to these government treasury bills at zero cost to the Maldives government. This means the Maldives incurs no interest expense on the borrowed amount, the Edition.my news portal reported.

The first treasury bill, valued at USD 50 million, matured in January 2024, which the Maldives had repaid. The second treasury bill, also valued at USD 50 million, is set to mature in May 2024. In response to a special request from the Maldives, SBI has opted to extend its subscription for another year.

The third treasury bill is due to

mature in September, the report said. The Maldivian government on Monday thanked India for its support. "I thank EAM @DrSJaishankar and the Government of India for extending vital budgetary support to the Maldives with the rollover of USD 50 million Treasury Bill. This is a true gesture of goodwill which signifies the longstanding friendship between #Maldives and #India," Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer tweeted.

The Government of India has provided budget support of USD 50 million to the Maldives. The support was in the form of a rollover of USD 50 million Treasury Bill, for an additional year, through the State Bank of India, Male', from May 13, 2024, the Maldivian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "Government of India's decision to rollover the T-Bill came following a request to that effect made by Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer to India's External Affairs Minister

Dr S Jaishankar, during the official bilateral visit to India from May 8-10, the statement said. The Government of Maldives is highly appreciative of the generous support that the Government of India has been providing to the Maldives in the form of budgetary support. A large number of infrastructural developmental projects and High Impact Community Developmental projects are underway with assistance from the Government of India, which consists of a notable part as grant assistance, the statement said. The Government of Maldives looks forward to continuing this collaborative partnership for the mutual benefit and prosperity of their people, it said. Zameer after coming back from the visit said that significant strides have been made in expediting India-assisted projects in the Maldives, as he underscored the government's commitment to prioritising the resumption and completion of these projects.

Putin replaces Sergei Shoigu as defence minister

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday replaced Sergei Shoigu as defence minister in a Cabinet shakeup that comes as he begins his fifth term in office.

In line with Russian law, the entire Russian Cabinet resigned Tuesday following Putin's glittering inauguration in the Kremlin, and most members have been widely expected to keep their jobs, while Shoigu's fate had appeared uncertain.

Putin signed a decree on Sunday appointing Shoigu as secretary of Russia's Security Council, the Kremlin said. The appointment was announced shortly after Putin proposed Andrei Belousov to become the country's defence minister in place of Shoigu.

The announcement of Shoigu's new role came as 13 people were reported dead and 20 more wounded in Russia's border city of Belgorod, where a 10-story apartment building partially collapsed after what Russian officials said was Ukrainian shelling. Ukraine hasn't commented on the incident.

Belousov's candidacy will need to be approved by Russia's upper house in parliament, the Federation Council. It reported Sunday that Putin introduced proposals for other Cabinet positions as well but Shoigu is the only minister on that list who is being replaced. Several other new candidates for federal ministers were proposed Saturday by Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, reappointed by Putin on Friday.

Shoigu's deputy, Timur Ivanov, was arrested last month on bribery charges and was ordered to remain in custody pending an official investigation. The arrest of Ivanov was widely interpreted as an attack on Shoigu and a possible precursor of his dismissal, despite his close personal ties with Putin.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Sunday that Putin had decided to give the defence minister role to a civilian because the ministry should be "open to innovation and cutting-edge ideas." He also said the increasing defence budget "must fit into the country's wider economy," and Belousov, who until recently served as the first

deputy prime minister, is the right fit for the job. Belousov, 65, held leading positions in the finances and economic department of the prime minister's office and the Ministry of Economic Development. In 2013, he was appointed an adviser to Putin and seven years later, in January 2020, he became first deputy prime minister.

Peskov assured that the reshuffle will not affect "the military aspect," which "has always been the prerogative of the Chief of General Staff," and Gen Valery Gerasimov, who currently serves in this position, will continue his work.

Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, said in an online commentary that Shoigu's new appointment to Russia's Security Council showed that the Russian leader viewed the institution as "a reservoir" for his "former" key figures — people who he can't in any way let go, but doesn't have a place for." Figures such as former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev have also been appointed to the security coun-

cil. Medvedev has served as the body's deputy chairman since 2020.

Shoigu was appointed to the Security Council instead of Nikolai Patrushev, Putin's long-term ally. Peskov said Sunday that Patrushev is taking on another role, and promised to reveal details in the coming days. Shoigu has been widely seen as a key figure in Putin's decision to send Russian troops into Ukraine. Russia had expected the operation to quickly overwhelm Ukraine's much smaller and less-equipped army and for Ukrainians to broadly welcome Russian troops.

Instead, the conflict galvanized Ukraine to mount an intense defence, dealing the Russian army humiliating blows, including the retreat from an attempt to take the capital, Kyiv, and a counteroffensive that drove Moscow's forces out of the Kharkiv region. Before he was named defence minister in 2012, Shoigu spent more than 20 years directing markedly different work: In 1991, he was appointed head of the Russian Rescue Corps disaster-response

agency, which eventually became the Ministry of Emergency Situations. He became highly visible in the post. The job also allowed him to be named a general even though he had no military service behind him as the rescue corps absorbed the militarised Civil Defence Troops.

Shoigu does not wield the same kind of power as Patrushev, who has long been the country's top security official. But the position he will take — the same position that Patrushev worked to transform from a minor bureaucratic role to a place of sizable influence — will still carry some authority, according to Mark Galeotti, head of the Mayak Intelligence consultancy. High-level security materials intended for the president's eyes will still pass through the Security Council Secretariat, even with changes at the top. "You can't just institutionally turn around a bureaucracy and how it works overnight," he said. Thousands of civilians have fled Russia's renewed ground offensive in Ukraine's northeast that has targeted towns and villages with a

barrage of artillery and mortar shelling, officials said Sunday. The intense battles have forced at least one Ukrainian unit to withdraw in the Kharkiv region, capitulating more land to Russian forces across less defended settlements in the so-called contested gray zone along the Russian border.

By Sunday afternoon, the town of Vovchansk, among the largest in the northeast with a prewar population of 17,000, emerged as a focal point in the battle. Volodymyr Tymoshko, the head of the Kharkiv regional police, said that Russian forces were on the outskirts of the town and approaching from three directions. An Associated Press team, positioned in a nearby village, saw plumes of smoke rising from the town as Russian forces hurled shells. Evacuation teams worked non-stop throughout the day to take residents, most of whom were older, out of harm's way. At least 4,000 civilians have fled the Kharkiv region since Friday, when Moscow's forces launched the operation, Governor Oleh Synyehubov said in a social media statement.

Ukraine army locked in 'fierce' border battles amid Russian assault

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian troops are locked in intense battles with the advancing Russian army in two border areas, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, while the death toll from a Russian apartment building collapse blamed on Ukrainian shelling rose to 15.

Zelenskyy said "fierce battles" are taking place near the border in eastern and northeastern Ukraine as outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers try to push back a significant Russian ground offensive. "Defensive battles are ongoing, fierce battles, on a large part of our border area," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address on Sunday.

The Kremlin's forces are aiming to exploit Ukrainian weaknesses before a big batch of new military aid for Kyiv from the US and European partners arrives on the battlefield in the coming weeks and months, analysts say.

That makes this period a window of opportunity for Moscow and one of the most dangerous for Kyiv in the two-year war, they say.

The new Russian push in the northeastern Kharkiv region, along with the ongoing drive into the eastern Donetsk region, come after months when the about 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line barely budged. In the meantime, both sides have used long-range strikes in what largely became a war of attrition.

The Kharkiv incursion may be

an attempt to create a "buffer zone" to protect Belgorod, an adjacent Russian border region battered by Ukrainian attacks. Russian emergency services on Monday finished clearing the rubble in the region's capital city of Belgorod, where a section of a residential building collapsed following what authorities said was Ukrainian shelling. Fifteen bodies were pulled from the rubble, Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said, and 27 other people were wounded. Another three people in the city of Belgorod were killed by shelling late Sunday, he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday replaced Sergei Shoigu as defence minister in a Cabinet shakeup. Shoigu was widely seen as a key figure in Putin's decision to send Russian troops into Ukraine in February 2022. Russia had expected the operation to quickly overwhelm Ukraine's army and for Ukrainians to broadly welcome Russian troops.

Zelenskyy said fighting in the Donetsk area is "no less intense" than in Kharkiv. He said the Kremlin aimed to "spread our forces thin" by opening a second active front in Kharkiv. He described the area around Pokrovsk region, just inside the Ukrainian border in Donetsk, as "the most difficult". Pokrovsk was a town of around 60,000 people before the war and was until recently a two-hour drive from the front line. Now it is less than half that.

Pillai named state minister in Singapore PM Wong cabinet

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Indian-origin Member of Parliament Murali Pillai will be appointed the Minister of State for Law and Transport in the new incoming cabinet of Singapore's new Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, it was announced on Monday.

Pillai, 56, will be appointed and sworn in on July 1, according to a report by The Straits Times newspaper while others will be sworn in on May 15. Pillai, a member of the ruling People's Action Party, is a lawyer.

Among other Indian-origin politicians, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan will remain as Foreign Affairs Minister, K Shanmugam will continue as

Minister of Home Affairs and Law, and Indraneel Rajah as the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office.

The new cabinet line-up was announced by the Singapore Prime Minister's Office on Monday.

It will be led by Wong, who will be sworn into the highest executive office on Wednesday after incumbent Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 72, announced that he will step down on Wednesday after leading the country for 20 years.

Gan Kim Yong, 65, will be promoted to Deputy Prime Minister as part of a cabinet reshuffle and will remain as Trade and Industry Minister. He will be the acting prime minister in the absence of the

prime minister. He will also take over as the chairman of the Monetary Authority of Singapore, the de facto central bank, and assume responsibility for the strategy group within the Prime Minister's Office.

Currently, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat, 63, will continue in his role. Heng was first named to succeed Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong but he has declined to take up the position.

Wong, 51, also announced other promotions and appointments on Monday, but there were no major changes to the ministers helming each ministry in this reshuffle.

For example, Wong will remain at the helm of the Finance Ministry.

Nepal DyPM quits in setback to Prachanda-led govt

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and senior Madhesi leader Upendra Yadav on Monday tendered his resignation and his party pulled out of the government, a setback to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda-led coalition government.

Yadav, also the Minister for Health and Population, submitted his resignation to Prime Minister "Prachanda" on Monday morning, according to sources close to the Madhesi leader. Along with Yadav, Minister of State for Forest and Environment Dipak Karki, from the same party, has also submitted his resignation.

The resignation by Yadav, the

Chairman of Janata Samajwadi Party Nepal (JSP-Nepal), comes a week after his party split into two groups with senior leader Ashok Rai forming a new party named Janata Samajwadi Party. The new party has been recognised by the Election Commission. "This morning, I submitted my resignation to Prime Minister Dahal. Given the current political situation, I find it untenable to continue my cooperation with the government," Yadav said.

The JSP-Nepal had altogether 12 lawmakers in the House of Representatives (HoR). Now the party's strength has been reduced to 5 in the HoR as Rai and six other lawmakers and 30 central committee members joined the new party.

The ruling coalition led by Prime Minister Prachanda still holds a majority with 77 seats of the CPN-UML, 32 of the Maoist Centre, 21 of the Rastriya Swatantra Party, seven of the newly formed Janata Samajwadi Party and 10 seats of the CPN-Unified Socialist (CPN-US). The coalition requires at least 138 seats in the 275-member House of Representatives to prove a majority.

"The party's pull out from the government will not have an immediate impact on the Prachanda-led coalition government," said Sunil Manandhar, former environment minister and central committee member of the ruling CPN-Maoist Centre.

BABA FARID UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, FARIDKOT

(Admission Branch)

Admission Notice for BPT, BMLT & B.Sc Medical (APB) Courses, session 2024

Online applications through University website alongwith requisite registration fee are invited w.e.f. 14.05.2024 to 26.05.2024 from eligible candidates for admission to Bachelor of Physiotherapy, Bachelor in Medical Laboratory Technology & B.Sc Medical (Anatomy, Physiology & Biochemistry) Courses, session 2024. The Last date for submission of Online Fee through payment gateway is 27.05.2024. For Eligibility/Prospectus/Schedule / Details/Updates visit the University website i.e. www.bfuh.ac.in.

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00/12/238/2023/34064 Dated CHD :- 5/13/2024

Stock markets rebound on last hour buying

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Benchmark Sensex and Nifty staged a dramatic rebound on Monday to settle higher following buying in HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Tata Consultancy Services. Helped by buying at the fag-end, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed higher by 111.66 points or 0.15 per cent at 72,776.13. The index opened lower and plummeted further 798.46 points or 1.09 per cent to hit a low of 71,866.01 in day trade. The NSE Nifty rose by 48.85 points or 0.22 per cent to 22,104.05. The 50-issue rebounded around 310 points from the day's low of 21,821.05 and hit a high of 22,131.65. From the Sensex basket, Asian Paints, Sun Pharma, HDFC Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Axis Bank, Tata Steel, JSW Steel,



Larsen & Toubro, ICICI Bank and Power Grid were the major gainers. Tata Motors dropped over 8 per cent despite reporting over three-fold jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 17,528.59 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2024. NTPC, Bharti Airtel, Titan, State Bank of India and Nestle were the other major laggards. Vinod Nair, Head of

Research, Geojit Financial Services said, "Though the market reversed from the day's low and ended up with a marginal gain, investors remain concerned over the progressing general election and high valuation." An absence of major positive triggers and the flight of FIIs from the domestic market will keep the short-term trend weak, Nair added. "The week kicked off with market volatility, but by the

end, it managed to eke out marginal gains. Initially bearish sentiments gave way to a recovery, particularly among key heavyweights, which not only erased losses but also propelled the index to close near the day's peak," said Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd. Experts said that market volatility was high amid the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. As many as 96 seats went to polls in the fourth phase of elections on Monday. "VIX's rise from record lows to above 20 now, has unfolded in just a fortnight's time. So, while recent history points to more room for upside in VIX and thereby volatility, the abruptness in the rate of change of VIX, may lead to a cool off, perhaps even before the electoral results," Anand James, Chief Market Strategist, Geojit Financial Services said.

Rupee falls 1 paisa to close at 83.52 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day lower by 1 paisa at 83.52 (provisional) against US dollar on Monday, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by strong American currency. Forex traders said with foreign investors buying US dollars and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) selling the greenback, the USD/INR pair is expected to remain range-bound with a bit of a weakness bias. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit traded in a narrow range. It opened at 83.51, and touched an intraday low of 83.53 during the day. The domestic unit finally settled for the day at 83.52 (provisional), down 1 paisa from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee closed at 83.51 against the American currency. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on the strong US dollar and



weakness in the domestic markets. Continued selling by FIIs may further pressure the rupee. However, any bond-related dollar inflows may support the rupee at lower levels," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Traders may take cues from India's inflation data. Investors may remain cautious ahead of inflation data from the US this week. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of

Rs 83.30-83.80, Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was at 105.27, marginally lower by 0.02 per cent. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.12 per cent to USD 82.89 per barrel. On the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 111.66 points, or 0.15 per cent, to close at 72,776.13 points. The broader NSE Nifty settled 48.85 points, or 0.22 per cent higher, at 22,104.05. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Friday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,117.50 crore, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, after three consecutive weeks of drop, India's forex reserves increased USD 3.668 billion to USD 641.59 billion for the week ended May 3, the RBI said on Friday.

Google Cloud to offer cloud solutions to Airtel customers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Google Cloud and Bharti Airtel have collaborated to deliver cloud solutions to the latter's customers, according to a joint statement issued on Monday. The long-term partnership will offer cloud solutions from Google Cloud to fast-track cloud adoption and modernisation for Airtel's customers, the statement said. "The two companies will bring together their unique strengths of connectivity and AI technology to develop industry-leading AI/ML solutions that Airtel will train on its large data set," it said. The two entities will work together on a "joint go-to-market", combining Airtel's connectivity and distribution channels with Google Cloud's AI technologies. Airtel will provide cloud-managed services to its customers, which include both large enterprises and emerging businesses. These solutions will include geospatial analytics solutions with advanced location intelligence, voice analytics solutions, and marketing technology solutions to forecast consumer behaviour, perform tailored audience segmentations, and streamline content creation with high-precision contextual ads at reduced costs. "As India accelerates its digital transformation, cutting-edge cloud and AI solutions will be at the heart and centre of this change. "We are happy to partner with Google Cloud and jointly address this market opportunity with secure and scalable Cloud solutions for government, enterprises, and emerging businesses," Bharti Airtel Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Gopal Vittal said.

Banks' risk appetite through higher loan growth to be key in determining creditworthiness: Fitch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Fitch Ratings on Monday said Indian banks' risk appetite through higher loan growth will remain a key consideration for their creditworthiness despite improved financial performance. It said asset quality pressures from the previous credit cycle are subsiding, creating a favourable business environment. This has bolstered banks' potential and appetite for growth. Bank loans grew by 16 per cent in the financial year ended March 2024, similar to

FY23, exceeding the 8 per cent CAGR (compound annual growth rate) over FY15-FY22. Retail loans constitute around 10 per cent of system loans, and grew at a 20 per cent CAGR since FY21, fuelled by a shift towards unsecured credit to expand margins, the US-based rating firm said. Large private banks gained significant market share in the last credit cycle and continue to grow rapidly; state banks also returned to brisk growth but lagged large private banks, Fitch said in a report titled "Risk profile weighs on Indian banks'

viability ratings despite improved performance." Fitch said India's household debt is among the lowest in the world, despite rising to around 40 per cent of GDP from 38 per cent in FY23. "Nonetheless, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has expressed concerns regarding the fall in the household savings rate, early delinquencies, higher loans per borrower (43 per cent of consumption loan borrowers had three live loans), and surge in consumption loans, even though secured loans dominate banks' loan books," Fitch said.

Zomato posts Q4 consolidated net profit at ₹175 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Online food delivery firm Zomato Ltd on Monday reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 175 crore in the March quarter on the back of higher revenue. The company had posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 188 crore in the same quarter last fiscal, Zomato Ltd said in a regulatory filing. Consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 3,562 crore. It was Rs 2,056 crore in the year-ago period, it added. Total expenses were at Rs 3,636 crore. The company posted its total expenses at Rs 2,431 crore in the corresponding period a year ago, it said.

For the fiscal ended on March 31, 2024, the consolidated net profit was Rs 351 crore. It had posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 971 crore in the previous fiscal ended on March 31, 2023, the filing said. In FY24, consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 12,114 crore. It was at Rs 7,079 crore. The results for the year ended March 31, 2024, are not comparable with the year ended March 31, 2023, due to the acquisition of Blink Commerce Pvt Ltd (formerly known as Grofers India Pvt Ltd) in June 2022, the filing said. Zomato said its margin expansion continues in both

food delivery and quick commerce. The quick commerce business, Blinkit, reached an adjusted EBITDA break-even mark for the month of March 2024. The company said a rapid store expansion is underway in the quick commerce business and it is aiming for 1,000 stores by March 2025. In a letter to shareholders, Zomato Managing Director & CEO Deepinder Goyal said the food delivery GOV (gross order value) growth continues to be strong at 28 per cent year-on-year despite the softness in the overall restaurant industry due to the "convenience and predictability layer" that Zomato has built on top of the

services offered by restaurants. "We believe that we can continue to grow faster than the overall restaurant industry (and therefore power a significant part of the growth of the restaurant industry) if we continue to innovate using our customer-first principles, while creating value for all our other stakeholders our restaurant partners, and our delivery partners," he added. On Blinkit, which has become a larger shareholder value driver than the food delivery business in less than two years after the acquisition, Goyal said, "...The bet that we took on Blinkit worked out just fine..."

Share of North East in total MF assets more than doubles in four years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The share of North East in overall mutual fund assets in the country more than doubled in the last 4 years to Rs 40,324 crore in March 2024, spurred by increased awareness and growing interest among retail investors to invest in equities, a report by ICRA Analytics said. Also, this signals a growing appetite among investors from smaller towns and cities to invest in mutual funds. The combined share of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura rose to 0.73 per cent of the total average asset under management (AUM) of the mutual fund industry, which stood at Rs 55,011 lakh crore in March 2024. The share was around 0.67 per cent in March 2020, when the industry's AUM was at Rs 24,711 lakh crore. Data for Sikkim was not provided. In March 2020, these states had an asset base of Rs 16,446 crore as compared to Rs



40,324 crore in March this year. "Though the contribution of these states to the total AAUM of the industry is still small in percentage terms, there has been a steady and consistent growth in mutual fund inflows in these states backed by increasing awareness among people and the growing interest among retail investors for investing in equities through the mutual fund route," Ashwini Kumar, Senior Vice President and Head Market Data, ICRA Analytics, said. With an AAUM of Rs 29,268

crore, Assam was the leading contributor among Northeastern states, accounting for nearly 73 per cent of the total AAUM of Rs 40,324 crore of these states in March 2024. AAUM of Assam grew nearly 159 per cent from Rs 11,298 crore in March 2020. Meghalaya accounted for 9 per cent of the total AAUM at Rs 3,623 crore in March 2024 as compared to Rs 1,714 crore in March 2020. Tripura accounted for 5 per cent of the total asset base at Rs 2,174 crore in March this year, up from Rs 1,155 crore in March

2020. Further, Nagaland contributed 4 per cent of the total asset base at Rs 1,668 crore, way higher than Rs 965 crore in March 2020. Arunachal Pradesh contributed 3.8 per cent at Rs 1,532 crore in the period under review, up from Rs 525 crore in March 2020. Manipur's share was 2.9 per cent at Rs 1,152 crore, an increase from Rs 403 crore in March 2020 and Mizoram accounted for 2.25 per cent at Rs 907 crore, up from Rs 386 crore in March 2020, it added. "There has been a steady increase in awareness about the various investment options among people, primarily from smaller towns and cities. This, coupled with growing financial literacy and the surge in interest among retail investors for investing in equities through the mutual fund route, all contribute to a good growth in AAUM in towns and cities beyond the top 30. "The investor awareness campaigns conducted by AMCs (asset management

companies) in the northeastern region have also helped build awareness among people," Kumar said. However, he pointed out that mutual fund penetration still continues to be low in the country and there is a lot of scope for growth. The burgeoning middle class and a rising financial literacy is likely to prompt more and more people to resort to financial planning so as to accrue savings and this is expected to shore up mutual fund investments in northeastern states moving forward. Overall, the Indian mutual fund industry continues on its growth momentum with an increase in inflows across both debt and equity-oriented schemes in April 2024. The net AUM of the industry, which posted 35 per cent growth in 2023-24, continued to register a stellar performance in April 2024 as it surged by nearly 38 per cent year-on-year to Rs 57,26 lakh crore as compared with Rs 41.62 lakh crore in April 2023.

Exim Bank FY24 profit jumps 62 per cent to ₹2,518 crore

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Export-Import Bank of India on Monday reported 62 per cent jump in FY24 net profit at Rs 2,518 crore, primarily helped by a sharp improvement in the asset quality. In FY23, profit stood at Rs 1,556 crore. Amid souring of ties with the Maldives, Exim Bank said it has disbursed USD 450 million to the island nation, and the entire exposure is performing well, a senior official said. The bank's overall loan book grew 17 per cent during the fiscal year and it is aiming for at least 10-12 per cent growth in FY25, managing director Harsha Bangari told reporters here. When asked for the reasons for the lower growth aim for FY25, she said the bank had a similar target for FY24 as well but the asset growth came in higher than expectations.

The bank does not feel the need to go for any equity raising in FY25, she said, adding that it will be borrowing up to USD 3.5 billion in foreign currency and around Rs 35,000 crore from rupee-denominated borrowings. The bank has a commitment to repay USD 1.2 billion coming up in FY25, she said. The commercial book grew at 49 per cent, much faster than the policy business in FY24, which helped deliver the higher loan growth. The overall contribution of commercials in the overall book has reached 56 per cent business now. Net interest margin declined sharply to 2.06 per cent in FY24 as against 2.29 per cent a year ago, which was attributed to the composition of assets wherein over 88 per cent are from the low-yielding investment grade and also hardening of rates across the world.

Bangari said a NIM of over 1.75 per cent is good for the bank as a bulk 93 per cent of the expenses for it revolve around interest repayments. Gross non-performing assets ratio improved to 1.93 per cent as on March 31, 2024, from 4 per cent in the year-ago period, primarily because the slippages went down. As a result of that, the overall provisions went down to Rs 2,600 crore from Rs 4,700 crore in FY23. Bangari said the governments of Ghana and Zambia paid USD 200 million of dues which also helped reduce provisions. When asked about the Maldivian experience, a senior bank official said the bank has a commitment of USD 1.3 billion through a line of credit arrangement of which USD 450 million has been disbursed. Bangari stressed that all the exposure to the Maldives is performing well.

Assam: Mid segment businesses hit hard by high tax, inflation, absence of schemes

PTI ■ GUWAHATI
Businessmen, traders and contractors in Assam are keeping their fingers crossed as they hope that crucial issues such as high taxes, exclusion from financial schemes and inflationary pressure that are affecting the mid-segment businesses will be resolved by the new dispensation at the Centre after the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. They felt that there would be an adverse impact on the economy if the mid-segment businesses continued to reel under pressure, despite being one of the biggest employment-generating sectors after the railways. While interacting with PTI, businessmen and traders, who are from Marwari and Bengali communities in the state, also alleged that the government has "totally neglected" the medium segment of businesses across sectors. "In the present scenario, the government is focussing on industrialisation. But the

medium size businesses are not progressing. The government has not rolled out any scheme targeting the medium scale units," Sivasagar-based garment trader Rupchand Karnani said. The government claims that many schemes are launched, but when traders go to banks and financial institutions to avail of these facilities, too many documents are sought and finally, they become a failure, he said. Karnani, also the Sivasagar District Secretary of All India Marwari Federation, claimed that the sales of every trader were down, as compared to the previous years, during the recent Rongali Bihu, which is the main festival of Assam. "The government also imposed a lot of taxes on us and every year, the rates are increasing. Municipality tax, property tax, licence fee — all are rising. Rents are also skyrocketing. Staff wages are rising along with the prices of goods. Where from will we pay for these?" he asked.



With voting for Lok Sabha elections in Assam coming to an end, the mid-segment business community is optimistic that a new government at the Centre will look into their problems for long-lasting solutions. Stating that the outgoing government was "only concerned about the rich and small businesses", Karnani hoped that the new government at the "Centre

would encourage all sections of businessmen and only then India progress." "You have to look after the middle-class citizens as well as the business community. The highest sale is in this middle segment. All people do not go to high-end malls for shopping," he said, adding that online businesses have also impacted the traders to a large extent. Telecom contractor Suresh

Kumar Berlia seconded him and claimed that the mid-segment businesses are "deprived" of a beneficiary scheme. "When we go for a loan, they (financial institutions) ask for more collateral than the borrowing amount. If they give us a Rs 50 lakh loan, collateral or mortgage worth Rs 1 crore is needed, he claimed. Expressing disappointment over the current situation, Berlia alleged that the government waived loans amounting to crores of rupees for big industrialists, but "loan accounts of mid-segment businesses are termed as non-performing assets (NPA) even if a single instalment is misused." "Trading by the mid-segment businesses is the biggest industry after the railways as per my estimation. If the segment gets weakened, everything surrounding these businesses will suffer. Unfortunately, we have never got the due recognition and respect for our service," he added.

However, Berlia does not have much expectation from the new dispensation at the Centre as "all governments go for populist schemes and ignore the mid-segment business community". Gopal Ghosh, who runs a sweet-meat shop at Borjuri in Golaghat district of Assam, lamented that he has applied to several state-sponsored schemes to expand his eatery but has not received any positive response. "High inflation is affecting my business. With prices of all raw materials rising regularly in the last few years, the rates of tea and sweets have also increased accordingly. Sales are also affected," he said. Guwahati-based hardware trader Sandeep Sharma said online businesses are creating hurdles, which, in a way, are weakening the trade prospect as his shop does not sell products through digital platforms. "Taxation is a big issue here. The government says everything should be sold with GST, but customers don't

want to pay the indirect tax due to increasing rates," he said. Prices of construction materials have increased manifold in the last few years, but consumers want cheaper rates and are not keen on paying the GST component, the trader said. "However, we bought the goods from dealers by paying GST. So, it's a tricky situation for us. Customers want to buy the goods without paying GST, and it's a loss to us," he added. Sharma hoped that the new government, after the Lok Sabha elections, would try to rationalise the Goods and Services Tax (GST) along with the enhancement of individual income tax slabs which will provide more purchasing power to the people. He, however, lamented that the government has never looked after the mid-segment business class, and it did not receive any support even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Vivek Sharma, who looks after

his father's restaurant at Titabar in Jorhat district, said carrying out developmental work is a basic duty of any elected government and it should continue irrespective of the party in power. "The government should work more in controlling the prices. In recent times, increasing prices of medicines and all other commodities are hurting all sections of people, and it is affecting the purchasing power," he said. Sharma hoped that inflation would be brought down to a minimum so that poor and middle-class families could survive, and also help them spend for different goods. The young businessman also pointed out that labour problems are a challenge and his business faces scarcity of workers sometimes. The voting of 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam took place in three phases — April 19, 26 and May 7. The counting of votes will be on June 4 after completion of the entire seven-phase elections across the country.

NEERAJ CHOPRA, KISHORE JENA TO COMPETE DIRECTLY IN FED CUP FINALS

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Star Indian javelin throwers Neeraj Chopra and Kishore Jena have been given direct entry into the Federation Cup finals here on May 15, having already bettered the minimum qualification mark of 75m multiple times in their careers. Olympic and world champion Chopra is coming off a fairly good outing at the Doha Diamond League last week where he finished second with a throw of 88.38m. Asian Games silver-winner Jena's Diamond League debut, however, ended in disappointment as he was eliminated after three rounds with 76.31m being his best. DP Manu, who finished sixth in the 2023 World Championships and who is looking to qualify for the upcoming Paris Olympics by breaching the 85.50m mark, will also compete directly in the finals. "All those who have crossed 75m will not compete in the qualifying round on Tuesday. There are nine of them from among those who had made entries, including Neeraj and Jena. They will directly compete in the final on Wednesday," Indian athletics head coach Radhakrishnan Nair said, quoting the Athletics Federation of India's qualification rules. "The remaining who have below 75m mark will compete in the qualifying round and the top three will join the nine above-75m throwers in the final." The AFI is quite looking forward to 26-year-old Chopra's first home competitive outing in three years. "The AFI is not at all surprised at Neeraj taking part in the Federation Cup. His participation in domestic event is no doubt a very good thing for Indian athletics," a top official of the AFI told PTI. It is learnt that the AFI wanted Chopra to compete in a domestic event after he won gold in Tokyo Olympics and before the Paris Games. He did not take part in any



domestic event in 2022 and 2023 as he was training or competing abroad. His last domestic event was the Federation Cup in March 2021. It is learnt that Chopra has reached India from Doha but will land here only on Tuesday. Asian Games medalist Jena is arriving here later on Monday. Nair played down the injury to men's 4x400m relay squad member Rajesh Ramesh who pulled out midway during the second leg of the first round qualifying heat in Bahamas earlier this month. Ramesh was replaced by Arokia Rajiv, who was also not fully fit, in the second round of the Olympic qualifying heat and the Indian team booked a Paris ticket. "Ramesh's injury is not a hamstring pull, it's related to tendon in thigh. So, it is not a major injury. He is expected to start training in 10-15 days. Rajiv will also be alright soon," Nair said. "There should not be any problem in Olympics preparation." A total of 19 track and field athletes have qualified for Paris and Nair said the team will train in Spala in Poland for four weeks before travelling to Paris for the Olympics. Track and field events starting on August 1. "The team will train in Spala before Olympics and we will reach Paris three or four days before the competition starts," he said. Indian athletes have trained in Spala many times in the past. Nair also said the AFI is still hopeful of the mixed 4x400m relay team's Paris qualification despite its failure in Bahamas during the World Relays. Only two slots remain up for grabs. "Our mixed 4x400m team will take part in the Asian Relays (May 20-21 in Bangkok) and we can qualify for Paris if we run below 3 minutes 14 seconds and we feel can do that." Meanwhile, it is learnt that the AFI will shortly come out with a strategic plan with the target of winning multiple medals in the 2036 Olympics. The target is irrespective of India winning the right to host the Games.



Shyaamnikhil ends 12 years wait, becomes India's 85th GM

PTI ■ DUBAI

Shyaamnikhil became India's 85th Grandmaster by completing his third and final GM norm in the just-concluded Dubai Police Masters chess tournament, ending a 12-year wait for the player who took to the sport as an eight-year-old. Shyaamnikhil needed just one win and eight draws to complete the long-overdue GM title which he achieved in the tournament. The 31-year-old conjured the requisite 2500 ELO rating points, the minimum requirement to be a GM, way back in 2012 with two Grandmaster norms but for the third one, he had to wait for 12 years. "I started playing at the age of eight, my parents taught me but I could not play any tournament for three years. Winning the under-13 State championship opened up opportunities for me as I could play Asian and age group world championship," recalled Shyaamnikhil. Hailing from Nagarcoil in Tamil Nadu this was not an easy ride for the player, who was known as one of the finest talents of his time. "He shifted his base to Chennai to pursue chess despite coming from a modest background and stayed with me," said his former coach K Visweswaran. Making his first GM norm in

Whoa Nelly! Rose Zhang wins Founders Cup to end Korda's record tying LPGA Tour winning streak

AP ■ CLIFTON (US)

Great things have been expected from Rose Zhang from the moment the two-time NCAA champion won in her professional debut last year and joined the LPGA Tour the following week. The 20-year-old finally delivered again Sunday, birdieing four of the final five holes to win the Cognizant Founders Cup. She beat Madelene Sagstrom by two strokes while putting an official end to Nelly Korda's record-tying LPGA Tour winning streak. "I was able to grow so much throughout the journey in this past year," Zhang said. "I don't know, it's crazy to come out here. Didn't have any expectation of having to win because I realize that it's all just noise and I really just have to be able to work at it myself and try my best to put myself in positions like this. "But no matter what happened this week, I would've been very satisfied and it reignited my passion for the game once again," she added after winning on Mother's Day. Zhang, who was talking to her mom coming into the media room, actually had a funny start to her round. The Stanford product almost fell on her rear end taking a shot from an awkward stance on the first hole. The shot could have gone anywhere. It hit the pin and she made par. "I just thought to myself, wow, I mean, today is probably going to be a lucky day," said Zhang, who played with Sagstrom in a stroke-play duel with the rest of the field far back. "Maybe I can get something



going. Would not have imagined myself being who are now, especially after 12. Sagstrom birdied that hole to take a three-shot lead and things did not look good for Zhang. It got better in the event that honors the 13 founding members of the tour. Zhang, who shot a 6-under 66, birdied Nos. 14, 15, 17 and 18 at Upper Montclair Country Club, while Sagstrom bogeyed the 16th in finished two back. Korda, who struggled the final two days after playing magnificently in winning the five straight events she entered, began the day 11 strokes back and shot her second straight 73 to tie for seventh at 7 under. She had no regrets. She hopes someone will join her and Hall of Famers Nancy Lopez and Annika Sorenstam in winning five straight or even more. "But just to do that with all the competition out here is super, super

rewarding with how much work that I've put in," the 25-year-old Korda said. "So I think to get a streak like that in any sport in general is amazing with the amount of talent that I feel like every athlete has in their sport. Just an amazing feeling and hopefully one day it'll sink in." It was a heart-breaking end for Sagstrom, the 31-year-old Swede who started the day with a one-shot lead and was looking for her first victory since 2020 and second overall on tour. "I struck it so nicely this week. I've worked really hard for a long time," Sagstrom said. "I putted incredibly. It's really high up there. That's probably why it hurts more. Nothing against Rose. She played incredible. I kind of wish I gave myself a few more chances at the end there. Didn't want it to end that way. This is probably the best golf I played in years." Sagstrom led by three after 13, but Zhang curled in a birdie putt at 14 and made an 8-footer on the next to draw within one. They were tied after 16, with Sagstrom missing a 10-foot par putt after a bad chip from the back fringe. After Sagstrom saved par at the par-3 17th with a fast, downhill 25-footer, Zhang took the lead with a short birdie putt and she closed things out on the final hole with Sagstrom waiting to make a birdie attempt. Zhang, who won last year at nearby Liberty National in her pro debut, finished at 24 under 264. Rookie Gabriela Ruffels of Australia was third at 9 under, her best finish. She shot 71. Peiyun Chien of Taiwan and Ruoning Yin and Xiyu Lin of China tied at 8 under.



Wanted to be a doctor but opted for athletics due to father passion: Olympic bound Jyothika

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Her mother is a home-maker and she has an elder sister who got married recently. "My father was a bodybuilder when he was young but stopped as there was no support from family. Now he is a businessman. He is very much interested in sports and he pushed me a lot and he wants me to be in the Olympics. "Because of him, I did not have to struggle much. He takes care of everything. So, now I want to fulfil his dream of seeing me do well in the Olympics," said Jyothika who has a personal best of 52.73 seconds in individual 400m. It all started after Jyothika won races in school meets and that was when her father realised the talent of his daughter. "I used to finish first in annual school sports competitions in 200m and 400m and even in some races organised by clubs. "He took me to the school PET teacher when I was in seventh class (around 12 years of age). I ran on the mud tracks at a college ground in my place. I started taking part in district and state meets when I was in ninth class in 2014." Between 2014 and 2021, Jyothika trained under Sports Authority of India coach Vinayak Prasad in Vijaywada. In 2021, she trained under Ramesh Nagpuri, current national junior team head coach, in Hyderabad for one year during which she ran her then personal best of 53.05 seconds after which she was called for the national camp. "I got national medals, I went to World School Games and Asian Youth Championships but interest in sports, I did not have. Till 2017, I did not have interest in sports. An academically-inclined child is a dream realised in most Indian households and that's why Olympic-bound runner Jyothika Sri Dandi aspired to be a doctor before she realised that her father would be happier seeing her excel in sports. The 23-year-old from Tanuku town in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, secured 97 per cent in Class X while studying at the Montessori School at her home town. But, her father Srinivasa Rao, a body-builder in his younger days, nudged her into taking interest in sports as he wanted to see her in the Olympics some day. That dream is going to be a reality in less than three months' time. Jyothika was part of the Indian women's 4x400m relay team that qualified for the Paris Olympics during the World Relays in Bahamas earlier this month. "I got 97 per cent in class X and when I was in school I actually wanted to be a doctor. But, once I started doing sports, I could not go back and think about becoming a doctor," Jyothika, who is taking part in the Federation Cup here, told PTI in an interview. "My father felt I have the talent to do well in athletics and bring laurels for the country in the Olympics. Seeing his sacrifice and passion to mould me into a successful athlete, I decided to follow his dreams. "I did not tell him that I wanted to be a doctor because I want to make him happy. Till 2017, I did not have interest in sports but around 2020 I began taking interest."

Wonder goal for Ella Toone as Manchester United wins Women FA Cup with 4-0 rout of Tottenham

AP ■ LONDON

Manchester United won its first major trophy by routing Tottenham 4-0 in the Women's FA Cup final at Wembley. Ella Toone's stunning long-range strike in first-half stoppage time set up victory for Marc Skinner's team. United cruised to victory after the break through two goals from Lucia Garcia and another from Rachel Williams. United quickly made up for defeat to Chelsea in last year's final by lifting the trophy 12 months on. Toone's wonder goal broke Tottenham's resistance when she curled the ball into the top corner from around 20 yards (meters) in the third minute of time added on in the first half.



Williams doubled United's lead with a powerful header nine minutes after the break. United effectively sealed victory three minutes later, this time through Garcia, who was named player of the match. Seizing on a weak clearance from Spurs goalkeeper Becky Spencer, Garcia pounced to score from close range. She added her second and United's fourth in the 74th minute by lifting a shot into the top corner from inside the

box. It is the first time since Birmingham's victory in 2012 that the cup hasn't been won by one of Arsenal, Chelsea or Manchester City. Victory eases the pressure on Skinner, who guided the club to second place in the Women's Super League last season but has endured a difficult campaign this time round with United set to finish fifth. Skinner's contract is set to expire this summer. Asked if he expected to carry on next season, the 41-year-old Skinner said: "I hope so ... But we've created history and I have got to live in that moment. "I believe in myself fully and I am still only a baby in terms of my career."

Djokovic follows Nadal to early exit at Italian Open in first match after being hit by water bottle

AP ■ ROME

Novak Djokovic's performance was so poor that even the 24-time Grand Slam champion admitted it was "concerning." Djokovic put on one of his worst displays at one of his favorite tournaments as he was upset by 29th-seeded Alejandro Tabilo in the third round of the Italian Open. It was Djokovic's first match since accidentally getting knocked on the head by a water bottle while signing autographs after his opening win on Friday. "I managed to sleep okay. I had headaches. The next day or yesterday was pretty fine, so I thought it's okay. Maybe it is okay. Maybe it's not," Djokovic

said. "I mean, the way I felt on the court today was just completely like a different player entered into my shoes. Just no rhythm, no tempo, no balance whatsoever on any shot. It's a bit concerning." Djokovic started off with a double-fault and it didn't get much better for the six-time Rome champion. The top-ranked Djokovic lost his first two service games and went on to lose the match 6-2, 6-3 in just 68 minutes, handing Tabilo the victory when he double-faulted - his fifth of the match - amid boos at the Foro Italico. "I'm trying to soak it all in and wake up right now," Tabilo said after the biggest win of his career. "I was just trying to keep my nerves in and keep



swinging. Towards the end my arms were getting tired but I was trying not to think about it. "It's crazy, I just can't believe what's happened. I can't believe it right now. I don't think anyone can believe it." The third-round loss marked Djokovic's worst performance at the Italian Open. He had lost only once before to an opponent outside the top 10 in Rome, where he had never gone out before the quarterfinals. Djokovic followed Rafael Nadal to an early exit after the record 10-time Rome champion lost his third-round match to Hubert Hurkacz 6-1, 6-3 on Saturday. While Djokovic had said he was "fine" after the water

zero break point chances. He was broken four times in the match, including in the final game, and Djokovic could only shake his head when another unforced error handed Tabilo match point. Djokovic is still without a title this year - the first time he's reached May without a trophy since 2018, when he was returning from a right elbow injury. Tabilo next faces 16th-seeded Karen Khachanov, who beat Francisco Cerundolo 6-2, 6-4. Third-seeded Alexander Zverev advanced after the 2017 Rome champion beat Luciano Darderi of Italy 7-6 (3), 6-2. Grigor Dimitrov and Thiago Monteiro also advanced, while Taylor Fritz beat American compatriot

Sebastian Korda 6-3, 6-4. Another American, Ben Shelton, lost to Zhang Zhizhen. In the women's tournament, second-seeded Aryna Sabalenka eased through to the fourth round with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Dayana Yastremska. American Sofia Kenin, who won the Australian Open in 2020 and also reached the final at Roland Garros the same year, was upset by Slovakian qualifier Rebecca Sramkova 6-4, 4-6, 6-4. American Danielle Collins is safely through after beating Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-3. Also advancing in third-round matches were Maria Sakkari, Irina-Camelia Begu, Jelena Ostapenko, Victoria Azarenka and Elina Svitolina.



Focus on KL Rahul as LSG face DC in playoff battle

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Focus will be on skipper KL Rahul as a struggling Lucknow Super Giants look to keep their slim IPL playoff chances alive when they face an equally desperate Delhi Capitals in a must-win game here on Tuesday. There has been a lot of speculations about Rahul's future as LSG skipper after his "public reprimand" by team owner Sanjiv Goenka following their 10-wicket hammering by Sunrisers Hyderabad last Wednesday. Speculations are rife that Rahul may step down as captain or perhaps he will do his duties for the remaining two games before leaving LSG. In either case, the India batter would look to answer with his bat and end things on a high. Rahul hasn't been in the best of form and it's not only cost him a place in India's T20 squad but also left LSG at the seventh spot with 12 points with RCB

and DC, who are fifth and sixth respectively. Five days is a lot of time to introspect and Rahul and Co. Will look to come out all guns blazing when they face DC, who are also on 12 points and are coming into the match after a loss against RCB on Sunday night. Besides Rahul, Quinton De Kock's poor form this season has left LSG struggling in the powerplay, putting pressure on the likes of Marcus Stoinis and Nicholas Pooran, who haven't got the freedom to unleash their big shots. Although Pooran and Ayush Badoni managed to rescue the team in the last match, the bowlers failed miserably against the formidable SRH pair of Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma, who racked up 167 in 9.4 overs, a T20 record by any team. The loss of tearaway pacer Mayank Yadav to injury has left a big hole which Yash Thakur and Naveen-ul-Haq haven't been able to fill. Also



Mohsin Khan picked up an injury and didn't play last match. The spin duo of Krunal Pandya and Ravi Bishnoi too have been to do a lot of soul

searching after being punished by SRH. Delhi Capitals, on the other hand, will hope the return of skipper Rishabh Pant after a one-match suspension due to slow overrate against

Rajasthan Royals will help them to end things on a high. Delhi sans Pant paid the price for their fielding lapses as those drop catches and misfields came back to haunt them

against RCB on Sunday night. While the bowlers let RCB off the hook after a good start, the batting once again came unstuck as they lost four wickets inside 4 overs to be bowled out for their lowest innings score this IPL. But this is the same team which scored four 200 plus totals this season and they will have to find their mark in their last game to salvage any slim hopes of a top four. Jack Fraser-McGurk, with 330 runs from seven matches at an impressive strike-rate of 237.41, has been their most impactful batter. While Abhishek Porel (269, 156.39), Pant (413, 156.43) and Tristan Stubbs (321, 185.54) too have been among runs this season. In the bowling department, the spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav (15) and Axar Patel (10) have shared 25 wickets, while pacers Khaleel Ahmed (16 wickets) and Mukesh Kumar (16) too have got them the breakthroughs.



Going forward, players will be selected in playing XI on basis of impact and not averages: Miller

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
For someone who has the ability to deliver maximum impact, South African batter David Miller reckons averages in T20 cricket will gradually lose relevance and strike rate will be the only barometer of success. Over the past couple of years, Miller has performed the finisher's role with distinction both for Gujarat Titans and his national team. With seven scores in excess of 250 plus this IPL season, the batters have taken the power game to the next level, fuelling the strike rate debate. "We've seen some high scores this year. And it's been incredible batting by a few teams and few individual players in this IPL. And look, I always see everyone judges a batter on the average," Miller told PTI Videos. "But in T20 cricket, it can be difficult to judge someone purely on that. The top three batters, definitely you can because of the number of overs they get to bat. When it comes to the middle order, it has always been the strike rates and what kind of impact the batter has had in the game. "I suppose as we move forward, it becomes more and more about impact. How impactful are you in the game? Depending on the situation. If we're needing 15 an over, can you do it? And that's, I think, what guys are going to have to select teams on their match-winning ability," said the 34-year-old. Talking about the T20 World Cup next month, Miller is looking forward to intense battles with likes of Jasprit Bumrah. "There are so many good Indian players. But me being a batter facing the bowlers, Bumrah is bowling well at the moment. And he has been a world-class bowler for many years. He's a threat to me, as well as every other batter in the World Cup," said the southpaw. He also showered praise on fellow Titans' batter Sai Sudharsan, who is in the middle of his most productive season in the IPL. "He's an incredibly talented player. Still got a long career ahead of him. I've enjoyed watching him play. I love the way that he preps. And just the build-up to games and how he goes about it. He's a very level-headed young boy that's got a lot of talent," said Miller. "The World Cup in the Americas will provide Miller and South African opportunity to get their hands on an elusive global trophy. The hard-hitting batter is excited about the challenge. "This team that we have at the moment has played a lot of cricket together the last couple of years and has a lot of confidence and a lot of success. "We've got a lot of experience, guys that have been under pressure before and come through successfully. So, putting all the individuals together in a T20 World Cup, I have no doubt that we most certainly going to give it our best shot. We have the players to do it, the skill to do it." On his own performances in ICC events, Miller added: "I love World Cups, I must be honest. I feel like I've done well at World Cups, personally. And I just want to continue the momentum. "For you to say, finally, Killer Miller coming to life, I think I've done pretty well at previous World Cups."

RCB have demonstrated ability to deliver when it counts: Moody

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Royal Challengers Bengaluru have shown the ability to perform when it matters most, said former Australian all-rounder Tom Moody after their fifth straight win in the IPL. Languishing at the bottom of the points table 10 days ago, Virat Kohli and Co have found their mojo back. Their winning streak has given them a fighting chance to make the knockout stage. "Once again, RCB has demonstrated their ability to deliver when it counts, setting the stage for what promises to be a thrilling encounter between the two teams," Moody said on Star Sports. They will take on MS Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings, who are also in contention for a playoff berth, in their final league game at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday. "It's iconic for the entire IPL, truly. You've got two colossal names in cricket here in India and in world cricket-Dhoni



and Kohli. "They're both dominant figures, leaving a huge legacy wherever they've been. And the interesting thing is anything can still happen on that table. Barring Kolkata Knight Riders, who have already qualified, as many as seven teams are still in contention for a playoffs berth. "After the weekend, I was assuming that a couple of games results will sort of fall the way they should fall and then we'll have a clear idea who's going to end up in that top four. "Yet, it's still anyone's game. Any team could clinch a spot

in that coveted top four," Moody said. After a sedate start to the season, RCB batter Rajat Patidar has found his groove, scoring five fifties in the last seven innings at a quick pace. "Patidar, in particular, has been a revelation in the past five or six games, notching up several quick-fire half-centuries. "His aggressive approach has consistently put pressure on the opposition's bowling attack, making it incredibly challenging for them to get back into the contest," Moody added.

PBKS' Livingstone returns to England to address knee niggle ahead of T20 WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Punjab Kings' all-rounder Liam Livingstone on Monday returned to England from the ongoing IPL to undergo a knee recuperation ahead of the next month's T20 World Cup. The Kings are already eliminated from this IPL after managing just four wins from 12 matches and they are currently at the bottom of the table with eight points. "IPL done for another year, had to get my knee sorted for the upcoming World Cup," Livingstone wrote on his Instagram wall. "Thanks once again to the Punjab Kings fans for all their love and support. Disappointing season as a team and personally, but as always, I loved every minute of playing in the IPL," he added. Hence, Livingstone will not be available for PBKS' last two matches of the tournament against Rajasthan Royals (May 15) and Sunrisers Hyderabad (May 19).



The injury is not of serious nature but the England management, as per ESPNcricinfo, decided to give him more time to get it treated prior to their home T20I series against Pakistan, beginning on May 22. After that series, the defending champions will travel to the West Indies for their T20 World Cup engagements, starting on June 4 against Scotland in Bridgetown,

Barbados. Livingstone had a lean IPL this season, scoring 111 runs from seven matches and took just three wickets. Meanwhile, other England players in the IPL who are part of their World Cup squad - Moeen Ali (CSK), Sam Curran, Jonny Bairstow (PBKS), Jos Buttler (RR), Will Jacks, Reece Topley (RCB) and Phil Salt (KKR) - will be home-bound the coming weekend.

We have switched on the attacking mode: RCB pacer Dayal

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Pace bowler Yash Dayal attributed the renaissance of Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the second half of the IPL to them "switching on the attacking mode." After six consecutive defeats, Royal Challengers won five matches on the bounce to remain in contention for a playoff berth. In the last game, RCB defeated Delhi Capitals by 47 runs here on Sunday to leap to fifth spot on the table with 12 points from 13 matches. "Our performances have markedly improved in the last few matches. I think we have switched on that attacking mode in the last few matches. It has been a big positive for us," said Dayal, who took three for 20 against DC, during the post-

match press meet. The left-arm quick said even while RCB were going through a losing streak, the dressing room remained a thickly-knit unit. "When you lose matches continuously, like it happened with us, morale will come down a bit. But we took it in our stride and bounced back well. "But even when we were losing, fingers were not pointed at anyone. We have remained positive throughout the season," he added. The resurgence of RCB is directly linked with the improved performance of their bowling unit, which was all over the place in the first half of the season. Dayal credited team bowling coach Adam Griffith for that turnaround. "The credit goes to our bowling coach. He engages us in specific drills,



visualising particular opposition batsmen and we discuss this a lot. "When I go out to bowl, I just think about how to get the batter out or save some runs. All of us think the same way," he added. "GAVE TOO MANY RUNS": James Hopes, the DC bowling coach, said dropped catches allowed RCB to add a few more runs and reach an over-par total. Rajat Patidar, who made a quick fifty, and Will Jacks, who scored a fluent 41, were dropped multiple times on Sunday. "They got one too many and we dropped four catches and had we taken them we could have probably restricted them to 160-165. "But that's fine and if you are not going to put it together with the bat you are not going to win too many games in this

tournament," said Hopes. The Delhi side now has 12 points from 13 matches and it now needs a massive win over Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday to keep their playoff hopes alive. The former Australian all-rounder was confident of achieving it in their home ground. "We have to win big now. But fortunately, we are going back to Delhi where big scores have been the norm for the season. "So, we are going to ask them to put a big score on the board and keep them a fair way below us to have any chance to advance in this tournament," he said. However, Hopes rued the missed opportunity against RCB. "But today was our chance to really get into the mix for playing finals, and now we've left it up to fight, which you don't really want to do in this tournament."

OTHER SPORTS

Satwik, Chirag look to regain competitive edge as Thailand Open begins

PTI ■ BANGKOK
Star shuttlers Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will look to regain their competitive edge as they spearhead the Indian challenge at the Thailand Open Super 500 tournament, beginning here on Tuesday. The top seeded Indian pair, who are one of the favourites to win a gold at the Paris Olympics, found it a tad difficult to negotiate the variety of serves dished out by the Indonesians and Chinese at the Thomas Cup. Both shuttlers will look to address the slight drop in their level this week when they begin their campaign against Malaysia's Nur Mohd Azriyn Ayub Azriyn and Tan Wee Kiong. With the Olympic-bound shuttlers looking to fine-tune their skills ahead of the Paris Games, the BWF world tour events will offer the perfect platform for them to test those new strokes or tweaks that they make to their games. Asian Games bronze medallist, too will have to find his best footing after being troubled by health issues this season. His win over Indonesia's Anthony Ginting was a confidence booster but the loss against China's Shi Yuqi will



trouble him as he needs to close out such narrow games to get into the best mental shape ahead of the Olympics. Kiran George and Sathish Kumar Karunakaran are also in fray, while Lakshya Sen and PV Sindhu had pulled

out before the draw was announced last week. While Kiran will face China's Australia Open winner Weng Hong Yang, Sathish, who had claimed the Odisha Masters title last December, takes on a qualifier in their respective opening matches. In Sindhu's absence, Ashmita Chaliha, Malvika Bansod and Aakarshi Kashyap will look to keep India's flag fluttering with a solid show in women's singles. The Guwahati shuttler will be squaring off against Indonesia's Ester Nurumi Tri Wardoyo, while Malvika faces top seed Chinese Han Yue and Aakarshi is pitted against Busanan Ongbamrunphan of Thailand. Young Unnati Hooda and Imdad Farooqui Samiya will also hope to produce a good show when they take on Belgium's Lianne Tan and China's Goa Fang Jie. In women's doubles, fourth seeded Indian pair of Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who has qualified for the Paris games, will also be in the fray but will begin campaign in second round after receiving a bye.

Atletico Madrid moves closer to securing Champions League spot after beating Celta Vigo

AP ■ MADRID
Atletico Madrid moved closer to securing the fourth and final Champions League spot with a 1-0 win over Celta Vigo in the Spanish league. Rodrigo De Paul scored an 84th-minute winner for Atletico, which opened an eight-point gap to fifth-place Athletic Bilbao with three rounds remaining. Athletic was held at home to a 2-2 draw with Osasuna on Saturday. "You know me, we have to keep improving until the end," Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone said. "We have to keep fighting no matter what." It was the third win in a row for Atletico, which is three points behind third-place Barcelona. The Catalan club hosts seventh-place Real Sociedad on Monday.

Celta, which has lost three of its last five games, dropped to 17th place and five points above the relegation zone. Rayo Vallecano moved to 16th, also five points from danger, after a 0-0 draw at eighth-place Valencia. **BETIS WINS:** Real Betis beat last-place Almeria 3-2 at home to move to sixth place and strengthen its hold on the European qualifying spots. Pablo Fornals, Isco and Ayoze Pérez scored for Betis, which has won four of its last five matches. Almeria was coming off only its second win of the season in the league, at Rayo Vallecano. **CADIZ HOPEFUL:** Cadiz, sitting in 18th place, kept alive its hopes of escaping demotion with a 1-0 win against midtable Getafe. Rubén Alcaraz scored the winner for the hosts by converting a 35th-minute

AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit made before Executive Magistrate, Banpur, Dist- Khordha, I, sangita Pradhan, aged about 24 years, D/o-Parsuram Pradhan, W/o-Adhir Palai of Chhatragarh PO-INS Chilika, PS-Balugaon, Dist-Khordha solemnly affirm and state that, my actual name is Sangita Pradhan in my Aadhaar card bearing no-5486 8002 5503 and also educational certificate. But in my husband's service record, my name has been mentioned as Sangita Palai. So I want to insert my name as Sangita Pradhan instead of Sangita Palai in service record of my husband Adhir Palai vide Service No.15720135 F for all future purposes.