

**OPINION 6**  
AMBEDKAR'S WARNING ON  
DEMOCRACY RINGS TRUE

**WORLD 8**  
BODIES OF 3 MORE HOSTAGES  
RECOVERED FROM GAZA

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## DELHI ON KARTAVYA PATH

Unique affair as CM on bail; Cong, AAP fight in sync

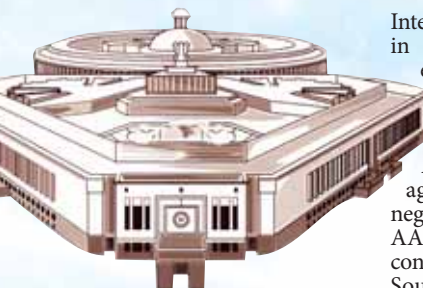
RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A sort of history will be created when the national Capital votes in the Lok Sabha elections on Friday. Firstly, the voting will occur while the Delhi Chief Minister is out on interim bail after serving 50 days in judicial custody and is set to return to Tihar Jail on June 2. Secondly, it will be for the first time that Congress and AAP have united to challenge BJP's dominance of Delhi. In the last two Lok Sabha elections - 2014 and 2019 - the BJP retained all seven seats in Delhi.

So far there used to be a direct fight between the Congress and BJP with Aam Admi Party (AAP) being the third entrant but the 2024 general elections will give chance to the electorate to vote for BJP candidates or combined candidates of Congress and AAP.

Interestingly AAP had dislodged the 15 years of Congress Government-led by late Sheila

Dikshit on charges of



corruption and the incumbent Kejriwal-led AAP Government is facing charges in multi-crore liquor scam. Since 2013, AAP has replaced Congress as a major political force in Delhi.

A total of 1.52 crore voters, including 82 lakh male and 69 lakh female voters as well as 1,228 third gender, are eligible to cast their votes at more than 13,000 polling booths in 2,627 places across the seven seats.

The weather department has sounded a yellow alert on the polling day with maximum temperature expected around 44 degrees Celsius.

The national Capital is always a battle of prestige and not numbers. Delhi has only seven parliamentary constituencies but it has high stakes.

Interestingly, despite winning all seats in two consecutive parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2019, the BJP has not been able to snatch Delhi from AAP in the Assembly polls.

In late February, Congress and AAP reached a seat-sharing agreement after weeks of negotiations. Under this agreement, AAP will contest in four constituencies: East Delhi, West Delhi, South Delhi, and New Delhi. Congress will field candidates in the remaining three constituencies: Chandni Chowk, North East Delhi, and North West Delhi.

The electoral battle in Delhi had its fair share of twists and turns with the BJP dropping its six out of seven sitting MPs replacing them with freshers and the INDIA constituents entering into a seat-sharing agreement.

The AAP faced a major jolt with its national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal being arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case, hardly a week after announcement of the polls, on March 21.

After 50 days, Kejriwal was granted a

interim bail by the Supreme Court to campaign. He came out of Tihar on May 10 energising his party cadre and supporters with a whirlwind tour of the city in the road shows and public meetings in favour of not only the AAP candidates but also its ally, the Congress.

The Congress also faced a revolt. Arvinder Singh Lovely resigned as Congress chief protesting the party's move to name former JNU Students Union president Kanhaiya Kumar from North East Delhi and 'outsider' Udit Raj from North West Delhi.

BJP is banking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charisma and works done by the Modi Government including national security. It has also focused on corruption charges against Kejriwal and minority appeasement issues while both AAP and the Congress have focused on dictatorship of Modi and misuse of ED, CBI against Opposition leaders. The entire election in Delhi is focused between two personalities- Modi vs Kejriwal.

## Poll preparations reach fever pitch

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With urban apathy continuing through the first five rounds of polling, the Election Commission (EC) on Friday reminded urban voters of their right and duty to vote, urging them to break this trend despite the extreme heatwave and high humidity.

Over 11.13 crore voters, including 5.29 crore women, will cast their votes for the 58 Parliamentary constituency seats in six States and Union Territories on Saturday.

The commission has called upon voters to turn out in greater numbers at polling stations and to vote with responsibility and pride.

Voters of Parliamentary constituencies in urban centres like Delhi, Gurugram and Faridabad are specially reminded about their right and duty to vote and break the trend of urban apathy.

After the five rounds of voting on May 20, the EC lamented the lower voter turnout in urban cities such as Mumbai, Thane, Jaipur, Lucknow, Chennai, Jhansi, Thiruvananthapuram, Howrah, and Madurai compared to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, calling it urban apathy. An analysis of turnout shows that of the 409 seats where data can be compared with 2019, nearly two-thirds, or 258, have witnessed a lower percentage turnout this year and 88 (more than one in five) have seen even the absolute number of votes drop from five years ago.

The EC had noted that in the past, these cities have "suffered" from urban apathy as far as voting is concerned. On May 3 too, while referring to voter turnout in phase two, the commission had said it was "disappointed" with the turnout level in some metropolitan cities.

Last month, the EC assembled many metro commissioners here to devise a strategy to combat voter apathy. Urban and youth apathy is described as a phenomenon when young voters and those living in metros

### STARS IN FRAY

CONSTITUENCY	CANDIDATE	PARTY
North East Delhi	Manoj Tiwari	BJP
Delhi	Kanhaiya Kumar	Congress
New Delhi	Bansuri Swaraj	BJP
	Somnath Bharti	AAP
Gurgaon	Rao Inderjit Singh	BJP
	Raj Babbar	Congress
Karnal	Manohar Lal Khattar	BJP
	Satpal Brahmachari	Congress
Rohtak	Arvind Kumar Sharma	BJP
	Deepender Singh Hooda	Congress
Sultanpur	Maneka Gandhi	BJP
	Ram Bhuwal Nishad	SP
	Udraj Verma	BSP
Puri	Sambit Patra	BJP
	Arup Patnaik	BJD
Anantnag-Rajouri	Mehbooba Mufti	People's Democratic Party
	Mian Altaf Ahmed	National Conference
Azamgarh	Dinesh Lal Yadav 'Nirahua'	SP
	Dharmendra Yadav	SP
Purvi Champaran	Radha Mohan Singh	BJP
	Rajesh Kushwaha	Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP)

fail to turn up at polling stations on the election day.

Besides urban apathy, heatwave in poll bound States and UTs are major concerns to the authorities to improve voter turnout.

According to the weather department, the maximum temperature is expected to be around 44 to 45 degrees Celsius which is likely to give feelings of over 50-52 degrees Celsius.

In a statement issued on Friday, the poll panel said the India Meteorological Department has predicted "no adverse impact" of cyclone in poll-going constituencies. But it gave no details.

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**VOTE FOR CONGRESS**

Congress

# HAATH BADLEGA HALAAT



# Naveen addresses huge meeting in Baleswar

PNS ■ BALAESWAR

BJD supremo and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik hit the campaign trail and addressed a huge public meeting in Baleswar town on Friday.

Patnaik, while mentioning his government's various development schemes, asked the audience whether these schemes are good. He spoke about the BSKY, KALLA, Mission Shakti,



Mamata scheme, students' scholarship, Shreemandir Parikrama Prakash project and LAccMI bus scheme.

He also mentioned that from July the electricity would be free for those who consume less than 100 units per month.

Patnaik alleged that the BJP leaders are spreading lies and shedding crocodile tears.

Speaking at the meeting, 5T Chairman VK Pandian emphasised on pension for Mission Shakti members.

He said an urban cluster comprising Baleswar, Bhadrak and

Mayurbhanj would be set up to provide jobs to the youths through industrialisation.

He said these two proposals would receive Cabinet approval after he assumes as CM for a sixth time in a row.

Meanwhile, Simulia MLA Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi rejoined the BJD a day after his resignation from the party. He was appointed the district president of the party. He has been denied a party ticket for Simulia.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of polls today

### 35,000 police personnel to be deployed

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

DGP Arun Kumar Sarangi on Friday said a total of 35,000 Odisha Police and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel would be deployed to maintain law and order in six Lok Sabha and 42 Assembly segments during the third phase of the simultaneous polls in the State on Saturday.

For the elections in 10,551 booths in 7,646 locations, 121

CAPF companies, 106 platoons of Odisha Armed Police and 19,865 civil police forces have already been deployed. Besides, 43 Additional SPs, 95 DSPs, 238 Inspectors, 2160 SIs, 10, 212 armed and unarmed Constables and Havildars and 7,117 Home Guard have been deployed.

Around 20% of the booths have been identified as sensitive during this phase of elections, Sarangi informed. Five IPS officers of ASP rank have been

deputed in Sambalpur, Khordha, Keonjhar and Cuttack. While each Assembly segment has been divided into two parts and a DSP placed in charge of the security arrangement there, an Additional SP rank officer is in charge of security arrangements for each Assembly segment, the DGP said. The Election Commission of India has also provided 20 additional companies of paramilitary forces to Odisha, Sarangi said.

## In Ghasipura

### BJD leader held with Rs 5L cash

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

With only a few hours to go for the third-round polls in Odisha, a flying squad on Friday detained a BJD leader with over Rs 5 lakh in cash in the Padana area under Ghasipura Assembly constituency of Keonjhar district.

The leader was identified as Pradip Kumar Sahu aka Tulu Sahoo. He is the sarpanch of Ramchandrapur.

According to sources, the cash along with party posters was seized from his vehicle. Tulu is said to be a close aide of BJD's MLA nominee from

Ghasipura Badri Narayan Patra and it was alleged that he had been distributing cash in different villages in the constituency to garner support for him. He is also the district coordinator of Jeevan Bandhu programme of the BJD.

Following the seizure, Tulu was detained at the Ramchandrapur police station but later released.

Meanwhile, Independent candidate from Ghasipura Soumya Ranjan Patnaik has appealed to the Election Commission of India to ensure smooth polling in sensitive booths under the constituency.

# 'Sambalpur to be one of 50 top Indian cities'

## Sambalpur dialect to be in 8th Schedule: Pradhan

NIMAI CHARAN SAHU ■ SAMBALPUR

As the Model Code of Conduct comes into effect ahead of the upcoming elections, Union Minister and Sambalpur Lok Sabha candidate Dharmendra Pradhan held a final Press conference. He focused on key issues affecting Sambalpur and emphasized the significance of Odisha's pride in the election.

Pradhan criticized the Odisha Government's 24-year tenure, highlighting poor cleanliness, inadequate drink-

ing water systems, and sub-standard sewage systems in Sambalpur. He noted that the district suffers from diarrhoea outbreaks even in March, pointing to severe sanitation issues.

Pradhan also addressed the decade-long demand for an Orissa High Court bench in Sambalpur, accusing the State Government of neglecting this critical issue. He mentioned the Government's failure to engage with the Bar Association of Sambalpur as evidence of this neglect.

Regarding the Mahanadi water dispute with Chhattisgarh, Pradhan questioned the State Government's inaction in developing a mechanism to save monsoon

water. He also criticised the Western Odisha Development Council's (WODC) headquarters being in Bhubaneswar, far from western Odisha.

He expressed concerns about the lack of teachers at Sambalpur University and Gangadhar Meher University and condemned the State Government's ban on Hanuman Jayanti celebrations while allegedly prioritizing the construction of a mosque.

Pradhan promised to transform Sambalpur into one of India's top 50 cities, with modern amenities, a knowledge-based economy, and abundant job opportunities for youth. He envisioned Sambalpur as a hub of technology, startups,

and innovation.

In a significant announcement, Pradhan assured that he would push for the inclusion of the Sambalpur language in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. He acknowledged the long queue of regional languages awaiting inclusion but promised to advocate for Sambalpur's recognition when its turn comes.

Pradhan's remarks also targeted Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, questioning his commitment to Odisha and suggesting that he relies on outsiders for speechwriting.

As elections approach, Pradhan's promises and criticisms set the stage for a heated contest in Sambalpur.

## Free Odisha from mafia raj: BJP



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In the BJD, only two people are visible. In the State administration, corruption and percentage (PC) is prevalent from the top to bottom. In Odisha, there is 'mafia raj'. The people who are coming from outside the State are also feeling this, said the BJP here on Friday.

The BJP is requesting the people to free Odisha from the clutches of the BJD. If this happens, the development of the State would materialise. This is Modi guarantee. The BJD leaders are misleading people and saying that if the

BJP comes to power, the BSKY scheme and women SHG schemes would be stopped. The BJP requests people to stay away from this misleading campaign, said BJP spokesperson Sajjan Sharma at a Press conference.

The BJP assures that no welfare scheme would be stopped; instead, they would be made more vibrant. The people of the State would get benefits of Ayushman Bharat and the SHGs would become developed through the Subhadra Yojana by getting Rs 50,000 under it which would make women more self-reliant, said Sharma.

## Elephant tusks seized; 11 held in S'garh



PNS ■ ROURKELA

Forest officials have seized elephant tusks before those were being smuggled out of Odisha and arrested 11 persons in this connection in Sundargarh district.

Following reliable information that some people had gathered in the house of a poacher

in Banagaon village under the Rourkela Forest Division to smuggle the elephant tusks, a special team was formed to apprehend them, sources said.

On the direction of Assistant Conservator of Forests Soumya Ranjan Gochhayat, the team conducted a raid on the house of one Rameswar Nayak in the village on Thursday.

During the raid, the forest officials seized two elephant tusks weighing around 3 kg. They also arrested 11 persons from the house.

Further investigation was going on to ascertain involvement of other people in smuggling of the tusks and the prospective buyers of the wildlife materials, said a forest official.

## BJP writes to DGP to 'free' Naveen from 'hostage'

### I'm in good health, says CM

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a move, seen as a political gimmick, the BJP on Friday urged the State Director General of Police (DGP) to "free" Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik from the "clutches" of VK Pandian, who wields high influence in the ruling BJD and the CM.

In a letter to DGP Arun Sarangi, BJP leader Samir Mohanty said his party believes that the CM has been



held hostage by Pandian.

"It is evident from the videos posted on various social media platforms of the CM's own party BJD that the CM is being held hostage by Pandian and some other non-Odia of-

ficials," the letter read.

Meanwhile, Naveen Patnaik, speaking to news agency ANI, said he is fit and he has been campaigning for the elections across the State over the last one month.

"There is a limit to lies. The BJP has crossed all limits of telling lies, said he.

The 77-year-old Patnaik's reaction on his health came after the BJP leaders indirectly targeted him saying Odisha needs a "young" and "healthy" CM who has understanding of Odia language, culture and heritage.

# Long-awaited elephant census begins in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The much-awaited elephant census started in Odisha on May 22 after a gap of seven years.

Wildlife Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) Susanta Nanda charted out a roadmap for the census in a scientific manner.

The All Odisha Elephant Estimation 2024 has been started across 46 divisions out of the 51 Forest Divisions of the State. The estimators make headcount of the jumbos using the direct count method.

State Wildlife Organisation officials said a total of 1,136 machans along with barracks, watchtowers and other such establishments are used by the census teams. The collected data would be analysed at the range, division and circle levels and finally at the headquarters for arriving at the fi-

nal figure.

Elephants have been detected in 46 divisions out of 51 divisions except Malkangiri, Koraput, Puri, Kendrapada and Jagatsinghpur. All other 25 districts have elephant presence, informed Nanda.

Odisha used to conduct its own elephant census every two years. It, however, was not done in 2019 and subsequently put on hold following the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020.

In the last census undertaken way back in 2017, the State recorded a headcount of 1,976, a marginal rise from the previous census figure of 1,954 in 2015. However, the State has also reported the death of over 400 elephants in five years between 2019-20 and 2023-24 owing to various reasons, including poaching, electrocution and accidents.



## Low pressure

### Heavy rains in 4 dists predicted



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

With the IMD's prediction of a low-pressure area over central Bay of Bengal, Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Satyabrata Sahu has alerted the Collectors of four north-coastal districts, Kendrapada, Bhadrak, Baleswar and Mayurbhanj to take preparatory measures.

The IMD, Bhubaneswar intimated that the well-marked low-pressure area over west-central and adjoining south Bay of Bengal moved northeastwards and concentrated into a depression on Friday morning.

Subsequently, it would move nearly northwards, intensifying into a severe cyclonic storm, called 'Remal', by Saturday

night. It is very likely to cross Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal coasts around Sunday midnight as a severe cyclonic storm.

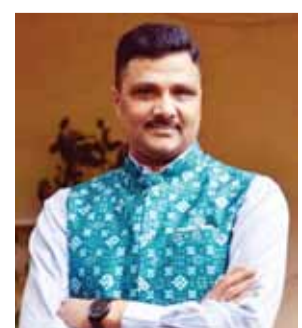
Under its impact, there is a possibility of wind speed reaching 40 to 50 kmph accompanied with heavy to very heavy rains at most places of the five districts of Odisha.

## As Vikram Yadav proceeds on leave

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Senior IAS officer Arabinda Kumar Padhee has been given additional charge of Chief Administrator of Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA), Puri.

He was given the additional charge after the incumbent Chief Administrator Vir Vikram Yadav was granted permission to visit Canada on personal grounds. Yadav, who was serving as Principal Secretary of Works Department with additional charge of Principal Secretary, Food Supply and Consumer Welfare Department and



SJTA Chief Administrator, is on leave for 21 days from May 22, according to a notification issued by the General Administration Department.

Padhee will continue as Principal Secretary, Agriculture & Farmers' Empowerment Department, with additional charge of Principal Secretary, Handlooms, Textiles &

Handicrafts Department while serving as the SJTA Chief Administrator.

Besides, senior IAS officer Hemant Sharma will take charge of the Works and Food Supply and Consumer Welfare Departments during Yadav's absence. He is currently serving as Principal Secretary, Industries Department.

# Monsoon to set in Water release alert to downstream districts by H'kud dam

Between June 1 and Oct 31  
**NIMAI CHARAN SAHU** ■  
SAMBALPUR

As the monsoon approaches, the Hirakud reservoir authorities have taken a decision to alert people downstream about the release of water from the dam into the river Mahanadi anytime from June 1 to October 31.

The dam authorities have issued a notice to all the district administrations along with the other line departments in the downstream districts, about the forthcoming release of the flood water. Additionally, a notice has been issued for information of people downstream of the dam.

The notice said flood water will be released at any time during the monsoon, which

will result in increasing the water level of the distributaries, and it asked the people to remain alert while venturing into the tributaries.

As per the Hirakud Dam project rule, the water level should be kept at 605 ft against the full reservoir level of 630 ft. However, the water level of the dam has already exceeded the 605 ft mark and monsoons are around the corner. As an early

intimation, the dam authorities have informed downstream districts about the possible date of water release. Also, siren will operate in the left dyke area, when the water will be released.

Official sources said, the water level of Hirakud Dam stood at 608.85 ft against the full reservoir level of 630 ft on Wednesday. Moreover, the inflow of water into the reservoir was 3,042 Cusec

and outflow from the dam was 11,122 Cusec including 9,872 Cusec to Power Channel and 294 Cusec water for industrial use.

The dam authorities had released the first flood water from the dam on July 23 in 2023. Similarly, the authorities had released the first flood water from the dam on July 18 in 2022. There are 98 gates to release the flood water from the Hirakud dam.

## Drinking water crisis Ganjam villagers obstruct NH, protest apathy



**PNS** ■ BRAHMAPUR

Soon after the elections, hundreds of women of Ratanpur village in Sadar police station limits under Kukudakhandi Block in Ganjam district came out of home with empty pots in hand and obstructed 216 NH de-

manding early resolution of their drinking water problem. The traffic in NH 216 that passes through Brahmmapur-Hinjili-Aska was disrupted due to the Rasta Roko as hundreds of vehicles including three wheeler Autos were stranded on the road for a long time. After getting information

Kukudakhandi BDO Pallabi Swain, Tehsildar Sapan Kumar Sahu and Sadar PS IIC Rama Subramanyu Pradhan reached the spot and reportedly gave written assurance to the agitating villagers for early resolution of the problem. Later, the villagers withdrew the agitation and freed the NH.

## In Bhadrak Water, food provided to stray animals

**PNS** ■ BHADRAK

While the State is experiencing high temperature along with high-voltage election campaign in this summer, the roadside-planted saplings and stray animals are severely neglected.

In this juncture, social activist Sitakanta Tripathy along with some volunteers

and likeminded people took the efforts to water the roadside saplings as well fencing them for their overall protection. Besides, they distributed water and food to different stray animals and birds.

These noble efforts have got the supports from the local people. According to Tripathy, these efforts will be multiplied in the coming

years. "Most of us are concerned to protect human lives only and least bothered towards protection and preservation of the biodiversity, flora and fauna in our own areas," Tripathy observed. He is hopeful that the concern and awareness towards environment can be developed through these efforts.

## SC advocate Parekh felicitated by Odisha Bar

**PNS** ■ BRAHMAPUR

ISIL president and Supreme Court senior advocate Pravin H Parekh was on a visit to the State from May 20. The Odisha Bar Association in Cuttack organised a welcome-felicitating ceremony.

On the occasion, floral tributes were paid to the statue of Madhubabu. Odisha Advocate General Ashok Kumar Parija, State Bar Council president, Sitanshu Mohan Diwedi, vice-president Rajib Kumar Mohanty, Bar Council mem-



ber Gyan Ranjan Mohanty, Bar Council's Debi Prasad Dhala, members Sanjeet Panigrahi, Dhananjay Munde, Dinesh Chandra Ray, Akshay

Kumar Pati, Arupa Nanda Das, Laxminarayan Patel, Tapan Kumar Biswal and Manas Chand were present in the felicitating meeting.

## KLH Hyderabad Campus sets 100% Placements

**PNS** ■ BHUBANESWAR

The KLH Hyderabad Campus celebrated its placement success with 100-per cent placements for its registered and eligible graduating students at KLH Aziz Nagar campus in Hyderabad. These remarkable professional achievements and outstanding academic successes hail from its students across diverse programmes.

This year's placement season successfully recorded a wide array of national and international placements and internships with prestigious companies.

This remarkable success reflects the university's commitment to providing excellent career opportunities. Out of 360 students registered for placements, an impressive 620 job offers were received, showcasing the strong industry con-

nections and employability of the B. Tech students.

The average Cost to Company (CTC) offered was Rs 8.4 LPA while the median CTC stood at Rs 7.8 LPA, indicating a balanced and competitive salary range for the graduates. The highest CTC reached an outstanding Rs 50.57 LPA, showcasing the students' talent in attracting top-tier recruiters and attaining lucrative job opportunities.

## B'PUR NGO VOWS TO ARRANGE BLOOD FOR NEEDY

**PNS** ■ BRAHMAPUR

NGO 'Team Clean City' founder Rajesh Kumar Sahu donated blood on Wednesday for a cancer patient, struggling for life. Senior journalist and NGO convener Shaktidhar



Rajguru declared that the organisation will continue its efforts in providing blood to the needy patients in future. President of Milan Group 1986 Rashmita Panigrahi congratulated Team Clean City for the noble works.

## In Ganjam 6 injured, 3 critical in Ganjam chemical plant

**PNS** ■ CHHATRAPUR

Six persons were injured in an explosion at a chemical factory in Ganjam on Friday.

The conditions of three among them were stated to be critical.

According to sources, the explosion took place at the Grasim Industries Ltd's chemi-

cal plant in Ganjam where a sulphuric acid pipe burst at around 9:30 am.

The seriously-injured employees were initially rushed to the MKCG Medical College Hospital and later shifted to a private hospital here. They were identified as Kesabh Sahu, an instrumental engineer, Sasikant Maharana, a produc-

tion engineer, and Rahul Yadav, a supervisor in the chemical factory. The acid split on their face and body causing grievous injuries.

While the company was yet to issue a statement, locals questioned the safety measures at the factory, where a similar incident had been reported earlier.

## Puri Ratna-Bhandar issue hits nat'l, int'l media

Temple authority, servitors tightlipped

**PNS** ■ PURI

After making a hue and cry in media of Odisha, the Ratna Bhandar of the Puri Jagannath Temple is now a hot cake for the national and international media which have made it their headlines for last two days following doubts are expressed over safety of the invaluable treasures stored for centuries in

the locked-up compartment.

After PM Narendra Modi raised the missing keys issue in his poll rallies in Odisha, the mainstream channels like Times Now, Mirror Now, India Today, Aj-Tak, Zee News, CNNNews18 besides all the media houses have drawn it into their prime time shows. Even the Youtube and Instagram platforms are at play with big debates and discussions on the sentimental issue of the Odisha people. In the meantime, massive talks on the mysterious

compartment within the principal shrine are underway in the city with temple officials and servitor communities remaining tight-lipped about the future action. Since it has already turned into a poll issue for the BJP with Modi and Saha committing to punish the culprits found involved in the misadventure to the hidden treasures, the servitors and shrine officials are in state of anxiety following possible probe by the national agencies and its repercussions in future.

# Does Russia-China bonhomie pose a threat to India?



**BISHNUPRIYA PADHI**

Relations between Russia and China are principal foreign policy vectors for India. Russia is a longstanding strategic partner of India while the relationship with China has been all along contentious. India and the erstwhile Soviet Union shared common perceptions about China. But with the end of cold war and changing global political economy towards an era of protectionism, Indian foreign policy has to navigate the tempestuous terrain. Russia has settled its border issues with China and has significantly enhanced its bilateral cooperation in recent years. The rise of China and

its ever-growing clout are re-shaping equations in the South Asian regions. India can't remain insulated from these developments. Given India's close strategic ties with Russia, the upsurge in Sino-Russian friendship and their impacts on the nature of Sino-Russian relationship is of enormous importance to India.

The recent visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin (May 16-17) to China, his first overseas trip after being inaugurated for a 5th presidential term this month, is being viewed by many commentators as a risk on the horizon for India.

How is Russia useful to China in a volatile international system? Both are veto-holding members of the United Nations Security Council. Moscow diverts most of its energy exports to China and imports high-tech components for its military industries from Chinese companies amid Western sanctions. China has become a senior partner with regard to the volumes of trade

between them. The Chinese trade with Russia stands at 240 billion dollars compared to \$65 billion between India and Russia.

Nearly 92% of the trade between Russia and China is done in local currencies whereas Russia complains that it is stuck with unusable Indian rupees. China invests in the energy sector of Russia whereas India buys energy from Russia. China is a senior partner in investment in Russian energy sector. China's economy is \$17 trillion whereas Russia's is only \$ 2.2 trillion. Chinese population is ten times more than that of Russia now.

Graham Allison has described the deepening of China and Russia relationship as the most consequential undeclared alliance in the world. They have built a 'no-limit' partnership that will have "no forbidden areas".

As Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping reaffirm their "no-limit" friendship in view of Ukraine conflict and portents

of new Cold War, India's dependency on Russian defence supplies and its ongoing border conflicts with China create a complex geopolitical scenario. The evolving partnership between the two challenges India's strategic positioning and highlights critical questions about future military and diplomatic dynamics. Putin, during his visit, has underscored the deepening ties between the two and highlighted non-opportunistic nature of their relationship. Xi described it as "everlasting" and a model for new international relations.

It may be recalled that despite Xi's assurance to the US Secretary of State and Treasury Secretary not to sell arms to Russia and control dual-use goods, China continues to export machine tools, computer chips, and logistic equipments which are of vital importance to Russia's military support.

The meeting between Putin and Xi highlights the implications of a stronger Sino-Russian partnership for

global politics and regional stability. For India, the primary concern remains ensuring reliable defence supplies while managing its strategic positioning against the backdrop of increasing China-Russia friendship. With 60-70% of India's defence supplies coming from Russia, India's dependency is critical, especially amid its ongoing border tensions with China.

Some Western analysts warn that Russia could become a junior partner to China, complicating India's strategic calculations. The historical context of the Soviet Union's stance in siding with China during the Indo-China war in 1962 adds another layer of complexity to the current geopolitical scenario. Both China and Russia want to show that despite what is happening globally, despite the pressure that both sides are facing from the US, both of them are not about to turn their backs on each other anytime. The visit of Putin to China is the second one in six months and

both the leaders have met over 40 times since 2010. It is also believed that Russia is a valuable partner of China in displacing the US. Russia sees Taiwan as an integral part of China and there is a speculation about the war scenario in the Indo-Pacific and Russia might step up to help and join China in possible war efforts.

India and Russia share a preference for a multipolar global order. India offers a more benign worldview that is 'non-Western' but not explicitly anti-Western as held by Russia and China. This in all probability may make India increasingly estranged from the agenda being pursued by forums where Russia and China play a prominent role such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), BRICS and Russia-India-China trilateral, confirming this world view. When asked where does India stand on relations with the West and the Russian-Chinese axis, S Jaishankar, India's Foreign

Minister, replied, "We are a democracy; we are a market economy; we are a pluralistic society; we have positions on international law; and I think that should give a fair part of the answer," adding that India's membership of the Quad "should tell you which direction we are going". This is apparent from India's membership of a growing number of US-led initiatives from the Minerals Security Partnership to the Artemis Accords.

Of late, India has made a shift from normative non-alignment to transactional principles that it calls a multi-vector or multi-alignment foreign policy designed to serve national interest and project cultural nationalism. India seeks to accommodate multiple interests with aspiration for a global status. To balance China, it needs the help of the West; it needs Russian hydrocarbons for its economic development; maintain relationship with the Gulf and ASEAN countries for its energy need.

Conclusion: As India watches how this partnership develops, the impacts are likely to resonate well beyond borders of Russia and China, influencing global diplomatic, economic and defence strategies. The strategic depth of the China-Russia alliance, characterised by both opportunity and caution, will contribute to shape the contours of Indian foreign policy in years to come. India should make concerted efforts to shape an inclusive global order to suit its interest-based partnership. She should find ways to reduce India Inc's over-reliance on a belligerent neighbour by creating additional manufacturing capabilities, particularly in products sourced from China. She should also try to preserve and manage her relations with those forces which have significant bearing on India's economic, geopolitical and military standing.

(Dr Padhi is a freelance researcher on international diplomacy)

# MEA serves show-cause notice to Revanna

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has served a show-cause notice to suspended JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna asking why his diplomatic passport should not be cancelled as sought by the Karnataka government in view of allegations of sexual abuse against him, it was learnt here on Friday. Official sources on Thursday had said the MEA is processing the Karnataka government's request to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport. Currently, he is believed to be in Germany. If the passport is cancelled, then Prajwal's stay abroad will be illegal and he may face legal action by concerned authorities in the country he is staying, a person familiar with the matter said. On Wednesday, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah wrote a second letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to take "prompt and necessary" actions to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport. The chief minister sent a similar letter to the prime minister on May 1. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) set up by the Karnataka government to probe the sexual abuse



as related regulations, sources said. If the passport is cancelled, then Prajwal's stay abroad will be illegal and he may face legal action by concerned authorities in the country he is staying, a person familiar with the matter said. On Wednesday, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah wrote a second letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to take "prompt and necessary" actions to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport. The chief minister sent a similar letter to the prime minister on May 1. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) set up by the Karnataka government to probe the sexual abuse

charges against Prajwal wrote the MEA to cancel his diplomatic passport after an arrest warrant was issued against him by a local court. A 'Blue Corner Notice' seeking information on Revanna's whereabouts has already been issued by the Interpol following a request by the SIT. Earlier this month, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Prajwal travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and he 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. "Obviously, no visa note was issued either. No visa is

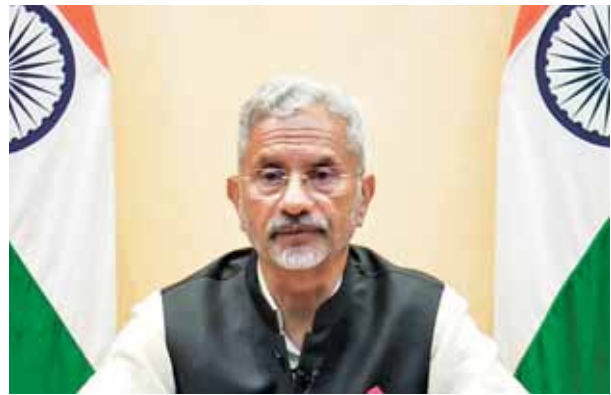
required for diplomatic passport holders to travel to Germany. The Ministry has not issued visa note for any other country," the MEA spokesperson said. On Friday, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also addressed questions about Revanna's diplomatic passport cancellation while speaking to the media. "MEA got this request from the Karnataka Government only on the 21st of May. People were saying a lot of things to the press. I don't know how other governments/state governments function. We in MEA at least function as per the law," he said. Incidentally, Janata Dal Secular (JDS) supreme 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 @PrajwalRevanna to return immediately from wherever

he is and subject himself to the legal process. He should not test my patience any further." Deve Gowda's warning, in a two-page letter dated May 23 with the title 'My Warning To Prajwal Revanna', 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. 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.

# India's growing weight will ensure overall global balance remains in favour of freedom, openness: EAM Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India's growing weight will ensure that the overall balance in the world order remains in favour of freedom, openness, transparency and a rules-based order, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Friday. In a virtual address at the Nikkei Asia Future of Asia Forum, he said the challenge of supply chain and the use of economic coercion by states have put a premium on resilience, in comments that came amid China's attempt to become an economic hegemon. Jaishankar said the world is undergoing a flux, driven by geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-technological developments and that the global order today is visibly under stress, with Asia and the Indo-Pacific very much part of this transformation. "But it is not just change we are seeing; there is also much greater risk-taking. It is visible in the conflict in Ukraine, in violence in the Middle East and the disregard for international law and agreements in Asia and the Indo-Pacific," he said. This has economic facets, perhaps even more concerning. The supply chain challenge,



over-concentrations stemming from globalization and the use of economic coercion by states have put a premium on resilience and redundancy," he said. The minister said equally important is the technology challenge that has created a new level of inter-penetration and interdependence. "As a result, the era of AI, EVs (electric vehicles), green and clean technologies have brought both hope and anxiety in equal measure. "As both market shares and data harnessing are leveraged, national security has become crucial to many economic transactions," he said. Jaishankar said the transformation of India is critical to strengthening multipolarity in

Asia itself, which is a prerequisite for a multipolar world. "India's growing weight will ensure that the overall balance in the world order remains in favour of freedom, openness, transparency and a rules-based order," he said. "Equally, its greater sense of responsibility and more contributions are also making a difference. Indian naval ships are currently operating in the Red Sea to protect maritime shipping," he noted. "India has been a First Responder for natural disasters across the Indian Ocean, sometimes even beyond. Its initiatives ranging from solar energy to disaster resilience and bio-diversity have been recognised across the world," he said.

# Ensure well being of Indian students in Kyrgyzstan: Students' association to EAM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A students' association of Jammu and Kashmir on Friday wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and requested that "proactive measures" be taken immediately to ensure well-being of the Indian students in Kyrgyzstan. This comes days after mobs targeted the foreigners in capital city Bishkek triggering concerns about their safety. Jammu and Kashmir Students Association in its letter also said that students from the Kashmir Valley studying there are "waiting to return to their homeland" after the incident. Meanwhile, the Indian Embassy in Kyrgyz Republic on Friday said the situation in Bishkek "continues to remain calm". "However, upon request of Indian medical students, the Embassy is working with Medical Universities in the Kyrgyz Republic to arrange for their transport to the nearest international airport to address their concerns," it posted on X. Ambassador Arun K Chatterjee had met the Indian medical students at International Higher School of Medicine (IHSM) in Bishkek on May 22 and as part of its outreach activity, some embassy officials had also met with various Indian medical students at Royal Metropolitan University, Jammu and Kashmir



Students Association in its letter said several Kashmiri students and their parents have "reached out to us, expressing their fear and anxiety following a series of troubling events". The Indian students, particularly those from Kashmir in Kyrgyzstan's capital city, Bishkek, were "caught unaware of the mob violence" and are "desperate to return home", it said. "Given the gravity of the situation and the urgency of ensuring the safety and well-being of our fellow citizens, we earnestly request the Ministry of External Affairs to take immediate steps to facilitate the evacuation of Indian students stranded in Kyrgyzstan. Their safe return home should be a priority to prevent any further distress or potential harm," the letter said. "We trust in the prompt and decisive action of the Ministry in safeguarding the interests and security of Indian citizens in Kyrgyzstan. We request that

proactive measures be taken immediately to ensure the well-being of these students," it added. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) should "collaborate closely" with the respective government and diplomatic mission to "facilitate the safe passage of Indian students out of harm's way", the association said. "Your swift intervention in this matter will be greatly appreciated by the students, their families, and the students' body," it added. The Indian Embassy had on Thursday also posted on X that the "situation in and around Bishkek is normal and stable today. Flights to India are operational". "Embassy is in contact with Medical Universities in Kyrgyzstan to address concerns of Indian students. They can reach out to the Embassy for any assistance at 0555710041 and 0555005538," it said.

# Army Chief exhorts NDA cadets to further spirit of jointness

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Army chief General Manoj Pande on Friday exhorted National Defence Academy (NDA) cadets to further the spirit of jointness as they grow in service and also emphasised about the revolution in military affairs which are mostly driven by technology. He made this assertion while reviewing the Passing Out Parade of 146th Course of National Defence Academy at Khetarpal Parade Ground, NDA, Khadakwasla. A total of 1,265 cadets participated in the parade of which 337 cadets were from the passing out Course. This included 199 Army Cadets, 38 Naval Cadets and 100 Air Force cadets including 19 cadets from Friendly Foreign Countries including Bhutan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Maldives. A contingent of 24 female cadets, presently in their third and fourth term of training also took part in the parade. Known as the cradle of military leadership, the NDA is the country's premier Joint Services Training Institution. The 146th course was inducted in June 2021 and after completion of three years of rigorous military training the cadets passed out in a grand ceremonial event. The cadets will now join their respective Pre-Commissioning Training



Academics. Battalion Cadet Captain (BCC) Shobhit Gupta won the President's Gold Medal for standing first in the overall order of merit, Academy Cadet Adjutant (ACA) Manik Tarun won the President's Silver Medal for standing second in the overall order of merit and BCC Anni Nehra won the President's Bronze Medal for standing third in the overall order of merit. Golf Squadron bagged the prestigious 'Chiefs of Staff Banner', for being the Champion Squadron which was presented during the parade. General Pande congratulated the passing out course cadets, medal winners and the Champion Squadron for their hard work and overwhelming performances. He conveyed his sincere grat-

itude to the proud parents of the passing out course for sending their motivated wards to join the Armed Forces. In a solemn ceremony at the Hut of Remembrance, National Defence Academy which followed this Passing Out Parade, the Army chief paid homage to the brave hearts whose names are etched in the hallowed precincts. The Hut of Remembrance was constructed by the cadets of 10th to 17th Course NDA and has since then been a symbol of bravery, courage and selfless services. The walls of this hallowed memorial recite the sagas of undaunted courage, valour and innumerable sacrifices made by the alumnus of National Defence Academy over the last 75 years.

# India would have progressed at much faster pace had borders been more secure: NSA Doval

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval said here on Friday India would have progressed at a much faster pace if its borders had been more secure, defined and not in "adversarial dispossession." He also underlined that the country's power has grown immensely in the last 10 years. Delivering the Rustamji Memorial Lecture organised by the Border Security Force (BSF) on its 21st investiture ceremony, Doval said India's economic progress would have been much faster if "we had more secure borders". "In the foreseeable future, I don't think our borders are going to be as secure as we will require for our fast economic growth. So, the responsibility on border guarding forces has become very, very heavy. They have got to remain on alert 24x7 in perpetuity. They have got to see that our national interests and country are protected," he said. Borders are important because that is the limit which "defines our sovereignty", he said. "Jameen par jo kabja hai wo apna hai, baki to sab adalat aur kachehri ka kaam hai, usse farak nahi padta (The land which is in our possession is ours, the rest is the matter of courts and that is immaterial)," Doval said.



The government has paid very, very high attention to border security during the last 10 years, a period in which "our comprehensive national power has grown immensely", Doval said on Friday. The NSA said India is changing very fast and, in the next 10 years, "we will be a USD 10 trillion economy and the third largest economy" that he called a "major achievement". He said India will have one of the largest workforces and be a hub of high-technology artificial intelligence, semiconductors, quantum computing and various other areas of defence and security manufacturing. The country, which was an importer of arms, exported USD 2.5 billion worth of arms until March 31, emerging as a big exporter because of the government's policy of self-reliance and Atmanirbhar Bharat, Doval said. In this changing India, prosperity guarantees security to some extent and increases vulnerability in much larger areas, he said.

# Its criticism of Agnipath scheme within MCC: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Days after the Election Commission (EC) asked the Congress not to "politicise" the armed forces, the party Friday said its criticism of the Agnipath military recruitment scheme was within the Model Code of Conduct, and alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "taking the support" of the poll watchdog. Congress' ex-Servicemen Department chief Colonel (retired) Rohit Chaudhry said the model code states that the "criticism of other political parties when made shall be confined to their policies, programmes, past records and work". The armed forces are doing a great job in protecting the country, and the Congress was only talking about the policy of the government when it made statements on the Agnipath scheme, Chaudhry told a press conference at the AICC headquarters here. He said the Modi government has weakened the army by introducing the Agnipath scheme. "We are challenging the scheme which is not in the interest of the country, the army and the soldiers." Chaudhry said the Election Commission has written to Congress President

Mallikarjun Kharge that the party's star campaigners should not talk about the operational matters of the defense forces. "Whenever Modiji gets into trouble, he looks for some support. Earlier, he used to hide behind the defence forces. Now he is taking the support of the Election Commission," the Congress leader said. "If our government is formed, the Agnipath scheme will be scrapped." This scheme has created discrimination in the Army and is also weakening the security of the country, Chaudhry alleged. The EC has asked the party not to politicise defence forces and make potentially divisive statements regarding the socioeconomic composition of the armed forces. The Commission was referring to remarks made by top Congress leaders on the Agnipath scheme. The government rolled out the Agnipath recruitment scheme in June 2022 for short-term induction of personnel with an aim to bring down the age profile of the three services. It provides for recruiting youngsters between the age bracket of 17-and-half years and 21 for four years with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for 15 more years.

# At least 20 per cent cancer patients in India below age of 40, says study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indicating a significant rise in cancer diagnoses among the younger generation in the country, a study has said at least 20 per cent of cancer cases in the country are detected in patients below the age of 40 years, with 60 per cent being male and 40 per cent female. The study was conducted by the Cancer Mukta Bharat Foundation's National Cancer across 1368 cancer patients who reached out to the Cancer Helpline Number. It pointed out that this shift in demographics mirrors a global trend highlighted by the American Cancer Society, showing a rising number of cancer diagnoses among middle-aged individuals. The study also sheds light on the prevalence of different cancer types, with head and neck cancer being the most common (26 per cent), followed by GI cancers (15 per cent), breast cancer (16 per cent), and blood cancers (9 per cent). Alarmingly, 63 per cent of cases are diagnosed in stage 3 or 4, underlining the urgent need for early detection and intervention.



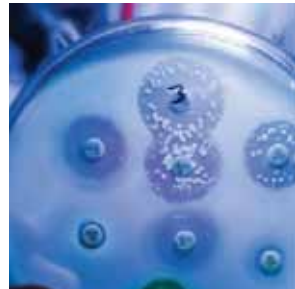
The launch of the National Cancer Helpline Number, offering free consultations with leading oncologists, has emerged as a crucial support system for cancer patients across India, said Dr. Ashish Gupta, Principal Investigator of the Cancer Mukta Bharat Campaign. He emphasised on the importance of education and early detection in combating cancer. Lifestyle modifications, vaccinations, and regular screenings are vital in preventing and detecting cancer at an early stage, he added. The study also highlighted the diverse treatment landscape in India, with 67% of patients seeking treatment from private hospitals and 33% from government hospitals. This

inclusive approach ensures that patients from all socioeconomic backgrounds have access to crucial support and guidance. Dr. Gupta underscored the need for lifestyle changes to curb the rising cancer rates, emphasizing the importance of a healthy lifestyle, avoiding tobacco and alcohol, and promoting physical activity. According to reports, in 2020, India reported an estimated 1.39 million cases of cancer which rose to 1.42 million and 1.46 million in the years 2021 and 2022, respectively. Studies have estimated a 12.8 per cent increase in the number of annual cancer cases by the year 2025, which would be around 1.57 million.

# AMR infections threatening millions of lives globally, says Lancet study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) threatens millions of lives annually, with bacterial infections claiming one in every eight global deaths, said a study published in The Lancet, painting a grim picture of a world where 50 lakh lives are lost each year due to bacteria resistant to antibiotics. It said up to 7.5 lakh AMR-related deaths annually in low middle income countries could be prevented by improving infection prevention measures, including hand hygiene, sanitation, and vaccination, said the authors and have called for support in providing sustainable access to antibiotics to be central to ambitious and actionable targets for tackling AMR. "Access to effective antibiotics is essential to patients worldwide. A failure to provide these antibiotics puts us at risk for not meeting the UN sustainable development goals on child survival and health ageing," said series co-author, Iruka Okeke of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Okeke said that effective antibiotics prolong lives, reduce disabilities, limit healthcare costs and enable other life-saving medical actions such as



the rollout of some paediatric vaccines, such as pneumococcal vaccines which help protect against pneumonia and meningitis, along with introducing new ones, such as RSV vaccines for pregnant women, the researchers found. "Our findings highlight how public health actions to prevent infections in the first place should be prioritised as a strategy to tackle AMR as these methods have the potential to drastically reduce the number of deaths from AMR-associated infections," said co-author Yewande Alimi of Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "If we can focus on improving infection control methods, water and sanitation and vaccination in LMICs then it should be possible to reduce the number of deaths linked with AMR by 10 per cent by 2030," said Alimi. Along with preventing infections in the first place, the authors also looked at evidence for preventing resistance emerging in bacteria. Antibiotic stewardship (reducing the use of antibiotics when the benefit to patients is limited) is thought to reduce the selection pressure on bacteria to develop resistance, however, there is a lack of research in this area.

# INDIA Bloc wants to rob reservation of SCs, STs, OBCs to appease Muslims: Nadda

PTI ■ KUSHINAGAR/BALLIA (UP)

Hitting out at the INDIA bloc, BJP president J P Nadda on Friday alleged that the "ghamandiya" (arrogant) alliance is against the Dalits, tribals and backward classes because it wants to rob the reservation of these sections and appease Muslims. The BJP chief also alleged that the "arrogant alliance" is "anti-Sanatani" and "anti-national". Nadda was addressing an election rally organised in Kushinagar in support of the local BJP candidate and sitting MP Vijay Dubey. Later, he also addressed a rally in Ballia.

because they want to appease Muslims by robbing the reservation of these sections of the society. "This alliance wants to rob the reservation of Dalits, Advasis and backward communities for Muslim appeasement," he said. Praising the work of Prime Minister Modi, Nadda said, "Today, despite being hit by COVID and the war in Ukraine, India has jumped from the 11th position to become the fifth largest economy in the world under the leadership of Narendra Modi. If Narendra Modi becomes the prime minister for the third time, India will become the third largest economy of the world." Reminding the Covid crisis, Nadda said, "No leader of the world was capable of fighting Covid. America, Europe and Japan could not take a decision but Narendra Modi imposed a lockdown and made the country capable of fighting Covid within two months."

Making an appeal to the people to vote in favour of the BJP candidate, he said, "If the button is pressed at the right place, development takes place. But if the button is pressed at the wrong place, the honour of daughters-in-law is put in danger and businessmen are forced to flee." He said, "Seeing the people's excitement, enthusiasm, happiness and energy, I am convinced that you have made up your mind to send Vijay Dubey to the Lok Sabha again. The question is not about Dubey but about making Narendra Modi the prime minister." Nadda also praised Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He held Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav for scams including Gomti River Front. He talked about the fodder scam involving RJD supremo Lalu Yadav and said West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's people are involved in the alleged teacher recruitment scam. He also



accused the DMK leaders of being involved in alleged sand scam and Arvind Kejriwal in the alleged liquor scam. The BJP chief said, "Once upon time, Uttar Pradesh was known for mafia rule where daughters-in-law were not safe, businessmen were

mafia are in jail." Nadda accused the opposition parties of indulging in nepotism. Naming several leaders of the INDIA bloc, he accused them of thinking only about their family members. He went on to assert that Modi on other hand is concerned about 140 crore people of the country. UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also addressed the poll meeting. In his election rally at Ballia, in support of BJP candidate Neeraj Shekhar, Nadda said, "It is our good fortune that under the leadership of the successful Prime Minister Modi, not only the fate of India has changed along with the fate of India, but also the culture of Indian politics has changed today." Discussing "changing India", Nadda said Modi laid optical fiber in two lakh panchayats and opened common service centres in two lakh villages. Attacking the opposition parties,

he said, "This Congress, this SP, this educated illiterate (padha likha anpadh) Akhilesh (Yadav) used to say that India is a country of illiterate people, and what will you do by digitising it and what will Wi-Fi do in the villages." Nadda said, "You will be surprised to know that today even the vegetable seller does digital transactions. The one whom you (Akhilesh) called illiterate turned out to be more educated than you." Launching a sharp attack on Yadav, Nadda said, "It was Akhilesh who had proposed to release the terrorists of Banaras, Lucknow and Varanasi blasts. They are friends of traitors." The BJP president said, "Modi ji built four crore houses and three crore more houses will be built in the country in the next five years. A new story of development will be written." Elections for Kushinagar and Ballia Lok Sabha constituencies will be held in the seventh phase on June 1.

# Modi: Talabaaz sarkar in HP shut recruitment commission

PTI ■ SHIMLA/NAHAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday called the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh a "talabaaz sarkar" for shutting down the staff selection commission and said the party also intends to put a "tala", or lock, on Ayodhya's Ram temple. Addressing an election programme in Nahan in Sirmour district, he claimed a conspiracy is being hatched to snatch the reservation for the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and give it to Muslims. As Modi took to the stage, he chanted 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' and evoked local deities. Coming to Sirmour felt like a homecoming, he said. "Neither Nahan nor Sirmour is new for me but I have to say that today's atmosphere is new as I have never witnessed such a historic rally in Nahan," he told the crowd at the BJP's 'Vijay Sankalp' rally. "I have come here to seek your blessings for a third term for the BJP, not for myself or my family but for a developed nation and developed Himachal." The prime minister said the people of Himachal Pradesh live along the border and know the value of a strong nation. "I assure you that I won't let any harm come to you," he said. "Main jaan ki baji laga dunga per Himachal per sankat nahin aane dunga." Modi said he has visited every nook and corner of Himachal Pradesh during his days in the party organisation and he considers the state his second home.



Hitting out at the Congress over the dissolution of the Himachal Pradesh Staff Selection Commission (HPSSC), Modi said let alone giving one lakh jobs to the youth, the "talabaaz sarkar" of the Congress put a lock on the recruitment commission. In February last year, the Sukhu government disbanded the HPSSC whose functioning was suspended after a paper leak was detected in December 2022. In October last year, the state government notified the Himachal Pradesh Rajya Chayan Aayog (HPRCA) to replace the Hamirpur-based HPSSC. Modi further said, "The Congress opposed the Ram temple and mocked us with slogans like 'mandir wahin banayenge, tareekh nahin btayenge' (Will build the temple there only, but won't tell the date)." "We not only declared the date but also performed the Pran Pratishtha (of the Ram temple) and the Congress

boycotted it to appease its vote bank." The prime minister claimed that an aide of a top Congress leader has said that a conspiracy is being hatched to put a lock on the Ram temple in Ayodhya and shift Ram Lalla to a tent again if the party wins the Lok Sabha polls. Modi also alleged that a conspiracy is being hatched to snatch the reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs and give it to Muslims. The Congress has already done it in Karnataka, he said. The Calcutta High Court has quashed OBC certificates conferred on 77 classes of Muslims to please the Muslim vote bank but West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is not honouring the court order, he said. The HC on Wednesday struck down as illegal the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted since 2010, observing that the inclusion of 77 classes of Muslims in the list of

backward categories was to "treat them as vote bank". There are poor people in upper castes as well, Modi said, adding his government has provided a 10 per cent quota for the upper caste poor without snatching it from any other caste. Modi also targeted the Congress for not accepting the demand for 'one rank one pension (OROP)' and said his government not only implemented the promise made to ex-servicemen but has so far disbursed Rs 1.25 lakh crore for it. He said the Congress did not accept the demand for OROP for 40 years but after he declared at a rally of ex-servicemen in Jhajjar, Haryana in the run-up to the 2014 Lok Sabha polls that the BJP would do it, the Congress "insulted" the veterans by earmarking just Rs 500 crore for the scheme. Earlier, Pakistan used to commit excesses ("sar pe naachta tha") and the "weak" Congress government looked at other countries for help. "But, today we fight our own battle and kill the enemy by in their own territory." Appealing to the 2.50 lakh people of Hatti community of the Trans Giri area of Sirmour district, the PM said the Centre has given them tribal status but the Congress-led state government has failed to extend them the benefits. "When the people of Himachal Pradesh know the Congress is not going to form a government in Delhi, why should anybody vote for them? The people of Himachal Pradesh are very intelligent and they will not waste their votes," he said.

# Polling in Haryana for 10 LS seats today; former CM Khattar, Union Ministers in fray

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Polling in the 10 Lok Sabha constituencies in Haryana and for the Karnal assembly bypoll will be held on Saturday that will decide the fate of 223 candidates, including big guns like former chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Congress' Kumari Selja. A total of 223 candidates — 207 men and 16 women — are in the fray in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha polls and more than 2 crore people are eligible to vote in the state. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini is contesting the Karnal byelection. Voting will be held from 7 am to 6 pm. The BJP had won all 10 Lok Sabha seats in Haryana in the 2019 general elections. For the Lok Sabha elections, Union ministers Rao Inderjit Singh and Krishan Pal Gurjar, former chief minister Manohar Lal and Congress heavyweights Kumari Selja and Deepender Singh Hooda are among the candidates. Khattar, the BJP candidate from Karnal, is facing Haryana Youth Congress president Divyanshu Budhiraja. Haryana is witnessing a direct fight between the ruling BJP and opposition Congress on most seats. However, seats like Hisar are witnessing a multi-cornered contest. From Hisar, Power Minister Ranjit Singh Chautala, an Independent MLA who joined the BJP ahead of the polls, is pitted against two members of the Chautala clan -- JJP's Naina Chautala and INLD's Sunaina Chautala. Congress' Jai Prakash is also in the fray. The BJP has fielded industrialist and former Congress MP Naveen Jindal from Kurukshetra. He is



Chaudhary and Rao Dan Singh are contesting from Ambala and Bhiwani-Mahendragarh seats, respectively. BJP MLA Mohan Lal Badoli is contesting from Sonapat and JJP's Naina Chautala from Hisar. Saini, who is also the state BJP chief and the sitting Kurukshetra MP, was sworn in as the chief minister on March 12, replacing Khattar. He is contesting the Karnal assembly bypoll. There are nine candidates in the fray for the bypoll which was necessitated by Khattar's resignation as MLA. There are 2,00,76,768 registered voters in the state, including 94,23,956 women and 467 transgender voters, Haryana's Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Agarwal said. A total of 45,576 EVMs will be used in the state for the Lok Sabha elections and the assembly bypoll. Along with this, 24,039 control units and 26,040 VVPAT machines will be used, Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Agarwal said. A total of 20,031 polling stations have been set up in Haryana, including 19,812 permanent and 219 auxiliary. While 5,470 polling stations have been set up in urban areas, 14,342 have been set up in rural areas, he said. As many as 99 polling stations will be operated entirely by women staff. Apart from this, 96 polling stations will be manned by youth employees and 71 by PwD (Persons with Disabilities) employees, he said. Agarwal said polling parties in the state will depart for their respective polling stations on Friday. Foolproof security arrangements have been made for smooth conduct of the elections, said Director General of Police Shatruijeet Kapur.

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# BJP hits out at Congress Government in Karnataka

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Hitting out at the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government in Karnataka for the alleged "deteriorating law and order situation" in the state, the BJP termed the Silicon City as "Uda Bengaluru" and alleged the city is becoming the "adda" for narcotic substances and rave parties. Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Friday said it was not right on the part of the opposition to say Bengaluru is becoming "Uda Bengaluru" and should not cast aspersions. The development comes after the Bengaluru Police busted a rave party at a farmhouse here recently which was allegedly attended by 103 people. Of them, 86 individuals, including a Telugu film actress, tested positive for narcotics, according to police, citing medical tests. "Taking to 'X', the BJP has alleged that since the Congress government came to power in Karnataka, "immoral gatherings" were happening everywhere in Bengaluru. "Law and order has deteriorated, government chaos has been exposed. After the Congress government came to power, immoral gatherings are happening everywhere in Bengaluru. Silicon City is now full of drugs, cannabis drug rave parties," BJP Karnataka said in a post in Kannada. The BJP also used a poster featuring Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar with the hashtags #BadBengaluru and #CongressFailsKarnataka to hit out at the state government.

# Lalu neither worked for welfare of backward classes nor Yadavs: Shah



PTI ■ ARRAH (BIHAR)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday launched a blistering attack on Lalu Prasad, alleging that the RJD chief neither worked for the welfare of backward classes nor the people belonging to his caste 'Yadav'. While addressing an election rally in favour of senior BJP leader and Union Minister R K Singh in Arrah, Shah said if Prasad, as part of the "arrogant" INDIA bloc, comes to power, "jungle raj, abduction, and gang war will return to Bihar." "People don't want the return of 'jungle raj', gang war and abduction industry in Bihar.

Lalu neither worked for the welfare of backward classes nor the people belonging to his own caste 'Yadav'. They are under the wrong impression that Lalu works for them," Shah said. "Lalu Ji allowed his two sons to become ministers, sent one daughter to Rajya Sabha, and another is contesting the Lok Sabha polls. He made his wife the chief minister of Bihar....He promotes only his sons and daughters. He can't think for the welfare of people belonging to his own caste," Shah said. The BJP leader accused the Congress and the RJD of "trying to rob reservation from the quotas of SCs, STs and

OBCs and give such benefits to Muslims". "The NDA under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji will not allow this to happen. Congress, Lalu Prasad and Mamata Banerjee are against reservations to backward classes," he alleged. "They have been exposed," he said, referring to a Calcutta High Court order that cancelled OBC certificates issued in the state since 2010. The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday struck down as illegal the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted since 2010, sparking a political debate in the middle of the Lok Sabha elections. The court observed that the inclusion of 77 classes of Muslims in the list of backward categories was to "treat them as a vote bank" Shah also said, "If CPI-ML (Liberation) candidate wins from Arrah Lok Sabha seat, Naxalism will once again return to Bihar." RK Singh, as a BJP candidate, is seeking re-election from the Arrah Lok Sabha constituency, while CPI-ML (Liberation) nominated Sudama Prasad as a 'Mahagathbandhan' candidate.

# For Congress, Jharkhand is ATM of corruption, says Home Minister

PTI ■ JAMTARA/DEOGHAR (JHARKHAND)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday launched a scathing attack on Congress, alleging that the grand old party sees Jharkhand as an "ATM of corruption". He also alleged that Congress and Hemant Soren's JMM are competing with each other on corruption in the state. "For Congress, Jharkhand is its vote bank, property, land bank and ATM of corruption.... Corrupt JMM leaders, including Hemant Soren, are sitting on Congress' lap," Shah said while addressing a rally at Jamtara. Claiming to have secured 310 seats in the first five phases of Lok Sabha polls, the BJP leader urged people to make it cross the 400 mark in order to make the country a "developed" one under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He claimed that PM Modi not only freed the country from Naxals, including rebel leaders in Jharkhand's Budha Pahad, and did "justice to tribals". "The budget for tribals during the Sonia-Manmohan regime

was barely Rs 25,000 crore. PM Narendra Modi enhanced it to Rs 1.25 lakh crore in 10 years," he said. The BJP leader alleged that cattle smuggling was rampant in Jharkhand and promised to make it 'zero' like Assam. Shah was campaigning for BJP candidate Sita Soren who is contesting from the Dumka Lok Sabha seat. Later addressing a rally in Deoghar, he attacked the opposition INDIA bloc claiming that it does not have 'meta, niti or neeyat' (leader, policy or intention) and only Narendra Modi is fit to become the country's PM. He also alleged that INDIA bloc leaders favoured dynastic politics. "Lalu Prasad wants his son to become CM, Uddhav Thackeray wants his son to be CM, Sharad Pawar wants his daughter to be CM, Mamata Didi wants her nephew to be CM, Stalin wants his son to be CM and Sonia Gandhi wants to make her son Rahul Gandhi as PM," he said. The BJP will abolish reservations given to Muslims and hand them over to SCs/STs and OBCs, he added.

# SC refuses to direct EC to upload voter turnout data amid LS polls

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday refused an NGO's plea to issue the Election Commission directions to upload polling station-wise voter turnout data on its website during the Lok Sabha polls, saying a "hands-off approach" needs to be adopted during the elections. A vacation bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma said it cannot issue any such directions at the moment as five phases of polling have concluded and two remain and it would be difficult for the poll panel to mobilise manpower. The top court adjourned the interlocutory application (IA) filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) to be listed before the regular bench after the elections and pointed out that prima facie it appears the prayers in the application are similar to the main petition pending since 2019 on the issue. "This (IA) has to be taken with the pending writ petition because in between the elections, a hands-off approach has to be adopted," it said and pointed out that it would be difficult for the EC to mobilise manpower for uploading the voter turnout data on its website. "Granting any relief in IA will amount to granting relief in the main petition which is pending," the bench said. It said it needs to understand the ground reality and not overburden the poll panel by changing the process midway. On May 17, the top court had sought within a week the EC's response on the NGO's plea seeking a direction to upload polling station-



wise voter turnout data on its website within 48 hours of the conclusion of polling for each phase of the Lok Sabha elections. The ADR has filed an interim application in its 2019 PIL seeking directions to the poll panel that "scanned legible copies of Form 17C Part-I (Account of Votes Recorded)" of all polling stations be uploaded immediately after the polls. In its affidavit, the poll panel opposed the NGO's demand, stating that it will "vitalize" the electoral space and cause "chaos" in the poll machinery in the midst of the general elections. The poll panel has said that there is no legal mandate to provide Form 17C to any person other than the candidate or his agent. It has said that public posting of Form 17C — which gives the number of votes polled in a polling station — is not provided in the statutory framework and could lead to mischief and vitiation of the entire electoral space as it increases the possibility of the images being morphed.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Market's thumbs-up

There is jubilation in economic circles, signalling positive investor sentiment in Govt fate

It is not every day that the market breaches new records just days ahead of the Lok Sabha poll results. Both Sensex and Nifty are shooting northwards, especially since the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) declared a huge dividend bonanza for the Government. The stock market has witnessed a historic surge, with the benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty hitting lifetime highs two consecutive days. With the RBI also recently announcing a record dividend for the Government, this confluence of events has fostered an atmosphere of positive investor sentiment, largely driven by optimistic expectations from election outcomes. The RBI's decision to transfer a record dividend of Rs87,416 crore to the Government has been a crucial factor in this financial upturn. This move not only bolsters the Government's fiscal position but also signals robust economic health and prudent management by the Central bank. Such a hefty dividend payout is expected to provide the Government with additional fiscal space to boost public spending, invest in



infrastructure projects and support social welfare programmes. The substantial RBI dividend is seen as a sign of economic stability and strong fundamentals, encouraging both domestic and foreign investors to pour capital into the market. Following the dividend announcement, both Sensex and Nifty have experienced unprecedented highs. Sensex soared past the 62,000-mark while Nifty breached the 18,600-level. This surge reflects investor confidence in Indian economy's resilience and growth potential. The interplay between the RBI's dividend announcement and the buoyant stock market creates a positive feedback loop. Another critical driver of this market exuberance is the

anticipation of favourable election outcomes. Investors often view political stability as a key determinant of economic policies and growth trajectories. This growth prospect attracts more investment, driving the stock markets higher and creating a cycle of optimism and financial prosperity. The prevailing sentiment suggests that the election results will lead to a continuation of pro-business and market-friendly policies. Historical trends indicate that markets typically react positively to clear and stable election results, which are seen as conducive to consistent and predictable economic governance. The interplay between the RBI's dividend announcement and the buoyant stock market creates a positive feedback loop. The additional fiscal resources enable the Government to undertake more significant developmental initiatives, which in turn stimulate economic growth. This alignment of fiscal prudence, economic strategy and political expectations bodes well for the nation's future. As the election comes to an end shortly and a new Government takes over, a positive sentiment among investors is likely to reinforce market stability and growth. However, the market does not reflect the state of the economy. The indices are more speculative and driven by positive sentiments rather than actual ground realities.

### PICTALK



Buddhist devotees stand in a queue to light butter lamps during Buddha Jayanti, in Kathmandu

# Ambedkar's warning on democracy rings true



BHOPINDER SINGH

India backslides on global democracy indexes and exhibits resistance to internal party democracy, starkly contrasting with the political culture of the UK

In 1936, Dr BR Ambedkar wrote an undelivered speech, Annihilation of Caste, where he forewarned, "Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic." This sharp but sage observation was well before the Constitution of India was formally framed and adopted under his leadership. Eighty-eight years since the speech that was considered too controversial to be delivered, the issues of caste, constitutional impropriety and his controversial but astute insistence that



"Democracy in India is only a top-dressing on Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic" resonates loud and clear with the proceedings (rather, regressions) in the ensuing Lok Sabha elections. Amongst the most invoked, galvanising and feared concerns in the ongoing election pitch are still, caste and religion. Beyond the trumpeting label of 'world's largest democracy' which we proudly accept and acknowledge, is the damning backsliding on various Democracy 'indexes' - which we equally readily slam as vested, unfair, or even 'anti-national'. An unmistakably think-skinned spirit and hypersensitivity about the unflattering reportage abounds, which does not help build credentials of a mature, confident and progressive democracy. The 'mother of democracy' simply cannot be selectively entertaining of all praise and simultaneously small-spirited against criticism. However, beyond the multiple and well-known afflictions like dynastic tendencies, majoritarianism, ethnic-casteist-regional assertions, muscle power, money power et al, lies yet another serious curse of the complete lack of, or even any pretence of an 'internal democracy' in any political party, national or regional. We seem to be partaking in the exercise of democracy with a rather regrettable set of undemocratic parties. Beyond the obvious threats of the 'carrot-and-stick' nature (with murmurs of the infamous 'wash-

ing machine' phenomenon) that may have made many opposition politicians jump ships - there is yet another loud concern expressed of unapproachability, remaining essentially unheard, or even of inaccessibility attributed to political leadership that leads to members to leave political parties for greener pastures. All Indian political parties have their exclusive leadership cocooned, isolated and protected from lesser leaders - this seemingly helps build leadership aura, mystique and even fear of the respective 'high commands'. The top leadership is only for taking the 'final call' and all others must robotically comply with the same, as described in the uniquely Indian expression of subservience, 'as disciplined soldiers of the party'. Such obsequious and diktat-filled frameworks are more suggestive of autocracies rather than participative democracies. This suffocating, intolerant and illiberal normalcy of Indian political culture is in stark contrast to that of its progenitor, British Westminster politics. In the UK, there have always been divisions within party ranks (on issues), expressed ambition for top roles and public expression of dissenting positions e.g., Brexit. All these individualistic or non-conformist positions do not warrant the automatic



THERE ARE NO PERMANENT GODS IN BRITISH POLITICAL PARTIES, UNLIKE IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT, WHERE A FEW INDIVIDUALS RULE THE ROOST WITHOUT GETTING SUBJECTED TO ANY INTERNAL CHALLENGE, QUESTIONING OR CHANGE

expulsion or diminishment of an individual from party ranks. The ruling Conservative Party has many active and known 'camps' that may or may not agree with the policies and decisions of their Partyman as the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak. It has always been so with divides amongst social liberals and social democrats, modernisers and traditionalists and Brexiters of various sides and shades etc., Therefore, even though the Conservative Party has ruled uninterrupted since 2010 (then by David Cameron), it has since had five different Prime Ministers i.e., David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and now, Rishi Sunak. Even now the jostling within the Tories continues with apparently Boris Johnson planning a comeback to David Cameron having staged a dramatic comeback as the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, under Rishi Sunak! It is the same concept of 'internal democracy' that has seen a similar leadership change in the principal opposition party i.e., the Labour Party. Since 2010 under Gordon Brown, it has seen a constant change in leadership Harriet Harman, Ed Miliband, Jeremy Corbyn to now Sir Keir Starmer. Each of these individual leaders has

reflected the topical preference of the party cadres and leaders. Now with Keir Starmer sure to get elected as the Prime Minister of the UK, he couldn't be more unlike his party predecessor, Jeremy Corbyn, both in person and policies. Starmer continues to consult both the former Labour Prime Minister i.e., Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, though neither has any outsized political relevance. In short, there are no permanent Gods in British political parties, unlike the Indian context where a few individuals rule the roost without getting subjected to any internal challenge, questioning or change. The rules and circumstances for leadership can be made to change overnight to suit certain individuals or dynasties which essentially seek to perpetuate the leadership composition, that has existed for years. As Winston Churchill once said, "The opposition occupies the benches in front of you, but the enemy sits behind you" implying in his party ranks - that such internal competition can never be a sign of weakness but of ensuring that only one with the most competitive, compelling and winning credentials leads the party. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### CONTROL PLASTIC USE

Madam — Although the central and State Governments have imposed a complete ban on polythene covers of thickness less than 125 microns in the State, it is not seen in practice. The viscosity of polythene bags is too high. 75-micron-thick bags, which were once banned, are still being used today. A large number of polythene covers are used in vegetable, tiffin, grocery, big shops and wholesale shops. As authorities have failed to ban polythene covers, they are seen everywhere on roads and canals. Cattle are falling sick by eating the wastes dumped in these covers in front of the houses and on the road. Criticisms are being heard that even though so many mishaps are happening, the concerned authorities are not paying attention. The authorities should clamp down on the sale of banned polythene bags which harm the environment and take strict action against those selling them. The authorities should make an effort to inform the people about the disadvantages caused by the use of banned polythene bags and to organise awareness programmes to encourage people to use eco-friendly clothing as an alternative.

Appanna Gonapa | Visakhapatnam

### WORKPLACE GASLIGHTING HARMS

Madam — It refers to 'Deleterious Effects of Workplace Gaslighting' (May 23). Gaslighting within the organisational setting presents a significant threat to employee well-being and overall organisational effectiveness. This form of psychological manipulation, characterised by the deliberate undermining of an individual's perceptions, beliefs and reality, fosters a detrimental work environment with far-reaching consequences. The erosion of employee confidence and self-esteem, heightened anxiety and paranoia, social isolation and withdrawal and manifestations in physical health are some of the critical impacts of gaslighting in the workplace. Gaslighting through denial, blame-shifting and criticism erodes employees' self-worth and competence, causing isolation, stress,

## Recognise Palestinian sovereignty



Propos the news article, "Norway, Ireland and Spain give recognition to Palestinian State", published on May 23, this is my response. Palestine should be treated as a sovereign country as per the partisan plan of Great Britain's Palestine in 1947. Israel has been ignoring the two-State solution as per the 1993 Oslo Accord for decades and now it has engaged in genocidal violence in response to the October 7 Hamas attack. The United Nations secretary-general António

Guterres said that the Hamas attack did not take place in a vacuum. His comment was as right as the observation that the Indian Rebellion of 1857 did not take place in a vacuum. There were acts of terrorism against British civilians like Kennedy ladies during the British Raj in India. Khudiram Bose and his friend Prafulla Chaki threw a bomb at a carriage thinking that the district magistrate of Muzaffarpur, Douglas Kingsford, was in the carriage. However, Kingsford was seated in a different carriage and the bomb killed two British women. Can such attacks on the British civilians justify the Jallianwala Bagh massacre? Had the British still been ruling India, would the world have lent moral support to the colonial regime against the freedom fighters? Gaza massacre put Jallianwala Bagh to shame. More than 35,000 Palestinians, including nearly half of them children and elderly, have been killed in Gaza.

Sujit De | Kolkata

decreased productivity and physical health issues like headaches and sleep disturbances. Address gaslighting by documenting interactions, building support, prioritising self-care, limiting exposure and seeking intervention. Organisations must cultivate a supportive work environment through awareness campaigns, clear reporting mechanisms, robust anti-bullying policies, respectful communication practices and training for managers to identify and address gaslighting. By empowering employees and fostering a supportive culture, organisations can combat gaslighting effectively and build a healthier workplace for all.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

### MAKE STRESS YOUR FRIEND

Madam — In a world where stress is often demonised, reframing it as a friend can transform your relationship with it. Most people think that stress makes them sick; it increases the risk of everything from the common cold to cardiovascular disease. Basically, we have turned stress into our enemy. One study found that people who

experienced a lot of stress in the previous year had a 43 per cent increased risk of dying, but that was only true for people who believed that stress was harmful to their health. The researchers estimated that the people who died prematurely died not from stress but from the belief that stress was bad for them. Cultivate a mindset shift: view stress as a sign that your body is energised and ready to tackle tasks. Embrace the physiological changes, like an increased heart rate, as your body gears up for action. If you're breathing faster, there is no problem; it's getting more oxygen to your brain. Over a lifetime of stressful experiences, this one biological change could be the difference between a stress-induced heart attack at age 50 and living well into your 90s. Ultimately, by reframing stress as a friend rather than a foe, you no longer need to get rid of your stress; instead, make yourself better at it.

Harshita Dhakad | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## New-to-credit users drive financial inclusion

New-to-credit users have become one of the fastest-growing segments over the past three years but they also present challenges



MANISH SHARA

New-to-credit (NTC) users or first-time users of credit products were one of the fastest-growing consumer segments in the lending category in the last three years, driving sustainable financial inclusion and economic growth in India. Industry data suggests that India currently has around 200 million active credit users and around 800,000 NTC consumers are being added to this pool every year. Over the last few years, these consumers driven by easy access to credit cards and short-term-personal loans (STPL) grew the retail credit category at a rapid pace. Rapid digitisation of the lending process gave a boost to the rise in NTC customers but also resulted in challenges in background checks and client's repayment capacity. It took the RBI to step in by increasing risk weightage to control the uncontrolled growth in this category. As a result, the supply has been curtailed with first-time users increasingly finding it difficult to get easy access to credit products. However, there are



some specially co-created credit cards for first-time users, helping them to build a good credit history before getting access to other credit products. In such a situation, managing debt smartly has become important for first-time consumers. For them, using a credit card responsibly is crucial for building a positive credit history and avoiding debt. Here are some financial tips: **Understand your need for a credit card:** For new users, it is very important to understand the terms and conditions of your credit card. These include interest rates, fees, grace periods and rewards programs if applicable. We often make the mistake of activating the

credit card without understanding the finer details of credit card usage. This mistake may cost you a bad debt and a bad financial history, limiting your access to credit in the future. **Start small:** There is always a temptation to overspend with a credit card, especially if you are a first-time user. So, it is advisable to begin with a low credit limit to avoid overspending and to ease into managing credit responsibly. **Always pay on time and in full:** Always pay your credit card bill on time and in full to avoid late fees and interest charges. Setting up automatic payments can help ensure you never miss a due date. **Monitor your spending:** Keep track of your credit card transactions to stay within your budget and avoid overspending. Many credit card companies offer online or mobile banking apps to help you monitor your spending in real time. **Keep utilisation low:** Aim to keep your credit utilisation ratio—the amount of credit you're using compared to your total credit limit—below

30 per cent. This shows lenders that you're using credit responsibly and can help improve your credit score. **Avoid cash advances:** Cash advances often come with high fees and interest rates, so it's best to avoid using your credit card for cash withdrawals unless necessary. **Regularly check your credit report:** Monitor your credit report for any errors or unauthorised activity. You're entitled to a free credit report from each of the three major credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian and TransUnion) once a year. **Build an emergency fund:** Having an emergency fund can help cover unexpected expenses without relying solely on credit cards, reducing the risk of accumulating debt. **Having a financial discipline is very important towards a good financial future.** For NTC consumers the early they start is good for a healthy future but with a bit of discipline and consciousness. (The writer is a co-founder Zet-fintech platform; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

### TRUST IN THE SUPREME BEING!

The writer ponders the true nature of belief and the role of religion in our lives



SANJAY CHANDRA

I am not an atheist! But I do believe that there is a supreme power that guides us through the journey that we call life. Yet, there are questions that the rational mind refuses to subdue. One such dilemma that I have not been able to resolve is that we cannot be the only living beings in this vast universe. There have to be others. Would they also look like us?

Probably not my mother was a firm believer in the Gods of the faith that I was born in. She would make it a point to visit the nearby temples every week, accompanied by our father and the three of us children. We would watch her from outside the temple folding her hands in supplication before each God, praying for our wellbeing. I never asked my father the reason that he would stand at the entry to the temple, not accompanying his wife inside. Maybe it was to keep a watch on my mother's footwear, which had to be left outside.

Even a temple was not immune to missing slippers or sandals or shoes — others were more in need of the accessory. It also might have been because it was a little difficult to untie and then retie the laces on our shoes. As I grew up, I was intrigued by the increase in traffic at the temples, particularly at examination times. Young boys and also girls, could be seen touching the holy steps and then bowing to the deities, sometimes even putting their books reverentially at the feet of the Gods. I asked a friend, who smirked at my naiveté, before explaining that this helped in securing good marks. I also saw young unmarried women fasting and then visiting the temple on specific days of the week in the hope of getting a suitable husband.



I do not know if they lived a happily thereafter life. As I grew older, I too felt the need to visit the temple, particularly when facing a difficult time — initially when I was a student and then during my professional life. And then I realised the power of trust in a supreme being. It was this implicit faith, that the Lord above will not forsake me in my tough times, that gave me the confidence. It was a trust in my capabilities, reinforced by faith, that kept me going and kept me working. It sounds clichéd, but I also understood that my God resides within me; I do not need to visit a temple to pray to my God. I can do it wherever I am, whenever I need to. There was an interesting episode in my life recently. I got trolled on the WhatsApp group of my society by the same people who had only in the morning appreciated my writing. My fault — I had sinned opposing the construction of a temple inside the gated community. I felt there were more pressing issues to be attended. I smiled as I was called an elitist — the gentleman probably wanted to call me a pseudo-intellectual. These are the persons who have chosen, like me, to live out their lives in this complex — and hence, by default, they are the extended family. Relationships went for a toss. Which brings me to the query of the rational me. If there is a life after death and if there is life on many distant planets, then, I might be reborn in another form somewhere else. In that other life, I might pray to the supreme being in another form or shape. Then, is it really important for us to wear our religion on our sleeves or even to let it divide?

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

# Political messaging in Indian elections



SAIDEEP KAR

The current election cycle witnesses a proliferation of digital misinformation campaigns, presenting new challenges for the authorities and citizens alike



A prominent film programmer and writer David Schwartz has rightly quoted, "Political commercials pretend to be like documentaries, but they use all the techniques of fiction filmmaking, including scripts, performances and music." This could be quite apt to ponder on the current general election and political communication in India. The use of technologies including deep fakes is attempting to make this election distinct from the 2019 general election. Political communication is the production and influence of persuasive political messages, campaigns and advertisements, often involving the mass media. It is an interdisciplinary field that uses communication, journalism and political science. Political communication concerns ideas such as information flow, political influence, decision-making, news and impact on citizens. Since the advent of the World Wide Web, the amount of data to be analysed has increased and researchers are turning to computational methods to study the dynamics of political communication. This can be quite relevant in the light of Parliamentary elections, 2024 in India.

The parliamentary elections in India have started from 19 April and will continue up to 1 June in seven phases to elect all 543 members of the Lok Sabha. This is the longest election in history, surpassing the previous election of 44 days, second only to the Indian general election of 1951-52. Approximately 970 million of the 1.4 billion people are eligible to vote, that is 70 per cent of the total population. In the States of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim, parliamentary elections will be held simultaneously with general elections and by-elections to 25 constituencies in 12 legislative assemblies. The votes will be counted and the results announced on June 4. Current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has completed his second term, is running for a third consecutive term.



THE FRAUD PULSE HAS FOUND A NEW, MORE ENTHUSIASTIC CHANNEL IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS. LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES ARE WARNING LOUDER THAN EVER THAT THE AVERAGE INDIAN VOTER IN 2024 IS MOST AT RISK OF BEING MISINFORMED ABOUT THE ELECTION.

### Social media in the political domain

Social media has become an increasingly important tool for political communication. For certain demographics, it is one of the main platforms where people get their news and interact with it by commenting and sharing. Social media has dramatically changed the way modern political campaigns are run. As more and more digitally native citizens vote, social media has become an important tool for politicians to establish themselves and communicate with voters.

The experience of using social media depends largely on the user, as the platform's algorithms tailor the consumer experience to each user. This leads to each person seeing more like-minded people due to increased digital social behaviour. In addition, social media changed politics because it gave politicians a direct way to inform their constituents and people to speak directly to politicians. This unofficial nature can lead to misinformation because it is not subject to the same "fact-checking processes as institutional journalism". Moreover, social media platforms serve as democratising agents, empowering individuals to participate in political conversations irrespective of geographical or socio-economic barriers. Citizens can voice their perspectives, amplify marginalised narratives and mobilise collective action, thereby enriching the democratic fabric of society. Concurrently, social media's interactive nature engenders heightened transparency and accountability within political institutions, as public scrutiny intensifies and feedback mechanisms proliferate.

### AI Deepfakes: A new era

Technological implications are increasingly becoming imperative in the current election in India about political communication. This election season, misinformation has a new face. This time, India smiles, talks and woos the voters with a wisdom that is hard to start and harder to regulate. The 2019 election was no stranger to hate and misinformation campaigns, but the technology that enables this ecosystem has changed the rate of misrepresentation. The fraud pulse has found a new, more enthusiastic channel in the last five years. Law enforcement agencies are warning louder than ever that the average Indian voter in 2024 is most at risk of being misinformed about the election. There are gaps in people's ability to distinguish between real and artificial intelligence, leaving them vulnerable to fraud and unauthorised access. Social media companies struggle to curb fake news and propaganda; The Indian Government is updating existing legislation to better address the spread of online counterfeiting. The 2019 election took place on social media. Researchers identified sophisticated campaigns that used WhatsApp messaging and massive deployment of IT bots to distribute cropped photos, post coordinated content and publish fake videos on Facebook during the 2024 general elections. The pressing question now is how digital platforms tag, identify and contextualise such media. Even in the era of generative AI, such enforcement measures were nascent or seasonal at best. Now, cheap or free tools allow even amateurs to create deep fakes without content filters to prevent fake or illegal content from

spreading. This means that technology platforms have to act stronger against criminals and break the chain of disinformation faster than they do. One of the biggest changes in social media after the 2019 elections in India is the absence of Twitter (Now X), the platform used by India's controlled politicians and Government agencies to broadcast official information to the country's media.

### A way forward

In today's world, understanding politics means delving into how political actors communicate and navigate various media channels. These channels not only reflect but also shape political messages and images. Just as political systems influence media through policies and decisions, media structures profoundly impact political communication processes. Easy-to-make AI videos with near-perfect shadows and hand gestures can sometimes confuse even the digitally literate. But the risks are greater in a country where many of its 1.4 billion people are technologically challenged and where manipulated content can easily stoke sectarian tensions, especially during elections. The Election Commission of India recently warned political parties against using artificial intelligence to spread misinformation, issuing seven provisions of IT and other laws that carry up to three years in prison for offences including forgery, rumour and hostility. Looking forward to a free and fair election this time!

(The author is from Journalism and Mass Communication, Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar; views are personal)

# Millennium City says 'no development, no vote'

Frustrated by poor infrastructure despite high taxes, Gurgaon residents are shunning election candidates

This month Gurgaon has seen protests in several localities with frustrated and disillusioned residents announcing 'Election candidates not welcome, no development, no vote'.

Gurgaon residents are piqued that despite paying taxes (the highest share in the State), they are getting a raw deal. Sensing the mood of the public, both BJP stalwart and five-time MP, Rao Inderjit Singh and Congress candidate Raj Babbar, have made development their poll plank. Interestingly though it is a national election, focus remains on local issues, especially in the absence of a central national poll theme. Gurgaon may have fancy



VINOD BEHL

tags of 'Millennium City' and 'Cyber City' but the city which has made a global mark, lacks badly on physical and social infrastructure. It presents an ugly face with city waste besides construction debris lying all over, posing a serious health hazard.

It is not just Gurgaon, even the new sectors of the city which are grappling with poorly maintained roads (leading to accidents and dust pollution), inadequate drinking water, power and sewerage infrastructure. In the absence of proper drainage. Failure of civic authorities has made matters worse. The lack of an adequate metro network in the city has created a traffic mess on



the roads. The lack of proper parking infrastructure has only made matters worse. A lot of the city's civic woes are because of the flawed development model of real estate development preceding infrastructure

development. Moreover, unlike in neighbouring Noida where there is a single development authority, Gurgaon lacks on this front. GMDA (Gurgaon Metropolitan Development Authority) constituted to

put an end to a multiplicity of development authorities, has proved to be an eyewash with MCG (Municipal Corporation Gurgaon) and HSVP (Haryana Shahari Vikas Pradhikaran) around. Seeking vote on development, Rao Inderjit Singh takes credit for initiating the mega infrastructure and connectivity projects like KMP Expressway, Delhi-Mumbai Expressway (passing through Gurgaon), Sohna Elevated Expressway, Dwarka Expressway, Metro Expansion, Gurgaon Railway Station upgradation.

In rural and Muslim-dominated Nuh, he is telling voters about the development gains of key infrastructure projects like the Delhi-

Mumbai Expressway and Orbital Rail. Raj Babbar, on the other hand, is also playing the development card to counter Rao Inderjit, pointing to shoddy development with several civic issues plaguing the city, turning it into a slum. Long delays in metro expansion, Lack of an Inter-State Bus Terminus and the absence of a suitable Civil Hospital are among the issues he has been raking up among the voters, demanding a fair share of development. He is promising the transformation of Gurgaon.

Though Rao Inderjit Singh may be facing anti-incumbency he has an obvious advantage of a well-oiled organisation besides the Modi factor. On the other

hand, Raj Babbar faces the challenge of being an outsider. Besides he has the disadvantage of being a late starter due to a delay in announcing his nomination. The Gurgaon electorate seems to be in a mood to give another chance to the BJP, banking on the strong pro-development credentials of Modi. However, they have also shown their displeasure with the political parties. Indeed Gurgaon's infrastructure is not up to the mark and needs an immediate attention. Besides, their anger has led politicians to take notice of their woes and have now started showing interest in infrastructure upgradation.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

# Bodies of 3 more hostages recovered from Gaza

AP ■ TEL AVIV

The bodies of three more hostages killed on October 7 were recovered overnight from Gaza, Israel's army said on Friday, as the top United Nations court prepares to rule on whether Israel must halt its military operations and withdraw from the enclave. The bodies of Hanan Yablonka, Michel Nisenbaum, and Orion Hernandez Radoux were found and their families have been notified. The army said they were killed on the day of the attack at the Mefalim intersection and their bodies were taken to Gaza.

The announcement comes less than a week after the army said it found the bodies of three other Israeli hostages killed on October 7. Hamas-led militants killed around 1,200 people, mainly civilians, and abducted around 250 others in the October 7 attack. Around half of those hostages have since been freed, most in swaps for Palestinian

prisoners held by Israel during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

Israel says around 100 hostages are still captive in Gaza, along with the bodies of at least 39 more, while 17 bodies of hostages have been recovered.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to both eliminate Hamas and bring all the hostages back, but he's made little progress. He faces pressure to resign, and the US has threatened to scale back its support over the humanitarian situation in Gaza. On Friday, Netanyahu said the country had a duty to do everything to return those abducted, both those killed and those who are alive. In a post on X Friday, French President Emmanuel Macron gave condolences to the family of Hernández-Radoux, a French-Mexican citizen, saying France remains committed to releasing the hostages. The country is also expecting a ruling on Friday afternoon by the International Court of Justice to decide on an

urgent plea by South Africa to order Israel to cease operations. Israel is unlikely to comply with any such order.

Even so, a cease-fire order by judges of the International Court of Justice would heap more pressure on an increasingly isolated Israel.

On the hostages, Israelis are divided into two main camps: those who want the government to put the war on hold and free the hostages, and others who think the hostages are an unfortunate price to pay for eradicating Hamas.

On-and-off negotiations mediated by Qatar, the United States and Egypt have yielded little. Anger is growing at home at the government's handling of the hostage crisis. Earlier this week, a group representing the families of hostages released new video footage showing Hamas' capture of five female Israeli soldiers near the Gaza border on October 7. The video shows several of the young soldiers bloody and wounded. In one scene, a militant tells one of the terrified

## Top UN court opens hearing on Israel; seeks to halt military operation

The Hague (AP): The top United Nations court opened a hearing Friday to rule on a request to order Israel to halt its military operation in Gaza and withdraw from the enclave. While Israel is unlikely to comply with any such order, it would heap more pressure on the increasingly isolated country.

Criticism of Israel's conduct in the war in Gaza has been growing — even from its closest ally, the United States, which has warned against an invasion of the southern city of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have

sought shelter from fighting elsewhere. And this week alone, three European countries announced they would recognise a Palestinian state, and the chief prosecutor for another UN court requested arrest warrants for Israeli leaders, along with Hamas officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also under heavy pressure at home to end the war, which was triggered when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel, killing 1,200 people, most civilians, and taking some 250 captive. Thousands of Israelis have joined weekly demonstra-

tions calling on the government to reach a deal to bring the hostages home, fearing that time is running out. While the International Court of Justice has broad powers to order an end to the Israeli military campaign and any such ruling would be a blow to Israel's international standing, it does not have a police force to enforce its orders. In another case on its docket, Russia has so far ignored a 2022 order by the court to halt its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Israel signaled it, too, would brush off an ICJ order to stop its operations.

women she is beautiful. The video sparked more protests across the country calling for the hostages' release. The army said on Friday the hostages were found during an operation in Jabaliya. Military

spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said in a news conference that the army was able to retrieve the bodies based on "critical intelligence" uncovered last week by Israeli forces operating in Gaza. The

group representing the families of the hostages said the bodies had been returned to their families for burial.

Nisenbaum, 59, was a Brazilian-Israeli from the southern city of Sderot.

## 'More aid getting from US pier to people in Gaza after troubled launch'

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A six-day-old U.S. pier project in Gaza is starting to get more aid to Palestinians in need but conditions are challenging, U.S. officials said Thursday. That reflects the larger problems bringing food and other supplies to starving people in the besieged territory.

The floating pier had a troubled launch, with crowds overrunning some of the first trucks coming from the new U.S.-led sea route and taking its contents over the weekend. One man in the crowd was shot dead in still-unexplained circumstances. It led to a two-day suspension of aid distribution.

The U.S. military worked with the U.N. and Israeli officials to select safer alternate routes for trucks coming from the pier, U.S. Vice Admiral Brad Cooper told reporters Thursday.

As a result, the U.S. pier on Wednesday accounted for 27 of the 70 total trucks of aid that the U.N. was able to round up from all land and sea crossings into Gaza for distribution to civilians, the United States said.

That's a fraction of the 150 truckloads of food, emergency nutrition treatment and other supplies that U.S. officials aim to bring in when the sea route is working at maximum capacity.

Plus, Gaza needs 600 trucks entering each day, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development, to curb a famine that the heads of USAID and the U.N. World Food Program have said has begun in the north and to keep it from spreading south. Only one of the 54 trucks that came from the pier Tuesday and Wednesday encountered any security issues on their way to aid warehouses and distribution points, U.S. officials said. They called the issues "minor"

but gave no details.

A deepening Israeli offensive in the southern city of Rafah has made it impossible for aid shipments to get through the crossing there, which is a key source for fuel and food coming into Gaza. Israel says it is bringing aid in through another border crossing, Kerem Shalom, but humanitarian organizations say Israeli military operations make it difficult for them to retrieve the aid there for distribution.

The Biden administration last week launched the \$320 million floating pier for a new maritime aid route into Gaza as the seven-month-old Israel-Hamas war and Israeli restrictions on land crossings have severely limited food deliveries to 2.3 million Palestinians.

For all humanitarian efforts, "the risks are manifold," Daniel Dieckhaus, USAID's response director for Gaza, said at a briefing with Cooper. "This is an active conflict with deteriorating conditions."

Dieckhaus rejected charges from some aid groups that the pier is diverting attention from what the U.S., U.N. and relief workers say is the essential need for Israel to allow full access to land crossings for humanitarian shipments.

For instance, Jeremy Konyndyk, a former USAID official now leading Refugees International, tweeted that "the pier is humanitarian theatre."

"I would not call, within a couple of days, getting enough food and other supplies for tens of thousands of people for a month theater," Dieckhaus said Thursday when asked about the criticism. At maximum capacity, the pier would bring in enough food for 500,000 of Gaza's people. US officials stressed the need for flow through open land crossings for the remaining 1.8 million.

## SIA to continue review of safety processes after turbulence incident

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

In-flight meal services will now be suspended when the seatbelt sign lights up on a Singapore Airlines plane to better manage turbulence in the air, an airline spokesperson has said, days after severe weather forced a flight to make an emergency landing in Bangkok with one dead and 60 injured.

Singapore Airlines (SIA) said it will continue to review inflight security processes, giving utmost importance to the safety of passengers and crew following last Tuesday's incident. "The SIA will continue to review our processes as the safety of our passengers and crew is of utmost importance," the Straits Times quoted a spokesman for the flag carrier as saying on Thursday.

In-flight meal services will now be suspended when the seat-belt sign lights up on a Singapore Airlines plane as part of efforts to take a more cautious approach to managing turbulence in the air, the spokesperson said.

Cabin crew will also sit down and fasten their seat belts when the seat-belt sign is lit, the SIA said on May 23.

Unlike in the past, when only hot drinks would be cut off during turbulence, the new measures would require all meal and drink services to stop when the ride gets bumpy.

Other existing safety measures that kick in during poor weather conditions, including getting crew members to secure loose items in the cabin, advising passengers to return to their seats and buckle up, and monitoring, will remain in place.

On May 21, Flight SQ321, which was heading to Singapore from London, experienced sudden severe turbulence over the Irrawaddy Basin in Myanmar during the breakfast service. One passenger — 73-year-old Briton Geoffrey Kitchen — died, and dozens were injured. The pilot declared a medical emergency and diverted the Boeing 777-300ER carrying 211 passengers and 18 crew members to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, where the plane made an emergency landing at 3:45 pm (4:45 pm Singapore time).

It is the first SIA aviation accident involving a fatality since the

SQ006 crash in Taiwan in October 2000. Meanwhile, SIA has apologised to the injured passengers who say they had no information from the airline.

Keith Davis, an Australian passenger, on May 23 complained to the media that he had not heard from any SIA staff since he was hospitalised, according to local reports.

Another Singaporean, who was previously in the Intensive Care Unit at a Bangkok hospital, has been discharged while 48 passengers from Flight SQ321 remain wounded.

According to an update from Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital, 34 passengers remain warded in its premises as of noon on May 24, with another 12 at the Samitivej Sukhumvit Hospital and two at the Bangkok Hospital.

The 34 warded at Samitivej Srinakarin Hospital — comprising 14 males and 20 females — are from countries such as Australia, Britain, Malaysia, and the Philippines, according to media reports.

Singapore Transport Minister Chee Hong Tat said on Friday he was relieved that passengers who were injured when the Singapore Airlines plane encountered severe turbulence were recovering and that some had already been discharged from the hospital and returned home.

He said investigators from Singapore's Transport Safety Investigation Bureau (TSIB) were going through data from the cockpit voice recorder and the flight data recorder. "We await the investigation findings to understand what happened during those moments," the Singapore Daily quoted Chee as saying.

Investigators from TSIB, a department of the Transport Ministry responsible for investigating air, marine and rail accidents and incidents, had arrived in Bangkok on the night of May 21.

Asked what support the government is providing to the Singaporeans who remain in Bangkok, Chee said: "We will continue to provide whatever support and assistance that is necessary, working closely with the SIA and also the Thai authorities to bring the passengers and crew home as soon as possible."

## More than 100 people believed killed by landslide in PNG

AP ■ MELBOURNE

More than 100 people are believed to have been killed Friday in a landslide that buried a village in a remote, mountainous part of Papua New Guinea, and an emergency response is underway, the South Pacific island nation's leader and news media said. The landslide hit Kaokalam village in Enga province, about 600 kilometers (370 miles) northwest of the capital, Port Moresby, at roughly 3 am, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported.

Residents said estimates of the death toll were above 100, although authorities have not confirmed that figure. Villagers said the number of people killed could be much higher. Prime Minister James Marape said authorities were responding and he would release information about the destruction and loss of life when it was available.

"I am yet to be fully briefed on the situation. However, I extend my heartfelt condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the landslide disaster in the early hours of this morning," Marape said in a statement. "We are sending in disaster officials, PNG Defense Force, and the Department of Works and Highways to ... start relief work, recovery of bodies, and reconstruction of infrastructure," he added.

Australia, a near neighbor and Papua New Guinea's most generous provider of foreign aid, said the government stood ready to help. "We send our heartfelt sympathies to the people of PNG following the landslide at Kaokalam village," Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong posted on social media. "The loss of life and destruction is devastating," she added. "As friends and partners, Australia stands ready to assist in relief and recovery efforts."

Videos on social media showed residents pulling out bodies buried under rocks and trees.

Elizabeth Laruma, who runs a women's business association in Porgera, a town in the same province near the Porgera Gold Mine, said houses were flattened when the side of a mountain gave way.

"It has occurred when people were still asleep in the early hours, and the entire village has gone down," Laruma told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. "From what I can presume, it's about 100-plus people who are buried beneath the ground."

The landslide blocked the road between Porgera and the village, she said, raising concerns about the town's supply of fuel and goods.

Village resident Ninga Role, who was away when the landslide struck, expects that at least four of his relatives died.

"There are some huge stones

and plants, trees. The buildings collapsed," Role said. "These things are making it hard to find the bodies."

Belinda Kora, a Port Moresby-based ABC reporter, said helicopters were the only way of accessing the village, which is in the mountainous interior region known as the Highlands, with the main road closed. Papua New Guinea is a diverse, developing nation of mostly subsistence farmers with 800 languages.

There are few roads outside the larger cities. With 10 million people, it is also the most populous South Pacific nation after Australia, which is home to some 27 million. Telecommunications are poor, particularly outside Port Moresby where government data show 56 per cent of the nation's social media users reside. Only 1.66 million people across the country use the internet and 85 per cent of the population lives in rural areas.

## UK general elections to delay FTA with India

PTI ■ LONDON

As the campaign for the UK general election gathers momentum after British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak surprised many this week with a snap summer poll on July 4, exactly a month after India's election results on June 4, the prospect of an India-UK free trade agreement (FTA) has been kicked into the long grass.

While political analysts and strategic experts have expressed confidence that very little should change on the bilateral relationship front whatever the outcome in either election, the very small window that was open for a deal being clinched by the Sunak-led Tory government has now been swept away in the election wave of both countries.

The Opposition Labour Party, in the lead in most pre-election surveys, has committed itself to "finish the job" but the timelines will remain uncertain for some time. "Rishi Sunak's shock poll date announcement of July 4 has skewed any prospect of the finalisation of the long-awaited and much-anticipated FTA with India by a Conservative govern-

## King Charles III to limit public appearances during six weeks of election campaign

London (AP): King Charles III won't be out and about much over the next six weeks — and it's not because of his ongoing cancer treatments. Shortly after UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called an early parliamentary election for July 4, Buckingham Palace said that all members of the royal family were cancelling most public engagements until after the vote to avoid doing anything that might divert attention from the campaign.

That announcement is just one of the ways that Charles will seek to play his part as a

unifying head of state during the election, without violating a constitutional ban on interfering in politics. While the king's role in government is largely ceremonial, it's bound up by traditions that embody the way royal powers were gradually transferred to Parliament over the last 800 years. Here's a look at the monarch's role in the run up to the election, including a few dos and don'ts.

The decision to call an election was entirely Sunak's. But before he could do so, the king had to grant permission

to dissolve Parliament early. Technically, the king still has the power to refuse a dissolution request if he believes an election would be detrimental to the nation.

But the last time this happened was in 1835. Ignoring that precedent "would expose the monarch to allegations of political interference of an undemocratic nature, even if the intention of the refusal was to preserve the good functioning of democracy," according to the Institute for Government, an independent think tank.

Under Keir Starmer's leadership, the Labour Party has tried to reset relations with India, which had deteriorated under [former leader] Jeremy Corbyn," said Bajpaae.

"The UK's outreach to India also needs to be seen in the broader context of the UK's Indo-Pacific pivot. There are questions on the UK's ability to sustain this in the context of fiscal constraints and preoccupation with other foreign policy priorities — wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and reviving relations with the EU," he said. A key aspect of this UK election will be that the country's first Indian-origin Prime Minister, who took over in the wake of political turmoil within the governing Conservative Party in October 2022, will now be taking his record at Downing Street to the voters. The British Future think tank has already forecast that the next UK Parliament is set to be the most diverse yet based on candidate selections by the major political parties, with at least 10 more MPs of ethnic minority background being elected to the House of Commons. "While Labour is doing well overall in the polls, it's got more

## Joe Biden wins Idaho Democratic caucuses

Boise (US) (AP): Idaho Democrats on Thursday selected Joe Biden as their nominee for the White House, giving the president more delegates after he already clinched his party's 2024 nomination.

The caucus was structured a bit differently than previous Democratic caucuses. Instead of listening to speeches and moving to various parts of the room to show their support for a candidate, voters were given ballots to fill out their choices.

Only registered Democrats and unaffiliated voters were allowed to participate in the Democratic caucus. Unaffiliated voters first had to sign a pledge saying they are participating as Democrats and have not participated in any other presidential nomination contest this year. Voters who are 17 years old are allowed to caucus as long as they will turn 18 before the general election on Nov. 5. That is different from Idaho's Republican caucus, held earlier this year. The Republican caucus allowed only registered Republicans to vote, and they had to be at least 18 at the time of the caucus. Former President Donald Trump won all of Idaho's 32 GOP delegates at the March 2 event.



A couple take photograph outside the Houses of Parliament in London, Thursday.

## Two men to go on trial for aiding HK authorities in UK intelligence gathering

AP ■ LONDON

The office manager of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in London and another man will go on trial in February for allegedly helping Hong Kong authorities gather intelligence in the UK, a judge said on Friday.

Chung Biu Yuen, 63, and Chi Leung Peter Wai, 38, appeared at London's Central Criminal Court for a preliminary hearing, charged with agreeing to undertake information gathering, surveillance and acts of deception that were likely to materially assist a foreign intelligence service between December 2023 and May 2. Hong Kong authorities have confirmed that Yuen was the

office manager of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in London. A third suspect, Briton Matthew Trickett, was also charged in the case, but he was found dead Sunday in a park under what police said were unexplained circumstances.

Prosecutor Kashif Malik said during an earlier hearing that during a hearing that Trickett, reportedly a UK immigration enforcement officer and a former Royal Marine, had attempted suicide after being charged. He was also the director of a security company. Justice Jeremy Baker set a trial date for February 10, set to last for about five weeks. The judge said the men were granted bail on condition that they observe a set curfew and other restric-

tions. The three men were charged under Britain's National Security Act after an investigation by the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command. Prosecutors allege that the suspects also forced entry into a UK residential address. They were arrested earlier this month in London and Yorkshire in northern England by counterterrorism police, using provisions of a new law that allows suspects in national security and espionage cases to be detained without warrant. The case drew strong criticism from officials in Beijing and Hong Kong, a former British colony that returned to Chinese control in 1997. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman

Wang Wenbin said Friday that the charges were "an act of political manipulation in the name of national security." "It seriously infringed on the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese nationals in the UK, gravely undermined China-UK relations, seriously violated the principles of international law and the basic norms of international relations and badly harmed the image of the UK," he told reporters. In Hong Kong, a government spokesman said the city's Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Algernon Yau, met with Britain's deputy consul-general in Hong Kong on Friday to reiterate concerns about the case.



# Taiwan tracks Chinese warplanes and navy vessels during drills

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan tracked dozens of Chinese warplanes and navy vessels off its coast on Friday on the second day of a large exercise China's People's Liberation Army held in response to the inauguration of the island's new leadership.

China has issued elaborate releases to media showing Taiwan being surrounded by forces from the ruling Communist Party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army. A new video on Friday showed animated Chinese forces approaching from all sides and Taiwan being enclosed within a circular target area.

Despite that, there was little sign of concern among Taiwan's 23 million people, who have under threat of Chinese invasion since the sides divided during a bitter and bloody civil war in 1949. Taiwan's parliament was mired in a dispute between its political parties over procedural measures on Friday and business continued as usual in the bustling capital of Taipei.



In this photo released by the Taiwan Ministry of National Defense, Chinese vessels are seen near Taiwan on Thursday. Taiwan tracked dozens of Chinese warplanes and navy vessels off its coast Friday on the second day of a large exercise China's People's Liberation Army held in response to the inauguration of the island's new leadership.

The defense ministry said it tracked 49 warplanes and 19 navy vessels, as well as Chinese coast guard vessels, and that 35 of the planes flew across the median of the Taiwan Strait, the de facto boundary between the sides, over a 24-hour period from Thursday to Friday.

Marine and coast guard vessels, air and ground-based missile units have all been put on alert, particularly around the Taiwan-controlled island chains of

Kinmen and Matsu located just off the China coast and far from Taiwan's main island, roughly 160 kilometers (100 miles) across the Taiwan Strait. "Facing external challenges and threats, we will continue to maintain the values of freedom and democracy," Taiwan's new President Lai Ching-te told sailors and top security officials on Thursday as he visited a marine base in Taoyuan, just south of the capital, Taipei. In his inauguration speech on Monday, Lai had called on Beijing to stop its military intimidation and said Taiwan was "a sovereign independent nation in which sovereignty lies in the hands of the people."

China's military said its two-day exercises around Taiwan were punishment for separatist forces seeking independence. It sends navy ships and warplanes into the Taiwan Strait and other areas around the island almost daily to wear down Taiwan's defences and seek to intimidate its people, who firmly back their de facto independence.

# Putin on two-day Belarus visit

AP ■ BELARUS

Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived Thursday in Belarus for a two-day visit as part of several foreign tours to kick off his fifth term in office, underscoring close ties with a neighboring ally that has been instrumental in Russia's war effort in Ukraine.

Putin traveled to China earlier this month, and is expected in Uzbekistan on Sunday. Earlier on Thursday, the Russian president hosted Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in the Kremlin.

In Belarus, Putin is to hold talks with his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko. Lukashenko greeted him on the tarmac, and then the two sat down for a "short conversation" at the airport, the Kremlin reported. Lukashenko promised to discuss "security issues at the forefront, and tomorrow we will discuss economic issues together with our colleagues from the governments."

The Belarusian leader on Thursday appointed a new chief of the country's military general staff in a move that analysts say is aimed at showing the Kremlin the utmost loyalty of its neighbor and ally.



Russia used Belarus, which depends on Russian loans and cheap energy, as a staging ground in the war in Ukraine, deploying some of its troops there from Belarusian territory. In 2023, Russia also moved some of its tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus.

Maj. Gen. Pavel Muraveyka, who was appointed as chief of Belarus' General Staff and as first deputy defense minister, is known for publicly threatening neighboring NATO members Poland and Lithuania.

In October 2023, he said that Belarus could seize the so-called Suwalki Gap — a sparsely populated stretch of land running about 100 kilometers (60 miles) along the Polish-Lithuanian border. It links Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia with the rest of the NATO alliance and separates Belarus from Kaliningrad, a heavily militarized Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea that has no land connection to Russia. Military analysts in the West have long viewed the Suwalki Gap as a

potential flashpoint in any confrontation between Russia and NATO. They worry that Russia might try to seize the gap and cut off the three Baltic states from Poland and other NATO nations. "Muraveiko's appointment is an open challenge to the West and a desire to show Putin Minsk's complete loyalty and willingness to maintain a strategic partnership with Russia," independent Belarusian analyst Valery Karbalevich told The Associated Press.

"The deployment of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus does not leave Lukashenko a strategic choice, turns him into a hostage of the Kremlin and firmly binds Minsk to Moscow's policies," Karbalevich said. Both Russia and Belarus began military drills involving tactical nuclear weapons earlier this month. Moscow said its drills, announced publicly for the first time on May 6, were a response to statements by Western officials signaling possibly deeper involvement in the war in Ukraine. Belarus launched its maneuvers involving missiles and warplanes capable of carrying tactical nuclear weapons on May 7; Russia's exercises began this week.

# B'desh court remands 3 suspects in MP murder case for 8 days

PTI ■ DELHI

Dhaka (PTI): A Bangladesh court on Friday sent three suspects to an eight-day police remand for their alleged involvement in the brutal murder of the ruling Awami League lawmaker Anwarul Azim Anar while he was in India.

Anar, a three-time parliamentarian from the Jhenaidah-4 segment in Bangladesh and also the president of Awami League's Kaliganj sub-district unit, had made a personal visit to West Bengal's capital city Kolkata on May 12 to undergo medical treatment. He went missing from Kolkata on May 13.

According to the Kolkata police, circumstantial evidence indicated that the MP was first strangled and killed after which his body was chopped into pieces and dumped at different areas. Traces of his body or body parts are yet to be found. Bangladesh Police had arrested three persons in connection with his murder. On Friday, police produced the three accused identified as Tanvir, Shimul Bhuiyan and Silisti Rahman before the Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Dilruba Afroz Tithi and sought their 10-day remand.

After the hearing, the court sent the trio to an eight-day police remand. According to Bangladesh police, Bhuiyan, a leader of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party, changed his name to Amanullah and obtained a fake passport to facilitate the killing of the lawmaker in Kolkata and evade law enforcement agencies. The murder was planned two to three months ago, with multiple meetings held at two houses in Gulshan and Bashundhara areas which are owned by mastermind and the MP's close friend Akhtaruzzaman Shahin. Akhtaruzzaman, a Bangladeshi-born American citizen, fled to Nepal after the murder, police said. A team of the West Bengal CID visited Bangladesh on Thursday to interrogate the three accused. Earlier on May 23, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mahbubul Haque set a July 4 deadline for submitting the probe report in the case.

# China sends second consignment of glacial water from Tibet to Maldives

PTI ■ MALE

China has gifted 1,500 tonnes of water from the Tibetan glaciers to Maldives, the second such donation in less than two months, a media report said on Friday.

This is the latest in the multiple grants and aid that China has promised the Maldives, especially since pro-China Mohamed Muizzu took over as the President in November 2023.

China's Xizang Autonomous Region has gifted 1,500 tonnes of mineral water to the Maldives government on Thursday. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the donated water will be distributed to island communities, for use during times of drinking shortage, news portal Sun.mv reported. Earlier on March 27, the Maldives government had announced that it had received a similar consignment of 1,500 tonnes of water from China.

Foreign Minister Moosa



Zameer, while speaking at a ceremony where Wang Lixin, the Chinese Ambassador to the Maldives, handed over the donation, said that China continues to remain a "good friend to the Maldives," especially during the challenging times and crisis.

The minister also expressed his gratitude to the people of Xinjiang Autonomous Region for the kind gesture and to the government and people of China for their continued support and goodwill. "Grateful to receive 1,500 tonnes of mineral water from the people of Xizang

Autonomous Region, PRC. This generous donation will greatly support our island communities during water shortages. Thank you for your support and friendship," Zameer said on his official X handle late on Friday and tagged Wang while posting photos from the ceremony.

The Maldives has 26 atolls and its 1,192 islands are mostly composed of coral reefs and sandbars, a combination that makes groundwater and freshwater extremely scarce, and the problems are exacerbated due to climate change.

The country has tried between 2011 and 2015, a UN-funded 'Increasing Climate Resilience through an Integrated Water Resources Management Programme' but with limited success.

In December 2014, India carried out 'Operation Neer' during one of its worst water crises following a massive fire in the Male Water and Sewerage Company complex on December 4, 2014.

While announcing the earlier consignment in March, the government had said that the decision to provide Maldives with drinking water was reached during the official visit in November 2023 of China's Tibet Autonomous Region's Chairman, Yan Jinhai to the Maldives, when he met President Muizzu.

At that time, it was deliberated to donate water that is produced out of frozen water procured from glacial regions which are highly clean, clear, and rich in minerals. Moreover, Tibet (Xizang in Chinese) Autonomous Region is known to produce high-cost premium brands of water, the Maldives Foreign Ministry said then.

Previously, China had been exclusively known for its assistance in the urban and economic development of the Maldives. But since Muizzu assumed office, China has been helping the country with the supply of defence equipment too.

# Philippines to hold drills despite China's opposition

AP ■ MANILA

The Philippines will continue to build security alliances and stage joint combat drills in disputed waters to defend its territorial interests, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro said Friday, dismissing China's criticisms of such moves as paranoia.

Teodoro bluntly criticised Beijing's increasingly aggressive actions in the South China Sea, without citing China by name, in a speech before the military's top brass at a ceremony marking the anniversary of the Philippine navy's founding in Manila. The Philippines, he said, would not tolerate aggression and provocative moves.

Since territorial hostilities with China surged last year in the South China Sea, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's administration has taken steps to forge new security alliances with a number of Asian and Western countries and allowed a US military presence in more Philippine

bases under a 2014 defence pact.

In April and May, the Philippine military staged annual live-fire combat exercises with US forces in and near the disputed waters. China has said such actions by the US and its allies, including the Philippines, were provocative, aimed to contain Beijing and were endangering regional security.

"Termining these cooperative activities with like-minded nations as a containment or a provocation is disinformation and evidence of paranoia of a closed political system," Teodoro said in a clear reference to China. "The ultimate intent is to get what they want by the threat or the use of force. This we cannot allow to continue." The Philippines is the US's oldest treaty ally in Asia. Washington has warned that it is obligated to help defend the Philippines if its forces, aircraft and ships come under an armed attack, including in the disputed South China Sea. The Philippines has defense pacts

allowing American and Australian forces to enter the country for annual combat-readiness and disaster-response training and is negotiating a similar agreement with Japan and considering another pact with France. It has held joint maneuvers with the US, Australian and Japanese navies this year. In their largest and boldest annual military exercises last month, thousands of US and Philippine forces staged the retaking of an island and sank a warship in combat drills focusing on territorial defence in or near the South China Sea. They carried out aerial reconnaissance and logistical transport drills and secured an airfield during mock combat in a Philippine town near Taiwan. "For the first time we have evolved a realistic training scenario with evolutionary hypothetical scenarios where we can actually test our capabilities," Teodoro said. "There will be more maritime cooperative activity between us and like-minded nations."

# 'Hungary will seek to opt out of NATO efforts to support Ukraine'

AP ■ HUNGARY

Hungary will seek to opt out of any NATO operations aimed at supporting Ukraine, Prime Minister Viktor Orban said on Friday, suggesting that the military alliance and the European Union were moving toward a more direct conflict with Russia.

Orban told state radio that Hungary opposes a plan NATO is weighing to provide more predictable military support to Ukraine in coming years to repel Moscow's full-scale invasion, as better armed Russian troops assert control on the battlefield.

"We do not approve of this, nor do we want to participate in financial or arms support (for Ukraine), even within the framework of NATO," Orban said, adding that Hungary has

taken a position as a "non-participant" in any potential NATO operations to assist Kyiv.

"We've got to redefine our position within the military alliance, and our lawyers and officers are working on ... how Hungary can exist as a NATO member while not participating in NATO actions outside of its territory," he said.

Orban, considered Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest partner in the EU, emphasised NATO's role as a defensive alliance, and said he doesn't share the concerns of some other Central and Eastern European countries that Russia's military would not cease its aggression if it wins the war in Ukraine. NATO's strength cannot be compared to that of Ukraine," he said.

"I don't consider it a logical proposition that Russia, which cannot even deal with Ukraine, will come all of a sudden and swallow up the whole Western world."

Hungary has refused to supply neighbouring Ukraine with military aid in contrast to most other countries in the EU, and Orban has vigorously opposed the bloc's sanctions on Moscow though has ultimately always voted for them.

The nationalist leader is preparing for the European Parliament election on June 6-9, and has cast his party as a guarantor of peace in the region.

He has characterised the United States and other EU countries that urge greater support for Ukraine as "pro-war" and acting in preparation for a global conflict.

# Russia smashes train tracks in Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV

A nighttime Russian attack destroyed train tracks and rolling stock in Ukraine's north-eastern Kharkiv region, officials said Friday, and authorities organised the evacuation of children from the area that is being pumelled by the Kremlin's forces in a powerful new offensive.

The overnight strike also damaged buildings and freight cars, according to Ukraine's national railway operator Ukrzaliznytsia. No injuries were reported. Authorities have evacuated more than 11,000 people from the Kharkiv region since Russia launched an offensive there on May 10, regional Gov Oleh Syniehubov said. Officials on Friday announced the mandatory evacuation over the next 60 days of 123 orphans and children living without their parents in the area.

Russia's Kharkiv push appears to be a coordinated new offensive that includes testing Ukrainian defences in the Donetsk region further south, while also launch-



A rescuer recovers a lifeless body from under the rubble after a Russian missile hit a large printing house in Kharkiv, Ukraine, Thursday

ing incursions in the northern Sumy and Chernihiv regions. Ukraine's problems have been mounting in recent months as it tries to hold out against its much bigger foe, and the war appears to be at a critical juncture.

The new Russian offensive is stretching thin Ukraine's depleted ranks, exhausted by more than two years of war. Destroying the train network puts further pressure on the already overstretched Ukrainian army.

Crucial Western aid for Kyiv,

especially air defence systems to stop Russia's targeted destruction of the power grid, isn't arriving quickly enough. Also, most Western donors won't let Ukraine use the sophisticated long-range weapons they are providing to strike targets on Russian soil. That allows Moscow to assemble virtually unimpeded its troops for cross-border assaults, as well as deploy missile launchers to bombard Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said those limitations made possible an attack on the city of Kharkiv, the region's capital, on Thursday that killed seven civilians and wounded 21 others. Zelenskyy said on social media that Ukraine has "a shortage of air defence systems that are actually available in the world" and a "lack of long-range capabilities for our warriors and the complete inability to destroy the very source of Russian terror near our borders, including the missile launchers that actually hit Ukraine and the lives of our people."



Buddhist devotees stand in a queue to light butter lamps during Buddha Jayanti or Buddha Purnima festival at the Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal on Thursday.

# 'Progress in talks with Pak on new bailout package'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The IMF has said that "significant progress" has been achieved during talks with Pakistani officials towards reaching a staff-level agreement for an extended fund facility for the cash-strapped country.

Pakistan has made a formal request for a fresh bailout package between USD 6 and USD 8 billion under the EFF, with the possibility of being augmented through climate finance.

If successful, it would be the 24th International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout programme for the country.

An IMF team led by Nathan Porter, the IMF's Mission Chief to Pakistan, visited Islamabad between May 13 and May 23 to discuss the country's plans for a home-grown economic pro-

gramme that can be supported under the IMF's Extended Fund Facility. The visit was undertaken on Islamabad's request.

The global lender has emphasised that prioritising reforms to revitalise the Pakistani economy outweighs the size of the new loan package being negotiated. The mission and the authorities will continue policy discussions virtually over the coming days aiming to finalise discussions, including the financial support needed to underpin the authorities' reform efforts from the IMF and Pakistan's bilateral and multilateral partners," Porter said in a statement.

Ahead of the discussions, the IMF had warned that downside risks for the Pakistani economy remained exceptionally high. The official said that building on the economic stabilisation

achieved through the successful completion of the 2023 Stand-by Arrangement, the global lender and the Pakistani authorities made "significant progress" toward reaching a Staff Level Agreement (SLA) on a comprehensive economic policy and reform programme that can be supported under an EFF. "The authorities' reform programme aims to move Pakistan from economic stabilisation to strong, inclusive, and resilient growth. To achieve this, the authorities plan to continue to strengthen public finances to reduce vulnerabilities by improving domestic revenue mobilisation through fairer taxation while scaling up spending for human capital, social protection, and climate resilience; secure energy sector viability, including reforms to reduce the high cost

of energy; continue progress towards low and stable inflation by appropriate monetary and exchange rate policies; improve public service provision through state-owned enterprise (SOE) restructuring and privatisation; and promote private sector development, by securing a level-playing field for investment and stronger governance," the statement said.

Shortly after the statement's release, the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) gained 556.5 points to stand at 75,670.97 points at 9:41 am on Friday from the previous close of 75,114.47.

The Washington-based lender opened discussions with Pakistan on a new loan programme after the cash-strapped country last month completed a short-term USD 3 billion

programme, which helped stave off a sovereign debt default. Ahead of the discussions, the IMF had earlier this month warned that downside risks for the Pakistani economy remained exceptionally high. Pakistan narrowly averted default last summer, and the economy has stabilised after the completion of the last IMF programme, with inflation coming down to around 17 per cent in April from a record high of 38 per cent last May.

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

# Markets end lower after scaling record peaks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed marginally lower on Friday as investors booked profit in FMCG, IT and healthcare stocks after the BSE Sensex and Nifty hit fresh lifetime highs in intra-day deals. The 30-share BSE Sensex dipped 7.65 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 75,410.39. During the day, it rallied 218.46 points or 0.28 per cent to hit its all-time intra-day high of 75,636.50. The NSE Nifty breached the 23,000 mark for the first time in early trade. During the day, the benchmark



climbed 58.75 points or 0.25 per cent to hit its lifetime peak of 23,026.40. However, it pared all the gains and ended with a marginal decline of 10.55 points or 0.05 per cent at 22,957.10. Markets were on a

record-breaking rally for the second straight day ahead of the results of Lok Sabha polls. The results of the ongoing general elections will be declared on June 4. From the Sensex firms, Tech Mahindra, Asian Paints, Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, JSW Steel and ITC were among the major laggards. On the other hand, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, Larsen & Toubro, NTPC, Axis Bank and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Thursday after days of

offloading equities. They bought equities worth Rs 4,670.95 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading with cuts. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.73 per cent to USD 80.77 a barrel. With nearly a fortnight left for the results of Lok Sabha polls, benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty zoomed more than 1.6 per cent to close at lifetime high levels on Thursday.

# Windfall RBI dividend positive, usage to signal new Government's fiscal priorities: Ratings agencies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Global rating agencies on Friday said windfall of Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend from the RBI is positive for the country's fiscal metrics and its usage will provide a signal around the new government's fiscal priorities. The board of India's central bank earlier this week decided to pay Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government from the profits earned in 2023-24. This is more than double of Rs 1.02 lakh crore that was budgeted by the government.



Fitch Ratings Asia-Pacific Sovereigns Director Jeremy Zook said sustained deficit reduction, particularly if underpinned by durable revenue-raising reforms, would be positive for India's rating fundamentals over the medium-term. "The use of the dividend — whether it is saved or used for additional spending — could provide a signal around the government's fiscal priorities," Zook told PTI in an email response. Fitch has a 'BBB-' rating on India with a stable outlook. In January, the rating agency had affirmed India's rating on robust growth outlook, but had said that weak public finances continue to constraint the rating.

Another rating agency Moody's Ratings said the fiscal impact of much higher-than-expected dividend transfer by the RBI will be determined by what the incoming government decides to do with these additional resources. Moody's Ratings Senior Vice President Christian de Guzman said on one hand, the government could observe expenditure restraint and facilitate further progress towards meeting its deficit target. This would lower the borrowing requirements that could in turn free up liquidity in the market for other purposes. He said the government could also deploy these extra funds towards new policies and initiatives. "The impact of much higher-than-expected transfers from the RBI will ultimately be determined by what the incoming government decides

The interim budget presented in Parliament earlier in the year had set a fiscal deficit target of 5.1 per cent of the GDP for 2024-25, down from 5.8 per cent in 2023-24. As per the fiscal consolidation roadmap, the deficit — the difference between government expenditure and revenue — would be brought down to 4.5 per cent by 2025-26. Another global rating agency S&P Global Ratings on Thursday said the additional dividends from the RBI are around 0.35 per cent of GDP and India can get a 'rating support' over time, if it utilises the windfall dividend to reduce fiscal deficit. "The additional dividends may not necessarily lead to a full decrease of the deficit, due to potential revenue shortfalls in areas like divestment receipts or additional allocation to expenditures in the final budget. 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," S&P Global Ratings Analyst YeeFarn Phua had told PTI. All three global rating agencies — Fitch, S&P and Moody's — have the lowest investment grade rating on India with a stable outlook.

# Bengaluru, Hyderabad see jump in IT sector job opportunities in April: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Even as overall job opportunities in the IT sector declined by 3.6 per cent nationwide, openings gained traction in technology hubs Bengaluru and Hyderabad that saw a growth of 24 per cent and 41.5 per cent, respectively, during April, a report said on Friday. According to data from Indeed, job postings in the IT sector have increased by 41.5 per cent in Hyderabad and 24 per cent in Bengaluru, highlighting the growing prominence of these cities as

top destinations for IT professionals. There has also been a significant growth in job clicks, with a 161 per cent rise in job seeker interest in Hyderabad and an 80 per cent increase in Bengaluru, the report added. Overall, there has been a decrease in IT job opportunities nationally, with job postings declining by 3.6 per cent, indicating that tech companies are being cautious in hiring due to the uncertain global economic climate, said the report. The report is based on data

related to job postings and job clicks on Indeed's platform in April compared to that of the corresponding month in 2023. The report further revealed that the rise in top five job postings are for skills in analysis, agile, APIs, javascript and SQL. "Software and IT positions seem to be highly sought after, not just by those currently working in the field but also by individuals looking for new career opportunities. Despite the layoffs, the appeal of IT jobs has risen.

# Lava rejobs board, excludes former chairman Hari Rai

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Homegrown mobile phone maker Lava International has restructured the company's board in which it has excluded former chairman and managing director Hari Om Rai, according to a company statement. Rai resigned from his position in February and does not hold any directorial position in the company. He is under judicial custody in an alleged money laundering case filed by the Enforcement Directorate.

# NHPC bags awards



New Delhi: NHPC has been conferred with the prestigious 'The Economic Times HR World Future Ready Organisation Award 2024-25'. The Award was received by Uttam Lal, Director (Personnel), NHPC along with Lucas Guria, Executive Director (HR) and a team of NHPC officers at a glittering Awards Ceremony held in Mumbai on 23rd May 2024. PNS

# India should impose tax on ultra wealthy to tackle wealth inequality: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India needs to impose a 2 per cent tax on net wealth exceeding Rs 10 crore and a 33 per cent inheritance tax to deal with the problem of rising inequality in the country, a new research paper co-authored by economist Thomas Piketty has suggested. The paper titled 'Proposals For a Wealth Tax Package to Tackle Extreme Inequalities in India' propose a comprehensive tax package on the ultra-wealthy to tackle the massive concentration at

the very top of the wealth distribution and create valuable fiscal space for crucial social sector investments. "Raise phenomenally large tax revenues while leaving 99.96 per cent of the adults unaffected by the tax. "In a baseline scenario, a 2 per cent annual tax on net wealth exceeding Rs 10 crore and a 33 per cent inheritance tax on estates exceeding Rs 10 crore in valuation would generate a massive 2.73 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in revenues," the paper suggested.

The paper said that the taxation proposal needs to be accompanied by explicit redistributive policies to support the poor, lower castes, and middle classes. "For example, the baseline scenario would allow nearly doubling the current public spending on education, which has stagnated at 2.9 per cent of GDP over the past 15 years, well below -- less than half -- the 6 per cent target set by the government's own National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)," it said. The paper noted that the taxation proposal needs to be

extensively debated, with a consensus on specific details of the design emerging from a broader democratic debate on tax justice and wealth redistribution in India. The paper has been authored by Thomas Piketty (Paris School of Economics and World Inequality Lab), Lucas Chancel (Harvard Kennedy School and World Inequality Lab) and Nitin Kumar Bharti (New York University and World Inequality Lab). According to the paper, debates on income and wealth inequality in India have gained significant

momentum in recent weeks, partly following the release of our study 'Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj', which revealed that economic disparities in India have reached historical highs. These extreme inequalities and their close link with social injustice can no longer be ignored, it said. The authors in their working paper released on March 20 had said inequality in India has skyrocketed since the early 2000s, with the income and wealth share of the top 1

per cent population rising to 22.6 per cent and 40.1 per cent, respectively, in 2022-23. "Between 2014-15 and 2022-23, the rise of top-end inequality has been particularly pronounced in terms of wealth concentration. "By 2022-23, top 1 per cent income and wealth shares (22.6 per cent and 40.1 per cent) are at their highest historical levels and India's top 1 per cent income share is among the very highest in the world, higher than even South Africa, Brazil, and the US," the paper had said.

# VIT-AP University Celebrates 7th University Day



Amaravati: VIT-AP University celebrated its 7th University Day with grandeur and enthusiasm. The event was graced by guests, including the Chief Guest, Justice CT Ravi Kumar, Judge of the Supreme Court of India, and the Guest of Honour Amit Chaudhry, Director of Data Platforms at Microsoft, Bangalore. PNS

# JLR to produce Range Rover, Range Rover Sport in India; prices set to fall up to 22 per cent

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Tata Motors owned Jaguar Land Rover will start producing its Range Rover and Range Rover Sport in India, marking a first for the iconic models in their 54-year long history, to be rolled out from a country outside of the UK. Till now the two models were only produced in Jaguar Land Rover's Solihull plant in the UK and then exported to around 121 markets globally, including India. With enhanced localisation, the Marquee British brand aims to make the two products better in terms of pricing to cater to a larger set of customers in India. The price of two models is set to come down in the range of 18-22 per cent with the local production. Tata Group Chairman N

Chandrasekaran lauded Tata Sons Chairman Emeritus Ratan Tata for bringing the JLR brand to the Tata family 15 years ago. "The Range Rover will be manufactured right here in India is just a super feeling. Its a very very special moment and I feel proud," he said. He noted that the company would see an increase in sales in the country going ahead. "We will sell more, I am very confident that it's going to be a great journey from here," Chandrasekaran said. And the manufacturing here should really send a signal and show the confidence that the company has in this market, he added. In an interaction with PTI, JLR India Managing Director Rajan Amba said the local production is a big step for the company to make the two models accessible to a wider set of customers in the

country. "For the first time in the history of the company, the Range Rover and Range Rover Sport will also now be produced in India...This is a huge announcement for us as these are our flagship cars and have only been produced in Solihull in their 54 years long history," Amba said. He noted that the step is also an indication of the kind of market India is developing when it comes to premium products. "This (local assembly) will allow us to take the benefit of the duty structure and to bring the price down of the two models by about 18 to 22 per cent," Amba said. The dip in prices will help in making the models affordable and enhance sales, he added. JLR India reported an 81 per cent increase in retail sales last fiscal in India at 4,436 units.



Amba said the company has calibrated expansion plans to grow business in the country. "Our intent is to double our business in the next three years. We will bring innovative products, leverage the Tata Group ecosystem and

bring in the latest innovative products to the country," he said. JLR also plans to introduce six new battery electric vehicles in India over the next four years, Amba noted. With local production, the

price of Range Rover Sport, which would be available for deliveries in August this year, would come down to Rs 1.4 crore as compared with Rs 1.9 crore currently, Amba said. Similarly, the price of Range Rover which will be available

in the market from this month-end, would cost Rs 2.6 crore for the Autobiography version which is currently tagged at around Rs 3.3 crore, he added. "So the products remain very premium but more in a price range where we can capture that aspiration and desire to be affiliated to the brand," Amba said. The local production would also help over the next year to bring down the waiting period on the two SUVs, he stated. With the addition of the two models, JLR India will now be rolling out a total of six models from the Pune-based facility it shares with Tata Motors. JLR currently has an installed production capacity of around 10,000 units per annum at the plant. The company already assembles Range Rover Velar, Range Rover Evoque, Jaguar

F-PACE and Discovery Sport in Pune. JLR Chief Commercial Officer Lennard Hoornik said that over the last few years, India has witnessed steady and spectacular economic growth and is poised to grow consistently in the near future as well. This growth has resulted in tremendous opportunities to localise product offerings for Indian customers, he stated. Local manufacturing of the Range Rover and Range Rover Sport in India is the next significant step towards the brand consolidating its position as the most desirable modern luxury SUV family, in the country, Hoornik said. Range Rover MD Geraldine Ingham said retail sales in India have surged and the local manufacturing of the Range Rover will enable the brand to respond to this growing demand.

# AI anchors to helm DD Kisan relaunch on May 26

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Meet AI Krish and AI Bhoomi, the world's first Government TV channel Artificial Intelligence (AI) anchors on Doordarshan Kisan. Powered by artificial intelligence, these virtual presenters are poised to redefine the way farmers across India receive agricultural information. Scheduled to debut on May 26, the same day the channel was launched 15 years ago, these anchors will provide crucial updates on agricultural research, market trends, weather forecasts, and government schemes in fifty languages, catering to viewers from Kashmir to Tamil Nadu and Gujarat to Arunachal Pradesh. What will set these new presenters apart will be their capability of tirelessly delivering news 24/7 without fatigue as they will provide crucial updates on agricultural research, weather forecasts, and government schemes in fifty languages, catering to viewers from Kashmir to Tamil Nadu and Gujarat to Arunachal Pradesh. This unparalleled linguistic versatility ensures that crucial agricultural information reaches every corner of the country, empowering farmers with



knowledge and insights to make informed decisions. With AI Krish and AI Bhoomi leading the charge, DD Kisan is hoping to pioneer a revolution in agricultural communication, ushering in an era of accessibility, efficiency, and inclusivity. These AI anchors epitomize the channel's commitment to serving farmers and advancing the agricultural sector in India, said an official from the DD Kisan. "The DD Kisan is committed to promoting balanced farming, animal husbandry, and plantation, thus fostering a comprehensive approach to agriculture.

As it embarks on this new chapter with AI anchors, DD Kisan continues its journey towards uplifting and empowering the agricultural sector, contributing to the holistic development of rural India," the official added. Commenting on DD Kisan's initiative in the AI sector, Dr. Subi Chaturvedi, global AI expert and Chief Corporate Affairs and Public Policy Officer at InMobi, welcomed the move, which she said, is in keeping with the Centre's vision of 'Digital India'. "This highlights the transformative potential of AI, emphasizing its capacity to revolutionize every sector," she said, stressing the importance of understanding AI's applications and potential use cases. Dr. Chaturvedi also pointed out that with changing times, AI is not merely an option but an essential opportunity for any country aspiring to become an economic powerhouse. The AI in Agriculture Market is projected to grow from USD1.7 billion in 2023 to USD4.7 billion by 2028, highlighting the pivotal role of advanced technologies in this sector. DD Kisan is the only TV channel in the country, which has been established by the central Government and dedicated to the farmers.

# Power Quiz 2024 ends



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

NTPC proudly hosted the National Finals of the Power Quiz 2024 and Medha Pratiyogita 2024 at the Power Management Institute (PMI), Noida, celebrating a remarkable journey of learning, knowledge sharing, and healthy competition among employees and their families. A total of 1820 teams participated in these events, with 570 teams competing in the Power Quiz 2024 and 1250 teams competing in Medha Pratiyogita 2024.

# Zee seeks USD 90 million termination fee from Sony for calling off merger

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Zee Entertainment Enterprises has sought a termination fee of USD 90 million (around Rs 748.7 crore) from the Sony Group for calling off the USD 10 billion merger deal in January this year. It has sought termination fees from two Sony Group entities — Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI), now known as Culver Max Entertainment, and Bangla Entertainment (BEPL), according to a regulatory filing from Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) on Thursday. ZEEL has, on account of Culver Max's and BEPL's breaches under the Merger Cooperation agreement (MCA), terminated the MCA by issuing a letter dated May 23, 2024. The company has sought a

termination fee from Culver Max and BEPL under the provisions of the MCA, it said. "Culver Max and BEPL have failed to comply with their obligations under the MCA. Therefore, the company has terminated the MCA and called upon Culver Max and BEPL to pay the termination fee i.e. The aggregate amount equal to USD 90 million in accordance with the MCA," it said. Earlier on January 22, 2024, Sony Group Corporation (SGC) had said that ZEEL did not satisfy the merger conditions and initiated arbitration proceedings before the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) claiming USD 90 million as termination fee. This was contested by ZEEL before the SIAC, which denied any interim relief to the Sony group against the

Indian broadcaster. ZEEL had moved the National Company Law Tribunal seeking implementation of the proposed merger and later withdrew its plea. "We hereby wish to inform you that the company has, on account of Culver Max's and BEPL's breaches under the MCA, terminated the MCA by issuing a letter dated May 23, 2024, and sought a termination fee from Culver Max and BEPL in accordance with the provisions of the MCA," the filing said. ZEEL and SPNI had entered into an agreement to merge on December 22, 2021. On August 10, 2023 the Mumbai bench of NCLT approved the scheme of merger of ZEEL with Sony group entities Culver Max Entertainment and BEPL, which could have created a USD 10 billion media entity.

# INDIA SQUAD FOR FIFA WC QUALIFIER AGAINST KUWAIT: GOGOI, HAMMAD MISS OUT DUE TO INJURIES

**PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Forward Parthib Gogoi and defender Muhammad Hammad were left out due to injuries as India announced a 27-member squad for the World Cup qualifying match against Kuwait on June 6 which would mark the end of long-serving captain and ace striker Sunil Chhetri's international career. The squad for the game to be held in Kolkata was announced by head coach Igor Stimac.

A total of 32 players had been camping in Bhubaneswar, out of which five — Phurba Lachenpa, Parthib, Imran Khan, Hammad and Jithin MS — have been released from the camp.

"All of them were very professional and hard-working. The competition is really strong amongst them, especially in the positions of Jithin and Parthib," Stimac said in a media release.

"Parthib and Hammad suffered minor injuries a few days back and will need 7-14 days of rest," he added without specifying the nature of injuries. The remaining players will



continue to train in Bhubaneswar until May 29 when they will travel to Kuwait. The Blue Tigers will face Kuwait at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan on June 6. Following the match against Kuwait, India will travel to take on Qatar on June 11 in their last two matches of Group A. India are currently placed second in the group, with four

points from four matches. The top two teams in the group will qualify for Round 3 of the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers and book their berth at the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027.

Chhetri, 39, announced his decision to retire from international football on May 17. The match against Kuwait will bring the curtains down on a glittering 19-year career during which he became India's top goal-scorer with 94 strikes. He will leave the scene as India's most-capped player after competing in 151 matches at the end of his swansong contest. Chhetri will bow out third in the list of goal scorers among active players behind Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. He currently sits fourth in the all-time list of international goal-scorers.

- THE SQUAD:**
- Goalkeepers:** Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Amrinder Singh, Vishal Kaith.
- Defenders:** Amey Ranawade, Anwar Ali, Jay Gupta, Lalchungnunga, Mehtab Singh, Narender, Nikhil Poojary, Rahul Bheke, Subhasish Bose.
- Midfielders:** Anirudh Thapa, Brandon Fernandes, Edmund Lalrindika, Jeakson Singh Thounaojam, Lallianzuala Chhangte, Liston Colaco, Mahesh Singh Naorem, Nandhakumar Sekar, Sahal Abdul Samad, Suresh Singh Wamiam.
- Forwards:** David Lalhlansanga, Manvir Singh, Rahim Ali, Sunil Chhetri, Vikram Partap Singh.



## Indian lose 1-4 to Belgium in FIH Pro League

**PTI ■ ANTWERP (BELGIUM)**

Defensive lapses cost the Indian men's hockey team as it went down 1-4 to hosts and world no.3 Belgium in the European leg of the FIH Pro League here.

The Harmanpreet Singh-led side had defeated Argentina 5-4 in shootout after both the teams were locked at 2-2 at the end of regulation time in the opening match here on Wednesday.

After a barren first quarter, Belgium took the lead in the 22nd minute through a field goal by skipper Felix Denayer. Four minutes after half-time, the home side doubled its lead through a penalty corner conversion by Alexander Hendrickx.

The Indian defence was relentlessly caught off guard by the brisk passing and skillful play of the Belgians as they extended their lead in the 49th minute through another fine field goal by Cedric Charlier.

Young striker Abhishek pulled one back for India from a field effort but Belgium looked too strong as they sealed the affair in the final minute of the game when Hendrickx sounded the board from a penalty stroke.

The Indian defence looked in disarray from the word go as they failed to counter Belgium's relentless attacks with veteran custodian PR Sreejesh cutting a lonely figure at the back.

India too had their chances and secured their first penalty corner in the 18th minute but skipper Harmanpreet's flick was saved by Belgium goalkeeper Loick van Doren.

Two minutes later, India secured back-to-back penalty corners but an off-colour Harmanpreet failed to utilise the chances.

Belgium eventually took the lead in the 22nd minute when captain Denayer guided the ball into the goal after Sreejesh blocked the first shot from Florent van Aubele. Belgium doubled their lead four minutes into the third quarter from a blistering counter-attack from Tanguy Cosyns, Denayer and Nicolas de Kerpel to eventually win a penalty corner, which was converted by Hendrickx through Sreejesh's feet.

Charlier made it 3-0 in favour of Belgium in the 49th minute after receiving a long cross-field pass from Denayer, finding the bottom-right corner of Sreejesh's goal.

India drew one back five minutes from the final hooter with a superb reverse hit strike from Abhishek to beat Van Doren.

It was not to be India's day as they conceded a penalty stroke just before the hooter for not being 5m away when a Belgian player was receiving the ball inside the circle, and Hendrickx stepped up to seal the deal. India skipper Harmanpreet was understandably disappointed with the performance.

"We did some good things, but the finishing wasn't there. Defensively we need to improve, man-to-man marking needs to get better. Excited to play them again on Saturday, looking forward to improve game-by-game," he said after the match on Thursday night.

**AP ■ PARIS**

If this is, as expected, Rafael Nadal's final French Open, it will be one that everyone — the 37-year-old Spaniard included — surely will remember vividly.

No matter how healthy the guy everyone calls "Rafa" might be. No matter how long his stay in Paris lasts. No matter whether he somehow adds another championship at Roland Garros to the record 14 he owns.

Narrator: Not even Nadal truly believes that is possible. Indeed, it wasn't even certain that he would be in the field until his name was placed in the bracket on Thursday - and he was drawn to face No. 4 seed Alexander Zverev - although Nadal has been practicing all week on site.

"I am not negative," he explained. "I am just realistic." Think back just a couple of years ago to Serena Williams' farewell at the U.S. Open. That's the sort of atmosphere and adoration likely to be on display whenever Nadal swings a racket or simply strolls around the compact-for-a-Grand-Slam-grounds in the southwest section of the

## If this is Rafael Nadal's last French Open, it should be similar to Serena Williams last US Open

French capital where the clay-court tournament begins Sunday. "I cannot predict what kind of emotions I am going to have there," said Nadal, who has been saying for a while that he thinks 2024 will be his final season before retirement. "I just want to enjoy every day."

That's been difficult lately because of hip and abdominal muscle injuries that limited him to 20 matches, and a 9-11 record, over the past 20 months.

Nadal missed nearly all of 2023 after hurting his hip during a loss at the Australian Open that January. He had surgery almost exactly a year ago and sat out the French Open for the first time since making his debut there in 2005, when, naturally, he claimed the trophy at age 19.

A torn hip muscle this January forced Nadal to miss the Australian Open; an ab problem sidelined him later. He returned in April, but in three places he's won a total of



27 titles — Barcelona, Madrid, Rome — Nadal made it no further than the fourth round anywhere and called himself "unpredictable."

That stretch was capped by a 6-1, 6-3 loss to Hubert Hurkacz at the Italian Open, a result so demoralizing that Nadal wondered aloud whether he should bother showing up at Roland Garros, although did say he was reluctant to skip "the most important event of my tennis career."

The 22-time major champion

is not able to run at full speed or compete with full force. He does not have the match-readiness required to succeed.

"For him to feel like he's going in with his C' game - not B' game; C' game - and maybe fearing almost that he could lose first or second round?" said Chris Evert, who won seven of her 18 Grand Slam titles in Paris. "He's been such a perfectionist on that surface, why would he want to expose himself at that level?"

No man has won even half as many French Opens as Nadal. His winning percentage there is .974. He had streaks of five championships in a row, four in a row and three in a row.

This says it all: There's already a statue of him near the main stadium.

"It's really a paramount challenge to play him in Roland Garros," said Novak Djokovic, whose 24 major trophies make him the only man with more than Nadal. "He's an incredible athlete. The tenacity and intensity he brings on the court, particularly there, is something that was very rarely seen, I think, in the history of this sport."

Djokovic - who formed, with Nadal and the now-retired Roger Federer, the so-called Big Three - and Iga Swiatek are the defending champions in France and both are ranked No. 1. Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner are the emerging stars of men's tennis; Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff have that status in the women's

## Indian compound mixed team enters final

**PTI ■ YECHON (SOUTH KOREA)**

Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Priyansh advanced to the compound mixed team final, confirming India's second medal, while Deepika Kumari brightened the country's gloomy recurve campaign, reaching to her second successive Archery World Cup semifinals after her comeback in the Stage 2 of the event, here on Friday.

The compound women's team of Jyothi, Parneet Kaur and Aditi Swami had assured India's first medal by making the final on Wednesday.

Young compound archer Prathamesh Fuge is also eyeing a medal as he advanced to the semifinal in the individual category.

The Indian compound mixed team, No. 2 in world rankings, dropped just two points from 16 arrows to eliminate the host country's duo of Han Seungyeon and Yang Jaewon 158-157 in a tight semi-final. Jyothi and Priyansh will face USA's Olivia Dean and Sawyer Sullivan in the gold medal match on Saturday in a clash of the top-two world ranked nations. The fourth-seeded Indian duo earlier ousted Vietnam 159-152 in the first round of 16, missing the target only once from 16 arrows.

India then thwarted some strong resistance from formidable Mexico, seeded fifth, to win 156-155 in an intense quarterfinal.

Former world number one Deepika, who is making a return to the International circuit after embracing motherhood in December 2022, secured four back-to-back wins to enter the last-four stage and remained the only



**DEEPIKA IN SUCCESSIVE ARCHERY WC SEMIFINALS AFTER COMEBACK**

Indian recurve archer in the medal hunt. Deepika will face home favourite and world No. 2 Lim Sihyeon in Sunday's semi-final, four weeks after the rising South Korean 20-year-old won the Shanghai Stage 1 gold by in a ruthless straight set victory. Starting at fourth in the qualifications, Deepika overcame early jitters when she pipped Slovenian teenager Tinkara Kardinar in the shoot-off after 1-3 down in a dramatic first round clash.

Deepika started out shooting twice in the red ring (8-8) to total 26 and lost the first set by two points. She drew level in the second set, shooting 27, and came on her own in the third where she dropped just a point to win the set 29-25.

Deepika won the fourth set 28-24 as pressure began to mount on the 18-year-old opponent. But there was more drama as Tinkara won the fifth set 28-27 to force a shoot-off that the Indian won 9-8.

Deepika then went on defeat Loc Thi Dao of Vietnam (6-2), Lisa Barbelin of France (6-0), Elif Berra Gokkirk of Turkey (6-

## Sindhu enters semifinals of Malaysia Masters, Ashmita loses

**PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR**

Double Olympic medalist P V Sindhu took a giant stride towards securing a title at the Malaysia Masters after progressing to the semifinals with a hard-fought win over top seed Han Yue of China here on Friday.

World No. 15 Sindhu recovered from a mid-game slump to outwit Han, ranked sixth, 21-13 14-21 21-12 in a 55-minute quarterfinal battle to avenge her loss to the Chinese in their last meeting at the Asia badminton Championships in Ningbo last month.

Sindhu, a former world champion, will now square off against either Indonesia's Putri Kusuma Wardani or Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan in the last



four stage.

In other results, Ashmita Chaliha's fine run ended in the quarterfinals with a 10-21 15-21 loss to sixth seed Zhang Yi Man of China.

Sindhu, who last won the Singapore Open

in 2022, gave a good account of herself during the 55-minute match as she broke off from 3-3 in the opening game to take a 11-5 cushion at the break.

The Chinese slowly made her way to 13-16 but Sindhu reeled off the remaining five straight points to take the opening game. Stung by the reversal, Han zoomed to a 5-0 lead after the change of sides. She continued to dominate the proceedings as Sindhu struggled. The result was she jumped to a massive 15-2 advantage and despite some fightback from the Indian, Han comfortably took the match to the decider.

Sindhu gathered her wits in the third game to open up a massive 11-3 lead at the break, which proved decisive as Han just couldn't bridge the gap.



## Nagal drawn against world number 18 Khachanov in French Open 1st round

**PTI ■ PARIS**

India's top-ranked singles player Sumit Nagal was handed a tough opening round at the French Open as he is set to face world number 18 Karen Khachanov of Russia here on Sunday.

World No. 94 Nagal earned a direct entry into the main draw of the Grand Slam after his consistent performances on the tour. He became the first Indian male player to qualify for the French Open main draw since Prajnesh Gunneswaran in 2019.

Nagal, though, has not been in the best of form leading up to the clay Grand Slam. He lost to Holger Rune in the third round of the Monte Carlo Masters, before missing the Madrid and Rome Masters.

The 26-year-old then made first round exits from the Bordeaux Challenger and Geneva Open earlier this month.

On the other hand, Khachanov who has been seeded 18th, had reached the quarterfinals last year. He won the Qatar Open 250 in February and enjoys an impressive 21-7 record this season.

## Record breaking gymnast Oksana Chusovitina bid for ninth Olympics ends with injury

**AP ■ TASHKENT (UZBEKISTAN)**

Record-breaking 48-year-old gymnast Oksana Chusovitina says an injury has ended her attempt to qualify for what would have been her ninth Olympics.

Chusovitina said in a statement on Instagram that she had been injured while practicing her floor exercise ahead of the Asian championships in her home country of Uzbekistan. That was Chusovitina's last opportunity to qualify for the upcoming Paris Olympics.

"I will not be able to take part and I am very upset as I have been preparing for this competition for a long time," Chusovitina said in the statement Thursday. The competition was starting



Friday, and Chusovitina said she would be there to support the rest of the Uzbekistan team.

Chusovitina's long career is all the more striking in gymnastics, a sport where medalists are often in their teens and elite-level careers rarely last long. She has previously competed alongside

the Soviet Union, for which she won world championship gold in 1991 at the age of 16.

Only one female Olympian has competed at the Games more times than Chusovitina. Georgian shooter Nino Salukvadze marked her ninth Olympic appearance in Tokyo in 2021 and has qualified for this year's Games in Paris.

Chusovitina has repeatedly retired and un-retired over the decades and made no statement on her future following her latest injury. She has previously left open the possibility she might carry on competing even if she misses the Paris Olympics.

"If next year I can't qualify," Chusovitina said in September at the Asian Games, "maybe I will give up my career."



# DK BOOSTED ME WHEN I STRUGGLED IN IPL 2022: KOHLI

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Premier India batter Virat Kohli has paid tribute to Dinesh Karthik after his retirement at the end of RCB's IPL campaign, describing the veteran wicketkeeper-batter as a wise and honest person who lifted his spirits during a phase of struggle in the league's 2022 season.

The 38-year-old, who joined Royal Challengers Bengaluru from Kolkata Knight Riders in 2022 for his second stint after 2015, played his last IPL match on Wednesday when RCB were eliminated by Rajasthan Royals in the playoffs.

"Off the field, I have had some really nice and interesting conversations with him. He is a wise man, and has great knowledge about a lot of things, not just cricket," Kohli said in a special tribute video posted by RCB.

The little over 11-minute video features tributes from Karthik's wife, Dipika Pallikal Karthik; his personal mentor, Abhishek

Nayar; RCB assistant coach, Malolan Rangarajan; and fitness coach, Shanker Basu.

Kohli recalled the 2022 season when he averaged just 22.73 scoring 341 runs from 16 matches as they missed the final bus losing to Rajasthan Royals in the second qualifier.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my conversations with him. Even in that phase in 2022 when I did not have a great IPL season, I was really struggling for confidence," he recalled.

"He sat me down a couple of times and just gave me a very honest explanation of how he saw things and maybe I am not able to see them myself," Kohli added.

A veteran campaigner in the IPL, Karthik has been involved in all the editions of the league since the inaugural 2008 season and has represented six franchises, including leading KKR to the playoffs in 2018. He ended with 4,842 runs in 257 matches with 22 fifties.

"I just like his honesty, his courage to go and speak to



anyone about things that he really feels about. And that, I think, is the most special thing for me when it comes to Dinesh. "And that's something that I've always cherished about him. And that's why we get along really, really well."

**A CORRECT PLAYER:** Kohli also hailed Karthik as a technically "correct" and versatile batter.

"I always looked at Dinesh and felt like he was such a correct player technically that he could adapt to any kind of role that's been given to him, and I remember watching him in the 2013 season where he got 600 runs or something and he batted brilliantly at three.

"I saw him play shots which were like 'wow'. I think he's done brilliantly to switch and become a renowned finisher.

"...I wish him all the very best for all his future endeavours moving forward." Kohli hoped that Karthik would stay connected to the RCB franchise in some capacity.

"...Because his expertise when it comes to cricket is priceless. I think he's of great value to this franchise," he said.

**"HYPERACTIVE, CONFUSED PERSON":** Recalling his first meeting with Karthik during India's tour of South Africa in 2009, Kohli said at first, he found him to be a hyperactive and confused person moving all over the place.

"The first time I met him, I remember we were playing in South Africa if I am not wrong in the Champions Trophy 2009. It was the first time I shared the change room with Dinesh, and I found him to be very amusing, very... I would say hyperactive, confused person. "Most of the time, he was moving all over the place, never stopping. That was my first impression of Dinesh.

"He is an outstanding talent, brilliant batter to watch and my first impression and the present-day impression are not far — just that he has become wiser and calmed down a lot," Kohli added.

# No reason for Dhoni to stop playing: Kaif

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former India batter Mohammad Kaif feels there is no reason why Mahendra Singh Dhoni should not play the next season of the IPL, given his form, fitness and ability to play big shots with ease.

Speculation has been rife that Dhoni, who has led CSK to five IPL titles, could have played his last IPL season.

The former CSK skipper, who had undergone surgery to treat a knee injury issue last year, scored 161 runs in 73 balls at a strike rate of 220.55 this season. He was also good behind the stumps.

Kaif thinks Dhoni has enough left in the tank to keep playing.

"Personally, I don't think he's done, he could not win the game (last league match against RCB). In the last over after hitting a six, he got out. You could make out seeing his



body language that he seemed very disappointed not winning the game for CSK," Kaif, a cricket expert with Star Sports, told PTI Videos.

"Why he should not come back? He is fit, he is scoring runs and hitting sixes, and there's no reason to stop playing... It's up to him, we can't say with Dhoni what's his plan," added Kaif, regarded as one of India's greatest fielders.

20 points.

"He (Iyer) missed the whole IPL last year and KKR probably missed his captaincy in 2023. The way he is changing the bowlers, and picking his playing XI, he looks very calm under pressure.

"In a tournament like the IPL, you have to be very composed, you have to know what's happening in the game and Iyer has come a long way. He has become a much better captain now," opined Kaif.

Experts are also attributing KKR's success this season to Gautam Gambhir returning to the side as the team mentor but Kaif said the team's superb run had got a lot to do with how Iyer marshals his boys on the field.

"We always talk about (Gautam) Gambhir, but he can't enter the field... In the rope with the players. Iyer has been there with the players

and it will help him grow as a person and player.

"He missed out on the (T20) World Cup this year (beginning in the US and West Indies next month), but certainly it's great learning for him, captaining the team, leading it to the finals. He has a great future ahead," said Kaif.

Kaif said KKR were the overwhelming favourites to lift the IPL trophy this season given that they have quality bowlers and a balanced side, the two ingredients required to win.

"I think KKR is a very well-balanced side. Tournament-winning team has to have good bowlers, KKR has got the bowlers. You saw how (Mitchell) Starc bowled against (SRH in Qualifier 1), it's a balanced side. KKR has got all bases covered in terms of batting and bowling. They are the team to beat in IPL, they are way ahead."

# Shah denies approaching Aussies for coach job



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Thursday that he was approached to take over the role but said that he declined as it did not fit with his "lifestyle" right now.

Ponting told ICC review, "I've seen a lot of reports about it. Normally these things pop up on social media before you even know about them, but there were a few little one-on-one conversations during the IPL, just to get a level of interest from me as to whether I would do it."

"I'd love to be a senior coach of a national team, but with the other things that I have in my life and wanting to have a bit of time at home... everyone knows if you take a job working with the Indian team you can't be involved in an IPL team, so it would take that out of it as well," he said.

"Taking up the job of coaching India also implies spending 10-11 months away from home but Ponting said his family seemed ready for it.

"...I had a whisper to my son about it, and I said, 'Dad's been offered the Indian coaching job' and he said, 'Just take it, dad, we would love to move over there for the next couple of years'" he said.

"That's how much they love being over there and the culture of cricket in India, but right now it probably doesn't exactly fit into my lifestyle," Ponting said.

Meanwhile, Langer, who had remained noncommittal about applying for India coaching role after IPL clash between LSG and Mumbai Indians, said he would "never say never" but at the same time revealed receiving crucial advice from Lucknow skipper KL Rahul.

Langer told BBS Stumped Podcast, "It would be an amazing job. I also know that it's an all-encompassing role, and having done it for four years with the Australian team, honestly, it's exhausting.

And that's the Australian job." "You never say never. And the pressure of doing it in India... I was talking to KL Rahul and he said, 'You know, if you think there's pressure and politics in an IPL team, multiply that by a thousand, (that is) coaching India. That was a good bit of advice,' guess," Langer said.

"It would be an awesome job, but not for me at the moment," he added.

Former England and current Royal Challengers Bengaluru head coach Andy Flower had also ruled himself out of the race saying he is happy being involved in franchise cricket for now.

Chennai Super Kings chief executive Kasi Viswanathan has done the same for Stephen Fleming claiming the former New Zealand captain won't be keen on taking a job which requires him to work 'nine-ten months a year'.

Shah described the position of India's head coach as the most prestigious job in international cricket, saying it demands high level of professionalism given the kind of support the national side enjoys.

"When we talk about international cricket, no role is more prestigious than that of the Head Coach of the Indian Cricket Team. Team India commands the largest fan base globally, enjoying support that is truly unrivalled," he said.

"Our rich history, passion for the game make this one of the most lucrative jobs in the world. The role demands a high level of professionalism as one gets to nurture some of the best cricketers in the world and an assembly line of talented cricketers to follow.

"Catering to the aspirations of a billion fans is a huge honour and the BCCI will pick the right candidate, capable of propelling Indian cricket forward," Shah added.

## OTHER SPORTS

# Indian junior men hockey team loses 4-5 against Dutch local club

PTI ■ ANTWERP (BELGIUM)

Indian men's hockey team will hope to iron out the flaws ahead of the Paris Olympics, while the women's team under new skipper Salima Tete will look to overcome the disappointment of not qualifying for the Summer Games, when the gruelling European leg of the FIH Pro League commences here with matches against Argentina on Wednesday.

The men's team under drag-flicker Harmanpreet Singh is coming into the tournament following a 0-5 Test series whitewash at the hands of Australia and would look to make the most of the opportunity in Europe to get back to winning ways ahead of the Paris Games.

"Undoubtedly, we are focused on the Olympics but we also need to give our best to finish as champions (in Pro League) and secure direct qualification for the 2026 Hockey World Cup as well," said Harmanpreet, whose team is currently placed third with 15 points from eight Pro League games.

Netherlands are leading the charts with 26 points (12 matches), while Australia are on 20 points (8 matches).

"To achieve both these targets (doing well ahead of Olympics and secure direct qualification for 2026 World Cup), we will strive to give our all on the pitch and win all our matches," the skipper added.

Besides Argentina, the Indian men's team will also test their Olympic preparations against Belgium, Germany and Great Britain. The Indian women, currently placed sixth on the Pro League table, have a chance to climb up the table when they take on world No.7 Argentina on Wednesday.



The world No.6 side has earned eight points from an equal number of games in the Pro League home leg, registering victories against the United States and Australia.

Newly-appointed captain Salima Tete said the friendlies against South Africa in India earlier this month had helped her team prepare for the European leg of the Pro League.

"We played practice matches against South Africa (in India) to prepare for these Hockey Pro League matches. The point difference between us and second-placed China is just seven points," said Tete in a Hockey India release.

"We (will) aim to close this gap in the remaining matches against Argentina, Belgium, Germany, and Great Britain in a bid to finish as high as we can," she added. China are placed second on the table with 15 points from eight games, while leaders Netherlands are on 36 points with an all-win record in 12 games.

Following the matches against Argentina, the women's team will play Belgium on May 23, while the men's side will take on the hosts a day later. The women's and men's teams will face Belgium again on May 25. India women and men will end their first half of the European tour with matches against Argentina on May 26, before moving on to the final leg in London where they play Germany on June 1 and 8 and take on hosts Great Britain on June 2 and 9.

# Delhi HC appoints administrative committee for Equestrian Federation of India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has appointed an ad-hoc administrative committee under its retired judge to run the affairs of the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) following allegations of "impropriety" in its functioning.

Justice Tara V Ganju said, ordinarily, a court does not interfere in the administration of a national sports federation but when there is "clear impropriety" and the administration is being carried

on in an "arbitrary" or "perverse" manner, the situation cannot be ignored. The court said the ad-hoc administrative committee (AAC) shall have former high court judge Justice Najmi Waziri as its chairperson, former Chief Election Commissioner S Y Quraishi as observer/member and advocate Rohini Musa as member.

The order came on a petition by Rajasthan Equestrian Association.

"Pending the conduct of elections, EFI cannot be left

without any office bearers.. This Court cannot in good conscience leave the functioning of the EFI solely in the hands of those office bearer(s) whose tenure has expired and who are acting in a capricious manner and in violation of the directives of the court," said the court in an order passed on May 21.

"Accordingly, the interest of justice would be served if an ad-hoc Administrative Committee is appointed to supervise the administration of the Respondent No. 1/EFI," the court ordered.

# Atwal, Jeev open with 69s at seniors PGA Championships



PTI ■ BENTON HARBOR (US)

Indian golfers Arjun Atwal and Jeev Milkha Singh opened with identical rounds of 2-under 69 each and were on Tied-19th at the end of the first round at the KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship, one of the Majors for the Seniors, on the Champions Tour here.

As the Indian duo began strongly, leading the field in the USD 3.5 million seniors' event (over-50s), were Australian Richard Green and Englishman Richard Bland,

who shot 7-under 64 each at Harbor Shores.

Green hit all 13 fairways and 17 of the 18 greens in regulation en route to the 64.

Green shared the lead with Englishman Richard Bland, playing his first over-50s event. Bland showed great overall form and did not miss a fairway until the eighth hole, which was his 17th of the day. He was bogey free on his debut on the PGA TOUR Champions.

Defending champion Steve Stricker opened with a 5-under 66 and was among five players

with 66.

Jeev, playing from the first alongside Italian Emanuele Canonica (69) and Jeff Schmid (66), opened on the first with three pars and then had a great run. He birdied the fourth and then had three in a row from seventh to ninth to turn in an impressive 4-under.

On the back, he missed a couple of birdie chances but was hit by a double bogey on Par-4 12th and no more birdies or bogeys to finish with 69.

Atwal, the only Indian to have won on the main PGA TOUR, began on the 10th with a birdie and added a second on the 12th. He dropped three shots in a row from 16th to 18th and turned in 1-over.

On the back nine, Atwal birdied the first, third and ninth and bogeyed Par-4 sixth to finish in 69, while his playing partners Jake Reeves (89) and Kirk Triplett (75) struggled through the day.

Presidents Cup International team captain Mike Weir mixed six birdies with one bogey to open in 5-under 66 and was T-4. He played alongside Darren Clarke (67) and Ernie Els (70).