



OPINION 6 CHILD DEVELOPMENT AS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

WORLD 8 INDIAN STUDENTS TURNING AWAY FROM UK UNIVERSITIES

MONEY 10 SENSEX, NIFTY HIT ALL TIME PEAKS

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SRH VS RR: BATTLE FOR IPL FINAL SPOT 12 SPORTS

All players set for penultimate battle

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI Slogans ranging from sympathisers of Pakistan to changing the Constitution and appointing Amit Shah as a next Prime Minister to assault on Swati Malwani to Adityanath vs Arvind Kejriwal dominated in the sixth phase of polling as campaigning ended on Thursday for May 25 polls for 58 Lok Sabha seats spread in six States and Union Territories.

Rajouri (Jammu & Kashmir), Abhijit Gangopadhyay (BJP) from Tamluk (West Bengal), and BJP's Manohar Lal Khattar (Karnal, Haryana), Naveen Jindal (Kurukshetra) Raj Babbar (Gurugram) Dinesh Lal Yadav alias Nirahua (Azamgarh) and Rao Inderjit Singh (Gurugram). So far, polling has been completed in 428 constituencies across 25 States and Union Territories, with phase V witnessing a voter turnout of approximately 62.19 per cent. In the corresponding phase during the 2019 polls, a voter turnout of 64.16 per cent was recorded as 51 seats across seven states went to the polls. The Congress did not win even one of these 58 seats in the 2019 elections. In contrast, the BJP won 40, securing a vote share of more than 40 per cent on 47 seats in the last elections. This clearly shows, Congress doesn't have any strongholds in this phase. On the last day of campaigning, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a rally in Punjab and Haryana. He took a dig at the INDIA Bloc, saying the "cow hasn't given milk but the fight over ghee has started" as the alliance is "talking about having five PMs in five years". Modi also asserted that till he is alive, no one can snatch the reservation for Dalits and tribals.

LOK SABHA ELECTION PHASE VI SEATS 2024 LS voting concludes for States marked in red on May 25. Table with columns: STATES, NO. OF SEATS, CONSTITUENCY. Rows include Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal.

The day before, he referred to the Calcutta High Court's decision to strike down the OBC status granted to "77 classes" in West Bengal since 2010 to hit out at the INDIA Bloc, saying its "obsession with appeasement" has crossed every limit. The contest in the national Capital has become interesting as it is a direct fight between the BJP and INDIA Bloc parties — the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) after the release of Arvind Kejriwal on an interim bail for electoral

campaigning. The Kejriwal-led AAP is contesting four seats, while the Congress has fielded candidates in three seats as per the seat-sharing agreement. The BJP, which won all seven seats of Delhi in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, has dropped all except Manoj Tiwari. The BJP's poll campaign in Delhi saw Modi addressing two rallies besides canvassing by Union Ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadhkar, Smriti Irani and Piyush Goyal and Chief Ministers of BJP-ruled States, including Yogi Adityanath (Uttar Pradesh), Pushkar Singh Dhami (Uttarakhand) and Pramod Sawant (Goa). The INDIA Bloc is clearly counting on the sympathy wave following Kejriwal's arrest. The BJP's campaign, on the other hand, relies on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's development agenda while questioning the credentials of Kejriwal, the once anti-corruption crusader who is now named as accused in a money laundering case. At the peak of campaigning in Odisha, BJP's Puri candidate Sambit Patra kicked up a row with his comment that "Lord Jagannath is a devotee of Modi". Patra later clarified that his remark was inadvertently made and

expressed regret. In Jammu and Kashmir, polling in four of the five parliamentary seats having ended peacefully, the focus has now shifted to the reshaped Anantnag-Rajouri constituency which witnessed four terror attacks in the last 30 days. The constituency spread on either side of the mighty Pir Panjal was originally scheduled to go to polls on May 7 but it was deferred to May 25 due to adverse weather conditions on the request of several parties, including the BJP, Apni party and the DPAP. Mehbooba faces a tough challenge from National Conference candidate and influential Gujjar leader Mian Altaf and the Apni Party's Zafar Iqbal Khan Manhas, who has the BJP's backing. Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) leader Mohamad Saleem Parray In UP, Sultanpur which is a seat to watch, next door to Amethi, another Gandhi, Maneka Gandhi of the BJP, is locked in a keen contest with her Samajwadi Party rival. Mayawati-led BSP's party nominee Udray Verma, who hails from OBC Kurmi caste, is causing trouble to the BJP as well as the SP candidates but Akhilesh Yadav-headed SP candidate Ram Bhuai Nishad is at a greater loss.

Nehru's aura bubble burst in 1962: Modi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday launched a scathing attack on Congress and said China thrashed India when the bubble of Pandit Nehru's aura burst in 1962. He also claimed that the INDIA Bloc is talking about having five PMs over the next five years and said the fight over 'ghee' has broken out in the alliance, even before the cow has given milk. Addressing an election rally in Bhiwani, Haryana, Modi said, "1962 mein, pandit Nehru ke aura ka gubbara jo phoot gaya, China ke haathon jo hamari pitaayi huvi", he (Congress) held our military responsible for that defeat. That family even today keeps looking for opportunities to demean our military. And in a sense of revenge, they have thrown Rs 500 and said OROP (One Rank One Pension) will be done. Modi has said what it means to implement OROP..."

Modi also said the INDIA Bloc is talking about having five PMs over the next five years and said the fight over 'ghee' has broken out in the alliance, even before the cow has given milk. Hours before campaigning for the sixth round of the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls came to an end, Modi asserted that till he is alive, no one can snatch the reservation for Dalits and tribals. All ten Lok Sabha seats in Haryana will go to polls on May 25. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP had secured all 10 seats. In this election, "you will not only choose the country's PM but also decide the country's future", the PM told the gathering. "On one hand is your tried and tested 'sevak' Modi. Who is on the other side, one does not know," he said, targeting the INDIA Bloc that has as its constituents Opposition parties, including the Congress, Aam Aadmi Party, Trinamool Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The INDIA Bloc is "extremely communal, casteist and nepotist", he said while alleging that when the Congress was in power, it did not allow construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Recalling his days working for the BJP in the State in the mid-1990s, Modi said, "Haryana has showered a lot of love on me, I have deep relations with you."

Choose INDIA MPs in Delhi, says Cong

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI Just days before the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi rode the Delhi Metro on Thursday to connect with voters. Congress candidate from North East Delhi, Kanhaiya Kumar, shared photos of Rahul interacting and posing with passengers. En route to a rally in Mangolpuri with Kumar on the last day of campaigning, Rahul engaged with commuters. Delhi will vote on May 25 under Phase VI. Speaking at an election meeting at the DDA ground, GTB Nagar, Dilshad Garden in northeast Delhi, Rahul said the BJP always wanted to "tear and throw away" the Constitution, and asserted that the Lok Sabha elections this time is a fight to safeguard it. Thursday was the last day of campaigning for the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. This is Rahul's second rally in Delhi where he notably avoided mentioning Arvind Kejriwal's AAP, despite their alliance with Congress in the region. The Congress has fielded former JNU Student Union president Kanhaiya Kumar, who is locked in a fierce contest against BJP's Manoj Tiwari for the Northeast Delhi



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with party leader and INDIA Bloc Lok Sabha candidate from North East Delhi constituency Kanhaiya Kumar during a public meeting at Dilshad Garden in New Delhi on Thursday. Photo by: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

The former Congress president said the BJP has finally "accepted" in this election that it wanted to change the Constitution. However, the BJP will have to face the Opposition and crores of people of the country if it tries to change the Constitution, he said. "I want to tell them (BJP) you don't have the dare to do it (change Constitution). You will have to face us and the crores of people of India if you attempt it," Rahul added. Later addressing an all-women poll meeting in Mangolpuri in support of the Congress' North West Delhi Lok Sabha seat candidate Udit Raj, Rahul said though the BJP passed the women's reservation bill in Parliament with much pomp and show, later it said that it will be implemented after 10 years. "Met fellow passengers and enquired about their well-being -- I am happy to see that our initiative of building metro in Delhi has proved so convenient for public transportation," the former Congress president said in a post on X in Hindi. He also shared pictures of him interacting and clicking pictures with passengers in the metro. have to play your part in this fight." Speaking at the election meeting, Rahul said these people have always wanted to tear and throw it (Constitution) away. "They never accepted neither the Indian Constitution nor the Indian flag. In this election finally they have accepted that they want to change it," he charged. "In this election, the fight is for safeguarding the Indian Constitution. It is not simply a book, our Constitution carries thousands of years of ideological heritage of Gandhi, Ambedkar and Nehru," the Congress leader said.

A typical repairman as renovation Ambassador

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI When N Rangaswamy, the 73-year-old Chief Minister of Puducherry was handed over a pearl white Ambassador car on Tuesday, he was left speechless. The soft-spoken Chief Minister could not believe that it was the same 1995 model Ambassador which he had entrusted to Thanjaneyan, a car mechanic at Thoothukudi for restoration. This car had seen many summers and winters and was as good as scrap when Thanjaneyan asked him permission to restore the vehicle to its original form. Rangaswamy, who had a sentimental attachment to the car, did not think twice and asked Thanjaneyan to go ahead. The Chief Minister always preferred the battered and bruised old Amby for his personal use. Though Hindustan Motors, the company that manufactured the car had stopped production in 2014 because of mounting losses and other factors, the passion for Ambassador remained intact. For two years, Thanjaneyan worked on the car in his small workshop and once it was completed, the restored Ambassador



resembled a showroom model in all respects. It is living up to the catchword 'the Car with Plenty of Drive', coined by the manufacturer," said Dr Anjan Chatterjee, a lawyer-turned-car lover. Dr Chatterjee is an authority on the 'horoscope' of the Ambassador, which extends from the genesis till the car took the last bow. "It was exciting work because it is an Ambassador car. Restoring and maintaining the Amby is an intoxicating experience," said Thanjaneyan, an expert in restoring even the previous models of Ambassador like the Morris, Vauxhall, Land Master and Baby Hindustan. The white Amby that was lying in the backyard of N Rangaswamy's residence has been brought to the portico of the house.

One of the slogans used to promote the Ambassador and caught the national attention was "ideal at 200 potholes per hour". There were no national corridors or expressways in the country till former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee launched the six-lane highway mission in 1998 and which was pursued by the Narendra Modi government since 2014. Dr Chatterjee lists many reasons for the shut down of the Ambassador plant in Hooghly district of West Bengal. "Militant trade unions and a management without any clue of what is happening around were the factors that led to the untimely demise of the car manufacturer," he said. Doraiswamy Naveen, an avid car collector said he could not find any owners who made complaints about the Ambassadors. "There was a time when the choice of cars were restricted to Ambassador and Premier Padmini (owned by Walchand family). The liberalisation saw the gradual opening of the car sector to foreign investors and technology and this resulted in Ambassador making way for the newcomers," said Naveen who himself is busy restoring a Mark II Ambassador owned by his grandfather.

Infographic titled 'PRECAUTIONS AGAINST HEATSTROKE DURING POLL'. It includes sections for 'SYMPTOMS OF HEATSTROKE' (Severe sweating, Reeling, nausea and vomiting, Severe thirst, Muscle cramp, Fainting / Fits), 'PRECAUTIONS' (Prefer cool hours of morning/afternoon for going outside, Drink enough water before going outdoors, Use light colour loose cotton dress, umbrella & foot wear, Avoid physical labour / long walking under sun, Take rest in shade periodically), and 'HEATSTROKE TREATMENT' (Shift the patient to an open and cool place, give ORS/salt-sugar solution/plain water, Remove clothing as far as practicable, Provide head bath and cold sponging, Keep the patient under AC or fan, If condition does not improve, shift to hospital). It is from the Health & Family Welfare Department, Odisha.

Naveen's Nayagarh meeting draws large crowd Cyclonic storm won't affect Odisha

PNS ■ NAYAGARH
BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday addressed a huge election meeting at the Stadium Ground in Nayagarh town. A large number of women, youths, senior citizens, intellectuals and BJD supporters had gathered from the morning and waited to hear the Chief Minister's address.



Patnaik said that from July, no electricity bill would come to households and the BJD government would provide free electricity when it comes to power again. Then, he asked the crowd whether they are happy in the BJD regime. He also took the

views of the people on the BSKY scheme, Madhubabu Yojana, Mamata Yojana, KALIA scheme and other welfare measures of his government.

He said the opposition parties' leaders are telling lies and shedding crocodile tears. He urged the people to vote for the BJD MP and MLA candidates.

5T Chairman VK Pandian said the Chief Ministers of various States and BJP leaders are coming to the State and making tall claims. Puri BJD MP candidate Arup Patnaik praised the selfless service of Naveen Patnaik and said he would take oath as Chief Minister for a sixth term on June 9.

Rains predicted in some districts

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The severe cyclonic storm brewing over west-central and adjoining south Bay of Bengal won't have a direct impact on Odisha, said the Regional Office of the IMD here on Thursday.

The low-pressure area formed over the southwest and

adjoining west-central Bay of Bengal on Wednesday lay as a well-marked low-pressure area over west-central and adjoining south Bay of Bengal at 8.30 am on Thursday.

It is very likely to continue to move north-eastwards and concentrate into a depression over central parts of the Bay of Bengal by May 24 morning. Thereafter, it is very likely to continue to move north-eastwards and intensify fur-

ther into a cyclonic storm over the east-central Bay of Bengal by May 25 morning. Subsequently, it would move nearly northwards and reach Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal coasts by May 26 evening as a severe cyclonic storm.

However, most places of north Odisha would experience light to moderate rainfall and districts like Baleswar, Bhadrak and Kendrapada are

very likely to witness heavy to very heavy rainfall.

On May 26, most places of north Odisha will experience light to moderate rainfall and one or two places may witness heavy to very heavy rainfall. The districts that are expected to witness heavy to very heavy rainfall are Baleswar, Bhadrak and Kendrapada," said IMD Regional Director Manorama Mohanty.

MLA Jitu Mitra quits BJD, returns to BJP



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Senior BJD leader Jyotirindra Nath (Jitu) Mitra resigned from the party and joined the BJP on Thursday.

Soon after, Mitra, who is the sitting MLA of Khordha, along with his supporters, participated in a road show of Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi.

Aparajita, who is seeking reelection from prestigious Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha seat as BJP candidate, took out the road show from the Gosala ground in Khordha town.

Mitra and Aparajita also sought votes for party MLA candidate Prasant Jagdev.

The three-time MLA Mitra said the people are dissatisfied over the performance of the BJD government and want a change. "I joined BJP to help the party bring development to our State," he said.

Mitra had quit the BJD in 2014 after being denied a party ticket. He then switched over to the BJP and contested the Assembly elections unsuccessfully. He again returned to the BJD in 2019 and won the election as Khordha MLA.

'Odisha people want to give rest to Naveenbabu'

Nadda claims BJP will win State's all 21 Lok Sabha seats

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

This time, it is clearly visible that the people of Odisha have decided to give 21 out of 21 Lok Sabha seats to the BJP. They have also decided to give Naveenbabu rest and let the BJP the government in the State," said BJP national president JP Nadda on Thursday while addressing a public meeting at Karanjia in Keonjhar district.

Nadda said Prime Minister Modi has changed the definition and culture of development and politics in the last 10 years. People used to say that politics would continue like this and there would be no change. Now, every person in the country is walking with PM Modi towards the vision



of Viksit Bharat. Earlier, politics was done based on religion, caste and area and even a divide & rule policy. PM Modi gave one mantra, 'Saab Ka Saath, Sab Ka Vikash' and made development a top priority, he said.

"The tribals, who were earlier seen as vote bank politics, are now dreaming of a better life and it has happened only due to PM Modi. A daughter of Odisha, Droupadi Murmu is the President of India and it shows the

vision of the Prime Minister for tribal welfare," said Nadda.

The BJD government in Odisha has given only pain to the poor and tribals. Hence, the tribals and those staying near mining areas are forced to migrate outside the State in search of livelihood, alleged he.

"PM Modi started the Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana and provided free ration to 3.2 crore people in Odisha including 18.5 lakh people in Keonjhar. Under PM Awas Yojana, 4

crore houses were constructed in the last 10 years. Now, it has been decided that nobody will live in kutcha houses and hence 3 crore more houses will be constructed in next 5 years," said he.

Nadda said it is unfortunate that "an outsider is running the governance in Odisha. Why has the administration been outsourced?"

"Vote BJP to power, and a son or daughter of Odisha will run the State," he urged people.

'BJP, BJD responsible for misery of poor'



Congress promises guarantees if voted to power

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The BJD government which is ruling Odisha for the last 24 years and the Modi government which is in power at the Centre for 10 years are the reasons for untold misery of the middleclass, lower middleclass and poor people of the country, said the Congress here on Thursday.

Both the governments have broken the financial backbone of the aforesaid class of people. The acute unemployment problem, along with the price rise of petrol, diesel, cooking gas, medicines and other essential commodities, have turned into a headache for the

people. Due to both the governments' policies, the capitalists are benefitting and the poor are becoming more poorer, said OPCC Campaign Committee chairman Bhakta Charan Das.

The beneficiaries are getting rice due to the Food Security Act brought by the UPA government. Prime Minister Modi, instead of changing the name of the scheme, hasn't done anything else. The Modi government has waived off loans worth Rs 16,000 crore of its industrialist friends. The Congress has always fought for the rights of the poor. The party, when it comes to power, would fill up the 30 lakh vacant government jobs. Besides, it would provide Rs 1 lakh to each woman for livelihood. These are some of the guarantees of the Congress, said Das

'Early detection of blood cancer key to fight disease'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Early detection of blood cancer is a key to fight the disease as treatment in the form of stem cell transplant has significantly improved the survival rate, an expert said at a programme organised at the Institute of Medical Sciences and SUM Hospital here on Wednesday.

India ranks third in the world in terms of reported cases of blood cancer after the United States and China with around 1 lakh people getting diagnosed with a form of the disease like leukemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma every year, Prof (Dr) Priyanka



Samal, Head of the department of Hematology, Hemato Oncology and Bone Marrow Transplant at the hospital, said.

The programme was organised ahead of the World Blood Cancer Day observed globally on May 28.

Prof (Dr) Samal said the various types of blood cancer

had divergent subtypes, symptoms and causes requiring different treatments with Leukemia being India's most common type of blood cancer accounting for over half of all cases.

The IMS and SUM Hospital, she said, was equipped with state-of-the-art technology for

the diagnosis and management of all types of blood cancer, she said, adding it offered a wide range of diagnostic services including advanced imaging and laboratory tests to accurately identify the stage of the disease.

"The treatment options available in the hospital were

tailored to the individual patient's needs which included chemotherapy, radiation therapy, immunotherapy, targeted therapy and stem cell transplant," she said.

She said that the hospital had been conducting bone marrow transplantation since 2019 and 50 patients had un-

dergone autologous and allogeneic transplantation.

Prof (Dr) Ashok Kumar Mahapatra, eminent neurosurgeon and SOA University's Principal Advisor (Health Sciences), Prof (Dr) Lalit Kumar Meher, senior professor in the medicine department and Prof (Dr) Rachita Sarangi, Additional Dean (Examination Cell) also addressed the event attended by many blood cancer patients.

Prof (Dr) Mahapatra said around 15 lakh people worldwide were diagnosed with the disease every year. In India, a blood cancer patient was diagnosed every five minutes, he said.

In Keonjhar Cash seized from BJD MLA candidate's wife

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Ahead of the third phase polling in the State on May 25, cash of Rs 84,000 was seized from the vehicle of Sabitri Sethi, wife of BJD's MLA candidate for Anandapur Assembly seat Abhimanyu Sethi.

As a part of the intensified

surveillance, a flying squad team was carrying out checking at Tartara Square on the Anandapur-Bhadrak road in Keonjhar district on Thursday.

The squad detained the vehicle of Sabitri Sethi, who is also the chairperson of Hatadihi block. They carried out a search and seized the cash from the vehicle.

SOCIAL CANVAS

Healthcare guarantee for polls Vs Constitutional promises

The Constitution of India's Article 21 guarantees the Right to Life and Personal Liberty. The Right to Health is inherent in the Right to Life. The Directive Principles of State Policy very well spells out the role of the State in promoting public health in its Articles 38, 39, 42, 43 and 47. Health being a State subject, it is the primary responsibility of the State Government to bring the desired improvement in the health sector.

Unfortunately, currently the political parties are making promises and giving guarantee cards to voters, forgetting that it is the primary duty of the Government to take care of the public health. But this Constitutional guarantee is hardly respected by the elected Governments over the past 75 years since our independence, both at Centre and State. Are the ruling parties not accountable to people for the non-implementation of the constitutional guarantee?

It has been observed from a



MANAS JENA

number of health indicators that the health status of Odisha is quite disappointing. Health and education are vital to developing human resources, but the State Government has been advertising its piecemeal activities through various schemes without improving the health sector as a whole. The poor health condition of a majority of

the working masses has a number of ramifications on the socio-economic conditions. One of the major reasons of the persistent backwardness of Odisha is negligence of its public health and education system.

The health cards issued to the poor mostly help the private hospitals to earn a good business with taxpayers' money, as a sizeable portion of the health budget goes for this purpose. This has not been helpful in building public health infrastructure; rather this encouraged people to visit private hospitals and facilitates.

Health indicators by the Sample Registration System report 2018 show the infant mortality rate (IMR) in the case of Odisha was 40, which is higher than the national average of 32 and it was the highest, 48 in MP but in case of Kerala it was 7 and lowest 4 only in case of Nagaland. The States having higher IMR are also featured as having a considerable percentage of people below the poverty

line, such as Odisha, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. These States have poor health infrastructure in comparison to other southern States. The primary healthcare centers in these States lack basic amenities and minimum healthcare professionals. The data clearly established the link of poverty with the health care system of a State and related issues.

The case IMR in case of STs and SCs and in rural backward regions in Odisha is much higher in comparison to other social groups. The impact of programmes such as ICDS linked to IMR and MMR for the last three decades has had a very negligible impact on the malnutrition condition of the poorer section. The issues of Juang tribe in Nagada of Jajpur and other PVTG groups, the death of children by Japanese Encephalitis in Malakangiri district, the plight of the Paudi Bhuya of Sundargarh, Dana Majhi of Kalahandi and Kabir Bhoi of Puri district are tell-tale signs of our poor health service sys-

tem which has not been improved much. The ruling party has been advertising its work and making further promises in the election manifesto to increase insurance money without any vision for the State health sector.

Public health infrastructure, both human and physical, are linked to qualitative and developed human life and the modern State has to ensure this through public investment and dedicated institutional arrangements. But as experienced, this process has not produced the desired result, especially for the deserving majority of the poor and marginalised. The negligence in public health investment in developing basic health infrastructure for the last sixty years has widened the rural and urban gap, as a result of which, mostly the rural poor are migrating to urban areas for a better living. Studies have found that the lack of basic amenities has a wider impact on working conditions and the trend shows that the work culture in rural areas has been

deteriorating with increasing health problems along with lack of improvement in health education. The social life and living conditions in rural areas and its change process are linked to the availability of basic health infrastructure and amenities. The living condition of people reflects the social, and economic development of a country.

Mercer's annual worldwide quality of living survey ranked Vienna, Zurich, Auckland, Copenhagen, Munch, Frankfurt, Geneva and Singapore in top positions among Asian countries as good cities. The quality of living in Indian cities has been poor in comparison to global standards. Among the Indian States, the quality of living and availability of basic amenities are widely unequal. States such as Kerala, TN and AP are comparatively better than Odisha as Odisha ranked close to the bottom of the list of the India Today survey 2016. There has been lack of segregated data over malnutrition issues of different social groups in various

regions of the State, which is required for a number of purposes. The malnutrition problem is linked to the overall socio-economic environment and its eventual impact on the quality of life. It is a fact that, in spite of interventions, the access of vulnerable areas to healthcare facilities has not been improved.

Still, the health delivery system discriminates against the poor and marginalised sections by preventing their access to existing available public healthcare facilities. The increasing privatisation is worsening it further. The health service providers are not being drawn from the marginalised sections. People in interior areas have been deprived of getting healthcare from the hospital and, even in some places, they have to travel a long distance to get the service. There has been a need for PHCs, health workers and doctors, but the State Government has failed on this front.

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Ex-MLA Reddy walks free after 10 months in jail

Was serving life term for killing policeman

PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR

After spending nearly 10 months in jail, former Chhatrapur MLA Nagireddi Narayan Reddy, who is a key accused in the killing of a policeman in Ganjam district, walked free on Tuesday when the Orissa High Court granted bail to him and two of his accomplices.

Ten others, previously sentenced to life imprisonment along with Reddy, will be released from the jail on Thursday, sources said.



In August 2023, a district court sentenced the former CPI MLA and 12 others to life imprisonment for their involvement in the death of Reserve Police Inspector Binoba Meher during a clash in June 1998 over land acquisition for a steel plant by the Tata Steel.

Reddy, who represented the Chhatrapur Assembly constituency during 2004-2009, had

then said that he and other convicted persons would challenge the verdict in the higher courts.

The murder had taken place when a clash broke out between agitators and police during a meeting called by the administration at Sindhigaon village. Meher was killed in the confrontation and a case was later registered under Section 302 of the IPC against Reddy and 22 others, of whom eight persons have died.

Notably, Reddy had also been arrested in December 2011 for violence against land acquisition in Erasama by South Korean steel behemoth POSCO, which later pulled out of the project.

108 Ambulance crew donate blood for mishap victim

PNS ■ BURLA

Gajadhar Sahu (80), a resident of the Jamankira police station area, was injured in an accident and admitted to the VIMSAR in Burla on Tuesday.

The doctor treating him, Pavitra Hemram, asked her patient's assistant to arrange blood for the patient. But there was no O+ group blood in the blood bank.

On receiving information that a patient needed blood

urgently, a pharmacist of the 108 Ambulance Service of the Fasimal Community Health Centre came forward to donate blood. The hospital authorities have praised the ambulance crew for their timely help.

2 arrested for killing youth in Gajapati



PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI

Police on Thursday arrested two persons in connection with the murder of a youth, Prasanta Jena near Vinala village in Gurandi tehsil of Gajapati district on May 18.

The arrested were identified as Santosh Swain and Simanchal Pradhan.

Police seized two motorcycles, a blood-stained stick and iron rods from their possession.

According to police sources, on the fateful day's evening, the arrested duo had allegedly attacked Prasanta and his friend Kalia with iron rods and

sticks and fled from the spot. Prasanta was critically injured in the attack.

Getting information about the incident, Prasanta's family members rushed to the spot and took him to the District Headquarters Hospital here. But doctors referred him to Srikakulam. Prasanta succumbed to the injuries on the way to Srikakulam.

"Five persons were involved in the incident. Santosh and Simanchal have been arrested and they have confessed to the crime. The other three accused will be nabbed soon," said Paralakhemundi SDPO Madhabananda Nayak.

Activist Bitanu remembered on birth anniversary



PNS ■ BARIIPADA

Late social activist Bitanu Nayak was remembered here on his birth anniversary at a meeting held here to mark the occasion.

Intellectuals, lawyers, litterateurs and social workers attending the event showed their love and respect for Bitanu.

Those who paid glowing tributes to the man and his deeds included his mother Haramani Dalei, litterateur Padmanabh Sahu, social worker Biraja Devi, lawyer Kaveri Mishra, activist Sarat Nayak, writer Manoj

Dalbehera, journalist Kavi Vishnu Satpathy and poet Gopal Sao.

All of them described late Bitanu as an illustrious son of the soil and pointed out that he always worked for the promotion of literature and culture and also for the upliftment of Mayurbhanj in every way.

A book in Bitanu's memory entitled "Bhanjamatira Singhasabaka Bhanjadoota Bitanu" was released on the occasion. Bitanu, who had an untimely death at the age of 28 was the founder-editor of the periodical magazine "Bhanjadoot" - a magazine meant to safeguard the interests of Mayurbhanj.

Turtle Day celebrated in Ganjam

PNS ■ CHHATRAPUR

A seminar to celebrate the World Turtle Day was organised at Palibandha in Ganjam district on Thursday.

ACF Dibya Ranjan Behera, who presided over the seminar, spoke about the safety pro-

ocols to protect the endangered Olive Ridley turtles in this area. He stressed the importance of protection of turtles as the Rushikulya river mouth of Ganjam is famous for nesting of turtles. He further emphasised the role of these turtles to maintain eco



balance.

Ganjam District Eco Club Coordinator Dr Shankar Narayan Beja, Rabindra Kumar Biswal, Bijay Kumar Biswal, Balakrushna Maharana, Tulasiram Behera and many others participated in the seminar.

5 NYAYS - GUARANTEED BY CONGRESS

YUVA NYAY

- 30 lakh government jobs
- ₹1 lakh stipend under Apprenticeship Act for degree / diploma holders

KISAN NYAY

- Legal guarantee of MSP
- Loan waiver for farmers
- GST-free agriculture

SHRAMIK NYAY

- ₹400 daily wage under MGNREGA
- Free healthcare of up to ₹25,00,000

NARI NYAY

- ₹1 lakh annual cash transfer to women
- 50% reservation for women in government jobs

HISSEDARI NYAY

- Socio-economic caste census
- Settlement of all FRA claims within 1 year

HAATH BADLEGA HALAAT



In Kendrapada Post Master, ABEO found campaigning for BJD

Action demanded against duo

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

A complaint made by a rights activist two weeks ago related to two Government officials campaigning for a BJD candidate has drawn no action from the Collector despite the fact that the complainant has provided all the required video clips and photos to prove his point.

Activist Alaya Samantaray of Mashakani village on May 6 filed the complaint before the District Election Officer (DEO)-cum-District Magistrate of Kendrapada, Chief Election Commissioner of Odisha, and the CEC of India, alleging that Bibhu Ranjan Mangaraj, who is presently working as the PostMaster in Teragaon post office under sub post office of Mahakalapada, was found participating in election propaganda/canvassing for Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak, the BJD MLA candidate of Mahakalapada Assembly constituency.

In the viral photos it was seen Bibhu Ranjan standing in

front of Atanu in an election campaign and distributing leaflets and directing other persons regarding the election matter. It was seen he was motivating the people for their support to BJD and influencing them to cast their votes in favour of the BJD candidates, which is a serious violation of MCC Rule and breach of U/S 129 of People's Representative Act 1951, alleged Samantaray.

Similarly, it came to the notice that Prasant Kumar Beura, presently working as Assistant Block Education Officer (ABEO), Marshaghai block, sitting in an election meeting surrounded by some active members of BJD of Marshaghai block. The errant officer was sitting near Sanjaya Lenka, Marshaghai block BJD president, who organized the election meeting in his block. Prasant was encouraging locals to cast their votes in support of BJD, alleged Samantaray.

He demanded immediate disciplinary action against the duo officials. When contacted, District Election Officer-cum-DEO, Suryawanshi Mayur Vikas stated he had directed a probe into the incident.

In Jajpur Missing Pihu's family to boycott polls



AKSHAY ROUT ■ JAJPUR

Missing toddler Pihu's mother Monalisa Nayak and her family members have decided to boycott the elections. They have put up a banner in this regard in front of their house at Madhusudan Nagar under the Binjharpur police station in Jajpur district. They have also written about their decision to the Election Commission of India and the district administration.

They alleged that Pihu went missing on August 9, 2020. The State Government and public representatives have not helped in finding the girl.

"Four and a half years have passed and we are still ignorant where our daughter has gone. When I wanted to meet the Prime Minister during his Odisha visit to demand a CBI

inquiry to find out Pihu, we were prevented by security personnel," said Monalisa.

However, no reactions could be obtained from the police and district administration in response to the allegations by Pihu's family members. Notably, before going missing, Pihu was last seen playing on the village road. Though Monalisa staged protests several times and even approached the Orissa Human Rights Commission, it was of no use. The government and police had assured to trace her daughter, but nothing happened.

Monalisa had even written to the President of India through the district Collector seeking permission for euthanasia. Earlier, she had urged the State Government to initiate a CBI investigation into the matter.

Saline water ingress RWSS projects defunct in Ganjam; thousands hit

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAMPUR

Over 50 villages in the coastal area of Ganjam Block are reeling under drinking water crisis as salt water from tidal wave ingress into the deep bore well forcing women folk to walk a long distance to fetch water from tube wells under the unprecedented heat wave.

The mega RWSS water supply project for 147 villages of both Ganjam and Brahmagiri Blocks was started in 2018 at a cost of Rs 200 crore. Though it was targeted for completion in 2022, the project is still not complete in all respects for reasons only known to the Government. It started supplying drinking water only a few months back, reportedly keeping the general elections in mind, but now the entire project is defunct due to the borewell on river Rushikulya at Sribana village under Ganjam

Block whose water is frequently contaminated by tidal waves.

Similarly, another mega project through deep bore well on the river Rushikulya meant to provide drinking water to about 100 villages and industrial area of Chhatrapur too is a non-starter right from the inception as the place in tidal wave zone is causing saline contamination to the groundwater posing a threat to the life of the local residents. Senior BJP leader who recently visited the affected villages, namely, Gokharkuda, Myurpada, Binchanapalli, Shipakuda and Podempetta to take stock of the situation on the ground, said that the situation is quite alarming and suggested to the Executive Engineer, RWSS to immediately construct a sand-check dam on the downstream of the bore wells in order to prevent intrusion of saline wave and for storage of thin river flow

to percolate to ground water.

Panda further said that when he was a Member of the State Planning Board in his letter dated 17.11.17, he had written to the Development Commissioner for construction of a barrage/check dam on the river Rushikulya and to construct the intake wells of the mega drinking water project on the upstream of Kansari Ganda to prevent the intrusion of sea tidal wave. The Planning Department had then taken a meeting on December 11, 2017 after which the construction of the barrage was approved, while the intake wells are downstream of the barrage.

The only option left now is to construct a small height check dam adjacent to intake wells to prevent the ingress of saline water, he added. He urged the authorities to look into the matter on a priority basis on humanitarian grounds.

No cakewalk for BJD's Sana in Champua

As scenario changed after Laguri family joins Cong

RAJENDRA K SAHU ■ KEONJHAR

The simultaneous elections for the lone Lok Sabha seat and six Assembly segments of Keonjhar district will be held on May 25, which is the third phase of the elections in the State and the sixth phase in the country.

However, all eyes are on the mining rich Champua Assembly constituency this time. Given the large gathering of supporters of both BJD and BJP on the nomination day at the Champua Sub-Collector office, it was expected that the fight will be between BJD and BJP and Sana Mahakud of

BJD might win the election considering his support base coupled with the Naveen wave. But after the nomination of Yashwavant Singh Laguri as Congress nominee for Champua, the situation has changed. It is now difficult to predict who will win the elections.

As regards Laguri, he is the son of Dhanurjaya Laguri - a veteran tribal Congress leader and two-time MLA of Champua having a strong hold over large numbers of tribal people who constitute about 30 percent of total voters of Champua. Being influenced by late Pyari Mohan Mohapatra, the then Margadarshak of BJD, Laguri had joined BJD in the year 2008 and then his son - Yashwavant Laguri and daughter-in-law, Shakuntala Laguri (

wife of Yashwavant) were given ticket for Keonjhar Lok Sabha seat in the year 2009 and 2014 elections respectively and they won. However, in the year 2019, Laguri family was not given ticket by the BJD. For the 2024 election, Laguri family was aspirant for the Lok Sabha ticket but being denied, the entire family quit BJD and joined Congress to return back their old home.

In view of the present poor organisation of Congress, it was thought that Laguri will have no impact in this election but gradually on each passing day, situation is turning in favour of Congress. This was evident when more than 20,000 tribal people had joined the first meeting organised by Laguri.

Another thing which is go-

ing in favour of Laguri is the rebels within the BJD those who consider themselves original BJD. Their allegation is that there are two types in the BJD. One is Sana BJD and the other is Naveen BJD. The problem is that Sana BJD and Naveen BJD don't see eye to eye. The people in Naveen BJD complain that they feel suffocated within party after the joining of Mahakud just before election. Under such circumstances, the rebels are planning to shift their votes in favour of Laguri with whom they are more comfortable in comparison to Mahakud.

Another factor is that Mahakud is facing stiff opposition at places due to incumbency against Meenakshi Mahanta MLA, Champua who was at some

point of time a protege of Mahakud.

The problem with the BJP is their overconfidence of winning the election and failure to study the public perception. They look more dependent on Modi than their personal charisma. Although Mahakud has a mass support but the problem with him is his close aids, don't let common people have direct interactions with their leader.

This is the reason, voters will not vote for Mahakud to teach a lesson to him. Most important is the mining lobby which considers Mahakud a threat to their business.

Under the above circumstances, Champua Assembly election will see a triangular contest and whoever wins, the margin of victory will be small.

LS polls: Phase V turnout 62.2 per cent, says EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The voter turnout in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha polls held on May 20 has now climbed to 62.2 per cent, the Election Commission (EC) said on Thursday with women outnumbering men.

According to an EC statement, 61.48 per cent of the registered male voters turned up at the polling stations as compared to 63 per cent of female electors.

In phase 5, 49 seats across six states and two union territories went for polling where over 8.95 crore people, including 4.69 crore men, 4.26 crore women and 5409 third gender were eligible to vote.

The participation of women in voting was higher as compared to men in Bihar, Jharkhand, Ladakh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. The male-female turnout gap was wide in Bihar and Jharkhand. While in Bihar, the male turnout was 52.42 per cent, the female turnout was 61.58 per cent.

Similarly, in Jharkhand, the male turnout was registered at 58.08 per cent, while the female turnout was 68.65 per cent. A maximum of 38.22 per cent of voters registered in the third gender category turned out to



vote in West Bengal. The poll body noted that repolls at two polling stations in the Kandhamal parliamentary constituency in Odisha will be concluded on Thursday and the figures "may" change accordingly, once the data is updated for post-repoll. In the corresponding phase in the 2019 polls, the turnout was registered at 64.16 per cent when 51 seats across seven states went to polls. According to the Election Commission, the voter turnout in the fourth phase stood at 69.16 per cent, 3.65 percentage points higher than the corresponding phase in the 2019 parliamentary elections. The voter turnout figure for

the third phase of polling in the Lok Sabha elections was 65.68 per cent. In the third phase of the 2019 elections, the turnout was 68.4 per cent. In the second phase of the 2024 elections, the turnout was recorded at 66.71 per cent as against 69.64 per cent in the second phase of the 2019 polls. In the first phase of the ongoing general elections, a 66.14 per cent turnout was recorded. In the 2019 polls, the turnout in the first phase was 69.43 per cent. The poll panel has said the final turnout will only be available after the results, with the counting of postal ballots and its addition to the total voting percentage.

BJP again hits at INDIA Bloc over quota, appeasement politics

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday here launched a fresh attack on the INDIA Bloc on the issue of reservation, accusing the Opposition grouping of indulging in appeasement politics, and said the people of the country will give them a fitting reply in the Lok Sabha polls.

The BJP's charge came a day after West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee said she will not accept a Calcutta High Court order that scrapped the OBC status of several classes granted in the state since 2010, and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed the system is heavily aligned against lower castes and his party aims to fix this.

Latching on to their comments, senior BJP leader Shivraj Singh Chouhan said, "Appeasement is the dose and diet of parties like the Congress and the TMC. Without this, they cannot survive even a day." The former Madhya Pradesh chief minister alleged after coming at the helm in West Bengal, Banerjee pursued vote bank politics and gave OBC certificates to a number of castes and the beneficiaries included Muslims, Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. "The Calcutta High Court's decision in the matter that came on Wednesday was a



tight slap on Banerjee's vote bank politics," he told a press conference at the party headquarters here.

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday struck down as illegal the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted since 2010. The court observed that the inclusion of 77 classes of Muslims in the list was to "treat them as vote bank." Reacting sharply, Banerjee asserted she "will not accept" the order and challenge it in a higher court. Chouhan slammed the West Bengal chief minister for her refusal to accept the High Court's order and termed her remarks an insult to the Constitution. "What does Mamata

Banerjee think of herself? Is she above the Constitution? This is the height of arrogance and anarchy," he charged and said the TMC chief has no right to continue holding the post of chief minister who provided reservation on the basis of religion in violation of the Constitution. On Rahul Gandhi's statement, Chouhan asserted the BJP has been saying for several years that the Congress is anti-poor, anti-Dalit, anti-tribal and anti-backward classes. "Rahul Gandhi accepted this truth yesterday."

Addressing an event in Ranchukula on Wednesday, Rahul Gandhi had said the system is heavily aligned

against lower castes and that he knows the system from inside as his grandmother and father were prime ministers and later he used to visit the PM's house when Manmohan Singh lived there. The Congress leader claimed that the country's 90 per cent population including the Dalits, OBCs, tribal communities and the minorities does not have representation in the country's narrative and power structure, and said his party aims to ensure their participation in the country's progress.

"The Congress has always snatched away the rights of the Dalits, OBCs and tribals. The Congress-ruled states including Andhra Pradesh

and Karnataka have committed the crime and sin of robbing the rights of OBC by providing reservation to minorities from their shares," Chouhan charged.

He alleged that while the Congress did not give Constitutional status to the OBC Commission for about 40 years, its government committed the "sin" of ending the reservation for Dalits, OBCs and tribals in the educational institutions like the Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh and Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi.

"Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar once said at Rally in Punjab that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru did not do anything for Dalits and backwards. Such has been the mindset of the Congress since the beginning," Chouhan charged.

The BJP leader alleged that the Congress and other constituents of the INDIA bloc have been engaged in taking away the rights of Dalits, backwards and tribals while pursuing politics of appeasement. "The BJP will not allow this conspiracy to go on. People are seeing the truth as the INDI alliance's policy of appeasement stands exposed. Now people will reply to it. The BJP will form its government by winning 370 seats on its won and with the NDA getting more than 400 seats (in the Lok Sabha polls)," he added.

Return immediately or face my wrath, Deve Gowda issues warning to Revanna

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

Janata Dal Secular (JDS) supremo H D Deve Gowda on Thursday issued a stern warning to his grandson Prajwal Revanna, asking him to return to India, surrender to the police or face his wrath. He also said he should be given the harshest punishment if the accusations against him turn out to be true.

The former Prime Minister took to X (formerly Twitter) and posted a letter to Prajwal and captioned it saying "I have issued a warning to @iPrajwalRevanna to return immediately from wherever he is and subject himself to the legal process. He should not test my patience any further." In a related development, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is processing a request of the Karnataka government seeking cancellation of the diplomatic passport of suspended Janata Dal (Secular) MP Revanna, who is accused of sexually harassing several women. Official sources said the MEA

has received a letter from the Karnataka government seeking revocation of Revanna's diplomatic passport. As regards, Deve Gowda's warning, in a two-page letter dated May 23 with the title 'My Warning To Prajwal Revanna', he said "I spoke to the media about Prajwal Revanna on May 18, when I was headed to the temple to offer pooja (prayers). It took me some time to recover from the shock and pain he (Revanna) has inflicted on me, my entire family, my colleagues, friends and party workers." Deve Gowda further went on to say he was of the view that Prajwal Revanna should be subject to the 'harshest of punishments', and that his son and former Karnataka Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy also advocated his stance on the matter. He said people (reacting to the Prajwal Revanna sex scandal) have used the 'harshest of words' against him and his family in the last few weeks. In the open letter, the 91-year-old politician said he asserted

that he is not aware of the alleged activities of his grandson, who is also the sitting MP of Hassan. Deve Gowda further warned Prajwal to return if the latter has any respect towards his grandfather. He further wrote, "I can do only one thing. I can issue a stern warning to Prajwal and ask him to return from wherever he is and surrender before the police. He should subject himself to the legal process. This is not an appeal that I am making, it is a warning that I am issuing." Deve Gowda also told Prajwal that not listening to family members will lead to total isolation. "If he does not heed to this warning, he will have to face my anger and anger of all his family members. The law will take care of the accusations against him, but not listening to the family will ensure his total isolation. If he has any respect left for me, he has to return immediately," he added. Revanna is at the centre of a sexual abuse case and the Hassan MP is said to have left India late last month, a day

after voting for the Lok Sabha elections took place in his constituency. "The MEA has received a letter from the Karnataka government for cancellation of diplomatic passport in respect of MP Prajwal Revanna. This is being processed," a source said. Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said the Centre has not responded to the request for cancellation of Revanna's diplomatic passport on the basis of an arrest warrant issued against the JD(S) leader. A Special Court for Elected Representatives issued an arrest warrant on Saturday against Prajwal following an application moved by the SIT. Earlier this month, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Revanna travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and did not seek political clearance for the trip. "No political clearance was either sought from or issued by MEA in respect of the travel of the said MP to Germany," Jaiswal had said.

Madhya Pradesh sees record breaking surge in spiritual tourism

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya earlier this year is being hailed as a pivotal moment in religious tourism, yet Madhya Pradesh, the heart of India, is already experiencing a significant surge in the sector with five out of the top ten most visited tourist destinations being spiritual sites. These include Ujjain, Maihar, Chitrakoot, Omkareshwar, and Salkanpur, reflecting the state's rising popularity of spiritual tourism. This trend has contributed to a record-breaking tourist footfall of 11.21 crore, showcasing substantial growth compared to 2022's 3.41 crore visitors. Ujjain, renowned as one of India's holiest cities, emerged as the most popular tourist destination in the State, attracting over 5.28 crore spiritual seekers and tourists. It is revered as the abode of Lord Shiva and is home to the famous Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga temple, a major pilgrimage site for Shaivites. Ujjain also hosts the Kumbh Mela, one of the largest



religious gatherings in the world, attracting millions of devotees and tourists every few years. The city's spiritual ambiance, ancient temples, and religious festivals make it a significant destination for spiritual tourism in Madhya Pradesh, contributing to the state's cultural heritage and tourism sector. "Number of footfalls not only surpassed pre-Covid levels but also positioned Madhya Pradesh as a leading tourist destination in India. Given that Ujjain among five religious sites have emerged as the top attraction, drawing over 5.28 crore pilgrims and tourists. "This showcases the state's growing prominence in reli-

gious tourism," SheoShekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary of State Tourism and Culture on the occasion of Madhya Pradesh's Tourism Day said here. Ujjain was followed closely by Maihar, with 16,849,000 tourists, as per the State Government data. Likewise, Indore, known for its historical landmarks and culinary delights, welcomed over 10 million tourists, making it a prominent destination in the state. Chitrakoot attracted 9,001,126 tourists seeking solace and spiritual enlightenment. Omkareshwar witnessed a considerable footfall of 3,475,000 tourists whereas Jabalpur saw

2,669,869 tourists exploring its myriad attractions. Salkanpur recorded 2,565,000 tourists, Narmadapuram, encompassing Pachmarhi, Madhai, Narmadapuram, and Adamgarh, witnessed 2,283,837 tourists and Raisen, boasting attractions like Bhimbetka, Sanchi, and Bhojpur, welcomed 2,137,058 tourists. Bhopal, the capital city known for its string of lakes, attracted 1,950,965 footfalls. According to the State Government, while 2022 recorded 34,138,757 tourists, 2021 saw 25,595,668 tourists, and 2020 welcomed 21,400,693 tourists. According to reports, religious tourism in India is moving North, projecting a CAGR of over 16% between 2023 and 2030. Post COVID, religious inclination of Indians has become stronger. Industry reports also indicate a significant rise in overnight journeys for pilgrimage & 14% rise in donations in the year 2021-2022, according to Sachin Alug, CEO, NLB Services as per reports.

Kaamya becomes youngest Indian to scale Mount Everest



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Sixteen-year-old Kaamya S Karthikeyan successfully climbed Mount Everest, becoming the youngest Indian mountaineer to scale the world's highest peak from the Nepal side, the Indian Navy said on Thursday. The daughter of a naval officer, Kaamya is a class 12 student at Navy Children School, Mumbai. Kaamya and her father Commander S Karthikeyan successfully summited Mt. Everest (8,849 m) on May 20, according to a statement issued by a Navy spokesperson. "After this feat, she has become the second youngest girl in the world, and the youngest Indian mountaineer to summit the world's highest peak from the Nepal side," the

statement said. With this, Kaamya has completed six milestones in her mission to summit the highest peak of all seven continents and aims to climb Mount Vinson Massif in Antarctica this December to become the youngest girl to accomplish the "7summits challenge," the Navy said. The Indian Navy also shared her pictures in a post on X. "#IndianNavy congratulates Ms Kaamya Karthikeyan d/o Cdr S Karthikeyan on becoming the youngest #Indian & the second youngest girl in the world to summit Mt Everest from the Nepal side. "Kaamya has exhibited immense courage & fortitude in summiting the highest peaks in six of the seven continents," it said. "#IndianNavy wishes young Kaamya the very best in her

aspiration to summit the highest peaks of all seven continents, becoming the youngest girl to do so. #7SummitsChallenge," it added. Over the decades, Everest has drawn mountaineers, young and old, from across the world. Lauding her feat, Tata Steel Adventure Foundation (TSAF) chairman Chanakya Chaudhary said in a statement "we are incredibly proud of Kaamya Karthikeyan's extraordinary achievement of summiting Mt. Everest at such a young age. Her journey is a testament to the spirit of perseverance, meticulous preparation, and unwavering determination." The TSAF supported her endeavour. Kaamya was a recipient of the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Shakti Puraskar.

Congress attacks BJP for not fulfilling farmers' promises



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday hit out at the BJP for not fulfilling the promises made to farmers' organisations and asserted that an INDIA bloc government will implement all its guarantees to the tillers, including the legal guarantee of MSP. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh noted that elections have been held in 428 constituencies and now polling on 115 seats, including those in Punjab and Haryana, are left. In a video statement on X, he said the farmers' movement has been going on in Haryana and Punjab since five years and though the government took back the "three black farm laws", it has "not fulfilled the promises" it made to farmer organisations. "For the last five years, the Modi government has continuously ignored the farmers' movement of Haryana, Punjab

and Uttar Pradesh. Atrocities were committed against the farmers. Now they are talking about snatching the MSP from the farmers of Punjab and Haryana for burning stubble," Ramesh said and asserted that the Congress strongly opposes this policy. "Farmer justice will be the top priority for the incoming INDIA Janbandhan government," he said in a post in Hindi along with the video statement. Ramesh said the Congress has given five concrete guarantees to the farmers in its Nyay Patra, including legal guarantee of MSP, based on the Swaminathan formula, and a permanent commission to effectively implement loan waiver plans. The party has also given the guarantee for direct transfer of insurance payment within 30 days of crop loss, a proper import-export policy and removal of GST from everything necessary for farming, he said.

ICG organises pollution response seminar, mock drill



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) organised a 'Pollution Response Seminar and Mock Drill' at the Headquarters Coast Guard District number 8 (West Bengal) in Haldia on May 22-23, Defence Ministry said here on Thursday. Giving details, officials said the event gathered key stakeholders from various agencies, along with oil handling agencies, to address the critical challenges of combating oil spills at sea. Participants engaged in a table-top exercise, collaborating on simulated scenarios to enhance their

response capabilities and foster synergy among all involved parties. State-of-the-art pollution response equipment was demonstrated, providing participants with practical experience to further improve their readiness for environmental crises. The Commander of Headquarters Coast Guard District No. 8 (West Bengal) emphasised the importance of synergy and effective implementation of the National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan. He highlighted the collective responsibility to protect marine resources and reaffirmed the ICG's commitment to ensuring safer seas and cleaner coasts.

Indian Naval ships arrive in Manila for deployment in South China Sea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian naval ships Delhi, Shakti and Kiltan visited Manila, Philippines as part of operational deployment of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet to South China Sea. The visit demonstrated India's strong ties with Philippines and its commitment to further deepen the partnership, navy said here on Thursday. The port call included Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE) between the Indian Navy and personnel of Philippines Navy, sports fixtures, cross deck visits, cultural exchanges and collaborative community outreach programmes. Rear Admiral Rajesh Dhankhar, Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet, and Commanding Officers of ships had an interaction with Rear Admiral Renato David, Commander Philippine Fleet (CPF), and Vice Admiral Rolando Lazor Ponzalan Jr, Deputy Commandant for Operations, Philippine Coast Guard. Dhankhar also held wide ranging discussions with the Flag Officer in Command (FOIC), Vice Admiral Toribio Dulinayan Adaci JT, on the avenues for collaboration, matters of mutual interest and the current security situation in the region and beyond.



BJP has already crossed 310 mark, Congress struggling to get 40: Shah

PTI ■ SIDDHARTHANAGAR/SANT KABIR NAGAR (UP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday claimed that in the first five rounds of polling, "BJP has crossed 310" and that the Congress is "not even getting 40 seats" this time. "INDI alliance has been wiped out in the first five phases. I am telling you, this time Congress is not even getting 40 seats and Akhilesh Yadav will not even get four seats," said Shah, addressing a poll meeting in Siddharthnagar in support of Domariyaganj BJP candidate Jagdambika Pal. In another rally in Sant Kabir Nagar, Shah named several leaders from the opposition parties and accused them of nepotism. "Lalu Prasad Yadav wants to make his son the chief minister, Uddhav Thackeray wants to make his son the chief minister, Sharad Pawar wants to make his daughter the chief minister, Stalin wants to

make his son the chief minister, Mamata Banerjee wants to make her nephew the chief minister and Sonia Gandhi wants to make her son Rahul Gandhi the prime minister," he said, adding, someone who works for his family is not going to work for a constituency. Shah asserted that the PoK (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) is a part of India and the BJP will take it back. "Leaders of Pakistan say that PoK is theirs. Congress leaders also say that they (Pakistan) have an atom bomb. BJP people are not scared of atom bombs. PoK is and will remain part of India and we will take it back," he said. He said the opposition was attempting to end reservation for SC/ST and OBC in order to appease their vote bank. "Rahul Baba and Akhilesh Yadav you have been blinded by vote banks politics. We will finish reservation on the basis of religion and give it back to the ST/ST and OBCs," he said. He also pointed out that



the INDIA bloc did not have any prime minister face and claimed that the alliance, if it comes to power, will have five PMs. "Can the country run like this?" Shah alleged that Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav have tickets booked for a vacation abroad once results of the Lok Sabha polls are announced, unlike Narendra Modi who works tirelessly for the nation. "On the one hand, there is Rahul Gandhi who leaves for Italy, Thailand and Bangkok and on the other hand, there is Narendra Modi who has not taken any leave for 23 years and even spends his Diwali with soldiers on the border," he said. Shah said the BJP ensured OROP (One Rank-One Pension) scheme for the retired army personnel and asserted that India will become the third largest economy in the third term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Shah on Thursday also addressed a poll rally in Khalilabad of Sant Kabir Nagar

in support of Praveen Kumar Nishad, who is contesting on a NISHAD party ticket, a partner of NDA. There, he accused the opposition of stalling the construction of Ram Temple for over 70 years and attributed its construction to Modi. "This election is between the one who constructed Ram Temple and those who opened fire on Ram Bhakts," he said. On the abolition of Article 370 in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, he said, "Article 370 which was protected by the Congress and Samajwadi Party was removed by Narendra Modi in 2019 and Kashmir was made a part of India forever. No one dares to explode bombs there." Shah alleged that in the erstwhile SP government "goonda raj" was rampant in Uttar Pradesh, and it was Yogi Adityanath, the current CM, who set all goons right. Polling in Domariyaganj and Sant Kabir Nagar will be held in the sixth phase of ongoing Lok Sabha polls on Saturday.

Odisha MLAs, MPs cannot meet CM, Government is outsourced: Nadda

PTI ■ KARANJIA/ DHAMNAGAR (ODISHA)

Alleging that the Odisha government has been "outsourced", BJP president JP Nadda on Thursday claimed the people's representatives like MLAs and MPs are unable to meet Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. The government in the state needs to be changed to get rid of this practice, Nadda said while addressing election rallies at Karanjia and Dhamra.



"The Odisha administration has been outsourced. There is no son or daughter of Odisha left who can run the administration here. Who is stopping the MPs and MLAs of Odisha from reaching the seat of Chief Minister?" he said at a public meeting in Karanjia. Though Nadda did not name anyone, he was apparently referring to bureaucrat-turned-BJP leader VK Pandian, a close associate of the chief minister. The BJP has been calling him an "outsider" in Odisha's politics. Pandian was born in Tamil Nadu, studied in Delhi and started his career as a Punjab cadre IAS officer, but shifted to Odisha cadre after marrying an Odia. Urging the people to vote for the BJP, Nadda said he assures the gathering that only a son or daughter of Odisha will rule the state. Nadda also claimed that all government contracts are given to outsiders. "Even the contract for the supply of school dress, cycle

for children and food in school are given to outside contractors," he said in another rally at Dhamnagar. The BJP president also came down heavily on the BJD government over the missing keys of Lord Jagannath's Ratna Bhandar (treasure chest) in Puri and said the new administration formed by the saffron party after the elections will find them out. "We will inquire into irregularities over the Ratna Bhandar and properly manage the Lord's treasury... People have decided to give rest to Naveen Babu and engage BJP to work for them," he said. The Ratna Bhandar, located in the basement of the 12th-century shrine, has two parts. The outer chamber of the Ratna Bhandar stores ornaments used by the deities daily, while many pieces of jewellery are kept in the inner chamber of the treasury. While the keys to the outer chamber are available, the

Arunachal human rights body takes cognisance of complaint over fake voter ID

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

The Arunachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission (APSHRC) has taken cognisance of a complaint filed by a woman against election officers in the Changlang district for their alleged inaction over "forged" voter ID of a person. The woman had lodged the complaint to the Election Commission in June last year, alleging that the Changlang district electoral officer

(DEO) and the electoral registration officer (ERO) did not take action against the person who was accused of "fraudulently obtaining a fake voter identity card". The accused had filed his nomination for the B o r d u m s a - D i y u n constituency in the assembly elections in March this year but his bid was rejected. "The Arunachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission deems it very serious that the ERO of

Bordumsa-Diyun of Changlang district did not make a decision on the complaint despite the hearing on August 23, 2023, and the DEO, Changlang district, did not take any decision in the appeal case heard on February 15, 2024. "This allowed a person against whom complaints of cheating and forgery regarding his voter ID are pending to continue as a voter and submit a nomination," said an order

issued by APSHRC member Bamang Tago on Wednesday. The APSHRC has directed the ERO of Bordumsa-Diyun and the DEO to submit a "detailed reply to the complaint and the entire proceedings of the hearings held on August 23, 2023, by the ERO and the appeal heard by the DEO on February 15 this year". They must also explain why the commission should not recommend an appropriate inquiry against them within

15 days, it said. The complainant claimed that the accused was residing in Arunachal Pradesh without obtaining the required Inner Line Permit (ILP), violating the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873. According to her, the person fraudulently obtained the voter ID in 2022 after moving to the Diyun — Bordumsa constituency, without providing proof of residence.

Will industrialise Jaunpur so that youth do not have to migrate: BJP candidate

PTI ■ JAUNPUR (UP)

BJP candidate Kripashankar Singh says his priority on winning the election would be to set up industries in this parliamentary constituency so that people don't have to leave home to find jobs like he once did. For this, I will use my "Mumbai contacts", said Singh, who moved to the city in 1971 and was once considered a strong leader of the Maharashtra Congress and also served as a former Minister of State for Home in the state. "Jaunpur, with a population of about 46 lakh, is a district where most of the youth migrate to Mumbai and other cities every year in search of employment," Singh told PTI. "Every sixth North Indian in Mumbai is from Jaunpur district who has gone there



for employment," Singh said. Singh started his political career with the Maharashtra Congress in the 1970s. About four years ago, he resigned from the Congress party and joined the BJP. He said Jaunpur produces potatoes in huge quantities and its people are hardworking, yet there are no sugar and potato processing units here. It is also very important to have a sugar mill in Jaunpur. About 900 acres of

government land are available on the highway in the Shahganj assembly segment of the district where industries can be set up, yet so far it hasn't happened. But now it will be used, Singh asserted. Singh said he would use his "five-decade-old contacts" in Maharashtra, which has a thriving sugar industry, to set up potato and sugar processing units along with a sugar mill in Jaunpur. "On December 1, 1971, at the age of 21, I had to leave my home and go to Mumbai to earn a livelihood... Who would know better than me the pain of leaving home for a job or business? My wish is that in the coming three to four years, no youth of Jaunpur should have to go outside for work," Singh said. Within a month of winning the election, work will start on the issue of generating

employment for the youth of Jaunpur, he said, adding "An action plan for this is being prepared by a team of experts." Asked about his chances of victory in the elections, Singh said, "I was born in Jaunpur and I grew up here. This is my home and my family members live here. The debt I owe to the people and my family members here will be repaid with the help of Prime Minister Narendra Modi." He also said that the people of Jaunpur are very happy with the work done by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and the Narendra Modi government at the Centre. This is why the people of Jaunpur have made up their minds to make Narendra Modi the prime minister for the third time and ensure that the BJP-led NDA gets more than 400 seats in the Lok Sabha.

INDIA Bloc talking about having 5 PMs in 5 years: Modi

PTI ■ MAHENDRAGARH (HARYANA)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday claimed that the INDIA bloc is talking about having five PMs over the next five years and said the fight over 'ghee' has broken out in the alliance, even before the cow has given milk. Hours before campaigning for the sixth round of the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls came to an end, Modi at a rally in Haryana's Mahendragarh asserted that till he is alive, no one can snatch the reservation for Dalits and tribals. In this election, "you will not only choose the country's PM but also decide the country's future", the prime minister told the gathering. "On one hand is your tried and tested 'sewak' Modi. Who is on the other side, one does not know," he said, targeting the INDIA bloc that has as its constituents opposition parties, including the Congress, Aam Aadmi Party, Trinamool Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The INDIA bloc is "extremely communal, casteist and nepotist", he said while alleging that when the Congress was in power, it did not allow construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Claiming that the INDIA bloc is talking about having five PMs in five years, Modi said.

Saran violence: Lalu's daughter Rohini Acharya named in FIR

PTI ■ SARAN/PATINA

RJD president Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya has been named in one of the FIRs registered in connection with "irregularities" during polling in Bihar's Saran Lok Sabha constituency and post-poll clashes leading to the death of one person there earlier this week, officials said on Thursday. Acharya was the Mahagathbandhan candidate in Saran against BJP MP Rajiv

Pratap Rudy. The state government extended the suspension on internet services in the district by two more days till May 25, while the process to attach properties of the absconding accused was initiated, officials said. One person was killed and two others were injured in post-poll violence at Bada Telpa area in Saran on Tuesday morning. The police registered a total of four FIRs to probe into the alleged irregularities on May

20, the day of polling, and also the violence on Tuesday. Two persons have been so far arrested in this connection. The police registered an FIR naming Acharya under various sections of the Representation of People Act, 1951, based on a complaint filed by Manoj Kumar, a representative of the BJP's Lok Sabha nominee from Saran. In his complaint, Kumar alleged "Rohini Acharya, along with her seven supporters and 50 unidentified people



indulged in illegal/irregular practices in polling booth number 318 and 319 in Chapra assembly seat on May 20," said the statement.

The complaint has been converted into an FIR, an official said. The police also constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to nab the absconding accused. "The process to attach properties of absconding persons, who have failed to appear before the police, has also been initiated by the authorities concerned," the Saran Police said in a statement on Thursday. Saran District Magistrate

Aman Samir said, "The situation in Saran is completely under control. Security personnel are keeping a strict vigil in the Bada Telpa area near Bhikhari Thakur Chowk following Tuesday's incident." As a precautionary measure, the government has extended the ban on internet services in the district by two more days till May 25, he said. "The process to attach properties of absconding persons, who have failed to appear before the police, has

been initiated," Saran district SP Gaurav Mangla told PTI. He, however, refused to reveal the exact number of persons whose properties are being attached. Meanwhile, senior RJD leaders on Wednesday met family members of Chandan Rai, who was shot dead in the post-poll violence, and handed them over a cheque of Rs 10 lakh. The RJD leaders also gave a cheque of Rs 2 lakh each to the family members of the two injured persons.

Big guns missing in Maneka Gandhi's low decibel campaign

PTI ■ SULTANPUR (UP)

In Sultanpur, near high-profile Amethi, BJP's Maneka Gandhi appears to be fighting a lone battle to retain her parliamentary seat with few top leaders of her party canvassing for her and no opposition biggies campaigning against her either. Sultanpur goes to polls on May 25 and Thursday is the last day of campaigning. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressed a public meeting in support of Maneka Gandhi in Qazipur on Wednesday. Her son Varun Gandhi, who has been benched by the BJP in this Lok Sabha election, is expected to join her for campaigning on Thursday. Her nephew Rahul Gandhi and niece Priyanka Gandhi Vadra have visited Uttar Pradesh multiple times to canvass for INDIA bloc candidates but have not



campaigned against her. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati campaigned in Sultanpur in support of her party's candidate Udraj Verma, an OBC, on Wednesday and attacked both the BJP and the Congress. Despite little help from the BJP's big guns, Maneka Gandhi is confident of steering her party to victory in Sultanpur, which was represented by Varun Gandhi before 2019. In an interview with PTI, the sitting Sultanpur MP asserted

that her victory margin this time will be bigger than last time. In the 2019 general elections, Maneka Gandhi had won the Sultanpur seat by a margin of 14,000 seats. The BJP is confident of gaining around 2 lakh votes of the fishermen community in Sultanpur with their leader and Nishad Party chief Sanjay Nishad holding a ministerial berth in the Uttar Pradesh cabinet. Maneka Gandhi said neither the Ram temple nor the denial of a ticket to her son is an election issue in her constituency as people are more concerned about their problems and their MP's response to their concerns. She said the people of her constituency are happy about the opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya but "it is not an issue in the polls here." "I don't look at the people coming to me with their needs on the lines of caste or

religion. Everybody in the constituency belongs to me and I hold the responsibility of their better future," the eight-time Lok Sabha MP said. Asked about the BJP's call to wipe out the Nehru-Gandhi family from Rae Bareilly, the 67-year-old Sultanpur MP said, "I have no comments to make... I am concerned about the problems of my constituency and the people here." Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is in the fray from Rae Bareilly. BJP district president R K Verma said the people here have a positive response to the "Modi-Yogi" combination. Toilets have been built for people and they have received houses and free foodgrains under different government schemes, he said. "Maneka ji helps whosoever comes to her for assistance irrespective of one's caste or religion," he said.

Bengal: Pangs of deprivation among tribals of Bankura as political parties vie for their favour

PTI ■ RANIBANDH (WB)

An indomitable spirit of struggle seems to be the source of sustenance for residents of the Santhal villages of Ranibandh in Bankura, where pangs of deprivation of access to government welfare schemes like Awas, Lakshmir Bhandar or MGNREGA keep their lives on the edge. Although infrastructure developments in the form of blacktop roads cutting across the lush green forests, solar street lights in some pockets and tap water connections to households were apparent, people claim that unequal distribution of government benefits affects them big time. The story remains uniform across the Santhal villages of Ghagra, Rautera, Sonardi, Haludkanali and several other forest-covered areas, forming parts of West Bengal's Jangalmahal, which



were affected by Maoist activities a little over a decade ago. "Some are getting these benefits twice over, while others are fully deprived," said Sukhlal Mandi, who works as an occasional bus driver on a local route, while sitting outside his modest but tastefully decorated mud house in Ghagra village. Mandi said that he never received a house under the government's Awas yojana. Lamenting that the political leaders and candidates come

only before the elections, Shyamal Hembram of Sonardi village said, "All parties take advantage of us." Sudhir Tudu, a septuagenarian, of Rautera village, said that his old age pension has stopped getting deposited in the bank. "I made visits to the officials concerned, but nothing fruitful has happened yet to restart the pension," he said. Ghagra village youth Bijoy Murmu said although he works as an agricultural labour in the farming season,

but mostly sits idle during other parts of the year. "All the parties are the same, no one is there for people like us," he said. Murmu said that there are problems of lack of jobs, water not flowing out of taps, housing and distant schools. "What is the use of studying anyway, there are no jobs," he said. Mandi lamented that while the well-to-do get richer, the conditions of the poor hardly see much change. Two middle-aged women of Sonardi, unwilling to share their names, said they work as daily labourers and are yet to get funds under the Lakshmir Bhandar scheme of the state government. Shyamal Hembram of Sonardi claimed that water flows from taps in their village only on the days officials visit the area. He said that only one person has a government job in his village which houses a hundred-odd people.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

EC stirs a bit

The poll panel's latest directive to parties for a honest fight is a classic case of too little, too late

With the Lok Sabha elections approaching the final phases, the Election Commission (EC) has issued a stern directive to the Congress and the BJP against creating false narratives and making communal utterances. Interestingly, this directive comes after five of the seven poll phases are over. Also, the timing and impact of this intervention raise critical questions: Is the EC's directive aimed more at ensuring a free and fair election or at salvaging its image which has taken a dip? Though it is an independent, autonomous constitutional body, several events have raised doubts about its impartiality and functioning. There have been accusations of Government interference, from influencing the timing of elections to being lenient towards the BJP while being overly strict with the Opposition. Savour this: Since 2019, three Opposition parties registered 27 complaints against PM Modi but the EC took no action. A scrutiny of these complaints and the EC's response shows the poll body's 'reluctance' to act against the Prime Minister. The Congress has accused the panel of being "super, super cautious" regarding complaints against Modi, following the EC's request to the BJP to respond to the allegations of Modi's divisive speech in Rajasthan. The EC also asked the Congress to address the BJP's complaints against Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi. The EC's letters mark the first such action against a Prime Minister. But will any real action ever be taken?



According to the poll panel, approximately 425 major complaints, excluding those related to canvassing or requiring clarification, have been filed by various parties and candidates. Action has been taken or the matter resolved in 400 of these cases. Interestingly, in most cases, the punishment was so mild that it did not matter much; like abstaining from campaigning for two days, and so on. Now, with only two phases of polling left, the directive is not likely to achieve much since the electoral narrative has already been set, with party rhetoric having saturated media channels and influenced public opinion. The late issuance of this warning suggests only an attempt to curb last-minute escalations in divisive rhetoric. By waiting until the tail end of the election cycle, the EC has allowed political parties ample time to embed their narratives into the electorate's psyche, with an extra long rope for the ruling party. Besides, for such a warning to be effective, it needs to be backed by the possibility of tangible consequences. While the directive emphasises the need for a respectful and fact-based campaign, it lacks clear punitive measures for violations. Political parties might calculate that the benefits of inflammatory and polarising rhetoric outweigh the potential repercussions. To ensure future elections are fairer and more respectful of democratic principles, the EC should adopt a more proactive stance involving faster interventions and stricter penalties for violations. It can draw inspiration from its own history when TN Seshan first empowered the institution.

PICTALK



Devotees at Har Ki Pauri on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, in Haridwar

Child development as a fundamental right



APARAJITA SHARMA

In the pursuit of a more equitable society, the universalisation of early childhood development should be recognised as a fundamental right, not a gratuitous freebie

That early childhood development (ECD) should be treated as a fundamental right rather than a gratuitous freebie is paramount for fostering an equitable society. The 2024 general elections offer a significant opportunity to advocate for the universalisation of ECD from birth to 18 years. Ensuring access to quality early education and care is crucial for the holistic development of children and the broader advancement of society.

ECD as a Fundamental Right India's commitment to social welfare is enshrined in its Constitution. The Directive Principles of State Policy mandate the Government to secure adequate means of livelihood, equitable distribution of resources and special protection for children and vulnerable sections. Early childhood is a critical period for cognitive, emotional and social development. The National ECCE Policy 2013 underscores the importance of providing quality health, nutrition, early learning and protection for children under six. Recognising ECCE as a justiciable entitlement under the RTE Act would ensure that all children receive the foundational support necessary for their development.

Challenges in Providing ECD After 13 years of implementation of the RTE Act 2009, only 25.5 per cent of schools across the country are RTE compliant. 8.4 lakh teacher positions are vacant and there is a constant shift towards contractual teachers. 19 per cent of schools in India are estimated to have teacher vacancies and one school in seven is run by a single teacher. While the quality of education cannot be ensured without professionally qualified and motivated teachers, 44 per cent of all teachers across the country work without job contracts, many fail to receive social security benefits and all are pressured with non-academic work which is estimated to account for 20-25 per cent of teachers' working hours. The average expenditure is 8,997 per annum for pre-primary, 9,913 for secondary and 13,845 for higher secondary. Costs are significantly higher in



urban areas and private unaided educational institutions. Despite the recognised importance of ECD, significant challenges remain. As of recent surveys, only 38 per cent of children aged 3-6 years are enrolled in preschool education in Government Anganwadi centres. Additionally, the issues regarding 0-3-year-old children remain at the bottom of the pyramid of rights and entitlements in the country. Issues such as being underweight, stunting and anaemia among children highlight the need for comprehensive early childhood programs that address both educational and nutritional needs. As of 2018-19, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) had 30.1 per cent of Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) positions and 27.7 per cent of Supervisor positions vacant across the country. About 6.9 per cent of sanctioned positions for Anganwadi workers (AWWs) and 7.6 per cent of sanctioned positions for Anganwadi helpers (AWHs) were also vacant. This is a grave concern for achieving universalisation of childcare services in the country as well as improved governance at the project level. Despite the mention of establishing creches for promoting women workers and childcare services for their children vide several legislations,[6] the



THE DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY MANDATE THE GOVERNMENT TO SECURE ADEQUATE MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD, EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES AND SPECIAL PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE SECTIONS

number of creches came down to a drastic 3400 creches with only 84000 beneficiaries by 2023. The promise of creche for promoting women workers is a welcome in political parties' agendas, however without universalisation and adequate public provisioning of childcare services they may again leave behind the most marginalised children and serve only a selected few. A public manifesto collated by four national-level networks working for children's rights spotlights the need for reiterating the constitutional provision to ensure rights, entitlements and the overall well-being of children. The manifesto calls for extending the Right to Education (RTE) Act to cover children from birth to 18 years, aligning with the internationally recognised definition of childhood.

The manifesto further calls for drafting, implementing and enforcing a national regulatory framework for private schools and ECCE centres to combat the increasing commercialisation and privatisation of education. This framework should regulate fees, ensure compliance with quality norms and address social segregation. The Government must take immediate steps to ensure that all private schools adhere to the conditions under which recognition is granted and that no unrecognised schools are allowed to operate.

The State must be held accountable for its enforcement to guarantee that all children receive quality education. Strengthening School Management Committees (SMCs) and community participation in education is vital for the successful execution of educational policies. Additionally, it is critical to strengthen the Anganwadi system. Critical positions such as AWWs and AWHs must never be left vacant. The capacities of Anganwadi centres and workers should also be enhanced.

Way Ahead Investing in ECD has significant long-term benefits. Studies indicate that quality early childhood programs yield a high return on investment, contributing to better health, education and economic outcomes. Children who receive adequate early care and education are more likely to succeed in school, secure better jobs and contribute positively to society. Therefore, ECD should be recognised as a fundamental right, not a discretionary freebie. Its universalisation must be backed by adequate funding and robust policies, to ensure equitable access to marginalised children. There is a clear roadmap for achieving this goal.

(The writer is a member of Alliance for Right to ECD; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BUDGET CLIMBDOWN CONCERN

Madam — Apropos the news story "Do not withdraw capital support for oil PSUs," published on 23 May, this is my response. As a regular newspaper reader, the Government's recent decision to halve the equity infusion for three major public sector oil companies—Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL)—is concerning. Initially, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a substantial Rs 30,000 crore for these companies to aid their transition to green energy and achieve net-zero emissions. However, this amount was slashed to Rs 15,000 crore, with no clear explanation provided. Despite impressive profit margins, companies in the capital-intensive energy sector require substantial investments to transition to green energy. Past Government directives led to financial losses and predictable policy support is crucial to offset these losses and ensure their contribution to India's green energy transition and economic stability.

Khirabdi Tanya | Noida

ELECTION BATTLE IN THE LAST LAP

Madam — Apropos the news story "Epic election battle enters decisive phase," published on 23 May, this is my response. With only ten days left in India's intense two-month election season, the focus sharpens on Uttar Pradesh, a critical battleground for the ruling BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath have been tirelessly campaigning, emphasising law and order and cultural nationalism. Meanwhile, opposition leaders, notably Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge, strive to break the BJP's dominance. Despite Modi's polarising campaign, Yogi's steadfast leadership and achievements, including the Ram temple at Ayodhya, galvanise the BJP's base. The outcome in Uttar Pradesh, with its pivotal 80 seats, will significantly influence the national result. Both

Israel honours Indian caregivers



Apropos the news story "Israel honours Kerala caregivers," published on 22 May, this is my response. The celebration of Israel's National Day in India underscored the deep bonds between the two nations, especially in light of recent tragic events. Naor Gilon, Israel's Ambassador to India, expressed profound gratitude for India's unwavering support since the Hamas attacks on October 7. This solidarity reflects

the extraordinary relationship between Indians and Jews. Gilon honoured two brave Keralaites, Meera and Sabitha, who risked their lives to save an elderly couple during the attack and paid tribute to Romi, a young Israeli child of Indian descent, for her bravery amidst the tragedy. The event, graced by Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra, highlighted the resilience and resolve of the Israeli people despite the pain inflicted by terrorism. Kwatra emphasised India's zero-tolerance stance on terrorism, aligning with Israel's fight against such threats. The national anthems of both countries played, symbolising unity, while a special message from President Isaac Herzog of Israel reinforced the call for the release of the 128 hostages. The Christian Alliance and Action for Social Action in Kerala also voiced strong support for Israel, praying for the hostages' safe return.

Jitu Majumdar | Kolkata

Modi and Yogi's efforts will be crucial in determining the BJP's success, potentially solidifying their path to victory on June 4.

Preeti Bajaj | Chandigarh

RAISI'S OPPRESSIVE REGIME

Madam — Apropos the editorial "Iran at Crossroads," published on May 22, this is my response. The late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a hardliner, has long been regarded as a prospective successor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He frequently criticised America and Israel and was on Washington's tight blacklist for serious human rights breaches. He was very vocal about growing Iran's nuclear power, despite US sanctions. Raisi held various key posts before becoming President of Iran in 2021 and many scandals have surrounded him. Specifically, he was accused of forcefully suppressing movements and opponents. Raisi was one of the Iranian politicians at whose behest two of the harshest acts of repression took place. Iran enacted regulations regulating women's dress and behaviour after Raisi

was elected president. Iran's hijab law has tightened. In September 2022, Iran witnessed significant protests after Mahsa Amini's death in custody for violating dress laws, marking the largest unrest since the 1979 Revolution. The demonstrations resulted in numerous casualties. Ebrahim Raisi, known for his harsh stance on exiled opposition and human rights groups, was linked to the mass killings of Marxists and leftists in 1988 while serving as Tehran's Revolutionary Court deputy prosecutor. Amnesty International reported the existence of 'Death Committees' in Iran, comprising religious judges, prosecutors and intelligence officers. These committees arbitrarily sentenced thousands of inmates to death. Amnesty reports that these committees have sentenced over 5,000 people to death. It was only after the mass hanging of 1988 that Raisi was called 'The Butcher of Tehran.'

Ahijit Roy | Jamshedpur

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Summer can be fun and learning for students

By engaging in innovative and educational activities, children can make the most of their summer break, ensuring both physical and intellectual growth

School students look forward to the arrival of summer vacations with a great deal of excitement. That period is also one of the happiest phases of a student's life. It also becomes imperative that parents recognise the worth of their children's time at this point. They start to worry about how they will ever let their child utilise his time wisely during those days. On the contrary, children are full of energy and anticipation in those months. However, it becomes troublesome for working parents if their kids are younger and highly energetic. Their daily scheduled activities go wild, making it harder for parents to engage their children in meaningful activities.



Though summer vacation means different to everyone, the significance of summer learning should not be ignored. It is a vital component of children's physical as well as academic health. With just 60 days of summer vacation, every day a child does not participate in summer training represents a setback. Nevertheless, parents can engage their children in a variety of new and entertain-

ing activities. Summer Vacation Courses The hot Indian summer can be the toughest time to endure for some people, especially kids. They can suffer severely if they stay unprepared to beat the heat. Parents should be cautious about the meals their children eat during these hot days so that no additional stress is placed on their digestive systems. In order to avoid digestive and dehydration issues, parents can add watermelon, curd, cucumber, coconut water and seasonal vegetables to their children's meal plans. Children must begin learning about the contemporary technological environment in which they live. Therefore, parents can engage their kids with engaging and innovative learning products. Trends are as follows: AI and ML course for kids: There are various courses online to introduce children

with futuristic skillset like Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. Any career option kids would choose, this skillset will be must. Students should opt for courses which consist of Python Coding, Generative-AI prompt writing and Industry Projects like Website & App Building. Kids and parents should not get afraid of new technologies rather take these as an opportunity to outsmart in the future job market. Learning AI tools will upgrade the performance quality of culturally active students also. Learning AI-ML will prepare the students for upcoming innovation and robotics related competitions too. The best outcome will be grabbing an online internship. It will help the kids become more confident for the future. Summer specialised Innovation Based Online Experiments: Students and Parents should look for online innovation based experiments or projects which will not only provide a project kit but also consist of live sessions to understand the science and technology of the project. Students should be able to represent the projects in

(The writer is advisor innovatos and director at YuviPep; views are personal)



AJITH KUMAR NS



FIRST COLUMN

NEW CHALLENGES FOR INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

The global geopolitical landscape grows more complex with Russia-China ties



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The gruelling Indian elections, one of the largest democratic exercises in the world will be over in a week or so. A hectic flurry of pending policy decisions is likely to start immediately. If the current party comes back, a hundred days action-packed agenda would be rolled out by most major Government departments, going by PM Modi's Stated objective of not wasting a minute after polls are over. However, the geo-political space, which existed when the elections were declared, has become far more complex refusing to wind down any time soon.

To be fair some of the changes are driven by elections happening all across the globe during 2024, including in key European Union and US. This will ensure that almost all multilateral forums, where these key constituents and India are major contributors, would be subject to pressures of domestic politics and issues. Meanwhile, India's long-standing partner Russia, finished their election nearly a month back and upon reelection President Putin undertook his first State visit to China last week. Russia and China have emerged as the key UN Security Council permanent members, whose interests and policies are not likely to align with the US-led block any time soon.

The joint Statement released after President Putin's visit to China highlighted the importance of his visit to China. It was a message to the wider Western block of countries opposed to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, coming at a time when the Chinese president had just come back after meeting every senior leader from the European Union, the French President and reaffirmed firm support from a couple of East European countries. The European Union and recently the US have expressed grave concerns



and taken some tariff measures regarding China's non-competitive trade practices, especially regarding State-subsidised cheap Electric vehicles flooding their markets. Apprehensions have been raised by Indian trade associations that the loss of the lucrative US market for Chinese Electric vehicles could lead to, these automotive products being dumped in India leading to a situation similar to Europe and the US. In this context Russia seems to have come out in full support of the Chinese automotive sector, perhaps also sending a strong message to Europe and the US. In the media Statement released during Mr Putin's State visit to China, he mentioned "Regarding bilateral industrial cooperation, we are pleased to witness the proactive expansion of Chinese automakers and household appliance manufacturers in the Russian market. As discussed during our talks and as the President said, we acknowledge the detrimental effect of any unlawful actions, sanctions, or restrictions. We wholeheartedly embrace collaboration with our Chinese counterparts..."

China has refrained from overtly criticising Russia over its war in Ukraine and has in the past been accused of supplying military equipment stealthily. Even though Ukraine found mention in both Statements by President Putin and President Xi Jinping, it was velvet-gloved, under larger international foreign policy issues and overall commentary on geo-political matters. On foreign policy matters Russian president's Statement read "We are working together to create a fairer and more democratic multipolar world order based on the central role of the UN and its Security Council, international law, cultural and civilizational diversity, as well as a calibrated balance of interests of all members of the international community. We believe that the creation of such alliances is extremely harmful and counterproductive." Reforming multilateral institutions, especially the UN and a permanent membership has been a long-term foreign policy goal for PM Modi. In the wake of geopolitics, the new Government will have its task cut out on foreign policy.

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

Elder abuse is far more rampant than assumed



GURDEEP KAUR

Despite respect for the elderly, many seniors face abuse from family members. This hidden crisis demands urgent action to protect their dignity and wellbeing



The culture in India over the past few decades has significantly transformed. As the 21st century unfolded with developments and advancements in science, technology, communication etc. the values upon which cohesion and amicable environment at family to global level can be built have been hit hard. The world has never been wealthier or possessed greater knowledge and technological prowess than it does today but sadly, inequality, poverty, food insecurity, violence, exploitation and discrimination continue to escalate unchecked. Among the victims of exploitation are the elderly population across the globe. And this issue becomes more worrisome for India where the culture of respect and care for the elderly has always existed and was deeply rooted. Given the cultural norms, the value system of filial piety and residence with the children, more often than not the elders in the family seem protected but on closer and deeper investigation, it is not so. The prevalence of elder abuse and neglect is evolving as a pressing and distressing hidden reality. As the person ages, his or her ability to engage in productive/ remunerative work gradually decreases, further their physical ailments, diseases etc demand care and specific needs to be looked after, this worsens and complicates the problem. As dependency grows and contribution declines, the elders in the family become subject to abuse, isolation, neglect, humiliation and harassment. The increased rate of urbanisation, transborder migration, inflation, technological advancement and the scale and extent of dependency add to the vulnerability of the elderly being exploited and neglected. In most cases, the perpetrators of abuse- physical, psychological, financial and verbal are their children whom they have raised by sacrificing their comforts and basic needs. According to the United Nations policy brief titled The Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Older-Persons (2020), the cases of elder abuse have grown worldwide during and after the pandemic, making it a worrisome issue. Life expectancy and life longevity have enormously improved, given the advancements in diagnostic, medical and therapeutic science but for the ageing population support



THE PREVALENCE OF ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT IS EVOLVING AS A PRESSING AND DISTRESSING HIDDEN REALITY IN INDIA, DESPITE THE COUNTRY'S CULTURAL NORMS OF RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

services from family, community and the Government are also crucially needed for dignified life and death. In the present-day neo-liberal world order, access to State-of-the-art health and care facilities burns a big hole in the pocket of those wanting to access them. In addition, inflation, job crunch, financial crisis and the burgeoning household budget for education, basic needs, recreational, health care services etc are largely responsible for the elders and their needs being pushed to the periphery. Lack of timely care and preventive measures compounds their problem and vulnerability to the extent of extreme dependency. The State of complete/ partial dependency makes them subject to neglect, harassment and humiliation, abrogating their human rights. With intra and transborder migration of young and productive age groups, the threat to survival, safety and well-being of the ageing population is rising across the globe including India. In the past few decades, the migration from rural to urban areas and from urban to distant lands has been considerably growing, the dearth of resources, harsh living conditions and tough competition faced by the young population a reason although indirect, for elder abuse and in absence of dear ones (son/grandchildren), adjustment to new settings also drains the elder population mentally, financially and emotionally and risks their wellbeing and safety. Further, as senior citizens are seen as a liability, apart from the conflict over their care and responsibility, the conflict over inheritance and property share also traumatises them. It is estimated that more than 90 per cent of elder abuse cases emerge from property-related matters. Thus physical, verbal, sexual, mental and emotional abuse can occur within these dynamics, causing immense suffering to the elderly. The sadden-

ing part about elder abuse is that the perpetrators of violence and hardship against them are their family members, it could be their son/ daughter-in-law/ daughter/ son-in-law/niece/nephew/ grandchildren among other close relatives as a result of the instances of violence either don't come in the public domain or if at all it comes, it isn't given attention stating that it is a personal/family matter. Due to a lack of intervention, the concerns of the elderly being abused and harassed most often go unattended and cared for. In most cases the abuse is subtle and persistent, so is perceived as normalised by victims and is difficult to label as abuse, however, badly harms the victims and their wellbeing. In some cases, senior citizens suffering from dementia or other cognitive impairments are unable to understand that they are being ill-treated and abused or at times may find it difficult to effectively communicate the reality and seek intervention. The absence of timely and appropriate intervention discourages the victims from reporting their abuse. It is also out of fear of offending the family members/ agonising them that the victims are reluctant to report or discuss the instances of violence and humiliation meted out by them. There is also a stigma around abuse and the concern that society may perceive them to be weak/ incapable and also that it might bring the family in a bad light is a reason that discourages senior citizens from speaking about their vulnerability and abuse. Moreover, the elderly either don't have awareness about the legal mechanism that they can take recourse to or do not have trust in the system and the law designed to protect them. As most cases remain unreported, the exact figures associated with violence against elder persons cannot be provided. This however can-

not be taken as a reason to escape and deny the grim reality. The issue indeed is important and the laws enacted in the recent past to save the elders from abuse and violence, the growing number of old age homes and the increase in property-related disputes where the elders in the family are either as plaintiff or the defendant are a testimony. Globally, a very good proportion of the population is growing older, India mirrors this trend too. According to the United Nations Population Fund's India Ageing Report 2023, the population above 60 years will double from 10.5 per cent or 14.9 crore (as of July 2022) to 20.8 per cent or 34.7 crore by 2050. There is a dire need to understand that this population is neither small nor are their issues insignificant that can be ignored. It is important to understand that the elderly population which isn't engaged in productive work were once the ones who shouldered responsibilities and looked after the needs of the children. They had been once a very potential workforce in nation-building. They are a reservoir of knowledge and experience and should be valued for their sacrifices, pains and contributions made during their lifetime. As reasons are multiple behind elder abuse so are the ramifications, it is therefore important to have solutions at different levels ranging from sensitising the society at large to spreading awareness among elders, formulating policies, emboldening social security measures to robust monitoring and judicial mechanism to deal with the perpetrators of violence. Concrete measures need to be taken so that elder abuse, albeit hidden, is not perceived as normalised.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Political Science, Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)

Political turncoats being turned down by voters

There is a concerning pattern of political leaders forsaking their party affiliations in pursuit of personal gain, but voters are giving them a run for their money

India, once a beacon of guidance in global affairs encompassing Statecraft, religion and politics, now confronts a disheartening reality. Presently, its political landscape appears adrift and devoid of purpose. Those in positions of authority seem driven solely by personal gratification. The completion of the fifth phase of the 2024 general elections has stirred heightened activity among political factions. Both ruling and opposition parties fervently urge the public to cast their votes in their favour. As the electoral process unfolds, leaders assess their prospects of triumph or defeat, often shifting allegiances between parties. Moreover, other political entities not only welcome



VINOD TAKIAWALA

defectors into their ranks but also offer them electoral tickets, even at the expense of their loyalists. The phenomenon of leaders defecting from one party to another is not new. Reflecting on historical trends, in the 1960s, approximately 30 per cent of parties witnessed leadership changes. However, public sentiment, termed 'Janata Janardan,' proved decisive,

thwarting 31 per cent of defectors in 1977 and 85 per cent in 2019. Examining the success rates of party-switching leaders, in the 1960s, around 30 per cent of parties with new leadership secured victories. Contrastingly, in the 2019 elections, the success rate plummeted to less than 15 per cent. A recent example is Seema Soren from Jharkhand, a three-time MLA and sister-in-law of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who departed from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on March 19. Similarly, Congress MP Geeta Koda from Jharkhand also crossed over to the BJP and secured a ticket for the

Singhbhum constituency. The trend continues with leaders like Brijendra Singh and Rahul Kaswa, former BJP MPs now contesting under the Congress banner and Ritesh Pandey, previously a BSP MP, a BJP candidate. Afzal Ansari, once aligned with the BSP, is now a candidate for the Samajwadi Party, while Bibi Patil and Sangita Azad, both former BSP MPs, are now BJP candidates. Analysts attribute these defections to various factors such as the denial of tickets or perceived better prospects in another party. However, the prognosis for such defectors appears bleak as data analysis from the Trivedi Center for Political Data at Ashoka University indicates a dwin-



dling success rate, dropping below 15 per cent in the 2019 elections from around 30 per cent in the 1960s. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, out of over 8,000 can-

didates, 195 were party-switchers, constituting 2.4 per cent of the total candidates. However, only 29 emerged victorious, marking a success rate of 14.9 per

cent, significantly lower than previous years. The peak year for party-switching was 1977, post-Emergency, when disparate political forces united against Indira Gandhi, resulting in a success rate of 68.9 per cent for defectors. Conversely, the subsequent election saw this rate decline sharply. The question of which party, BJP or Congress, better accommodates defectors remains a subject of debate. In 1984, following Indira Gandhi's assassination, sympathy propelled the Congress, leading to a remarkable success rate of 81.3 per cent for defectors. Conversely, the BJP, contesting its inaugural Lok Sabha elections in 1984, saw no success among its 62

defector candidates. However, subsequent years witnessed shifts in these figures. In 2019, 5.3 per cent of BJP candidates were defectors, with a success rate of 56.5 per cent, whereas the Congress, with 9.5 per cent defectors, saw only 5 per cent success. The future of defector leaders in the ongoing 2024 Lok Sabha elections remains uncertain until June 4th, when the Indian electorate bestows its verdict, symbolised by the 'Vijayshree' crown. Until then, further speculation would be premature, necessitating patience from all stakeholders.

(The writer is a columnist and a freelance journalist; views are personal)

Nikki Haley says she'll vote for Trump in presidential elections

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Indian-American former presidential hopeful Nikki Haley has said that she will vote for her ex-opponent and boss Donald Trump in the November US election, breaking her silence on the matter since exiting the Republican presidential primary more than two months ago. Haley, 52, however, stopped short of an official endorsement.

Haley, who once served as Trump's United Nations ambassador, was the last of his major rivals to drop out of the party primary contest, in early March. "I will be voting for Trump," Haley said on Wednesday in response to a question during her appearance at the Hudson Institute, a top conservative think-tank in the American Capital, as she delivered a speech on national security and foreign policy.

"As a voter, I put my priorities on a president who's going to have the backs of our allies and hold our enemies to account, who would secure the border,

no more excuses; a president who would support capitalism and freedom; a president who understands we need less debt, not more debt," she said.

"Trump has not been perfect on these policies. I've made that clear many, many times. But (Joe) Biden has been a catastrophe. So, I will be voting for Trump. Having said that... I stand by what I said in my suspension speech," she said.

Haley was born Nimarata Nikki Randhawa in Bamberg, South Carolina, to immigrant Sikh parents from Amritsar, Punjab. Haley is the first Indian-American to serve in a presidential cabinet.

Haley said she has "no regrets" about her Republican primary bid: "We left it all on the field." She also thanked the primary voters who have continued to back her even after she withdrew from the race — a potential warning sign for Trump.

And she reiterated the call she'd made when exiting the race in March for the former president to reach out to those voters. "Trump would be smart to



Nikki Haley and Donald Trump in the Oval Office in 2018.

File photo

reach out to the millions of people who voted for me and continue to support me and not assume that they're just going to be with him. I genuinely hope

he does that," Haley said in response to the question. Anti-Trump Republican voters largely coalesced behind Ms Haley's presidential bid earlier

this year and her dormant candidacy is still picking up support more than two months after she left the race. She won more than 20 per cent

of the vote in at least two state primary elections over the past fortnight.

But she did not call on her supporters to do the same. "I stand by what I said in my suspension speech," she told the audience.

Speculation is now likely to grow over whether Haley will formally mend ties with Trump and endorse him.

In her speech, the former South Carolina governor slammed President Biden on his foreign policy and let China, Russia, and Iran grow stronger.

"Since the fall of Afghanistan, North Korea has gotten more aggressive towards South Korea and Japan. China is preparing to invade Taiwan. Of course, Iran and Russia have already started wars of their own. Without the Afghanistan debacle, Iran would have thought twice before letting Hamas attack Israel. For that matter, Russia likely would not have invaded Ukraine," she said.

"While the Ukrainians have proven to be amazing fighters, Biden refuses to help them

win. He gives them just enough to survive while Russian missiles and tanks grind their country to dust. It seems like the President wants a negotiated ceasefire in which Ukraine cedes some of its territory that Russia stole. That will only leave Russia as the winner and wanting more," she alleged.

The same goes for Israel, she said.

Hamas was better positioned to attack Israel because Biden spent three-plus years appeasing Iran. He eased sanctions, forked over billions of dollars, and begged the Ayatollahs to get back in the nuclear deal, she said.

"Biden has given Iran nothing but cash and time. Cash and time it used to strengthen its terrorist proxies. Cash and time are used to get to the brink of a nuclear bomb. Joe Biden's legacy is already clear. He will go down in history as the commander-in-chief who refused to stop our enemies. He will be remembered for spending more on national debt interest than national defence. He weakened

America while letting China, Russia, and Iran grow stronger," Haley said.

Biden campaign officials said Haley's remarks would not sway the anti-Trump moderates and independents who reject the violence and division that Trump represents.

"Nothing has changed for the millions of Republican voters who continue to cast their ballots against Donald Trump in the primaries and care deeply about the future of our democracy," Michael Tyler, the communications director for Biden's re-election campaign, said in a statement.

"Only one candidate shares those values, and only one campaign is working hard every day to earn their support — and that's President Biden's." The Biden campaign has been working behind the scenes to reach out to high-profile Republicans and Haley voters. It is also planning to roll out a grass-roots group with dedicated staff workers to organise Republican voters in key battlegrounds.

UK PM Sunak, Opposition Labour hit campaign trail for July 4 polls

PTI ■ LONDON

Rishi Sunak, his Conservative Party colleagues and Opposition Labour Leader Keir Starmer and his shadow cabinet hit the campaign trail with gusto on Thursday, a day after the British Prime Minister surprised many within his ranks by calling an election just six weeks away on July 4.

The 44-year-old British Indian leader's rain-soaked speech on the steps of 10 Downing Street on Wednesday evening sent the political corridors of the country into a flurry of activity, with Sunak hitting the ground running with a campaign event in east London right after with his three poll pitches of "Clear Plan, Bold Action, Secure Future".

"Over the next few weeks, I will fight for every vote," he pledged.

Asked by the BBC why he chose to fire the starting gun for the election race getting drenched in the pouring rain, Sunak replied that it showed that he is "not a fair-weather politician".

"I believe very strongly in the traditions of our country. And when prime ministers make important statements like that, they do it on the steps of Downing Street come rain or shine. And I believe in those traditions and that's why I did what I did," he explained.

The Opposition Labour Party Leader, Starmer, kicked his campaign off with a simpler one-word message — "Change". "On July 4 you have the choice. And together, we can stop the chaos. We can turn the page. We can start to rebuild Britain, and change our country," he declared.

The reaction to a summer general election, which was not expected before October when Sunak would have completed three years in office as Prime Minister, has been mixed — with many Tory MPs fearful of losing their seats due to the anti-incumbency that has built up after 14 years of the party being in charge. Almost every pre-election survey shows the governing Conservatives trailing behind Labour, which is holding a firm 20-point lead after securing decisive wins in the local

elections held just earlier this month and seen as a sign of things to come.

"I am feeling quite emotional about all this. I was anticipating an autumn departure from Parliament and still had important issues to raise on behalf of my constituents between now and then. I am sad that I won't now get to do that," said Tracey Crouch, one of the backbench Tory MPs more vocal about the displeasure over the election timing.

"A great amount has been achieved over those 14 years and during this campaign, I look forward to speaking to voters about my record of delivery both locally and nationally," said another backbench MP Priti Patel, who chose to be more positive.

Poll watchers believe that Sunak decided to take the gamble of an earlier election as he was convinced that nothing much would improve by the October-November timeline being pitched earlier.

With inflation hitting a 2.3 per cent mark this week, indicating an improvement in the cost-of-living crisis that has crippled the UK economy since the COVID pandemic, he decided to take the plunge into a trim six-week election campaign.

The economy will be the central plank of Sunak's pitch to the nation, saying the inflation figures are "proof that the plan and priorities I set out are working".

Immigration and investment in the defence sector will be some of his other key focus areas, claiming that the Opposition by contrast has no clear plan on these crucial issues.

The Labour Party, on the other hand, is on a slightly easier wicket with its focus being on how they plan to turn things around after the "chaos" of a Conservative Party-led government. The British Parliament is now into just days of so-called "wash-up" when the government finalises and concludes non-contentious pieces of legislation before its dissolution next week.

Under the timeline now set, a new Parliament is likely to be in place in the week following the election results on July 5.



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, centre, watch beer being bottled at the Vale of Glamorgan Brewery, in Barry, south Wales, while on the General Election campaign trail, Thursday.

AP/PTI

Indian students turning away from UK universities

London (PTI): Indian students choosing the UK as their higher education destination have started registering a fall, with over 21,000 fewer Master's degree applicants than the previous year being registered in official statistics released in London on Thursday.

According to UK Home Office data based on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures, there was a 16 per cent drop in Indian student applicants over the year ending December 2023 in an overall 10 per cent fall in net migration compared to 2022. While the figures will come as a welcome sign for British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak who has made curbing migration one of his key planks for a general election now set for July 4, the student visa figures will worry universities who rely on overseas student fees.

"There were 116,455 sponsored study visa grants to main applicants that are Indian nationals in the year ending March 2024, (26 per cent of the total), 21,717 fewer than the previous year," the Home Office analysis reads.

"The majority (94,149, or 81 per cent) of Indian students come to the UK to study at Master's level, and the recent decrease in Indian students was driven by 21,800 fewer Indian nationals coming to study at Master's level," it notes.

The fall in numbers follows a visa clampdown on students being able to bring their family dependents, spouses or children, from earlier this year.

It comes at a time when university vice-chancellors and diaspora groups are lobbying the government not to safeguard the country's post-study work visa offer under the Graduate Route scheme.

In the year to March 2024, Indian nationals represented the largest group of students granted visas on this route (64,372), representing almost half (46 per cent) of the grants.

This reaffirms previous statistics around this scheme, which offers a chance to gain work experience at the end of a degree and is seen as crucial to Indians choosing their higher education destination.

Thursday's data also revealed data under the new India Young Professionals Scheme, which has a quota of 3,000 visas for young people annually and saw 2,105 grants to Indian nationals up to March this year. According to the ONS, almost half of those immigrating to the UK for work-related reasons came from India or Nigeria, most commonly in the Health and Social Care sector, and Indians continued to top the tally of Skilled Worker visa grants.

Drexel Univ clears pro-Palestinian encampment

AP ■ PHILADELPHIA

Protesters packed up their belongings and left a pro-Palestinian encampment at Drexel University on Thursday after the school announced a decision to have police clear the encampment.

University President John Fry said in a statement that he decided to have campus police and public safety officers join Philadelphia police in clearing the encampment as peacefully as possible.

News outlets reported that police gave protesters a warning to clear the encampment and protesters left. Protesters didn't immediately comment.

Fry said the university is committed to protecting the community members' right to assemble peacefully and express their views, but he has the responsibility and authority to regulate campus gatherings to ensure safety and fulfil the mission to educate students.

"An unauthorised encampment that involves large numbers of people unaffiliated with Drexel trespassing on our campus is illegal," Fry said.



Black smokes rise to the sky during clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian demonstrators in the West Bank city of Jenin, Wednesday.

AP/PTI

"The language and chants coming from this demonstration, underscored by protestors' repugnant demands, must now come to an end." Protesters gathered their belongings as dozens of officers on bicycles arrived around 5:20 a.m., but in less than a half hour only a few items remained on the Korman Family Quad where the 35-tent encampment had been, the Philadelphia Inquirer reported.

"The campers picked up their

belongings for the most part and left by their own free will," Philadelphia Police Sgt. Eric Gripp said.

The encampment had persisted despite Fry's threat earlier this week to have the encampment cleared. Fry said on Tuesday that classes would be held virtually for a third day on Wednesday after administrators tried to open a line of communication to the protesters but were rebuffed. News outlets

reported that the university announced Wednesday night that the campus would return to normal operations on Thursday.

In his statement early Thursday, Fry said previous requests for protesters to disperse had been ignored, but he was asking Drexel affiliates to leave the encampment so police could "escort any remaining trespassers off our campus".

A wave of pro-Palestinian tent encampments on campuses has led to over 3,000 arrests nationwide.

On Thursday, the leaders of Northwestern University and Rutgers University are expected to testify at a House Committee on Education and the Workforce hearing about concessions they gave to pro-Palestinian protesters to end demonstrations on their campus.

The chancellor of the University of California, Los Angeles, also was scheduled to appear at the latest in a series of hearings looking into how colleges have responded to the protests and allegations of anti-semitism.

Leaders of South Korea, China and Japan to meet for their first trilateral talks since 2019

AP ■ SEOUL

Leaders of South Korea, China and Japan will meet next week in Seoul for their first trilateral talks in more than four years to discuss how to revive their cooperation, South Korea's presidential office said Thursday.

After their inaugural stand-alone trilateral summit in 2008, the three countries' leaders were supposed to hold such a meeting every year. But the summit has been suspended since the last one in December 2019, in China, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and often complicated ties among the Asian neighbors.

The trilateral meeting between South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will take place in Seoul on Monday, Kim Tae-hyo, Seoul's deputy national security director, told a news conference.

Chinese President Xi Jinping will not be attending.

Li and Kishida were scheduled to arrive in South Korea on Sunday. They will meet Yoon individually on Sunday afternoon before attending a welcoming dinner banquet with the South Korean president, Kim said.

Japanese officials said a bilateral meeting between Kishida and Li remains undecided.

"This summit will be a turning point for Korea, Japan and China to completely restore and normalize three-way cooperation systems," Kim said.

Kim said the three leaders were expected to discuss cooperation on six South Korea-proposed topics — personnel exchanges, climate change, trade, health and aging population, technology and disasters. He said these discussions will be included in a joint statement after their summit.

Kim said the three leaders will also discuss unspecified regional and international political issues and how to respond together to a global poly-crisis and contribute to international

peace. Japan's chief Cabinet secretary, Yoshimasa Hayashi, said the three leaders share responsibility for regional peace and prosperity so their meeting is important for the entire region.

Closely linked economically and culturally with one another, the three countries together account for about 25 per cent of the global gross domestic product. But efforts to bolster trilateral cooperation often become snagged because of a mix of issues, including historical disputes stemming from Japan's wartime aggression and the strategic competition between China and the United States.

South Korea and Japan are both key US military allies, together hosting a total of 80,000 American troops on their territories. North Korea's advancing nuclear program and China's growing assertiveness in the region have prompted South Korea and Japan to reinforce their trilateral security partnership with the

United States.

That has angered China and North Korea.

Observers say the trilateral meeting comes as the three Asian nations share a need to improve ties. They say South Korea and Japan want to maintain good ties with China, their biggest trading partner, while Beijing also doesn't want to see a further strengthening of a Seoul-Tokyo-Washington security cooperation.

If the current situation continues, South Korea, the US and Japan will stick together further, forming a tool to check and contain China. In that sense, China can't help thinking that advancing ties with South Korea and Japan will better serve its national interests," said Kim Yeol Soo, an analyst with South Korea's Korea Institute for Military Affairs.

Paik Wooyeal, a professor at Seoul's Yonsei University, said South Korea and Japan would find it easier to deal with China in a trilateral structure rather than bilaterally.

Strong winds topple stage at campaign rally in Mexico, killing at least nine

San Pedro Garza Garcia (Mexico) (AP): A strong gust of wind toppled the stage at a campaign rally on Wednesday evening in the northern Mexican state of Nuevo Leon, killing at least nine people — including a child — and injuring 63, the state's governor said.

The collapse occurred during an event attended by presidential long-shot candidate Jorge Alvarez Maynez, who ran to escape. Videos of the collapse on social media showed people screaming, running away and climbing out from under metal polls.

The victims "will not be alone in this tragedy", Maynez told reporters on Wednesday night, adding that he had suspended upcoming campaign events.

Afterward, soldiers, police and other officials roamed the grounds of the park where the event took place while many nearby sat stunned and haunted by the tragedy.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said he "sends a hug to family members, friends of the victims and political support-

ers". Condolences poured in from across Mexico, including by other presidential candidates.

In a video message, Nuevo Leon Gov. Samuel Garcia, a leading member of Maynez's Citizens Movement party, asked residents to shelter in their houses for the next two hours. He provided the death toll of at least five and dozens injured.

Maynez wrote in his social media accounts that he went to a hospital after the accident in the wealthy suburb of San Pedro Garza Garcia, near the city of Monterrey. He said he was in good condition.

"The only important thing at this point is to care for the victims of the accident," he wrote.

Miguel Treviño, the mayor of San Pedro Garza Garcia, wrote in his social media accounts, "My prayers are with the victims."

Campaign events are being held this week and next in anticipation of the June 2 presidential, state and municipal elections.

Videos of the accident showed Maynez waving his arm as the crowd chanted his name.

Iran begins burial of late president, others

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran on Thursday prepared to inter its late president at the holiest site for Shiite Muslims in the Islamic Republic, a final sign of respect for a protégé of Iran's supreme leader killed in a helicopter crash earlier this week.

President Ebrahim Raisi's burial at the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad caps days of processions through much of Iran, seeking to bolster the country's theocracy after the crash that killed him, the country's foreign minister and six others.

However, the services have not drawn the same crowds as those who gathered for services for Revolutionary Guard Gen Qassem Soleimani in 2020, slain by a US drone strike in Baghdad.

It's a potential sign of the public's feelings about Raisi's pres-



idency during which the government harshly cracked down on all dissent during protests over the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, detained for allegedly not wearing her mandatory headscarf to authorities' liking. That crackdown, as well as

Iraq war. Prosecutors have warned people against showing any public signs of celebrating Raisi's death and a heavy security force presence has been seen in Tehran since the crash.

Thursday morning, thousands in black gathered along a main boulevard in the city of Birjand, Raisi's hometown in Iran's South Khorasan province along the Afghan border. A semi-truck bore his casket down the street, with mourners reaching out to touch it and tossing scarves and other items to be placed against it for a blessing. A sign on the truck read: "This is the shrine."

Hours later, Raisi's casket arrived in Mashhad. He will be buried at the Imam Reza Shrine, where Shiite Islam's 8th imam is buried. The region long has been associated with Shiite pilgrimage. A hadith attributed to Islam's Prophet

Mohammad says anyone with sorrow or sin will be relieved through visiting there.

In 2016, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei appointed Raisi to run the Imam Reza charity foundation, which manages a vast conglomerate of businesses and endowments in Iran, as well as oversees the shrine. It is one of many bonyads, or charitable foundations, fueled by donations or assets seized after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. These foundations offer no public accounting of their spending and answer only to Iran's supreme leader. The Imam Reza charity, known as "Astan-e Quds-e Razavi" in Farsi, is believed to be one of the biggest in the country. Analysts estimate its worth at tens of billions of dollars as it owns almost half the land in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city.

Iran's struggling economy, have gone unmentioned in the hours of coverage provided by state television and in newspapers. Also never discussed was Raisi's involvement in the mass execution of an estimated 5,000 dissidents at the end of the Iran-

Russian missiles kill seven in Ukraine's second-largest city

AP ■ KYIV

Russian missiles slammed into Ukraine's second-largest city in the northeast of the country and killed at least seven civilians early Thursday, officials said, as Kyiv's army labored to hold off an intense cross-border offensive by the Kremlin's larger and better-equipped forces.

At least 16 people were injured as S-300 missiles struck the city of Kharkiv, regional Gov Oleh Syniehubov said. The sound of 15 explosions reverberated around the city of some 1 million people.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the attack "extremely cruel." He expressed renewed frustration at not getting enough air defense systems from the country's Western partners to prevent the barrages after more than two years of unrelenting war.

The city of Kharkiv, which is the capital of the region of the same



Servicemen of Ukraine's 93rd Mechanised Brigade fire a French MO-120-RT heavy mortar at the Russian forces on the front line near the city of Bakhmut in Ukraine's Donetsk region on Wednesday. AP

name, lies about 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the Russian border. Moscow's troops have in recent weeks captured villages in the area as part of a broad push, and analysts say they may

be trying to get within artillery range of the city. In what is shaping up to be Ukraine's biggest test since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, outnumbered

and outgunned Ukrainian forces are being pressed at several points along the about 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line that snakes from north to south along the eastern side of the country.

With Ukraine short of air defenses and waiting for more Western military support that recently started trickling in, its army has been pushed backwards in places while Russia has pounded its power grid and civilian areas. Kyiv endured further power outages Thursday.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said the attacks underscored the country's "urgent" need for more US-made Patriot systems to defend its skies. Germany recently pledged one of the missile systems "but getting six more as soon as possible remains critical not only for Ukraine's survival but for peace in Europe," Kuleba wrote on the social media platform X.

US to announce \$275 mn more aid for Ukraine, officials say

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The United States is expected to announce an additional \$275 million in military aid for Ukraine on Friday as Kyiv struggles to hold off advances by Russian troops in the Kharkiv region, two U.S. officials say.

This will be the fourth installment of military aid for Ukraine since Congress passed a long-delayed foreign aid bill late last month and comes as the Biden administration has pledged to keep weapons flowing regularly and to get them to the front lines as quickly as possible. The package includes high mobility artillery rocket systems, or HIMARS, as well 155 mm and 105 mm high-demand artillery rounds, according to the two U.S. officials. They spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide details of the aid package before the public announcement.

It follows a monthly gathering Monday of about 50 defense leaders from Europe and elsewhere who meet regularly to

coordinate getting more military aid to Ukraine. At this latest meeting, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Ukraine was in a "moment of challenge" due to Russia's new onslaught on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. He pledged to keep weapons moving "week after week."

Russia has sought to take advantage of Ukrainian shortages in manpower and weapons while the war-torn country waits for the arrival of more U.S. assistance, which was delayed for months in Congress. Ukrainian forces have been pushed backward in places, while Russia has pounded its power grid and civilian areas. In the month since President Joe Biden signed the \$95 billion foreign aid package, which included about \$61 billion for Ukraine, the U.S. has announced and started to send almost \$1.7 billion in weapons pulled from Pentagon stockpiles. It's also announced \$6 billion in funding through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative.

Allies debate funding for Kyiv using frozen Russian assets as Ukraine losing ground

Frankfurt (AP): Ukraine's allies are wrestling with how to squeeze money out of frozen Russian assets to support Kyiv's war effort, a debate that is ever more urgent as Russia gains territory on the battlefield and as the outlook for Ukraine's state finances looks shakier.

What to do with the Russian central bank reserves frozen in response to the invasion of Ukraine is at the top of the agenda as finance officials from the Group of Seven rich democracies meet Thursday through Saturday in Stresa, Italy, on the shores of scenic Lago Maggiore. The issue: Ukraine and many of its supporters have called for the confiscation of USD 260 billion in Russian assets frozen outside the country after the February 24, 2022, invasion. But European officials have resisted, citing legal and financial stability concerns. And most of the frozen assets are located in Europe.

A European plan to merely use the interest on the Russian funds would provide only a trickle of money every year — some USD 2.5 billion—USD 3 billion at current interest rates. That would barely meet a month's financing needs for the Ukrainian government.

US Treasury officials and outside economists are proposing ways to turn that annual trickle into a much larger chunk of upfront cash. That could done be through a bond that would be repaid by the future interest income, giving Ukraine the money immediately. The ministers meet with Ukrainian Finance Minister Sergii Marchenko on Saturday. "Securing Ukraine's position in the medium-to-long term requires unlocking the value of immobilised Russian sovereign assets," US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said at a news conference on Thursday in Stresa.

"We support the EU's decision to utilise the windfall profits from these assets, but we must also continue our collective work on more ambitious options."

The debate over the Russian assets is being revived after President Joe Biden in April signed into law the Rebuilding Economic Prosperity and Opportunity for Ukrainians Act, which allows the administration to seize the roughly USD 5 billion in Russian state assets located in the US. The law was included in the US aid package for Ukraine and other nations, which includes roughly USD 61 billion for Ukraine's defence.

Exactly what the income from Russian assets would be spent on remains open, but one key focus is Kyiv's state budget. Ukraine spends almost the entirety of its tax revenue on the military and needs another USD 40 billion a year to continue paying old-age pensions and the salaries of doctors, nurses and teachers — the glue that holds society together under dire wartime circumstances. Support from allies and a USD 15.4 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund was initially thought to have secured the budget for four years, but the prospects of an extended conflict have darkened the outlook.

Ukraine depends on its allies for that money because the war keeps the government from accessing international bond market borrowing. The alternative would be printing money at the central bank, which risks igniting hyperinflation.

Thanks to EU support and the US aid package, passed after months of delay, this year's budget "looks decent in terms of budget financing" but "next year is going to be much more challenging," said Benjamin Hilgenstock, senior economist at the Kyiv School of Economics Institute. The ministers will seek to build consensus ahead of the June 13-15 summit of G7 national leaders in Italy. Yellen will also raise China's outsized, state-backed production of green energy technology, which the US considers a threat to the global economy.

Dy chief of Russian military jailed

Moscow (AP): A deputy chief of the Russian military general staff has been arrested on charges of large-scale bribery, Russian news reports said on Thursday, the latest in a series of bribery arrests of high-ranking military officials. The arrest of Lt. Gen. Vadim Shamarin followed the arrest this week of Maj. Gen. Ivan Popov, a former top commander in Russia's offensive in Ukraine, also on bribery charges.

In April, Deputy Defence Minister Timur Ivanov was arrested for bribery. Ivanov was a close associate of Sergei Shoigu, whom President Vladimir Putin dismissed as defense minister soon after Putin's inauguration to a new term in May. Lt. Gen. Yury Kuznetsov, head of the defence ministry's personnel directorate, was arrested on bribery charges two days after Shoigu was replaced. Shamarin is also the head of the defence ministry's main communications directorate. He is being held in custody for two months, Russian news agencies cited a military garrison court as say-

ing, but other details of the case were not reported. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the wave of arrests of defence officials did not indicate a campaign against the military.

The fight against corruption is consistent work. This is not a campaign, it is constantly ongoing work.

This is an integral part of the activities of our law enforcement agencies," he said on Thursday in a conference call with journalists.

The deputy head of the federal prison service for the Moscow region, Vladimir Telayev, also was arrested on Thursday on charges of large-scale bribery, Russian reports said.

Shoigu had been widely blamed for Russia's failure to capture Kyiv early in the Ukraine fighting and was accused of incompetence and corruption by mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, who launched a mutiny in June 2023 to demand the dismissal of Shoigu and military chief of staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov.

China launches 'punishment' drills around Taiwan

PTI ■ BEIJING/ TAIPEI

The Chinese military on Thursday launched a two-day "punishment drills" surrounding Taiwan in retaliation for "separatist acts" after the self-ruled island's new President Lai Ching-te rejected Beijing's sovereignty claims over it. The Eastern Theatre Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) started joint military drills surrounding the island of Taiwan at 7:45 a.m. Thursday. The drills involved the People's Liberation Army, navy, air force, and the rocket force, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

China views Taiwan as a rebel province that must be reunified with the mainland, even by force. Li Xi, spokesperson for the PLA Eastern Theatre Command, which looks after the Taiwan Strait said, "The drills also serve as a strong punishment for the separatist acts of 'Taiwan independence' forces and a stern warning against the interference and provocation by external force." The drills are being conducted in the Taiwan Strait, the

north, south and east of Taiwan Island, as well as areas around the islands of Kinmen, Matsu, Wufu, and Dongyin.

The Taiwan Defence Ministry said it has dispatched aircraft, warships, and kept ready shore-based missile systems to respond accordingly in response to PLA drills. The Armed Forces adopted joint intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance measures to uphold strict vigilance, it said.

Lai, 64, also known as William Lai, who succeeded his independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) colleague Tsai Ing-wen after winning the popular vote in the January Presidential election this year, was sworn in as the president at a ceremony held in Taipei on Monday.

In his no-holds-barred inaugural speech, Lai called on China to stop threatening the island, promised to uphold the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and said his government would adhere to the four commitments (of national sovereignty, democracy, and freedom) and maintain the status quo without being overbearing

or servile.

The Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin on Thursday defended the joint military drills surrounding Taiwan as legitimate and necessary and fully in line with international law and practice.

It's completely legitimate and necessary for the PLA to conduct joint military drills around Taiwan to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity, strongly punish the "Taiwan independence" separatist forces for seeking "independence," and seriously warn against interference and provocation by external forces, spokesperson Wang told a media briefing here.

Wang said that Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory. This is not only a historical fact, but also a real status quo. It will never change in the future. "Taiwan independence" leads nowhere, he said. All "Taiwan independence" separatist acts will be hit head-on by more than 1.4 billion Chinese people, and all "Taiwan independence" separatist forces will be hit hard in the face of the historical trend

of China's complete reunification, he added.

Asked about comments by Deputy Commander of US Indo-Pacific Command Lt. Gen. Stephen Sklenka said that the drills by the PLA aimed at practicing invasion of Taiwan, Wang said the US should stop emboldening and supporting the "Taiwan independence" forces and stop interfering in China's internal affairs.

"Any act that endangers China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity will be resolutely and forcefully counter-attacked by China," Wang said. Gen. Sklenka was quoted as saying in a speech at Canberra that in the past exercises, the PLA simulated a maritime and air blockade of Taiwan, amphibious assaults and counter-intervention operations and continued exercise the features for a potential invasion of Taiwan.

Zhang Chi, an associate professor at the National Defence University in the mainland, told state broadcaster CCTV on Thursday that the PLA forces are practicing the blockade of Taiwan.

Imran Khan seeks live telecast, personal attendance at NAB hearing in Pak SC

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has sought personal appearance and live streaming of the Supreme Court proceedings on his petition seeking to set aside the amendments to the National Accountability Ordinance introduced by the Pakistan Democratic Movement government.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief submitted an application to the top court in this matter through Adiala jail authorities, Dawn News quoted his counsel as saying. Khan, 71, a week earlier appeared before the top court via video link as a petitioner in the matter but did not get a chance to speak.

Talking to the reporters after the hearing in the GBP 190 million corruption case, the cricketer-turned-politician said: "I have a match on May 30 in the Supreme Court."

The cricketer-turned-politician is currently imprisoned in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail as he serves several sentences in the Toshakana, un-Islamic marriage, and the cipher cases. The PTI founding chairman said he was convicted thrice before the February 8 elections, but people voted for his party despite all the negative propaganda.

"They were thinking that the PTI would avoid the elections; however, the returning officers of Islamabad were on the run," he said, claiming that his party had won the elections in Islamabad by a huge margin. The former premier argued that election tribunals should have delivered their verdicts by now, given that it has been over three months since the general election.

Khan said he is aware of who was responsible for the attack on Raouf Hassan, PTI's information secretary, and this incident reveals that the system is

Pak media watchdog's ban on reporting of ongoing cases challenged in court

Lahore (PTI): A ban imposed by Pakistan's media watchdog on the reporting of the ongoing court cases in the country was challenged in the Lahore High Court (LHC) on Thursday. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) on May 21 had placed a ban on TV news channels from airing news, opinion, and commentary on the proceedings of ongoing court cases.

The ban has been imposed to stop the airing of 'adverse comments' of judges in cases related to the intelligence agencies' meddling in judicial affairs and former prime minister Imran Khan.

Tensions between the military-backed government of Shehbaz Sharif and the judges of Islamabad High Court have been simmering over the alleged interference of intelligence agencies in judicial matters as the former accused the latter of coercing them to get desired verdicts in different cases especially related to Imran Khan and his party, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) leaders. The PEMRA notification was issued on the day when the Islamabad High Court grilled the country's spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in the alleged kidnapping of Kashmiri poet Ahmad Farnad. The poet's family has accused

being controlled through force and intimidation. He called upon his party to prepare for street protests in response to the attack on the PTI leader. Khan explained that the PTI is exercising restraint due to the fragile state of the economy, which cannot withstand large-

scale protests. However, he hinted that the party will react during the upcoming budget session.

He commended the judges for upholding the rule of law and observed that the judiciary is finally breaking free from the shackles of fear, demonstrating

its independence and commitment to justice. Khan said he used the funds generated from selling Toshakhana gifts to construct the Banigala road. P. Meanwhile, A court in Pakistan on Thursday said it will announce its verdict on the appeals against the conviction of jailed former premier Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the illegal marriage case on May 29.

Khan, 71, and Bibi, 49, were sentenced to seven years in prison each on February 3 by a trial court for contracting the marriage during iddat, a mandatory period for a woman in Islam to wait before a second marriage after the death of her husband or divorce. The case was filed by Bushra's ex-husband Khawar Maneka against the couple in November 2023, alleging that they married without Bushra observing the mandatory waiting period of iddat. He asked the court to declare the marriage null and void and suspend the notification till the final decision on the petition.

In its notification, PEMRA said: "TV channels are directed to refrain from airing tickers/headlines about court proceedings and shall only report the written orders of the court. Don't air content including commentary, opinions or suggestions about the potential fate of sub judge matter which tends to prejudice the determination by a court, tribunal." The journalist bodies have rejected PEMRA's ban, saying it violates the country's Constitution.

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The former first couple had challenged the verdict in Islamabad District and Sessions Court where Judge Shahrukh Arjumand heard the appeals and reserved the verdict after hearing the arguments by lawyers.

The court said it would announce the judgement on May 29. The couple had married in 2018, the year Khan went on to win elections and become prime minister. Bushra was ostensibly his spiritual guide but the two developed affection for each other during their meetings. She got a divorce from her husband of 28 years with whom she had five children. She is the third wife of Khan, a former cricketing hero, who during his heydays of sporting career had a playboy reputation.

Bosnian Serb leader reiterates threat to secede from Bosnia

AP ■ SREBENICA

The leader of Bosnia's Serb-controlled territory reiterated a threat to secede from the Balkan country on Wednesday, a day ahead of a UN vote on establishing an annual day to commemorate the 1995 genocide of more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs.

Relatives of the victims, meanwhile, said that the vote would mark a historic day in ensuring that the deaths cannot be denied or forgotten. The proposed UN resolution sponsored by Germany and Rwanda has been supported by the Bosniaks, who are mostly Muslim, but has sparked protests and a lobbying campaign against the measure by the Bosnian Serb president, Milorad Dodik, and the populist president of neighbouring Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic. The two leaders say the resolution would brand all Serbs as genocidal, although the draft does not explicitly mention Serbs as culprits. Both Serbia and

Bosnian Serbs have denied that genocide happened in Srebrenica although this has been established by two UN courts. For the women who lost their loved ones in the massacre, any denial of the scope of the crime has meant more grief. This is why the UN vote "means a lot" for victims, truth and justice, said Munira Subasic, from the prominent Mothers of Srebrenica group. "People who live in lies, who don't know the truth, they will need this UN resolution more than we do," Subasic said, adding that she was referring to "genocide deniers" among Bosnian Serbs and in Serbia. "They will not be able to glorify war criminals any more."

"We expect a fair decision tomorrow, a decision that will tell us, the families, that there is justice in the world, that there is humanity," added Nura Begovic, who also lost several family members in Srebrenica. On July 11, 1995, Bosnian Serbs overran a UN-protected

safe area in Srebrenica. They separated at least 8,000 Muslim Bosniak men and boys from their wives, mothers and sisters and slaughtered them. The 193-member UN General Assembly plans to debate the resolution on Thursday to be followed by a vote. Serbs have the support of their allies Russia and China, while the resolution is supported by the US and most other Western states.

Dodik, who is president of Republika Srpska, which comprises about half of Bosnia, said on the social media platform X that the UN resolution is being forced on the country by supporters of Muslim Bosniaks and that it will split up the country.

He said his government could formally propose a separation on Thursday. "Bosnia and Herzegovina has reached its end, or to be more precise, it was brought to an end by those who swore to it," Dodik said on X. "All that remains is for us all to make an

effort to be good neighbors and to part in peace." Dodik has made several such threats in the past to have the Serb-controlled territories secede from Bosnia and join with neighbouring Serbia.

He and some other Bosnian Serb officials are under US and British sanctions partly for jeopardising a US peace plan that ended Bosnia's 1992-95 war. The Srebrenica killings were the bloody culmination of the war, which came after the breakup of Yugoslavia unleashed nationalist passions and territorial ambitions that set Bosnian Serbs against the country's two other main ethnic populations, Croats and Muslim Bosniaks.

The International Court of Justice, the UN's highest tribunal, determined in 2007 that the acts committed in Srebrenica constituted genocide, and the court's determination is included in the draft resolution. It was Europe's first genocide since the Nazi Holocaust in World War II.

Explosion at apartment in China kills one

Beijing (AP): An explosion at an apartment building in northeastern China killed one person and injured at least three others Thursday, state media reported. Parts of the five-story apartment building in Harbin were damaged, with one apartment's balcony completely blown off, videos on social media showed. Officials told local media that the explosion was likely from a natural gas tank. One woman died of her injuries, according to Jimu News, a state-backed media outlet. The three others were taken to the hospital for their injuries. Videos online also showed at



least one person being carted away by first responders into an ambulance, and the streets

were covered in debris. Xinhua news agency said the explosion occurred at roughly 7 am.

Harbin is the capital of China's northeastern Heilongjiang province.

Sensex, Nifty hit all time peaks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices rallied on Thursday, with the Sensex and Nifty hitting their lifetime peaks, after the RBI approved the highest-ever dividend of Rs 2.11 lakh crore to the government and supported by buying in blue chips Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank.

The 30-share BSE Sensex regained the 75,000 level. It climbed 951.22 points or 1.28 per cent to reach its all-time high of 75,172.28.

The NSE Nifty went up by 308.45 points or 1.36 per cent to 22,906.25 — its record peak. Among the Sensex firms, Larsen & Toubro, Maruti, Mahindra & Mahindra, Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank, HDFC Bank, Bajaj Finserv, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries were the major gainers. PowerGrid, Sun Pharma, NTPC and JSW Steel were the laggards.

The Reserve Bank of India will pay a record Rs 2.11 lakh crore dividend to the government for the fiscal ended March 31, more than double of budgeted expectation, helping shore up revenue ahead of a new



government taking office. The RBI board, at its 608th meeting on Wednesday, approved the transfer of surplus, the central bank said in a statement.

"There are positives and negatives for the market today. The biggest positive is the record Rs 2.11 lakh crore dividend from the RBI to the

government," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services. This means the government can reduce its fiscal deficit and step-up infrastructure spending, he added.

"Brent crude dipping below USD 82 is positive for India's macros," Vijayakumar said.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.15 per cent to USD 81.79 a barrel.

The negative for equity markets is the US Fed meeting minutes, which indicate concern over the stubbornness of inflation, he noted. In Asian markets, Tokyo traded in the green while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong quoted lower. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Wednesday.

"The Nifty index has surged to a record high after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a substantial Rs 2.11 lakh crore dividend to the government. This development is a significant macroeconomic positive for the market, with direct implications for the fiscal deficit and bond yields," Santosh Meena, Head of Research at Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 686.04 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark climbed 267.75 points or 0.36 per cent to settle at 74,221.06 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty advanced 68.75 points or 0.31 per cent to finish at 22,597.80.

India to get rating support if it uses RBI dividend to reduce fiscal deficit: S&P analyst

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India can get 'rating support' over time if it utilises the highest-ever dividend of over Rs 2 lakh crore received from the Reserve Bank to reduce fiscal deficit, said an S&P Global Rating analyst on Thursday.

The RBI board has decided to pay a record Rs 2.11 lakh crore dividend to the government for the fiscal ended March 2024, more than double of what was budgeted expectation of Rs 1.02 lakh crore.

"The additional dividends from the RBI are around 0.35 per cent of GDP. Whether it would support the narrowing of the fiscal deficit in fiscal 2024-25 would really depend on the final budget that would be passed after the June election results," S&P Global Ratings Analyst YeeFarn Phua told PTI.

The interim budget presented in Parliament earlier in the year targets a fiscal deficit of 5.1 per cent of the GDP. The additional dividend from the RBI may not necessarily lead to a full decrease in the deficit due to potential



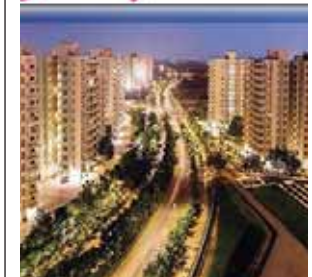
revenue shortfalls in areas like divestment receipts or additional allocation to expenditures in the final budget, Phua said in an email interview from Singapore. However, "if it does lead to a full decrease of the deficit, we believe it will lead to a faster path of fiscal consolidation that, in turn, will provide rating support over time", Phua added.

The government expects to bring down the fiscal deficit to 5.1 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal, down from 5.8 per cent in 2023-24. As per the fiscal consolidators roadmap, the deficit — the difference between government expenditure and

revenue — would be brought down to 4.5 per cent by 2025-26.

In May last year, S&P Global Ratings affirmed India's sovereign rating at 'BBB' with a stable outlook on growth but flagged weak fiscal performance and low GDP per capita as risks. 'BBB is the lowest investment grade rating. All three global rating agencies — Fitch, S&P and Moody's — have the lowest investment grade rating on India with a stable outlook. The ratings are looked at by investors as a barometer of the country's creditworthiness and impact on borrowing costs.

Godrej Properties sells about 650 flats for over ₹2,000 crore



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Godrej Properties has sold around 650 flats in Noida for more than Rs 2,000 crore, amid strong consumer demand for residential properties. Godrej Properties on Thursday said in a regulatory filing it has "sold around 650 homes worth over Rs 2,000 crore in its project, Godrej Jardinia, located in Sector 146, Noida."

The project was launched this month. "This is Godrej Properties' most successful-ever launch in Noida in terms of the value of sales achieved," the company highlighted.

Gaurav Pandey, MD & CEO, Godrej Properties, said, "Noida is an extremely important market for Godrej Properties, and we will look to further strengthen our presence in the city in the years ahead."

Godrej Properties is one of the leading real estate developers in the country. It has a major presence in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Delhi-NCR, Pune and Bengaluru property markets. It has recently entered the Hyderabad market.

Godrej Properties achieved its best-ever annual sales in the 2023-24 fiscal. In the last financial year, the company's sales bookings jumped 84 per cent to a record Rs 22,527 crore, from Rs 12,232 crore in the preceding year.

For FY24, this is the highest sales reported so far by any listed entity. Godrej Properties has set a target of Rs 27,000 crore sales bookings for the current 2024-25 fiscal. To meet this target, Godrej Properties plans to launch a 21.9 million (219 lakh) square feet area this fiscal with an estimated sales bookings value of Rs 30,000 crore.

Emcure, Gennova settle litigation with HDT, ink pact to develop mRNA vaccines

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Emcure Pharmaceuticals Ltd and its arm Gennova Biopharmaceuticals have settled all legal disputes with HDT Bio Corp and have signed a long-term agreement to develop mRNA vaccines, the company said on Thursday.

Under the settlement, the litigation between them, including before US courts and the arbitral tribunal in London, has been settled and dismissed, Emcure said in a statement.

The parties have also entered into a long-term agreement to develop mRNA vaccines against a broad range of infectious diseases, in India and several other countries. As part of their agreement, HDT has granted a licence to Gennova to use its patented mRNA vaccine technology in multiple fields, it added.

"Gennova and HDT, who previously collaborated on the successful development of Gennova's mRNA Covid-19 vaccines, will once again collaborate on the development

commercialisation of mRNA vaccines," the statement said. HDT had filed lawsuit against Emcure alleging stealing of Covid-19 vaccine technology trade secrets.

Emcure Pharmaceuticals CEO & Managing Director Satish Mehta said, "...The misunderstanding between us and HDT not only stands resolved but we have widened the scope of our technical collaboration on a long-term basis."

He further said, "mRNA platform will be the launching pad for our foray into vaccines for tuberculosis, rabies, dengue and other infectious diseases and our collaboration with HDT will be mutually beneficial."

Commenting on the development, HDT CEO Steve Reed said, "HDT's proprietary technology, combined with Emcure's and Gennova's innovation and manufacturing excellence and established distribution network will bring life-saving vaccines to countless people. We are committed to a successful relationship with Emcure and Gennova."

Leather exporters seek national policy to attract investments, create jobs, boost shipments

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Apex body for leather and footwear exporters CLE has asked the government to formulate a national policy for the sector with a view to attract investments, boost India's shipments and create jobs.

In a letter to Niti Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam, Council for Leather Exports (CLE) said that though there are schemes and support measures at central and state levels, there is a need for holistic development of the entire sector through a national policy.

The elements of the proposed policy, it said, can include incentives for setting up of manufacturing units, training of workers, support measures for adoption of sustainable technologies and innovative products.

"This policy should cover the entire supply chain of the sector, starting from raw materials to finished products, including processing, product development, marketing, supply chain management, and backward integration," the council said.



Explaining the importance of the policy, CLE Executive Director R Selvam said that the sector needs a national policy as it is a labour-intensive sector, which employs about 4.4 million, with over 85 per cent women. "The sector has a huge socio-economic benefit. The policy would help the industry in boosting exports and creating huge number of jobs," Selvam told PTI.

The council asked the government to implement the production-linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the entire supply chain of the footwear and leather industry and also the machinery segment. It added that there is a need to fine-tune special economic zone (SEZ) policy with a focus on increasing productivity through flexible labour laws,

lowering the tax burden for the sale of goods in the domestic market.

Further, the CLE suggested that the policy should include a blueprint for infrastructure development in all leather and footwear clusters to make them smart clusters; measures for logistics management; and monetary policy; credit facilities; and insurance coverage.

"I would request to frame the policy to facilitate growth and development and provide additional employment opportunities to at least two million youth in the next seven years," CLE Chairman R K Jalan said.

He also called for organising a meeting of global CEOs of major leather products and footwear brands with industry secretaries of states.

"Such a meeting will be helpful in attracting more investments from brands," he said adding that there is a demand for setting up plug-and-paly models of factories wherein ready-to-use factory sheds with all required infrastructure and support services are provided by the government.

Government plans big scale radiation processing of onions to prevent shortages

PIT ■ NEW DELHI

The government is planning to significantly ramp up the radiation processing of onions to create a buffer stock of 1,00,000 tonnes this year, as it aims to prevent shortages and price rises of the politically sensitive bulb, according to a top government official.

The world's biggest exporter of onions is expected to see output fall by 16 per cent to 25.47 million tonnes in 2023-24 amid lower yields in key growing states of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, according to government estimates.

To discourage hoarding and curb price volatility often sparked by supply disruptions, the government plans to use radiation technology on a large scale to increase onions' shelf life, said Nidhi Khare, secretary at the consumer affairs ministry.

"We are identifying 50 irradiation centres around the consuming areas. If we are successful, we will be able to store up to 1 lakh tonnes of radiation-processed onions



this year," Khare told PTI.

The ministry has asked the state agencies NAFED and NCCF, who are procuring 500,000 tonnes of onions to create a buffer stock this year, to explore irradiation facilities around key consumption centres such as Sonapat, Thane, Nasik and Mumbai. Radiation processing was tried on a small scale of 1,200 tonnes near the growing region of Maharashtra last year.

To facilitate quicker transportation of the buffer stock, the ministry is also considering setting up controlled atmosphere storage facilities at major railway hubs, Khare added.

In the past, the government has banned onion exports and stockpiled a substantial share of the crop to safeguard supplies after hoarding and drought cycles led to shortages.

Working on Gen AI tool to make video learning content more accessible, affordable: Upsurge

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Upsurge, an e-learning platform that focuses on stock market trading and investing, aspires to become the leading platform in the domain of finance and is working on a generative AI tool to churn out video-based content to make its offerings more accessible and affordable, say its co-founders.

The focus right now is on Indian markets but the company eventually plans to go global to tap into the growing financial markets overseas, according to Kunal Shah.

Shah and Mahip Gupta co-

founded Valuationary, which was acquired by Raise Financial Services in 2022 and rechristened Upsurge. With more people keen to dabble in stock market investment, the demand for learning stock market trading and investing is on a constant rise, said Gupta.

"At Upsurge, we feel stock market participants shall learn about how to trade and invest in the markets thoroughly so that they make fewer mistakes while they are trading or investing," Gupta told PTI.

The wide range of courses on offer today cater to both beginners stepping into the stock market and experienced



traders and investors looking to enhance their skills, Shah added. The name Upsurge resonates better with the younger trading and investing audience, he said.

"Upsurge is working on a generative AI tool to produce video-based learning content that will make its product more accessible and

affordable," Shah told PTI.

"The idea behind creating Upsurge is to ensure that stock market participants trade and invest right, especially in the Futures and Options (F&O) segment, where 90 per cent of traders do not make money. Upsurge imparts education through well-produced courses, live

sessions, mentorship programmes, and social media initiatives," he explained.

With over 60 courses and more than five mentorship programmes (revolving around options trading, technical analysis, investing strategy and personal finance among others) in its arsenal, the platform has garnered more than 100,000 users who are constantly learning on their platform and becoming better traders and investors, Shah noted.

Upsurge has been using multiple services from AWS (Amazon Web Services) since its inception to ensure traffic management, as the platform

builds up and scales.

Over 50 traders, investors and fund managers teach on Upsurge's platform. The overall community size is over half a million learners across Upsurge platforms. "Life has changed quite drastically for the founders and the entire team post the acquisition," said Shah. The speed of lining up courses and product offerings is lightning fast.

"While maintaining the speed, we are also ensuring that the value we provide to our users is much higher than the price that we charge. This is also the reason why Upsurge is one of the most affordable platforms to learn trading and investing across

India," he said.

The vision for Upsurge is to become the number one learning platform in the domain of finance.

"Going forward, we will be gamifying the entire learning process to make it more interactive and engaging. This shall help Upsurge to increase its completion rates (people enrolling & completing the course), which are currently at about 25 per cent," he says.

Upsurge has leveraged AWS services — Amazon's cloud computing unit — extensively, in scaling its business.

"We have been using multiple services from AWS since the inception of our business like EC2 for autoscaling our

servers to ensure we manage our traffic well. Along with that, we have been using Cloud Front, Elemental MediaConvert, and S3 to ensure that our content storage, video processing, and content streaming work seamlessly," Gupta said.

Amazon's SES (Simple Email Service) has helped Upsurge to automate high-volume emails, leading to 10 percent of free users getting converted into paid users.

"We are a big beneficiary of AWS services," Gupta said, exuding confidence that the partnership with AWS will play an instrumental role in helping upsurge scale its business.

JSW Group's paint business turns profitable

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

JSW Paints crossed Rs 2,000 crore in revenue from operation in FY24 and logged its first operating profit in five years of inception, a top company official said on Thursday.

The JSW Group firm, which aims for Rs 5,000 crore revenue in the next two years, is expanding its retail presence in the home decorative business and adding more products in the industrial coating business, company's Joint Managing Director & CEO Sundaresan AS said.

"We have been able to achieve operating breakeven this year (FY24)," Sundaresan told PTI. JSW Paints, which is among the new entrants in the fast-



growing Indian paints industry, is aiming "to grow much faster than the market". "We aim to keep growing anywhere from 5 to 10 times the market growth. In the current year (FY24), we have grown 10 times the rest of the industry," he said adding that JSW Paints is bringing new products into the market,

expanding its reach and network and continuing to invest in building the brands. Asked about JSW Paints' target to have Rs 5,000 crore revenue within the next two years, Sundaresan said: "We believe it is possible."

"Of course, it has to be aided by a buoyant market and if you keep doing the right things which we have been doing. We have always believed in taking the aspirational goals and working towards them systematically. So we believe it is possible," he added.

Currently, JSW Paints has a network of 6,000 retailers across the country and will continue to expand it further. "So we keep adding anywhere from 2,000 to 2,500 retailers annually, which we will

continue to do," he said.

JSW Paints has so far invested Rs 900 crore for its decorative and industrial coating business.

Regarding the paints market, Sundaresan said, the industry has been growing at double-digit in the last few decades and is expected to do so going forward. It is a growing market and has a place for newcomers in the segment.

In the Indian paints market, in the last 4-5 years, several new players including Aditya Birla Group, Pidilite and some others have entered into the segment.

"This is going to add more value to the industry, quality competition and new offerings," Sundaresan said. JSW Paints is trying to make a "significant difference" in

terms of its offerings and has achieved this milestone in a short span of time despite two years being lost in COVID, he added.

"We have already faced the existing competition actively over the last five years. We believe JSW Paints will be able to face both the existing as well as new competition which is coming into the industry well with our approach and difference we can make in industry," he said.

Launched in May 2019, JSW Paints is a part of the USD 24 billion JSW Group, whose business interests span sectors such as steel, energy, maritime infrastructure, defence, B2B e-commerce, realty, cement, sports and venture capital.

MG Motor India signs pact with Vertelo to deliver 3,000 EVs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

MG Motor India on Thursday said it has signed an initial pact to deliver 3,000 EVs to integrated fleet electrification platform Vertelo in a phased manner.

Both the entities have signed a memorandum of understanding to this effect. The partnership will focus on providing sustainable mobility solutions to riders and will also work towards establishing a robust EV charging infrastructure in the country, MG Motor India said in a statement.

"This partnership between MG India and Vertelo

demonstrates a shared vision for a green and sustainable future with decarbonisation in India. We also believe that this collaboration will augment our endeavours to offer advanced e-mobility solutions for passengers and boost faster adoption of EVs in the country," MG Motor India Chief Growth Officer, Gaurav Gupta said.

Vertelo is a fleet electrification platform that aims at providing end-to-end solutions to operators and corporates. It has been established by Macquarie Asset Management and has received anchor investment from the Green Climate Fund which has committed to

invest up to USD 200 million. "This partnership with MG Motor India to purchase around 3,000 electric cars, marks the beginning of an exciting journey for both organisations with a common goal of accelerating fleet electrification and achieving Net-zero emissions," Vertelo CEO, Sandeep Gambhir said.

The range of electric vehicles that MG Motor plans to bring in India over the next few years coupled with Vertelo's integrated electrification solutions for fleet operators and corporates will go a long way in accelerating the shift towards a more sustainable transportation ecosystem, he added.

Panghal in focus as Indian boxers fight in final qualifiers for Paris Olympics

PTI ■ BANGKOK
Indian pugilists will be determined to overcome the recent setbacks both inside and outside the boxing ring when they aim for the last available tickets to the Olympic Games at the second World Qualification Tournament, starting here on Friday.
Up until the last qualifying event, Indian boxers had four quotas but in an unprecedented embarrassment, that number is now down to three after women's 57kg holder Parveen Hooda was handed a 22-month ban for whereabouts failure this month.
The boxers' performance at the previous world qualifiers in March was dismal to say the least with only 2023 world champion bronze-medallist Nishant Dev moving past the opening round.
This also triggered a coaching crisis. High

Performance Director Bernard Dunne handed his resignation during the first World qualifier itself.
"From the Thailand qualifiers, we definitely hope to clinch 4-5 quota places and we are hoping for the best. This time we have a definite chance," Indian boxing coach CA Kuttappa told SAI Media ahead of event here.
The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) has made several changes with India's lone male world championship silver-medallist Amit Panghal finally back the mix after Deepak Bhoria failed to win a quota in the first two qualifying events in the 51kg category.
Panghal is coming off a gold-winning run at the prestigious Strandja Memorial tournament earlier this year and the 2022 Commonwealth Games. He will have only one shot at making the Olympics and the former Asian Games champion will look to make



the most of it. Abhinash Jamwal has been handed an opportunity to make the cut for his debut Olympics after the seasoned Shiva Thapa's repeated failures in the 63.5kg weight class, which has five quotas on offer.
Young boxer Abhimanyu Loura, who has replaced Lakshya Chahar, will try his luck in 80kg. He will have to make it to the top three to earn his maiden Olympic appearance.
Nishant Dev missed sealing his berth in Italy by a whisker. He would be brimming with confidence.

With five quotas on offer in 71kg, he is expected to return with a ticket to Paris. In women's competition, Ankushita Boro, who competed in the 66kg event, has moved down to 60kg, pipping Jaismine Lamboriya in the assessment. Ankushita will have to finish in the top three to make the cut.
However, Jaismine who failed to book a berth during the earlier two qualifying events, has got a third shot albeit in the 57kg after Parveen was sanctioned.
National Champion Arundhati Choudhary (66kg) will be the third Indian female boxer in the fray.
With 188 boxers having already earned Olympic berths via the continental qualifiers and the world qualifiers, Indian boxers are expected to add to the tally of three quotas.
"Our boxers are in a good mental position now. The confidence from the sparring sessions has risen and psychologists are playing a key role to keep them away from pressure," Kuttappa said.
The tournament has 51 quota places on offer, including 23 for women and 28 for men, and a boxer will be assured of a Paris ticket after reaching the semifinals. India had an unprecedented nine boxers competing at the Tokyo Olympics, which yielded one medal -- a bronze by Lovlina Borgohain.
Nikhath Zareen (50kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg) and Borgohain (75kg) secured their entry to Paris at the Asian Games last year.
SQUAD:
Women: Jaismine Lamboria (57kg), Ankushita Boro (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (66kg).
Men: Amit Panghal (51kg), Sachin Siwah Jr. (57kg), Abhinash Jamwal (63.5kg), Nishant Dev (71kg), Abhimanyu Loura (80kg), Sanjeet (92kg), Narendra Berwal (+92kg).

Prathamesh Fuge makes semifinal; recurve archers disappoint in WC stage 2

PTI ■ YECHEON (SOUTH KOREA)
Young compound archer Prathamesh Fuge advanced into the semifinals but men's and women's recurve teams endured shock opening round losses in the World Cup Stage 2, here on Thursday.
Reigning Asian Games champion Jyothi Surekha Vennam, who bagged a hat-trick of gold medals at the Stage 1 Shanghai leg last month also fell by the wayside, going down to Sara Lopez 142-145 in the compound women's individual quarters.
The 21-year-old Fuge secured one of the top wins of his career when he shocked 2021 world champion and world No 6 Nico Wiener 146-145 to set up a semifinal clash against James Lutz of the USA.
He mounted early pressure, shooting a perfect round of 30 in the

first end, as the Austrian heavyweight struggled to come back.
Wiener managed to level 117-all in the fourth end, but Fuge held his nerves and dropped just one point in the final round to seal a thrilling one-point win.
Multiple World Cup gold medalist Abhishek Verma made a second round exit, while Priyansh lost out in the pre-quarters.
Coming on the back of shocking world champions South Korea to win the Shanghai gold, Indian men's team of Tarundeep Rai, Dhiraj Bommadevara and Mrinal Chauhan failed to live up to the pre-tournament hype and were knocked out 3-5 by Canada in their opening match.
The loss also ended the hopes of another gold medal clash between home favourites South Korea and India, who had finished top-two in the qualifying round.

Mbappé chases last trophy with PSG in French Cup final against Lyon

AP ■ PARIS
This time, it's really the end. After missing Paris Saint-Germain's last two league games, Kylian Mbappé should start in the French Cup final against Lyon on Saturday for his final match in a PSG shirt.
The forward, widely expected to join Real Madrid, was given some free time by coach Luis Enrique last weekend and was spotted enjoying himself at the Cannes film festival, while PSG wrapped up a 12th victorious league campaign in less glamorous settings.
Mbappé told PSG in February he will leave at the end of the season - Saturday night - and confirmed it this month.
Over the last three months, Enrique has tried to make PSG less reliant on his star striker, arguing that he needed to start thinking about the future knowing that Mbappé would not be around next season.
Although Enrique has yet to decide on his starting XI for Saturday's final at Lille's



Stade Pierre-Mauroy, snubbing Mbappé, or even leaving him on the bench, would equate to a slap in his face.
Mbappé is the club's all-time top scorer with 256, winning six Ligue 1 titles and three French Cups with PSG. Although he didn't lead the club to a Champions League trophy in his seven seasons in Paris, he largely contributed to helping PSG reach a respected status on the continent.
Leaving him on the sidelines on the night he could cap his PSG journey with yet another title seems highly unlikely, although Enrique has warned his players he will select only those who deserve it.
"We'll see who's ready, who's not ready (to play), who wants to, who doesn't want to," Enrique said.

Like Mbappé, Ousmane Dembélé did not play against Nice and Metz in the closing league rounds but should be back to face a resurgent Lyon side led by former Arsenal striker Alexandre Lacazette.
LYON MASTER OF COMEBACKS
Lyon has been in impressive form in recent months and Enrique can't afford to take the five-time Cup champion lightly.
Since Pierre Sage was appointed coach last November when Lyon was at the bottom of the league, the team has been transformed into a winning machine.
After sealing European soccer next season, Lyon can cap a remarkable second half of the season with its first silverware since 2012.
One of Lyon's main assets has been its capacity to come from behind under Sage's guidance.
According to French league statistics, Lyon has secured 27 points from a losing position, with only Liverpool and Girona doing better in the top five leagues.



Atalanta hat trick hero Ademola writes himself into European soccer history

AP ■ DUBLIN
There was an unlikely answer to the question of who would score the first hat trick in a men's European club final since 1975.
Ademola Lookman scored all three goals in Atalanta's 3-0 beating of Bayer Leverkusen to win the Europa League title and each had much to admire.
Stealth in the penalty area, balance on the ball, deft footwork, and precise shooting with both feet were factors in a standout performance.
And yet even Atalanta coach, Gian Piero Gasperini, acknowledged he was not buying a pure striker when Lookman arrived at the club two years ago.
"He wasn't overly prolific in England," Gasperini said of a player who was bought from Leipzig, yet had spent the previous two years on loan at Fulham and Leicester in the Premier League.
Lookman also had been a winger at Everton, yet also slipped through the net there after being allowed out on loan to Leipzig and then sold. Joining Atalanta at almost 25, Lookman had never scored 10 goals in a season. He has now scored 15 times in each of his two seasons in Italy.
The London-born Nigeria international offered a hat trick of ideas after the game for why he has flourished. A love and support from his family and African home. The trust he felt from Gasperini's managing. The calmness of life in the picturesque city of Bergamo.
"The unwavering support I get and the love back home from people is unbelievable," said Lookman, who won an Under-20 World Cup with England before changing eligibility to play for Nigeria in 2022. "It gives me the motivation to try to inspire myself."
On Gasperini, a 20-year

veteran of coaching at Italian clubs, he said: "The first few conversations I had with him made me look at football a lot different. Made things simpler in my mind, play my game in a different light."
For a former resident of London and Liverpool, Lookman said his new home city "gives me a sense of calmness. It has helped me a lot in terms of my living style."
Lookman's family was on the field with him Wednesday, helping him show off the trophy he helped secure for Atalanta - the club's first senior title for 61 years.
"I have a lot of love for the people I call family. I owe them a lot," he said.
Atalanta captain Berat Djimsiti said he told Lookman before the game "we need the best version of Ademola."
"I see it for myself in every training it's hard to play against him," Djimsiti said, "and today was incredible."
Atalanta will be in the Champions League next season and should have Lookman for a full season. He was away with Nigeria through January for the African Cup of Nations.
"He has had a great year, albeit it was interrupted by Afcon," Gasperini said. "He was gone for a long while."
Now Lookman enters European soccer history as the first hat trick scorer in a club final since Jupp Heynckes for Borussia Mönchengladbach in the 1975 UEFA Cup. That came in a 5-1 win over Twente in the return game of what was then a two-leg final.
Among the few men who have scored hat tricks in European finals are Real Madrid greats Ferenc Puskás and Alfredo di Stefano, more than 60 years ago.
Now on that storied list Lookman, Gasperini said, "has established himself as a matchwinner."

Recruitment for 24 posts under sports quota notified by Northeast Frontier Railway

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MALIGAON
Northeast Frontier Railway has published recruitment notification to fill up 24 different posts for men and women under the Sports Quota. Online applications have been invited from eligible sports persons, who are citizens of India and recruitments will be for various posts in Level-1 to 5.
The last date to apply for the posts is 09.06.2024. Aspirant candidates can apply online through the link given in the website www.nfr.indianrailways.gov.in after going through all the details mentioned.
Sportsperson from the field of weightlifting, golf, boxing, cycling, cricket, badminton, football, table tennis can fill up the online application and submit. The age limit prescribed between 18-25 years as on July 1, 2024 for the candidates applying in posts in level 4 and 5 and as on January 1, 2024 for posts in level 1 to 3.
The candidates possessing minimum prescribed educational qualification and sports achievement as per norm can apply for the respective post. The sportsperson who are currently active player and having sports achievements in recognised championship/events held on or after 01.04.2021 shall only be considered for their appointment.
Tentative dates for trials are likely to be held on 20th and 28th June, 2024 and candidates should keep themselves in readiness for the trials for his/her concerned sports discipline.

Indian junior women and men hockey teams suffer losses

PTI ■ BREDA (NETHERLANDS)
The Indian men's and women's junior hockey teams endured losses in their respective matches against Belgium here on a disappointing day in their ongoing tour of Europe.
Both the teams lost 2-3 to their Belgian counterparts. While Binima Dhan (49', 58') scored a brace for the women's team, captain Rohit (44', 57') scored a brace for the men's team.
In the women's match, the Indians looked eager to take the lead in the first quarter, winning two penalty corners early on.
However, a resilient Belgian team ensured there was no change in the scoreline. The Belgian unit responded fiercely in the second quarter, taking a 1-0 lead before the match broke for half-time.
While India searched for the equaliser, Belgium increased their lead scoring in the third and fourth quarters to bring the score to 3-0.
The Indians rallied in the final



quarter but the effort came too late. They will next play against Belgium in Antwerp May 24.
In the men's match, the Belgians took the lead early in the game with a goal in the first quarter. They doubled the lead in the second quarter. The Indians pulled one back with Rohit leading the charge to reduce the goal difference in the third quarter. Belgium, however, scored a third goal with a penalty corner conversion to regain their two-goal lead.
A quick retaliation came from Rohit who converted a penalty corner to keep his team in the hunt but the Belgians held onto their lead. The team will take on Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push in Breda later on Thursday.

Sports Ministry approves foreign training for Lakshya and Sindhu ahead of Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Indian shuttlers Lakshya Sen and P V Sindhu will train in France and Germany respectively as part of their Olympic preparations after the Sports Ministry's Mission Olympic Cell approved financial assistance to cover the cost for both of them.
Sen had sought financial assistance for a 12-day training session in Marseille, France. Sen, who will compete in the men's singles event in Paris, will train at The Halle des Sports Parsemain with his coach and support staff from July 8 to 21 ahead of the Olympic Games.
Sindhu's proposal was for Saarbrücken, Germany to train at the Hermann-Neuberger Sportschule. She will practice there for over a month along with her coach and support staff before heading to Paris.
"MOC approved their funding their airfare, boarding/lodging cost, local transportation charges, Visa Fees, shuttlecocks expenses under the Ministry's Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)," the ministry said in



a release.
During the meeting, MOC also approved table tennis player Sreeja Akula and Women's 4x400 Relay Team in TOPS Core group and the promotion of wrestlers Nisha (68kg) and Reetika (76kg) to Core group.
MOC also inducted upcoming golfer Kartik Singh in TOPS Development with focus towards 2028 and 2032 Olympics in Los Angeles and Brisbane respectively.

30-year-old triple amputee from Goa climbs Mt Everest Base Camp

PTI ■ PANAJI
Tinkesh Kaushik, a 30-year-old man from Goa, has become the world's first triple amputee to reach the Mount Everest Base Camp located 17,598 feet above sea level, a private disability rights body has claimed.
Kaushik, who completed the challenging Everest Base Camp journey on May 11, said despite his physical disabilities, he managed to achieve the feat due to his

mental strength.
The man lost his both limbs below knees and a hand following an electrocution accident in Haryana when he was 9 years old. The amputee, who uses prosthetic limbs, moved to Goa a few years back and has been working as a fitness coach.
Kaushik has made Goa proud with his achievements, Disability Rights Association of Goa (DRAG) chief Avelino D'Souza told reporters at a press conference here on



Wednesday.
On the occasion, Kaushik said he initially thought the trek would be easy as he is a fitness coach but realised the challenges when he started preparing for it.
"I did not have any prior experience in mountaineering. I prepared for that before going for the base camp. I am a fitness coach by profession and thought it will be an easy trek for me," he said.
Kaushik said as he started

work on the ground, it was very painful for him on the first day because of his level of amputation and prosthetic limbs.
"I found trekking to be challenging. On the second day, I said that I have to do it. It's a doable trek. In between, my health was bad, I suffered an acute mountain bout (sickness)," he said.
Kaushik said he could finish the trek because of his mental strength.
Soon after accomplishing the

task, Kaushik posted on his Instagram handle: "Today, the 11th of May 2024, I completed the challenge of trekking to Everest Base Camp. As the first Triple Amputee with 90 per cent Locomotor disability to have achieved this feat, it was a very emotional moment for me. I did it for myself and I did it for a cause. I thank everyone who supported me, to make this a reality. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."



SRH big hitters up against RR's spin stars in battle of nerves for place in IPL final

PTI ■ CHENNAI

IPL's best power-hitters Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma will face a very different challenge in wily spinners Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravichandran Ashwin when Sunrisers Hyderabad take on Rajasthan Royals in a high-octane second Qualifier here on Friday.

'Travishek' as the duo is affectionately called by the fans have taken power-hitting to a new level. Head (533 runs at 199.62) and Abhishek (470 at 207.04) have hit 72 sixes apart from 96 boundaries between them. If that's not enough, they have a swashbuckler in Heinrich Klaasen (413 runs at 180), who also has 34 maximums to his credit. But playing on an Uppal shirtfront that resembled a

national highway or at the Kotla or Wankhede is completely from playing at the Chepauk where the strip will be sticky in nature. The ball stops and stroke-makers do have a tough time when it comes to hitting through the line. Ashwin, who has played all his cricket at this ground, knows the strip like the back of his hand and his form has improved towards the back-end of the tournament. With the country's best leg-spinner Chahal for company, Royals would be hoping that Head, Abhishek and Klaasen can be disposed off quickly to gain control of the proceedings. As for their bowling, the onus would once again be on T Natarajan, who has been SRH's top wicket-taker this season,

and playing on his home turf here, he would love to exploit the conditions. Also, the experienced duo of Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Cummins have a lot to deal with as the former has been wicket-less in his last two games. SRH's problems lie in not having two quality spinners. Mayank Markande is mediocre at best and Shahbaz Ahmed's primary skill is willow-wielding, not bowling slow left-arm orthodox twerkers. As for RR, the side finally ended its five-game winless streak, thanks to its all-round show against RCB. In batting, the top-order displayed some positive signs, especially Yashasvi Jaiswal, and he would love to continue the form ahead of the T20 World Cup in the Americas next



month. However, skipper Sanju Samson will have to do better, given that he hasn't crossed the 20-run mark in the last three contests. In the middle order, Dhruv Jurel will be under pressure, having failed to enter the double digits in his last two outings. The side would also be relying on its Caribbean game-changers Shimron Hetmyer and West Indies T20 skipper Rovman Powell for some power-hitting that they displayed against RCB. Riyan Parag, who has displayed some serious form this term, is also one of their bankable batters.

SQUADS:
SRH: Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Aiden Markram, Abdul Samad, Nitish Reddy, Shahbaz

Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips (wk), Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Upendra Yadav (wk), Jhathavedh Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijaykanth Vijaykanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaj Singh and Mayank Agarwal.
RR: Sanju Samson (c & wk), Abid Mushtaq, Avesh Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Donovan Ferreira, Kuldeep Sen, Kunal Singh Rathore, Nandir Burger, Navdeep Saini, Ravichandran Ashwin, Riyan Parag, Sandeep Sharma, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dubey, Rovman Powell, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Trent Boult, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yuzvendra Chahal and Tanush Kotian.



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Dinesh Karthik: Man of comebacks and Dhoni's understudy calls time on IPL and international career

Dinesh Karthik's international career was a classic case of what could have been after the arrival of Mahendra Singh Dhoni but on Wednesday, when he said goodbye to the game at the end of his team's IPL campaign, it was from a stage he made his own over the past 17 years. The Eliminator between his Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Rajasthan Royals ended up being Karthik's swansong, bringing down curtains on a 20-year-old career marked by a series of comebacks across formats. Twenty six Tests, 94 ODIs and 60 T20s over two decades don't make for eye-popping numbers but the forever fidgety 38-year-old managed to stay relevant till the very end despite spending more time in the commentary box than on the field over the past couple of years. Ahead of the T20 World Cup squad announcement, Karthik forced himself into the selection debate for the wicket-keeper batter's role with head-turning performances for RCB but that one final comeback wasn't meant to be as selectors rightly went for younger talent. While he was commenting on the India-England Test series in February-March, Karthik had made up his mind on retirement but the world only got to know when Michael Atherton let it slip in a podcast with the Tamil Nadu stumper. Having played for as many as six

teams in the IPL since the tournament's inception in 2008, Karthik can be proud of his record in the world's premier T20 league. He finished as an IPL winner with close to 5000 runs over 17 seasons besides taking 145 catches and effecting 37 stumpings. He batted at various positions all these years but his days at the RCB as a finisher over the past three seasons stood out. In a format increasingly ruled by power-hitters, Karthik relied on his experience, game awareness and touch to find the boundaries at will. His 330 runs at a strike rate of 183 in 2022 earned him a recall to the Indian team for the T20 World Cup but that happened to be his last time in national colours. He scored at an even higher clip this season but despite making himself available for the upcoming World Cup, he deep down knew his comeback saga with Indian cricket had come to an end. **KARTHIK HAD HIS MOMENTS IN STOP-START INDIA CAREER:** The Chennai-born cricketer was only 19 when he made his India debut in an ODI against England at Lord's in September 2004.



admission, he was shocked to know about his exclusion from the home series against Australia, ahead of the ICC event in England. The selectors surprisingly brought him back for the World Cup where he only got three games, including the ill-fated semifinal against New Zealand. The final chapter of his comeback story unfolded after a stellar IPL in 2022 but like on previous instances, Karthik could not seize the opportunity and could only manage only 14 runs in three innings at the T20 World Cup in Australia. By his own admission, his India career could have been so much more but there was no shame in being overshadowed by someone like Dhoni. The consistency that he lacked in international cricket was his friend in the IPL and his significant contribution was duly recognised by his RCB teammates on Wednesday night including the great Virat Kohli who was the first one to acknowledge his long career. Karthik will be back in the commentary box soon and could be seen playing the T20 leagues outside the IPL.

We need bowlers with specific skill set of bowling at Chinnaswamy: RCB head coach Flower

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Raw pace alone will never be enough to win T20 games consistently at Chinnaswamy where bowlers with different skill-sets, executing a specific plan will be required in RCB set-up, head coach Andy Flower said after his team's exit from IPL Eliminator. While RCB had a brilliant run at the back-end with six straight wins and qualified for the 'Eliminator', the team lost most of its games at the Chinnaswamy with none of the pacers — Mohammed Siraj (ER 9.18), Lockie Ferguson (ER 10.62), Yash Dayal (ER 9.14), Recce Topley (ER 11.200), Karn Sharma (ER 10.58) haven't exactly set the stage on fire. "You certainly need highly skilful bowlers at (M) Chinnaswamy (Stadium). Simply pace is not going to be the answer there. You need skilful, intelligent bowlers and people that can bowl to really specific plans at Chinnaswamy," Flower said. With the mega auction scheduled to take place before next IPL, Flower wants RCB to pick specific kind of players. "I don't really want to talk about that stuff yet - I'm still digesting what's happened in this game. (But) I do think though as part answer to your question the Chinnaswamy has some particular qualities that we need to be able to exploit," Flower said when asked what the franchise's approach will be for the next year.

NEEDED: On batting front, Flower wants players with better power game, who can keep up the tempo. "We have all seen how the power game has affected T20 cricket recently. On the batting front, you certainly need to recruit batsmen with that sort of power that can keep up that sort of tempo," he added. **COACH SUPPORTS 'IMPACT PLAYER' RULE:** Flower batted for the 'Impact Player' rule saying that it allows two Indian players to participate in a game. "It has got a few positives about it absolutely. Now there's an extra Indian playing and that's a good thing for Indian cricket. It has catalysed the batsmen," Flower said. "It has given them a little bit of a safety net and they've taken off and attacked the game a little more this year." The left-hander believes that even if the rule is done away with, batters won't back away from the ultra-aggressive approach seen this year. "Even if you took the impact player rule away, I believe batsmen will still retain that very aggressive game that they're playing at the moment because they've proved to themselves that they can play that aggressively and stay in," Flower said. **DON'T SEE REASON THAT MAXWELL CAN'T TURN THINGS AROUND:** Flower backed the struggling Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell to turn things around after he was dismissed for a duck and finished with a mere 52 runs in 10 matches.

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High scores in IPL due to batters skills, not impact player rule: Ravichandran Ashwin

Ravichandran Ashwin does not want to single out impact player rule as the only contributing factor in high scores being recorded several times this IPL, as the premier India spinner attributes it to the evolution of batters. Ashwin also has urged bowlers to start working on their batting skills in order to meet the demands of the game. The season has witnessed some astonishing batting records -- teams crossed the 200-run mark for a staggering 41 times whereas the 250-mark was breached on eight instances in the league round. IPL's record highest team total of 287 was also registered in the ongoing edition. "Even if the impact player rule wasn't there, scores would be this high," Ashwin said on JioCinema Match Centre Live after their four-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the

IPL Eliminator, here on Wednesday. "In my opinion, batters have more confidence and pitches everywhere have been standardised." "In the future, all bowlers will need to be hitters because we know that no matter how well we bowl, we also need to be able to bat. The game is headed in that direction," he said. While Indian captain Rohit Sharma has criticised the rule, arguing that it hampers the development of all-rounders in the country, star batter Virat Kohli has opined that it disrupts the balance of the game. The rule was formally adopted in the 2023 edition of the IPL after a trial in the Syed



Mushtaq Ali Trophy domestic T20s. The BCCI secretary Jay Shah recently said the impact player rule was implemented on a 'test case' basis and is not

a permanent one. Shah has also said the board authorities will talk to the stakeholders before taking a final call on the debatable rule. Coming off a gruelling five-match home Test series against England where he was the leading wicket-taker in India's 4-1 win, Ashwin said he had to overcome an abdominal injury and started bowling in his elements only in the business end of the competition. "My tournament has gone in two halves. The first half was coming off the Test series, so my body didn't feel fresh. My arm speed wasn't there and I also had an injury, an abdomen tear. I played through the injury but didn't get much bowling time or repetitions. Ashwin was adjudged man-of-the-match for his miserly 2/19 that restricted Royal Challengers Bengaluru to 172/8.

"I am someone who depends on bowling repetitions. Over the last 6-7 games, I feel like my rhythm came back. I was able to bowl off spin. I changed my action slightly. My plan was simple. I came with a single-minded focus on changing the line and length of my deliveries and it was executed well," added Ashwin. Ashwin has also hailed Riyan Parag's maturity and said the Assam batter has come a long way since making his debut as an 18-year-old in IPL 2019. "It's important to give batters, especially junior batters, role clarity. Riyan came into the team as a 17-year-old child and he's matured over the years, getting role clarity for the first time this season. "I never doubted his ability. The shot he hit over the covers tonight, not many batters can hit that. Based on his talent and how his season has gone, I think he can reach wherever he wants to," he said.

Avesh Khan Way: Sleep well, eat well and bowl well

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Eat, sleep. Bowl and repeat. Avesh Khan has simplified the mantra of success and it is paying dividends as one saw his performances during key games for Rajasthan Royals in this year's IPL. With 16 wickets from 15 matches, mostly played on flat decks, an economy rate of 9.81 is praiseworthy and his control at the death has made him look a different bowler this time around. "I have simplified my cricket - I have to sleep (well), I have to eat (well) and I have to bowl (well) and there is nothing else to it," said Avesh, who took a three-for to help Rajasthan Royals reach Qualifier 2 in IPL here on Wednesday. "The more you would think... cricket is like a circle, the smaller you keep it, the better it will be. You expand this circle more and you will

find (more and more) gaps," he added. "This has changed my life too and also impacted my cricket," he said. The 27-year-old, who is among India's reserve players for next month's T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and the USA, on Wednesday revealed that analysing his strengths and weaknesses after a heavy domestic season followed by IPL last year helped him find the better version of himself. "Last year when I played for LSG, I had played 10 matches of Ranji Trophy wherein I bowled about 320 overs. The body was not responding to the efforts I was putting in," he said. He also needed to be aware that playing too much can cause wear and tear. "It happens, sometimes as a bowler you just end up playing so much. Even in the IPL, you may think that it's a four-over game or a 20-over



game but still, there is a lot of effort that goes in. The body starts giving up and there are mental and physical fatigues too," he added. "Your execution could go off the mark, but if you are mentally and physically fresh you will be able to execute better. I was not fresh last year so I did not have a successful IPL. I (also) realised later that there is no good in taking so much tension," he added. Avesh said going back to the drawing board and working with his coach in order to work on his bowling action and setting up right routines for training and recovery have helped him immensely. "I could not find the answers back then, but after the IPL last year, I analysed that there were some technical changes in my bowling. I worked with my coach Anand Rajan and I did well with him," he said. "I played in the Deodhar Trophy and Duleep Trophy

which was followed by my comeback into the Indian team." Avesh said leaving LSG for Rajasthan Royals also had specific benefits for him as a bowler. "I understood my body and when the trade was made this year, I was also happy because anything can happen to you at any time in IPL," said Avesh. "The trade was not in my hands, but I took it positively, and Rajasthan's (home) ground is also quite big, the team is also good... as a bowler you need such margins," he said. While acknowledging that various methods help player develop mental toughness, Avesh said there is no better teacher than going through the grind regularly. "I get up only at 2:00pm on match days so there is no time to think that much," Avesh replied when asked what he does to develop mental

toughness. "You can do whatever you can to build mental toughness but until you are not in a position to have faced the challenges repeatedly, you cannot overcome them. I acknowledge all that, but when (as a batter) you need 10-12 runs in an over, you forget everything and focus on execution," he added. The pacer acknowledged RR's dugout was tense during a close finish against RCB in the Eliminator here but he said the team perhaps remembered head coach Kumar Sangakkara's message before the game. "The talk was simple — either we would win or go back home. We had to give it our all," he said. "We were top two till the last game of the (league stage) and we finished third. (Kumar) Sangakkara said whether we win or lose, there should not be any regrets," Avesh added.