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Modi to hold 2 more poll rallies in State

Shah to address 4 public meetings

NALINI SAHU
BHUBANESWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah seem to be taking no chance while chasing their "Mission Odisha" dream. Modi, who has already addressed seven poll rallies and held two road shows in his three previous trips to the State, is again coming on May 29, party sources said on Wednesday. Modi is scheduled to address two public meetings, one at Kendrapada and the other at Baleswar.

BJP national vice-president Bajajant Panda is trying his

luck from the Kendrapada Lok Sabha seat while the party has fielded former Union Minister Pratap Sarangi from the Baleswar constituency.

According to BJP election in-charge for Odisha, Vijaypal Singh Tomar, Modi's upcoming trip to the State will further boost the morale of the party workers and leaders and help it get a majority in the 147-member State Assembly and win maximum number of the State's 21 Lok Sabha seats.

Tomar informed that Amit Shah would visit the State on May 25 to attend public meetings in Baripada, Chandbali, Korei and Nimapara, respectively covering the Mayurbhanj, Bhadrak, Jajpur and Jagatsinghpur Lok Sabha

constituencies.

On Thursday, BJP national president JP Nadda is scheduled to attend public meetings in Chilika under the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha segment and Mahanga under the Kendrapada parliamentary constituency.

The BJP central leaders, unlike the previous elections in 2014 and 2019, have now been directly targeting the State's ruling Biju Janata Dal president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, accusing him of compromising with Odia Asmita (pride and honour), messing up with natural resources and failing to bring economic prosperity to the State due to poor governance, nepotism and corruption.

Naveen held under house arrest, says Giriraj

NALINI SAHU
BHUBANESWAR

Union Minister Giriraj Singh on Wednesday took potshots at Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's "brief appearances" before the public by short video clips and concise public meetings, not extending a few minutes. The BJP leader alleged that Patnaik is perhaps under "house arrest" and all his activities are being remote-controlled by a bureaucrat-turned politician, meaning VK Pandian.

Singh was holding a road show in Sambalpur, from where Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is contesting Lok Sabha polls.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah have also been targeting Pandian in all their poll rallies in Odisha.

Singh said Patnaik has ap-

parently been "abducted" by some people and is being produced at certain events when required by the captors. Soon after the events are over, he is taken back to his residence.

"Naveen Patnaik is now 77 years old and wants to make his close aide Pandian the next CM by destroying Odia Asmita. I strongly believe that the people of Odisha

should oppose this. We want to assure that a son/daughter of Odisha will be the State's Chief Minister after we form a government here," said Singh.

While interacting with mediapersons later, Singh said he is confident that the BJP would certainly accomplish the 400-Lok Sabha seat target set by Modi.

Meanwhile, actor Arun Govil of Ramayana fame addressed a public meeting in Keonjhar, appealing to the voters to cast their ballots in favour of local BJP Lok Sabha candidate Ananta Nayak and party's Champua MLA nominee Murli Manohar Sharma.

MLA Panigrahi quits BJD

PNS BHUBANESWAR

Former minister and Simulia MLA Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi resigned from the primary membership of the BJD on Wednesday.

In a video message, he said his late father Parshuram Panigrahi was associated with former CM Biju Patnaik, after whom the BJD has been named, for over 40 years and he had served the party for 10 years. "My family will continue to serve the people of Khaira and Simulia," he added.

In 2019, Panigrahi retained the seat, which he had won in 2014, by defeating Padmalochan Panda of BJP with a margin of 14,959 votes. Playing the women card, the



BJD, however, has nominated Subhasini Sahoo from Simulia this time. She is the wife of Shashi Kumar Sahoo, who unsuccessfully contested from the Assembly segment on a BJP ticket in 2014.

Bikash Sangathan holds 5th annual fest

PNS BHUBANESWAR

The Bhubaneswar Bikash Sangathan celebrated its fifth annual event on Monday. Founded in 2019, during the aftermath of cyclone Fani, the organisation was established by the Atmashakti Trust to address the significant issues faced by the slum areas of Bhubaneswar.

Initially focused on the northern zone, the organisation has since expanded its reach to over 370 slum areas across Bhubaneswar, working to ensure fundamental rights, water and sanitation



facilities, and social security for the residents.

The foundation day was commemorated at the

Fuleshwari slum (Ward No-49) in Patrapada. The event was attended by district-level representative Manjulata Swain,

zone-level representative Ambika Pani, slum-level representative Sangeeta Patra, and youth volunteer Lakshmi Kumari Sharma, among others.

They shared their experiences and commitment to continue working with the organisation to improve the slum areas.

Keynote speaker Arun Prasad Dihudi from the Atmashakti Trust, along with officials from Bhubaneswar Bikash Sangathan, addressed the gathering and discussed future plans to strengthen the organisation and enhance its impact.

Study by IIT BBS

'Urbanisation led to 60% rise in warming in Indian cities'

PNS BHUBANESWAR

An innovative study by the researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bhubaneswar, reveals that urbanisation alone has caused up to 60% additional warming in Indian cities, with significant variability among different cities.

This research provides a science based quantitative ranking of urbanisation for Indian cities. The study titled 'Urbanisation and regional climate change-linked warming of Indian cities' published in the journal 'Nature Cities' is first-of-its-kind providing an insight by carefully separating regional climate change and urbanisation in multiple cities.



In the context of rising temperature, the study investigated the contributions of local-scale urbanisation and regional climate change to the observed surface warming in 141 major Indian cities over the past two decades. By leveraging 18 years of high-resolution land surface temperature data from the MODIS sensor on NASA's Aqua satellite for the period between 2003 and 2020, the research team carefully compared urban and rural warming trends. Applying strict quality control measures, they subtracted the

regional climate change effects observed in rural areas from the urban warming to isolate the urbanization effect.

Notably, Tier II cities in Eastern India showed stronger urbanisation-driven warming compared to larger metro cities like New Delhi and Mumbai. This disparity underscores the importance of targeted urban planning and efforts to mitigate heat impacts, which could also address other urban issues like extreme rainfall, floods, and air pollution. Targeting smaller cities with systematic heat action plan is expected to be far cheaper with positive outcome than for large urban agglomerations or megacities. The study emphasises the urgent need for

detailed urban climate studies and data generation as Indian cities rapidly expand.

The research was led by Dr V Vinoj, Associate Professor, School of Earth, Ocean and Climate Sciences and Soumya Satyakanta Sethi. Commenting about the study, Dr Vinoj said, "A lot more aspects related to urbanization are still unexplored in the Indian context. However, this study provides an early glimpse of science-backed information that may be useful for national or State level policymaking to view each city differently and allocate limited resources systematically to reduce warming of our cities. Such an approach will help in implementing policies that may make our growing smart cities smarter."

In Khordha Missing couple's bodies recovered

Kin allege murder

PNS KHORDHA

Two highly-decomposed bodies were found near a river at Gadamantri village under the Begunia police station in Khordha district on Wednesday.

Locals spotted the bodies and informed police. The Begunia police and the Khordha SDPO reached the spot and seized the bodies, which were suspected to be of a couple missing for the last 10 days. A forensic team was roped in to collect evidence

from the spot.

A missing complaint was filed in the Begunia police station a few days back by the parents of a woman from Lathipada village under Hirapur panchayat of the district. She was reported to be missing along with her male friend from Botalama village in Atharanga panchayat since May 11.

Family members of the couple identified the bodies from the clothes they were wearing. While they allege that the duo was murdered, police said they were waiting for the postmortem report to ascertain the cause of their death.

In Sambalpur Rs 1.5 cr seized by IT Dept from transporter

PNS SAMBALPUR

Income Tax (IT) Department officials during a raid in the premises of a businessman in Sambalpur seized cash of Rs 1.5 crore ahead of the third phase of elections in the State on May 25.

The seizure was made following a raid in the premises of a transporter, whose identity was yet to be revealed. But the IT officials were trying to ascertain the source and if the cash was kept in the premises

for distribution to voters ahead of the elections.

The businessman's financial records and transactions were being scrutinised for any connections to political activities or violations of election regulations.

Notably, various enforcement agencies on the instructions of Election Commission of India (ECI) are vigilant against efforts to influence voters with cash, liquor or any other means to ensure free and fair elections.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

Religious matters never determine poll outcomes

Ratna Bhandar keys issue is a case in point

As polls are on across the country, big political parties that have no good enough issue on hand to attack or belittle opposition outfits, are seen to be resorting to religious non-issues just to create confusion. Most leading parties in Odisha have been wasting precious time on silly things like the Jagannath Temple's Ratna Bhandar keys that are allegedly lost. The temple administration has meanwhile traced the duplicate keys which have not been used as yet. The ignorant, populist media has gone overboard to consume a great deal of print space and broadcast time to go on irritating the gullible as well as conscious public no end. The story is made out to appear as if the near-empty treasure house has not been opened for centuries. The forgetful public as



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

well as authorities seem to have forgotten the simple fact that the treasure was audited physically forty-six years ago and an exhaustive list was made after all articles of any value were inventoried for the rest of the world to know. More than 90% of the valuables, mostly jewellery and gemstones, have been taken out of the inner treasure trove to be used on special occasions as are visible to all today. There

is hardly anything left inside the inner trove.

As per hazy history and legends, the Puri Jagannath Temple has been robbed across times and there is not much left to see beyond what is being used by the Deities on routine and special occasions. A big rumour making round for ages is that several unscrupulous, greedy superintending monarchs have also looted many pieces of valuables, all before the government took charge of the temple by making an Act in 1955.

The anti-BJD party leaders and activists keep screaming 'foul play' by the government as if the State officials run the temple alone. The Gajapati king, watchful servitors whose number is fairly big and the vigilant members of the public are all too smart to know if any robbery of the slightest kind would ever happen.

The temple managing committee now has unanimously agreed to urge the State Government to

allow the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to conduct a structural inspection of the Ratna Bhandar. Another recommendation is to be made by a high-level team, headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court or Orissa High Court only to supervise the reopening of Ratna Bhandar as has been made clear by Samarth Verma when he was Puri Collector-cum-Deputy Chief Administrator of SJTA.

According to the Jagannath Temple Act, 1955, the Ratna Bhandar should be opened for inventory every three years. The treasury was last opened and audited between May 13 and July 23, 1978.

So, the hue and cry about the Ratna Bhandar keys having been lost or found does not make much sense. The anti-BJD have been hugely influenced by the make-believe computer-generated fairytale visuals displaying immeasurable jewellery and gemstones overflowing half-open exquisite casks with frighteningly slithering serpents

guarding the valuables all like grandma's tales kids heard. The visual media outfits need to be punished for all this nonsense. It is like the fantasy-ridden 'Alibaba and the Forty Thieves' tale that creates a lot of imaginary figures and facts at the back of the mind.

It would be appropriate to mention that living old timers, who were part of the 1978 search adventure, are very candid about the measure of the treasures. One of the search members of the latest adventure in 2015 had made it open that the inner treasury room was divided only by an ordinary mild steel grill with a gate shutter of the same material. Though the keys in hand never matched the grooves of the lock, the team focused beams of light to discover only one nondescript zinc trunk lying as if abandoned for having nothing inside or only articles of no significance.

The Ratna Bhandar 'keys' issue must be buried here once for all.

Besides, the inventory of 1978 should be made public and matched against the valuables used now on special and ordinary occasions.

Evidently, there is a huge 'Ado about Nothing' kind of a situation to keep people guessing so that the guys remain in public glare. BJP and Congress leaders and the numbskull activists need to look up the inventory of 1978 to know how much wealth are actually missing by tallying against what is available at hand. One fails to understand why the fools are knocking at the doors of courts of law and sparring on visual media platforms instead of doing the simple tallying of materials against the 1978 inventory, all in public glare.

Only a couple of days ago, the Puri BJP Lok Sabha candidate Sambit Patra told a sentence in which the critical words were interchanged obviously by an act of 'slip of tongue'. All hell broke loose across the anti-BJP camps. They made mountain out of a molehill

by going berserk to confuse people in vain. Instead of saying 'Modi is a great devotee of the Lord Jagannath', he fumbled in a hurry to say 'Lord Jagannath is a great devotee of Modi'. Without losing one moment, the detractors filled the social media with the alleged sin and made an excessive hue and cry, which actually provided a brilliant scope for the candidate to apologise profusely in public and on media to buy hearts and score brownie points. He went several extra miles to go on a three-day fast to expiate the unintended commitment of sin. He even splashed full front-page ads in newspapers to express apology with utmost grief. Such blunders occur and are ignored.

All said and explained, the underlying truth is that the BJD is still invincible under the Naveen banner and going to form government for a sixth consecutive term in the first week of June unless miracles happen for the saffron crowd.



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GURBAZ SAYS KKR IS FAMILY TOO 12 SPORTS

EC makes its presence felt

Underlines nation's inviolable socio-cultural milieu

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With only two phases of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections remaining, the Election Commission has now upped the ante against political parties particularly the BJP and the Congress asking them to desist from campaigning along caste, community, language, and religious lines, asserting that India's socio-cultural milieu cannot be made a casualty to elections.

The two phases will see polls on 115 seats including in Delhi on Saturday. The Election Commission on Wednesday in a stern warning to both the BJP and the Congress, the EC has also directed them to issue a formal notice to its 'star campaigners' disallowing them from making statements that "divide the society" and may cause tension between different castes and communities.

The EC had last month issued notices to JP Nadda on Opposition charges that Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a divisive speech in Rajasthan's Banswara. A similar notice had been issued to Mallikarjun Kharge, too, based on the complaints filed by the BJP against him and the main Opposition party's senior leader Rahul Gandhi regarding their remarks. The commission rejected the defence by Nadda and Kharge and asked them to instruct their parties' star campaigners to desist from campaigning along caste, community, language,



and religious lines. The EC also asked the Congress not to politicise defence forces and make potentially divisive statements regarding socio-economic composition of the armed forces. The EC had broken from norms when it issued notices to the BJP and Congress presidents on April 25 on complaints against Modi by the Opposition and against Rahul and Kharge by the ruling party. While the EC did not name Modi or Rahul, it asked Nadda and Kharge for their "comments" on the "star campaigners" alleged MCC violations. "Elections are periodic exercises, they come and go, but political parties like yours



endure; even more enduring preserve is India's socio-cultural milieu; political parties are in the task of nurturing leaders for the country for present and future," the commission said. It also asked the Congress to ensure that its star campaigners and candidates do not make statements which give false impression that the Constitution may be abolished or sold. The EC asked the presidents of the two national parties to issue formal notes to their star campaigners to correct their discourse, exercise care and maintain decorum. Referring to their respective replies to the notices issued to



Voter sympathy for Kejriwal ebbs

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Riding high on the electoral sympathy after the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) seems to have lost its advantages after the alleged assault on Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal in the run up for the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi.

The Maliwal incident has dented Kejriwal's image badly, who is facing corruption charges in the excise policy scam case, which is visible in the party's campaign. The saffron party seems to have an upper hand in all seven seats as this has not gone well among the women voters.

Top BJP leaders are confident to repeat the 2019 results. The BJP, which is banking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charisma and corruption free administration in his 10 years rule, has now focussed its strategy, utilising the alleged assault on Maliwal, to portray its top leadership, including Kejriwal, as responsible — first through "silence", acceptance, and then a "direct attack" on Maliwal — for "denigration" and "assault" of their own women colleagues.

On the other hand, Kejriwal who has maintained radio silence, seems to be on back foot, hurting the party's electoral prospects. The BJP's campaign strategy to counter the INDIA Bloc in Delhi has been to target the AAP more than the Congress.

Besides, the BJP has consistently raked up corruption allegations against the AAP, including the now-scrapped excise policy and 10 other alleged scams. AAP hopes Kejriwal's arrest will



generate sympathy for the party in the general elections and help it win maximum seats in Delhi and Punjab.

The BJP hopes that Kejriwal's arrest has dented his image and the image of a party with a difference (AAP), and it would not get any sympathy votes in Delhi. BJP leaders in Delhi, however, are confident of retaining all the seven seats the party has held since 2014. According to political pundits, the election is being contested between two personalities — Modi and Kejriwal in Delhi. This is for the first time that an election is being fought without any issues. Interestingly, there is no anti-incumbency factor against the Modi Government at the Centre. The BJP has crafted its electoral campaign well planned to corner the Kejriwal Government.

The BJP has also sought to balance the caste factor in announcing its candidates — fielding Harsh Malhotra a Punjabi from East Delhi against AAP candidate Kuldeep Kumar. Baniya leader Praveen Khandelwal from Chandni Chowk against Congress veteran Jai Prakash Aggarwal, MLA and Gujjar leader Ramvir Singh Bidhuri from South Delhi and AAP candidate Saharaj Pehalwan, Jat leader Kamaljeet Sehrawat

from West Delhi against AAP leader and former Congress MP Mahabab Mishra and Dalit leader Yogendra Chandolia from the reserved North West Delhi seat against Congress leader Udit Raj. It has retained sitting MP Manoj Tiwari from North East Delhi where Congress has fielded former JNU president Kanhaiya Kumar. Aggarwal and Mishra have posed some challenges to BJP candidates while Kumar is facing a financial crunch to run the campaign. Kumar is collecting money through crowdfunding. The alliance of AAP and Congress, which are fighting jointly in Delhi, also seems to have not worked. Insiders said AAP supporters do not want to revive the Congress. Similarly, Congress supporters are also against the AAP.

Besides, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has also fielded seven candidates here with an aim for a stronger showing. In the early 2000s, the BSP emerged as a significant competitor to Delhi's established political parties. However, it gradually lost its support and voter share to the AAP and onwards. Despite this setback, the BSP's resilience and determination remained steadfast.

Modi rips into INDIA Bloc's Communal plank

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday tore into the INDIA Bloc accusing it of being extremely "communal, extremely casteist and extremely nepotistic" as he alleged that the Congress is to be blamed for the anti-Sikh riots.

Addressing a rally in West Delhi's Dwarka sector 14, the Prime Minister said the BJP's development model is committed to 'nation first' but for the Congress and the INDIA grouping, the only agenda is family first.

Modi denounced the communal and casteist agendas of the INDIA Bloc, accusing them of prioritising vote-bank politics over the welfare of the nation. He criticised their divisive tactics and highlighted instances of communal violence and corruption under their rule. "The country also understands



Delhiites throng Dwarka sector 14 to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday

Ranjana Dimri/Pioneer

that if by mistake any vote is cast in favour of the INDIA alliance, that vote is not going to be of any use to the country. Every vote given to BJP will strengthen the resolve of 'Viksit Bharat'. That is why this huge sea of people is also

saying in one voice 'Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar', he said. He said, "The BJP's development model says, Nation First. On the other hand, Congress and the INDIA alliance's only agenda is family first. This INDIA alliance is a

symbol of every evil that exists in the country today. They are highly communal, casteist, and family-oriented. Our Delhi has been a direct witness to their communalism." Attacking the Congress and the INDIA Bloc, he referred

to 1984 riots when Sikhs were burnt alive. "It was in this very Delhi that my Sikh brothers and sisters were burned alive with burning tires around their necks. Whose crime was this? Congress. Today, every party standing under the Congress umbrella is guilty of the Sikh riots. It is Modi who is delivering justice to the victims of the Sikh riots. As soon as Modi came to power, an SIT was formed. Hundreds of cases were reopened. The Congress leaders who were roaming freely have been punished by us," he said.

During his speech, Modi emphasised the stark differences between the governance models of the BJP and the Congress-led INDIA Bloc. He underscored the BJP's commitment to fast-paced

development and efficient governance, contrasting it with the slow progress and systemic injustice perpetuated by the Congress and its allies.

Speaking about the Congress and INDIA Bloc's misrule and caste-based politics, Modi said, "Who doesn't know about the prestigious Jamia Millia Islamia, a Central University in Delhi? For 60 years, it remained a regular educational institution, even there, Dalits, backward classes, and tribals used to get reservations. But in 2011, the Congress Government played a trick. Suddenly Jamia was declared a minority institution. This imposed a 50 per cent reservation for Muslims in Jamia. Earlier, all SC/ST/OBCs used to get reservations in admissions. Now even that has been restricted based on religion."



Naveen holds 3rd road show in BBSR

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president Naveen Patnaik conducted another road show in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday evening to garner support for party candidates for the twin elections.

This was Naveen's third road show in the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha constituency, where polling will be held in third-round of elections in Odisha on May 25. The voters of the Assembly segments under the Parliamentary constituency will also exercise their franchise on the day.

Naveen, who started the road show from Rental Square, waved at the cheering crowd



on both sides of the road. The journey in a specially-built customised bus culminated at Patia Square.

Making short speeches at a few locations, Naveen highlighted the BJD's poll promises of providing free electricity and BSKY health cards to all.

'Modi must apologise for Sambit's Jagannath comments'

BJP-BJD quarrel over Odia

Ashmita mere farce: Khera

SUGYAN CHOUDHURY ■ BHUBANESWAR

Addressing a Press conference here at PCC Office, Bhubaneswar, AICC media cell chairperson Pawan Khera lambasted PM Modi and BJP national spokesperson and party's Puri MP candidate Sambit Patra for hurting sentiments of millions of devotees of Lord Jagannath across the world by the latter describing the Lord as Bhakt of the former.

They have been receiving innumerable telephone calls from USA, UK and such other



countries of the world in which devotees of the Lord are expressing their sorrow over the statement of Patra. Although more than 48 hours has passed since Patra made the comments on the Lord, PM Modi has never apologised in the public domain though he was also related to the comments of Patra, said Khera.

He made it clear that during the Shree Rama Temple installation a picture which had gone viral depicted Modi's photo as bigger than the photo

of Lord Ram. Interestingly enough, BJP president JP Nadda has equated Narendra Modi not only as the King of men but also as Surendra i.e. as the King of Gods, he said.

Khera also alleged that Modi has himself expressed twice that he was not biologically born but also was a direct Avatar (incarnation) of the divine. This is nothing but the egoistic and megalomaniac traits of Modi, who needs to be thrown out of power, Khera demanded.

Low pressure forms over Bay of Bengal

No direct impact on Odisha: IMD

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A low-pressure area has formed over the southwest Bay of Bengal (BoB) and is likely to concentrate into a depression over central parts of BoB by the morning of May 24, said the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here on Wednesday.

There are chances that the depression will trigger heavy rainfall and also intensify into a cyclone, the first cyclone during this pre-monsoon season.

"The depression is expected to intensify into a cyclone with chances of further intensification. If the cyclone moves towards the Indian coast, it will support monsoon; and if it moves towards Myanmar then it will be a spoiler and can negatively impact monsoon onset, the

The IMD has predicted light to moderate rainfall at many

places with heavy rains at isolated places in Baleswar and other parts of north Odisha on May 24 and 25.

Furthermore, squally wind speed reaching 40-50 kmph gusting to 60 kmph is likely over central Bay of Bengal from May 23 morning. It would extend to adjoining areas of North Bay of Bengal from 24th morning with increased wind speed of 50-60 kmph gusting to 70 kmph.

Sea condition is also likely to be rough to very rough on May 23 and 24. Fishermen have been warned not to venture into the sea on these two days.

However, IMD DG Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said, "A detail forecast on what will be its intensity and which coast it will cross will be issued tomorrow (May 23).

Mohapatra further said that as of now, there would be no direct impact on Odisha. However, only rainfall warning has been issued for Baleswar and Bhadrak districts on May 25 and 26.

Security beefed up in BBSR for polls

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

For smooth conduct of the polls, elaborate security arrangements have been made for elections for the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha and Assembly seats on May 25.

As per reports, polling would be held in 1,132 booths in the Bhubaneswar Parliamentary seat. Of these booths, 421 are Sakhi (managed by women) booths.

The administration has identified 145 booths as sensitive while web-casting would be held at 525 booths.

Moreover, 15 flying squads and 15 striking surveillance teams will keep moving around the constituencies for 24 hours to maintain strict

vigil. Apart from the Commissionerate Police, district police and 12 companies of Central Armed Police Forces would be deployed in various parts of the city.

After the end of the campaigning on the evening of May 23, checking and blocking would be intensified in the city. Night patrolling will be stepped up while entry points will be guarded by armed forces.

Police Commissioner Sanjeeb Panda said, "We have identified 145 booths as sensitive in the city. CRPF will be deployed in all sensitive booths. For transparent polling, web-casting will be done in 525 booths."

2024 LS elections have 8,360 candidates, highest since 1996

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 8,360 candidates are contesting the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, the highest since 1996, according to an analysis of official data. In the 2019 polls, there were 8,039 candidates, and in 1996, a record 13,952 candidates were in the fray for 543 seats of the Lower House of Parliament. The 2024 general elections are being held in seven phases, with five rounds of polling completed. The sixth and last rounds will be held on May 25 and June 1, respectively. Counting of votes will be taken up on June 4. The fourth phase of the elections held on May 13 had the highest number of candidates in the fray, 1,717 in 96 parliamentary constituencies in 10 states and Union Territories (UTs). The first phase held on April 19 had 1,625 candidates in 102 constituencies in 21 states and UTs, according to Election Commission (EC) data. There were 1,198 candidates in the second phase on April 26 in 89 constituencies across 13 states and UTs, 1,352 candidates in the third phase on May 7 in 94 constituencies in 12 states and UTs and 695 candi-



dates in the fifth phase on May 20 in 49 constituencies across eight states and UTs. In the upcoming sixth and seven phases on May 25 and June 1, there are 869 and 904 candidates, according to the EC data. Fifty-seven constituencies are going to polls in seven and eight states and UTs on May 25 and June 1, respectively. The number of candidates contesting the Lok Sabha polls has seen a rise of over four times from 1,874 in 1952 -- the first time elections were held -- to 8,360 in 2024, and the average number of candidates

per constituency has increased from 4.67 to 15.39 on an average, according to official data. There used to be only around three to five contestants per Lok Sabha seats on an average till as late as the sixth Lok Sabha elections in 1977 but in the previous elections 14.8 candidates contested per constituency across the country. There has been a marked increase in the total number of candidates contesting the elections over the years. While in 1952 there were 1,874 candidates for 489 seats with an average of 3.83 contestants per constituency, the number

steadily increased to 2,784 candidates in 1971 with an average of 5.37 per constituency, according to official data. In 1977, 2,439 candidates contested and average candidates per constituency stood at 4.5. The 1980 elections saw an increase in the number of candidates to 4,629 with an average of 8.54 per seat, the data showed. In 1984-85, the eighth general elections, had 5,492 candidates with an average of 10.13 contestants per constituency. The ninth general elections in 1989 had 6,160 candidates in the fray with an average of

11.34 per Lok Sabha seat while in the tenth general elections in 1991-92, 8,668 candidates contested for 543 seats with an average of 15.96 per constituency, according to official data. There were a record 13,952 candidates in the fray for 543 Lok Sabha seats in 1996 with the average contestants per seat increasing to 25.69 from 16.38 in the previous elections in 1991, the data showed. The increasing of security deposit from Rs 500 to Rs 10,000 by the EC apparently helped in bringing down the number of contestants per seat to 8.75 candidates in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. It was after a long gap that the total number of contestants was less than 5,000 (4,750) that only increased marginally in the 1999 general elections to 4,648 candidates, averaging 8.56 candidates per seat. In 2004, the number of contestants again crossed the 5,000-mark with 5,435 contestants in the fray for 543 Lok Sabha seats, averaging just over 10 contestants per seat. The 2009 general elections saw a 8,070 candidates with the average of contestants per seat sharply increasing to 14.86. A total of 8,251 candidates are in the fray in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

Women less than 10 per cent of LS picks: ADR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Less than 10 per cent of the candidates contesting in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections are women, according to an analysis of data shared by the poll rights body Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). Of the 8,337 candidates analysed, only 797 are women, representing a mere 9.5 per cent of the total candidates contesting across the seven phases of the elections. This is the first election since the passage of the women's reservation bill to reserve one-third of seats in Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women, reviving a bill pending for 27 years for want of consensus among parties. The bill is yet to come into effect. During the first phase of the elections, out of 1,618 candidates, only 135 were women. This pattern continued in the subsequent phases, with women candidates remaining a small fraction of the total. Phase 2 saw 1,192 candidates of which affidavits of 1,198 candidates were analysed and as many as 100 were women. Phase 3 had 1,352 candidates, including 123 women and 244 with criminal cases. In phase 4, affidavits of 1,710 out of 1,717 candidates were analysed and 170 were women. Phase 5 had the fewest candi-



dates at 695, with 82 women, while in phase 6, affidavits of 866 out of 869 candidates were analysed, and there were 92 women. In phase 7, there will be 904 candidates candidates, with only 95 women. This significant gender imbalance has sparked criticism from political analysts and activists, who question why political parties are waiting for the women's reservation bill to be implemented instead of proactively issuing tickets to women. Dr. Sushila Ramaswamy, Professor at Delhi University's Jesus and Mary College, has emphasised that political parties should take concrete steps to promote women's candidacy. "Political parties should have been more proactive and fielded more women candidates," she said, highlighting the effectiveness of seat reservations for women within party structures, as seen in Britain's Labour Party. With women constituting near-

ly half of India's electorate, their under-representation in the candidate pool raises broader questions about the barriers hindering women's full participation in the political sphere, Dr. Iftekhar Ahmad Ansari, Associate Professor at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), said. Beyond symbolic gestures and promises, he stressed the importance of structural reforms to ensure equal opportunities for women in politics, underscoring the critical role of party leadership in promoting gender diversity. "Political parties must prioritise gender inclusion in candidate selection and provide adequate support to women aspirants," he emphasised. The issue of women's political representation extends beyond numerical quotas to encompass systemic changes in party dynamics and electoral processes, noted Farhat Jahan, a retired faculty member at Abdullah Women's College at AMU.

SC cancels bail given by HC to eight PFI members

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday set aside a verdict of the Madras High Court which had granted bail to eight accused in a case registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act against alleged PFI operatives, holding that national security is of paramount importance. A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mishra directed the accused, who were granted bail by the high court on October 19 last year, to surrender forthwith and go back to jail. "The impugned order passed by the high court is set aside," the bench said while pronouncing its judgement. The court observed it can't be denied that national security is always of paramount importance and any act linked to terrorism is liable to be restricted. The bench delivered its verdict on a plea filed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) challenging the high court judgement granting bail to these accused. The eight accused —

Barakathullah, Idris, Mohamed Abuthahir, Khalid Mohammed, Syed Ishaq, Khaja Mohaideen, Yasar Arafath and Fayaz Ahmed — were arrested in September 2022. On October 20 last year, the apex court had posted the NIA's plea challenging the high court order for hearing after advocate Rajat Nair, appearing for the anti-terror agency, mentioned it for urgent listing. In its plea, the NIA had claimed that the PFI is a fundamentalist Islamic organisation and it was formed only to achieve the "dangerous goal" of establishing Muslim rule in India governed by Sharia law. It had said an FIR was registered against the alleged office bearers, members and cadres of the PFI, which had been spreading the extremist ideology across Tamil Nadu after establishing its state headquarters at Purasaiwakkam in Chennai and offices in various districts of the state through their front organisations. The petition said the accused had "conspired to commit acts of terror, recruited members for

furthering their extremist ideology and imparted training to commit terrorist activities, organised mass drills for displaying their might by gathering their members in combat uniforms, intending that participants shall be trained to use criminal force for violence against other religious communities to spread fear or alarm or insecurity. "It is respectfully submitted that the leaders/cadres of PFI had formed the organisation only to achieve a dangerous goal of 'Vision India 2047', that is to make this country ruled by Muslims as per sharia law," it had said. The plea claimed tactical weapons training was being imparted and there was evidence on record which showed that PFI cadres where influenced, brainwashed and indoctrinated by the accused. "All the acts were done by the accused in an effort to raise an armed militia to take up the fight for usurping and violating the sovereignty and integrity of the country," it had alleged. Rahul Datta.

Congress questions EC over difference in voter turnout data

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday raised questions over the difference between the real time voter turnout data and the final figures released by the Election Commission, and said voters are worried over the "strange goings-on" in the poll body. Congress leader and head of media and publicity department of the party Pawan Khera said the difference is around 1.7 crore votes, and termed it as unprecedented. "Voters are worried about the strange goings on in the Election Commission through the four phases of voting. First, the Election Commission takes 10-11 days to bring out the final figure of voting and then the difference between real time data and final figure turns out to be 1.7 crore votes. This is truly unprecedented," Khera said on X. "Unanswered questions about the missing EVMs are also very worrying," he added.



AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "This difference of 1.07 crore overall translates into an increase of 28,000 in each LS seat. This is HUGE." "The discrepancy is maximum in states where BJP is expected to lose seats heavily. What is happening?" Ramesh asked. Other opposition parties have also raised questions over the delay in release of final voter turnout. Lok Sabha polls are being held in seven phases and the results will be declared on June 4.

IAF chief inaugurates emergency medical helpline for Air Force staff

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In order to provide expert guidance and definitive care during medical emergencies of serving personnel and their families of the Indian Air Force (IAF) across the nation, an Emergency Medical Response System (EMRS), was inaugurated by IAF chief V R Chaudhari at Command Hospital Air Force, Bengaluru on Tuesday. IAF officials said here on Wednesday. The EMRS is a first of its kind 24/7 telephonic medical helpline for serving IAF personnel and their families across India. The system aims to provide prompt response by a team of medical and paramedical professionals to the caller experiencing the emergency anywhere across the country. The responding medical professional shall provide immediate advice to the caller, while simultaneously getting in touch with the IAF medical facility nearest to the caller. This facility symbolises IAF's commit-



ment towards incorporating technology to deliver high quality healthcare in the event of an emergency. The sole aim of EMRS is to save valuable lives. The event featured a demonstration of the system's capability and outreach, highlighting the ease with which expert guidance would be provided to the distressed caller, as well as expeditious launch of a medical support team from

the nearest medical echelon. IAF chief, who originally envisioned this concept, highlighted the importance of the EMRS and further added "this initiative is not just a milestone for the Indian Air Force but a significant advancement in medical readiness, representing a critical step forward in the ongoing efforts to provide immediate and expert medical care during emergencies".

CBI terminates service of inspector held taking bribe

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has terminated the services of its inspector Rahul Raj who was arrested by the agency while allegedly taking a bribe of Rs 10 lakh from the chairman of a Madhya Pradesh-based nursing college, officials said on Wednesday. Following its policy of "zero tolerance towards corruption", the agency sacked Raj under Article 311 of the Constitution that allows termination of services of government employees, they said. Raj was caught "red-handed" on Sunday while allegedly accepting an illegal gratification of Rs 10 lakh from Malay College of Nursing chairman Anil Bhaskaran and his wife Suma Anil, an official alleged. The couple has also been arrested. The CBI has also attached its Deputy Superintendent of Police Ashish Prasad to the headquarters. He was named in the FIR in the case. Sushil Kumar Majoka and Rishi Kant Asathe, both on attachment with the CBI from the Madhya Pradesh Police, will be repatriated to the state police soon as their alleged role in the bribery racket has surfaced. The CBI swung into action

after inputs and surveillance by its internal vigilance unit indicated that one of the support teams constituted on the orders of the Madhya Pradesh High Court to examine infrastructure in nursing colleges in the state was indulging in corruption. "CBI, ACB, Bhopal, had constituted seven core teams and three-to-four support teams, comprising officials from CBI, those nominated by nursing colleges in Madhya Pradesh and patwaris, in compliance of the directions of the high court for conducting statewide inspections to ascertain whether nursing colleges satisfied the laid down norms and standards for nursing colleges in respect of infrastructural facilities and faculty," CBI spokesperson said. The agency said during monitoring of inspections being carried out by the various teams, officials of one of the support teams, including Raj, were found to be indulging in corruption. It said it was observed that they were giving favourable inspection reports in lieu of bribes collected through conduits. The CBI has arrested 13 people, including Raj, for giving favourable inspection reports to nursing colleges in Madhya Pradesh in exchange for bribes collected through conduits, officials said.

Alert citizens helping DoT prevent cybercrimes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vigilant and alert citizens are playing an indispensable role in preventing cybercrimes. Through their proactive reporting of suspected fraud communications via the Chakshu-Report Suspected Fraud Communications facility on the Sanchar Saathi portal, these alert citizens are contributing significantly to a safer digital environment. Their watchful eyes and swift actions protect not only themselves but also countless others from falling victim to scams, phishing attempts, and fraudulent activities. By reporting suspicious messages, calls, and impersonation attempts, these citizens act as the first line of defence against cyber criminals, ministry of communications said here on Wednesday. This prompt approach of citizens helps the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) combat and prevent cybercrimes. The DoT expresses gratitude to the vigilant citizens who enable the Department in ensuring a safer and secure digital ecosystem. With these inputs, the DoT has been taking prompt and strict action on cyber/financial frauds. In the latest cases, people were being duped by fraudulent communication in the name of fake LIC officials and Insurance company represen-



tatives and SMSs for redemption of SBI Rewards. The DoT received inputs from citizens on 19.05.2024 regarding such frauds from 14 mobile numbers. Within 24 hours, the DoT analysed these cases and generated all linkages for these mobile numbers. Therefore, 372 mobile handsets linked to these mobile numbers were blocked on pan-India basis on 21.05.2024. Also, 906 mobile connections were suspended and flagged for re-verification. The Department has urged citizens to stay vigilant and report such fraud communications at 'Chakshu - Report Suspected Fraud Communications' facility of Sanchar Saathi portal (www.sancharsaathi.gov.in/sfc). Such proactive reporting helps DoT in prevention of misuse of telecom resources for cybercrime, financial frauds, etc. Advisories have been issued on a regular basis for the public to create awareness on fake

notices impersonating DoT/TRAI, suspected fraud communications and malicious calls via press, SMS, and social media. This collaborative approach is safeguarding citizens against fraudsters and DoT expresses gratitude to them for coming forward and reporting, keep vigilant, keep reporting and Let's fight it together Chakshu is the latest addition to the citizen centric facilities already available on the Sanchar Saathi portal of the DoT. 'Chakshu' facilitates citizens to report suspected fraud communication received over call, SMS, or WhatsApp with the intention of defrauding like KYC expiry or update of bank account/payment wallet/SIM/gas connection/electricity connection, sextortion, impersonation as government official/relative for sending money, disconnection of all mobile numbers by the DoT, etc.

10th International Day of Yoga held



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the 10th International Day of Yoga was commemorated by the All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) on Tuesday with a distinct focus on 'Yoga for Women Empowerment', Sister BK Shivani, a motivational speaker underscored the significance of yoga in nurturing resilience and informed decision-making, especially among the younger generation. Likewise, in her inaugural speech, AIIA Director Prof. (Dr.) Tanuja Nesari, appealed to everyone to celebrate this Yoga Day for women's empowerment, for guidance and to strengthen minds, spirits, and souls, to unite within ourselves, and to unite with the outside world by following Ayurveda's way of living. "Ayurveda and yoga are two sides of the same coin. . . Ayurveda is the physical aspect of yoga, and yoga is the spiritual aspect of Ayurveda," she said and urged everyone not only to teach but also to practice both yoga and Ayurveda. "Youth of today should understand the importance of perseverance and the significance of Yoga for bringing a change for the betterment of humanity," she said.

Indian Navy must remain combat ready: Navy chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy must remain combat ready at all times to safeguard national maritime interests, Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi has said. This assertion came amid China's increasing forays into the Indian Ocean and volatile situation in the Red Sea. In an address to officers posted at the naval headquarters here, the Navy chief helved into the current security environment in the strategic waters and consequent actions required by the Navy. He emphasised that as the primary manifestation of India's maritime power, the "raison d'etre of Indian Navy is to remain combat ready at all times to safeguard national maritime interests anytime, anywhere, anyhow". In his remarks to the officers on Tuesday, the Navy chief reiterated the unwavering commitment of the Indian Navy towards the government's Aatma Nirbharta (self-reliance) initiative. Admiral Tripathi laid emphasis on finding in-house solutions, innovation and embracing niche technologies to address the existing and emerging challenges in the maritime domain to remain a responsive



force. He conveyed to the mid and senior level leaders posted at the naval headquarters that they must remain focused on being "the solution providers" and "prioritising outcomes" towards a combat ready, credible, cohesive, and future ready Navy. The admiral praised the dedication and professionalism demonstrated by the personnel in meeting all mandated tasks by the service, according to a Navy spokesperson. In the last few months, the Indian Navy provided assistance to a number of cargo vessels after they came under attacks in strategic waters around the Red Sea. The Houthi militants have been targeting the merchant ships in the Red Sea apparently to build pressure on Israel to stop its military offensive in Gaza.

Shah: INDIA Bloc does not have any leader who can become PM

PTI ■ GHATAL (WB)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday launched a blistering attack on the "corrupt INDI alliance" and said the opposition bloc doesn't have any leader who can become Prime Minister.

While addressing a rally at Ghatal, Shah said the INDIA bloc leaders just want their dynasty to move ahead and "neither have any leaders to lead the country nor have any intention for the development of the nation."

Shah, while referring to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir said "PoK is part of India and we will take it."

"The INDI alliance doesn't have any leaders. The INDI alliance wants five PMs in five years. The INDI alliances neither have leaders nor have any intention for the development of the nation," he said.

The BJP leader said the ongoing parliamentary elections are about choosing between "leaders of dynastic politics or honest leader Narendra Modi" who



considers the country as his family. "Sharad Pawar wants his daughter to be the chief minister. Mamata Banerjee wants her nephew to succeed her as chief minister. Stalin (Tamil Nadu CM) wants to see his son succeed him. Sonia Gandhi wants Rahul Baba to become the Prime Minister of the country. On the other side, there is

Congress, SP Pakistan sympathisers: Modi

PTI ■ BASTI (UP)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday here called Congress and Samajwadi Party "sympathisers of Pakistan" and alleged that these parties are "scaring the country" with its nuclear power status.

Addressing a rally here, Modi alluded to the partnership in UP between Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav in 2017, when the two campaigned together for the Assembly elections — and failed. "I am surprised by the repeated release of flop film of two 'shehzadas' of SP and Congress," Modi said.

The Congress this time is contesting from 17 of the 80 Lok Sabha in a seat-sharing agreement with the SP.

On Pakistan, Modi said, "This patron of terrorism which once used to dare us in such a condition that its people are hard up even for food grain... Pakistan is finished but its sympathisers, SP and Congress, are busy scaring the country."



"They say one needs to be scared of Pakistan because it has an atom bomb. Don't they know what is 56-inch (chest)? It's not the weak Congress government ... But the strong government of Modi," he said at a rally campaigning for BJP's Basti Lok Sabha candidate Harish Dwivedi.

"India does not spare those who try to bully it. India today hits them in their own homes," he said.

Referring to Akhilesh Yadav's claim that the

Dharma... The shehzada of Congress wants to change the Supreme Court's judgement of Ram Temple. They dream of putting a Babri lock on the Ram temple and want to send Ram Lalla back to the tent," he said. Modi referred to the nearly two-year-long Emergency and said that Congress talks of Constitution but it did not even follow the party's constitution.

He claimed that former Congress president Sitaram Kesri, who belonged to a backward community, was locked in a bathroom the day Sonia Gandhi was made the party's president.

The PM also accused Congress of trying to change the Constitution and end reservation for the Dalits and backwards. "These people want to snatch the reservation of Dalit and Backwards and give it to those who do Vote Jihad. Congress wants to change the Constitution to give reservation to Muslims. Samajwadi Party is standing with Congress in its anti-Dalit and anti-backward conspiracy," he said.

On the SP, Modi said it used to accord goons and rioters special protocol during its government.

Yogi Adityanath and his government had to make efforts to bring UP from the ditch it was thrown in long back," Modi said.

Seeking the public's support, the PM said their votes will bury the "politics of appeasement in kabristan" and ensure the future of the country.

"We have become the fifth largest economy. When India speaks, the world listens and tries to accompany India in the decisions made by it," he said.

Modi was accompanied by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on the stage.

Adityanath in his address expressed confidence of thumping victory for the BJP. "When we talk of crossing 400, SP and Congress start fainting because they are not even contesting on 400 seats together."

BJP's Harish Dwivedi is pitted against Ram Prasad Chaudhary of Samajwadi Party. Polling in Basti will be held in the sixth phase on May 25.

AP police teams on hunt for YSRCP MLA who damaged EVM

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena on Wednesday said police teams have been formed to look for 'absconding' YSRCP MLA P Ramakrishna Reddy who vandalised an electronic voting machine (EVM) at a polling centre in Macharla constituency of Palnadu district.

The CEO said police raided Reddy's residence this morning, but he was not found there.

"His (Reddy) house was raided in the morning. He was not found, so several teams are now moving around to arrest him," Meena told media.

Mamata compromising national security for sake of vote bank politics, says Shah

PTI ■ KANTHI/GHATAL/PURULIA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of compromising national security for the sake of vote bank politics and "committing a sin" by allowing infiltrators to change the demography of the state.

Addressing back-to-back rallies in Kanthi, Ghatal, and Purulia Lok Sabha constituencies, Shah said the TMC will "disintegrate" and there will be a "farewell of Mamata Banerjee's government" after the BJP wins 30 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

"Bengal has become a safe haven for infiltrators. Due to infiltration, the state's demography is changing, impacting not only this state,



but the entire country. Banerjee is committing a sin by helping to change the demography of Bengal. She is compromising national security for sake of vote bank politics," he said.

Alleging that "infiltrators are the vote bank of the TMC," Shah said Banerjee is opposing the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to appease her vote bank.

"TMC ko ghuspetiyo se pyar aur CAA pe vaar' (TMC has a love for infiltrators and attacks the CAA). The infiltrators are the vote bank of the TMC," he said.

Shah criticised Banerjee's recent comments against certain monks of Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha, asserting that these socio-religious organisations are being threatened to appease the TMC's vote bank.

"Banerjee is attacking the Sangha, but she is not aware that had it not been there, Bengal would have been a part of Bangladesh," he said.

Addressing an election rally in Goghat under Arambagh LS constituency on Saturday, Banerjee had claimed, "Some monks of Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha are working under the influence of BJP leaders in Delhi.

JD(S) complains to police against Rahul for claiming MP Prajwal raped 400 women

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The JD(S) on Wednesday complained to Karnataka DGP Alok Mohan against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for allegedly claiming that Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing charges of sexual abuse, has "raped 400 women."

In a complaint, H M Ramesh Gowda, a former MLC and party's Bengaluru City president has sought registration of a criminal case against Gandhi under section 202 (Intentional omission to give information of an offence by a person legally bound to inform) of the Indian Penal Code for his alleged statement while addressing election rallies in the district headquarters of Shivamogga and Raichur on



May 2.

The JD(S) leader also cited the alleged statement by Gandhi in his complaint, "Prajwal Revanna has raped 400 women and made videos. This is not a sex scandal but mass rape. And the Prime Minister, in front of the people of Karnataka, was

supporting and seeking vote for this mass rapist. He is saying that if you vote for this mass rapist, it would help him."

The complainant said in the interest of justice for the alleged victims, Gandhi being a public servant is duty bound to give information of offence.

"In view of the fact that Gandhi has made a specific statement that Prajwal has raped 400 women, he is aware of the information and details of the 400 women raped and has intentionally failed to disclose the details," he stated in the complaint.

The 33-year-old Prajwal, who is the grandson of JD(S) patriarch and former PM H D Deve Gowda and is the NDA's candidate from Hassan Lok Sabha segment, is facing charges of multiple instances of sexually abusing women. The cases came to light after a number of explicit videos of sexual assault allegedly by Prajwal became public. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) is currently probing these cases.

"Till date, the SIT has also not issued any notice to Rahul Gandhi calling for such information for the statement made by Rahul Gandhi," the complaint stated.

However, no FIR has been registered yet in this regard, police said.

Prajwal reportedly left for Germany on April 27, a day after Hassan went to polls, and is still at large. Interpol has also issued a Blue Corner Notice seeking information on his whereabouts.

BJP gains ground as TMC battles to retain foothold in Suvendu Adhikari's backyard

PTI ■ KANTHI (WB)

The future of the Kanthi Lok Sabha constituency in West Bengal appears to be volatile on account of the dual and opposing factors of the BJP sharply gaining political ground and the TMC desperate to retain its sway over voters.

While the BJP looks emboldened by its recent rural poll successes and the Adhikari family's defection to the saffron camp, the TMC seems to be counting on its grassroots connections and the state's welfare schemes which the party believes have attained last-mile connectivity with the electorate.

Located in Purba Medinipur district, the Kanthi seat exemplifies dynasty politics through the influence of the state's Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari, whose family members have held



other constituencies of the state, featuring a distinctly bipolar electoral landscape where voters face a clear choice between supporting the BJP and its national agenda or favouring the TMC government in Bengal and its welfare schemes.

"In Kanthi, the binary nature of the contest underscores the significance of the political stakes involved, as voters will weigh their preferences between national and regional priorities. It will be a vote of 'Yes-BJP or No BJP and Yes-TMC or No-TMC'," political analyst Biswanath Chakraborty said.

Known for its fluctuating political affiliations, Kanthi has moved on from being an erstwhile CPI(M) stronghold to a TMC bastion and, more recently, to a key political arena of the BJP.

The initial transformation from the Left to the TMC was spurred by the 2007

Nandigram anti-land acquisition movement. The significant shift was driven by a grassroots uprising that followed strong disillusionment with CPI(M)'s land acquisition policies.

Since then the Adhikaris, led by the family patriarch Sisir Adhikari and his sons Suvendu, Dibyendu, and Soumendu, have held key political positions within the TMC in the region.

A dramatic shift occurred in December 2020, barely months ahead of the state assembly polls, when Suvendu defected from the TMC to the BJP.

This move significantly altered the political balance of Kanthi and Purba Medinipur. Suvendu's departure from the TMC meant not just the loss of a key leader of Mamata Banerjee's party but also the transfer of a considerable support base to the BJP.

Latur admin urges LS poll candidates to adhere to EC guidelines during vote counting on June 4

PTI ■ LATUR

The Latur district administration has sought cooperation from all candidates who contested the Lok Sabha polls from here and representatives of various political parties during the counting of votes on June 4.

Latur Collector Varsha Thakur-Ghughe held a meeting at her office on Tuesday and appealed to all the candidates and representatives of the political parties to adhere to guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India regarding the counting process.

Guideline handbooks for the election representatives were distributed on the occasion.

The collector said the district administration here in Maharashtra has completed preparations for the counting of votes.

All candidates are requested to inform the collector's office



about names of their representatives for counting. The representatives should be imparted training on the counting process and mobile phone is not allowed at the counting venue, the collector said.

The Election Commission of India has appointed two observers for the counting process, she said.

Modi, Shah to undertake another round of campaigning in Odisha

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Odisha on May 29, aiming to provide a final boost to BJP's electioneering efforts in the state, party sources said.

Modi's upcoming visit will include addresses at two election rallies in Balasore and Kendrapada Parliamentary constituencies, BJP's election in-charge for Odisha, Vijay Pal Singh Tomar said.

This will mark Modi's fourth visit to Odisha within a month, highlighting BJP's concerted efforts to strengthen its electoral prospects in the state.

Previously, the PM visited Odisha on May 6, 10, and 19, during which he addressed seven election rallies and held two road shows in Bhubaneswar and Puri.

Vikramaditya, Kangana trade charges over black flag protest against her

PTI ■ MANDI/SHIMLA

Trading barbs over black flags shown to the BJP's Lok Sabha candidate from Mandi Kangana Ranaut in Lahaul and Spiti's Kaza two days back, the Congress' Vikramaditya Singh targeted the actor Wednesday over her remark against the Dalai Lama from April last year.

"People of the tribal area worship Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama as their God and if someone passes any remarks against their God, they will surely not like it and protest," Singh, who contesting the election against Ranaut, said in Mandi in response to a question.

Hitting back at Singh, Ranaut alleged that the Congress was behind the protest against her. The Congress has stooped to

hooliganism and the Kaza incident would prove to be the last nail in its coffin and contribute to her winning margin, the BJP candidate added.

"I feel sad to see such hooliganism which reflects the Congress' character... People have seen the true face of the Congress, which is indulging in violence and hooliganism," she told media persons in Lahaul and Spiti's Udaipur.

Singh, however, said his party had nothing to do with the incident and accused the BJP of blaming the Congress as it was losing the elections. They were referring to



black flags being shown to Ranaut by local people and Congress workers in Kaza on Monday. The Congress workers raised anti-Kangana slogans — "Kangana, go back, Kangana Vangana nahi chalegi", apparently enraged over her remarks on the Tibetan spiritual leader.

Ranaut had in April last year tweeted a meme featuring the Dalai Lama that said, "The Dalai Lama receives a warm welcome at the White House". The photoshopped picture in the tweet showed the Dalai Lama sticking his tongue out with US President Joe Biden with a comment — Both of them have the same illness. Definitely, they could be friends. Following this, a group of

Buddhists staged a dharna outside her office in Mumbai. Ranaut later apologised, saying she did not mean to hurt anyone and that it was a harmless joke about Biden being friends with the Dalai Lama. After Ranaut faced the protest in Kaza on Monday, the Himachal Pradesh BJP filed a complaint with the state chief electoral officer. The party alleged that stones were pelted at Ranaut's carcade and party worker was injured.

It also demanded the transfer of election officials and an investigation into the incident as both the BJP and the Congress were given permission to hold rallies adjacent to each other.

However, Lahaul and Spiti SP Mayank Chowdhary told PTI that workers of both the BJP and the

Listing his priorities for the Mandi parliamentary constituency, Vikramaditya Singh, the son of former chief minister Virbhadra Singh and Himachal Congress chief Pratibha Singh, said his focus would be on bringing the municipal corporation of Mandi under the Smart City project and the construction of the Bhubhu Jot and Jalori Jot tunnels and the Kullu Medical College.



FIRST COLUMN

DELETERIOUS EFFECTS OF WORKPLACE GASLIGHTING

It is a menace that undermines individuals' perceptions, beliefs and reality



SAKSHI SETHI

In the network of modern workplaces, emerges a shadowy spectre, threatening the very fabric of organisational culture and well-being - Gaslighting, a form of psychological manipulation in which one person seeks to undermine another person's perceptions, beliefs or reality often done regularly or subtly making the victim doubt their perception, memories or sanity by shifting blame or responsibility onto the victim.

Gaslighting can create a hostile work environment where employees feel anxious and confused and at times even question their competence causing a detrimental effect on themselves, their teams and organisational culture. It is a form of psychological manipulation that can have serious consequences for the well-being and productivity of those involved. When talked about the workplace, the term Gaslight can manifest in myriad forms, often subtle and insidious. It may begin with seemingly innocuous comments undermining an individual's contributions or abilities and may gradually lead to dealing with small instances of manipulation that escalate over time. Gaslighting tactics often target an individual's sense of self-worth, competence and confidence resulting in significant emotional distress, including feelings of anxiety, depression and confusion. It even isolates victims from their support networks by undermining their relationships with coworkers, friends and even family members.



It is often believed that toxic workplace gaslighting can stem from various causes that are often rooted in systemic issues, interpersonal dynamics or individual motivations such as power imbalances, insecure leadership, lack of accountability, interpersonal conflicts and many more. When communication breaks down, tensions escalate, egos clash and employees/individuals start resorting to gaslighting as a means of gaining leverage or inflicting harm.

Addressing the toxic workplace gaslighting requires a comprehensive approach that involves raising awareness, fostering a culture of respect and accountability and providing support for those impacted. Promoting transparency, accountability and psychological safety in organisations is crucial to recognise toxic gaslighting behaviour effectively.

Undoubtedly, workplace gaslighting thrives on power imbalances and psychological manipulation. Victims of gaslighting suffer immense stress, anxiety and identity erosion. Prolonged exposure leads to physical health issues like headaches, GI problems and sleep disturbances, weakening immunity and increasing illness risks.

It becomes crucial for the victims to first recognise and validate their experiences, refusing to internalise the gaslighter's manipulations. The use of assertive communication techniques, such as "I" Statements and boundary-setting, can help individuals confront gaslighting behaviour while preserving their self-esteem and dignity. Additionally, fostering a culture of accountability and transparency within organisations empowers employees to speak out against gaslighting tactics without fear of reprisal. Remember, when personal gain takes precedence over ethical conduct, gaslighting may become a tempting strategy. The only way that may benefit the victims of gaslighting is by seeking support from trusted colleagues, mentors or mental health professionals. By creating a workplace culture that promotes open communication, respect and accountability can the organisation help prevent gaslighting and other forms of manipulation from taking hold as left unchecked, it can inflict lasting psychological harm, exacerbating issues of mental health and well-being in the workplace.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Do not withdraw capital support for oil PSUs



UTTAM GUPTA

The Government slashes equity infusions for three major oil sector CPSUs by 50 per cent, contradicting its 2023-24 budget commitments



In the Budget for the financial year 2023-24 (April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024) presented on February 1 last year, the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced an equity infusion of Rs 30,000 crore in three Central public sector undertakings (CPSUs) viz. Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), are majority-owned by the Government of India (GOI). She had also proposed Rs 5,000 crore for buying crude oil to bolster its strategic reserves (SRs) in underground storages at Mangalore in Karnataka and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh. The equity infusions in IOCL/BPCL/HPCL were meant to support their capital investment plans for the transition to 'Green Energy' and achieve 'Net Zero' objectives. Net zero refers to a situation where the emissions of polluting gases such as carbon dioxide due to human activities and their removals are in balance over a given period. On the other hand, the allocation for SRs was meant to guard against the possibility of any disruption in its supply.

Under the above, IOCL and BPCL had done necessary spade work including approval by their respective boards for coming up with 'rights issues' of requisite amounts to enable the Union Government to give effect to its capital contribution (albeit by way of equity) promised in the budget. In the case of HPCL, the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) having acquired majority equity shares from the GOI in FY 2017-18 was to come up with the issue of the preferential issue to give effect to the latter's budgetary intention. However, in a big climb down, in November 2023, the Government reduced the amount of equity infusion to the trio by 50 per cent to Rs 15,000 crore even while deferring implementation of the budgetary announcement on the SRs. Meanwhile, the Interim Budget for FY 2024-25 presented by Sitharaman on February 1, 2024, didn't show any allocation for equity infusion for FY 2023-24. The said amount has been earmarked for the FY 2024-25. This was confirmed by Finance Secretary T V

Somanathan at a post-budget press conference. As for SRs, the budget documents do not provide any funds either in the revised estimate for FY 2023-24 or during FY 2024-25.

Why did the Government climb down?

Even as the Ministry of Finance (MoF) hasn't given any reason, it seems the decision was prompted by a significant boost to their profitability during 2023-24. The IOCL posted a standalone net profit of close to Rs 40,000 crore as against a profit of a little over Rs 8000 crore during 2022-23. The BPCL posted a net profit of around Rs 26,500 crore in 2023-24, compared to about Rs 1,850 crore profit during 2022-23. The HPCL posted a profit of around Rs 14,500 crore during 2023-24 against a loss of about Rs 9,000 crore in 2022-23.



JUST BECAUSE DURING FY 2023-24, THEY HAVE IMPROVED THEIR PROFITS DUE TO CONTINUING MODERATION IN THE PRICE OF CRUDE OIL, IT WON'T BE LOGICAL TO TRIM THE PROMISED BUDGETARY SUPPORT

When the companies can generate good profits hence, a good investible surplus for meeting their investment commitments, why do they need the Government's budgetary support? But, there is much more than what meets the eye on a plain reading of the profit numbers. First, out of the net profit, a substantial amount is paid as dividends to the shareholders. For instance, in case IOCL @Rs 7 on a share of Rs 10 each, the payout during 2023-24 on a total of 1,412 crore outstanding shares would be around Rs 10,000 crore.

Second, these undertakings are engaged in the business of refining crude oil to produce a range of finished products such as petrol, diesel, LPG etc besides importing them to meet their demand. That makes their operations highly capital-intensive. Consequently, their investment requirements for expansion and growth are heavy. This is exacerbated by their commitments regarding the transition to 'Green Energy'. While IOCL has decided to

achieve 'Net Zero' by 2040, BPCL and HPCL intend to reach this goal by 2045.

Third, the most potent reason as to why the Government shouldn't backtrack on the capital support once promised to oil PSUs has to do with the loss the latter had suffered during FY 2022-23, courtesy of directions given by the former regarding setting retail prices of petrol and diesel. To understand the full ramifications of such orders, let us look at some basics.

Petrol and diesel were deregulated long back in June 2010 and November 2014 respectively. As a result, oil PSUs got the freedom to fix their retail prices. The price is fixed as refinery-gate price or RGP (import parity price or IPP and export parity price or EPP of the fuel in the ratio of 80:20) plus freight, marketing costs, marketing margin, dealers' commission taxes and duties. Considering that over 85 per cent of India's crude oil needed for making refined products is imported (the balance 15 per cent is sourced from domestic companies such as ONGC, Oil India Limited or OIL) etc, an increase/decrease in its international price should lead to corresponding increase/decrease in the retail price of petrol and diesel but only if the marketing PSUs are allowed to fix the price strictly as per the formula. But, this is rarely done. The Government issues tacit instructions to IOCL/BPCL/HPCL (together, they account for around 90 per cent of the domestic fuel retail network in the country) to fix the retail price. This is driven by extraneous considerations. Ever since the start of the Ukraine war in February 2022, the international price of oil has been on the boil. The average of the basket of crude oil that India imports during April-September 2022 was \$ 103.7 per barrel against the \$90 per barrel that prevailed before the war started. But,

these PSUs were told to keep the price of petrol and diesel unchanged for six months. This led to substantial under-recovery from the sale of these products.

For instance, in June 2022, the price of petrol in Delhi remained at Rs 97 per litre corresponding to the pre-war crude price of US\$ 90 per barrel. This was despite the price of crude jumping to US\$ 116 per barrel which would have required the price to be set at Rs 112 per litre. Consequently, on the sale of petrol during June 2022, the PSUs suffered under-recovery of Rs 15 per litre (112-97).

Cumulatively, the three PSUs incurred a loss of around Rs 40,000 crore during the first half of FY 2022-23. As the crude price started to decrease from October 2022 onward, their finances became a shade better during the second half. For the whole year, they posted a meagre profit of Rs 850 crore. The capital infusion of Rs 30,000 crore proposed in the budget for 2023-24 was meant to help them offset the losses incurred in the previous year.

Just because during FY 2023-24, they have improved their profits due to continuing moderation in the price of crude oil, it won't be logical to trim the promised budgetary support. Moreover, they need some cushion to guard against crude prices moving north yet again; that possibility is not ruled out considering the continuing tense geo-political situation. For the same reason, the Government shouldn't defer bolstering the strategic buffer of crude oil.

In sync with its emphasis on 'predictability' and 'stability' of the policy, having deregulated petrol and diesel, the Government shouldn't interfere in the process of setting prices by the oil PSUs.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Is AI a game changer or a disruptor in the communication landscape?

Artificial Intelligence has introduced complex dilemmas, balancing data-driven insights with human ingenuity and profoundly impacting various sectors

The growing tentacles of AI have become a push factor for change, innovation and disruption in the borderless world that we live in today. AI tools, processes and its vast architecture have been billed as game changers, influencing a vast range of stakeholders including policymakers, Governments, multi-lateral bodies, agencies and institutions, which are responsible for carving out the road ahead. The debate today hovers around whether AI has become a disruptor or a transformative catalyst leading to a new normal, which is unpredictable, tech-driven and bereft of the necessary human connection. It has disrupted the communication engagement matrix to a terrain that at



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

times is daunting, unpredictable, spontaneous and instant. In the given context, it is important to understand that AI has truly created layers of dilemma, a tug-of-war related to ideas, content, data analysis and the conflict between human minds and data-driven mindsets. We are in a situation perhaps where we over-depend on machines, their learning tools & predictability leading to an

ecosystem that is technology savvy, the behaviour of stakeholders being driven by data metrics and accompanying models and influenced by the power of prediction. The impact of AI has been profound in several areas, as the search for the unknown has grown bigger. A report on India's media and entertainment sector published by EY #Reinventin 2024 mentions that AI can provide an Rs 450 billion boost to the Indian M&E sector by 2027. The report also mentions AI and especially Gen AI - gives it the tools the sector has always dreamed of and can result in a 10 per cent revenue growth and 15 per cent cost efficiency. AI is now used for measuring the effectiveness of campaigns, the growth of cus-

tomised solutions for addressing issues, analysing data for data-driven narratives and stakeholder engagement and changing equations in the context of the client-agency relationship. There is a need to balance human competence with tech tools and the fear of the unknown in the future. For AI to succeed its performance indicators must be based on open, transparent and inclusive. Its tools are re-engineered to reflect the spirit of "Oneness", and "The World is One Family" and the social and economic impact is studied and analysed. As far as outreach is concerned, the need is to balance the technology push that characterises AI outlining its operational efficiency and the creative quotient of human

beings. As a tool for outreach AI supplements outreach with data-focused audience insights which provide practitioners with a feel of audience preferences and behaviours leading to focused and targeted communication strategies. The data processing of the medium also leads to a better and more comprehensive understanding of stakeholder demographics, dynamics, strategy protocols and audience behaviour. There is an urgent need to integrate the communication matrix with the broad themes to ensure a seamless operation of both verticals. AI being futuristic commands the means to create a positive perception of the AI architecture. Some of the themes to be discussed are AI and Machine

Learning in communication networks, AI-powered communication networks: Shaping a greener digital future and including other sectors such as health, environment and education. In all such discussions, the process of communicating the theme will be critical for both policymakers and practitioners. It is also critical that in the era of change, the continuity of technology is weaved with access that is open and democratic. The benefits of positive change must be beneficial to all through the principle of open sourcing; tools, processes, opportunities and community participation. There must be standard operating procedures and processes that ensure the standardisation of algorithms, address

the frailties of human behaviour and integrate the machine and human mind. Technological advancement is only possible if the gap is bridged between the haves and have-nots. AI as a tool for policy formulation and information dissemination should be based on the strong foundations of adaptability, cohesiveness, inclusivity, access and a proper understanding of the complex and diverse social ecosystem of which we are its key constituents. As the impact of AI grows across different terrains, the evolution has to be in sync with human abilities and the irreplaceable human trait that characterises outreach. To ensure a sustainable process, AI needs to follow the five mantras of outreach commu-

nication: Being Receptive, Responsive, Responsible and Reciprocal and Reconcile to the needs and requirements of an ecosystem that believes in equity, equal participation, mutual recognition and collaboration. The success of communication depends on the balance between perception, tools and trust i.e. positioned across different platforms and sectors. A model of this nature will certainly ensure a perfect symphony between AI and the communication landscape bringing forth an effective and lasting communication process.

(The writer is a former civil servant. Views are Personal. Inputs by Vaishnavie Srinivasan and Zoya Ahmad)

Norway, Ireland and Spain give recognition to Palestinian state

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Norway, Ireland and Spain said on Wednesday they are recognizing a Palestinian state, in a historic but largely symbolic move that deepens Israel's isolation more than seven months into its grinding war against Hamas in Gaza. The announcements came as the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is seeking arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his defense minister and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is considering allegations of genocide that Israel has strenuously denied.

Palestinians welcomed the announcements as an affirmation of their decades-long quest for statehood in east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — territories Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war and still controls. Israel recalled its ambassadors to the three countries and summoned their envoys, accusing the Europeans of rewarding the militant Hamas group for its October 7 attack that triggered the war. Netanyahu's government, which is opposed to Palestinian statehood, says the conflict can only be resolved through direct negotiations, which last collapsed over 15 years ago.

As if to underline the point, Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir paid a provocative visit Wednesday to a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem sacred to Jews and Muslims in a move that could escalate tensions across the region. Ben-Gvir said the visit was a response to the move by the three European countries. "We will not even allow a statement about a Palestinian state," he said.

The Al-Aqsa mosque compound is the third holiest site in Islam, and the hilltop on which it stands is the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount.

With their formal recognition, planned for May 28, the three countries will join some 140 — more than two-thirds of the United Nations — that



Demonstrators display Palestinian flags and chant slogans while marching Tuesday in Boston. AP/PTI

have recognized the state of Palestine over the years. The United States and Britain, among others, have backed the idea of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel but say it should come as part of a negotiated settlement. The announcements from Europe came in a swift cascade. Norway, which helped broker the Oslo accords that kicked off the peace process in the 1990s, was the first to announce its decision, with Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store saying "there cannot be peace in the Middle East if there is no recognition."

Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris called it an "historic and important day for Ireland and for Palestine," saying the announcements had been coordinated and that other countries might join "in the weeks ahead."

The international community has long viewed the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel as the only realistic way to resolve the conflict, and in past weeks several European Union countries have indicated they plan to recognize a Palestinian state to further those efforts. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who announced his country's decision before parliament, has spent months touring European and Middle Eastern countries to garner support for recognition, as well as for a possible cease-fire in Gaza.

'Israel addresses Biden's concerns over Rafah op'

Cairo (AP): Israel has addressed many of President Joe Biden's concerns over its long-simmering plan to carry out a wide-scale military operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah aimed at rooting out Hamas, a senior Biden administration official said Tuesday.

The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and requested anonymity, said that in talks over the weekend with White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan, Israeli officials incorporated many changes into their planning that seem to meet concerns about deepening an operation in an area that has been flooded with Palestinian refugees during the seven-month war. Biden had previously said he opposed a wide-scale operation in Rafah that did not prioritize the safety of innocent Palestinian civilians.

The official said the administration stopped short of green-lighting the Israeli plan but said Israeli officials' altered planning suggested they were taking the American administration's concerns seriously. About 900,000 Palestinians have fled Rafah in recent weeks after the population swelled to about 1.5 million.

occupation of our land." Hamas, which Western countries and Israel view as a terrorist group, does not recognize Israel's existence but has indicated it might agree to a state on the 1967 lines, at least on an interim basis.

The announcements are unlikely to have any impact on the ground. Israel annexed east Jerusalem and considers it part of its capital, and in the occupied West Bank it has built scores of Jewish settlements that are now home to over 5,000,000 Israelis. The settlers have Israeli citizenship, while the 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank live under seemingly open-ended Israeli military rule.

Singapore Airlines cooperating in severe turbulence probe

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore Airlines on Wednesday said it is fully cooperating with relevant authorities in the investigation into the London to Singapore flight which encountered severe turbulence, leading to the death of one passenger and injuring nearly 60 others. Geoffrey Kitchen, a 73-year-old British passenger, died likely due to a heart attack on the Singapore Airlines (SIA) flight SQ321, operating from London (Heathrow) to Singapore on Tuesday, said Kittipong Kittikachorn, General Manager of Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok, to where the flight was diverted under emergency. Nearly 60 passengers were injured after the flight on May 21 encountered "sudden extreme turbulence over the Irrawaddy Basin at 37,000 feet about 10 hours after departure". The carrier said the remaining

passengers aboard the Boeing 777-300ER aircraft carrying 229 people were examined and treated at the airport.

The SIA is fully cooperating with the relevant authorities in probing this incident, the flag carrier's Chief Executive Officer, Goh Choon Phong, said.

As many as 58 people are still receiving medical treatment in three hospitals in Bangkok, Channel News Asia reported, citing officials at the Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital.

At least 20 injured passengers are being treated in intensive care units, while 38 passengers are receiving in-patient care, the report said.

The Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital has 41 patients, while 15 patients are in the Samitivej Sukhumvit Hospital, and two are in Bangkok Hospital, it said. Of the patients in Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital, nine successfully underwent surgery on Tuesday and five more are

expected to undergo surgery on Wednesday, it added.

As many as 131 passengers and 12 crew members, who earlier arrived in Singapore via a relief flight on May 22, were received at Changi Airport by Goh. The SIA, in its latest update, confirmed an additional five passengers and one crew member will return to Singapore on Wednesday.

Another 74 passengers and six crew members, including those receiving medical care and their family members and loved ones who were on the flight, were still in Bangkok.

"For passengers with onward connections, we have rebooked them on alternative flights. We have also arranged hotel accommodation or lounge access for them to rest until their next flight," Singapore's flag carrier said. "On behalf of the Singapore Airlines Board, I extend my deepest condolences to the family and loved

ones of our passenger who passed away on May 21, 2024, in the SQ321 incident. I assure all passengers and crew members who were on board the aircraft that we are committed to supporting them during this difficult time," said Peter Seah, Chairman of Singapore Airlines.

"I also wish to express my gratitude to everyone in Singapore, Thailand, and around the world who are assisting those affected by this incident," Seah said. The nationalities of the passengers are as follows: 56 from Australia, three Indians, two from Canada, one from Germany, two Indonesians, one from Iceland, four from Ireland, one from Israel, 16 from Malaysia, two from Myanmar, 23 from New Zealand, five from the Philippines, 41 Singaporeans, one South Korean, two from Spain, 47 from the United Kingdom, and four from the US.

UK hails drop in visas as stranded Indian workers appeal for help

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK government on Wednesday hailed a significant drop in healthcare visa applications following its restrictions on family dependants, even as hundreds of Indian care workers who find themselves unfairly stranded in the country appeal for help.

Latest Home Office statistics reveal a 76 per cent drop in overseas workers applying for jobs in the UK's care sector and a 58 per cent fall in family dependents in the Health and Care visa category in the first full month since restrictions were in place, compared with April 2023. Indian nationals topped the Health and Care visa grants last year. The number of dependants, or spouses and children, in the student visa category, also registered a significant drop of 79 per cent over the same period since those new rules came into force earlier this year. "This monthly data is the most

up-to-date picture of visa levels, showing that on current trajectories legal migration continues to fall across key routes," said UK Home Secretary James Cleverly.

"The British people deserve an immigration system that puts their interests first. Our approach is about control and fairness; to the highly skilled coming here who deserve a decent wage, to taxpayers who shouldn't be relied on to support them, and to British workers who shouldn't be undercut," he said.

The monthly data was released to reflect the impact of changes by the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak-led government, which is keen to show falling immigration numbers ahead of a general election later this year. Since March, previously unmonitored care providers in England acting as sponsors for migrants are required to register with industry regulator Care Quality Commission (CQC) — a move the govern-

ment said will address worker exploitation and abuse within the sector.

Indian nationals have topped the Health and Care visa grants, with 38,866 given out last year, and are now facing the brunt of these previously lax rules governing dubious recruitment agencies. "Some of these victims had borrowed thousands of pounds to get the visas and now face deportation for no fault of theirs," said the National Council of Gujarati Organisations (NCGO) UK, which is lobbying on behalf of these workers, many of whom are from Gujarat.

"Some of these agencies are bogus and operate from a hired desk at serviced offices. The majority of them were not checked for their genuineness by the Home Office and were issued with quotas like confetti," said Kanti Nagda of the NCGO UK, which is now seeking a meeting with the Home Secretary to appeal on behalf of these workers.

Four accused of killing Nijjar appear before Canada court

Ottawa (PTI): Four Indian nationals accused of killing Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar last year in Surrey were ordered by a Canadian court to have no contact with several people in the community, as they made their first joint appearance before it in the case that has severely strained ties between India and Canada.

Three of the four suspects — Karan Brar (22), Kamalpreet Singh (22) and 28-year-old Karanpreet Singh — appeared in person for the first time in B.C. Provincial Court in Surrey. The fourth suspect — Amandeep Singh, 22, — appeared by video link. Amandeep Singh remains in custody in Ontario where he was facing unrelated weapons offences before being arrested on May 10 for Nijjar's killing. Judge Mark Jette spoke to the men through an interpreter as he placed them under a no-contact order, before adjourning until the suspects' next appearance on June 25, CBC News reported.

Prosecutor Marcel Daigle said the time until the next hearing will allow the Crown to fulfill its evidentiary disclosure obligations to the suspects' lawyers. Those appearing in person wore red prison sweatsuits as they entered the courtroom.

Richard Fowler, the lawyer representing Karan Brar, told the Vancouver Sun, "it's completely understandable given the context why there is an enormous amount of community interest in this case. That level of community interest makes me...to ensure that those charged with these offences have a fair trial." Attendees at the latest hearing for the men were searched before entering the courthouse, while the supporters of Nijjar held a protest outside.

Sheriffs at the hearing placed people's phones in plastic zipper bags and kept them outside the courtroom in plastic bins, with the judge warning observers that recording audio and taking pictures was prohibited, the report added. Nijjar, 45, was killed outside Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia on June 18, 2023.

Iran's supreme leader prays for late president, others

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran's supreme leader prayed Wednesday over the coffins of the country's late president, foreign minister and other officials who were killed in a helicopter crash earlier this week. Later, hundreds of thousands of people followed a procession honouring the dead down Tehran's main boulevard.

Iran's Shiite theocracy views mass demonstrations as crucial evidence of its legitimacy and the people's support. Still, Wednesday's funeral service for President Ebrahim Raisi and others saw a turnout that onlookers described as noticeably lower than the 2020 procession honouring Revolutionary Guard general Qassem Soleimani, who was killed in a US drone strike in Baghdad. Many of the participants said they came to Tehran for the ceremony from other cities and towns across the Islamic Republic, an indication of how those in Iran's capital viewed Raisi, who won the presidency in a record low turnout and later oversaw repeated crackdowns on all dissent — including in the



Iransians follow a truck carrying coffins of the late President Ebrahim Raisi and his companions who were killed in a helicopter crash on Sunday in a mountainous region of the country's northwest, during a funeral ceremony for them in Tehran, Iran, Wednesday. AP/PTI

wake of the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini that sparked street protests over Iran's mandatory hijab, or headscarf. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who openly wept for Soleimani, also remained composed while reciting the stan-

dard prayer for the dead. "Oh Allah, we didn't see anything but good from him," Khamenei said in Arabic, the language of Islam's holy book, the Quran. He soon left and the crowd inside rushed to the front, reaching out to touch the

coffins. Iran's acting president, Mohammad Mokhber, stood nearby and openly cried.

The death of Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and six others in the crash on Sunday comes at a politically sensitive moment for Iran, both at home and abroad.

Raisi, who was 63, had been discussed as a possible successor to the position among Iran's political elite — particularly one who is a Shiite cleric, like Raisi. During Raisi's term in office, Iran launched an unprecedented attack on Israel last month as its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip rages on. Iran has supported Hamas through-

out the war and provided weaponry to the militants.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh attended the prayers Wednesday morning, just two days after the International Criminal Court's prosecutor said he'd seek an arrest warrant for him and others over the October 7 attack that sparked the latest Israel-Hamas war. In the unprecedented assault on southern Israel, Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people and seized 250 hostages.

The ICC prosecutor is also seeking arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for their conduct in the war, which has seen more than 35,000 Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip and also hundreds in the West Bank.

Haniyeh recounted meeting Raisi earlier this year in Tehran during Ramadan, the holy Muslim fasting month, and heard the president say the Palestinian issue remains the key one for the Muslim world. He also described Raisi calling the October 7 attack an "earthquake in the heart of the Zionist entity."

Nepalese climber Kami Rita climbs Everest for 30th time

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's veteran summiteer Kami Rita Sherpa made history on Wednesday by scaling Mt Everest for the 30th time, breaking his own record that he made 10 days ago for the highest number of ascents on the world's highest peak.

The 54-year-old legendary mountaineer reached the 8,849-metre peak at 7:49 am local time, according to Tashi Lakpa Sherpa, Chief Executive Officer at the 14 Peaks Expedition high-altitude sports company.

Kami summited the peak for the 29th time only 10 days ago. "He has scaled Everest on May 12 for the 29th time," The Himalayan Times newspaper quoted Tashi Lakpa as saying.



Kami, a senior mountain guide at the 14 Peaks Expedition and Seven Summit Treks, climbed Mt Everest for the first time in May 1994, the report said. He was born on January 17, 1970, and his mountaineering journey began in 1992 when he joined an expedition to the highest peak as a supporting staff. Kami developed a deep passion for climbing from a young age and has been scal-

ing mountains for over two decades, Tashi Lakpa said.

Besides Mt Everest, he has also conquered Mt K2, Cho Oyu, Lhotse, and Manaslu.

Last year, he successfully scaled Mt Everest for the 27th and 28th times in the same season.

His closest rival, 46-year-old Pasand Dawa Sherpa of Solukhumbu, also completed his 27th summit of Everest last year. Altogether, 414 climbers from 41 expeditions have acquired permission to scale Everest this season. Official data from 2023 showed that since 1953's Hillary-Norgay summit, around 7,000 mountaineers have successfully scaled Mt Everest while over 300 have lost their lives.

Trump hush money trial concludes without his testimony

AP ■ NEW YORK

Donald Trump's hush money trial moved into a new phase Tuesday, drawing closer to the moment when the jury will begin deciding his fate after testimony concluded without the former president taking the stand in his own defense.

"Your honor, the defense rests," Trump lawyer Todd Blanche told the judge. Trump's team ended with a former federal prosecutor who was called to attack the credibility of the prosecution's key witness, one of two people summoned to the stand by the defense. The Manhattan district attorney's office called 20 witnesses over 15 days of testimony before resting its case Monday.

The jury was sent home for a week, until May 28, when closing arguments are expected, but the attorneys returned to the courtroom to debate how the judge will instruct jurors on deliberations, a sort of road map meant to help them apply the law to the evidence and testimony. The two sides haggled over word choices, legal phrases and how to describe various campaign-related issues. Trump, the first former American president to be tried criminally, did not answer questions about why he did not testify.

Trump had previously said he wanted to take the witness stand in his own defense, but there was no requirement or even expectation that he do so. Defendants routinely decline to testify. His attorneys, instead of mounting an effort to demonstrate Trump's innocence to jurors, focused on attacking the

credibility of the prosecution witnesses. That's a routine defense strategy; the burden of proof in a criminal case lies with the prosecution. The defense doesn't have to prove a thing.

Yet even as Trump denounces the trial as a politically motivated travesty of justice, he has been working to turn the proceedings into an offshoot of his presidential campaign. He's capitalized on the trial as a fundraising pitch, used his time in front of the cameras to criticize President Joe Biden and showcased a parade of his own political supporters.

Prosecutors have accused the presumptive Republican presidential nominee of a scheme to scoop up and bury negative stories in an illegal effort to influence the 2016 presidential election. Trump has pleaded

not guilty to falsifying business records to conceal the alleged scheme and denied any wrongdoing. It's the first of Trump's four criminal cases to go to trial, and quite possibly the only one before the 2024 presidential election.

"They have no case," Trump said outside court. "There's no crime."

He also again attacked the prosecutor, despite repeated warnings from Judge Juan M. Merchan not to violate a gag order that bars him from publicly commenting on witnesses, prosecutors, court staff or the judge's family.

Jurors have been given a lesson on the underbelly of the tabloid business world, where Trump allies at the National Enquirer launched a plan to keep seamy, sometimes outrageous stories about Trump out of the public

eye by paying tens of thousands of dollars to "catch and kill" them. They watched as a porn actress, Stormy Daniels, recounted in discomfiting detail an alleged sexual encounter with Trump in a hotel room. Trump says nothing sexual happened between them.

And they sat intently in the jury box as Trump's former-lawyer-turned-foe Michel Cohen placed Trump in the middle of the scheme to buy Daniels' story to keep it from going public in the waning weeks before the 2016 presidential election. During that time, Republicans were wringing their hands in distress over the potential political fallout from the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape, where Trump bragged about grabbing women sexually without asking permission.

Russian attacks on Ukraine power grid hit Kyiv with blackouts

AP ■ KYIV

Sustained Russian attacks on Ukraine's power grid in recent weeks have forced leaders of the war-ravaged country to institute nationwide rolling blackouts. Without adequate air defences to counter assaults and allow for repairs, though, the shortages could still worsen as need spikes in late summer and the bitter-cold winter. The Russian airstrikes targeting the grid since March have meant blackouts have even returned to the capital, Kyiv, which hadn't experienced them since the first year of the war. Among the strikes were an April barrage that damaged Kyiv's largest thermal power plant and a massive attack on May 8 that targeted power generation and transmission facilities in several regions. In all, half of Ukraine's energy system was damaged, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said. Entire apartment blocks in the capital went dark. The city's

military administration said at least 10 per cent of consumers were disconnected. For many, it is a taste of what might be in store if Ukraine doesn't find other electricity sources before winter. With no end in sight to the attacks on the power grid and without a way to adequately defend against them, there are no quick fixes to the electricity shortages, Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko explained. Ukraine is appealing to Western allies for more air defence systems and spare parts to fix its Soviet-era plants. "With each attack we lose additional power generation, so it just goes minus, minus, minus," Halushchenko said on Tuesday while standing outside a coal-fired plant in central Ukraine that was destroyed in an April 11 attack. Any efforts to repair the plant would be futile until the military can defend it from another attack. "Should we repair (power stations) just for them

(Russians) to renew strikes while we are unable to defend ourselves?" the minister asked. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock's joined him on the plant visit, underscoring Ukraine's desperation to close the power gap as quickly as possible. The first major test of the grid will come in July and August, when consumption can mirror levels in the sub-freezing winter months, the minister said. By mid-May, Kyiv's residents began to feel the consequences of Russia's attacks. A cold snap drove up consumption, forcing Ukrrenerg, the main transmission system operator, to introduce controlled blackouts throughout the country. Ukraine can't generate enough power to cover evening peaks, and the shortage is greater than the country's ability to import electricity from Poland, Slovakia and Romania. The April 11 attack on the plant destroyed generators, transformers and turbines — every

necessary part to generate electricity, said Yevhen Harkavyi, the technical director of Centerenergo, which operates the plant. Five missiles hit the facility that day, and workers were still clearing away rubble on Tuesday as snow-like tufts of poplar cotton fell through a hole in the roof. The plan for winter is to restore power generation as much as possible, said Harkavyi. How that will happen isn't clear, he conceded. "The situation is already too difficult." Ukraine is hoping to acquire parts from long-decommissioned German plants. Harkavyi said Ukrainian teams recently went to Germany to evaluate the equipment, which was taken offline because it doesn't meet European Union environmental standards. It remains to be seen how willing European allies will be to invest in Ukraine's coal-fuelled energy sector given their own green goals.

Pak court rejects plea to disqualify Imran for concealing alleged daughter's name in 2018 nomination papers

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court has rejected a petition seeking the disqualification of former prime minister Imran Khan for concealing his alleged daughter Tyrian White while submitting his nomination papers for the 2018 general elections. The Islamabad High Court (IHC) took up the petition on Tuesday after a gap of almost a year, the Dawn newspaper reported. The petition alleged that the 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party founder had not disclosed his alleged daughter — Tyrian White — in his nomination papers for contesting the 2018 general elections. Khan's PTI party won the 2018 general elections, and the former cricketer-turned-politician served as the prime minister of Pakistan from August 2018 to April 2022. The IHC rejected the petition after noting that a three-judge bench had previously dismissed it, the



report said. Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri read the opinion of the two judges given last year and ruled that the case has already been dismissed. On May 10, 2023, a three-member bench of the court

hearing the case was dissolved by IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq after the opinion of two of the three judges — supporting the petition's dismissal — was uploaded on the court's website. The majority judgement was

deleted from the website minutes after it was uploaded, and the IHC chief justice dissolved the bench. Khan's party welcomed the judgement, saying that the two judges had already decided the case, but the IHC chief justice "tried to keep it alive on technicalities". Senior lawyers questioned the constitution of a fresh bench when the case had been decided earlier, according to the report. The petition said that even though Khan had three children, he had mentioned only two in the papers and concealed the existence of his third child. It also alleged that Khan did not marry his alleged girlfriend Sita White, mother of Tyrian, because her father told Khan that he would not get a "penny" from his wealth if he married Sita. The PTI founder initially joined the proceedings but later backtracked after he was asked to undergo a blood test, it added.

Vietnam's top security official confirmed as pres

AP ■ BANGKOK

Vietnam's top security official To Lam was confirmed on Wednesday as the nation's new president. He oversaw police and intelligence operations over a period when rights groups say basic liberties have been systematically suppressed, and its secret service was accused of violating international law. Lam was confirmed by Vietnam's National Assembly after his predecessor resigned amid an ongoing anti-corruption campaign that has shaken the country's political establishment and business elites and has resulted in multiple top-level changes in government. Vietnam's presidency is largely ceremonial, but his new role as head of state puts the 66-year-old in a "very strong position" to become the next Communist Party general secretary, the most important political position in the country, said Nguyen Khac Giang, an analyst at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong



was elected to a third term in 2021, but at age 80, he may not seek another term after 2026. Trong is an ideologue who views corruption as the gravest threat facing the party. As Vietnam's top security official, Lam has led Trong's sweeping anti-graft campaign. Lam spent more than four decades in the Ministry of Public Security before becoming the minister in 2016. His rise took place while Vietnam's politburo lost

of six of its 18 members amid the expanding anti-graft campaign, including two former presidents and Vietnam's parliamentary head. Lam was behind many of the investigations into high-profile politicians, said Giang. Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh is seen as the other major contender to possibly succeed Trong, Giang said. The current vice-speaker of Vietnam's parliament was con-

firmed on Monday as the National Assembly speaker after his predecessor, Vuong Dinh Hue, resigned amid the anti-graft campaign. Until his resignation, Hue was also widely seen as a potential successor to Trong. This unprecedented instability in Vietnam's political system has spooked investors as the country tries to position itself as an alternative for companies looking to shift their supply chains away from China. A flood of foreign investment, especially in manufacturing of high-tech products like smartphones and computers, raised expectations it could join the "Four Asian Tigers" — Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, whose economies underwent rapid industrialization and posted high growth rates. But the scandals and uncertainty — including the death sentence for a real estate tycoon accused of embezzling nearly 3 per cent of the country's 2022 GDP — have brought with them uncertainty and bureaucratic reticence to make decisions. Economic growth slipped to 5.1 per cent last year

from 8 per cent in 2022 as exports slowed. During Lam's years heading the Public Security Ministry, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other watchdog organisations have strongly criticised Vietnam for its harassment and intimidation of critics. In 2021, courts convicted at least 32 people for posting critical opinions about the government and sentenced them to multiple years in prison, while police arrested at least 26 others on fabricated charges, according to Human Rights Watch. Under Tam's watch as Vietnam's top security boss, civil society faced further curbs, foreign aid restrictions introduced in 2021 were tightened in 2023, the country jailed climate activists, and laws were introduced to censor social media, said Ben Swanton of The 88 Project, a group that advocates for freedom of expression in Vietnam. "With To Lam's ascent to the presidency, Vietnam is now a literal police state," said Swanton, adding that the Vietnamese ruling Politburo was now domi-

nated by current and former security officials. He said he expected further intensification of repression and censorship. While Vietnam was under a COVID-19 lockdown in 2021, a video surfaced showing Turkish chef Nusret Gokce, popularly known as Salt Bae, feeding Tam a gold-encrusted steak in London. Despite efforts to censor it, the video went viral, stoking widespread anger from people enduring virus lockdowns that exacerbated economic deprivations. Meantime, a Vietnamese noodle vendor named Bui Tuan Lam, who followed the video with a parody of Salt Bae, was arrested on charges of spreading anti-state propaganda and sentenced to five years in prison. It was also under Lam's tenure as public security minister, in 2017, when German authorities say Vietnamese businessperson and former politician Trinh Xuan Thanh and a companion were abducted and dragged into a van in downtown Berlin, in what officials there called "an unprecedented and flagrant violation of German and international law".

India, China agree to cooperate in paying in local currency for imports: Maldives

PTI ■ MALE

The Maldives on Wednesday said both India and China have agreed to cooperate in efforts to pay for imports in their respective countries' currency instead of the US dollar, which is likely to help Male save almost 50 per cent of the annual USD 1.5 million imports bill from the two countries. Maldives' Economic Development Minister Mohamed Saeed said he met with the Indian High Commissioner Munu Mahawar two weeks ago, who in turn, said that New Delhi would support and cooperate in arranging for the settlement of import payments in Indian Rupee. Similarly, Saeed said, he received a letter from China's Commerce Ministry, two days ago, in which Beijing provided assurance it will cooperate in allowing the option to settle import payments in Yuan, the Chinese currency, as requested by President Mohamed Muizzu. Annually, Maldives imports goods worth USD 780 million and USD 720 million from India and China respectively, the minister had said in April when he had first announced that the Maldives was discussing with India and China if the island nation can make payments for its imports from the country in Maldivian Rufiyaa. International trade between two countries in local currency is a mutually beneficial mechanism as it helps in saving each other's foreign exchange reserves. Moreover, the move will mark a significant shift away from the dominant use of the US dollar in international transactions. In July 2023, the Government of India declared that Maldives was among the 22 countries that were permitted by the Reserve Bank of India to open Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVAs) as part of efforts to promote bilateral trade in local currencies. News portal Sun.mv on

Wednesday quoted Saeed as speaking with state-run PSM Media: "Maldives imports between USD 600-700 million in commodities from both India and China, each year. Therefore, we import around USD 1.4 billion to USD 1.5 billion in commodities annually, from both markets combined." "We are negotiating with both sides to make arrangements for us so that, for example, for imports from China, the shipping company can bring the invoice and the payment can be settled by converting Maldivian Rufiyaa to their local currency through the banks, instead of US dollar," Saeed said, adding, it will save up to 50 per cent from the annual USD 1.5 million in imports from the two countries. "If we can arrange up to USD 300 million from each country, that means USD 700 million. This means we can eliminate the reliance on US dollars by that amount in the future. That will reduce the demand for dollars. And the future demand for dollars will continue to fall," Saeed was quoted as saying by Sun.mv. Saeed blamed the poor state of finances on the former administration and agreed that challenges persist as foreign countries are still skeptical about the Maldives but "it is slowly improving." The new Maldivian administration has said that the country's economic situation was "alarming", but that the government was implementing strong fiscal reforms to rectify the issue, including stopping printing money. Earlier in April, during campaigning ahead of the parliamentary polls, Saeed had said that if the ruling party was able to secure a majority in Parliament, they would be able to bring "the dollar rate back down to official market values within approximately two years." President Muizzu-led People's National Congress (PNC) secured a clear majority in the 87-member People's Majlis.

'Lanka's presidential election first, parliamentary polls later'

PTI ■ COLOMBO

President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Wednesday reiterated his intention to hold the next presidential election this year ahead of the parliamentary election. Sources confirmed that he told the Cabinet meeting earlier in the day that financial allocations have only been reserved so far for the conduct of the presidential poll. Despite speculation that a General Election will precede a Presidential election, Wickremesinghe informed the Cabinet that the Presidential election will be held first this year. According to the Election Act, the presidential election should happen first. The next parliamentary election is not due before August 2025. The Elections Commission earlier this month said the presidential election would be conducted at a date between September 17 and October 16. The ruling Sri Lanka People's Front, commonly known by its Sinhalese name Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP),



which has the current parliamentary majority, had pressed Wickremesinghe to hold the parliamentary election ahead of the presidential poll. Wickremesinghe, 75, is yet to announce his candidacy despite declarations by two other main opposition leaders: Sajith Premadasa the main opposition leader, and the Marxist JVP leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake. Wickremesinghe, from the arch-rival party United National Party (UNP), succeeded SLPP-elected president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to become president for the rest of Rajapaksa's term when the lat-

ter was ousted, after the island nation declared first international default, during street protests which lasted between April and July of 2022. Rajapaksa gave in to calls for his resignation due to his inability to handle the unprecedented economic crisis. The Rajapaksa administration announced Sri Lanka's first-ever sovereign default as forex shortages caused long queues for essentials and fuel. Wickremesinghe since taking over has steered the economy to safety by securing an IMF bailout. Analysts, however, feel that Sri Lanka is not completely out of the woods yet.

Pak govt forms committee to probe attack on PTI leader

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar on Wednesday said an inquiry committee has been formed to investigate an attack on a senior leader of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party a day earlier. Terming the attack as "regrettable and sad", the law minister while speaking in a Senate session today said such attacks should not happen. "The government is seriously investigating the attack on Raouf Hasan," Tarar said, according to Geo News. An FIR on charges of murder and attempted murder concerning the attack on Imran Khan's party's Information Secretary Raouf Hasan has been registered at Islamabad's Abpara police station, the Express Tribune newspaper reported. Hasan was allegedly attacked by a group of around four apparently transgender persons in the capital. It drew strong condemnation from his party, however, it remains unclear why the politician was attacked.

UK lawmaker returns to work as 'bionic MP' after losing his hands and feet to sepsis

London (AP): Britain's fractious politicians shared a rare moment of unity on Wednesday, when a Conservative lawmaker returned to work six months after sepsis put him in a coma and forced the amputation of his hands and feet. As Conservative legislator Craig Mackinlay walked unaided into the House of Commons before the weekly Prime Minister's Questions session, government and opposition lawmakers alike rose in a standing ovation. "As you know, we don't allow clapping," Speaker Lindsay Hoyle said as Mackinlay's wife and 4-year-old daughter watching from the public gallery. "But this is an exception." Mackinlay, 57, said he wants to be known as "the bionic MP." He plans to campaign for greater awareness of the signs of sepsis, and for Britain's state-funded National

Health Service, which treated him and saved his life, to offer better treatment and prosthetics to people who have lost more than one limb. Addressing his fellow lawmakers in the Commons chamber, Mackinlay thanked Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Hoyle for visiting him while he was in hospital. Referring to the speaker's formal black tailcoat, he joked that "the rest of the hospital thought I must be dreadfully ill, because they said that guy's got the funeral director in already." He asked Sunak to ensure the health service would "embed recognition of early signs of sepsis." "If we can stop somebody ending up like this, I would say that is a job well done," Mackinlay said. He also called on health ministers to ensure the "provision of appropriate prosthetics."

Chinese journalist released from prison after 4 years

AP ■ BANGKOK

Zhang Zhan was released from prison after serving four years for charges related to reporting on the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, according to a video statement she released Tuesday, eight days after her sentence ended. Zhang was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," a vaguely defined charge often used in political cases, and served her full term. Yet, on the day of her release, her former lawyers could not reach her or her family. Shanghai police had paid visits to activists and her former lawyers in the



days leading up to her release. In a short video, Zhang said she was taken by police to her brother Zhang Ju's home on May 13, the day she finished her sentence. "I want to thank everyone for their help and concern," she said in a soft voice, standing in what

appeared to be a hallway of an apartment building. The video was posted by Jane Wang, an overseas activist who launched the Free Zhang Zhan campaign in the United Kingdom and is in contact with one of Zhang's former lawyers. However, Wang said in a state-

ment that Zhang still has limited freedom. They became concerned that Zhang would be kept under further control by police even if she was no longer in prison. The United States Department of State also issued a statement of concern over Zhang's status in the days after she was due to be released. Ren Quanniu represented Zhang before being stripped of his license in February 2021. He said he confirmed the video was true by speaking with Zhang's family. During her detention at Shanghai's Women Prison, Zhang staged a hunger strike and was hospitalised at one point in 2021. Zhang's family,

who could often only speak to her by phone, faced police pressure during her incarceration, and her parents refused to speak to news outlets. Zhang was among a handful of citizen journalists who travelled to the central Chinese city of Wuhan after the government put it under total lockdown in February 2020, in the early days of the pandemic. She walked around the city to document public life as fears grew about the novel coronavirus. Others spent time in jail for documenting the early days of the pandemic, including Fang Bin, who published videos of overcrowded hospitals and bodies

during the outbreak. Fang was sentenced to three years in prison and released in April 2023. Chen Qiushi, another citizen journalist, disappeared in February 2020 while filming in Wuhan. Chen resurfaced in September 2021 on a friend's live video feed on YouTube, saying he had suffered from depression. He did not provide details about his disappearance. The coronavirus remains a sensitive topic in China. In the first week of May, the Chinese scientist who first published a sequence of the COVID-19 virus protested authorities barring him from his lab, after years of demotions and setbacks.

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Markets climb on buying in Reliance, Infosys



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices ended with gains on Wednesday amid buying in blue-chips Reliance Industries and Infosys amid mixed cues from global markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 267.75 points or 0.36 per cent to settle at 74,221.06. During the day, it jumped 354.48 points or 0.47 per cent to 74,307.79. Similarly, the NSE Nifty advanced 68.75 points or 0.31 per cent to finish at 22,597.80. "Despite mixed global market sentiments ahead of the US Fed minutes, Indian markets exhibited a subtle positive trend. Investors are optimistic about stable Q4 earnings and easing election jitters that had previously increased volatility. "Interest in the FMCG sector has risen due to the potential for an early onset of monsoon. Nevertheless, markets may underperform in the short term as they wait for the election outcome, with FIIs staying on the sidelines,"

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. Among the Sensex firms, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries, Infosys, Asian Paints, ITC and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers. State Bank of India, JSW Steel, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, Tata Steel and Tata Motors were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading lower. Wall Street ended in the green on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.84 per cent to USD 82.18 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,874.54 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark declined 52.63 points or 0.07 per cent to settle at 73,953.31 on Tuesday. The Nifty, however, ended higher by 27.05 points or 0.12 per cent to 22,529.05.

Rupee rises 3 paise to close at 83.28 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated by 3 paise to settle at 83.28 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday amid softening crude oil prices. Forex traders said the local unit consolidated in a narrow range weighed down by foreign fund outflows. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 83.29 and moved in the range of 83.22 and 83.29 against the greenback during the session. The local unit finally settled at 83.28 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a rise of 3

paise from its previous close. The Indian rupee gained on positive domestic markets and a decline in crude oil prices. However, mixed to positive US Dollar and FII outflows capped sharp gains, said Anuj Choudhary — Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias as the US Dollar may recover from lower levels if the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting minutes are hawkish," Choudhary said. FII outflows may also weigh on the rupee. However, a



positive tone in the domestic markets and weakness in crude oil prices may support the rupee at lower levels, Choudhary added. Investors may remain cautious ahead of PMI data from the US this week. USDINR spot price is

expected to trade in a range of Rs 83 to Rs 83.55, Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, advanced 0.09 per cent to 104.75, as most Fed officials warned of cutting interest rates too early and need more data to cut rates. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, slipped 0.69 per cent to USD 82.31 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 267.75 points, or 0.36 per cent, to settle at 74,221.06 points, and Nifty

rose 68.75 points, or 0.31 per cent, to close at 22,597.80 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 1,874.54 crore, according to exchange data. On the macroeconomic front, according to an article in the RBI's May Bulletin released on Tuesday, India is likely to grow by 7.5 per cent in the first quarter of the current financial year, driven by rising aggregate demand and non-food spending in the rural economy.

Mahindra Finance gets IRDAI nod to sell insurance products as corporate agent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mahindra & Mahindra Financial Services on Wednesday said it has received corporate agency licence from insurance regulator IRDAI, which will enable it to sell life and general insurance policies offered by various insurers. The registration shall be valid from May 21, 2024 to May 20, 2027, Mahindra Finance said in a regulatory filing. The registration as 'Corporate Agent (Composite)' will enable the company to undertake supplemental business activity of soliciting and procuring insurance business in the areas of life, health and general insurance — both group and individual, it said. The process would augment the company's existing sources of revenue and profits as it would deploy its common infrastructure of branch network and feet on street. Mahindra Finance Managing Director & CEO Raul Rebello said, "This diversification will open new revenue models for us while delivering personalized services to customers across Mahindra Finance's 1360+ branches, thereby enhancing their experience." The corporate agency licence will enable Mahindra Finance to solicit, procure and carry on the business of selling, distribution, advertising, marketing of all kinds of insurance products/ services, including life insurance, health insurance, and general insurance, on behalf of various insurance companies as a corporate agent as permitted by IRDAI, it said.

Suzlon bags new orders of 402 MW wind energy from Juniper Green Energy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Renewable energy solutions provider Suzlon Group on Wednesday said it has bagged new orders for the development of 402 MW wind energy projects from Juniper Green Energy. Suzlon will install a total of 134 wind turbine generators (WTGs) with a Hybrid Lattice Tubular (HLT) tower and a rated capacity of 3 MW for both projects at the Suzlon proposed site at Fatehgarh in Rajasthan, a company statement said. As part of the agreement, Suzlon will supply the wind turbines and execute the project including foundation, erection, and commissioning. Suzlon will also undertake comprehensive operations and maintenance services post-commissioning. "Juniper Green Energy has been a long-term, repeat



customer for us, and we are delighted to partner with them again. This order helps us expand our footprint in Rajasthan," Girish Tanti, Vice Chairman, Suzlon Group, said in the statement. The electricity generated from these projects will help realise the vision of the Rajasthan government to serve the people of the state with green energy, he added. The generated power will be provided under FDRE (Firm and Dispatchable Renewable Energy) Hybrid and Merchant projects. Projects of this size can provide electricity to 3.31 lakh households and curb 13.07 lakh tonnes of CO2 emissions per year.

Paper, paperboard imports up 34 per cent in FY24: IPMA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Imports of paper and paperboard in the country rose by 34 per cent to 19.3 lakh tonnes in 2023-24, driven by higher shipments from ASEAN countries, an industry association said on Wednesday. The Indian Paper Manufacturers Association (IPMA) in a statement said that the increasing imports of these products are hurting the domestic industry. Paper and paperboard imports, as per the commerce ministry data, were 14.3 lakh tonnes in the financial year ended on March 31, 2023, the IPMA said. "ASEAN has come to account for the largest chunk in the paper import pie in the country accounting for 27 per cent share. Paper imports from ASEAN, which enter the country at zero import duty under the ASEAN-India free



trade agreement, doubled to 5.1 lakh tonnes during the year from 2.7 lakh tonnes in FY23," the association said citing commerce ministry data. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a 10-member bloc. The members include Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. In value terms, paper imports

doubled to Rs 13,248 crore in FY24 from Rs 6,140 crore in FY21, the body said. "The unprecedented imports of paper and paperboard pose a significant threat to India's Make-in-India initiative Aatmanirbhar Bharat," IPMA said. The major paper grades which are coming from these nations include printing paper, coated paper, and paperboard. IPMA said that this surge comes despite substantial investments by the domestic industry in recent years to upgrade technology, improve product quality, and enhance agro / farm forestry practices. "These investments are now at risk due to the influx of duty-free imports," it claimed. IPMA has urged the government to increase the basic customs duty (BCD) on the import of paper and paperboard from 10 per cent to 25 per cent.

Housing prices near peak level, nominal growth seen in coming years, says C&W India head

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Growth in housing prices is expected to be nominal in short to medium term after rising sharply over the last two years due to surge in demand post the COVID pandemic, according to Cushman & Wakefield India head Anshul Jain. In a video interview with PTI, Jain, the Chief Executive India & South East Asia and APAC Tenant Representation, Cushman & Wakefield, said the housing demand would continue to be strong in view of high economic growth and a growing desire to own homes among consumers especially, young population. "Housing demand in India



was quite muted from 2013-2014, all the way to 2019. The prices were stagnant. There was a wave at that point in time, where people, particularly youngsters did not want to own anything. We were talking about Uberisation of the residential sector where people wanted to rent and did not want to sort of

make a commitment," Jain said. However, he noted that the COVID pandemic changed that mindset. "People realised the stability of having their own house. Plus people wanted larger houses, and combining that with one of the lowest interest rate regimes India had seen for a

while really spurred the demand for housing," he said. Jain noted that housing sales and prices went up driven by end-user demand. "Seeing the prices going up, the investors came into the market. So, a combination of that became a perfect cocktail, for a very strong demand post COVID from a housing perspective," Jain observed. Going forward, he said there would be nominal growth in prices. "... Clearly there has been a very significant price rise in the last two years. But if you normalize that, over about 10 odd years, 2013-2014 to now, I think the price rise has still been strong, but not abnormal.

India exports over 45,000 tonnes onion after lifting ban



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has exported more than 45,000 tonnes of onion since the ban on outbound shipments was lifted early this month, a top government official said on Wednesday. These exports provided relief to farmers after curbs were imposed to keep domestic supplies steady ahead of general elections. The world's biggest vegetable exporter banned exports of the bulb last December and then extended it in March, after a rise in prices triggered by sluggish production. "Since the ban was lifted, more than 45,000 tonnes of onions have been exported, mostly to the Middle East and Bangladesh," Nidhi Khare, Secretary of the Consumer Affairs Ministry, told PTI. To keep onion prices affordable during the election

period, the government on May 4 lifted the ban but imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of USD 550 per tonne. Khare said the forecast of a good monsoon this year will ensure better sowing of kharif (summer) crops, including onion from June onwards. State-owned agencies have started procuring onions from the recent rabi (winter) harvest to build a targeted 5,00,000-tonne buffer stock for the current year, she added. The country's onion production is expected to fall 16 per cent from a year earlier to 25.47 million tonnes in the 2023-24 crop year due to lower output in key growing regions like Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, according to the Agriculture Ministry's first estimates.

Paytm net loss widens to ₹550 crore in Q4

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fintech firm One97 Communications, which owns the Paytm brand, on Wednesday said its loss in the fourth quarter of the financial year 2023-24 has widened to Rs 550 crore following the ban imposed by the RBI on transactions related to its payments bank. The company had posted a loss of Rs 167.5 crore in the same period a year ago, the company said in a regulatory filing. "Our fourth quarter FY24 results were impacted by temporary disruption on account of UPI transition etc. And permanent disruption because of the PPBL embargo. Paytm reported a revenue of Rs 2,267 crore, a modest decline of 3 per cent Y-o-Y (year-on-year). Our contribution margin was 57 per cent including UPI incentives, and 51 per cent excluding UPI incentives," Paytm said in a statement. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) barred Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) from accepting deposits, credit transactions or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, and FASTags, keeping in view the interest of customers, including merchants from March 15 onwards. "PPBL products like the Paytm wallet and FASTag were distributed by Paytm. Due to the current embargo on these products, we anticipate the steady state annualised direct impact on EBITDA to be around Rs 500 crore, as previously disclosed. Most of this impact will be in the first quarter as these products were operational during most part of the fourth quarter of FY24," the statement said. The company during the reported quarter wrote off Rs 227 crore investment for a 39 per cent stake in PPBL following future uncertainties associated with the bank's business operations including the uncertainty of any other regulatory development etc. "PPBL, the management, on a prudent basis, has determined that the value of the company's investment in PPBL is impaired and, accordingly, has recorded an



impairment provision of Rs 2,271 crore, representing the carrying value of its investment in PPBL and disclosed the same as impairment of investment in associate," the company said in an audit note. Paytm Founder and CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma holds 51 per cent in PPBL. The company for the first time posted operational profit before Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) cost for the full year. "FY24 has been a landmark year for the company as we achieved our first full year of EBITDA before ESOP profitability (since IPO) of Rs 559 crore. We demonstrated strong revenue momentum (up 25 per cent) and continued our disciplined focus on profitability (EBITDA before ESOP margin up by 8 per cent), in spite of regulatory action on our associate entity, Paytm Payment Bank Ltd," Sharma said in a letter to shareholders. The revenue from operations of Paytm declined by 2.8 per cent to Rs 2,267.1 crore during the reported quarter from Rs 2,464.6 crore in the corresponding quarter of the financial year (FY) 2023. Paytm said that there were temporary disruptions in operating metrics like Monthly Transacting Users (MTU), merchant base, and Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) during February and March. "This is expected to have an incremental EBITDA impact of Rs 100-150 crore, in the first quarter of FY25 and should start recovering from the second quarter as we are seeing stabilisation or growth in consumer and merchant base metrics from April/May," the statement said.

NHPC organises Shramdaan programme under Swachhata Pakhwada 2024

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

NHPC organised a Shramdaan programme for cleanliness campaign under 'Swachhata Pakhwada 2024' on 21st May 2024. RP Goyal, CMD, NHPC, Shri Uttam Lal, Director (Personnel), NHPC and RK Chaudhary, Director (Technical & Projects), NHPC, senior NHPC officers and employees performed Shramdaan by running a cleanliness drive in Mughal Bridge over Budhia Wala Nala (a monument), in Faridabad. During the Shramdaan programme local people also took part



enthusiastically along with the NHPC employees. NHPC is observing 'Swachhata Pakhwada 2024' at its Corporate Office and all its Regional Offices, Projects and Power Stations across the country from 16th May to 31st May 2024 as per guidelines issued by the Government of India. During this Pakhwada, NHPC is organising various activities as cleanliness awareness programmes, tree/ sapling plantation, skit presentation, cleaning kit/ sanitary pad distribution, awareness programmes on hygiene, drawing and painting competitions etc. across all its locations.

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NTPC secures third rank at ATD BEST Award 2024

New Delhi: NTPC has achieved an impressive milestone by securing the 3rd rank globally at the ATD BEST Award 2024, the highest ranking among all Indian companies. Notably, NTPC is the only PSU to have received this prestigious award seven times in the past eight years. The accolade was accepted by Rachana Singh Bhal, CGM (Strategic HR & Talent Management), at a distinguished ceremony held in New Orleans, USA, on May 21.

Government needs to further expand scheme to make India global drone hub, says report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government needs to expand the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme and develop an ecosystem to realise the goal of making India a global drone hub, a report said. An incentive of Rs 120 crore spread over three financial years was provided for Indian manufacturers of drone and drone components under the PLI Scheme notified on September 30, 2021. As per the Ministry of Civil Aviation projections, the Indian drone manufacturing industry is expected to reach Rs 900 crore by 2025 from just Rs 60 crore in 2020-21, according to a study conducted by Nexgen Exhibitions. It also noted that the Indian drone market is expected to grow at 22.15 per cent CAGR



(compounded annual growth rate) during the 2024-30 period. With innovation and expansion of its application portfolio, India has the potential of becoming the global drone hub by 2030, it stated. The study highlighted that the key to realising India's vision lies in boosting the domestic drone ecosystem. Other major factors are the expansion of the PLI scheme, government procurement, and pushing the Make in India initiative, it stated. The application of drones is already proven in the fields of

Border Surveillance, Rescue Disaster Management, and COVID management etc. The drone services industry's operations in logistics, data processing, and traffic management etc are far bigger in scale and will outshine the other related sectors very soon, the report highlighted on Tuesday. Around 250 drones and unmanned systems manufacturers, anti-drone radar, guns and jammers innovators, component, wires, motors, sensors, CCTV suppliers, software developers for drones and unmanned systems, drones as service providing companies, GPS and Geospatial solutions providers participated in the survey. Institutes developing drones, defence research labs manufacturing drones, and aerospace companies like flight

control, and simulator developers were also part of the survey. The survey was conducted across 10 states - Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The survey also reached out to foreign companies from the Middle East, Europe, the UK, the US and Australia. Drone International Expo 2024, which will be held on July 4-5, is a premium expo for drones unmanned systems (land and water), counter drones, LiDAR geospatial, artificial intelligence and air taxi. It is one of Asia's biggest drone sector platforms for buyers, industry representatives and stakeholders from across the board to connect.

POWERGRID wins prestigious award for third time

Gurugram: Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a Maharatna CPSE under Ministry of Power, Government of India, has been conferred the prestigious ATD BEST Award 2024 for strategic approach to talent development driving business results. The award was conferred by the world's leading Learning and Development (L&D) body, Association of Talent Development (ATD), USA.

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Sindhu sails to Malaysia Masters second round

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Returning from a break, two-time Olympic medalist P V Sindhu progressed to the women's singles second round with a straight-game win over Scotland's Kirsty Gilmour at the Malaysia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

World No. 15 Sindhu, who had skipped the Uber Cup and Thailand Open, notched up a 21-17 21-16 win over Gilmour, who is ranked 22nd, in the opening-round match that lasted 46 minutes.

The fifth-seeded Indian, who last won a title in 2022 Singapore Open, will next face Korea's Sim Yu Jin.

In mixed doubles, B Sumeeth Reddy and N Sikki Reddy, world No. 53, also advanced to the second round after outlasting Hong Kong qualifiers Lui Chun Wai and Fu Chi Yan 21-15 12-21 21-17 in 47 minutes.

The husband-wife duo will have the task of taming the top



seeds Chen Tang Jie and Toh Ee Wei of Malaysia next.

For Sindhu, it was her third win over Gilmour, a two-time medallist in the Commonwealth Games.

The 28-year-old Sindhu was quick to open up a 7-1 lead but Gilmour managed to claw back at 14-14 and 15-15. The Indian, however, dashed her hopes of a challenge as she grabbed six of the next eight points to take the first game.

After the change of sides, Sindhu was more ruthless as she didn't allow her opponent to make any comeback after once again gaining an early 3-0 lead. Sindhu was 11-6 at the break and kept moving ahead to grab eight match points. To her credit, Gilmour saved four match points before Sindhu sealed the match comfortably.

Sindhu, a former world champion, has endured a series of narrow losses ever since returning from a knee injury early this year. She is eyeing a good show here to boost her confidence ahead of the Paris Olympics.



Archery World Cup Stage 2

Compound women team in final, men miss bronze medal

PTI ■ YECHAEON (SOUTH KOREA)

World number one Indian women's compound team stormed into the final of the archery World Cup Stage II but the men's team will return empty-handed from the tournament after losing the bronze medal clash to Australia here Wednesday.

The trio of Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Parneet Kaur and Aditi Swami, that had clinched gold medal in World Cup Stage I in Shanghai last month, knocked out world number four USA 233-229 in the semi-final.

India will now clash with world number seven Turkey in the gold medal clash on Saturday. Turkey had stunned top-seed and local favourites South Korea 234-233 in the other semi-final.

It was an overall easy sailing for the Indian women's team, which got a bye into the quarters after finishing second in the qualifying round. They eliminated Italy 236-234 in the last-eight.

The world number one men's team of Priyansh, Prathamesh Fuge and veteran Abhishek Verma, who had slipped to fourth in the qualifying round on Tuesday, lost to lowly-ranked Australia 133-133 (10-10*) in a shoot-off.

The Aussies, who are world ranked 21st, took the Indian trio by surprise starting with a 59, dropping just one point.

The Aussies team of Bailey Wildman, Brandon Hawes and Jonathon Milne continued its fine run and overcame a one-point deficit after the second round to make it 233-all after the regulation four ended.

The two teams were 30-all in the ensuing shoot-off but the Aussies edged out the inconsistent Indians by shooting two Xs (arrows closer to centre) to secure the bronze medal.

Having started their campaign with an easy 235-212 win over lowly-ranked Vietnam, India overcame tough competition from Denmark and top seed USA, winning both the matches in shoot-off.

Meanwhile, the veteran duo of Tarundeep Rai and Deepika Kumari finished fourth and sixth in their respective qualifiers as recurve competition got underway.

The 2010 Asian Games silver medalist Rai shot 681 points for a sixth spot in rankings, while Dhiraj Bommadevara narrowly missed a top-10 finish on X (closer to centre) count after five archers shot 678 with the Indian finishing 11th.

The Army duo's solid finish ensured Indian recurve men's team No 2 seeding in their title defence. India and top-seeded South Korea will begin their campaign at the opposite ends of the draw.

Indian men's team shocked the world champions South Korea for the first time in a World Cup to take the gold in Stage I of the event in Shanghai last month.

Deepika missed the top-three finish in the rankings by just one point, shooting 677 as the Korean duo of Lim Sihyeon (685), Jeon Hunyoung (680) and Li Jiaman (678) took the 1-2-3 seedings.

The other Indians however fell way short with Bhajan Kaur (653 points) and Ankita Bhakat (646) were the next best Indians at lowly 34th and 49th places respectively. As a result, the women's team seedings could not be better than six.

Rai and Deepika combined to get a cumulative 1358 points for the second spot behind South Korea in the recurve mixed team category.



Concussion replacements added for Copa America under the pink substitution pass system

AP ■ LUQUE (PARAGUAY)

Coaches at next month's Copa America will be able to make a 6th and extra substitution in cases of suspected head trauma or concussion.

South American soccer's governing body CONMEBOL announced the decision Tuesday, making it valid for all its competitions once the Copa America starts in the United States on June 20.

CONMEBOL issued a statement saying coaches will need to notify the referee or the 4th match official of the concussion replacement through a pink substitution pass. A similar method was implemented in Major League Soccer in 2021 as part of a FIFA pilot program.

The player who leaves the pitch under those conditions will have to go to the locker rooms or a hospital for assessment.

"The substitution for concussion will take place regardless of the number of substitutions until the moment it happens," CONMEBOL said. "When the concussion substitution takes place, the opposing team will automatically be allowed to make an additional substitution."

Team doctors who detect a suspected concussion or head trauma on the pitch will have up to 24 hours to send a medical report to CONMEBOL, the South American body said.

Brazil's Vasco da Gama and 777 Partners in legal battle for control of soccer club

AP ■ SAO PAULO

Brazil's Vasco da Gama and 777 Partners are intensifying their legal battle after the American company went to court Tuesday to reclaim its rights over the top-flight soccer club.

Last week, a Rio de Janeiro judge preemptively removed 777 Partners from Vasco's soccer department's administration after a series of complaints from the club. Brazilian law allows foreign entities to buy the rights to soccer sections of multi-sport clubs, in an operation known as SAF.

The preliminary ruling is yet to be confirmed, but the American group stepped up the fight in court and accused the club of not making image rights payments to its players on Monday, as scheduled.

"It was the first time that wages or image rights payments have been delayed since we took over 18 months ago," 777 said in a statement Tuesday. "The injunction that momentarily pushes us out of the command of Vasco's SAF stopped us from making a bridge payment, as we did last year in the same period of the year, when soccer revenues are lower."

Image rights are part of the payment for footballers.

Vasco executives have said the payment of wages is up to date for all players.

The tug of war in Brazil adds to the pressure on the Miami-based company, which has recently faced setbacks in court over its ownership of Belgium's Standard Liege plus other financial problems.

A court in Liege last week ruled in favor of Standard's former owner Bruno Venanzi and shareholders of the company holding the club's stadium. They claimed 777 had defaulted on a payment.

The legal woes for the 777 add to its period of financial turmoil. The Miami-based investment company has also seen its airline in Australia grounded in recent weeks. It also faces a fraud lawsuit in New York.

777's other clubs include Genoa in Italy's top tier and Hertha Berlin in Germany's second division.



Playing Carlsen in his home turf not a challenge for me: Praggnanandhaa

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)

Having beaten Magnus Carlsen several times in the last couple of years, young Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa feels he will be under no pressure when he takes on the multiple-time world champion in his home turf during the Norway Chess tournament, which gets underway here on May 27.

Praggnanandhaa last beat the 33-year-old Carlsen in the Superbet rapid and blitz tournament, a part of the Grand Chess Tour, in Warsaw earlier this month.

"I don't think playing Magnus in his home turf is a challenge for me. Usually, it matters to the player playing in his home but it won't matter so much for me," said Praggnanandhaa, who will also have his sister R. Vaishali playing the Norway Chess Women's Tournament for the first time.

The 11-day tournament will see a very strong field including the likes of world champion Ding Liren and Hikaru Nakamura besides home favourite Carlsen.

Reflecting on his contest with Carlsen at last year's FIDE World Cup where Praggnanandhaa gave the Norwegian a tough challenge, the Indian GM said the experience here would help him in future competitions.



"I always enjoy a good challenge. After the World Cup last year, this will be my first classical game with him. I am quite excited to play him and equally excited to play the others. No doubt the experience here will help me in future tournaments," said Praggnanandhaa in a Norway Chess release.

"I am very happy and excited to play in Norway Chess. The field is extremely strong. This is perhaps the strongest field I have played and I see this as an opportunity and a challenge to give my best."

"I am also looking forward to play in this time control which I have not played anywhere else," added the 18-year-old.

The tournament will be played in a double round-robin format with a time control of 120 minutes.

The teenaged Indian GM also expressed happiness with the growth of chess worldwide.

"It is a busy schedule this year. After the Norway Chess, we move to Budapest for the Chess Olympiad and I will also be playing the Global Chess League later this year. It is really good to have such an exciting league which I think will definitely help grow the game. "As a chess fan, I'm happy to see this league grow. For now, my focus is on Norway Chess and I am physically and mentally well-prepared to do my best there."

With sister Vaishali competing in the women's category, Praggnanandhaa said he will also be tracking her progress in the tournament.

"I am happy to see an exclusive women's tournament being introduced in Norway Chess. It is a very good initiative because there are not many tournaments for women. This will encourage other organizations to come up with women's tournaments too."

Thousands of fans come to see Nadal practice ahead of the French Open

AP ■ PARIS

Vanessa Peltier got up at dawn and traveled 500 kilometers (310 miles) to Paris from the Creuse region of central France just so she could watch Rafael Nadal practice on Tuesday.

Along with thousands of other fans, she lined up outside the main court to catch a glimpse of the Spanish champion at what's expected to be his final appearance at the French Open, a tournament he's won a record 14 times.

"I woke up at 6 a.m. And drove from the middle of France to be here," said Peltier, 50. "Nadal has

always had my support, and the support of France."

The line stretched for 200 meters (yards) as fans queued up for Nadal's second day of practice at Roland Garros. Morgan Chevallier said he waited for 45 minutes to get inside the tennis stadium.

"I could not pass on this opportunity. He is almost bigger than the tournament itself," he said.

The 37-year-old Nadal was sidelined with injuries for nearly all of last year and much of this season. His loss in the third round of the Italian Open two weeks ago left questions about his fitness. He hasn't yet said whether he's ready

for the clay-court tournament.

The fans know this may be their last chance to see him at Roland Garros.

"I skipped work for Nadal," said Sergiu Popa, 26.

Nadal started with low-intensity ball exchanges before playing two sets against his sparring partner for

the day, Sebastian Korda of the United States. The crowd erupted in cheers and chants of "Rafa, Rafa" after the Spaniard hit a winning shot.

Outside the court, fans took photos in front of the Nadal statue at the entry gate and lined up to pose with a life-size cardboard cutout of

him, with a hole where they could put their own faces.

"This way I can imagine what it's like to have the same biceps as him," joked Philippe Charvet as his friend took his picture.

In the Roland Garros gift shop, an entire section is dedicated to Nadal merchandise. Frédéric Caubert and his son Gaspar elbowed their way to buy a hat with Nadal's signature for 28 euros (\$30).

"It's not cheap, but it will be a nice memory once Nadal leaves us," Caubert said. "It's like he is part of our family. When he's gone, family dinners won't feel the same," he said with a smile.

Emma Hayes' first roster as coach of the US women team includes two first time call ups

AP ■ NEW YORK

Coach Emma Hayes has selected her first roster for the United States ahead of a pair of friendlies as she prepares to lead the women's national team at the Paris Olympics.

Hayes, named U.S. Coach last November, finished her final season as coach of Chelsea on Saturday, winning the team's fifth straight Women's Super League Title with a 6-0 rout of Manchester United.

Her first U.S. Roster announced Tuesday includes two National Women's Soccer League players called up to the national team for the first time, Chicago Red Stars defender Sam Staab and Washington Spirit midfielder Hal



Hershfelt. A notable omission from the roster is veteran goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher, who injured her left thigh while playing in a match for the Chicago Red Stars on May 12.

The team will play South Korea on June 1 in Commerce City, Colorado, before a rematch on June 4 in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The 23-player roster is Hayes' last chance to look at players before she names an 18-player roster for the Olympics. The United States will play a pair of sendoff matches in July.

"I expect complete commitment from everyone to absorb very quickly the things that I value as the most important so that we can compete this summer. I know they are a highly coachable group and

resigned from the U.S. Team following last year's disappointing finish in the Women's World Cup.

Twila Kilgore led the team in the interim while Hayes finished the season with Chelsea. Kilgore, who went 10-1 with the team, will now serve as an assistant coach under Hayes.

Captain Lindsey Horan, among five players from European teams on the roster, will join training camp after her club, Lyon, faces Barcelona for the Champions League title on Saturday.

Alex Morgan and Jaedyn Shaw were included on the squad despite missing recent matches with the San Diego Wave because of injuries. Lynn Williams, who was left off the team that played in the SheBelieves Cup, was not on

the latest roster.

Crystal Dunn, who has played mostly at outside back for the national team in recent years, was listed by Hayes as a forward.

Hayes also added three training players to the roster: Olivia Moultrie of the Portland Thorns and Croix Bethune and Kate Wiesner, who both play for the Washington Spirit.

The players are due to report to camp in Colorado on Monday.

The U.S. Roster by position with club affiliation:

GOALKEEPERS: Jane Campbell (Houston Dash), Aubrey Kingsbury (Washington Spirit), Casey Murphy (North Carolina Courage).

DEFENDERS: Tiarna Davidson (NJ/NY Gotham), Emily Fox (Arsenal), Naomi Girma (San Diego Wave), Casey Krueger (Washington Spirit), Jenna Nighswonger (NJ/NY Gotham), Emily Sonnett (NJ/NY Gotham), Sam Staab (Chicago Red Stars).

MIDFIELDER: Korbin Albert (Paris Saint-Germain), Sam Coffey (Portland Thorns), Hal Hershfelt (Washington Spirit), Lindsey Horan (Lyon), Rose Lavelle (NJ/NY Gotham), Lily Yohannes (Ajax).

FORWARDS: Crystal Dunn (NJ/NY Gotham), Catarina Macario (Chelsea), Alex Morgan (San Diego Wave), Trinity Rodman (Washington Spirit), Jaedyn Shaw (San Diego Wave), Sophia Smith (Portland Thorns), Mallory Swanson (Chicago Red Stars).



It's hard to leave ailing mother in hospital but KKR is family too, says Gurbaz

PTI AHMEDABAD

Afghanistan wicketkeeper-batter Rahmanullah Gurbaz has revealed that he made the difficult choice of leaving his ailing mother in hospital when his IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders sought his services ahead of the playoff clash against Sunrisers Hyderabad here as the team is also his "family".

Gurbaz, in his maiden game of the season, played a vital role in KKR's win over SRH by taking two vital catches and giving his side a blazing start with a 14-ball 23 on Tuesday. He replaced Englishman Phil Salt at the top and hit the ground running to help the two-time champions enter the IPL final with their comfortable eight-wicket victory here on Tuesday.

"As a cricketer, you (should) know, what to do. (In) League cricket, only a few players can play. If there is opportunity for you, you should do best. If there's no

opportunity for you, you should be prepared, well prepared for the opportunity," Gurbaz told the media here after the match.

"My mom is still sick. I went (back) there and the call from here was (that) Phil Salt was leaving. They called and they messaged me that 'Gurbaz, we need you, and what is your feedback for us?'," he revealed.

"I said, 'yes, I will come.' My mom is still in hospital, and I'm always talking to her, but this is also my family. I should manage both of that, my mom and my KKR family. It's hard, it's tough, but still, I need to manage it," he added.

SRH skipper Pat Cummins' decision to bat first backfired. Gurbaz said KKR had planned to bowl first had they won the toss.

"We all (had) decided that we should go and we should bowl first, because in this kind of moment, and team likes Sunrisers that have a strong batting side and you should know what (is) the total and then you go for it," he said.



"We bowled really well, actually. (To get a) team likes Sunrisers all out on 160, that was bowling effort. And then once we come to the batting end, we also not just try to, we should win the circle (powerplay)."

"(In) my mind was (the) only (thought) that I should win the circle, because sometime in low total like this, you need to have a good circle, otherwise, match can be difficult in the end."

Gurbaz said it was the best he had seen KKR pacer Mitchell Starc bowl after the left-arm pacer took three wickets in the powerplay to set up the game for his side.

"He was just unbelievable. The way he bowled today, he's one of the best, he has a lot of experience, he knows how to manage the big games. I saw him today totally different than other games," he said.

Gurbaz said Afghanistan players are preparing well for the T20 World Cup next month. He said

franchise cricket is something that comes second and doing well for their country is always their priority.

"It's all about hard work. It doesn't mean that you come from Afghanistan, you come from India, you come from Australia, whatever. It's all about hard work, I think. If you work hard, if you know what to do, and it's help you in every situation."

"Afghanistan is not the same Afghanistan. We know what to do and how can we represent our country. Everything is good for cricket there, and we played really well, the last World Cup, and from the last six-seven years, Afghanistan is doing great," he said.

"Our mindset (is) not (just) to play for league cricket, our mindset is always to do something better for our country, and then come the leagues. If you do good for your country, all leagues will pick you, and that's the point that we play all the leagues," he added.



I could not have made better choices: Former RCB owner Mallya on Kohli

PTI NEW DELHI

Former Royal Challengers Bengaluru owner Vijay Mallya on Wednesday said he couldn't have made a better choice when he bid for Virat Kohli in the inaugural IPL auction as he lauded the superstar batter for his brilliant run in the ongoing season.

RCB have made a tremendous comeback after losing seven out of their first eight games to qualify for the playoffs with six straight victories, riding on Kohli's sublime form which

has so far fetched him 708 runs from 14 innings.

RCB will face Rajasthan Royals in the Eliminator on Wednesday night.

"When I bid for the RCB franchise and I bid for Virat, my inner instinct told me that I could not have made better choices," Mallya, who currently lives in the United Kingdom and is trying to avoid extradition to India, wrote on 'X'. "My inner instinct tells me that RCB have the best chance to go for the IPL Trophy. Onward and Upward. Best of luck."

Kohli was bought by RCB for USD



30,000 ahead of the 2008 IPL following his title-winning run with India's U19 World Cup.

RCB, however, hasn't been able to lift the trophy despite reaching the final thrice — in 2009, 2011 and 2016.

Mallya is accused in a bank loan default matter of over Rs 9,000 crore involving his defunct Kingfisher Airlines.

He has been living in the United Kingdom since March 2016. The same year he had to forego his ownership of RCB due to the legal proceedings against him.

Till I play Tests, I will limit franchise appearances to only two events a year: Travis Head

PTI NEW DELHI

Travis Head might have taken this year's IPL by storm but Test cricket remains his top priority and till the time he is playing the format, the Australian big-hitter would like to limit his participation in T20 leagues to just two events per year.

Head, who has enjoyed an incredible last 10 months, has been a nemesis for India with centuries in both the World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup finals. Currently, He has blazed to 533 runs for Sunrisers Hyderabad, forging a fabulous opening partnership with uncapped Indian Abhishek Sharma.

Needless to say he is sought after and asked how he plans to manage the lucrative T20 offers with his commitment for the 'Baggy Green', Head said it's a no brainer.

"This has been the first year in IPL for me in quite a while (since 2017). I would put all my eggs in Test basket for the moment, I will continue to do that," Head told PTI during an exclusive interview organised by Prime Video ahead of their upcoming docu-series, 'The Test Season 3', featuring the Australian team's tour of England last year.

"After Tests, I will pick formats, and see in which different ways I am available for selection." T20 events have mushroomed across the world with some like West Indies' Andre Russell and Sunil Narine appearing in multiple events, adding up to more than five a year.

Having had a great run for the 'Orange Army' this season, Head is keen on coming back to IPL next year too.

"At this stage, I would like to be back here in IPL next year. Like I will play Major League Cricket (MLC in USA) this year right after the World T20 but next year might just look a lot different.

"Each year, you prioritise what you can and can't do. Next year, Test cricket is around, we tour the West Indies and probably I will not feature in many other franchises," the 30-year-old was categorical.

"Look, in few years when I am finished with Test cricket, then probably there will be few more opportunities to play a bit more franchise cricket. But at this time, I would try to limit it to a couple of franchise may be, and (focus on) Test cricket." The last 10 months have been very hectic for Head starting with the WTC final, followed by the Ashes and then the World Cup where he came in during the second half after recovering from a hand injury.

Right now, more than two months of IPL will be followed by World T20 in the Americas. But the southpaw doesn't want to make a big deal about workload management.

"I will be home in a couple of days' time once we are done with IPL. Be home for two-three days and make the trip to the West Indies with family and start all over again.

"Look, we are very fortunate to do what we do and I am not going to do it forever. So try and make the most of it as we can, we are lucky that we are well looked after."

"I know in a few years, I can retire and do nothing, I will have plenty of time to look back and wish I was back on tour, I would like to be in the moment, keep batting through and stay in the moment, enjoying the moment."

CRACKING THE 'INDIA CODE': The performance that Head has delivered over the past few months, he believes that the seeds of it were sown early in 2023 when he came with the Test team, a hard-fought series that Australia lost 1-2.

"I think a lot of that has come from the Test tour last year, spending time here and working on things and also being a bit older, understanding my game and its blueprint and how you want to go about it and being content and my family being around, all those things," he explained.

"In IPL, I have evolved continuously while getting better but I still have some work to do," he seemed confident. His national team skipper Pat Cummins has been his SRH skipper and he says they have developed a chemistry where both know what to expect of each other.

"We are just close friends and just enjoy each other's company. Not too much game stuff and over time when you build relationships, he now knows how I will go about it (my job)...," he said.

"...If I need anything, I talk to him but he lets me do what I need to in order to perform. He backs me."

SRH lost the first qualifier on Tuesday to Kolkata Knight Riders but will have another shot at qualifying for finals in the second qualifier in Chennai on May 24.

Asked if a documentary like the 'The Test Season 3' can be intrusive and possibly catch players when they are at their most vulnerable and want to privately get over a low phase, Head,

Sunrisers Hyderabad batting approach was puzzling: Gavaskar



PTI AHMEDABAD

Legendary Sunil Gavaskar has questioned the "puzzling" batting approach of Sunrisers Hyderabad during the powerplay in the first IPL Qualifier, suggesting their reckless strategy may have cost them the match against Kolkata Knight Riders.

Having cleaned up his fellow

Australian Travis Head with a peach of a delivery with his second ball, Mitchell Starc blew away the SRH top-order in his opening spell of 3-0-22-3.

SRH lost four wickets inside the powerplay to be dismissed for a paltry 159, a target KKR shot down in 13.4 overs to storm into Tuesday's summit clash in Chennai.

"It was a terrific performance, no question. Such an impressive display with both the bat and the ball. They took four wickets in the power play, and that's where the Sunrisers were pushed onto the back foot, really on the ropes. They couldn't recover from that," the former Indian captain told Star Sports Cricket Live.

"There was a partnership of

sorts, but to me, the approach of the SRH batters in those first six overs was puzzling."

With Vaibhav Arora dismissing the in-form Abhishek Sharma in the next over, SRH's explosive opening pair were out for 13 runs.

Gavaskar said after losing two key wickets, SRH's batters should have played more cautiously. Instead, they continued to play aggressively, which led to further losses and ultimately cost them the match.

"When you've lost two wickets and the two who have been scoring runs for you, a certain amount of caution is required. Sure, don't miss out on scoring opportunities, but don't look to throw your bat at everything. That's what we saw."

"They lost those four wickets, and losing four top batters means you can't really expect numbers five, six, seven, eight, and nine to get you to 200. So, that is where they may have lost it. But full credit to Kolkata for the way they attacked and took advantage of that pitch as well," Gavaskar said.

The former India opener was all praise for Venkatesh Iyer

and emphasised his value as a versatile player, a top left-handed batter, and a capable medium-pace bowler, even if he hasn't bowled much recently.

Venkatesh struck a 28-ball 51 not out in an unbroken partnership with his skipper Shreyas Iyer (58 not out; 24b) to seal their eight-wicket win with 38 balls to spare.

"He's been a very good player for such a long time. His first season, a couple of seasons ago, was outstanding. Then, as it happens to everybody, the second season is harder because opponents have a better idea of how to bowl to you," Gavaskar said.

"But Venkatesh is the kind of

cricketer you want in your team. He's a top batter, a left-handed batter, and he can bowl medium pace. We haven't seen him bowl much recently, but he's a very good medium-paced bowler. He might not always pick up wickets, but he can bowl those few overs that can make a significant difference," he added.

OTHER SPORTS

Hina, Kanika strike as India juniors beat Dutch hockey club 2-0

PTI BREDA (NETHERLANDS)

Hina Bano and Kanika Siwach scored a goal each as the Indian junior women's hockey team began their tour of Europe with a 2-0 win against Netherlands club Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push here.

After a goalless first half on Tuesday, which saw both sides testing each others' strengths, India broke the deadlock with Hina scoring off a penalty corner after three failed attempts with the set-pieces in the second quarter.

Bredase Hockey Vereniging pushed aggressively for the equaliser but success eluded them despite the hosts earning three PCs in the third quarter.

Kanika Siwach found the back of the net to double India's lead in the fourth quarter following



which the defenders did well to ward off several spirited attacks from the opponents in the last few minutes.

The Indian junior team will play their next match against Belgium in Breda, Netherlands later on Wednesday.

न्यायालय नायब तहसीलदार रायपुर
जिला-रायपुर (छ.ग.)
सूचना-पत्र
क्रमांक/नायब/ना.ह. 2023-2024
रायपुर, दिनांक 09.05.2024

प्रति,
श्री रामजीशेखर गुप्त पिता श्री सखीनारायण गुप्त पत्नी सखीशेखर देवी के समाने मेरा बेटा सोहेला तहसील व पोस्ट सोहेला जिला बखार (उड़ीसा)
निम्न-संख्या: मासिक क्रमांक 22/08-4/ना.ह. 1989-2000 पत्रकार 38 एच.एच. निम्न-संख्या: मासिक क्रमांक 22/08-4/ना.ह. 60 बखारिल व जिला रायपुर में पत्र सम्बन्ध हेतु उपस्थित होने वाले।

निम्नलिखित संकेत में आपके पुत्रिका किराज का है कि प्रकरण में इन्फान्ट पत्रकारिता 12/07/2000 को प्रतिक्रिया प्रस्तुत कर लेख किराज है कि ग्राम भादगाव, प.ह.नं. 60 बखारिल व जिला रायपुर में नामांकन क्रमांक 193 दिनांक 09/06/2000 पत्रकार प्रस्ताव दिनांक 23/06/2000 के अनुसार निम्नलिखित विधायिका द्वारा आवृत्ति पत्र किया गया है। प्रतिक्रिया के साथ नामांकन पत्र की नकल एवं कार्यालय ग्राम पंचायत भादगाव के सारथी द्वारा हस्ताक्षरित पत्र की छायाप्रति संलग्न किया गया है। प्रकरण में आपकी किराज का है कि प्रतिक्रिया के पत्र दिनांक 28/07/2000 को प्रस्ताव अनेक पत्र की प्रति संलग्न है विद्यमान आपकी किराज का है कि प्रतिक्रिया के साथ नामांकन पत्र की नकल एवं कार्यालय ग्राम पंचायत भादगाव के सारथी द्वारा हस्ताक्षरित पत्र की छायाप्रति संलग्न किया गया है। प्रकरण में आपकी किराज का है कि प्रतिक्रिया के पत्र दिनांक 28/07/2000 को प्रस्ताव अनेक पत्र की प्रति संलग्न है विद्यमान आपकी किराज का है कि प्रतिक्रिया के साथ नामांकन पत्र की नकल एवं कार्यालय ग्राम पंचायत भादगाव के सारथी द्वारा हस्ताक्षरित पत्र की छायाप्रति संलग्न 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