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AIDE NABBED, KEJRIWAL THROWS THE GAUNTLET

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Minutes before his anticipatory bail was rejected, the Delhi Police on Saturday arrested Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's controversial aide Bibhav Kumar in connection with the alleged assault on AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on Saturday. Kumar was picked up from the Chief Minister's official residence by the police and brought to the Civil Lines Police Station. Maliwal has yet not reacted to the news of Kumar's arrest. The Tis Hazari court disposed of Kumar's anticipatory bail plea, terming it as "infructuous". Additional Sessions Judge Sushil Anuj Tyagi noted that Additional Public Prosecutor Atul Kumar Srivastava appeared through videoconferencing around 4.45 pm and informed the court that Kumar has already been arrested in the case. "On a court query, the additional public prosecutor for the State submitted that the applicant was arrested at about 4:15 pm," the judge said. In a direct challenge to the Prime Minister, AAP convener and Kejriwal on Saturday dared him to arrest all top AAP leaders who will be marching en masse to the BJP headquarters on Sunday noon instead of picking them up one by one. Kejriwal, however, asserted that his party could not be crushed by sending its leaders to jail.



Kumar is accused of assaulting Maliwal on May 13 at the residence of Kejriwal, who is also the national convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Advocate Karan Sharma representing Kumar said, "We've not received any information from the police yet. We've sent them an email that we will cooperate in the investigation." Kumar on Saturday told the Tis Hazari court that he was "getting quashed in the battle of political giants." "On May 17, I (Bibhav) sent an email stating that I will join the investigation. I don't know why this is happening to me,"



lawyer Hariharan, appearing on behalf of Kumar, told the court. He also said Kumar could not be arrested without being served with a notice under section 41A of the CRPC. His lawyer said he was just seeking interim relief as the apprehension of arrest was real. "I'm not at flight risk. I'm not running anywhere," Kumar's lawyer Hariharan said while reading the application. "I'm just seeking protection right now...as the apprehension of arrest is very real," he added. The AAP shared an email sent by Kumar which stated, "It has

come to knowledge of the undersigned through the media that a case FIR number 277/2024 has been registered at PS Civil Lines in which the undersigned has been named as an accused. Though the undersigned has not been served with any notice in the case till now, the undersigned categorically submits that he is willing to cooperate and join the investigation as and when called upon to do so by the investigating officer." "It may be emphasised here that the undersigned has also made a complaint bringing to light the true facts of the alleged incident that happened

on 13.05.2024 vide emails dated 17.05.2024 to police," it said. On Friday night, Kumar had also mailed a complaint to the police against Maliwal for 'illegal/ unauthorised entry into and creating a security breach by trespassing at the Chief Minister's residence; for creating a ruckus and interfering with public servants in discharge of duty'. He wrote, "When the complainant asked Maliwal to leave the CM residence, not only was he abused and physically pushed by her, but she also threatened to implicate him in false cases. Since Maliwal has made unauthorised entry, trespassed, breached the security of the CM residence, prevented Government officers from discharging their duty and assaulted the complainant, she is liable for her action as per law." Claiming that this can be BJP's conspiracy, he said, "You are requested to take appropriate legal action against Maliwal. Since it is election time, all of this may have been done at the behest of the BJP and it is therefore requested that her call records, chats and interactions with BJP leaders should also be investigated." On the arrest, National Commission for Women (NCW) chairperson Rekha Sharma said, "Kumar got arrested from his house. So the CM was giving shelter to alleged criminals." Kumar was also summoned by the NCW to appear before it on Friday, at 11 am in the morning, which he ignored. An FIR was registered on Thursday under sections 308 (Attempt to commit culpable homicide), 341 (Punishment for wrongful restraint), 354 D (Stalking), 506 (Punishment for criminal intimidation), and 509 (Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) at Civil Lines police station. Maliwal's MLC done at AIIMS hospital during the wee hours of Friday has also confirmed that she sustained injuries on her face and leg. Calling Kumar a parrot in which Kejriwal's soul resides, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said, "It is extremely shameful that Kejriwal, by forgetting his decades-old relationship, is now tarnishing the character of his partner, Maliwal, who has been associated with him for more than two decades. Now that Kejriwal's aide Kumar has been arrested, the day is not far when many dirty pages of Kejriwal's politics will become public." He urged Kejriwal to come forward and support Maliwal at a time when the entire AAP is trying to defame her. "If the AAP is trying to implicate Maliwal by showing edited videos, it would be better for the Delhi Police to immediately take complete CCTV footage of the Chief Minister's residence into its possession," Sachdeva said, reacting to videos of Maliwal in the residence of Kejriwal going viral.



Wreckage of a bus after it caught fire that left at least nine dead and fifteen others injured, near Tauru in Haryana's Nuh district, in the early hours of Saturday PTI

Five women among nine killed in Nuh as running bus catches fire

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

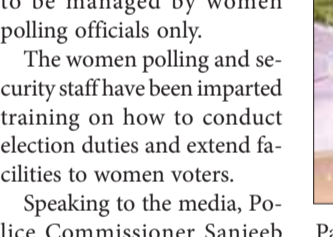
At least nine people, including five women, were burnt alive and 15 injured in a fire incident near Tauru in Haryana's Nuh district in the early hours of Saturday. The bus was carrying around 60 people, all residents of Punjab's Hoshiarpur and Ludhiana, who were returning from the pilgrim towns of Mathura and Vrindavan. All of them are relatives, police said. Police reported that the incident occurred around 2 am on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway. The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained and a probe is underway, a police official said. A local resident said after noticing the fire, some people chased the bus on a motorcycle and asked the driver to stop. The locals also informed the police and the fire department. President Droupadi Murmu condoled the loss of lives in the fire and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured. "The news of the death of many passengers in the tragic incident of a bus catching fire in Haryana's Nuh district is extremely sad. I express my deepest condolences to the bereaved families and pray for the speedy recovery of all those injured," Murmu said in a social media post. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini has expressed grief over the loss of lives and assured the best possible treatment for those injured.

All BBSR Central booths to be Sakhi booths

To enhance facilities for women voters

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

All the booths in the Bhubaneswar Central Assembly seat will be Sakhi booths to be managed by women polling officials only. The women polling and security staff have been imparted training on how to conduct election duties and extend facilities to women voters. Speaking to the media, Police Commissioner Sanjeeb Panda said, "Our women se-



curity personnel will provide security at the Sakhi booths. There will be no problems. As per the scale of deployment prescribed by the Election Commission of India (ECI), an adequate number of women security personnel will be deployed at these booths."

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Odisha tops in price rise in country

Records retail inflation of over 7% for 6 months

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As per a recently-published Retail Inflation Report by the Union Government, the retail inflation rate logged 7.1 per cent in Odisha in April, which was the highest in the country. Odisha has become the number one State in terms of rising prices of various commodities. The State has consistently recorded retail inflation rate of over seven per cent for the last six months. As per reports, it is the highest rate of inflation in the country for six



successive months. While the average inflation rate in the country for the month of April has receded to 4.8 per cent which is the lowest in the last 11 months, the graph is continuously showing an upward curve in Odisha. Delhi recorded the lowest rate of 2.2-per cent inflation in April. "Variation in prices of some

specific commodities and supply bottlenecks are the main reasons behind the high rate of inflation in the market. Besides, prices of vegetables and other essential commodities have skyrocketed in market as Odisha is no more a producing State and it is dependent on other States," said a market expert. "The tight demand-and-supply situation in certain categories of essential commodities and the production outcomes of key vegetables has pushed the retail inflation to a higher rate. Above-normal temperatures and the prevailing heat wave conditions have also pushed up the overall inflation," he added.

Low pressure over BoB by May 22

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even as hot and humid conditions continued to hit life in coastal parts of the State on Saturday, the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here on Saturday said a low pressure area is likely to form over southwest Bay of Bengal (BoB) around May 22. As per the IMD, the low pressure area is likely to move initially north-eastwards and subsequently concentrate into a depression over central parts of Bay of Bengal around May 24. IMD officials, however, said that only after further analy-

sis of the system, they would be in a position to say whether it would further intensify into a cyclone or not. The conditions are favourable for further intensification of the system. "However, as there are dissimilarities between the models and forecasts, we will be in a position to say further after getting more clarity on the development," they said. The weather office said hot and humid weather condition would prevail in the districts of Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khordha, Nayagarh, Ganjam and Gajapati on Sunday.

Advertisement for BBSR Sakhi Booths. Title: ଭୋଟ୍ ସମୟରେ ଅଶୁଦ୍ଧାତ ସତର୍କତା. Content: 1. ପ୍ରବଳ ଝାକ ବୋହିବା (Prevention: ଶୁଖିଲା ଅଖାର ଦିଶିବା ଓ ବାଟି ଲାଗିବା). 2. ପ୍ରବଳ ଶୋଷ ଲାଗିବା (Prevention: ମାଂସପେଶୀ ଚାକି ହେବା). 3. ଅଚେତ ହେବା କିମ୍ବା ବାତ ମାରିବା (Prevention: ଶରୀର ଶୀତଳ ରଖିବା). 4. ପୂର୍ବ ସତର୍କତା (Prevention: ସକାଳେ କିମ୍ବା ଉପରାଦେବା ଖରା କମି ଥିବାବେଳେ ବାହାରକୁ ଯାଆନ୍ତୁ; ବାହାରକୁ ଯିବା ପୂର୍ବରୁ ଯଥେଷ୍ଟ ପାଣି ପିଅନ୍ତୁ; ହାଲୁକା ରଙ୍ଗର ଡିଜା ପୋଷାକ, ଜପା ଓ ଚୋଟା ବ୍ୟବହାର କରନ୍ତୁ; ଖରାରେ ଶାରୀରିକ ପରିଶ୍ରମ କରନ୍ତୁ ନାହିଁ/ ଅଧିକ ଦୂର ଉଲଟୁ ନାହିଁ). 5. ଅଶୁଦ୍ଧାତର ପ୍ରତିକାର (Prevention: ରୋଗୀକୁ ଶୋଲା ଓ ଅଣ୍ଡା ଯାଗାକୁ ନେଇଯାଆନ୍ତୁ ଓ ଆର୍.ଏସ୍./ଟିନି ଲୁଗା ସର୍ବତ୍ର/ସାବାପାଣି ପିଆନ୍ତୁ; ଯୋଷାକ ଯଥାସମ୍ଭବ ଶୋଲି ଦିଅନ୍ତୁ; ନୁହଁ ଯୋର ଦିଅନ୍ତୁ ଏବଂ ଓଡ଼ା କପଡ଼ାରେ ଯୋଛନ୍ତୁ; ରୋଗୀକୁ ପଖା/କୁଲର/ଏସି ପବନରେ ଶୁଆର ଦିଅନ୍ତୁ; ଅବସ୍ଥାରେ ଉନ୍ନତି ନହେଲେ ସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟ କର୍ମୀଙ୍କୁ କରାନ୍ତୁ କିମ୍ବା ଆୟୁର୍ବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ ଡାକନ୍ତୁ). Footer: ସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟ ଓ ପରିବାର କଲ୍ୟାଣ ବିଭାଗ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା.

01PR: 10003/13/0003/2425

In third-phase poll

Champua BJD candidate Mahakhud richest

Total 126 crorepati in fray; 100 candidates have criminal cases

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

BJD candidate from Champua segment Sanatan Mahakud is the richest candidate in fray for the third-phase Assembly polls in the State, which is scheduled to be held on May 25.



crorepati candidates have remained in fray for the third phase Assembly polls in the State.

Independent candidate from Ghasipura, Soumya Ranjan Patnaik is the second richest candidate, who has declared assets to the tune of Rs 122.86 crore. The third place is occupied by the BJD candidate from Nayagarh Assembly segment, Pratyusha Rajeshwari Singh, who declared both movable and immovable

assets of her family totalling to Rs 120.56 crore.

Among the major parties, 36 out of 42 candidates from BJD, 29 from Congress, 28 from BJP and four from AAP have declared assets valued more than Rs 1 crore, the report said. The average of assets per candidate contesting in the Odisha Assembly elections 2024 (phase-III) is Rs 3.47 crore.

Three candidates with low assets are Samruddha Odisha's Kailash Chandra Nayak (Rs 1,000) contesting from Baramba MLA segment, independent candidate Sukanta Ghadai (Rs 2,000) from Brahmagiri and CPI (ML) Red Star nominee Gopinath Nayak (Rs 2,000) from Bhubaneswar North, it said.

Out of 381 candidates analysed, 100 candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves, among whom, 86

are facing serious criminal cases. Among the major parties, 23 BJP candidates, one CPI(M) candidate, 13 Congress candidates and 12 BJD nominees have declared serious criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits.

The report further said that 155 candidates have declared their educational qualifications to be between 5th and 12th standard while 210 candidates are graduates or above. Besides, 12 candidates are diploma holders while two candidates have declared themselves to be just literate and another two candidates are illiterates.

Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Puri and Sambalpur Lok Sabha constituencies along with 42 Assembly seats coming under these LS segments will go for poll in the third phase polls in Odisha on May 25.

INDIA front will get majority: Pilot



'BJD, BJP two sides of a coin'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The voice for a change is being heard in the entire country. The people's faith in the 10-year-old Modi Government, which they had elected, has been broken. Because the promises made by Prime Min-

ister Narendra Modi have not been fulfilled till now, said All India Congress Committee general secretary Sachin Pilot here at a Press conference on Saturday.

On the other hand, Pilot said, unemployment, corruption and prices have surged in the country. The crimes against women have spiralled.

farmers, Dalits, Adivasis and backward classes have been deprived of their rights. So, the people of the country have started to reject the BJP and its allies. The election results on June 4 would surprise everybody. The INDIA alliance would get decisive majority and form the government, said Pilot. The BJD and the BJP have a

secret pact in Odisha. They are two sides of a coin. In the 25-year tenure of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, unemployment, corruption and prices have increased. So, the Congress is the only alternative for the State. The people of Odisha should ensure victory of the Congress MP and MLA candidates, Pilot appealed.

BJD moves CEO against BJP candidate Sambit

'Patra distributing cups with his & BJP symbol photos'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) on Saturday moved the State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) for urgent action against Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Puri Lok Sabha candidate Sambit Patra accusing him of distributing cups with his photo and party symbol, the lotus.

A BJD delegation visited the office of the CEO and submitted a petition in this regard. The party alleged that besides flouting the principles of fair play,

Patra's act was in violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) also. They demanded that the total expenses incurred in the cups be included in the party expenditure.

The BJD leaders alleged that Patra was misusing resources and manipulating public perception.

Stating that free and fair elections are the cornerstone of democracy and any attempt to subvert this fundamental principle must be met with swift and decisive action, the BJD leaders urged for stringent action against the BJP candidate.

The BJD also urged the CEO to take proactive steps to prevent such incidents in the future.

Shah to visit State again after Modi's Puri road show

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Union Minister Amit Shah would visit Odisha again on May 21 and address a number of election rallies for the last two phases of polling in the State.

During his visit, the heavy-weight leader is slated to attend four public meetings to garner support for party candidates, BJP State vice-president Golak Mohapatra told the media on Saturday.

Shah is scheduled to visit Sambalpur, Keonjhar,

Dhenkanal and Nayagarh districts.

As per the tentative schedule, Shah is likely to visit Sambalpur first and hold a road show before addressing different poll rallies. He is slated to address meetings at Keonjhar, Parjang in Dhenkanal and Nayagarh to bolster the prospects of the saffron party.

Shah's visit will follow Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day tour of Odisha from May 19 when he would kickstart the BJP's electioneering in the State from Puri for the

third-round elections.

Modi would arrive in Bhubaneswar at 7 pm on Sunday (May 19) and hold an hour-long review meeting with party workers at the BJP State office here. The following morning, he would visit Puri to seek the blessings of Lord Jagannath before holding a road show there, a senior BJP leader said.

The PM would then travel to Angul to address a meeting and later attend an election rally in Cuttack, he added.

2nd phase polls on May 20 102 CAPF companies to be deployed in State



Highest 22 companies in Kandhamal

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Over 79 lakh voters would exercise their franchise in the second phase of polling in Odisha which is scheduled to be held on May 20, said Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Nikunjia Bihari Dhal on Saturday.

The voting would be held for 35 Assembly seats and five Parliamentary segments in the second phase of polling in the State and 5th phase of polling in the country.

The five Parliamentary segments are Kandhamal, Sundargarh, Bargarh, Balangir and Aska. A total 265 candidates are in fray for the 35 Assembly seats and 40 candidates for the five Lok Sabha seats, said Dhal.

A total of 102 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) would be deployed for the second phase of simultaneous polls in the State. The

highest of 22 companies of CAPF would be deployed in Maoist-affected Kandhamal district followed by Ganjam (20), Sundargarh (16), 14 each in Bargarh and Balangir, five each in Jharsuguda and Boudh, four in Subarnapur and two in Nayagarh, said Dhal.

A total of 79.69 lakh voters, including 39.35 lakh women and 851 transgender persons, are eligible to exercise their franchise at 9,162 polling stations. Of the total electorate, nearly 24% are aged below 30 years, he said, adding there were 975 women for every 1,000 men.

Out of the 9,162 polling stations, 1,541 would be model polling stations while 1,041 would be managed by all-women personnel and 25 would be run by PwD officials. Nearly 20% of the 9,162 polling stations have been identified as critical, including those in Maoist-hit areas, he said.

The Election Commission has appointed 10 general observers, 15 expenditure ob-

servers and three police observers for this phase of the polls.

"With the Met department predicting heat wave conditions on May 20, adequate drinking water, ORS and essential medicines will be made available at each polling station. Besides, paramedical staffers, ASHA workers, ambulances and mobile health units will also be deployed," he said.

An air ambulance would be kept on standby at Balangir for exigencies. For any security-related emergency, one Indian Air Force helicopter will also be kept on standby, Dhal said.

The ECI has, so far, seized cash, liquor, drugs and valuable materials worth Rs 254 crore in Odisha. A total of Rs 17.18-crore cash, 31 lakh litres of liquor (Rs 35.63 crore), drugs or ganja worth Rs 73.31 crore, precious metals worth Rs 14.35 crore and other materials worth Rs 112.66 crore have been seized by different enforcement agencies during the poll period.

IIT-BBS, NeXHS Renewables ink pact

For collaboration in renewable energy research

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar and Chennai-based NeXHS Renewables Private Limited signed an MoU on Friday.

Under the 'Fund for Improvement of S&T Infrastructure (FIST)' Scheme of the Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India, the School of Infrastructure at IIT Bhubaneswar will establish a center for coastal and river bank erosion, primarily focusing on research related to the morphological aspects of the coastal landforms, riverbank stability, and scour and deposition issues related to various offshore structures. As per the



agreement, the NeXHS Renewables Private Limited will provide partial funds towards the procurement of necessary equipment for the center.

The IIT Bhubaneswar and NeXHS Renewables Private Limited will work closely to identify areas of mutual interest, establish joint research teams, and facilitate the ex-

change of knowledge and resources. By combining academic expertise with industry insights, the partnership aims to accelerate the development and deployment of scalable renewable energy solutions that address the evolving needs of society and contribute to a sustainable future.

Director, IIT Bhubaneswar Prof Shreepad Karmalkar ex-

pressed enthusiasm about the partnership and said, "This collaboration represents a significant step towards our efforts to harness the power of renewable energy technologies for a greener and more sustainable future."

Head of School of Infrastructure of IIT Bhubaneswar Prof Sumanta Halder along with Dr Arindam Sarkar, Dr T

Jothi Saravanan and other faculty members stressed the quantum of cutting-edge research currently being carried out at the center for coastal and river bank erosion.

MD and CEO, NeXHS Renewables Private Limited Sudhansu Bhusan Prusty said, "We are excited to partner with IIT Bhubaneswar to explore new avenues for collaboration."

Elections, campaigns, uproars: Unifiers of country's solidarity

SADANANDA DAS

The electoral campaigns are hot in the sweltering summer days. Gone are the days of wall-writing slogans, pamphlets, the old model cars with megaphones atop, canvassing cheers and personal rapport. Things have changed fast, however, in the millennium. Now, the road-shows streaming with people, the address-pulpit, the huge banners, fray of candidates and the strange feelings of 96.8 crore comprising old and new voters are some of the visual abstracts of the democratic principles of India seen in the ongoing 18th Lok Sabha elections.

The election carnival and campaigns are the great unifiers of the country's solidarity. The bold speeches of the politicians, putting the prosperity of people and standing for them is safest to trust, a close reason which they believe their political victory depends on winning

votes. Interestingly, each party's "manifesto" with commitments without a based theory, in which nobody ever lived, virtually rests on human account.

Our democracy has survived many changes in the electoral process from the first general election in 1951 to the present poll in 2024. The poll journey had many reforms from the coloured ballot boxes for each candidate to ballot papers and then to EVM (Electronic Voting Machines). Presently, the ECI introduced VVPAT (Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail) in the upcoming election to make it free and fair and to keep the integrity of the electoral process. The campaigning is sanitized by adhering to the Moral Code of Conduct for maintaining certain rules of the electorate which was introduced by T N Seshan, Chief Election Commissioner, popularly known as an unflinching man of neutrality.

The people of this country have seen the days of coalition Government to absolute majority. The coalition Government before 2014 lost its foothold on the grounds of illegitimacy, misgovernance and massive corruption. It is true, when analyzing electoral politics, the lack-lustre perceptions of economic conditions affect voters' decisions in electoral campaigns and run-up to voting. When people are in search of dignified economic life, the ruling party emerged not so well in economic progress according to the CSDS-Lokniti pre-poll survey 2024.

There are concerns for limited employment opportunities, spiraling prices, rural distress and low household economic conditions. The oppositions have failed to address these issues effectively to convince the voters' intellect. The present regime seeks reelection on the basis of "Guarantees" of future

growth and achievements and sits pretty well on the inclusive idea of "Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas" and "Sabka Viswas, which strengthen the trust of the majority respondents.

"Corruption" says Edward Gibbon "the most infallible of constitutional liberty" which corrodes the national character. Corruption in India spoils the very fabric of economic stability. A startled recollection of warning words of doom: "If you do not put this thing down, it will put you down" and thus the ruling party worked on this theme very intensely, besides giving good governance.

The ruling party strengthened the Hindu identity through the construction and consecration of Ram Mandir, abrogation of Article 370 and Uniform Civil Code which are the possibilities of clearing the way to its electoral ascendance whereas oppositions have failed to exploit ambivalences. On the other

hand, the oppositions' adverse remark on "Sanatan Dharma" diluted the traditional voters' sentiments, giving opportunity to the ruling party to consolidate Hindu votes in their favour.

It did not seem that the oppositions stood on the same plank nor did they have one mind in electoral strategies. The opposition's electoral promise of wealth "redistribution" in the form of "inheritance tax", to give it to the poor minorities, sparked fiery debates. The ruling party, however, set a narrative before the respondents that such tax does not fit in socially and hence would worsen the economy, quality of life, pulling the opposition to the back foot. The gap between the poor and the rich cannot be bridged which is a common phenomena across the world. It makes us believe that equality of wealth can be reached by making the rich poorer or poorer rich or

both. Abandonment of patriotic political ideas is anti-democratic that increases selfishness attached to political affairs, degrading people's franchise and offences against free institutions in India. The issue of ethnic culture raised by the opposition during poll-going phases took a wrong turn of expressing racism not healthy for India's sovereignty. The promises for caste census and reservation for minorities landed the opposition into deep waters besides 30 lakh instant jobs to youth seems ridiculous in the tech-era of Artificial Intelligence (AI) where there will be more wealth creators than job-seekers. The dictum turns out to be a paraphrase of the poet Dylan Thomas to "Rage, Rage against the dying of the light".

Changes come when time believes in change. The elections have given emphasis to "women empowerment", appreciating the nomina-

tions of women folk from various fields trying their political career to serve the country in a better way. This resulted in Women's Reservation Act, making provision for 1/3rd of women candidature for Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, expected to be implemented before 2029 election to prove "Nari Shakti" mission while taking advantage of voting age being reduced from 21 to 18 years in 1989.

There is same fertile soil, the same blue sky, the same rivers and seas; there is the same land, the same glorious fragments of works of art, the temple with ornaments and inscriptions that excite wonder of admiration, the remains of a once high order of civilization, is the same old India living India now.

Verily, the humblest citizens in all the land, when clad in armour of a righteous cause, are stronger than all the hosts of error. (sndas.agora@gmail.com)

High Court seeks update on fake teachers

Asks govt to file affidavit
PNS ■ CUTTACK
The Orissa High Court has directed the State's Director of Elementary Education to submit an update on the status of the identification of teachers who have been appointed in government schools by allegedly submitting fake educational certificates.

Chakradhari Sharan Singh and Justice MS Raman directed that in the affidavit, the Director of Elementary Education shall also be required to make a statement on the allegation in relation to admission of nonexistent students for misappropriating the Mid-day Meal scheme fund.

The HC gave the order while hearing a six-year-old PIL that has raised issues relating to appointment of teachers in various schools under the School and Mass Education Department by allegedly submitting fake educational certificates.

Rourkela ex-Cong MLA Mohapatra joins BJP

PNS ■ ROURKELA
Congress leader and former Rourkela MLA Pravat Mohapatra, known as the arch rival of Dilip Ray, joined BJP on Friday in presence of senior BJP leader Amit Shah.



It may be noted here that in his long political career, Ray has tasted defeat only from Pravat Mohapatra in 1995 from Rourkela Assembly constituency. After losing the election, Ray was away from electoral politics for many years but due to his bad relationship with BJD he had joined Congress. After Ray's joining Congress, Mohapatra quit the party and joined the BJP. But just before the 2009 election, Ray joined the BJP leaving Mohapatra returned to his parent party Congress, from BJP. For the last one decade,

Mohapatra was daringly criticizing both the State Government and Union Government through his social media functioning. Even he was not hesitating to challenge both Sarada Nayak and Ray on many development issues. But while Rourkela Assembly election polling is scheduled for May 20, Mohapatra joined the BJP during the visit of Shah to the city. Even delivering the speech in Shah's meeting, he praised the BJP and Ray. But the political pundits are apprehensive over the longevity of the honeymoon of Ray and Mohapatra here.

MLA Dipali's brother quizzed by IT Dept

PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA
The Income Tax Department after questioning Jharsuguda BJD MLA Dipali Das' brother Bishal Das on Friday conducted a raid at residence of his personal assistant (PA) in Jharsuguda district on Saturday.



Office employees and businessmen linked to Dipali's family were also questioned. While the exact reason behind the I-T action was yet to be ascertained, the operation was stated to have been undertaken following recovery of cash from a temporary office set up in a hotel.

Rapist gets 10-yr RI in Keonjhar

PNS ■ KEONJHAR
Keonjhar Fast Track Court Judge Bijay Kumar Mishra sentenced Sarat Munda (22) of Kameswarpur under Patna police station to ten years rigorous imprisonment and slapped a fine of Rs 10,000 on him by convicting him in a minor girl rape case, on Friday. The court ordered imprisonment for six months more in default of payment of fine.

was found to be pregnant. After the family members inquired about the incident, the victim said that Sarat, the convict, had repeatedly kept sexual relations with her despite her protest on false promises. Later, the victim's stepmother filed an FIR at the Patna police station on May 3, 2000. Based on the complaint, the police arrested the accused and forwarded him to court.

Jajpur mine mishap Bodies of 2 more labourers recovered

PNS ■ JAJPUR
Dead bodies of two workers, who were buried under rubble in the mishap at the blackstone mine at the Dankari Hills under Dharmasala Tehsil in Jajpur district on Thursday, were recovered on Saturday.



With the recovery of the two bodies by rescue personnel, the total toll in the mishap rose to three. According to sources, quarrying work was underway when due to some reason, the soil caved in. It is suspected that the labourers working at the mine were buried due to the landslide of large rocks from the hill. The locals present at the scene rushed to the spot and informed police immediately. On receiving information about the incident, Fire Service personnel and police reached the spot and initiated a rescue operation. Further rescue operations are underway as it is suspected that more workers might have been buried under the rubble. In a similar instance on Thursday, three labourers died in the district as soil caved in on them during a pipeline construction. The incident took place in Rahasa village under Kapila panchayat of the Binjarpur police station in the district.

In Balangir Constable found dead in hotel room

Murder suspected
PNS ■ BALANGIR
A Reserve Police Constable was found dead under mysterious circumstances in a hotel near the railway station in Balangir town on Saturday.

Subsequently, Behera was found dead in the toilet of the hotel room No. 212 with his hands and legs tied. The room was booked in the name of one Vineet Sharma of Jharkhand. On being informed, a team of the Town police reached the spot and started an investigation into the incident. They seized the body and sent it for postmortem. Later, a forensic team was roped in to collect evidence. Preliminary investigations indicated that the constable was killed by someone.

In Kalahandi Ex-HM gets 2-yr RI in DA case

PNS ■ BHAWANIPATNA
A Vigilance Court on Saturday convicted a retired headmaster of Kalahandi district in a disproportionate assets (DA) case.

The judgement came on a charge-sheet filed in Koraput Vigilance police station against Pattnaik for possession of disproportionate assets. Following his conviction, Odisha Vigilance would now move the competent authority to stop his pension, sources said.

'Miringsingha project water supply to start in 2 months'

Says SE, RWSS, Keonjhar
PNS ■ KEONJHAR
Water supply to the villages of two blocks such as Keonjhar and Bansapal in Keonjhar district will start within the next two months. Presently, water is being supplied to 105 villages in Champua and Jhumpura blocks in the 1st phase and subsequently, remaining 489 villages out of total 589 will be supplied water, said SE, RWSS, Keonjhar Pratap Chandra Behera.

'Mission Odisha' Top BJP leaders hold road show in Baleswar



PNS ■ BALESWAR
Top BJP leaders, including Manmohan Samal and Baijayant Panda, on Saturday led a major road show here as part of the party's 'Mission Odisha' to challenge the BJD's 25-year rule by promoting PM Narendra Modi's development agenda. The event marked a strategic push ahead of the fourth

phase elections in the State. BJP State president Manmohan Samal, national vice-president Baijayant Panda, Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha candidate Aparajita Sarangi, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Baleswar MP candidate Pratap Sarangi were part of the road show. Samal said, "It is part of the party's strategy to reach out to

people with our manifesto with our pledge and vision. The people of Odisha want change and they are supporting us. They want an end to the corrupt government in Odisha." He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has earlier raised several Odisha issues including Odia Asmita and employment which are connected with the daily

lives of the State's people. Later, the BJP leaders held discussions and chalked out strategies with local party leaders, candidates and workers. The meeting assumed significance as the fourth-phase elections will be held in six places of Odisha including Baleswar. The BJP has been asserting that it will form the next government in the State.

After scrutiny of nomination papers 48 candidates in fray for 4 Assly, 1 LS seats in JSpur

PNS ■ JAGATSINGHPUR
A total of 48 candidates are in the election fray for the four Assembly seats and one Lok Sabha seat in Jagatsinghpur district after scrutiny of nomination papers ended on Wednesday.

The nominations of 11 candidates from several political parties including Independents for the Jagatsinghpur Lok Sabha seat were found valid after scrutiny. The prominent candidates are Dr Rajashree Mallick [BJD], Ravindra Sethy [INC], Ramesh Chandra Sethy [CPI], Bibhu Prasad Tarai [BJP], Bibhuti Bhusan Majhi [BSP] and Independents Shankar Das, Arjun Charan Behera among others.

According to official reports, the highest 12 candidates including six Independents are in the election fray in the Balikuda-Erasama Assembly segment. They are Sarada Prasanna Jena [BJD], Satya Sarathi Mohanty [BJP], Nalini Kumar Swain [INC], Seshadev Nanda, Sanjeev Biswal and Sriya Biswal [Independents]. Similarly, nine candidates in the Jagatsinghpur Assembly seat are Amarendra Das [BJP], Prashanta Kumar Muduli [BJD], Pratima Mallick [INC] Narayan Prasad Nanda, and Geetanjali Barik [Independents].

For the Tirtol reserved Assembly segment, eight candidates' nominations were found valid after scrutiny, such as Ramakanta Bhoi [BJD], Rajkishor Behera [BJP], Himansu Bhusan Mallick [INC], and others. The scrutiny of nomination papers for the 101-Paradeep Assembly constituency was held in the official chamber of Returning Officer-cum-Paradip ADM Lalita Mohan Behera on

Remuna Assembly seat Independents thorn on way of BJD, BJP candidates

Plaint against MP Pratap for riding horse to file nomination
UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ BALESWAR
Remuna reserve (SC) constituency which is with BJD is likely to see a tough fight between the BJD and BJP. It wouldn't be a comfortable seat for either, as dissidents from both the parties are contesting as Independents, posing tough challenges to the official candidates.

While Bidyasmita Malik, Sarpanch of Patripal, has been made candidate of BJD, dropping the sitting MLA (expelled) Sudhansu Sekhar Parida, the latter filed nomination as an Independent. Similarly, former MLA (2009-2014) of BJD Sudarshan Jena who was with BJD defected to Congress and is contesting on a Congress ticket. Both are likely to cause severe dents to the BJD vote bank.

Similarly, while former MLA (BJP) Gobinda Das is contesting this time on party's ticket, a retired engineer and an aspirant for BJP ticket, Bijay Sethi is contesting as an Independent. He is likely to cause substantial damage to the BJD vote bank.

Remuna which was primarily with Nilgiri was made a separate constituency in 2009 as SC Assembly seat and Sudarshan Jena of BJD was the first MLA. He lost to Gobinda Das of BJP in 2014. Jena was denied ticket in 2019 and Sudhansu Sekhar Parida fought on BJD ticket with Gobinda Das and the former won. This time the equations have changed and predicating shifting of votes has become literally very difficult. In the meanwhile, the district BJD unit has lodged a complaint with the Sahadevkhunta police against the incumbent BJP MP Pratap Chandra Sarangi alleging violation of Model Code of Conduct during a rally when he was on the way to file nomination.

Sarangi rode a horse while going for nomination which is against the guidelines of the ECI. The ECI expressly banned use of any animals during roadshows and campaigning as it would adversely impact on them due to large crowds, drum beats and loud noise etc. This also is cruelty against the animals, the complaint mentioned, which was signed by a vice president of the party.

India, UK undertake comprehensive review of Roadmap 2030

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and United Kingdom undertook a comprehensive review of the India-UK 'Roadmap 2030' during Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra's two-day visit to London, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Saturday.

The two sides also agreed to further strengthen bilateral cooperation in areas of trade, defence and security, science and technology and people-to-people exchanges.

The foreign secretary visited the UK from May 16 to 17 to attend the 16th round of

Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) between the two sides. In 2021, India and the UK adopted a 10-year roadmap to expand ties in the key areas of trade and economy, defence and security, climate change and people-to-people connections among others.

At the FOC, the foreign secretary held talks with Sir Philip Barton, the permanent under-secretary at the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Kwatra also held meetings with Minister of State (Foreign Office) Lord Tariq Ahmad, MoS for Defence Procurement James Cartledge, NSA Sir Tim Barrow, Home Office



Permanent Secretary Matthew Rycroft, Chief Trade Negotiator Crawford Falconer and Senior Foreign Policy Advisor to the UK prime minister, John Bew.

The MEA said both sides discussed the entire gamut of bilateral relations and regional and global issues of mutual interest.

"The foreign secretary and permanent under-secretary undertook a detailed review of the Roadmap 2030," it said. "Welcoming good progress across all pillars, they underscored their interest to raise the level of ambition and agreed to further strengthen bilateral cooperation including in trade

and economic, defence and security, science and technology, people-to-people ties and mobility, energy, and climate change, as well as health," the MEA said in a statement.

It said India and the UK share a comprehensive strategic partnership which has been strengthened across all domains through regular high-level political exchanges and meetings of bilateral institutional mechanisms. The India-UK relationship was elevated to the comprehensive strategic partnership in May 2021.

The two sides are currently negotiating a free trade agreement. Both sides are also keen to expand cooperation in the

maritime sphere.

In June 2021, the UK posted a liaison officer at the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre (IFC) that has emerged as a key hub in tracking movements of ships and other developments in the Indian Ocean region. The UK joined a select group of countries such as the US, Australia, Japan and France to depute officials at the Gurugram-based facility.

The Indian Navy established the IFC-IOR in 2018 to effectively keep track of the shipping traffic as well as other critical developments in the region under a collaborative framework with like-minded countries.

India asks its students to stay indoors in Kyrgyzstan after clashes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking cognisance of violence in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, India on Saturday asked its students there to stay indoors after the Kyrgyzstan capital city reported clashes between some locals and foreigners. There are about 15,000 Indian students there. Pakistan also issued a similar advisory to its students in Bishkek.

The Indian embassy said it is in touch with the Indian students and the situation is "calm" now. The mission asked Indian students in the city to stay indoors.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar advised the Indian students to stay in regular touch with the Indian embassy.

"Monitoring the welfare of Indian students in Bishkek. Situation is reportedly calm now. Strongly advise students to stay in regular touch with the Embassy," he said in a post on X.

The Indian embassy said, "We are in touch with our students. The situation is presently calm but students are advised to stay indoors for



the moment and get in touch with the Embassy in case of any issue."

Police in riot gear were deployed in part of Kyrgyzstan's capital overnight as large crowds gathered in anger over an alleged fight between local and foreign people, The Times of Central Asia reported.

The incident appeared to reflect tension over the presence of migrants, many from South Asia, in Kyrgyzstan, it said.

Pakistan's mission said a few hostels of medical universities in Bishkek, where students from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan reside, have been attacked amid the violence.

Reacting to the situation, the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry said in the wake of the violence, "law enforcement agencies took prompt measures to detain persons involved in the event, both foreign citizens and citizens of Kyrgyzstan".

It said the situation was "completely under the control of law enforcement agencies" and said "there are no seriously injured people among the participants of the incident". The Ministry went on to say that it did not receive information that any foreign citizen was injured in the violence.

Earlier in the day, the Indian Embassy in Kyrgyzstan tweeted, "We are in touch with our

students. The situation is presently calm, but students are advised to stay indoors for the moment and get in touch with the Embassy in case of any issue. Our 24-7 contact number is 0555710041."

In its advisory posted on social media, Pakistan's Embassy in Bishkek said the matter escalated after videos of a fight between Kyrgyz and Egyptian students on May 13 went viral online on Friday.

"A few hostels of medical universities in Bishkek and private residences of international students, including Pakistanis, have been attacked. The hostels are inhabited by students from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh," it said.

"There have been reports of light injuries to a number of students from Pakistan. Despite social media posts about the alleged death and rape of Pakistani students, so far, we have not received any confirmed reports."

The Embassy further said Pakistani students have been asked to "stay indoors until the situation returns to normal", adding that the violence appeared to be directed against all foreign students,

and not just Pakistanis. There are about 10,000 Pakistani students in the Central Asian nation currently.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, Hasan Zaigham said authorities were liaising with local law enforcement in Bishkek to ensure the safety of students.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has also expressed "deep concerns" over the situation in Bishkek, saying he has directed the country's envoy in Bishkek to "provide all necessary help and assistance" to the students. Also taking to social media, the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party posted several videos, in which a mob was seen walking and running on a road at night.

"Extremely disturbing reports coming in from Kyrgyzstan, where thousands of Pakistani students are under attack, with reports of violence and deaths," the party tweeted on Saturday and asked the Pakistan Foreign Office, the Embassy in Bishkek and the Foreign Ministry in Kyrgyzstan to "take immediate and effective measures to ensure safety of all Pakistani students".

4.24 lakh poll complaints on cVIGIL app reported so far

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The cVIGIL app, launched by the Election Commission of India, has proven to be a powerful tool for citizens to report election code violations during the Lok Sabha polls of 2024 with at least 4.24 lakh complaints logged in on it as of May 15, 2024 since the start of the General Election.

The complaints ranged from unauthorized campaigning to the misuse of loudspeakers, convoys without permission, and the dissemination of religious or communal speeches as election code violations.

With the EC disposing off 99.9 per cent of the complaints during the period, the app has proven to be a powerful tool for citizens to report election code violations.

At least, 99.9 per cent of cases have already been disposed of by the top election authority.

"Rapid response to reported violations has been facilitated by flying squads, aided by geo-tagging, often reaching the location within minutes. The

app has been instrumental in addressing various malpractices such as putting up posters/banners without permission (3.24 lakhs) unauthorized campaigning (4742 complaints), misuse of loudspeakers (2883), defacement of property (14022), and other forms of electoral misconduct. The efficient handling of complaints underscores the effectiveness of technology in ensuring fair and transparent elections," said an official from the Commission.

"Out of these 4,23,908 complaints have been disposed of and the remaining 409 cases are under process. Nearly 89% complaints were resolved within a 100 minutes timeline, a promise by ECI, firmly held. "Citizens have used this APP for checking electoral malpractices in use of loudspeakers beyond prescribed time or noise levels, campaigning during ban period, placing banners or posters without permission, deployment of vehicles beyond permitted limit, property defacement, display firearms/intimidation and in checking

inducements," said the official.

The cVigil is a user-friendly and easy to operate application, which connects vigilant citizens with the District Control Room, Returning Officer and Flying Squads Teams. By using this app, the citizens can immediately report on incidents of political misconduct within minutes and without having to rush to the office of the returning officer.

"As soon as the complaint is sent on the cVigil app, the complainant will receive a unique ID through which the person will be able to track the complaint on their mobile," explained the official.

A trinity of factors working simultaneously makes cVIGIL a success. Users capture audios, photos or videos in real-time, and a "100-minute" countdown for time-bound response to complaints is ensured.

The app automatically enables a geo-tagging feature as soon as the user switches on their camera in the cVIGIL to report a violation.

SC Collegium recommends two names for appointment as judges at Gauhati HC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Collegium headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud has recommended to the Centre the names of two additional judges for appointment as permanent judges of the Gauhati High Court.

The Collegium, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna and B R Gavai, recommended that Justice Rajesh Sekhri be appointed as an additional judge of the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court for a fresh term of one year with effect from July 29, 2024.

"... The Collegium resolves to recommend that Justice Susmita Phukan Khaund and Justice Mitali Thakuria, additional judges, be appointed as permanent judges of the Gauhati High Court against the existing vacancies," said one of the Collegium resolutions uploaded on the apex



court website.

It noted that the Collegium of the Gauhati High Court had unanimously recommended on April 1 the names of these two judges for appointment as permanent judges.

"The chief ministers of the States of Assam, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh and the Governors of the States of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh have concurred with the recommendation," the resolution said.

It noted that with a view to assess the merit and suitability

of the two additional judges for appointment as permanent judges, the Supreme Court Collegium scrutinised the material placed on record, including the opinion of the consultee-judges and the report of the judgement evaluation committee.

"Bearing in mind the above, the Collegium is of the view that Justice Susmita Phukan Khaund and Justice Mitali Thakuria, additional judges, are fit and suitable for being appointed as permanent judges," the Collegium resolution dated May 17 said.

In a separate resolution, the Supreme Court Collegium noted that the Collegium of the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court had on April 23 recommended that Justice Rajesh Sekhri be appointed as an additional judge for a fresh term, "there being no vacancy of permanent judge against which he could be considered".

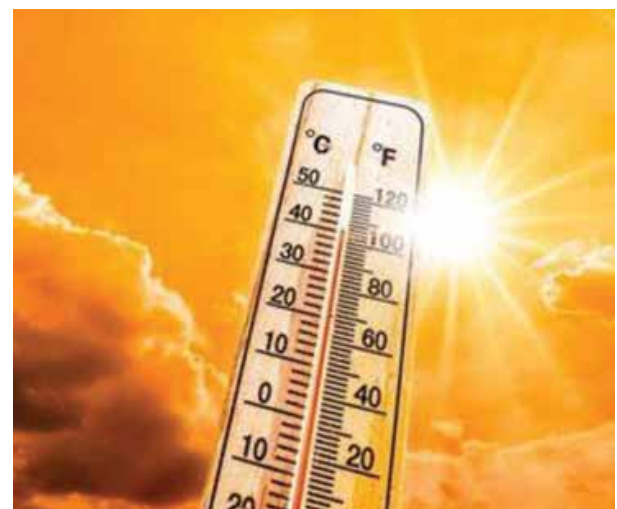
Severe heatwave likely in northwest India for next five days: IMD

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Over the next five days, Northwest India is expected to continue experiencing extreme heat, with temperatures likely to remain high across Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. On Friday, maximum temperatures surged to 47.4 degrees Celsius in Najafgarh and 47.1 in Haryana's Sirsa.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Saturday predicted a severe heat wave over the plains of northwest India during the next five days and a heat wave over the east and central regions during the next three days. A severe heat wave is declared if the departure from normal exceeds 6.4 notches.

The Met office also issued a red warning for Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and west Rajasthan, stressing the need for "extreme care for vulnerable people". It issued an orange alert for east Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and



Bihar and emphasised "high health concern" for vulnerable people, including infants, the elderly and those with chronic diseases.

The Met office said high humidity could add to people's inconvenience in Goa and sub-Himalayan West Bengal.

The IMD also said warm night conditions are likely in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and west

Rajasthan over the next two-three days. High night temperatures are considered dangerous because the body doesn't get a chance to cool down.

Increasing nighttime heat is more common in cities because of the urban heat island effect, in which metro areas are significantly hotter than their surroundings. In view of the general elec-

tions in India, experts have warned of an increased likelihood of heat-related illnesses in people exposed to the sun for prolonged periods or engaging in heavy work.

Researchers at Climate Central, a US-based group of climate scientists, said 543 million (54.3 crore) people in India will experience at least one day of extreme heat during May 18-21.

"Human-caused climate change has made this intense heat much more likely. The huge overnight temperatures make this event particularly alarming," said Andrew Pershing, vice-president for science at Climate Central.

Heat waves can be deadly, with the elderly and children particularly at risk of heat exhaustion and heatstroke. According to the World Health Organization, more than 1,66,000 (1.66 lakh) people died as a result of heat waves between 1998 and 2017.

Extreme temperatures can also impact economies. People are less productive

during hot weather, even if they work indoors, while children struggle to learn in extreme heat.

Before this, Kalaikunda in the Gangetic West Bengal region had recorded a high of 47.2 degrees Celsius on April 30.

The threshold for a heat wave is met when the maximum temperature of a weather station reaches at least 40 degrees Celsius in the plains, 37 degrees in the coastal areas, and 30 degrees in the hilly regions, and the departure from normal is at least 4.5 notches.

April witnessed record-smashing maximum temperatures in east, northeast, and southern peninsular India, prompting health warnings from government agencies and a few states to suspend in-person classes in schools.

Several places recorded their highest-ever April day temperatures, with the mercury soaring to 47 degrees Celsius. At least two people died in Kerala due to suspected heatstroke during this period.

Over 50 lakh farmland trees disappeared in India from 2018 to 2022

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Between 2018 and 2022, over 50 lakh large farmland trees disappeared in India owing to changes in farming practices like favoring paddy rice fields and removing mature trees from agroforestry systems, thus posing a threat to the environment and livelihoods, according to a study. The research is published in the journal Nature Sustainability.

Researchers said that "an observable trend was emerging" wherein agroforestry systems are being replaced with paddy rice fields, even as a certain loss rate could be found to be natural.

Large and mature trees within these agroforestry fields are removed, and trees are now being cultivated within separate block plantations typically with lower ecological value, they said.

Block plantations, usually involving fewer species of



trees, were found to have increased in numbers which some villagers from Telangana, Haryana, Maharashtra and other states confirmed via interviews.

The team, including researchers from the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, explained that the decision to remove trees is often driven by perceived low benefits of the trees, coupled

with concerns that their shading effect, including that of Neem trees, may adversely affect crop yields.

Boosting crop yields also contributed to the expansion of paddy rice fields, further facilitated by water supply which was augmented by the establishment of new boreholes, the authors said.

"This finding is particularly unsettling given the current

emphasis on agroforestry as an essential natural climate solution, playing a crucial role in both climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, as well as for livelihoods and biodiversity," the authors wrote.

Agroforestry trees are a vital part of India's landscapes as they generate socio-ecological benefits, along with being a natural climate solution owing to their ability to absorb carbon dioxide from the air.

However, despite their importance, the lack of robust monitoring mechanisms has contributed to an insufficient grasp of their distribution in relation to management practices, as well as their vulnerability to climate change and diseases, the researchers said.

For the study, the team used AI-based deep learning models for detecting individual non-forest trees for each year. By tracking the tree crown over the years, they then analysed the changes. Crowns of multiple trees together form

a canopy.

The researchers mapped about 60 crore farmland trees, excluding block plantations, and tracked them over the past decade.

They found that around 11 per cent of the large trees, each having a crown size of 96 square metres and mapped in 2010/2011, had disappeared by 2018. "Moreover, during the period 2018-2022, more than 5 million large farmland trees (about 67 square metres crown size) have vanished, due partly to altered cultivation practices, where trees within fields are perceived as detrimental to crop yields," the authors wrote.

The researchers clarified that while the findings may appear to contradict official reports and studies showing that tree cover has increased in recent years, they reported only gross losses and did not look at tree gains as a separate class.

Urgent action is needed to understand and address this concerning trend.

Species barrier preventing spread of deadly CWD: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A substantial species barrier is preventing the spread of deadly chronic wasting disease (CWD) seen in deer, elk, and moose to humans, according to a study conducted by National Institutes of Health scientists and published in Emerging Infectious Diseases.

CWD, also known as zombie deer disease, is highly transmissible and a type of prion disease -- degenerative diseases found in some mammals and primarily involve brain damage but can also affect the eyes and other organs.

The deadly disease occurs when abnormal proteins fold, clump together, and eventually destroy the central nervous system in the brain. While CWD has never been found in humans, so far, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) is the most common form of prion



disease among humans.

In the study, scientists from the National Institutes of Health in the US used a human cerebral organoid model to decode the risk of spread in humans. To validate the model, the team infected the organoids with human CJD prions (positive control).

The study's findings indicate a substantial resistance to CWD transmission in human cerebral organoids, providing reassurance regarding the risk of contracting prion diseases from CWD-infected cervid meat.

While acknowledging potential genetic susceptibilities and the emergence of new strains, researchers remain optimistic about the low likelihood of humans contracting prion diseases through inadvertent consumption of CWD-infected meat.

They then directly exposed the healthy human organoids for seven days with high concentrations of CWD prions from white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, and normal brain matter (negative control).

The results published in the journal Emerging Infectious Diseases showed none of the organoids became infected with CWD in the six months of observation. "This indicates that even following direct exposure of human central nervous system tissues to CWD prions, there is a substantial resistance or barrier to the propagation of infection," according to researchers.

Ukraine's mobilisation law comes into force

... as a new Russian push strains front-line troops

AP ■ KYIV

A divisive mobilisation law in Ukraine came into force on Saturday, as Kyiv struggles to boost troop numbers after Russia launched a new offensive that some fear could close in on Ukraine's second-largest city.

The legislation, which was watered down from its original draft, will make it easier to identify every conscript in the country. It also provides incentives to soldiers, such as cash bonuses or money toward buying a house or car, that some analysts say Ukraine cannot afford.

Lawmakers dragged their feet for months and only passed the law in mid-April, a week after Ukraine lowered the age for men who can be drafted from 27 to 25.

The measures reflect the growing strain that more than two

years of war with Russia has had on Ukraine's forces, who are trying to hold the front lines in fighting that has sapped the country's ranks and stores of weapons and ammunition.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also signed two other laws Friday, allowing prisoners to join the army and increasing fines for draft dodgers fivefold. Russia enlisted its prisoners early on in the war, and personnel shortages compelled Ukraine to adopt the new measures.

Russian troops, meanwhile, are pushing ahead with a ground offensive that opened a new front in northeastern Ukraine's Kharkiv region and put further pressure on Kyiv's overstretched military.

After weeks of probing, Moscow launched the new push knowing that Ukraine suffered personnel shortages, and that its forces have been



Newly recruited soldiers of the 3rd assault brigade train in Kyiv, Ukraine on Friday. A divisive mobilisation law in Ukraine came into force on Saturday, as Kyiv struggles to boost troop numbers after Russia launched a new offensive. AP/PTI

spread thin in the northeast. Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday during a visit to China that the Russian push aims to create "a buffer zone" rather than capturing Kharkiv, the local capital and Ukraine's second-largest city. Still, Moscow's forces have pummeled Kharkiv with

strikes in recent weeks, hitting civilian and energy infrastructure and prompting angry accusations from Zelenskyy that the Russian leadership sought to reduce the city to rubble.

On Friday, Mayor Ihor Terekhov said that Russian guided bombs killed at least three residents and injured 28 others that day.

Moscow denies deliberately targeting civilians, but thousands have died or suffered injuries in the more than 27 months of fighting.

The US last week announced a new USD 400 million package of military aid for Ukraine, and President Joe Biden has promised that he would rush badly needed weaponry to the country to help it stave off Russian advances.

Still, only small batches of US military aid have started to trickle into the front line,

according to Ukrainian military commanders, who said it will take at least two months before supplies meet Kyiv's needs to hold the line.

Thousands of Ukrainians have fled the country to avoid the draft since Russia's all-out invasion in February 2022, some risking their lives as they tried to swim across a river separating Ukraine from neighbouring Romania and Hungary.

Late on Friday, Ukraine's border service said that at least 30 people have died trying to cross the Tisza River since the full scale-invasion.

Romanian border guards days earlier retrieved the naked, disfigured body of a man that appeared to have been floating in the Tisza for days, and is the 30th known casualty, the Ukrainian agency said in an online statement. It said the man has not yet been identified.

Singapore seeing COVID-19 wave

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore is seeing a new COVID-19 wave as the authorities recorded more than 25,900 cases from May 5 to 11 even as Health Minister Ong Ye Kung on Saturday advised the wearing of masks again.

"We are at the beginning part of the wave where it is steadily rising," said Ong. "So, I would say the wave should peak in the next two to four weeks, which means between mid- and end of June," The Straits Times newspaper quoted the minister as saying.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) said the estimated number of COVID-19 cases in the week of May 5 to 11 rose to 25,900 cases, compared with 13,700 cases in the previous week.

The average daily COVID-19 hospitalisations rose to about 250 from 181 the week before. The average daily intensive

care unit (ICU) cases remained low at three cases, compared with two cases in the previous week.

The MOH said that to protect hospital bed capacity, public hospitals have been asked to reduce their non-urgent elective surgery cases and move suitable patients to transitional care facilities or back home through Mobile Inpatient Care@Home, an alternative inpatient care delivery model that offers clinically suitable patients the option of being hospitalised in their own homes instead of a hospital ward. Ong urged those who are at greatest risk of severe disease, including individuals aged 60 years and above, medically vulnerable individuals and residents of aged care facilities, to receive an additional dose of the COVID-19 vaccine if they have not done so in the last 12 months.



Trucks loaded with humanitarian aid from the United Arab Emirates and the United States Agency for International Development cross the Trident Pier before entering the beach in Gaza. AP/PTI

Flash floods kill 86 in Afghanistan

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Flash floods from heavy seasonal rains have killed at least 68 people in Afghanistan, Taliban officials said Saturday, adding the death toll was based on preliminary reports. Afghanistan has been witnessing unusually heavy seasonal rains.

In the hard-hit western province of Ghor, 50 people were reported dead, said Abdul Wahid Hamas, spokesman for the provincial governor. He also said the province has suffered significant financial losses after thousands of homes and properties were damaged and hundreds of hectares of agricultural land destroyed following Friday's floods, including the capital city Feroz Koh.

Meanwhile, 18 people in the northern province of Farayab were killed and two others injured on Friday, according to Esmatullah Moradi, the provincial governor's spokesman. Damages to property and land were reported across four districts and over 300 animals were killed, he added.

Slovak PM is stable after 'miracles' in hospital; suspect appears in court

AP ■ PEZINOK

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico's condition was serious but stable Saturday as the man accused of trying to assassinate him faced his first court appearance.

Two hours of surgery Friday to remove dead tissue from Fico's multiple gunshot wounds led to a good prognosis for his recovery but he was still not well enough to travel to a hospital in the capital, Bratislava, government ministers said outside University F D Roosevelt Hospital in Banska Bystrica, where Fico was taken by helicopter after the shooting.

"Several miracles have occurred in Banska Bystrica in recent days coming from the hands of doctors, nurses and the personnel at the Roosevelt Hospital," Defence Minister Robert Kalinak said.

Fico, 59, was attacked as he greeted supporters following a government meeting Wednesday in the former coal mining town of Handlova. The suspect was tackled to the ground and arrested.

The update on Fico's health was issued as the man accused of attempting to assassinate him



A car supposedly carrying the suspect, in shooting of Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico, arrives at court in Pezinok, Slovakia on Saturday. Officials in Slovakia say Prime Minister Robert Fico has undergone another operation two days after his assassination attempt and remains in serious condition. AP/PTI

suspect to his home in the town of Levice and seized a computer and some documents, Markiza, a Slovak television station reported. Police didn't comment.

With police remaining largely silent about the case, it was not clear how the suspect came to possess a firearm.

Slovakia has strict rules on firearms and gun owners must have a good reason to possess one and are required to pass a test.

As a consequence, Slovakia has one of the lowest gun ownership rates in Europe. It was ranked 23rd out of 27 European Union countries with a gun ownership rate of 6.5 per 100 people, according to the Association of Accredited Public Policy Advocates to the EU.

World leaders have condemned the attack and offered support for Fico and Slovakia. Fico has long been a divisive figure in Slovakia and beyond. His return to power last year on a pro-Russia, anti-American platform led to worries among fellow European Union and NATO members that he would abandon his country's pro-Western course, particularly on Ukraine.

Malaysian man kills two cops

AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR

The man who attacked a Malaysian police station and killed two officers was a recluse and is believed to have acted on his own despite suspected links to the Jemaah Islamiyah extremist group, the country's home minister said Saturday.

The man stormed the police station in southern Johor state near Singapore in the early hours of Friday with a machete. He hacked a police constable to death and then used the officer's weapon to kill another. He wounded a third officer before being shot dead. Police initial-

ly said the man could have attempted to take firearms from the station.

Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution called it a "lone wolf attack" based on an initial investigation and said there was no threat to the wider public.

"We have established that the attacker acted on his own ... a lone wolf driven by certain motivation and his own understanding," Saifuddin said. "His action is not linked to any larger mission." Police have said the man's father was a known member of Jemaah Islamiyah, a Southeast Asian network linked to al-Qaida, and that

they found materials linked to the group in their home. Seven people including the man's parents and three siblings were detained and police said they were searching for some 20 Jemaah Islamiyah members in the state.

The incident sparked concerns over a possible wider threat, prompting Singapore to issue a warning to its citizens to be vigilant when traveling to Johor. Police initially said the attacker was 34, but Saifuddin later said he was 21 years old, with no criminal record. He said the man did not interact much with his neighbors.

Pakistan, IMF to hold talks on fresh bailout package

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan, seeking a fresh USD 6 billion to USD 8 billion loan package from the IMF, will hold talks with officials from the Washington-based lender to discuss the terms of the fresh bailout for the cash-strapped country, according to a media report on Saturday.

An IMF support team has reached Pakistan to hold talks regarding its request for a fresh bailout package under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF). Pakistan has made a formal request for a fresh bailout package of USD 6 to USD 8 billion under the EFF with the possibility to be augmented through climate finance. If successful, it would be the 24th IMF bailout programme

for the country.

"Right now, a mission team led by Nathan Porter, our Mission Chief, is meeting with the authorities this week to discuss the next phase of our engagement with Pakistan," International Monetary Fund's Communication Director Julie Kozack said on Thursday.

IMF's Resident Representative for Pakistan Esther Perez Ruiz said a team, led by Porter, would meet Pakistani authorities "to discuss the next phase of engagement".

She had further said that the aim of the negotiations was to "lay the foundation for better governance and stronger, more inclusive, and resilient economic growth that will benefit all Pakistanis", Geo News reported.

The team is expected to stay

in the country for more than 10 days and would receive data from different departments and would also discuss the upcoming budget for the fiscal year 2025 with the Ministry of Finance officials, Geo News reported quoting sources. Last Tuesday, Pakistan and the IMF started negotiations for a fresh bailout package to address the cash-strapped country's fiscal challenges and implement crucial reforms, media reports said.

Last month, Pakistan completed a short-term USD 3 billion programme with the IMF, which bailed the country out of any default.

It was unclear whether the IMF mission would end with a formal staff-level agreement for the next bailout package, according to The Express

Tribune newspaper.

The duration, instrument, and size of the next IMF programme were open to discussion, the report said, quoting sources.

Pakistan narrowly averted default last summer, and the economy has stabilised after the completion of the last IMF programme, with inflation coming down to around 17 per cent in April from a record high of 38 per cent last May.

The country is still dealing with a high fiscal shortfall, and while the external account deficit has been controlled through import control mechanisms, it has come at the expense of stagnating growth, which is expected to be around two per cent this year compared to negative growth last year.

Yemen's Houthi rebels claim shooting down another US MQ-9 Reaper drone

AP ■ DUBAI

Yemen's Houthi rebels on Friday claimed to have shot down an American drone, hours after footage circulated online of what appeared to be the wreckage of an MQ-9 Reaper drone.

Early Saturday, a vessel also came under attack in the Red Sea.

The two incidents likely represent just the latest attacks by the Houthis as they press their campaign over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree claimed that rebels shot down the Reaper on Thursday with a surface-to-air missile.

He described the drone as "carrying out hostile actions" in Yemen's Marib province, which

remains held by allies of Yemen's exiled, internationally recognised government.

The Houthis later released footage they claimed showed the surface-to-air-missile being launched at night, along with night-vision footage of the missile hitting the drone.

A man, whose voice had been digitally altered to apparently prevent identification, chanted the Houthi slogan: "God is the greatest; death to America; death to Israel; curse the Jews; victory to Islam."

Online video showed wreckage resembling the pieces of the Reaper on the ground, as well as footage of that wreckage on fire.

The US military did not respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press over the Houthi claim.

While the rebels have made claims about attacks that turned out later not to be true, they have a history of shooting down US drones and have been armed by their main benefactor, Iran, with weapons capable of high-altitude attack.

Since the Houthis seized the country's north and its capital, Sanaa, in 2014, the US military has previously lost at least five drones to the rebels.

Reapers, which cost around USD 30 million apiece, can fly at altitudes up to 50,000 feet and have an endurance of up to 24 hours before needing to land.

The drone shootdown comes as the Houthis launch attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, demanding Israel ends the war in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000

Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the US Maritime Administration.

Early Saturday, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said a ship came under attack off the coast of Yemen's port city of Hodeida.

The captain "has confirmed sustaining slight damage after being struck by an unknown object on his port quarter," the UKMTO said. "The vessel and crew are safe and continuing to its next port of call."

Man gets 30 years in prison for attack on Pelosi's husband

AP ■ SAN FRANCISCO

The man who broke into the home of then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi seeking to hold her hostage and bludgeoned her husband with a hammer was sentenced Friday to 30 years in prison.

But prosecutors later filed a motion saying the court failed to offer the defendant, David DePape, an opportunity "to speak or present any information to mitigate the sentence" as required by federal rule. They asked the court to reopen the sentencing portion to allow him that option. The court did not immediately respond.

A jury found DePape, 44, guilty in November of attempted kidnapping of a federal official and assault on the immediate fam-

ily member of a federal official. Prosecutors had asked for a 40-year prison term.

The attack on Paul Pelosi, who was 82 at the time, was captured on police body camera video just days before the 2022 midterm elections and sent shockwaves through the political world.

He suffered two head wounds including a skull fracture that was mended with plates and screws he will have for the rest of his life. His right arm and hand were also injured.

Judge Jacqueline Scott Corley sentenced DePape to 20 years for attempted kidnapping and 30 years for the assault, the maximum for both counts. The sentences will run concurrently. He also was given credit for the 18 months he has

been in custody.

In its afternoon motion to the court, the US attorney's office said DePape was not given the opportunity by the court to speak before being sentenced and that could present an issue. DePape's defence, however, said they opposed bringing back their client to court and filed a notice of appeal, according to the filing. Prosecutors and defence counsel did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment late Friday.

The court has 14 days to correct a sentence resulting from error, prosecutors said.

DePape stood silently as he was sentenced and looked down at times. His public defence attorneys had asked the judge to sentence him to 14 years, pointing out that he was going

through a difficult period in his life at the time of the attack, had undiagnosed mental health issues and had no prior criminal history.

At trial, DePape testified that he had planned to wear an inflatable unicorn costume and record his interrogation of the Democratic speaker, who was not at her San Francisco home at the time of the attack, to upload it online.

Ahead of the sentencing, one of his defense attorneys, Angela Chuang, told the judge to consider the prison terms being given to those who participated in the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

"The five most serious sentences for people who were convicted of seditious conspiracy, of literally conspiring to

overthrow the government, range from 15 to 22 years," Chuang said.

Corley said the January 6 analogy didn't adequately reflect the seriousness of breaking into an official's private home. The attack may have a chilling effect on people seeking office in the future, she said.

"They have to think not only, Am I willing to take that risk myself, but am I willing to risk my spouse, my children, my grandchildren?" the judge said.

Prosecutors asked for the maximum sentence on each count and for DePape to serve 10 years concurrently, giving him a 40-year prison term.

Before sentencing, Christine Pelosi read her father and mother's victim statements, explaining how the violent

attack changed their lives. In Paul Pelosi's statement, he explained that 18 months after the attack, he still gets headaches and vertigo and has fainted and fallen twice at home.

"Once you are attacked in such a public and political manner, with such threatening language, you always have to fear a copycat," Nancy Pelosi said in her statement. "When I encourage people, especially women to consider running for office, physical threats to the family should not even be a factor, but they are."

Both Paul and Nancy Pelosi said there are still bloodstains on the floor and other signs of the break-in at their home.

"Our home remains a heart-breaking crime scene," Nancy Pelosi wrote.

Nepal bans sale of Indian spice-mix

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

After Singapore and Hong Kong, Nepal has also banned the sale and import of certain spice-mix products manufactured by Indian brands over alleged quality concerns.

Four spice-mix products by MDH and Everest were banned in the Himalayan nation from Friday due to suspected ethylene oxide or EtO contamination, according to the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control here.

Under this, Madras Curry Powder, Sambhar Mixed Masala Powder, Mixed Masala Curry Powder of MDH and Fish Curry Masala of Everest have been banned in Nepal.

"As residue contents of ethylene oxide are found to be exceeding the prescribed limit in these four products, the import and sale of these products are banned within the country as per Article 19 of the Food Regulation 2027 B.S.," the department said in a notice issued on Friday.

"Our serious attention has been drawn towards media reports about the sale of these sub-standard products in the market, and they are harmful for consumption," it said.

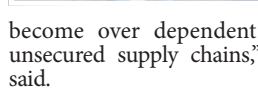
FDI norms in certain sectors likely to be eased under new Government: DPIIT Secretary

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has recently relaxed foreign direct investment norms in the space sector and there is a possibility of further FDI liberalisation in certain other areas when the new government will come to power, a top official said on Saturday. Secretary in Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajesh Kumar Singh said that in the last few years, India has liberalised FDI policy in many segments. India has one of the most liberal foreign direct investment (FDI) policies in the world and in fact more liberal than many Southeast Asian countries that the country is often compared with, he said. Recently FDI norms were eased in the space sector and "it is quite possible that under a new government, we can attempt some further

liberalisation of any pockets that are left and where some liberalisation is possible," Singh said here at CII's annual business summit. The Lok Sabha elections are underway in the country and the counting is scheduled for June 4. The government has eased FDI norms in the space sector by allowing 100 per cent overseas investment in making components for satellites, as part of efforts to attract overseas players and private companies into the segment. FDI in India declined 13 per cent to USD 32.03 billion in April-December 2023, dragged down by lower infusion in computer hardware and software, telecom, auto, and pharma sectors, according to the government data. Talking about the success of the production linked incentive schemes (PLI), the secretary said so far Rs 1.13 lakh crore of investments have come in and the beneficiary

companies have recorded over Rs 9 lakh crore of sales, exports of Rs 3.45 lakh crore and created jobs for over 8 lakh people. The scheme was announced in 2021 for 14 sectors, including telecommunication, white goods, textiles, manufacturing of medical devices, automobiles, speciality steel, food products, high efficiency solar PV modules, advanced chemistry cell battery, drones, and pharma with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore. Singh said some people criticize the scheme stating that it has not led to increase in domestic value addition but they should know that it takes time. People have raised issues with regard to India attracting players in the semi-conductor segment stating that it is too capital intensive and not suitable for India. "The target is not labour intensity, it is mainly strategic and to ensure that we do not



become over dependent on unsecured supply chains," he said. On ease of doing business, he said they are working on the World Bank's Business Ready (B-READY) index for which

the survey will start in August and this ranking involves a new set of indices which will cover ease of entry, ease of operation and ease of exit of business. The World Bank has shared a

set of 1,370 questions which will be assessed across various economies. "Our survey starts in September. DPIIT along with various ministries is at work and trying to sort of first assess

the situation and thereafter see whether we can make some quick reforms in certain areas to ensure that our overall performance improves," Singh said. These rankings despite certain shortcomings have a signalling effect on foreign investors. "We need to ensure that we do not regress and we continue to improve when it comes to those rankings," he said. He added that the department is working on the second edition of Jan Vishwas law after getting inputs from industry associations. "We have to do several rounds of these exercises to eliminate some of the vexatious and penal provisions that are unfriendly for business," the secretary said. In the first edition of the Jan Vishwas law, over 180 provisions were decriminalised in 42 Central Acts administered by 19 ministries and departments. Under the first Jan Vishwas law,

imprisonment and/or fine was removed in some provisions. Some of the legislations that were amended included the Boilers Act, Indian Forest Act, Drugs and Cosmetics Act, Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation Act, Warehousing Corporations Act, Food Corporations Act, Patents Act, and Food Safety and Standards Act. Further on the country's intellectual property rights (IPR) regime, the secretary said India has created a situation where its patent regime is meeting or getting close to global benchmarks in terms of patent examination time and approval. The number of patents granted went up from 5,978 in 2014-15 to 1.3 lakh in 2023-24. On how to enhance involvement of states in the reform process, he said "there are some weapons that we have to nudge them in the reform areas that we feel are really important for the country?"



Expecting good response from many companies on EV policy: Government

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Saturday said India is expecting good response from many automobile companies on its electric-vehicle (EV) policy, which was released in March to attract global players like Tesla. Secretary in Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajesh Kumar Singh said that in the policy, the government has used tariff tweaks without actually spending any money to seek commitments from manufacturers to set up base in India. "Everybody talks about one company (US-based EV major Tesla), but we are expecting responses from many companies to that policy," Singh said here at CII's annual business summit. On March 15, the government approved an electric-vehicle policy, under which duty concessions will be given to companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of USD 500 million, a move aimed at attracting major global players like Tesla. As per the policy, a company will get three years to set up manufacturing facilities in India, and start commercial production of e-vehicles, and reach 50 per cent domestic value addition (DVA) within five years at the maximum. The companies that would set up manufacturing facilities for

EV passenger cars will be allowed to import a limited number of cars at lower customs/import duty of 15 per cent on vehicles costing USD 35,000 and above for five years from the date of issuance of the approval letter by the government. At present, cars imported as completely built units (CBUs) attract customs duty of 70-100 per cent, depending on engine size and cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value less or above USD 40,000. The policy seeks to promote India as a manufacturing destination for EVs and attract investment from reputed global EV manufacturers. According to the scheme, the company will be allowed to import CBUs of e-4W manufactured by them at a reduced customs duty of 15 per cent, subject to the conditions. Singh also said that they have also managed to get commitments for investments in India in the tyre sector from two major multinational firms. "Two major multinationals came to us with certain products that were on a restrictive (import) list and they wanted that (those goods) to be allowed for imports. We told them that okay, we will allow you to import but we want these product lines to be manufactured in India. Once they gave us those commitments, we allowed those relaxations," he added. India has imposed mandatory quality control norms for certain types of tyres in India,

besides putting some on the licence list to boost domestic manufacturing. Citing the example of EVs and tyres, he said, "there are other ways to ensure that the kind of goals that we have under the PLI (production linked incentive) scheme for investments can be met even by prudent use of tariff-and non-tariff policies". Talking about India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA (European Free Trade Association) free trade agreement, which was signed in March here, the secretary said this is a first of its kind pact where investment commitments are there. "Those commitments are going to be monitored and there is a provision even to claw back the market access if those commitments are not met," he said. On March 10, India and EFTA signed a free trade agreement (FTA) under which New Delhi received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion in 15 years from the grouping while allowing several products such as Swiss watches, chocolates and cut and polished diamonds at lower or zero duties. The EFTA members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. He added that several FTA negotiations are under way and "my own anticipation is that you (industry) will see India becoming a little less conservative when it comes to these FTAs".

Markets end special trading session with gains

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices closed a special trading session on a firm note on Saturday, extending their rally to the third day running amid fresh foreign fund inflows. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 88.91 points or 0.12 per cent to end at 74,005.94. During the session, it jumped 245.73 points or 0.33 per cent to 74,162.76. The NSE Nifty advanced 35.90 points or 0.16 per cent to 22,502. The National Stock Exchange (NSE) and BSE on May 7 said they will conduct a special trading session in the equity and equity derivative segments on May 18 to check their preparedness for handling major disruptions or failures at the primary site. The special live trading session will have an intra-day switchover from the Primary Site (PR) to the Disaster Recovery (DR) site. In separate circulars, the two exchanges said there will be two sessions — the first from 9:15 am to 10 am from the PR, and the second from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm from the DR site. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies reached an all-time peak of Rs 4,12,36,791.05 crore in the special trading session. Among the Sensex components, Nestle,



Power Grid, Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Technologies, Hindustan Unilever and State Bank of India were the major gainers. JSW Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the laggards. Wall Street ended mostly higher on Friday. "The Dow Jones Industrial Average has hit 40,000 for the first time, buoyed by

optimism from a softer-than-expected April inflation report, which has increased bets on a September rate cut by the Federal Reserve. "This positive sentiment extends to Indian markets, with the Nifty likely trading between 22,000-22,500, facing resistance at 22,500 and support at 22,000," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Friday after days of

unabated outflows. They bought equities worth Rs 1,616.79 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. "Dow Jones closing in record territory above 40,000 will continue to provide global support for equity markets. A significant trend now is the FIIs turning buyers yesterday, and this takes away the pressure on the markets," said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services. The BSE benchmark climbed 253.31 points or 0.34 per cent to settle at 73,917.03 on Friday. The NSE Nifty rose 62.25 points or 0.28 per cent to 22,466.10. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.77 per cent and the midcap index advanced 0.48 per cent. All the indices ended in the green, with industrials, healthcare, telecommunication, capital goods and realty emerging as the major gainers. On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark climbed 1,341.47 points or 1.84 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 446.8 points or 2 per cent. Earlier on March 2 (Saturday), the BSE and NSE conducted a special trading session in equity and equity derivative segments. Typically, switching to the DR site is done to ensure business continuity in the case of a major disruption.

Debt, equity holders approve merger of IDFC with IDFC First Bank

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shareholders and non-convertible debenture (NCD) holders of IDFC First Bank have approved a proposal to merge parent IDFC Ltd with the lender. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) convened a meeting on May 17 through video conferencing and other audio-visual means to consider and approve the composite scheme of amalgamation for IDFC First Bank, the bank said in a regulatory filing. The board of the bank presented the result of voting on the proposal for amalgamation before the NCLT. "We wish to inform that the resolution approving the Scheme was passed by the overwhelming majority of 99.95 per cent of the equity shareholders, representing



more than three-fourths in value of the equity shareholders of the bank voting through remote e-voting and e-voting during the meeting, in terms of the provisions of Sections 230-232 of the Companies Act, 2013," the lender said.

In a separate filing, it said the proposal was passed by the overwhelming majority of 99.99 per cent of the NCD holders. As part of the composite scheme of amalgamation, IDFC FHCL would first merge with IDFC and then

IDFC into IDFC First Bank Ltd. Under the proposed reverse merger scheme, an IDFC shareholder will get 155 shares for every 100 shares she/he holds in the bank. Both stocks have a face value of Rs 10 each.

IDFC was an infra lender in the private sector space, and following its bigger peers like ICICI and IDBI, it also launched a banking subsidiary in 2015 — IDFC Bank — but could not make a mark. Like HDFC Bank, the merged IDFC First Bank will also have no promoter entity but is fully owned by institutional and public shareholders. IDFC began as an infra lender in 1997. It got in-principle approval from the RBI to set up a bank in April 2014, and in October 2015, it launched IDFC Bank when on-tap licensing began, following which loans and liabilities of IDFC were transferred to the bank. In December 2018, it took over Capital First, a consumer and MSME-focused non-bank since 2012, and was renamed IDFC First Bank and became a full-service universal bank.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Softbank-backed OYO is set to refile its much-awaited IPO as the global travel tech player is close to finalising its refinancing plans to raise up to USD 450 million via sale of dollar bonds, sources said. JP Morgan is the likely lead banker for the refinancing through the sale of dollar bonds at an estimated interest rate of 9 to 10 per cent per annum, a source said. In preparation for the refinancing, OYO has already moved its application with markets regulator SEBI to withdraw its current draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The company intends to refile an updated version of the DRHP, after the bond issuance. Oravel Stays Ltd, OYO's parent company, had in November prepaid a significant chunk of its debt amounting to Rs 1,620 crore through a buyback process. The buyback involved repurchasing 30 per cent of its outstanding Term Loan B of USD 660 million. The move

OYO withdraws DRHP, to refile IPO post refinancing: Sources

brought down its outstanding loan amount to around USD 450 million. A source closely involved in the company's IPO plans told PTI, "The refinancing will result in material changes to OYO's financial statements. Hence as per existing regulations, it will need to revise its filings with the regulator." "Since the decision for refinancing is at an advanced stage, it doesn't make sense to continue pursuing IPO approval with the current financials. So it's prudent to withdraw the current application," he added. The refinancing will extend the repayment timeline to five years -- versus the repayment of the remaining TLB due in 2026 -- the source said. The bond issuance would



significantly lower the current effective interest rate of 14 per cent on its existing USD 450 million Term Loan B (TLB) facility. "The refinancing is expected to

result in annual interest savings of USD 8-10 million (Rs 66.4-83 crore) in the first year, after accounting for the costs associated with the bond issuance. The company anticipates annual savings of USD 15-17 million (Rs 124.5 - 141.1 crore) thereafter, almost all of which would get added to its net profits. Post the debt refinancing, the company is open to contemplating an equity round, to reaffirm investor confidence before a public listing to fortify its financial strength," the source said. In September 2021, OYO had filed preliminary documents with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) for a Rs 8,430 crore IPO. The launching of the IPO was delayed due to the then volatile market conditions making the company prepare to settle for a lower valuation at around USD 4-6 billion instead of the USD 11 billion it was targeting initially.

Sundaram Home Finance hopeful of continuing growth momentum

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Sundaram Home Finance expects the growth momentum to continue in the current financial year and would focus expansion into smaller towns, a top official has said. The city-based company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Sundaram Finance Ltd would also be exploring opportunities in Tier 4 towns in South India, Managing Director Lakshminarayanan Duraiswamy said. "Given that the small towns in the South Market are seeing a good pace of growth on the back of increased affordability, we continue to be positive on the outlook for the real estate sector and are hopeful that the growth momentum will continue," he said in a



statement. "Our focus will be to penetrate deeper into smaller towns. We will also look at exploring opportunities in Tier 4 towns in South India and expect these new locations to drive our growth this year," he said. On the expansion drive launched in Maharashtra and Rajasthan, he said the company would continue to identify pockets of growth

opportunities and steadily strengthen the base in West and Central India. Sundaram Home Finance which forayed into the small business loan segment (up to Rs 20 lakh) has opened 30 exclusive SBL branches in Tamil Nadu with disbursements of over Rs 125 crore. Earlier in the day, Sundaram Home Finance reported a net profit of Rs 57 crore for the quarter ending March 31, 2024 as compared to Rs 65 crore registered during the same period of last year. Disbursements during the quarter under review surged by 20 per cent to Rs 1,469 crore, from Rs 1,222 crore registered in the corresponding quarter of last year.

Sift, Niraj win in Olympic Selection Trials

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Sift Kaur Samra won her third women's 50m rifle 3 positions competition while Niraj Kumar emerged victorious in the men's event for a second time on the penultimate day of the Olympic Selection Trial (OST) 3 and 4 here on Saturday. Sift shot 461.3 in the women's 3P trial 4 final to edge out Nischal by a point. Ashi Chouksey was third with 448.1. Shriyanka Sadangi and Anjum Moudgil were fourth and fifth respectively in the five-woman field.

In the men's 3P, Niraj finished on top with a healthy 462.9, a whole 1.7 ahead of second-placed Chain Singh. Aishwary Tomar was third with 449.8, while Swapnil Kusale and Akhil Sheoran finished fourth and fifth respectively. The results confirmed Sift as the top finisher in women's 3P, considering three best scores out of the four trials. Anjum Moudgil also confirmed her position as second best of the trials among the five qualified shooters. In the men's 3P, Aishwary Tomar



and Swapnil Kusale finished 1-2 after the competition of four trial matches.

CLARITY IN AIR EVENTS: The day also saw the qualification rounds of the men's and women's 10m air rifle and air pistol trial 4 play out.

While Sri Karthik Sabari Raj

topped the men's air rifle with a score of 631.6, Ramita Jindal was the star of the day, posting a scintillating 636.4 (0.1 more than the existing world record set by China's Han Jiayu at the Baku World Cup earlier this month) to top the women's air rifle.

Ramita's effort meant that she

was now second in the overall calculations, just 0.1 behind Olympian Elavenil Valarivan, whose score of 633.0 has taken her to the top of the standings. Ramita at the start of the day was in the fourth position. Mehuli Ghosh (633.1) was second, while Nancy (630.6) and Tilottama Sen (628.8)

were fourth and fifth respectively.

In the men's air rifle, the results had no bearing on the standings as Sandeep Singh (fourth with 628.3) and Arjun Babuta (fifth with 624.7) maintained their top two positions in the calculations.

Manu Bhaker confidently topped the women's 10m air pistol standings, finishing on top of the trial 4 qualification round with a score of 581. Surbhi Rao (577) was second while Palak (572) was third. Rhythm Sangwan was fourth on the same score as Palak's but lost out on inner 10s while Esha Singh was fifth with 572. In the men's air pistol, Sarabjot Singh shot 584 to top the trial 4 qualifications, while Arjun Singh Cheema was second with 583. Varun Tomar (577) was third, Ravinder Singh (576) fourth and Naveen (574) finished fifth.

The results in air pistol meant that in the present calculations, Manu and Rhythm are 1-2 in the women's air pistol while Sarabjot and Arjun have the top two slots in the men's event.

NBC will have crews at Manchester City, Arsenal for Premier League final

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Rebecca Lowe has reported on many significant Premier League moments during her 11 seasons hosting NBC's coverage.

The one thing missing has been a second-place team overtaking the leader on the final day of the season. This weekend, Lowe and the network's studio show will be at Emirates Stadium as Arsenal tries to do something that hasn't happened in Premier League history - move up from second to first on Championship Sunday.

"Are we due one? Maybe," Lowe said this week before leaving for London. Manchester City has a two-point lead going into the final match day. Arsenal needs a win over Everton and needs City to lose or draw against West Ham to win its first Premier League title in 20 years.

If City wins, it becomes the first team to win four consecutive titles since the Premier League became England's top division in 1992. Lowe thought she was close to seeing history two years ago when Liverpool took an early lead against Wolves and Manchester City fell behind by two goals to Aston Villa. City rallied for a 3-2 victory and ended up winning the title by one point. While the studio team will be at Arsenal, the top announcing crew of Jon Champion and Graeme Le Saux will be in Manchester. That covers NBC no matter what happens Sunday.

Coincidentally, Arsenal was the last team to vault from second to first in England's top division in 1989.

"You don't want to be where the story isn't. It is a difficult decision because it is a dynasty in Manchester, but sometimes in sports, the greatest stories are the underdog stories," Lowe said of the decision for the studio show to be at Arsenal instead of Manchester City. NBC will once again have coverage of all 10 matches going on simultaneously. NBC will air the Manchester City match, USA Network has



Arsenal while CNBC will air Brighton vs. Manchester United and Golf Channel has Chelsea vs. Bournemouth. Peacock will stream all 10 matches, including six exclusively.

The title going down to the final day will cap what has been a record season for NBC's coverage. Premier League matches on linear television and streaming are averaging just over 540,000 viewers per match, which is on pace to surpass the 2015-16 record.

This will be the third straight season and fourth overall NBC has averaged over 500,000. Six of the most-watched Premier League matches in the U.S. Have come this season, including a record 2.1 million for Manchester City's scoreless draw against Arsenal on March 31. Peacock had two matches this season that averaged over 1 million.

The influx of new fans - driven in part by the title race but also NBC going on the road to different cities during the season for Premier League fanfests — has been one of the

biggest things coordinating producer Pierre Moossa has been pleased about this season. "We want to make sure we're authentic and true to the sport. But at the same time, we want to be inclusive and welcoming to the new audience," he said.

The other has been the addition of Champion, who was already a favorite among U.S. Soccer fans from his work with ESPN. Champion and Peter Drury, who is in his second season with NBC, gives the network two top-flight announcers.

"What I've noticed is they bring out different aspects of Lee (Dixon) and Graeme's game. Lee and Graeme when they work with John is a different listen than when they work with Peter. Both are excellent listeners but different perspectives, point of views and commentary. I think the viewers really benefit from that," Moossa said.

Besides the title race, NBC will be keeping an eye on Liverpool hosting Wolves in Jurgen Klopp's final match as Liverpool's manager.

Woods makes two early triples en route to a 77 and will miss cut at PGA Championship

AP ■ LOUISVILLE (USA)

Tiger Woods will miss the cut at the PGA Championship after making two triple-bogeys over the first four holes Friday on the way to 6-over-par 77.

Woods finished the second round at Valhalla, the site of his 2000 title, at 7-over 149 and left the course tied for 136th place. The top 70 and ties will move to the weekend. When Woods walked off the 18th green, he was eight shots behind the projected cut line. This will be the fifth time Woods has missed the cut at the PGA, and the first since 2019. It will mark his 13th missed cut at a major since he turned pro in 1997.

After shooting 1-over 72 on the first day, Woods said he was feeling stronger and needed more real-life rounds. But any hope that he'd get more action in this weekend faded quickly.



On the par-4 second, he tried to flop a shot over a bunker from a patch of rain-soaked rough near the green, but the ball went into the sand. He picked the next shot out of the sand, over the green

and into another bunker and made 7. It was a similar scene on the par-4 fourth, which is playing the fifth-easiest this week. On that one, he tried to finesse a shot

just over a greenside bunker, but it hit the top and rolled back in. His first try to get out hit the top of the trap and rolled back in again. That led to another 7 to close a three-hole stretch he played in 7 over.

From there, the only question was whether he would break 80 and avoid his worst score ever at the PGA. That remains a 9-over 79 at Southern Hills in 2022.

His worst score at a major came last month when he shot 82 in the third round of the Masters, en route to finishing last among those who made the cut.

This will be the fifth cut Woods has missed to go with two withdrawals since he captured the Masters in 2019 for his 15th career major. That doesn't include the seven majors he skipped completely since the start of 2021, when he shattered bones in his right leg and ankle in a car wreck.



Satwik-Chirag pair enters Thailand Open final

PTI ■ BANGKOK

India's premier men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty entered the final of the Thailand Open badminton tournament with an easy straight-game victory over Lu Ming-Che and Tang Kai-Wei of Chinese Taipei here on Saturday.

Asian Games gold medalist pair of Satwik and Chirag needed just 35 minutes to beat their world No. 80 opponents 21-11 21-12 in the semifinal match of the Super 500 tournament at the Nimibutr Stadium here.

Satwik and Chirag have a deep relation with Thailand as it was here five years back in 2019 that they had won their maiden super 500 crown. On Saturday, the Indian pair inched closer to regaining the title after reaching the summit clash again. The Indian pair thus continued to make waves in the BWF World Tour after progressing to their fourth final of the season. The duo had finished runner-up at Malaysia super 1000 and India super 750 before claiming the French super 750 in March. In the final on Sunday, the world number three Indian duo, the top seeds in this tournament, will be up against the Chinese pair of Chen Bo Yang and Liu Yi, who defeated Kim Gi Jung and Kim Sa Rang of South Korea 21-19 21-18 in the other semifinal on Saturday. Satwik and Chirag had some

low returns in the last couple of tournaments. The Indian pair lost in the second round at All England Championships and then missed the Asia Championships due to an injury to Satwik. The Thomas Cup campaign was also not too fruitful as they lost a couple of narrow matches to top pairs. The final appearance will thus provide a major boost ahead of the Paris Olympics.

On Saturday, Satwik and Chirag were not really tested by Lu and Tang, who played well only in patches but lacked the aggression and accuracy to trouble the Indians, who were a cut above their rivals.

In the opening game, Satwik and Chirag were up 3-0 but the Taiwanese pair managed to make it 5-4 before they started leaking points. Errors crept into their game as they went long a number of times, allowing the Indians to enter the break with an 11-7 lead. Things didn't change after resumption as the Indians continued to gather point with their sharp placements. At 17-10, Chirag produced a power-packed smash as they gained nine game points when the Chinese went out twice. The second game began on a close note as the two pairs moves 4-4 to 6-6. Satwik also produced an ambitious behind-the-back return only to spray it wide. Leading 9-7 for the first time in the match, Lu and Tang however, couldn't sustain the pressure as a fast and long rally ended at the nets for the Chinese.

Zverev to face Jarry in Italian Open final after a comeback win over Tabilo

AP ■ ROME

For about an hour, Alexander Zverev had no answer to the rocket-like forehands and perfectly placed drop shots that Alejandro Tabilo kept producing on Rome's red clay.

The fifth-ranked Zverev kept patient, though, and took his chance when it came as he rallied to beat his unheralded Chilean opponent 1-6, 7-6 (4), 6-2 on Friday for a spot in the Italian Open final. "I was just hanging on the second set. I brought my energy up," Zverev said. "He hit me off the court in the first set and I didn't play well at all, but he was a big reason why. He gave me no rhythm."

In Sunday's final, Zverev will face another Chilean, Nicolas Jarry, who beat Tommy Paul 6-3, 6-7 (3), 6-3 on the American's 27th birthday.

The 24th-ranked Jarry came back from a set down to eliminate Stefanos Tsitsipas in the quarterfinals and will be playing his first Masters Series final.

It was an appealing contrast in styles between the big-serving 6-foot-7 (2.01 meter) Jarry, who goes for a lot of his shots, and the more defensive-minded Paul, who grinds it out and likes to make his opponents play longer points. Zverev, the 2017 Rome champion, had the pinkie on his left hand bandaged following a fall in his previous match, after which he said his finger was "crooked." The German plays right-handed but uses a two-handed backhand. He said his pinkie was swollen and he was using painkillers.

"I tore a capsule. ... But I didn't break any bones," Zverev said. "The finger is still very, very big. It was manageable." It's Zverev's third final in Rome. He won in 2017 by beating Novak Djokovic in



straight sets for his first Masters Series title. He lost to Rafael Nadal in the title match a year later.

"I've been here before," Zverev said. "I know what it takes and hopefully I can use that."

Top-ranked Iga Swiatek will play No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka in the women's final on Saturday.

Rome is the last big wamup before the French Open starts on May 26. Zverev, who has disputed a penalty order from a German court over allegations that he caused bodily harm to a woman, faces a trial starting during Roland Garros. He said recently that he won't attend the start of the trial.

Zverev leads 4-2 in his career meetings with Jarry but the series is tied 2-2 on clay.

"Nicolas is one of the most aggressive players we have on the tour," Zverev said. "Obviously huge serve, huge forehand. Tries to hit big from both sides of the court."

The 32nd-ranked Tabilo eliminated top-ranked Djokovic in the third round on Sunday and hadn't dropped a set in the tournament until errors helped Zverev win the second-set tiebreaker. Zverev then took control early in the third.

Tabilo, who is a leftie, saved a break point midway through the first set with a slicing serve out wide to the ad court then produced three drop shots to serve out the set.

Zverev and Tabilo were born in the same year and played often as juniors, when Tabilo represented Canada, where he was born.



Pranavi, Diksha and Tvesa make cut at German Masters

PTI ■ BRANDENBURG (GERMANY)

Pranavi Urs, Diksha Dagar and Tvesa Malik were the only ones to make the 36-hole cut at the Amundi German Masters.

Pranavi and Diksha carded 1-over 73 each and were 3-over for two rounds and placed T-30, while Tvesa (77) squeezed inside the cut line at 5-over.

Of the four others, Sneha Singh (75) missed the cut by a shot, Vani Kapoor (77) by three shots and Amandeep Drall (78) by five shots.

Avani Prashanth withdrew midway through the second round. The cut fell at +5, with 66 players making it through to the weekend. Germany's Alexandra Försterling produced a round of 70 (-2) for the second consecutive day to lead by a stroke.

The Berlin native sat in a share of fourth place overnight and began her second round from the 10th tee at Golf & Country Club Seddiner See. Försterling's round was built

around the three birdies she rolled in between the sixth and the ninth, as she had four birdies and two bogeys.

Since teeing it up at this tournament in 2023, Försterling has won three Ladies European Tour titles.

Försterling leads the charge, but there is plenty of German interest behind, with Patricia Isabel Schmidt, Sandra Gal and Helen Briem all one shot further back.

The German trio sit in a tie for second place on three-under, alongside LET Order of Merit leader Bronte Law of England. Schmidt, leading on the opening day, had a trickier second round, shooting a 73.

Five players sit in a share of sixth place, with France's Celine Herbin, Spain's Luna Sobron Galmes, Hong Kong's Tiffany Chan, Slovenia's Ana Belac and Morocco's Ines Laklalech all on two-under-par. Czechia's Tereza Melecka secured her first hole-in-one as a professional, acing the par-three fifth hole with a pitching wedge.

T20 World Cup: Majority of Indian players to leave for New York on May 25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The majority of the Indian players along with the jumbo support staff will be flying out to New York on May 25, with the rest leaving for the T20 World Cup only after the May 26 IPL final. Earlier, the members of teams failing to qualify for the play-offs were supposed to leave for New York on May 21, two days after the final league game of the IPL on May 19 but it has since been learnt

that there has been some change in plans and now the first batch will leave on May 25.

"The likes of skipper Rohit Sharma, Hardik Pandya, Suryakumar Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Rishabh Pant, Arshdeep Singh, Axar Patel are some of the players along with support staff who are expected to leave on May 25," a BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity. "Earlier, departure date for first batch was May 21 but



since India is playing only one warm-up game (vs Bangladesh on June 1), the players will get to spend some extra days at home," the source added.

Only those players who are part of the IPL final will stay back and will leave for New York on May 27.

This will also give adequate time to the squad to reduce jet lag and have at least three to four quality net sessions before the Bangladesh warm-up game.

India will open their campaign against Ireland on June 5 in New York, followed by the marquee clash against Pakistan on June 9.

India squad: Rohit Sharma (Captain), Hardik Pandya (Vice Captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant (WK), Sanju Samson (WK), Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohd. Siraj.



Rajasthan aim to snap losing streak, secure second spot against table toppers KKR

PTI ■ GUWAHATI
Rajasthan Royals will be desperate to snap their four-match losing streak and finish in the top two when they meet table toppers Kolkata Knight Riders in an important IPL game here on Sunday. Having secured the playoff berth with 16 points, Royals have started floundering at the business end of the tournament losing four matches on the trot. Their batting flair has eluded them as they have not managed to cross the 150-mark in their last two matches, and with their star England opener Jos Buttler returning home for national duty, the Royals have big shoes to fill. Their top three batters Yashasvi Jaiswal, skipper Sanju Samson and local hero Riyan

Parag will have to shoulder additional responsibilities if they are to snap the losing streak and head to the playoffs finishing in top-two, that will give them two cracks to reach the final. KKR (19 points), on the other hand, have already assured themselves a table top position after a washout against Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad in the previous round handed them one point. They will be high on confidence but at the same time they may have to guard against complacency. Since their win in the return leg clash against Mumbai Indians at Eden Gardens on May 11, KKR have not played any match with the washout in Ahmedabad. Travelling to Ahmedabad and then back home in Kolkata for a day's practice and again heading to



Guwahati for the final league clash could be quite frustrating and break their rhythm of four-match winning streak. It remains to be seen if the Gautam Gambhir-mentored side manage to hold on to the winning momentum without appearing to be rusty. In between, they have lost their in-form opener Phil Salt, their second leading rungetter this season as the Englishman is back home for the series against Pakistan in the build up to T20 World Cup next month. Salt and Narine, the two KKR openers, have scored 897 runs with seven fifties and one century between them at strike rate of 182-plus each. The duo's top form has been a key element in KKR's journey to their first playoffs since 2021. Rahmanullah Gurbaz will be a like-for-like replacement for

Salt but expecting him to make an impact like Salt straightway will be unrealistic. The Afghan wicketkeeper-batter, who played 11 matches in 2023, has not played any match this season and his last outing was way back on March 18 in a T20I versus Ireland. As KKR will be keen to keep their rhythm intact, the onus will be on the likes of skipper Shreyas Iyer, finishing duo of Rinku Singh and Andre Russell to fire in unison. There is also some rain forecast as conditions are likely to be on the slower side and in the last match between Rajasthan Royals and Punjab Kings the ball seemed to stop.

TEAMS (FROM):
Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat (wk), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Gus Atkinson and Allah Ghazanfar.
Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Abid Mushtaq, Avesh Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Donovan Ferreira, Kuldeep Sen, Kunal Singh Rathore, Nandre Burger, Navdeep Saini, Ravichandran Ashwin, Riyan Parag, Sandeep Sharma, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dubey, Rovman Powell, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Trent Boult, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yuzvendra Chahal, Tanush Kotian



I did not live up to standard but overthinking was not an option: Rohit

PTI ■ MUMBAI
India skipper Rohit Sharma acknowledged that he could not match the expected batting standards in the ongoing IPL but instead of indulging in overthinking, his endeavour was to stay in the right zone and keep working on his flaws. The five-time IPL winning skipper endured a wretched form in the second-half of the season, struggling to cross even a score of 20 in six matches for Mumbai Indians. "As a batter, I know I didn't live up to the standard. But, after playing for all these years, I know that if I overthink, I won't play well," Rohit said on JioCinema Match Centre Live. He returned to form with a 38-ball 68 in their last match against Lucknow Super Giants but MI ended up on the losing side and finished the season at the bottom of the table. "All I try is to stay in a good mindset, in the right zone, keep practicing, and improve on all the flaws in my game. That's all I kept doing. "Our season didn't go according to plan. We blame ourselves for this because we made too many mistakes during the season. We lost many games that we should

have won, but that's the nature of the IPL. You get a few chances and when those chances come, you must grab them." **70 PER CENT OF T20 WC PLAYERS HAD CLARITY:** The Indian skipper said they knew what their T20 World Cup-squad would be like and 70 per cent of the players had clarity about their roles going into the IPL. "We thought a lot about the team we ultimately selected for the World Cup. The spinners, seamers, batters, and keepers, we knew before the IPL who we would take to the World Cup. "The IPL performances for everyone can be up and down, so we didn't focus too much on that. We needed to see the performances of certain players, but it was important for us to give everyone the clarity they needed. "Everyone going into the IPL needed clarity of whether they would participate in the team and what their role would be so they could practice and play accordingly. All of these indicators we had shared with 70% of the team before the IPL." India begin their T20 World Cup campaign against Ireland in New York on June 5.

Coaching India could be exhausting, timing has to be right: Langer

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Being the India head coach is one of the biggest assignments in cricket world and former Australia head coach Justin Langer believes that it could be very exhausting if the timing isn't right for the incumbent. Langer, who coached Lucknow Super Giants during this IPL season was asked multiple times about his aspirations to become India head coach, a post set to be vacated by Rahul Dravid after T20 World Cup in the Americas. "It would almost be the biggest job in cricket - being the head coach of the Indian cricket team," Langer replied when asked if the Indian board had approached him for taking on the mantle. "One, because of the huge volume of cricket, the huge expectation. It would be a great challenge. It would be great fun and it would be a wonderful opportunity to win ICC titles," Langer told the media here at the Wankhede Stadium after Lucknow Super Giants beat Mumbai Indians by 18 runs in their last IPL match of the season. Langer cited immense pressure and workload that comes along being an India coach, while adding that it has not been too long since he held a similar role with Australia. "But with all these things, the timing

has got to be right. I did four or so years with the Australian cricket team. It is all encompassing. It is exhausting," said the 53-year-old. "Rahul Dravid will probably tell you the same thing and Ravi Shastri will probably tell you the same thing. The pressure on winning for the Indian team is massive," he said. He did drop a hint that he might not be mentally ready to commit 10 months a year for the job. "I'm sure the next person who gets the job will be really looking forward to the project," Langer added. IPL is as big as a World Cup Langer likened pressure in IPL with that of a World Cup competition, adding that it is the best domestic competition in the world. "I would say categorically - it is the best domestic competition in the world. I can't get over how tough the competition is. There's so many good players. There's so many good teams. There's so much pressure on performance," he said. "I guess the biggest thing is, it is just really tough cricket. It is like a World Cup. It is honestly like the same sort of pressure as a World Cup, and I've been to a few World Cups now. "That's a great credit to the IPL that we're able to keep producing such fun, entertaining, evolving cricket in front of a capacity crowd with noise every



game. And there's a game on every night. "I'm sad to go home. I'm going home on the weekend. I'm actually really sad to go home. I've loved it that much," he added. Langer admitted World Cup selection for LSG players in their respective national sides could have been a distraction. "I've had this sense that since the World Cup selection - and there is

always distractions every IPL - but things seem to change a little bit," he said. "I'm not exactly sure what happened, but we had a couple of poor games and it is cost us. We played some really good cricket. We started off well. I was warned about May; everyone's up and about in April, but how you go through May is very important in the IPL. "(It is) something that we did fall

away, we'll sort of analyse it as well as we can, but it is been disappointing because we had a very good team. We missed a few injuries to our bowlers, which made a difference," said Langer while adding that dropped catches 'killed' his side this season. Standing by KL Rahul, the batter Langer, however, backed Rahul despite consistent criticism over his batting strike rate. "I've heard the criticism, but you know, everyone does it differently. We can't all have, often if you play at a strike rate of 160 or 70 - it is very high risk cricket," Langer said. "The game is evolving and he will evolve and players will have to keep evolving. We've seen that with the opening partnerships in the powerplays this year. I mean, the strike rates have been extraordinary, right?" "He, like the great players, will keep evolving. All the best players and best coaches keep getting better. He'll keep doing that," Langer added. Langer said only Rahul could tell if he was disappointed on being excluded from India squad for the World Cup. "You'd have to ask KL that, but if you look at his numbers throughout the series, it is a pretty good series. Actually, it is a very good series. We're one game off being in the playoffs next week," Langer added.

Felt sorry for Hardik, never nice to go through something like that: Boucher on boos

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Mumbai Indians coach Mark Boucher really felt bad watching skipper Hardik Pandya face hostile reactions and boos from the fans throughout the disastrous IPL campaign and admitted that it did affect the star all-rounder, something that the management would need to address in coming days. Pandya, after two successful seasons as Gujarat Titans skipper was brought back as captain of Mumbai Indians, removing five-time champion skipper Rohit Sharma, a decision that didn't sit well with legion of fans. "It wasn't great hearing all the boos. I felt sorry for Hardik as well. It's never nice to have to go through something like that," Boucher said after MI lost their last league game to Lucknow Super Giants by 18 runs. "I do think that there are certain things that did affect individuals, which ultimately did affect the team," Boucher said after MI finished last for the second time in three years. Boucher felt the underwhelming performances and outside pressure did cloud his judgement. "There's a lot of stuff going on around him that, maybe, clouded his thoughts every now and again, which is tough for him as a leader as well. He

certainly had a lot of support within our dressing room as well and guys trying to help him out as well. But it's a tough thing to go through as a player," he said. Boucher said if any off-field issues are hampering the team, they require attention from management. "Those are the sort of things that, yes, we do need to sit down and address and hopefully make some good calls going forward, to address the off-field stuff that we can get it right on the field," he added. "Ultimately, this is a professional unit and players and staff and everyone alike gets judged about the performance that they put on the field. If there's stuff that's happening off the field which is hampering that, then we need to address it," he said. Boucher backed Pandya to continue as MI skipper even though he admitted a thorough review of the team's abysmal performance would be assessed but no emotional decisions must be taken.

"I think so. As I said, we haven't had discussions. Everything's been about the cricket stuff at the moment. Going forward, I'm sure that he is the guy that the franchise would like to take forward. We'll wait and see. We'll have these conversations at a later stage," he said. When asked if Boucher felt Mumbai Indians franchise should have handled the leadership change any differently, the South African agreed. "To be honest, I haven't really chatted to a lot of team management about that decision," Boucher replied when asked if the captaincy change could have been handed differently. "Now is not probably the right time. Everyone is very disappointed and emotional, so no good decision will get made in the nearest time, which is now in a week's time." "We need to evaluate exactly what's going on, things that we need improvement on, whether it be on the field or off the field stuff. We've got some great heads within the



management team as well," Boucher said. "We'll sit down and we'll find a way on how to make it better, ultimately, for the players to come out and produce the sort of cricket that I think we know that these players can produce, which was under par this season," the head coach added. Boucher said Pandya did find form as a bowler but a lot was left to be desired as a batter. "If he was here (at the press conference), he'd also (say that he was) disappointed in his performance. From a captain perspective, I thought he had some good games," he said. Boucher said Pandya would emerge as a stronger leader from this experience. Pandya was booed twice on Friday - once he walked out to bat and once after he was dismissed. "A lot of the stuff that he's going through is, personally, maybe a little uncalled for. It'll certainly be a learning curve for Hardik as his growth in leadership. "While times are tough now, a couple of things will pass and it'll make him a tougher leader

and it'll certainly grow him in the role as well," he said. Boucher said one of the reasons why Pandya failed as a batter was also due to the change in role from Gujarat Titans to Mumbai Indians. Pandya was 10th among MI batters with a mere 216 runs from 14 matches at an average of 18 with no fifties. Boucher felt that Pandya has only been effective as finisher when someone else has fired for MI at the other end and mostly during successful years, it was Kieron Pollard. "When Hardik was playing for Mumbai Indians, he was a finisher. He was playing in that sort of role with Polly (Kieron Pollard). He then went to (Gujarat) Titans and he was batting in a completely different scenario," Boucher said. "He was batting up front. There were slight technical adjustments that he had to make to his game in order to face a newer ball and the different lengths when you're facing a new ball as well. "He made himself aware of that as well. Throughout the whole season, it was a work in progress trying to get him back to the new role that he was playing now, more as a finisher, batting in the back end of innings as well," Boucher said, adding that Pandya needed to rediscover his hitting power.

Impact Player rule has disrupted balance of game: Virat Kohli

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Echoing India skipper Rohit Sharma's sentiments, star batter Virat Kohli has criticised the Impact Player substitution rule and said it is "disrupting the balance" of the game. The mid-innings substitution rule, adopted in the previous edition of the IPL, has sparked a row with Kohli expressing his displeasure in a podcast last month. Now, Kohli has urged for a rethink of the rule. "I agree with Rohit. Entertainment is one aspect of the game but there is no balance," Kohli said on Jio Cinema. "I think it has disrupted the

balance and a lot of people are feeling this way, not just me," he said. Kohli in the podcast had said, "I'm not a big fan... It's going to hold back all-rounders. Cricket is played by 11, not 12 (players)." Punjab Kings set the record for the highest successful chase in T20 history when they overhauled Kolkata Knight Riders' 262 with eight balls to spare. Sunrisers Hyderabad also smashed the record for the highest-ever total in franchise cricket by posting 287/3 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru. This edition has witnessed eight 250-plus totals and Kohli



felt the bowlers' pain. "Bowlers are feeling like what they should do," Kohli said. "I have never experienced anything like it where bowlers think they will concede four or a six on every ball. "Not every team has a Bumrah (Jasprit) or the mystery of Rashid Khan," he said. "I am telling you, with one extra batter there is a reason I am playing with 200-plus strike rate in the powerplays. I know there is a batsman waiting at No. 8 as well. "We are playing a high level of cricket and it should not be that dominant in my opinion. There is a beauty about having an equal balance between bat

and ball," Kohli added. BCCI secretary Jay Shah has said that the Impact Player rule is a "test case", implemented to give two Indian players opportunity in a game. He has also indicated that they would talk to the stakeholders for using it in future editions of the IPL. "I am sure Jay (Shah) bhai has mentioned it already that they will review it and I am sure that they will come to a conclusion which brings the game into balance," said Kohli. "As a batsman, I can say this rule is good but the match should be exciting. Only fours and sixes are not exciting in cricket. Exciting is that you can defend 160 as well," Kohli said.

"We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far"
— Swami Vivekananda



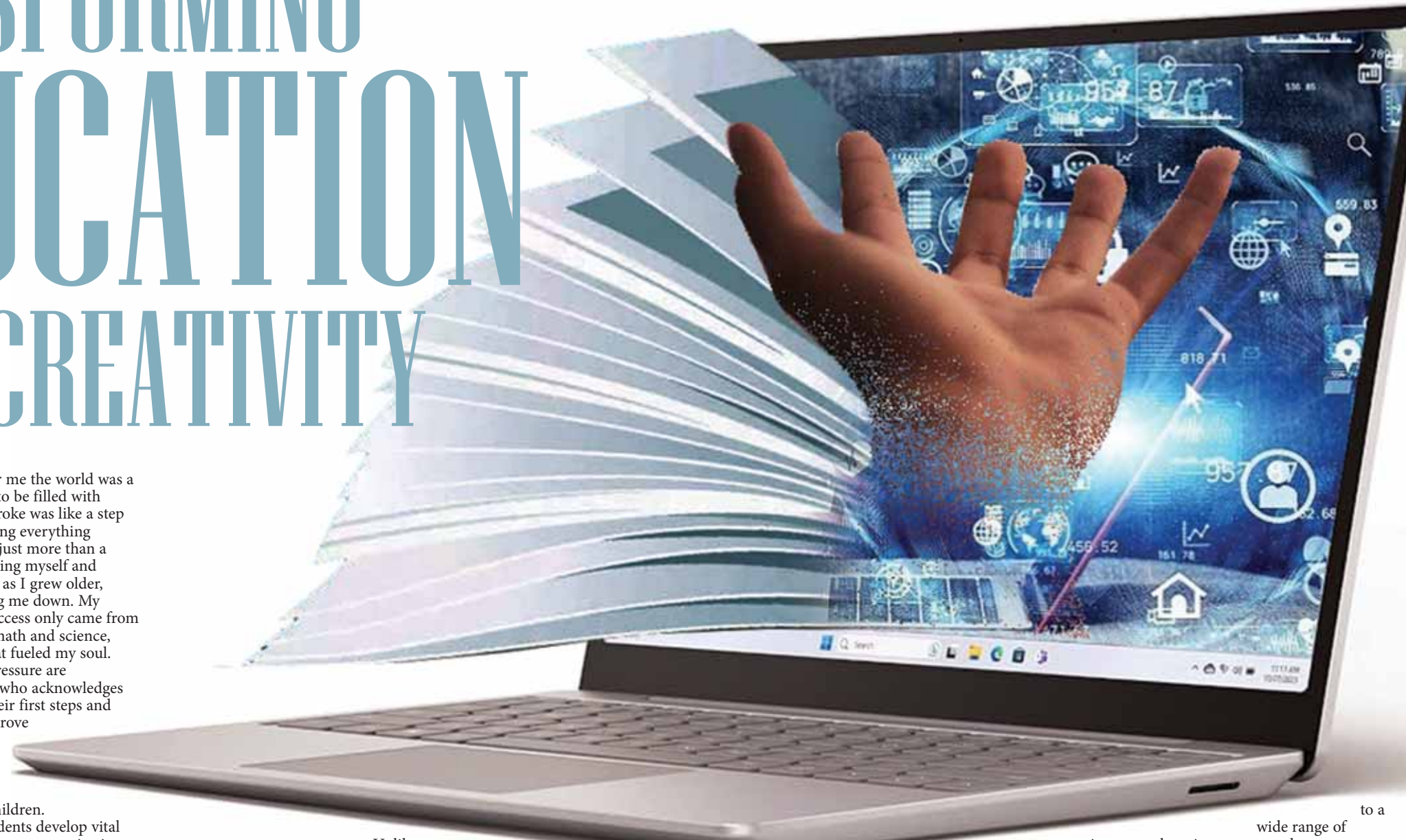
The future of education in India isn't just about doing well academically, it's about empowering kids to follow their passions and create their own paths to success. And that journey is definitely worth talking about, **ADITI SHARMA**



CANVAS OF CHANGE

**TRANSFORMING
EDUCATION
WITH CREATIVITY**

When I was a child, for me the world was a blank canvas, ready to be filled with colors. Each brushstroke was like a step towards understanding everything around me. Art was just more than a hobby for me, it was a way of expressing myself and finding escape in midst of chaos. But as I grew older, societal expectations started weighing me down. My parents and teachers believed that success only came from excelling in traditional subjects like math and science, leaving no room for the creativity that fueled my soul. Elders often believe that stress and pressure are exclusively their burdens to bear, yet who acknowledges that even toddlers struggle to take their first steps and teenagers face immense pressure to prove their worth to the world. This is where schools step in, recognizing the importance of nurturing not just academic growth but also the social and emotional well-being of children. Through socio-emotive learning, students develop vital skills such as problem solving, effective communication, conflict management, and self-care. These abilities enable them to understand and manage their emotions, build supportive and cooperative communities, and ultimately help both themselves and others thrive. One particular innovation that has impressed me is the use of Emotion Charts in schools. These charts have pictures of faces showing different emotions such as sadness, anger, surprise, happiness, silliness, fear, excitement, and embarrassment. Children can use these charts to express how they feel each day. The efforts made by schools to incorporate emotional learning are not only effective but also incredibly beautiful! This new approach to education is producing adults who are better at handling stress, managing their emotions, and controlling themselves. When I was in 3rd grade, my mother always stressed about my exams and expected me to score a perfect 20 out of 20. This pressure pushed me into an exhausting race for marks. I believe children should be exempted from exams during their primary years so they can enjoy a stress-free childhood and focus on developing their creativity and skills. The new education system has introduced a change many of us wished for as children, which is no exams until 3rd grade. This shift creates a less pressured environment, allowing children to learn at their own pace without worrying about marks or grades. By eliminating early testing, we can cultivate a love of learning in a calm, supportive atmosphere, free from the anxiety of exams. When my parents were in school, the main focus was on academics. When I was a student, we had academics as well as co-curricular activities and sports. But now, education has evolved even further. It includes subjects and activities like yoga, meditation, journal writing, and mindful coloring. This shift in education has had a significant positive impact on children. It has helped them in several ways with, aggression management, emotions regulation, making thoughtful decisions and better communication in relationships. Back in my teenage years, the school syllabus was synonymous with exams. Schools viewed exams as a method of assessment, but to me, they were more like photographs. Students needed to memorize information and reproduce it exactly in their answers. It felt as though we were being asked to take a screenshot of our textbooks and paste it directly onto our exam sheets. Traditionally, assessments focused purely on memory recall. However, today's educational landscape has evolved significantly. Modern assessments extend beyond paper and pencil, embracing practical, hands-on experiences and field experiments. These contemporary methods provide a more comprehensive evaluation of a student's understanding and skills, offering a richer, more meaningful approach to learning and assessment. Back in my 10th-grade days, I vividly remember yearning to choose subjects like English, Biology, and Fine Arts.



BOARDS! THE WORD ITSELF FEELS HEAVY WITH PRESSURE, EVEN THOUGH I NAVIGATED THEM LONG AGO. THE PRESSURE OF BOARD RESULTS WAS SUCH THAT, THOSE TIMES WERE SO STRESSFUL THAT EVEN A PEACEFUL BREATH FELT IMPOSSIBLE, AND MY ANXIETY WAS AT ITS PEAK

Unlike some education systems abroad, Indian education didn't grant us the freedom to pick our own set of subjects. But now, with the advent of the new education policy, the landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation. It's surreal to think that students today have the liberty to tailor their education according to their interests and passions. Imagine a science student delving into the world of music or arts and it's truly an evolution! When I chose humanities, people often asked me what my future profession would be and if I could earn well with it. The rise in humanities enrollments has validated the importance of creative and critical thinking skills, fostering an environment that values artistic expression and cultural understanding. BOARDS! The word itself feels heavy with pressure, even though I navigated them long ago. The pressure of board results was such that, those times were so stressful that even a peaceful breath felt impossible, and my anxiety was at its peak. My parents often reminisced about facing board exams in 5th and 8th grades, but as a child of the 2000s, I thankfully escaped that additional stress. For me, board exams were a daunting once-a-year event in 10th and 12th grades. It was a struggle to cover entire textbooks, and while I managed above-average marks, the pressure was intense. However, the upcoming change to split exams into two sessions seems promising. This approach will distribute the workload more evenly, reduce stress and give students more time to prepare for the next session. This division will allow timely feedback on performance, identifying areas for improvement and providing support before the next session, ultimately enhancing student learning and performance. My personal favourite change that has ever been happened in the

Indian education system has been the thoughtful replacement of the word "fail" with "essential repeat" and "back" with "supplementary." This shift was crucial, as the harsh terms "fail" and "back" often demotivate students and heighten the fear of judgment. The new supportive terminology boosts self-esteem and encourages students to persevere, fostering a more positive and resilient mindset. Cross culture learning is also a major revolution which is crucial as it fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, promoting empathy, respect, and global awareness among students. This inclusive approach not only enriches students' educational experiences but also equips them with the social and emotional skills necessary to navigate and contribute positively to a multicultural society. One of such is National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). NIOS offers flexible learning opportunities to students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including those from rural areas, tribal communities, and marginalized groups. Through its inclusive curriculum and open learning approach, NIOS promotes cross-cultural understanding by catering to the needs and realities of various communities across the country. In cultural exchange programs at my school not only exposed me to diverse perspectives but also highlighted the varied approaches to education around the world. Witnessing how children from different international cultures learn and left a profound impact, opens eyes to new possibilities in learning. My school had students from France and they spent a week immersed in the school's community. They also had the opportunity to explore Delhi's landmarks, museums, and cultural

students, accompanied by local sites, who act as guides and ambassadors. In return, they organized reciprocal visits, sending groups of students to partner schools abroad to experience different culture. It is an enlightening experience that underscored the importance of fostering international and global understanding through education, revealing that cultural exchange is not just a leisure activity but an essential aspect of comprehensive learning. With years these programmes have lifted students with gain of first-hand exposure to diverse perspectives, traditions, and ways of life. This experience not only broadens their worldview but also cultivates tolerance, appreciation for diversity, and intercultural communication skills. In the past, they often overlooked the importance of sports and physical education, especially during the crucial 11th and 12th grades. Previously, schools often overlooked this aspect of holistic development. However, there has been a shift in perspective, with educational institutions now recognizing the importance of nurturing not only academic excellence but also mental and emotional well-being through sports and physical activities. Speaking of mental health, it's heartening to see prestigious institutions like IITs and IIMs taking proactive steps to address the issue of student suicides. Programs focused on mental wellness and weekly counselling sessions are now becoming the norm, with institutions like IIT Guwahati leading the way. Well on discussing mental health, pandemic has affected our minds and changed the way we view things around us. Were you a quarantine student too? Well I was. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ed-Tech was the only way we could learn. With the introduction of EdTech, students now have access

to a wide range of learning resources that may not have been available to them before. Online platforms offer educational materials such as e-books, videos, and interactive tutorials, making it easier for students to explore different subjects at their own pace. Who would have imagined that tools like ChatGPT could handle assignments, develop content, and become indispensable aids? AI, VR, and AR have transformed education, especially in the arts, by creating exciting opportunities for creative expression and discovery. AI personalizes learning and provides intelligent creative tools, VR immerses students in virtual environments for hands-on artistic experiences, and AR overlays digital information onto the real world for enhanced visualization. Together, these technologies make art education more engaging, interactive, and innovative, fostering deeper creativity and understanding among students. **The education system is changing, and it's not just about academic freedom. It's also about unlocking creativity and supporting overall growth.** As someone who truly believes in the power of art, I'm excited to see more recognition of artistic and creative careers. It's no longer just about commerce and science. With the increasing popularity of vocational courses in fields like culinary arts, design, and interior decoration, India is on track to become a center of creativity and innovation. My passion for improving education comes from wanting to see every child bloom with their innovative and extraordinary minds. I wish to advocate for a system that not only keeps up with the times but also nurtures each person's unique talents and dreams. **The future of education in India isn't just about doing well academically, it's about empowering kids to follow their passions, express themselves freely, and create their own paths to success. And that journey is definitely worth talking about.**



TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF PRINTMAKING

An exhibition showcasing the past five decades of printmaking through the works of works of five acclaimed artists, highlights the profound impact and continued relevance of the medium in today's art world, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

The art world is a vast canvas, painted with vibrant strokes of creativity and innovation. Within this canvas, printmaking stands as a unique art form offering artists a medium to express their thoughts, emotions and perspectives in a distinct and appealing manner. Unlike painting or sculpture, where the final image is visible throughout the creative process, printmaking is a journey of revelation. The true image remains unseen until the very last stages adding an element of anticipation and surprise that makes printmaking so captivating. The exhibition, *Rupantar Panch Dashak: Five Decades of Printmaking*, delves into this alluring world of inked narratives. The preview of the exhibition was held at the Visual Art Gallery. Curated by Alka Pande, this exhibition is not merely a showcase of exquisite artwork; it is a celebration of printmaking's enduring legacy and its transformative power. Organised by Members of Multiple Encounters, the exhibition brings together the talents of five renowned printmakers: Anandamoy Banerjee, Kavita Nayar, Moti Zharotia, Dattatreya Apte, and Sushanta Guha. Each artist, a master in his or her own right, explores the art of printmaking as a tool of personal expression, transforming the medium into a canvas for their unique visions. The show promises to be a celebration of exceptional talent, presenting various printmaking styles and expressions. The exhibition's title, 'Rupantar', perfectly encapsulates the essence of printmaking signifying the transformative journey of an artist's work over five decades, highlighting the evolution and innovation inherent in their creations. Beyond the individual narratives, 'Rupantar' also offers a glimpse into the broader landscape of printmaking in India, showcasing its diversity, depth, and enduring relevance in the contemporary art scene. Anandamoy Banerjee, a recipient of prestigious awards like the AIFACS annual

best exhibition award, views printmaking as a reflection of his life experiences, dreams and artistic journey. His work, a blend of drawing, painting, prints and experimental pieces tells a story with each creation. Abstract and introspective, his works often present a colourful combination of human forms intertwined with abstraction. Dattatreya Apte, a founding member of the Indian Printmakers Guild draws inspiration from the world around him, the "reflections" and "impressions" that linger on surfaces. His prints whether painted, printed or physically cast, are a testament to his fascination with the art form's complex nature. Each piece showcases the evolution of his concept from an idea to the final artwork. Kavita Nayar's art reflects a deep personal journey, likened to the process of giving birth. Her focus on nature, particularly flowers symbolises life's cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Nayar's prints span five decades with works in oil pastels on paper and board. She also creates an installation with prints showcasing her diverse artistic expression. Moti Zharotia, an artist with a visionary approach, uses printmaking to delve into the essence of life. His silkscreen prints beautifully blend masculine and feminine energies, as seen in his theme *Purusha & Prakriti*. In his wider collection, 'Impressions on Impression', Zharotia symbolises the harmonious interplay of life's core forces. His work not only showcases the harmony between humans and nature but also highlights their interconnectedness creating a profound sense of balance and unity. Sushanta Guha, known for his socially conscious art uses printmaking as a tool to address pressing issues affecting humanity. His work vividly contrasts the rapid urbanisation seen in modern development with the simultaneous decline of human values, leading to increased individual suffering and identity crises. Through his impactful woodblock prints and



lithographs, Guha urges viewers to contemplate the complexities of the contemporary world. His art serves as a poignant reflection of societal challenges particularly highlighting issues like violence and religious extremism. Alka Pande, the curator, describes *Rupantar* as an enlightening experience. Witnessing the development and transformation in the artist's practices over five decades offers invaluable insights for aspiring artists. Beyond showcasing finished works the exhibition sheds light on the "art of making" itself from the technical aspects of printmaking to the final artistic expression. *Rupantar* also bridges the gap between traditional printmaking and contemporary artistic practices. It

highlights how younger artists who may not specialise solely in printmaking, incorporate various printmaking styles into their mixed media creations. The art world is a diverse and dynamic realm offering a medium through which artists can express their creativity. Among these, printmaking stands out as a unique and fascinating art form with a rich history and enduring appeal. Printmaking is the art of creating images by transferring them from a matrix or plate onto paper or another surface. This process allows for the production of multiple copies of an artwork making it an accessible and versatile medium for artists to explore and experiment with. Ultimately, *Rupantar Panch Dashak: Five Decades of Printmaking*, is a multifaceted celebration. It celebrates the artistry and dedication of five master printmakers while also elevating the art form itself. It highlights the intricate techniques and rich history of printmaking while acknowledging its contemporary relevance. *Rupantar* invites viewers to delve deeper into the world of art and appreciate the story's work into every mark on the paper. This exhibition serves as a powerful reminder that printmaking is not merely a means of reproducing images; it's a dynamic and versatile art form capable of sparking introspection, igniting social commentary and revealing the intricate beauty of the artistic process itself. The exhibition leaves behind a legacy of artistic excellence and imaginative exploration. It is not only a celebration of the talent but also highlights the importance of printmaking in the art world. It has shown us that printmaking is not just a technique; it is a form of expression that can convey deep emotions, tell compelling stories and provoke thought and reflection. Let us recognise the significance of printmaking in preserving cultural heritage, promoting artistic innovation and enriching our lives with beauty and meaning.

Laapataa Ladies Shines Bright

This Kiran Rao directed film is a must-watch for its engaging storyline, brilliant performances, and important social message, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Laapataa Ladies, is a perfect blend of humour, social commentary and a heartwarming storytelling. Marking Kiran Rao's return to the director's chair after several years, the film is a delightful surprise that resonates with the audiences. The original story by Biplab Goswami, screenplay and dialogues by Sneha Desai, along with additional dialogues by Divyanidhi Sharma contribute to the film's cohesive and engaging narrative. The film boasts a talented cast with Pratibha Ranta (Jaya), Nitanishi Goel (Phool Kumari), Sparsh Shrivastav (Deepak Kumar), Satendra Soni (Chhotu) and Chhaya Kadam (Manju Maai) along with the charismatic Ravi Kishan (Shyam Manohar). Each actor delivers a stellar performance, bringing their characters to life with finesse and authenticity. The story unfolds with two young brides, Phool Kumari and Jaya, accidentally swapped during a train journey due to a veiled misunderstanding. As Phool's helpless husband, Deepak Kumar seeks help from a cop Shyam Manohar, a point when the journey of the perfect story begins. Kiran Rao's storytelling is exceptional, seamlessly weaving together elements of amusement, emotion and social commentary. The film's storyline is compelling, offering a message about the importance of women's empowerment and identity in society. Rao adeptly employs humour and the motif of veiled identity (*ghunghat*) to illuminate the pervasive influence of patriarchy within society. The dialogue is witty and the humorous scenes are executed with finesse, keeping the audience entertained throughout. One of the film's standout aspects is its emphasis on the importance of self-realisation and self-identity. Through the character's journeys, the audience is reminded that true happiness comes from within and that women are their own heroines. The film delivers this message with subtlety and grace, making it relatable to a wide audience. The performances in *Laapataa Ladies* are superb, with Ravi Kishan stealing the show with his impeccable comic timing. His portrayal of Shyam Manohar adds depth to the film with his acting leaving a lasting impression. Chhaya Kadam's portrayal of Manju Maai is undeniably impressive. She delivers her dialogues with a powerful mix of conviction, truth and humour. Particularly noteworthy is her line, "A man who loves you has the right to hit you and one day I exercised my



right as well." This powerful statement serves as a slap in the face of patriarchal norms, forcing viewers to confront the harsh reality of domestic violence disguised as love. Manju Maai doesn't stop there. Her wisdom shines through another impactful line: "Being happy on your own is the toughest thing, Phool, but once you've mastered it, no one can bother you." This resonates deeply, highlighting the importance of self-respect and the empowering freedom found in self-sufficiency. Pratibha Ranta and Nitanishi Goel shine in their roles, bringing depth and authenticity to their characters. Their fresh faces coupled with immense talent create magic on screen. Even actors with smaller screen time such as Satendra Soni as Chhotu, Durgesh Kumar as Dubeyji or Rachna Gupta as Deepak's sister-in-law deliver impactful performances showcasing the depth and richness of the film's ensemble cast. The film explores themes of identity, self-discovery and empowerment. It highlights the strength and resilience of women showcasing how they navigate through societal expectations and find their voice in a male-dominated world. *Laapataa Ladies* is a must-watch for its engaging storyline, brilliant performances, and important social message. Kiran Rao has once again proved her directorial prowess, creating a film that is both entertaining and thought-provoking. While viewers need to exercise patience as the film unfolds at a somewhat slow pace, this deliberate pacing contributes to the movie's beauty and its ability to make a significant impact on the audience. Despite its leisurely pace, the film's narrative depth and emotional resonance make it a worthwhile and memorable cinematic experience.

Brett Lee bats for Australian Avocados

BY GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Avocados Australia recently launched in the Indian market with Cricket Legend Brett Lee as its brand ambassador. Soon Australian avocados would be available in India. The Australian exporters are upbeat about the Indian market as they feel it is the place where they would have first mover advantage and would be able to appeal to Indian consumers with their superior quality. Avocados are to the West what mangoes are to Indians. Avocados, often hailed as a superfood, are not just delicious but also incredibly nutritious. Native to Central America, these green fruits are packed with healthy fats, fibre, vitamins, and minerals. They're particularly rich in monounsaturated fats, which are beneficial for heart health. Avocados are incredibly versatile and can be enjoyed in various forms: sliced on toast, mashed into guacamole, blended into smoothies, or even used as a substitute for butter in baking. In fact, Brett Lee was seen making a few of avocado recipes by himself. As he put it "for an athlete nothing better than having avocados for energy and



nutrition, just slice it and with a dash of lemon and salt and you have an excellent healthy snack." Their creamy texture adds depth to dishes while providing a host of health benefits. Beyond their nutritional value, avocados are also environmentally friendly. They require less water to grow compared to other fruits and can thrive in diverse climates. Avocados Australia Limited, representing the Australian avocado industry, has officially entered the Indian market, unveiling cricket icon Brett Lee as their esteemed brand ambassador. This collaboration signals a significant milestone for both Australian avocados and the burgeoning Indian fresh fruit market. Renowned for their

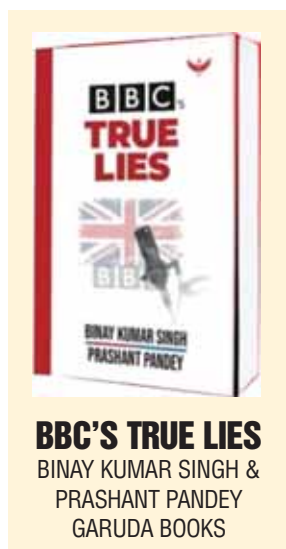
superior quality and health benefits, Australian avocados promise to tantalise Indian taste buds with a fusion of flavour, texture, and nutrition. With Brett Lee lending his endorsement, this launch aims to introduce a premium and healthy option to Indian households, advocating for the incorporation of avocados into daily meals and snacks. The avocado market in India is experiencing a notable uptick, mirroring a global trend of increased demand over the past decade. Avocados are hailed as a nutritious addition to all diets, particularly suiting vegetarian preferences. Australia's avocado industry is also on the rise, with production forecasted to surge from over 115,385 tonnes in 2022-23 to approximately 170,000 tonnes by 2026. Aligned with this growth trajectory, Australian growers are actively pursuing new overseas markets, including India, with increased exports crucial for the industry's long-term sustainability. So the next time you're craving something tasty and nutritious, consider reaching for an avocado - it's not just a delicious fruit but also a powerhouse of nutrients!

The real face of BBC's news coverage

BBC's True Lies is a signboard cautioning the common man about the dangerous acts perpetrated by the British Government owned media network, writes **KUMAR CHELLPPAN**.

There are enough laws in the Indian Penal Code to punish those involved in impersonation and cheating. Reports about fake physicians, engineers and lawyers getting caught and sent to prison are routine affairs in India. There are rules in the statute books to punish those engaged in food adulteration and marketing. There was an incident involving the Chennai Police arresting a Class VIII dropout by the name 'Professor Ravi Kumar Reddy' in 2015 who has been teaching advanced power systems at Saveetha College of Engineering for nearly three years. His colleagues and students never got a chance to doubt his credibility till one of the professors came across the real Prof Ravi Reddy who had been teaching at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. The Chennai 'Professor' turned out to be Ashok Kumar Choudhury from Guntur who was blessed with a photographic memory. We have legislations and provisions in the IPC to book such impersonators. Unfortunately, we do not have laws to prosecute fake journalists, the driving force behind media which is being flouted as the Fourth Estate of democracy. As on date most of the media and journalists act as propagandists while the line demarcating news and views have almost disappeared. There was a time when the English-speaking population

of Chennai woke up to their bed *Kaappee* and the morning newspaper which was known by the name *Mount Road Mahavishnu*. Not anymore. The moment readers understood that this *Mahavishnu* is feeding them fake and distorted news, they dumped the daily once and for ever. But the paper still survives because the minority community and Marxists believe only what is published in this newspaper. The story of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC World) is no different. The media house launched to disseminate to the world His Majesty's Voice (HMV) and counter the media blitzkrieg by Germany during the Second World War has degenerated into a fake news manufacturing plant. The last few decades of BBC's coverage of Asia and Africa speak volumes about its real intentions. The BBC is no more disseminating truths but specialises in spreading falsehood. There is a phrase which we regularly use; "*Suppressio Veri, Suggestio Falsi*" which means that suppression of truth is equivalent to suggestion of what is false. One need not elaborate on this as the term is self-explanatory. It may have a lot to do with the kind of statecraft and diplomacy being followed by the BBC. Author Binay Kumar Singh and columnist and Prashant Pandey, a seasoned journalist,



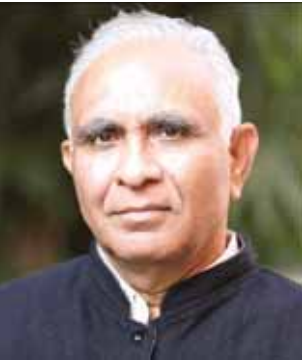
have come out with BBC's *True Lies*, a book which deals with the purpose for which the radio channel was launched, and its modus operandi. While in college, our teachers used to tell us to listen to BBC Radio news so that it would help us improve our English pronunciation. But I found the All India Radio's English news bulletins immortalised by the legendary Surjit Sen, always stand out. The day I started listening to the bulletins aired by the BBC, I could make out the distinct discrimination the channel had towards India. For the BBC editors, India was an uncivilized country of people believing in superstition and sorcery.

Although the Government of Britain claimed that they do not have any prejudice against India, the reality is quite the opposite. The authors explain how the BBC portrayed India taking over Goa as an armed attack on Portugal, a blatant case of misinterpretation of facts by the news channel. During 2023, student unions in Kerala were vying with each other in exhibiting the documentary film on Gujarat produced and aired by the BBC. The SFI students who always shunned the BJP were in the forefront of this campaign and made arrangements in campuses so that the gullible students could be fooled. Most of the viewers who sat throughout the documentary were in the dark about the facts that led to the riots. They were also ignorant about the Supreme Court verdict or the findings of the Special Investigation Team that interrogated Narendra Modi, the then chief minister of Gujarat for 19 hours. The BBC was rehashing and churning out charges levelled against Modi by TV journalists who had personal scores to settle with him. The most important thing to be borne in mind is that for the BBC, *jihadis* become terrorists only when they hurt British interests. All other *jihadis* are mere gunmen or liberators fighting against countries which Britain does not like. During the Cold War, Britain and the US had similar

criteria in identifying heads of nations. Those heading Communist/socialist/dictatorial regimes opposed to the then Soviet Union were friends of the US and UK. The best example was General Zia-ul-Haq, the Pakistani despot who perpetrated terrorist acts against India. There were many Latin American heads of nations for whom democracy was an alien word and who always were considered as friends of US and UK. The real face of BBC's news coverage came out in the open during the last 1970s when OP Tyagi introduced in Parliament a legislation named the Freedom of Religion Bill. The BBC started sounding alarm bells in its bulletins claiming that all religions other than Hinduism were in danger in India! Of late, there were allegations from various Hindutva forces that BBC was into religious conversion in a big way. It is for the BBC to prove that their hands are clean. Authors Binay Kumar and Prashant need to be appreciated for bringing out this book packed with explosive information. Since public memory is short, they are likely to forget what the media airs/publishes once they listen or read the contents. *BBC's True Lies* is a signboard cautioning the common man about the dangerous acts perpetrated by the British Government owned media network.

THE ENIGMATIC WORLD OF LEOPARDS

Leopards are the only large cat species with a widespread presence across the country, its conservation status and population dynamics serve as a barometer for the health of India's ecosystems



H S SINGH

The Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*), a sub-species of leopard out of nine sub-species of leopard in the world, is found throughout India from Jammu & Kashmir in the North-West Himalayas to Cape Comorin in the south and, from the Gir forest (Saurashtra) and thorn forest in the arid zone (Kachchh) in the extreme west to the moist forest of Myanmar in the east. Although the majority of them, about 95 per cent are confined to India, its small populations, about 5%, are also found in Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, east of the Indus River in Pakistan and a small area of southern China adjoining Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. Out of eight subspecies of leopards in Asia, except the Indian leopard, none of the other subspecies of leopards in Asia, have a population above a thousand, and few of them such as the Amur leopard, and Arabian leopards are Critically Endangered. Only two sub-species, the African leopard and the Indian leopard still have viable populations and distribution ranges.

POPULATION STATUS

Hunting records and British Gazetteers reveal that India had a large population of leopards before the Second World War. It is stated in the publications that about 150,000 leopards were hunted during a span of 50 years (1875-1925). Perhaps, the leopard population was in the range of nearly one lakh hundred years ago. The population drastically declined and reached to lowest level in the 1960s when about 6000 to 7000 individual leopards were estimated in the Indian jungle by the famous naturalist E P Gee (1964).

Protection and conservation measures by creating a network of Protected Areas and enacting laws have contributed to the leopard's recovery but the scale of poaching two decades ago slowed the recovery rate. When the scale of poaching declined, the population consistently increased in all leopard habitats, except Naxalite-affected states such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Telangana, Odisha and part of Maharashtra, and states in the North East of India.

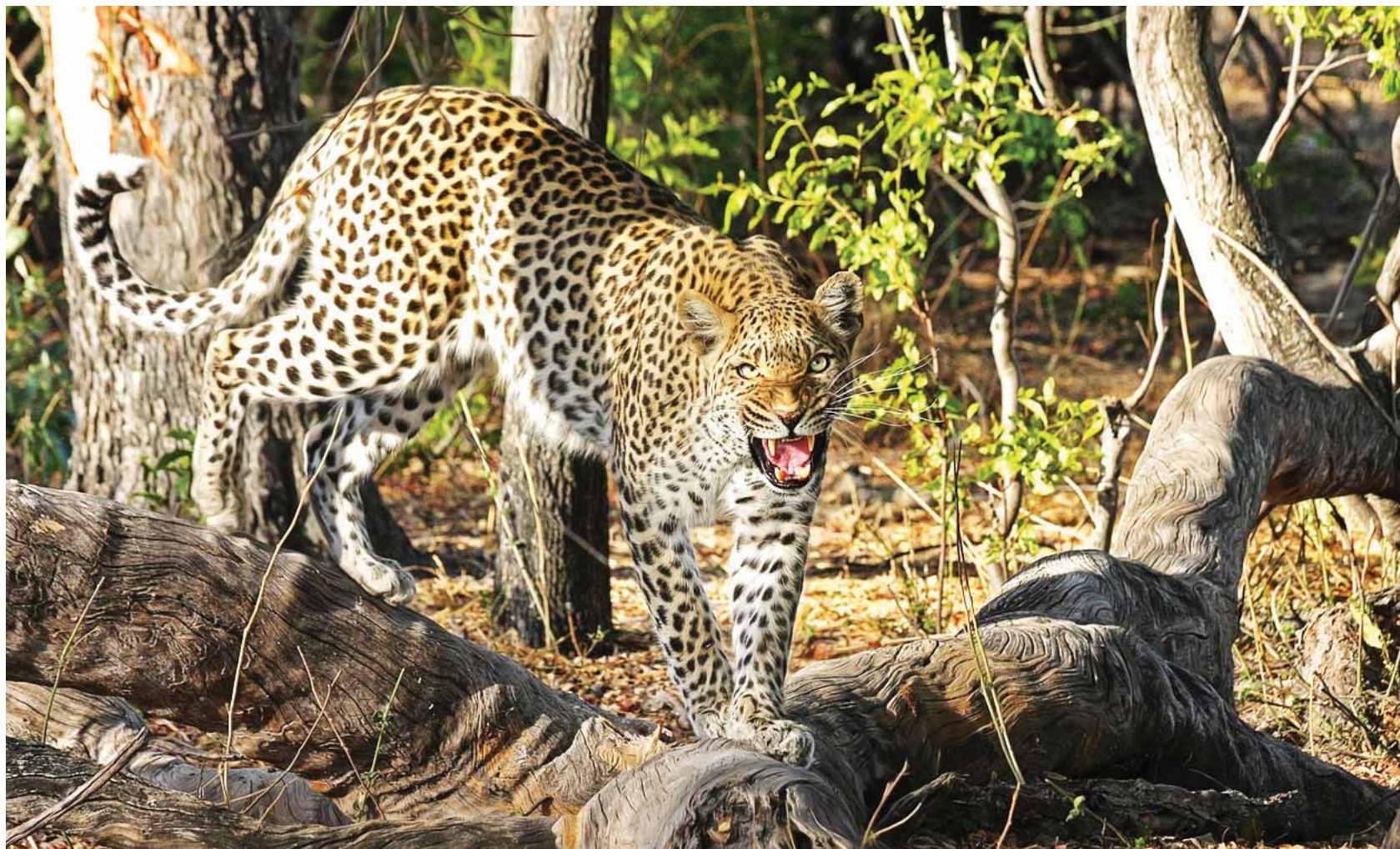
As per the report on the Status of the Leopard in India (2022), the overall leopard population in the tiger range landscape in 18 states of India was estimated at 13,870 subadult and adult leopards. In the tiger states also, the leopard-dominated area in Uttarakhand, major parts of North-East India and some other minor leopard habitats in those states were not covered in the survey. The Indian leopard occurs in 30 states and Union Territories whereas the population estimate in 2022 was only for major parts of 18 states.

Thus, the population declared in the leopard's report is only for two-thirds of the leopard distribution range, not for the entire India. Using data, as mentioned in the status report of leopard for leopard population in India by media and scientific communities is not correct. Major leopard states such as Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana and major parts of Uttarakhand and North-East states are not covered in this report.

After accounting for all habitats, the leopard population was over 8,650 in the Central India Landscape covering eight states. The second major population block supporting over 4,600 leopards in northern India: the Himalayas-Shivalik (Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal, Uttarakhand, terai belt of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and the northern plains). The third major population block supporting about 3,600 leopards is the Western Ghats (Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala).

The North-East and Brahmaputra plains have extensive forests but moderate to poor wildlife, including the Indian leopard and a total number of smart cats may be in the range of about 1,000-1,100 leopards. Gujarat Forest Department counted 2,274 leopards in the state in 2023.

Arid and semi-arid zones comprising Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat State, Dadara-Nagar Haveli and the Western Aravallis in Rajasthan support about 2,500-2,600 leopards. Additionally, leopards are also found in small patches of forests, tea gardens, sugarcane fields, ravine areas and other such lands that are not surveyed.



Man-eater leopards

Stories of man-eating leopards and shunning of innocent ones in search of punishing the culprit have been repeated over centuries. During Jim Corbett's time also, hunters killed several innocent leopards while targeting a man-eater. Like criminals in human society, the man-eating leopard always harmed innocent leopards. When two man-eaters killed one and a half dozen people in Dhanpur taluka in Dahod district in Gujarat in 2003, the authority punished innocent leopards by eliminating 14 of them from the area. When three children were killed between Talala and Veraval in Junagadh in February 2003, a total of 11 leopards were punished by removing them from the wild.

When one or two leopards killed five people in Mandavi taluka in Surat districts in the post-monsoon and early winter in 2010, the situation compelled the Forest Department to engage several trap cages in the area. While hunting and trapping the man-eater, about two dozen leopards, including cubs were eliminated from the six villages in three months. When a leopard killed five people in Veraval in Junagadh in March 2012, a total of nine leopards were trapped and removed from the area. Similarly, when a leopard killed eight people in Visavadar and the surrounding area, about one and a half dozen leopards were captured and removed from the area in the year 2019. When leopards caused the death of human beings in the sugarcane belt in the fringe of Gir forests, over two dozen leopards were caged in 2023.

The situation in Uttarakhand was not different. There were cases when people retaliated and eliminated a large number of leopards in Uttarakhand, unnoticed by the department when the leopards killed human beings. When people were killed in Borivali National Park near Mumbai by one or two man-eaters, a total of 37 leopards were removed from the park in three years. In Ahmednagar division in Maharashtra, a total of 57 leopards were captured during 2001-05

RANGE OF LEOPARD'S HABITAT

The occupancy area of leopards in the forests is over 320,000 sq. km. Leopards also occupy sugar-cane fields, tea gardens and other such vegetation cover. About one-fourth of the leopard's habitat overlaps with habitats of super cats - tiger and lion where leopards manage to survive under the persecution of the

supreme cats. Seven states - Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pradesh support about two-thirds of the total leopard population. These states are rich in livestock, especially sheep, goats and dogs. As per the Forest Survey of India Report (2021), the extent of forest cover is 713,790 sq.

km. in India. Of this, 684,000 sq. km. is in the states and Union Territories which support leopards. One-third of the forest cover in the leopard's states may not be suitable for leopards. Thus, potential leopard habitats may range over 450,000 sq. km. of forest cover to accommodate the growing population in the present occupancy areas of the leopards. How many leopards or tigers or Asiatic lions can be managed in the Indian forests is a million-dollar question. The big cats are on the path of recovery (about 700 lions, 3,680 tigers and over 20,600 leopards at present) in India but the dispersing big cats do not find proper habitats due to their fragmentations and absence of prey base. There is scope to accommodate the growing population of leopards in the forests which are devoid of leopards and wild ungulates, if herbivores are restocked by taking up long-term habitat restoration works.

HUMAN-LEOPARD CONFLICTS

Only about 35 per cent of the leopard population is found within national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and the rest were counted beyond the Protected Areas' boundaries. Leopards are also found in good numbers in extended habitats such as sugarcane fields, tea gardens, ravines, Prosopis thickets and other such non-forest areas. There are about three dozen Protected Areas or sites in the country where leopard density is high, over 10 adult and subadult leopards per 100 sq. km. and a few of them have very high concentrations, about 20 leopards or more per 100 sq. km. Dhanpur forests in Dahod district, Jambughoda forest in Godhra, sugar-cane belt in Mandvi taluka in Surat, some fringe areas around the forests of Gir and Girnar in Gujarat; Sanjay Gandhi National Park near Mumbai, some sites in the districts of Nashik, Ahmednagar and Gunnar in Maharashtra; Rajaji National Park, some areas in Pauri Garhwal, Teri Garhwal and Almora districts in Uttarakhand; Katarnighat forests in Uttar Pradesh and Kuno and Panna National Park in Madhya Pradesh, Sariska Tiger Reserve and a forest block adjoining Jaipur in Rajasthan; the Western Dooars in West Bengal and some open forest mosaics of central Karnataka have such high leopard concentration and human-leopard conflicts.

Population management in the conflict areas is one of the key management strategies to avoid human casualties and, if it is not done, public unrest may start in a big way against conservation. High leopard density normally results in the depletion of prey and frequent leopard attacks in the villages, leading to the eruption of anger and public agitation. Since the leopard population has doubled in India during the last two and half decades and it is now no longer Endangered or Vulnerable, there should

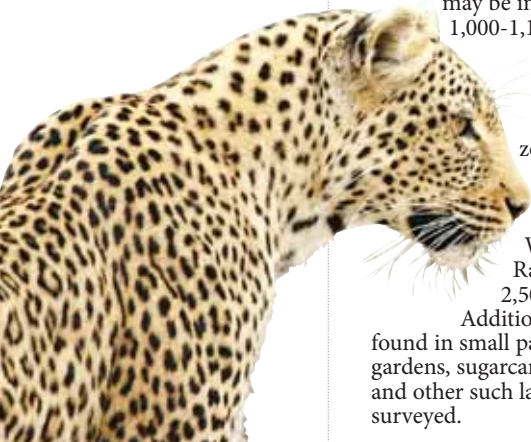
not be any hesitation to remove problem animals from such areas, if the attack on human beings persists. In no case, density should be allowed to exceed 25 adult leopards per 100 sq. km., as serious conflict is unavoidable in such high-concentration sites.

The human death rate in India due to leopard attacks was 400-410 people/year during the first decade of the 20th century (The Indian Forester Jan 1907). It declined drastically after the Independence of the country. Annually, about 95 to 100 human beings were killed by leopards during the first decade of the 21st century. Subsequently, human casualties increased consistently during the last decade due to the leopard's recovery and its dispersion in new areas, including villages and towns. In Uttarakhand, 565 human - beings were killed at an average rate of 22 human deaths/year by leopards since the creation of the state.

During the last few years, the average human death rate was 18 human deaths/year in Maharashtra. Annual death rate was 13 human deaths/year in Gujarat during the last five years. The scale of human deaths in Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, West Bengal, Himachal, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Karnataka is also close to the same range. Thus, annually, over a hundred people are killed and thousands injured by leopard attacks. If population management policy is not placed into operation, the human death rate due to leopard attacks may reach to the level that prevailed a hundred years ago. Since human-leopard conflicts are scaling up with the increase of the leopard population in many states, the management of dispersing leopards in villages and cities and increasing human-leopard conflicts are major management challenges.

The frequency of occurrence of leopard attacks on humans over a specific period should be mapped for the identification of conflict hot spots. The management should establish a Rapid Response Task Team with equipment and infrastructure to attend to cases without delay. A Rapid Response Team with the necessary equipment should be placed into operation in high man-leopard conflict sites. Tranquilizer gun, flashlights (to each member); first-aid Kits (one large kit to each team); mobile phones (to each member); reflector jackets (to each member); baffle shields and batons (to each member); public announcement system (one to each team); pamphlets and posters on 'Do's and Don'ts During Conflict Situations' (one set to each team) along with equipment as mentioned for RRT should be provided. Police Force should be integrated with the Task Force in high-conflict situations.

(Dr H S Singh is a Member of the National Board for Wild Life, Gandhinagar; views are personal)



YOUR WEEK AHEAD

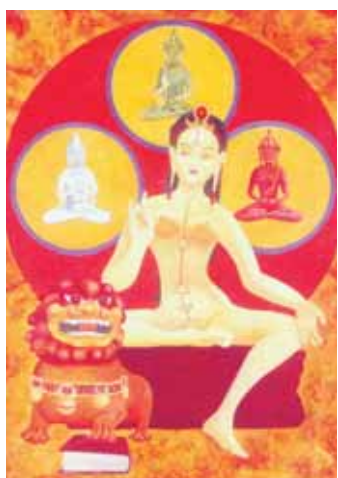
MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

Friends or relatives seeking financial assistance for personal events or needs. Given your current stability, you're well-placed to offer support, whether it be emotional or financial. Additionally, consider engaging in some charitable activities. As the week progresses, be wary of getting caught up in unrealistic dreams and desires. While it's natural to aspire for a luxurious life filled with fine dining, elegant apparel, and leisure, it's crucial to maintain clarity in your ambitions. Shifting goals too frequently can lead to confusion and a loss of true joy. Stay grounded and make firm decisions about what you truly want in life. With a realistic approach, you're more likely to achieve a sense of fulfillment. Embrace a positive outlook, as it will naturally attract good fortune, enhancing your overall well-being and prosperity.

Lucky number 7 | **Lucky colour** Turquoise
Lucky day Wednesday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

You have a natural inclination to lead and influence, often insisting on your own way of doing things. Your meticulous nature shines through in all your endeavors, and you infuse your surroundings with dynamism and responsiveness. Be aware, however, that an excess of intensity can sometimes lead to isolation or disputes, making interactions with colleagues and peers challenging. Situations may arise where differences in opinion could escalate into more serious disagreements. Channeling your robust energy into positive, constructive activities could be beneficial. You are endowed with a strong position and considerable influence, reflecting your hard-earned status. Despite your competitive spirit, fostering a more cooperative atmosphere could enhance your achievements even further. Remember, balancing your assertiveness can help preserve and build upon the successes you've worked so hard to achieve.

Lucky number 4 | **Lucky colour** Indigo
Lucky day Friday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

This week may bring some challenges to your health, possibly requiring a short period of medical attention. Despite this, it's a time rich with support and love from your partner, who will be by your side, offering care and comfort. Embrace this opportunity to deepen your spiritual connections; engaging in meditative practices can provide strength and restore balance. Allow yourself to lean into faith, embracing a path filled with love and compassion towards others. Family ties will strengthen as you find yourself sharing more with your partner. It's a perfect time for introspection and spiritual renewal. As the week progresses, you may find yourself drawn to peaceful retreats, which will aid in your recuperation. By week's end, expect to regain your usual pace, feeling refreshed and centered.

Lucky number 10 | **Lucky colour** Maroon
Lucky day Thursday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This week, you may find yourself in a position of influence and responsibility, leveraging your strong communication skills and leadership qualities. Your ability to empathize with others enhances your reputation as a dependable leader in your professional environment. However, be aware that not everyone may appreciate your approach. Some individuals could feel threatened by your success and might attempt to undermine your efforts. It's possible that achievements you've been aiming for, such as approvals or successful interviews, could unexpectedly benefit someone else due to underhanded tactics from competitors. As the week progresses, the weight of responsibilities may leave you feeling exhausted. It's crucial to consider the benefits of sharing tasks. By delegating, you can ensure a smoother workflow and prevent burnout, making your efforts more productive and less stressful.

Lucky number 9 | **Lucky colour** Magenta
Lucky day Sunday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This week ushers in a period of abundance and emotional satisfaction, with financial gains enhancing your sense of security and triumph. Enjoyment comes through entertainment and luxuries, enriching your family life and fulfilling personal desires. As the week advances, you may seek deeper emotional connections, possibly leading to significant romantic gestures. Mid-week, however, could bring a wave of uncertainty, with feelings of instability and a notable chill in personal interactions. By week's end, you'll find it necessary to adapt and reassess your beliefs. This reflective period emphasizes the importance of evolving with the times, encouraging you to adjust your lifestyle and mindset. Embrace these changes to confidently face upcoming challenges, recognizing that sticking to outdated norms may no longer serve you well.

Lucky number 4 | **Lucky colour** Olive
Lucky day Saturday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, you may find yourself emotionally sensitive, facing challenges that don't align with your hopes, leading to significant emotional distress. Your intentions to provide care might be stifled by circumstances, including health concerns that amplify your worries. Financially, prudent management and budget control are essential. As the week unfolds, it's crucial to adopt a methodical approach to daily activities. A balanced diet and disciplined lifestyle will greatly benefit your well-being. By week's end, you'll see notable progress in your professional life, with financial improvements from various sources boosting your economic status. This period could also be favorable for significant investments or acquisitions, such as a property purchase, bringing you satisfaction and an enhanced sense of stability.

Lucky number 15 | **Lucky colour** Beige
Lucky day Monday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

Last week you may have reaped the rewards of your hard work, but this week calls for caution. You may encounter conflicts or disputes at your workplace. Expect to face opposition from a colleague who views themselves as superior, potentially leading to troublesome situations characterized by criticism, rivalry, and verbal disputes. Midweek, you might find yourself influenced by someone whose presence is less than positive, a person who may challenge your principles and push you towards actions that clash with societal norms. However, your determination remains unshaken. With confidence, you navigate through these challenges. Your steadfastness and commitment to integrity will not only see you through but will also bring you success by week's end. As you overcome these obstacles, you'll earn admiration and applause, enhancing your reputation and leaving you feeling validated and respected.

Lucky number 8 | **Lucky colour** Coral
Lucky day Monday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week promises an enriching experience filled with enjoyment and recognition. Imagine being elevated to a place where success and joy are within easy reach, courtesy of your diligence and divine grace. You embody fairness, generosity, and a strong sense of justice, making you a natural leader whose guidance is sought after by many. Your pure intentions and ability to adapt gracefully to changes enhance your influence, helping you win admiration and respect in both personal and professional spheres. As you navigate through this period, your role as a pivotal figure is likely to be celebrated by your peers and loved ones. However, approach the weekend with caution; stay vigilant as there may be a minor financial setback or a health concern. Preparing ahead can help mitigate these risks, ensuring that your week remains largely positive.

Lucky number 5 | **Lucky colour** Teal
Lucky day Tuesday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

This week starts with tough decisions that might impact you or someone close to you; fairness and clarity are crucial. Aim for a low profile at work, as competition for roles increases—engaging in conflicts won't help. Embrace submissiveness as a theme. By midweek, challenging feedback from a superior might leave you disheartened. To counter this, practice meditation or yoga to restore confidence and mental equilibrium. This is also a time to refocus on your goals and aspirations. As the weekends, the atmosphere will improve. Tensions ease, setting the stage for positive developments in personal relationships, possibly involving a romantic or lifelong commitment, alongside encouraging news. Remain open and receptive to new beginnings and opportunities.

Lucky number 6 | **Lucky colour** Fuchsia
Lucky day Wednesday



CANCER June 21-July 22

This week begins with a burst of energy, prompting you to take decisive action rather than dwell on feelings. A significant work opportunity arises, requiring immediate attention and the honing of your abilities. Remember, nothing is achieved without effort. Improved efficiency and clear communication will be key to your success. Midweek brings a flurry of financial transactions; you may find yourself both donating to worthy causes and settling debts. Emotions might overwhelm you during this period, prompting a thoughtful reassessment of recent decisions. As the week closes, a new partnership agreement may be on the horizon, enhancing both professional and personal connections. Those in search of romance might find themselves ready to make meaningful gestures, potentially leading to new beginnings in love.

Lucky number 20 | **Lucky colour** Amber
Lucky day Saturday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

Lately, you may find yourself overwhelmed with increasing demands at work and in your studies. This surge in activity necessitates a period of rest to heal and replenish your energy. Without proper downtime, you might experience emotional and mental fatigue, which can lead to irritability. It's essential to focus on your health during this time. For women, particular attention should be paid midweek due to potential health sensitivities. Regular check-ups are crucial to maintain your well-being. At work, tensions may rise, potentially leading to disagreements with higher-ups. Managing your emotions and taking time to rejuvenate is key. If not, misunderstandings with authoritative figures in your life could escalate. Now is the time to balance your active life with moments of leisure to maintain harmony and effectiveness.

Lucky number 3 | **Lucky colour** Lavender
Lucky day Sunday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

This week, you possess a vibrant energy and remarkable work potential. However, without clear goals, your efforts may not yield the desired results. Set specific objectives and channel your creative energies constructively. It's crucial to give your family the attention and care they deserve. Ignoring any health issues could lead to significant financial losses, so taking precautions is wise. Some of you might face personal and financial challenges midweek, and relationships could become strained. Remember, your mental strength and inner fire are your greatest allies during tough times. Opportunities will present themselves towards the week's end, but you must stay alert not to miss them due to preoccupation. Engaging in meaningful conversations and embracing travel can enhance your emotional well-being. Love and mutual understanding are on the horizon for couples.

Lucky number 18 | **Lucky colour** Ivory
Lucky day Friday

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ASTROTURF
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

Watch and correct thought trends

What's wrong with our destiny indicators that there seems to be no end of our struggle. This, despite so many pujas suggested by pundits to ward off the evil. Why so? Is there no remedial measure that could grant us ease and comfort? My husband, the breadwinner of family, has been subject to unwanted twists and turn in career all through his life? So far, he lost his job nothing less than a dozen times. In between, many a times he remained jobless as well. He is honest, truthful, hardworking, and yet runs out of favour with related bearing on our life. His health too, becomes a matter of concern every now and then." A lady, concerned about her husband's ordeal came asking the other day.

In the above context, let us first examine whether heavenly beings could grant boons in return for transactional pujas offered in their praise, to mitigate our sufferings. Experience suggests that had it been so, no resourceful person would have ever suffered in life. At the best, such pujas can bring in psychological satisfaction, which may help restore your own faith.

It may not be out of place to mention here that Vedas, which serves as the premise on which the Indian philosophy stands, does talk of various deities engaged in cosmic management. That, however, doesn't mean some heavenly form-beings like us, who could selectively respond to our prayers. They, in fact, symbolise various forces playing through the cosmos, vital to our life cycle, and available in equal proportion to all. It is difficult to digest that forces would be imbued with some mind-like organism to respond to our individual call, and that too mediated by pundits. What needs to be appreciated here that our lives are driven by cause-effect chain - "As you show, so shall you reap", which defines the course of our destiny. And it works in a self-automated mode, almost like a software programme. There is no scope for any external agency adjudicating our course of destiny. The question now is: How does destiny play upon in our lives? Going by Indian Philosophical concept, human life is structured in three layers -



Causal, Astral, and Gross bodies. On death, it is just the gross body that disintegrates. The causal and astral bodies that are pure energy platforms do not wither away. They carry over memory impressions pertaining to the past life and make it available to the freshly incarnated body as thought seeds. These thought-seeds set the trends of mind - indwelling desires, virtues & attributes, habits & attitudes, likes & dislikes, prejudices &

obsessions. They, however, do not define in finite term specific events due in emerging times. They rather just offer a lead to proceed with. Here it needs to be appreciated that unless ground suited to germination of seeds is available, they may never bear fruit bearing plants. Invariably, guided by indwelling desires, we take off in life. Their fruition, however, would need qualitative effort, which, in the first place, calls for creating the ground necessary for fruition. Second, assess the environmental constraints as well as challenges posed by competing interests. Accordingly, articulate ways and means to intelligently pursue the task in hand. The irony, however, is that our mind, blinded by indwelling desires, doesn't allow time and space to invoke our own empowerment tool - Buddhi - for due diligence, before taking the final call. And when we fail, instead of trying to find out our own fault-lines, we take refuge in our destiny.

The most potent remedy, therefore, is that your husband reflects upon his own mind-trends and makes necessary amends. In this context, let us look at astrological pointers of the man concerned. The main marker is his Sagittarius lagna. Its lord Jupiter, though in exaltation, but is placed adverse to Uranus, Sun, and Moon. It implies, in the first place an undiplomatic and a tactless person. He would be known for his indiscrete and ill-timed instinctive outbursts at times not even sparing the seniors. Second, he is headstrong and opinionated, who may try to force his viewpoint. Third, he has a swaggering ego, often out of touch with reality that makes him stuck to his self-beliefs and not open to look beyond to explore better options. The Sun also ill-disposed off to Moon makes him vulnerable to conflict and disharmony with others on the slightest pretext. Intelligence signifying Mercury sandwiched between headless Ketu and mischievous Neptune accounts for his inner confusions and insensible reasoning. And the result is there to see.

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