

RAJKOT GAMING ZONE CHARS 22 PEOPLE TO DEATH

PTI ■ RAJKOT

At least 22 persons, including children, were killed and three others injured in a massive fire on Saturday evening that raged in a game zone teeming with people enjoying a summer vacation outing in Gujarat's Rajkot city. Rescue operations are underway at the affected TRP game zone for more than four hours after the blaze erupted at a fibre dome constructed for gaming activities at around 4:30 pm, officials said. According to officials, the structure collapsed due to the huge fire. Several persons including children were playing games when the blaze erupted.



"The fire control room received a call at around 4:30 pm regarding the blaze at the game zone. Fire tenders and ambulances rushed to the spot to douse the flames. The fire caused the collapse of the structure, and debris is being cleared. So far we have

received a figure of 16 deaths," said Rajkot Collector Prabhav Joshi. Several persons, including children, were present at the spot due to the ongoing summer vacation and weekend and playing games when the tragedy struck.

After the fire broke out, Rajkot Police Commissioner Raju Bhargav told media persons that the cause of the blaze would be investigated and that a message had been issued to all the gaming zones in the city to close operations. Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel tweeted that the city administration has been instructed to carry out immediate rescue and relief operations in the fire incident at the game zone in Rajkot. "Instructions have been given to the Municipal Corporation and the administration for immediate rescue and relief operations in the fire incident in the game zone in Rajkot. It has been instructed to prioritise arrangements for immediate treatment of the injured," Patel tweeted.

BJD to form stable govt, asserts Naveen

Walks to polling booth to cast his vote

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Saturday said that BJD would win the elections with a thumping majority and form a very stable government in the State.

Patnaik walked to the Aerodrome Upper Primary School near his residence in Bhubaneswar to cast his vote.

"I request all voters, especially young voters, to come out and vote. I expect BJD to have a great victory both in the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. We will form a very stable government in the State," Patnaik said speaking to reporters after casting his vote.

Earlier in the day, 5T Chairman and BJD leader VK Pandian cast his vote at a polling booth in Bhubaneswar. He exercised his franchise by going to the booth in an auto-rickshaw.

After casting his vote,



Pandian appealed to the people to participate in the polling and increase the voting percentage.

"The auto association requested me; so, I came in an auto rickshaw," he told the media.

Many senior BJD and BJP leaders, including MP Aparajita Sarangi, Baijayant Panda, Bhatruhari Mahtab, Santrupt

Misra, Ranendra Pratap Swain and Sambit Patra cast their votes in their respective booths in the morning.

Chief Secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena, ACS Satyabrata Sahu, DGP Arun Kumar Sarangi, CEO Nikunja Bihari Dhal and many senior officers also exercised their franchise by standing in the queues.



People wait in a queue to cast their votes at a polling booth during the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections, in South Kashmir, on Saturday PTI

Bengal shows the way, rest of India just votes

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With 'urban apathy' casting its shadow on the sixth phase of polling, the voter turnout stood at 60 per cent as of 8 pm on Saturday in 58 constituencies in six States and two Union Territories amid adverse weather. West Bengal recorded the highest turnout at 78.19 per cent amid sporadic incidents of violence reported from some areas while Jammu and Kashmir recorded voter turnout at 52.28 per cent, highest in the last 35 years. In the 2019 last general elections, the erstwhile Anantnag seat saw a meagre turnout of 8.9 per cent. However, the boundaries of the constituency extended across the Pir Panjal to include Jammu's Rajouri and Poonch. The three parliamentary constituencies in the valley namely Srinagar (38.49 per cent), Baramulla (59.1 per cent) and Anantnag-Rajouri (51.35 per cent as of 5 pm) recorded voter turnout which is highest in many decades. Healthy polling continued in Anantnag and Rajouri in Jammu and Kashmir which recorded 44.41 percent. Encouraged by the voter turnout in Jammu and Kashmir the Chief Election Commission Rajiv Kumar said the Election Commission will "very soon" initiate the process of holding assembly polls in the Union Territory.

3rd-phase elections Odisha records 60.07% polling by 6 pm

Begunia registers highest 65.70%

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The third phase polling in Odisha recorded a voter turnout of 60.07 per cent by 6 pm. According to sources in the Chief Electoral Officer's (CEO) office, the Begunia Assembly constituency had the highest polling of 65.70%.

While 64.80% of voters cast their votes in Jayadev constituency, Bhubaneswar-Central registered the lowest turnout in the State with 44.12% polling. The Khordha Assembly seat saw 58.12% voters exercising their franchise while Jatni registered 52.40% turnout till 5 pm. The final figure would be announced after completion of

polling in all booths and getting the data from those centres. The CEO is likely to release the final figure on Sunday. The third phase polling in the state began at 7 am in six Lok Sabha seats of Puri, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar and Sambalpur, and 42 Assembly segments under these Parliamentary constituencies.

Kejriwal cuts nosy Pak ex-Minister to size



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday chastised former Pakistan Minister Chaudhry Fawad Hussain after he called for the defeat of "forces of hate and extremism" in the Lok Sabha elections, saying the polls are India's internal matter and that India will not tolerate interference by the "biggest sponsors of terrorism". In the sixth of the seven-phase elections, 58 parliamentary constituencies, including seven in Delhi, went to polls on Saturday. After casting his vote, Kejriwal, who is the AAP's national convenor, shared a picture on X of his family members showing fingers marked in ink and said he voted against "dictatorship, inflation and unemployment". Sharing Kejriwal's post on X with the hashtags "MorePower" and "IndiaElection2024", Hussain said, "May peace and harmony defeat forces of hate and extremism." Minutes after Hussain's post, Kejriwal hit




back at him, saying his post was unnecessary. "Chaudhry Sahib, the people of my country and I are fully capable of handling our issues. Your comment is not needed. The situation in Pakistan is very bad right now. You take care of your country," Kejriwal said on X. In another post, the Chief Minister said the elections are India's internal matter and the country will "not tolerate interference by the biggest sponsors of terrorism". Responding to Kejriwal's posts, Hussain said, "CM sb! Indeed electioneering is

your own issue but hope you will appreciate extremism be it in Pakistan or India is a borderless phenomenon and dangerous for everyone be it BD (Bangladesh), India or Pakistan so everyone with some conscience must be concerned... (sic)." "The situation in Pakistan is very far from ideal but individuals must strive for a better society wherever they are," he said. Hitting out at Kejriwal, the BJP alleged that Pakistan has also jumped in support of the AAP leader's politics of corruption. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said his party has been saying "Kejriwal is hand in glove with the country's enemies". "Chaudhry Fawad Hussain is speaking now. He had also written a social media post on Kejriwal's release. Five phases of elections have already been conducted but no remarks were made, when polls are now being held in Delhi, the statement from Pakistan has come. This shows Kejriwal has the backing of Pakistan," Sachdeva told reporters.




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VOTE FOR SANKHA TWICE

ONE VOTE FOR MP 

ONE VOTE FOR MLA 

Published by Dr Sasmit Patra, General Secretary, Biju Janata Dal

3rd phase of polling in State Polling agent, woman voter die during voting

Violence, EVM glitches reported

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The third phase of polling in Odisha on Saturday was disrupted by violence at Athagarh in Cuttack district and EVM glitches at some places like Brahmagiri and Banki. A polling agent was also suspected to have died due to

sunstroke. An elderly voter also died while standing in a queue

Violence was reported from a booth at Athagarh as two groups clashed. Four person sustained injuries in the clash at a booth at Radhagobindapur.

As per initial reports, the clash erupted soon after BJD leader Ranendra Pratap Swain had gone to vote. Sources said it was Swain's own panchayat

and the two groups were engaged in verbal duel first and later attacked each other with chairs and even exchanged blows.

A polling agent died soon after falling sick during polling at a booth in Hindol in Dhenkanal district. He was identified as Sukadev Patnaik from Bahalunda. He fell unconscious and was rushed to a hospital, where the doctors

declared him dead. It is suspected that Patnaik died due to sunstroke.

An elderly woman voter died while she had come to exercise her franchise at a booth in Nayagarh. She was identified as Kumuduni Dalei (65) of Patharpunji village. She fell unconscious while standing in a queue.

Tension also prevailed at a booth at Gadarundanga in

‘Ratna Bhandar missing key guilty to be punished’

Smriti Irani accuses Pandian of remote-controlling govt

PNS ■ PARADIP/ KENDRAPADA/ BALESWAR

Union Minister Smriti Irani, addressing a public meeting at Kujang in Jagatsinghpur district on Saturday, lashed out at the Odisha Government.

Irani said a BJP government would not spare anyone if found guilty in the Shreemandir Ratna Bhandar key missing case.

“I am here to warn the remote-controlled BJD government that



as soon as Lotus blooms in Odisha, the Puri Jagannath Temple's Ratna Bhandar missing key report will be out in public domain. And those found guilty will not be spared by the Narendra Modi government.” Without taking name, Irani

called former IAS officer-turned politician VK Pandian a ‘Thekedar’ (contractor/agent) and accused him of giving full credit to the BJD regime for the free rice and rations being sent by the Modi government for about 3.2 crore people of Odisha.

Accusing Pandian of running a remote-controlled government in the State, she said Naveen Patnaik has been held captive and does not even have the right to speak. She appealed to people to vote for the BJP and ensure a “free future of Odisha”.

Later, speaking at a meeting in Aul of Kendrapada district, Irani questioned why the people's demand for a medical college in the district has not been fulfilled. She urged the people to vote for the BJP for a double-engine government for the development of Odisha. Later, she also addressed a meeting in Remuna of Baleswar district.

In Ganjam 2 injured in firing at cashew orchard

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

Two persons were injured when unidentified miscreants opened fire at them in Polasara under the Buguda police station of Ganjam district on Saturday.

The injured were identified as Abakash Jani and Raghunath Jani. The duo was plucking cashew apples at an orchard when they were shot at.

Locals, hearing gunshots, rushed to the spot; but by then, the miscreants had fled from there. While one of the injured suffered bullet wounds on the head, his associate was hit in the leg.

They shifted the injured duo to a local hospital. Getting information, a Buguda police team rushed to the spot and began a probe. But the motive behind the crime and the identities of the accused were yet to be ascertained.

Who's your CM face, Pandian asks BJP



PNS ■ JAJPUR

Addressing an election meeting at Sukinda in Jajpur district on Saturday, BJD leader VK Pandian dared the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to name its Chief Ministerial candidate.

“For the past 24 years, they have been searching for a Chief Ministerial face. And they will not be able to do so. If they so declare, the num-

ber of their seats will drop below 10,” he claimed.

Minster Pritiranjan Ghadai said, “The BJD government has always stood by the poor and weaker sections of the society. This effort will continue to make Odisha the number one State in the country.”

“Neither a double-engine nor single government, only the Naveen Patnaik engine runs in Odisha,” Ghadai remarked.

BJD govt has ‘anti-tribal mentality’: Jual

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

BJP leader Jual Oram on Saturday alleged that though the BJD government is in power for 25 long years, it has adopted an “anti-tribal mentality”.

This anti-tribal mentality was evident when the State Cabinet decided to hand over tribal land to industrialists and capitalists through the Tribal



Advisory Council (TAC), of which Chief Minister is the Chairman, he said at a Press meet here.

“I appeal to the people to

give a befitting reply to the BJD in this election,” he said.

The Adivasis are to benefit by receiving funding support from the SC ST Finance Cor-

poration at a lower-interest rate. But it is a matter of regret that this PSU has stopped lending, alleged Oram.

Similarly, the Tribal Development Corporation (TDCC) is supposed to collect minor forest produces, but it has failed in its agenda, said he.

Besides, he said, the State Government is not ensuring fair price to the tribals for minor forest produce (MFP).

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Tension also prevailed at a booth at Gadarundanga in Brahmagiri over EVM glitch.

Sudden ban on mobile phones in booths decried

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Resentment brewed among voters over ‘last-minute’ restrictions on carrying mobile phones inside polling booths in Odisha on the third phase of voting on Saturday. Though there are prescribed rules for restrictions on mobile phones, many voters rued that they were unaware and had to return as there was no provision to keep their phones safe inside or near the booth.

Earlier in the day, the Additional Chief Electoral Officer informed that voters and polling agents are strictly prohibited from carrying mobile phones inside polling booths.

“I had no information in this regard. There was no spe-



cific place to keep mobile phones at the booth where I exercised my franchise. There is a rule not to carry cell phones. Such inconvenience could have been avoided if the voters had prior information,” said a voter.

According to observers, it was certainly a contradictory proposition as on one hand

selfie points were set up and on the other hand restrictions were clamped on mobile phones.

“It is unfortunate if a voter is forced to return due to mobile phone restriction. This may affect voters’ turnout. The voters had no prior information regarding the restriction. Ignorance of law cannot be an ex-

cuse, but why this information was not shared earlier when other information is being shared,” argued an observer.

An elderly citizen said, “Had they informed us earlier, we would not have brought mobile phones. It is practically impossible for us to go back, keep our mobile phones and come back to cast vote.”

With wheelchair or oxygen support, elderly cast votes Cyclone to trigger rains in State

Set example for young voters

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In Odisha's third phase of polling on Saturday, elderly voters, some on wheelchairs and others with oxygen support, exemplified commitment to democracy, setting an example for the young voters to ensure that they also take part in the biggest festival of the democracy.

This phase will influence the outcomes for six Lok Sabha and 42 Assembly seats.

“Many people think that it doesn't matter if they do not vote. However, they are wrong as it is everybody's responsibility to exercise their franchise,” said an elderly voter.



Another elderly voter who also had discharged duty as a Presiding Officer said, “Earlier, we used to spend three days for conducting polling in a particular area and things were totally different. But things have changed now and every focus is being

given on facilities for voters.”

An 82-year-old voter said, “I queued before a polling booth in Bhubaneswar sharp at 7 am. I always make it a point to vote first and get to other works later.”

A patient was seen visiting

the Raj Bhawan UP School in Bhubaneswar with an oxygen concentrator to exercise her franchise despite her critical illness. “I think it is my duty towards the development of the nation. I am facing problems in breathing; and despite this, I

turned up for the voting,” she said.

The patient's husband said, “My wife is under treatment since 1998 and she is using oxygen concentrator. All facilities were good here that allowed us to vote on priority.”



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Heavy to very heavy rainfall, accompanied by strong winds, is likely to lash coastal areas of north Odisha under the influence of Cyclone ‘Remal’ which has formed over the east-central Bay of Bengal, said the IMD’ Regional

Office here on Saturday.

“Today morning, a depression developed in the Bay of Bengal. It has slowly started moving in north to north-east directions. As it starts moving northwards on Sunday, it will intensify and develop into a cyclone storm. And by tomorrow night, it will develop into

a severe cyclonic storm,” said the weather office.

“As a result, light to moderate rainfall will begin tomorrow. On May 26 and 27, coastal areas of north Odisha can witness isolated heavy rainfall and the wind speed will be 40 to 50 kmph, said the IMD.

Bizarre rape case using mobile App shakes the State

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

In Majhauri police station area of Sidhi district, three miscreants raped more than 7 college students by luring them through the voice changing magic voice app. The accused used to pretend to be a college teacher through the app and talk in a woman's voice and called them to isolated places in the name of asking for documents for scholarship. To avoid any doubt, they used to tell in advance that a boy would come on a bike to pick them up at the designated place and would take them to the teacher. All the victims of the case belong to the ST category. The accused used to target those college girl students where scholarship is available.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said that those who commit such condemnable acts are enemies of the society. Strict action will be taken against the accused. A 9-member SIT team has also been formed to investigate this matter. At the same time, Congress has cornered the government in this matter. When a victim complained to the police, the investigation revealed this. Police traced the location and caught the main accused. During interrogation, information was received about the involvement of two more people. According to police officers, till now the accused have confessed to raping 7 girl students. 4 girl students have lodged FIR. According to police, the number of victims

could be even higher. Interrogation of the accused is going on. Police have arrested the main accused Brajesh Prajapati (30) and his associates Rahul Prajapati and Sandeep Prajapati. Brajesh Prajapati has married twice. He left his first wife. He has a daughter from his second wife. The accused is a laborer by profession, but he got information about such a voice changing app on YouTube and installed it on his mobile. After this they started targeting girl students. One of the four girl students who complained of rape told the police that the rapists used to cover their faces with clothes. But the one who commits rape for the first time has burn marks on both his hands. According to what the

victim told the police, then with the help of location and other evidence, the police arrested the main accused and his associates. Rewa IG has formed a 9-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) under the leadership of Kusmi SDOP Roshni Singh Thakur. Rewa IG has formed a 9-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) under the leadership of Kusmi SDOP Roshni Singh Thakur. Accused Brajesh and his friends had extracted phone numbers of girl students from the WhatsApp group of a government college in Sidhi district. Ranjana used to call them several times posing as madam and take them into confidence. The accused told that they had been doing all this for three months.

However, the police do not believe this. IG Rewa Range Mahendra Singh Sikarwar said that till now the accused have confessed to raping seven girl students, but this number may also increase. It is being verified. The police headquarters has been informed about this. Rewa IG has formed a 9-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) under the leadership of Kusmi SDOP Roshni Singh Thakur. Apart from Roshni Singh, the team includes 9 members including Majhauri police station in-charge SI Deepak Singh, SI Preeti Verma, SI Kedar Parouha, SI Divya Prakash Tripathi, Head Constable Mahendra Patle, Constable Vivek Dwivedi, Constable Pratiksha Tiwari, Constable Pradeep Mishra.



Charred remains after a fire broke out in a biscuit factory in Kabad Khana locality in Bhopal on Saturday.

Pioneer photo

RMNH organising study programs for students

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Regional Museum of Natural History, Bhopal is organizing various environmental educational programmes under Summer Nature Study Programme-Green Teen for the students of class 8th to 10th. In continuation of the environmental educational programmes, 'Study Visit of Solid Waste Management Plant' at Thuakheda, Bhopal was arranged for the participants on 25th May, 2024. During the visit, Sanitary Inspector of the Transfer Station, Thuakheda, Ms. Veena Agrawal detailed about management of Dry and Wet Waste. She informed that hardboard, plastic, glass, metals, thermacol being removed from Dry waste and sold for recycling and rest of wet waste is being transferred for making of fertilizer and dry



waste for recycling.

In next session, In-charge of Construction & Demolition Unit, Shri Amit Shrivastava told that Bhopal municipal corporation established a crusher plant, a fly ash brick machine plant, one paver block making plant, where fly ash bricks and paver block are produced. He told that steel, wood, plastic, soil, concrete are segregated from construction and

demolition waste and dumped separately in a yard. Pure concrete crushed into small parts & dust. Mixture of concrete, dust, cement, water & fly ash used to produce the bricks and paver blocks. During the visit, participants understand how we can go forward towards zero waste society. Shri Manik Lal Gupta, Scientist-C was the coordinator of this programme.

Seminar on 'Leadership and management in defence industry' at vehicle factory

Jabalpur: A special seminar on "Leadership and Management in Defense Industry" was organized for all the officers at Vehicle Factory Jabalpur. Lieutenant General MK Das, MB Area (Retd) was invited as a special speaker in the seminar. In his speech of about an hour, MK Das ji explained about the rapid changes taking place in the defense industry as well as the needs of all the armies and state police. He said that we are developing rapidly and trying to become self-reliant in the field of defence. He said that the defense industry is not just for profit, national interest is attached to it. Therefore, we have to prepare defense products with more seriousness and promptness. He said that there is immense potential in the defense industry in the fields of drones,

mobility and naval transport and these areas are expanding rapidly. We should keep changing our working style, techniques and our approach keeping in view the demand of time. He also expressed his views regarding corporatization of armament factories. During his speech, he praised the commendable work being done by the Chief General Manager of the factory Mr. Sanjeev Kumar Bhola and all other officers and employees. Describing the future of VFJ as bright, he said that it will soon play the role of leader in the field of mobility. After his lecture, all the officers also got an opportunity to have one to one discussion with Das ji. During the discussion, Gaurav Dixit Working Manager, SP Kushwaha Working Manager, AK MK Das ji gave it.

Bakery in old categorised market catches fire

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

In Bhopal, a two-storey building of a bakery making biscuits and toast-bread burst into flames at 5.30 am on Saturday. The flames were so intense that 25 firefighters and water tankers were required to pacify the fire in 5 hours. The fire could be completely controlled by 10 am, for this the front part of the building also had to be demolished. The incident took place in the Old Categorised Market area of the city. Due to the narrow street and dense settlement, there was a fear of the fire spreading to the nearby houses. The bakery owner claims that goods worth Rs 80 lakh were burnt. The building also became dilapidated. The fire spread from the electric pole to the bakery. When people passed by the

bakery in the morning, they saw smoke rising from the electric pole and the bakery shed. After this the fire brigade was informed. Five fire tenders from Naya Kabadkhana area, Fatehgarh, Pul Bogda and Bairagarh reached the spot. After this, 20 more fire brigades were pressed into service. According to fire brigade personnel Nausahad Khan, the flames were brought under control by 8.30 am, but the fire kept smoldering from time to time. Items like oil, sugar, flour were kept in the bakery, due to which the fire spread rapidly. Bakery owner Mazhar Ali said that both the big ovens were burnt in the fire. One was bought for Rs 12 lakh, the other for Rs 6.25 lakh around 1500 trays were also burnt. Raw material (flour, sugar, oil etc) worth Rs 9 lakh was

loaded. There has been a total loss of Rs 80 lakh. The owner claimed that nothing was insured and opened the business by taking a loan. The fire destroyed everything. According to Mazhar, there is an electricity pole adjacent to the bakery. Sparking was happening in this. The electricity connection in the bakery was taken from this pole. The fire from the pole reached the cable and then spread to the bakery oven through the cable. There is oil in the oven. The back was filled with wood and goods. Due to this the fire spread rapidly. To completely control the fire, the front part of the building had to be demolished. Work goes on day and night in this bakery. In the night on Friday no one was at work which saved them from any injury or casualty at the bakery.



Children participate in a musical competition during a summer camp at Swami Vivekanand Library in Bhopal on Saturday.

Pioneer photo

BMHRC issues advisory, treating for heat wave conditions

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

In view of the increasing heat, Bhopal Memorial Hospital and Research Centre (BMHRC) has issued advisory to the citizens. The city is in the grip of heat-wave, it is advised to avoid exposure to the sun between 12 PM to 4 PM. If it's necessary to step out for essential tasks, ensure to cover your head. Consume fluids before heading out into the sun. Prevent dehydration by keeping yourself hydrated and always carrying a water bottle. Keep electrolyte-enriched water at home and consume it if signs of dehydration are observed. Wear light, loose, and comfortable clothing and refrain from wearing synthetic and dark-colored clothes. This information is provided to the patients visiting Health Centers 1 to 4 at Bhopal Memorial Hospital and Research Centre (BMHRC).



ORS packets were also distributed to them. Dr Manisha Shrivastav, Director In-charge, BMHRC, said that there is currently a heatwave in effect across Bhopal. The onset of summer has brought an increase in cases of heat-related illnesses such as stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea, and sunburn. In light of this, an awareness campaign about heat and heatwave prevention is being

conducted at all health centers. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt of India is also constantly making people aware to protect against Heat wave. The Ministry has also issued guidelines in this regard. People are being informed about measures to protect themselves from the heat. Approximately 700 ORS packets were distributed to patients. Awareness programs for heatwave prevention will

be organized in all other health centers next week. Other Heatwave Prevention Measures:- Always carry water and ensure hydration, Provide shade to animals and ensure they have access to an adequate amount of water, in extreme heat, cool the body with cold water or take multiple showers. Avoid bathing immediately after exposure to sunlight and hot winds, consume fewer high-calorie, protein-rich foods and limit the intake of alcohol, tea, coffee, etc, consume water, buttermilk, ORS solution, or homemade drinks like lassi, lemon water, mango juice, etc., to stay hydrated and fresh, maintain cleanliness in food and pay attention to water and shade, Names and Locations of BMHRC Health Centers- Kanchi Chola, Station Bazar, Chandbad, Tila Jamalpur, Ginnori, Central Library, Karond and Bal Vihar.

8 districts record temperatures above 45 degree Celcius in MP

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Over 8 districts have reported day temperatures above 45 degree celsius. Rajgarh and Ratlam recorded day temperatures above 46 degree celsius. In the wake of intense hot conditions, electricity maintenance work at several places have been suspended by the department. Nautapa has started from today 25th May with the Sun entering Rohini Nakshatra from Kritika. It is extremely hot throughout the state. There will be intense heat till June 2, because the sun's rays will fall directly on the earth. There is a red alert of heat wave in Guna, Ashoknagar and Niwari on the very first day. Due to extreme heat in Bhopal, electricity maintenance work has been postponed till May 28. Industrial coolers have been installed to cool the transformers on the LIG grid in Indore. Even in Mandasaur, fans had to be installed to cool the transformer. Due to the heat in Shajapur, the health of a 70 year old man deteriorated. This was the reason of his death. Here, in Malanpur of Bhind, smoke started coming out from the engine of a bus due to the

heat. The bus was immediately evacuated. The temple committee has installed coolers in Nandi Hall for the devotees reaching Ujjain to have darshan of Mahakal. Water is being poured on the roads in the temple premises. Here, patients in Guna District Hospital have to carry fans from home. Fountains have been installed in the cow shed in Dewas. Senior scientist of IMD Bhopal, Dr. Vedprakash Singh said, there is a severe heat alert in the state till May 31. There will be intense heat in Gwalior, Chambal, Indore-Ujjain divisions. The effect of heat wave, i.e. hot winds, is expected in other districts also. Shopkeepers are continuously spraying water on flowers at the bus stand in Chhindwara. Vijay Soni of Phool Bhandar told that due to heat, flower garlands wither quickly. To avoid damage, water has to be sprayed. Still there is loss. In Tikamgarh, the mercury was recorded at 44 degrees on the first day of Nautapa. Due to the heat, smoke started coming out from the DP installed under the transformer near State Bank at 4 pm. After some time sparks started coming out.

Heat stroke ward in distt hospital

Ujjain: Keeping in view the increasing temperature and extreme heat in Ujjain district, on the instructions of Ujjain Collector Neeraj Kumar Singh, a heat stroke ward has been created in the district hospital for quick treatment of patients affected by heat stroke or heat stroke. This seven bedded heat stroke ward is equipped with necessary facilities. On Saturday, Collector Singh reached the district hospital and inspected the heat stroke ward. He took information from the Civil Surgeon District Hospital about the arrangements at the heat stroke ward and the treatment of patients affected by heat. Civil Surgeon Verma said that 24x7 medical and other staff arrangements have been made for the treatment of patients in the said ward. There is also adequate availability of medicines required for the treatment of heat stroke. Two additional beds have also been arranged in the ICU ward for the treatment of serious patients. During this time, Collector Singh also inspected the general ward and gave instructions to provide better treatment to the patients. During the inspection, Civil Surgeon District Hospital PN Verma and other officers were present.

Ensure availability of adequate quantity of fertilizer: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said that an adequate quantity of fertilizer should be available at all places for Kharif. It should be ensured that the possibility of black marketing does not arise anywhere. Constant contact is being made with the Central Government to provide adequate fertilizer in the state. He said that farmers should be encouraged to use balanced fertilizer NPK. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav was reviewing agricultural inputs in Mantralaya. Chief Secretary Smt. Veera Rana, Agriculture Production Commissioner Shri Ashok Baranwal, Principal Secretary Cooperative Smt. Deepali Rastogi and other officers were present at the meeting. Chief Minister Yadav sought information about the demand for urea, DAP, NPK, SSP and MOP fertilizers in the state, the quantity received so far and the distribution system. Information about the availability of seeds of paddy, Kodo, Kutki, maize, jowar, millet, urad, groundnut, soybean, cotton, etc. was also given in the

Constant contact is being made with the Central Government to provide adequate fertilizer in the state

meeting. Chief Minister Yadav said that the process of honours and rewarding the farmers who produce good quality crops should also be started. Chief Minister Yadav said that farmers should be motivated to increase the use of natural fertilizers in the state. A system should be developed to help the farmers use bio-fertilizers so that the farmers come forward to buy organic products. There is a need to motivate farmers to grow three anna by coordinating animal husbandry and composting. This will help in maintaining a balanced crop cycle and ensure fertility of the land for a long time. Chief Minister Yadav said that for the safety of cows and their proper care, initiatives should be taken at the village level with gauzeva sangathans and socio-religious institutions.



Senior Congress leader and In-charge of party's Lok Sabha election affairs JP Dhanopia during a training programme for party workers ahead of the counting of votes for Lok Sabha elections, at PCC headquarters in Bhopal on Saturday

Pioneer photo

Three steal goods from moving truck in Madhya Pradesh

Bhopal: A video of three men stealing goods from a moving truck in Madhya Pradesh has gone viral on social media. The incident was caught on camera as a man driving at a slight distance from the truck between the Dewas-Shajapur route on the Agra-Mumbai highway recorded it from his car. The video of the robbery, in fact, is reminiscent of a Hindi film scene. In the video, a man was seen riding

ing a bike just behind the truck while his accomplices were tasked with stealing the goods. In order to do so, the two men climbed on top of the truck and cut the tarpaulin sheet that covered the goods. Moments later, a loaded box was extracted that one of them threw onto the road. Both of them, thereafter, climbed down the truck and meticulously stepped onto the pillion seat of the bike that the man was riding.

As the truck moved on, the bike slowed down so that the men could collect the box that was lying on the road. Madhya Pradesh Police has said that such similar incidents have been reported from Dewas and Tarana. Bheem Singh Patel, SHO of Maksi police station of Madhya Pradesh's Shajapur district, however said that he has not received any information regarding the aforementioned incident.

Will soon start process of holding Assembly polls in JK: EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Given the healthy trend of voting in Jammu and Kashmir in the Lok Sabha polls, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said here on Saturday the poll body will "very soon" initiate the process of holding Assembly polls in the Union Territory.

He also said the people of Jammu and Kashmir deserve their Government.

Responding to a question on the turnout in various seats of Jammu and Kashmir and if assembly elections could be held soon, Chief Election Commissioner said the poll panel is very encouraged by people's participation in the Parliamentary polls.

"It's music to (my) ears. People -- youth, women -- are happily turning out in large numbers (to vote). The roots of democracy are being further strengthened, people are participating," he said. They



deserve their government. We will initiate that process very soon ... very encouraged to do this," the CEC added. Announcing the schedule for the Lok Sabha elections in March, Kumar said holding assembly and parliamentary elections simultaneously was not practical due to logistical and security reasons. Whenever Assembly elections are held in Jammu and Kashmir, they will be the first since the August 2019 abrogation of Article 370 of the

Constitution and the division of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories. The electoral exercise in Jammu and Kashmir is usually spread over a month. Following a delimitation exercise, the number of assembly seats has gone up from 83 to 90, excluding those allocated to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. In December, the Supreme Court directed the poll panel to hold assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir by September 30.

CPM, CPI leaders vote, appeal voters to exercise franchise

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leaders from the Left parties LCPI (M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, polit bureau members Brinda Karat and Prakash Karat, and CPI leader Annie Raja were among the leaders who cast their votes in Delhi on Saturday and appealed to voters to exercise their franchise. The Left leaders also expressed confidence in the Opposition INDIA Bloc emerging victorious in the ongoing polls. "I voted for India, for my country. I voted for democracy, unity of my country and my Constitution. The people of India will win. Therefore India will win. That is what I hope, I expect, and am sure of. The Prime Minister of India himself, every day he speaks only to sharpen communal polarisation... The Election Commission has to take cognisance. Unfortunately, it is not doing so. But the people of India are opposing it," said Yechury. Annie Raja, who is in the fray from Kerala's Wayanad seat

against Congress' Rahul Gandhi, cast her vote at a polling booth in New Delhi's Sanchar Bhawan. "This election is a crucial election for the country, the people and their constitutional rights. So it is a historic election in that way... Now few seats are left, but in those constituencies, I appeal to the voters that they all vote for the INDIA alliance candidates," Annie Raja said. "The INDIA alliance is hoping and we are working to defeat the present communal, fascist government, and we are pretty confident we will win the election and form the government," she said, adding that the Left Front is also looking at increasing its tally, including in Kerala where Congress-led United Democratic Front is its main Opposition. Brinda Karat, who cast her vote at a polling station at St Columba's School in New Delhi, said she had to wait for almost an hour to cast her vote as the battery of the EVM control unit at her polling booth "drained out". The Election Commission, howev-

er, said voting was halted only for 15 minutes due to the battery issue and was resumed later.

Raising concerns over the arrangements Brinda Karat said, "I have written a complaint here. How is it that in the morning at 9 am the battery of the machine is down? What are the arrangements that they have made?" she said. Former CPI (M) general secretary and politburo member Prakash Karat said, "I voted today in defence of democracy, and against dictatorship because this is a very important election for the country," he said. Brinda alleged she had to wait for almost an hour to cast her vote as the battery of the EVM control unit at her polling booth "drained out". She said she had to wait for around 50 minutes before she could cast her ballot, expressing concerns over arrangements made by the Election Commission.

Priyanka confident of INDIA Bloc win

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday said unemployment and price rise are the "biggest issues" in the country and exuded confidence that the INDIA bloc will emerge victorious in the Lok Sabha elections, with an undercurrent in its favour. She made the remarks here after casting her ballot in the morning. Exuding confidence that the Opposition INDIA bloc will emerge victorious in the elections, she said price rise and unemployment are the "biggest issues" for everyone in the country. Asked about Congress leaders voting for AAP candidates and vice versa, she said, "Setting aside our differences, we are voting for our Constitution and democracy. I am proud of it." Later, she told reporters that there is an undercurrent and people have the feeling that their concerns have not been

looked into. "BJP leaders talk about all kinds of things but do not discuss the main issues of unemployment and price rise. People are fed up now," the Congress general secretary said. Asked what is working in favour of the Congress, Priyanka Gandhi said, "We are talking about people's issues since the beginning and this is what we have been campaigning on and our manifesto also talks about." Priyanka Gandhi's husband Robert Vadra, their daughter Miraya Vadra and son Raihan Vadra also cast their ballots. "I want people to come and vote, that's my only message," Miraya Vadra said after casting her vote for the first time. Voting for the sixth and penultimate phase of the Lok Sabha elections are being held on Saturday in 58 constituencies in six states and two Union Territories, including all seven seats in Delhi and the Jangal Mahal region of West Bengal.

Vice Admiral Gurcharan takes over as NDA Commandant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice Admiral Gurcharan Singh assumed the appointment of Commandant, National Defence Academy (NDA) on Saturday from Vice Admiral Ajay Kocchar. An alumnus of the National Defence Academy (Khadakwasla), he was commissioned into the Indian Navy in 1990, defence ministry said here.

The Flag Officer has held several appointments, both afloat and ashore. As a specialist in Gunnery and Missiles, he has served onboard Indian Naval Ships Ranjit and Prahar. He holds the distinction of being part of the commissioning crew of three Indian constructed warships, viz, INS Brahmaputra/ as Gunnery Officer, INS Shivalik/ as Executive Officer, and INS Kochi/ as Commanding Officer.

He has also commanded INS Vidyut and INS Khukri. He has been an instructor at INS Dronacharya (Gunnery School) and the Deputy



Commandant of Naval War College, Goa. His staff tenures include appointments at Directorate of Personnel/ NHQ, as the Assistant Chief of Personnel (HRD), Directorate of Naval Intelligence/ NHQ and Indian Naval Work-up Team. On 29 November 2022, he took over as the Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet. During this tenure, the fleet maintained high tempo of

operational preparedness with a laser sharp focus on the mission of 'Ordnance on Target. On elevation to the rank of Vice Admiral on 15 Jan 2024, the flag Officer was appointed as Controller Personnel Service wherein various initiatives were undertaken to improve working condition of personnel and naval community. He was awarded the Admiral Katar? Trophy for standing

'First in Overall Order of Merit of his batch during ab initio training. Under his command, INS Khukri was awarded the Chief of Naval Staff 'Unit Citation' in December 2011 for overall operational effectiveness and successful conduct of anti-piracy operations. He has also been awarded the FOC-in-C Commendation (2002), the Nao Sena Medal (2020), and Ati Vishist Seva Medal (2024). His academic qualifications include an MSc and MPhil (Defence & Strategic Studies). In addition to the Staff Course at DSSC Wellington, Higher Command at Naval War College, and NDC courses in India, he has attended the Maritime Intelligence Course at National Intelligence University (NIU), Washington, and the United Nations Staff Officers Course (UNSOC) at Stockholm, Sweden. With Vice Admiral Gurcharan Singh at the helm of affairs, the National Defence Academy will gain immensely from his vast experience and exposure in all arenas of operations, training, and human resource management.

Chauhan bats for joint efforts to utilise resources for training

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan visited Aircraft and Systems Testing Establishment (ASTE) and Air Force Test Pilots School (AFTPS) in Bengaluru and underscored the need to further enhance the joint efforts to efficiently utilise the scarce resources of the nation for training. He also urged all officers to continue exhibiting professional excellence towards bolstering the operational might of the nation, Defence Ministry said here on Saturday while giving details about the CDS visit on Friday. As part of his tour, General Chauhan was briefed on the ongoing trials at ASTE and flight test training activities of AFTPS alongside aspects of the organisational roles of these unique institutions of IAF. He was conducted around the facilities available at ASTE and AFTPS with the demon-



stration of major indigenous projects as part of Aatm Nirbharata and the training infrastructure. The CDS also visited the well-archived ASTE museum which houses artifacts depicting significant historical milestones along the five-decade-long journey of ASTE and AFTPS. The CDS presided over the valedictory function of the 46 Flight Test Course, which was conducted at AFTPS. A total of 17 students have graduated.

This event was hosted by the ASTE as the traditional Suranjan Das Dinner where not only the graduating students but also their spouses were given a certificate of qualification. Five students were also awarded trophies for their outstanding performance under various categories. The students who were awarded were Sqn Ldr A Berwal with the Suranjan Das Trophy for best Test Pilot, Sqn Ldr Kapil

Yadav - CAS Trophy for best flight evaluation, Sqn Ldr V Supriya - Maharaja Hanumanth Singhji Sword for best FTE, Sqn Ldr Rajnish Rai - Kapil Bhargava Trophy for best in ground subjects and Lt Cdr Gaurav Tyagi - Dunlop Trophy for most promising FTE and flight evaluation. In his valedictory address, the CDS complimented Commandant ASTE and all staff of AFTPS for maintaining the highest standards of training in this niche field and their crucial role in capability building and modernisation of the Indian Air Force, including the upgradation of the military aviation environment of the nation. He congratulated the graduating officers, emphasising the importance of professional competence to meet the quality and safety requirements for operational preparedness, and extolled them to continue to strive hard to achieve higher professional capability in their journey as test crew.

Actively monitoring cyclonic storm Remal progress, says ICG



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) is actively monitoring the development of cyclonic storm "Remal" originating in the Central Bay of Bengal which is expected to escalate into a Severe Cyclonic Storm by Saturday, officials said here on Friday. They said the system is likely to make landfall at North/North-West Bay of Bengal near West Bengal Coast on the night of May 26/27. The ICG has initiated comprehensive preemptive measures to ensure minimal loss of life and property at sea. Coordination efforts are underway with concerned state administrations and stakeholders to facilitate a synchronized response to potential contingencies arising from the cyclonic storm. All pertinent information regarding the evolving situation has been disseminated to stakeholders to facilitate preparedness and coordinated action. To ensure the safety of maritime traffic, the ICG's Remote Operating Stations at Haldia and Paradip are broadcasting regular and mul-

tilingual VHF alerts, advising transit merchant mariners to take necessary precautions. Additionally, ICG ships and aircraft are conducting surveillance along the projected path of the cyclonic storm to provide timely assistance and support. Merchant vessels at anchorages have been alerted, and respective port authorities have been advised to take appropriate actions. Despite the fishing ban in force, the Fisheries Department has been cautioned to inform country boats in their respective areas about the developing situation. In a collaborative effort, the ICG has notified Bangladesh Coast Guard authorities, urging them to undertake necessary preparations and disseminate alerts to Bangladeshi fishermen and merchant marine vessels. Moreover, ICG ships and aircraft are on standby for immediate deployment in search and rescue missions as required. Nine disaster relief teams have been positioned at strategic locations including Haldia, Paradip, Gopalpur, and Frazerganj, ready to provide immediate assistance in the event of an emergency.

Badshahpur Assembly MLA Rakesh Daultabad dies of cardiac arrest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GURUGRAM

Badshahpur assembly MLA Band Haryana Agro Industries Corporation (HAIC) chairman Rakesh Jhangu alias Rakesh Daultabad died on Saturday at 10.30 am due to cardiac arrest, a family member said. He was 45. Rakesh Daultabad, who was elected as an independent MLA ticket in the 2019 Assembly polls, developed uneasiness and was immediately shifted to a private hospital in the city on Saturday morning. Daultabad is survived by his two sons aged 16 and 21 and

his wife. His younger brother died in 2021 due to COVID-19. "Rakesh's condition had deteriorated at his Sector -22 home and he was shifted to a private hospital. After an initial check-up, he was admitted to the ICU and the doctor provided him with heart attack treatment but he could not respond and expired," Sombir brother of Rakesh Daultabad said. Local politicians had rushed to the hospital to enquire about Daultabad's health. He was the founder of Parivartan Sangh, an organisation that aims at facilitating healthcare, improving education levels, empowering women and taking several

other community initiatives. Rakesh had lost the assembly election twice in 2009 and 2014. In the 2019 assembly election, he fought as an independent candidate and won the election. Congress leaders took to social media to express their grief over the sitting MLA's demise. Meanwhile, Manipal Hospital Palam Vihar, Gurugram in a statement said a member of a legislative assembly, Rakesh Daultabad presented to the ER at 09:05 am with acute chest pain, the ECG was done immediately which showed ST elevation large myocardial infarction (extensive antero-lateral myocardial infarction), just

after the ECG the patient had a massive cardiac arrest and collapsed at 09:15 am. The cardiac massage (CPR) was started immediately, which continued for approx. 45 minutes. There was a recovery of the rhythm and blood pressure around 10:00 am therefore a collective decision was taken immediately for the definite cardiac procedure, he was shifted to the Cath lab, where it was found that the main artery was 100% occluded, which was opened, but due to refractory cardiogenic shock, he could not sustain and could not be revived despite all measures and was declared at 12:45 pm.

LS poll: Gurugram sees 51.7 per cent voter turnout

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Gurugram Lok Sabha constituency on Saturday witnessed 51.7 per cent voting till 5 pm in the sixth phase of the national election. The highest voter turnout was recorded in the Punahana Vidhan Sabha constituency at 58.50 per cent and the lowest in the Badshahpur constituency at 45.50 per cent. Polling was initially slow in Gurugram but started to pick pace as the day progressed. No untoward incident was reported in the Gurugram constituency across the day. Gurugram is one of the constituencies in 10-seat Haryana.

Voting was held between 7 am across nine Vidhan Sabha constituencies in three districts -- Gurugram (4), Rewari (2) and Nuh (3). There have been 25.73 lakh registered voters in Gurugram Lok Sabha constituencies. Gurugram District Election Officer and Deputy Commissioner (DC) Nishant Kumar Yadav visited several polling stations across the day to observe the situation. Vikas Arora police Commissioner, Gurugram along with other police officers had also visited several polling stations throughout the day. "The elections in the district were held without any violence," Yadav said.

Discovery regarding immune response to VL disease holds immense promise for India

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A discovery by international researchers regarding the immune response to visceral leishmaniasis (VL) holds tremendous promise for India's efforts to combat this deadly disease also known as Kala Azar. As one of the countries most affected by VL, with a significant number of cases reported annually, India has been actively working towards controlling and eliminating the disease. VL is caused by protozoan parasites transmitted by the bite of an infected female phlebotomine sand fly. It is characterised by irregular bouts of fever, weight loss, enlargement of the spleen and liver, and anaemia. In over 95 per cent of cases, the disease is fatal if left untreated. The discovery of a new CD4 T cell population and its role in combating the Leishmania parasite by the team of scientists by Institut national de la



recherche scientifique (INRS) and McGill University offers opportunities for enhancing India's VL elimination strategies which had missed elimination deadline three times. This discovery, published in the journal Cell Reports, sheds light on a surprising immune mechanism linked to

chronic VL, potentially paving the way for new therapeutic approaches. CD4 T cells are pivotal in defending the body against infections, but maintaining their functionality becomes challenging in chronic infections like leishmaniasis. The newly discovered CD4 T cell

population exhibits unique properties, including self-renewal and differentiation into effector or regulatory cells. This population appears to play a crucial role in preventing the exhaustion of naive CD4 T cells during chronic VL, thereby boosting the immune response against the parasite, said the study. "We have discovered a new CD4?cell population in mice infected with the parasite responsible for visceral leishmaniasis. These T cells have interesting properties," said Stäger, expert in immunology of infectious diseases. By observing these novel cells, the scientists noticed that they increase in number during the chronic phase of the disease and also that, like progenitor cells, they are capable of self-renewal or differentiation into other effector cells responsible for eliminating the parasite, or regulatory cells that inhibit the host's response. Professor Stäger pointed out

that CD4?T cells normally differentiate into effector cells from "naive" CD4?T cells. But during chronic infections, because of the constant need to generate effector cells, naive CD4?T cells are highly solicited and may become exhausted. "We believe that in the chronic phase of visceral leishmaniasis, the new population we have identified is responsible for generating effector and regulatory cells. This would allow the host to prevent exhaustion of its existing pool of naive CD4?T cells for a certain antigen," explained first author of the study, Sharada Swaminathan. Furthermore, the implications of this discovery extend beyond VL. Similar cell populations have been observed in other chronic infections, suggesting broader therapeutic potential. This opens up possibilities for developing innovative treatments not only for leishmaniasis but also for other chronic infec-

tious diseases prevalent in India, such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. The new lymphocyte population discovered by the INRS team could be a decisive immune booster, taking over from over-solicited naive CD4?T cells. "If we can figure out how to direct this new lymphocyte population to differentiate into a protective effector cell, it could help the host get rid of the Leishmania parasite," added Stäger. Each year, between 700,000 and 1 million new cases are reported. The initial target year for the elimination of the disease in India was 2010. This was later extended to 2015, then 2017, and 2020. In October 2023, Bangladesh became the first country in the world to be officially validated by the WHO for eliminating kala azar as a public health problem. Besides India, most cases occur in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Nepal, and Sudan.

Egypt agrees to send aid trucks through Israeli crossing to Gaza

UN court order on Gaza offensive further isolates US position

AP ■ TEK AVIV

Egypt said Friday it has agreed to send United Nations humanitarian aid trucks through Israel's main crossing into Gaza, but it was unclear if they will be able to enter the territory as fighting raged in the southern city of Rafah amid Israel's escalating offensive there. Meanwhile, the bodies of three more hostages killed on Oct 7 were recovered overnight from Gaza, Israel's army said Friday. The CIA chief met in Paris with Israeli and Qatari officials, trying to revive negotiations for a cease-fire and a hostage release. Gaza's humanitarian crisis has spiralled as the UN and other aid agencies say the entry of food and other supplies to them has plunged dramatically since Israel's Rafah offensive began more than two weeks ago. On Friday, the top UN court - the International Court of Justice - ordered Israel to halt the Rafah offensive, though Israel is unlikely to comply. At the heart of the problem lie the two main crossings through which around 300 trucks of aid a day had been flowing into Gaza before the offensive began.

Israeli troops seized the Rafah crossing into Egypt, which has been inoperative since. The nearby Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and Gaza has remained open, and Israel says it has been sending hundreds of trucks a day into it. But while commercial trucks have successfully crossed, the UN says it cannot reach Kerem Shalom to pick up aid as it enters because fighting in the area makes it too dangerous. As a result, the UN says it has received only 143 trucks from the crossing in the past 19 days. Hundreds of truckloads have been sitting on the Gaza side of the crossing unretrieved, according to Israeli officials, who say UN manpower limitations are to blame. UN and other aid agencies had to rely on the far smaller number of trucks entering daily from a single crossing in northern Gaza and via a US-built pier bringing supplies by sea. Humanitarian groups are scrambling to get food to Palestinians as some 900,000 people flee Rafah, scattering across central and southern Gaza. Aid workers warn Gaza is near famine. UNRWA, the main UN agency

in the humanitarian effort, had to halt food distribution in Rafah city because it had run out of supplies. The Egyptian announcement appeared to resolve a political obstacle on one side of the border. Israel says it has kept the Rafah crossing open and asked Egypt to coordinate with it on sending aid convoys through it. Egypt refused, fearing the Israeli hold will remain permanent, and demanded Palestinians be put back in charge of the facility. The White House has been pressing Egypt to resume the flow of trucks. In a phone call with US President Joe Biden on Friday, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi agreed to allow trucks carrying humanitarian aid and fuel to go to the Kerem Shalom crossing until a solution is found for the Rafah crossing, el-Sissi's office said in a statement. But it remained unclear whether the UN will be able to access additional trucks coming from Egypt. UNRWA did not immediately reply to requests for comment. In a post on social media outlet X on Thursday, it said, "We

could resume (food distribution in Rafah) tomorrow if the crossing reopened; we were provided with safe routes." Mercy Corps, an aid group operating in Gaza, said in a statement Friday that the offensive had caused the "functional closure...of the two main lifelines" of aid and "has brought the humanitarian system to its knees". "If dramatic changes do not occur, including opening all border crossings to safely surge aid into these areas, we fear that a wave of secondary mortality will result, with people succumbing to the combination of hunger, lack of clean water and sanitation, and the spread of disease in areas where there is little medical care," it said. Fighting appeared to escalate in Rafah. Bombardment intensified Friday in eastern parts of the city, near Kerem Shalom, but shelling was also taking place in central, southern and western districts closer to the Rafah crossing, witnesses said. Israeli leaders have said they must uproot Hamas fighters from Rafah to complete the destruction of the group after its Oct 7 attack.

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A ruling by the top United Nations court ordering Israel to halt its military offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah has deepened its disconnect with the United States over an operation that faces mounting international condemnation but that American officials describe, at least for now, as limited and targeted. The decision Friday by the International Court of Justice in The Hague adds to the pressure facing an increasingly isolated Israel, coming just days after Norway, Ireland and Spain said they would recognize a Palestinian state, and the chief prosecutor of a separate international court sought arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as leaders of Hamas. The Biden administration stands apart from the global community — though it is opposed to a major offensive in Rafah, the administration also insists that the steps its close ally Israel has taken so far have not crossed red lines. Administration officials so far

have appeared determined to press on with military and political support for Israel following the deadly Hamas attack it endured last October, while also pressuring its ally to avoid a full-scale military operation in densely populated Rafah. "What we have seen so far in terms of Israel's military operations in that area has been more targeted and limited, has not involved major military operations into the heart of dense urban areas," national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters at a White House briefing this week. But, he added, "We now have to see what unfolds from here." A State Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity to describe the administration's internal assessment of the situation, said the operation in Gaza had "not yet moved into the core heart of Rafah that gets us to the densest of dense areas." Earlier this month, the White House announced it was pausing a shipment of some 3,500 bombs, including massive 2,000-pound explosives that the Biden administration said

were leading to civilian deaths. President Joe Biden warned during a CNN interview that "if they go into Rafah, I'm not supplying the weapons that have been used historically to deal with Rafah." US officials in pressuring Israel had suggested that a major operation was a red line that would undermine stalled negotiations on a deal to return Israeli hostages taken by Hamas and would lead Biden to further dial back what weaponry he would send Israel. But the tone at the White House seemed to take a notable shift this week after Sullivan returned from a visit to Israel, where he said he had been briefed on "refinements" in the Israeli plan to root out Hamas in Rafah, and to Saudi Arabia. During Sullivan's talks with Netanyahu and other officials during the trip, the Israeli side addressed many of Biden's concerns about its plans for Rafah, according to a senior administration official who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The official said the administration stopped short of green-

lighting the Israeli plan but Israeli officials' altered planning suggested they were taking Biden's concerns seriously. That assessment may be of little consolation to Palestinians still trapped in Rafah - the southernmost part of the Gaza Strip on the border with Egypt, and the site of a critical crossing for aid. More than 1 million people sought refuge there in recent months after escaping fighting elsewhere but some 900,000 have since fled the city. Israel has brought hundreds of trucks in through the other main border crossing, Kerem Shalom, but the UN and aid groups say Israeli military operations make it dangerous for them to pick up food, water and other supplies for starving Palestinians. The US Agency for International Development says Gaza requires a steady flow of 600 trucks a day of food and other aid to reverse the onset of what the heads of USAID and the U.N. World Food Program call famine in the north and to keep it from spreading to the south.

Zelenskyy says Ukraine has taken back control in areas Kharkiv

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian forces have secured "combat control" of areas where Russian troops entered the northeastern Kharkiv region earlier this month, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said. "Our soldiers have now managed to take combat control of the border area where the Russian occupiers entered," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address on Friday evening. Zelenskyy's comments appeared to be at odds with those made by Russian officials. Viktor Vodolatskiy, a member of Russia's lower house of parliament, said Russian forces now controlled more than half of the town of Vovchansk, three miles (five kilometres) inside the border, Russian state news agency Tass reported Friday. Vovchansk has been a flash-

point for fighting since Russia launched an offensive in the Kharkiv region on May 10. Vodolatskiy was also quoted as saying that, once Vovchansk was secured, Russian forces would target the cities of Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and Pokrovsk in the neighbouring Donetsk region. No independent confirmation of the claims was immediately possible. Russia's Kharkiv push appears to be a coordinated new offensive that includes testing Ukrainian defences in the Donetsk region further south, while also launching incursions in the northern Sumy and Chernihiv regions. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said the Kremlin's army is attempting to create a "buffer zone" in the Kharkiv region to prevent Ukrainian cross-border attacks. The city of Kharkiv, which is the capital of the region of the

same name, is about 20 kilometres (12 miles) from the Russian border. Moscow's troops have in recent weeks captured villages in the area as part of a broad push, and analysts say they may be trying to get within artillery range of the city. Ukrainian authorities have evacuated more than 11,000 people from the region since the start of the offensive. The Russian push is shaping up to be Ukraine's biggest test since Moscow's full-scale invasion in February 2022, with outnumbered and outgunned Ukrainian forces being pressed at several points along the about 1,000-kilometre (620-mile) front line that snakes from north to south in eastern Ukraine. 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.

UK PM Rishi Sunak takes time away amid mass exodus of MPs

PTI ■ LONDON

After declaring a general election for July 4, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is reportedly spending his first Saturday with his closest advisers as he takes an "unusual step" of a day away from public events over the first weekend of the campaign. The 44-year-old Indian-origin leader is taking some private time out with his aides and family amid a mass exodus of senior members of Parliament from his embattled Conservative Party. Cabinet ministers Michael Gove and Andrea Leadsom became the latest Tory frontliners to announce their decision to not stand for re-election in this summer's polls, taking the number of party members quitting the race to as many as 78. Gove's announcement in a let-

ter released on social media on Friday evening had been anticipated amid strong challenges to incumbent Tories in constituencies around the country. Leadsom released her own letter shortly after, writing to Sunak: "After careful reflection, I have decided not to stand as a candidate in the forthcoming election." In his letter, Housing Minister Gove wrote that he knew "the toll office can take, as do those closest to me...No one in politics is a conscript. We are volunteers who willingly choose our fate. And the chance to serve is wonderful. But there comes a moment when you know that it is time to leave. That a new generation should lead." Former prime minister Theresa May is also among the senior MPs stepping away, with former defence minister Ben Wallace already having

announced his decision to leave frontline politics. According to sources quoted by the Guardian newspaper, Sunak is taking the "unusual step" of a day away from public events over the first weekend of the election campaign and instead will spend it in discussion on election strategy with his closest advisers. While one source was quoted as saying that the idea that Sunak was hoping to reset his campaign was "ridiculous", another campaign operative claimed that "prime ministers don't normally spend the first weekend of the campaign at home talking to their advisers". The reports prompted Opposition Labour MP Stella Creasy to post on social media: "Sunak is already in need of a duvet day. Britain is already in need of a different government." However, the claims were soon

rubbished, saying he was spending the day campaigning in his north England constituency of Yorkshire. Conservative minister Bim Afolami intervened to brand criticisms of the Sunak campaign made by the Opposition. "I think a lot of those things are fluff...I think that the important thing is that we frame this election correctly," he said. It came as Sunak visited the Titanic Quarter in Belfast on Friday, where the world's largest attraction themed around the ship is located, prompting one reporter to ask if he is "captaining a sinking ship going into this election". Opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer is also in full campaign swing planning to use the day at public events designed to focus on his argument that the Conservatives have damaged the economy and raised living costs.

Car bomb in Syrian capital kills one

AP ■ BEIRUT

A bomb attached to a car exploded early Saturday in the western part of the Syrian capital that is home to several diplomatic missions, killing one person and causing material damage, state media reported. Damascus' Mazze neighbourhood houses the Iranian consulate, destroyed last month in a strike blamed on Israel. The attack at the time killed seven people including two Iranian generals and a member of Lebanon's militant group Hezbollah and triggered a direct Iranian military assault on Israel for the first time, sparking fears of a regionwide war. Several airstrikes have hit the tightly-secured neighbourhood over the past months, mostly targeting Iranian officials. State news agency, SANA, didn't say who the person killed was but said the blast set two other cars ablaze.

NASA will soon train Indian astronauts for joint mission to ISS: Garcetti

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

NASA will soon provide advanced training to Indian astronauts to send a joint mission to the International Space Station this year or shortly thereafter, US envoy to India Eric Garcetti has said. Garcetti made these remarks while speaking at the "US-India Commercial Space Conference: Unlocking Opportunities for US & Indian Space Startups," hosted by the US-India Business Council (USIBC) and the US Commercial Service (USCS) in Bengaluru on Friday. "NASA will soon provide advanced training to Indian astronauts, with the goal of mounting a joint effort to the International Space Station, hopefully, this year or shortly thereafter, which was one of the promises of our leaders' visit together," Garcetti said. "And soon we will launch the NISAR satellite from ISRO's

Satish Dhawan Space Center to monitor all resources, including ecosystems, the Earth's surface, natural hazards, sea level rise, and the cryosphere," Garcetti said, according to a USIBC press statement issued here. NISAR is a joint Earth-observing mission between NASA and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). "You see whether it's the pursuit of peace and the peaceful use of space, things like the Artemis Accord, we are hand in hand, arm in arm. When it comes to prosperity and jobs, which is a big part of this conference today, it can be produced by startups in this sector, good-paying, high-tech jobs for Indians and for Americans. Space is right there," Garcetti said. The Artemis Accords lay out a framework for collaborating nations' safe exploration of the moon and beyond. The day-long event in Bengaluru saw the participa-

tion from senior officials from both the US and Indian governments, including Garcetti, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman Dr. S Somanath, representatives from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the Government of India, as well as prominent leaders from the commercial space industry, industry stakeholders, venture capitalists, and market analysts. "I must salute the visionary leadership that we have in both nations in India and the US for engaging in such an accord which looks at the moon as a sustainable place for all of us to come and work together," Somnath said in his remarks. "The connection between the Indian partners and also the US partners in critical technologies and specifically in the space sector is really becoming stronger. And I'm very

happy about that type of engagement and the options available to the industries and the US business indigenous to connect with India in the emerging space sector as well," he said. Expressing optimism about the prospects of US-India collaboration in space, USIBC president Atul Keshap described it as a new chapter in the US-India space partnership. This week has been particularly fruitful, with USIBC and USCS joining forces to champion these two iCET space deliverables, he said. "The conference highlights the deepening synergy between our two free nations in pioneering space exploration and innovation by the leading democracies. Through strategic alliances and collaborative efforts, we're on the brink of achieving extraordinary milestones and expanding the horizons of space exploration beyond what we once imagined," Keshap said.

Sharif to visit China for formal launch of next phase of CPEC

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will visit China in the first week of next month to join the formal launching of the second phase of the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, according to a media report on Saturday. A source in the Prime Minister's Office told the Dawn newspaper that Prime Minister Sharif was scheduled to leave for China on June 4, but the date of the visit could slightly be changed. The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is opposed by India as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Infrastructure and energy projects were part of the CPEC's first phase. In CPEC-II, both countries will focus on agriculture, Main Line-I of Pakistan Railways, businessmen-to-busi-

nessmen deals and realignment of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) etc. While presiding over a meeting of representatives of Chinese companies on Friday, the prime minister said that Pakistan wanted to benefit from Chinese experiences to promote its IT sector and boost exports. "China has an important role in Pakistan's development. It has always helped Pakistan in difficult times for which the entire nation, including me, is grateful to the Chinese leadership and the people," he said. He assured the Chinese firms that the security and protection of Chinese workers and citizens was the top priority of the government. Thousands of Chinese personnel are working in Pakistan on several projects being carried out under the aegis of the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Some have been attacked in recent years by militants who accuse them of exploiting mineral resources.

"The government has taken all possible measures to ensure foolproof security of the Chinese citizens in Pakistan," he told the meeting, adding that a comprehensive plan had been prepared on this. Sharif said that Pakistan was an agricultural country and wanted to utilise China's modern technology in this sector. He invited Chinese companies to invest in Pakistan's electric, hybrid auto sector and other sectors. Meanwhile, the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan reported that Minister for Planning, Development Ahsan Iqbal and China's Vice Chairman of the National Development Reform Commission Li Chunlin co-chaired a meeting of the Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC), where the Pakistan side appreciated the vision of Chinese leadership to upgrade the second phase of CPEC with the inclusion of new corridors.

Chinese military ends drills around Taiwan

PTI ■ BEIJING

The Chinese military has ended its two-day joint drills surrounding Taiwan, stated to be the biggest and closest exercises held around the prosperous self-ruled island that China claims to be part of its mainland. The drills on Thursday and Friday were held in retaliation to Taiwan's new President Lai Ching-te's remarks rejecting Beijing's sovereignty claims over the island and tested the Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) ability to seize power. China views Taiwan as a rebel province that must be reunified with the mainland even by force. While there was no official announcement that the drills ended, the Chinese social media WeChat account of the PLA's Eastern Theatre Command on Saturday said the exercises lasted two days from Thursday.

It said the exercises by land, navy, air force and missile forces were "punishment" for "Taiwan separatists" and a "severe warning" to outside forces intent on interference and provocation. The drills, called Joint Sword-2024A, involved "advancing", "besieging", "blockading", "attacking", "destroying" and "cutting off", the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post quoted the WeChat post. Observers said the drills were the biggest and closest exercises ever held near Taiwan. Lieutenant Colonel Zhang Chi, an associate professor at the National Defence University of the PLA, told state broadcaster CCTV that such drills could become a new norm for the mainland, the Post reported. State news agency Xinhua quoted Meng Xiangqing, from the same university, as saying the vessels involved in the exercises were "unprecedentedly close to the coast of Taiwan".

SIA passengers endured 62 seconds of extreme turbulence

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

The Singapore Airlines (SIA) Flight SQ321 that was rocked by severe turbulence on Tuesday climbed and descended rapidly twice in 62 seconds, stunning the passengers with one dying of heart attack, as the aircraft flew over the Irrawaddy Delta region of Myanmar, it emerged on Saturday. One passenger — 73-year-old Briton Geoffrey Kitchen — died, and dozens were injured in the incident. It is the first SIA aviation accident involving a fatality since the SQ006 crash in Taiwan in October 2000. As the flight, which was heading to Singapore from London, experienced sudden severe turbulence over the Irrawaddy Basin during the

breakfast service, the pilot declared a medical emergency and diverted the plane 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). Granular flight data from flight tracking website Flightradar24 shows that the Boeing 777-300ER climbed and descended rapidly twice in 62 seconds, starting from 3:49 pm Singapore time, as the plane was nearing the end of a non-stop flight from London to Singapore, The Straits Times newspaper reported. During this time, the plane climbed from its cruise altitude of 37,000 feet to 37,400 feet and then dropped to 36,975 feet before settling back onto its cruise altitude.

This indicates that it was the rapid transition between the climb and descent caused by the turbulence — and not the actual change in altitude itself, which was relatively minor — that caused pandemonium in the cabin. The Flightradar24 data — derived from a global network of ground-based receivers, satellites and radars that receive flight data from aircraft transponders — contradicts some earlier reports, which pinpointed the aircraft descending from 37,000 feet to 31,000 feet between 4:06 pm and 4:10 pm as the cause of the injuries. This latter transition appears to be the pilots carrying out a controlled descent, most likely to assess the situation before diverting to Bangkok, according to the broadsheet report

citing a commercial pilot who has flown both civil and military multi-engine passenger aircraft for more than 20 years. Speaking on condition of anonymity, the pilot said the rapid climb would have introduced positive G-forces onto passengers, causing sitting passengers to feel like they have been pinned down in their seats. The subsequent rapid descent would have resulted in negative G-forces, which would have sent unrestrained passengers and other loose items hurtling upwards onto the ceiling of the cabin, he added. The embattled plane went through another cycle of rapid climb and descent, causing more damage and injuries, with some passengers and objects hitting the roof panels and

overhead lockers before being flung back down. This is reflected in the accounts of passengers on board SQ321 who reported being thrown onto the cabin roof, with Australian passenger Teandra Tukhunen recounting that she was abruptly woken up when she was thrown to the roof and then to the floor. The G-force data would have been captured by the quick access recorder fitted onboard the aircraft. This is a flight data recorder designed to provide quick and easy access to raw flight data through means such as USB or mobile phone networks. The Flightradar24 data showed that the Boeing 777 first attained a climb rate of 1,664 feet per minute (fpm) — or 507m per minute, double the

height of 52-storey Capital Tower — before descending at 1,536fpm six seconds later. It rapidly returned to a climb rate of 900fpm a mere three seconds later, and then descended at 1,536 fpm after another 10 seconds. Transport Minister Chee Hong Tat said on Friday that investigators from Singapore's Transport Safety Investigation Bureau are going through data from the cockpit voice recorder and the flight data recorder. The United States National Transportation Safety Board's data from 2009 to 2018 showed that passengers injured in turbulence-related accidents were most often using, waiting for or walking to or from the toilet. The second-most common group was passengers who were seated but not belted up.

Indian startup ecosystem is mature, set to bolster Indian economy: AWS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian startup ecosystem is mature, with multiple tailwinds that are poised to escalate India to become the third largest economy in the world, said AWS' Kumara Raghavan. In a conversation with PTI, Raghavan, Head, Startups, Amazon Web Services (AWS) India, and South Asia, discussed the vibrant Indian startup scene, noting its strength and innovation potential. "We are the 5th largest economy, we are trending towards becoming the 3rd largest... Factors that will contribute to it are labor addition, infrastructure growth, and efficiency improvements, where technologies like GenAI will play their part, a large developer ecosystem, the ability to build products in the country and serviced all over the world, then there are regulatory tailwinds like Make in India and Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme as well," he said.



Raghavan lauded the maturity of the Indian startup ecosystem, noting the significant contributions of experienced founders who have embarked on multiple entrepreneurial ventures. "We are the third largest

startup ecosystem in the world. And there are a couple of tailwinds going for us," he said. He gave credit to various factors for driving India's growth as a startup ecosystem.

"Over the last decade, we have seen founders launch multiple startups over the last 7-8 years," he said, adding that this wealth of experience has not only accelerated the lifecycle of startups but has also enhanced their chances of success. India's strong developer ecosystem has further bolstered the startup scene, offering a competitive advantage and fostering a culture of innovation, he added. "These combine to give us a very strong momentum... India is one of the most vibrant and open markets. And there are so many opportunities to solve," he noted. Raghavan also pointed out the increasing interest of startups towards embracing GenAI, and gave instances of Yellow.AI, Healthify, Fibe (formerly EarlySalary) adopting and utilising AWS' generative intelligence (GenAI) capabilities to revolutionise customer experiences, internal operations, and scalability.

Reliance Industries seeks CCI approval for Viacom18 Star India merger

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani-promoted Reliance Industries has sought approval from fair trade regulator Competition Commission of India (CCI) for the USD 8.5-billion merger of Viacom18 and Star India Pvt Ltd (SIPL). "The proposed transaction aims to combine the entertainment businesses (along with certain other identified businesses) of Viacom18, part of Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) group and SIPL, wholly-owned by The Walt Disney Company (TWDC). "As a result of the transaction, SIPL, currently a wholly-owned entity of TWDC through its subsidiaries, will become a joint venture (JV) which will be jointly held by RIL, Viacom18 and existing TWDC subsidiaries," a notice filed with the CCI said on Friday. The proposed transaction will not cause any appreciable adverse effect on competition in India, RIL said in the notice. However, to facilitate the CCI's assessment, they have



identified several key markets where horizontal overlaps were significant such as licensing of audio visual content rights, distribution of broadcast TV channels, provision of audio visual (AV) content, and supply of advertising space in India. SIPL is engaged in a range of media activities, including TV broadcasting, motion pictures and operation of an OTT platform. It is a wholly-owned entity of US-based The Walt Disney Company (TWDC). Viacom18 is engaged in the business of broadcasting of television (TV) channels,

operation of an over-the-top (OTT) platform, in India and worldwide. It is also engaged in the business of production and distribution of motion pictures. In February this year, global media giant Walt Disney Co and Reliance Industries announced signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India to create a Rs 70,000 crore (USD 8.5 billion) behemoth. After the successful completion of the deal, it would create the biggest firm in the Indian media and entertainment sector, with over 100 channels in several languages, two leading OTT platforms and a viewer base of 750 million across the country. Nita Ambani, wife of Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani, will chair the joint venture, while Uday Shankar will be the Vice Chairperson. Reliance and its affiliates will hold 63.16 per cent stake in the combined entity, while Disney will have the remaining 36.84 per cent shareholding. Reliance has also agreed to invest around Rs 11,500 crore into the joint venture to grow the OTT business.

Dvara KGFS raises USD 10 million to fuel expansion plans

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Dvara Kshetriya Gramin Financials Pvt Ltd has raised USD 10 million from BlueOrchard Microfinance Fund to fuel its expansion plans, the company said on Saturday. The financial services company would utilise the funds raised to strengthen its efforts in the underserved communities across the country as it aims to grow 40 per cent in the current financial year, company Managing Director and CEO LVLN Murty said. BlueOrchard Microfinance Fund is a global investor and the debt was raised through the issuance of listed non-convertible foreign currency bonds under the External Commercial Borrowings route. "We are delighted to announce the debt raise from BlueOrchard. The company aims to grow by 40 per cent in the current financial year and exploring various avenues of raising liquidity will be critical to ensuring a well-diversified resource profile," Murty said in a company statement.

I-T department notifies cost inflation index for current fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The income tax department has notified the Cost Inflation Index for the current fiscal beginning April 2024, for calculating long-term capital gains arising from sale of immovable property, securities and jewellery. The Cost Inflation Index (CII) is used by taxpayers to compute gains arising out of sale of capital assets after adjusting inflation. The CII for financial year 2024-25, relevant to assessment year 2025-26, stood at 363, as per a notification of the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT). The CII number for last fiscal was 348 and for 2022-23 financial year it was 331. Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said the CII reflects the inflation in the economy, which causes the prices of goods and services to increase over time. For the financial year 2023-24, the CII was set at 348. The index for the following financial year, 2024-25, has been updated to 363, marking an increase of 15 points, which corresponds to an annual inflation rate of approximately 4.3 per cent. "This is consistent with the retail inflation rate of 4.83 per



cent recorded in April 2024. Taxpayers usually prefer a higher CII as it allows them to claim larger tax rebates," Mohan said. AKM Global Partner-Tax Sandeep Sehgal said the index is useful to adjust the capital gains for inflation, so that the taxpayers are taxed on real appreciation of the assets and not the gains due to inflation. "Taxpayers can use this to calculate gains for long-term capital assets sold during FY 24-25 and reduce the tax liability accordingly," Sehgal said. CII is notified under the Income-tax Act, 1961 every

year. It is popularly used to calculate "indexed cost of acquisition", while calculating capital gains at the time of sale of any capital asset. Normally, an asset is required to be retained for more than 36 months (24 months for immovable property and unlisted shares, 12 months for listed securities) to qualify as 'long-term capital gains'. Since prices of goods increase over time resulting in a fall in the purchasing power, the CII is used to arrive at the inflation adjusted purchasing price of assets so as to compute taxable long-term capital gains (LTCG).

EID Parry India reports consolidated Q4 PAT at ₹294.30 crore

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The EID Parry India Ltd has reported a consolidated profit after tax for the January-March 2024 quarter at Rs 294.30 crore, the company said. The city-based sugar manufacturer had registered a consolidated PAT at Rs 286.90 crore during the corresponding quarter of last year. Commenting on the financial performance, Managing Director S Suresh said, "the operating performance of the standalone sugar division was lower during the year as compared to the previous

year on account of nil exports, higher cane cost, lower recovery from cane and change in product mix in distillery on account of change in Government policy." The overall cane crush marginally reduced during the year from 51.81 LMT metric tonne to 50.09 LMT and sugar sales reduced from 5.20 LMT (lakh metric tonne) to 4.64 LMT, he said. For the financial year ending March 31, 2024 the consolidated profit after tax fell to Rs 1,617.57 crore, from Rs 1,827.74 crore registered a year ago. The consolidated total income during the quarter



under review slipped to Rs 5,680.02 crore, as against Rs 6,865.28 crore registered in the corresponding quarter of last year. For the financial year ending March 31, 2024 the consolidated total income declined to Rs 29,716.92 crore, from Rs 35,283.02

crore registered year ago. In a statement, the Murugappa Group company said the consolidated sugar operations reported an operating profit of Rs 161 crore during the January-March 2024 quarter, as against Rs 176 crore recorded in the same period last year. Farm inputs division clocked an operating profit of Rs 315 crore, during the quarter under review as against Rs 432 crore registered in the same period of last fiscal. The Nutraceuticals division reported an operating profit of Rs 16 crore during the January-March 2024 quarter, while it had registered a net loss of Rs 54 crore in the

corresponding quarter last financial year. Suresh said the expansion in Distillery of 165 KLPD in Haliyal (Karnataka) and Nellikuppam (near Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu) had reached greater degree of completion and will operate in full stream by Q1 FY2024-25. Further, the company has forayed into the staples space during Q4, FY2023-24. The nutraceuticals division had registered loss during the year as the sales to Europe was restricted on account of certification issues. "However, such certification issues are expected to be resolved in the near future," he added.

Brazil, Canada, EU urge India to submit timely notifications on sugar subsidies in WTO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A group of WTO member countries, including Brazil, Canada and the European Union, have urged India to submit timely notifications on sugar subsidies in the World Trade Organisation, an official said. The issue came up for discussion during the meeting of the WTO's agriculture committee on May 23-24 in Geneva. These countries are also major sugar exporters like India and they allege that support measures by India distort global sugar trade. Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Paraguay, New Zealand, the EU, and Guatemala have urged India to submit timely notifications on the subsidies, the Geneva-based official said. India has stated that the Indian central and state governments neither paid for nor procured sugarcane from



farmers, as all purchases were made by private sugar mills, hence, this information was not included in its notifications of domestic support. The discussion assumes significance as in 2022, India has appealed against a ruling of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) trade dispute settlement panel which ruled that the country's domestic support measures for sugar and sugarcane are inconsistent with global trade norms. The appeal was filed by India in the WTO's Appellate Body,

which is the final authority on such trade disputes and is not functioning. Brazil, Australia, and Guatemala had filed the cases against India on these support measures. In its appeal, India has stated that the WTO's dispute panel ruling has made certain "erroneous" findings about domestic schemes to support sugarcane producers and exports and the findings of the panel are completely "unacceptable" to it. The US and Australia have also presented a joint counter notification regarding India's sugar subsidies. According to their study, over the four-year period from 2018-19 to 2021-22, India has provided market price support on sugarcane in excess of the limits set out in the Agreement on Agriculture (10 per cent of the total value of sugarcane production) by a margin of 92-101 per cent.

Busy Bee Airways withdraws bid for Go First

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than three months after jointly bidding for Go First, travel portal EaseMyTrip's CEO Nishant Pitti on Saturday said he was withdrawing the bid for the bankrupt airline. Busy Bee Airways, majority-owned by Pitti, along with SpiceJet Chief Ajay Singh, had put in a bid for Go First, which is undergoing an insolvency resolution process, in February. Pitti said after careful consideration, he decided to withdraw the bid for Go First in his personal capacity. "The decision allows me to better focus on other strategic priorities and initiatives that align with our long-term vision and growth objectives," he said in a statement. The latest move also comes less than a month after the Delhi High Court allowed lessors to take back 54 planes leased to Go First. On April 26, Pitti had said he

will consider any necessary adjustments to its proposed offer for the grounded airline after reviewing the court order. It could not be immediately ascertained whether Ajay Singh will be pursuing the bid since the joint bidder Busy Bee Airways has opted out. Meanwhile, Pitti's announcement about the withdrawal of the bid also comes a day after EaseMyTrip on Friday reported a consolidated loss of Rs 15.07 crore for the March quarter and a full-year profit after tax of Rs 103.46 crore. On April 8, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) again extended the deadline to complete Go First's insolvency resolution process by 60 days to June 3. Prior to this extension, the deadline was April 4. Go First stopped flying on May 3, 2023, and its plea for voluntary insolvency resolution proceedings was admitted by the NCLT on May 10 last year.

WIPO concludes new treaty to protect genetic resources, traditional knowledge

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Members of Geneva-based World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) have concluded an agreement under which it will be mandatory for patent applicants to disclose country of origin or source of genetic resources if the claimed invention is based on those materials or associated traditional knowledge. The treaty will provide additional protection for Indian genetic resources and traditional knowledge. Although these are currently protected within India, they are prone to misappropriation in countries, which do not have disclosure obligations. The current patent legislation

does not have a mandatory provision requiring patent applicants to disclose the country of origin or source in case where the invention is based on genetic resources. At present, only 35 countries have some form of disclosure obligations, most of which are not mandatory and do not have appropriate sanctions or remedies in place for effective implementation. The new treaty was adopted on May 24 at the WIPO headquarters in Geneva after 192 countries and 86 observers participated in the two-week negotiations from May 13-24 at a Diplomatic Conference. This treaty will require contracting parties, including the developed world, to bring changes in their existing legal



framework for enforcing disclosure of origin obligations on patent applicants. Genetic resources (GRs) are present in things like medicinal plants, agricultural crops, and animal breeds. While genetic resources themselves cannot be directly protected as intellectual

property, inventions developed using them can, most often through a patent. Some genetic resources are also associated with traditional knowledge (ATK) through their use and conservation by indigenous peoples as well as local communities, often over generations. This knowledge

is sometimes used in scientific research and, as such, may contribute to the development of a protected invention. The WIPO treaty on "intellectual property, genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge" is a significant win for countries of the global South and for India, which is a hub of biodiversity hotspots with abundance of traditional knowledge, and wisdom. "The treaty also marks a big win for India and the global south which has for long been a proponent of this instrument. For the first time the system of knowledge and wisdom which have supported economies, societies and cultures for centuries are now inscribed into the global IP (intellectual

property) system," the official said. For the first time, the connection between local communities and their GRs and ATK is recognised in the global IP community. These are historic achievements long championed by India as a provider of traditional knowledge and wisdom and repository of biodiversity," the official said, adding that after two decades of negotiations, this treaty has been adopted at the multilateral fora, with a consensus among more than 150 countries. Most of the developed countries generate IP by using these resources and knowledge for research and innovation. "The treaty on ratification and

entry into force will require contracting parties to put in place, mandatory disclosure obligations for patent applicants to disclose the country of origin or source of the genetic resources when the claimed invention is based on genetic resources or associated traditional knowledge," the official said. By creating global standards on disclosure of origin obligations, the official said, this agreement creates an unprecedented framework within the IP system for provider countries of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge. "This treaty imposes a higher standard of obligation on the applicant than in the current patent act and therefore changes would have to be

introduced in the Patent act to introduce these obligations to comply with the treaty when India ratifies this treaty," another official said. The official added that through this treaty, for the first time, traditional knowledge and genetic resources are formally recognised within the global intellectual property system. The WIPO is the global forum for IP services, policy, information and cooperation. It is a self-funding agency of the United Nations, with 193 member states. The members include both developing and developed nations like India, Italy, Israel, Aregbrtina, Austria, Cuba, Brazil, China, Cuba, Egypt, Pakistan, the US and the UK.

Indian women compound archery team strikes gold, mixed team bags silver in World Cup

PTI ■ YECHON (SOUTH KOREA)

The Indian women's compound trio of Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Parneet Kaur and Aditi Swami grabbed their third successive Archery World Cup gold medal, while the mixed team added a silver at the stage two event here on Saturday. The world number one Indian compound women's team dominated Turkey's Hazal Burun, Ayse Bera Suzer and Begum Yuva right from the first end and sealed the gold without dropping a set, maintaining a healthy six-point margin (232-226) in a lopsided final. Asian Games champion Jyothi, however, failed to add a second gold to her kitty as she along with Priyansh squandered an opening round lead to go down to the USA's Olivia Dean and Sawyer Sullivan by two points (155-153) in the compound mixed team final. For Jyothi, Parneet and world champion Aditi this completed a hat-trick of World Cup gold medals together. They had won the season opening World Cup Stage 1 in Shanghai, downing Italy last month and also ended last year with a gold at the stage four of the event in Paris. In the compound women's team final, the second seeded



(L-R) Archers Aditi Swami, Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Parneet Kaur after winning women's compound team gold at Archery World Cup Stage 2, in Yecheon, South Korea, Saturday PTI

Indians began with three X (arrow near to the centre) and dropped one point each in the next three arrows to edge out their fifth seeded rivals by one point in the first round. In the next round of six arrows, the Indians showed complete supremacy, drilling

in five perfect 10s with two X, and one 9 to stretch their lead by four points at the halfway mark. Turkey fought hard in the penultimate round to shoot four 10s with one X to match India's score of 58. But that did not matter much

as the Indians were ahead by four points going into the fourth and final end. They sealed it by scoring yet another 58, which was studded with three 10s and one X. In a battle between world's top-two ranked nations in the compound mixed team final,

the USA made a remarkable comeback to win the gold and maintain their supremacy. Jyothi and Priyansh raced to a two-point lead by shooting a near-flawless 39 points out of a maximum 40 in the first end. But they struggled for consistency as Olivia and Sullivan bounced back to shoot 39 to edge out the Indians by two points to bring it level (76-all) at the halfway mark. The No. 2 seed USA pair landed a perfect score of 40 in the third end to snatch a slender one-point lead as the Indians managed 39, dropping one point. Jyothi and Priyansh needed to shoot a perfect 40 to force a shoot-off, but they managed a 38 as the USA pair scored 39 to seal the gold. A third medal is also expected from the compound category in this edition of the World Cup where Prathamesh Fuge is one win shy of a maiden individual World Cup podium finish. Fuge, who upset 2021 world champion and world No. 6 Nico Wiener of Austria in the quarters, will be up against world No. 7 James Lutz in his bid for a maiden individual World Cup medal. Fuge was part of the gold medal-winning men's team in Shanghai.



Sindhu one step away from Malaysia Masters title

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Double Olympic medallist P V Sindhu on Saturday earned a shot at the USD 420,000 Malaysia Masters crown after entering the women's singles finals with a come-from-behind win over Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan here. Fifth seed Sindhu, who has not won a title in two years, rallied to prevail 13-21 21-16 21-12 against world number 20 Busanan in a marathon semifinal that lasted 88 minutes to close in on the BWF World Tour Super 500 crown at the Axiata Arena. Sindhu had won the 2022 Singapore Open and finished runner-up at Madrid Spain Masters last year. It was her 18th win over Busanan, who has beaten the Indian only once in her career way back in 2019 Hong Kong Open.

World No. 15 Sindhu, who will be eyeing her third Olympic medal at the Paris Games in two months time, will face second seed and world no. 7 Wang Zhi Yi of China in the summit clash. Sindhu had lost to Wang at the Arctic Open last year but has defeated the Chinese twice in three meetings. A silver and bronze medallist in the last two editions of the Olympics, Sindhu seemed to have found her mojo back as she dished out some attacking badminton this week after looking out of sorts since making a comeback from a knee injury early this season.

It has been a while since Sindhu has defeated big guns such as Carolina Marin, Tai Tzu Ying, Chen Yu Fei and Akane Yamaguchi — whom she is expected to come across at the Paris Olympics. A title triumph here will provide her a major boost ahead of the Summer Games. Despite her overwhelming record against Busanan, it turned out to be a tough fight for Sindhu as she had to do the catching-up job, with the Thai dominating the proceedings in the opening game. It was a physical battle as the two tested each other in some high-quality long rallies. In the opening game, the Thai was spot on with her executions whether it was the leap smashes or superb blocks, drops or precise drives. Busanan kept a good pace in the rallies to open up a 8-6 lead with the Indian making a couple of judgement errors at the backline and spraying into the net.

A crisscross net shot, a forehand block gave Busanan a 10-7 lead before she took a two-point cushion at the break. The Thai constructed the rallies well, drawing Sindhu to the net and sending her to the flanks. Soon she led 15-9, which she extended to seven points at 17-10. In the end, Sindhu went to net twice to give seven game points to the Thai, who sealed it with an immaculate backhand block. In the second game, Sindhu lagged 2-4 but clawed back when Busanan found the net. Sindhu sent a stretched

backhand into the net and then missed another one at the backline as Busanan led 6-4. A fighting Sindhu, however, managed to grab the lead at 8-7 with a smash and moved to the break with a two-point advantage, following a lethal cross court smash. At 12-10, a long rally ended with Busanan faltering with a cross court net shot. The Thai made some judgement errors but managed to keep breathing down Sindhu's neck at 12-14. Sindhu dished out a trademark cross court followed by another down-the-line return to move to a three-point advantage at 16-13. The Indian dominated another rally, leaving Busanan completely out of position to establish an 18-14 lead. Sindhu soon grabbed five game points and converted in her second attempt. Spectacular in the opening game, Busanan completely lost control in the decider as she was erratic and struggled with her court coverage while Sindhu looked aggressive. The Indian soon opened up a 4-1 lead and swelled it to 8-3. Errors became too frequent for Busanan as Sindhu grabbed a decisive 11-5 lead at the interval. After the final change of sides, Busanan tried to close the gap but errors again showed up in her game as Sindhu moved to 17-10. The Indian grabbed eight match points with Busanan going to net again and when Busanan again went wide, Sindhu raised her arm to mark a subdued celebration.

Man United manager Ten Hag convinced he will keep his job despite troubled season

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Erik ten Hag is convinced he will be the Manchester United manager next season after holding talks with the club hierarchy ahead of Saturday's FA Cup final. The Dutchman has overseen United's worst season in 34 years and its lowest finish in the English Premier League era, eighth. It was reported on Friday that he would lose his job even if he wins the Cup against league champion Manchester City at Wembley. Ten Hag said he had already met new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe to review the season

and did not need assurances about his future. "It is not necessary, we will go for next season," he said, and added he will go on vacation on Sunday. Several names have already been mentioned as potential successors to Ten Hag if he is fired, including Mauricio Pochettino, Thomas Tuchel, Kieran McKenna, Thomas Frank and England manager Gareth Southgate. British billionaire Ratcliffe bought a 27.7% stake in United in February and immediately challenged Ten Hag to secure qualification for the Champions League, which he failed to achieve.



Former United managers David Moyes and Louis van Gaal were fired after missing out on the Champions League, while Jose Mourinho and Ole

Gunnar Solskjaer also lost their jobs in seasons when it became clear they were unlikely to secure a place among Europe's elite.

The best Ten Hag can hope for is the Europa League if United win the FA Cup. Ahead of the final, City manager Pep Guardiola sympathised with Ten Hag, who has had to cope with slew of injuries. United will be without defenders Harry Maguire and Luke Shaw for the final. But Guardiola accepts the pressure will be on his counterpart, if he cannot deliver a trophy. "So, in big clubs like United and City, when you don't win you are always in trouble. It is not a secret," he said. "We have done what we have done, but I would be in trouble if we didn't win.

Messi, Suarez and Busquets to miss Inter Miami's MLS game against Whitecaps

AP ■ VANCOUVER

Lionel Messi will not play in Inter Miami's match in Vancouver against the Whitecaps on Saturday, a move coach Gerardo Martino said was based on the team's crowded upcoming schedule. Messi and teammates Luis Suarez and Sergio Busquets will not play for Major League Soccer-leading Miami (9-2-4) in the match that was expected to draw more than 50,000. Miami has two home games scheduled next week. "We thought it was the most prudent for them not to play this match," Martino said Friday. "They have been training, but they will not be available for the game. "We obviously understand the frustration of the people wanting to watch these players play. We as coaches sometimes have to make these very difficult football decisions. But we always have to keep in mind the players' health first." Messi has missed other MLS



games, in in Orlando, New York and Washington. The 36-year-old Argentine star has 10 goals in 10 MLS games this season and leads the league in assists with 12. Martino noted that the artificial turf at B C Place did not play a role in the decision. Not using the players was about saving them from gruelling travel and a three-hour time change, he said. After the game against

Vancouver, which is seventh in the Western Conference, Miami hosts Atlanta on Wednesday and St. Louis next Saturday. In the past, MLS has opted not to schedule mid-week games for teams that have traveled long distances, or scheduled another road game nearby, Martino added. "But it's not a complaint," he said. "We understand in our specific

case that the players that we're talking about are very important for everyone. But the health of these players is the priority." MLS issued a statement on Friday saying it will "continue to review measures regarding how clubs report player availability." "Major League Soccer acknowledges fan disappointment when marquee players are unavailable for matches," the statement said. "Each MLS club makes its own personnel and competitive decisions based on what they believe is in the best interests of the club and each player." Whitecaps head coach Vanni Sartini said he is disappointed, too. "It's a bummer like for everyone else," Sartini said. "You would love also the opportunity to have the possibility to play against a lot of very strong and quality players and arguably probably the best player in the last 20 or 30 years.



India awarded silver, bronze in F46 javelin at World Para Athletics Championships

PTI ■ KOBE (JAPAN)

India were on Saturday awarded the silver and bronze in men's javelin throw F46 event after winning protest against second-place finisher Dinesh Priyantha Herath of Sri Lanka at World Para Athletics Championships here. Rinku Hooda and Ajeet Singh on Friday finished third and fourth respectively in the men's F46 javelin throw final but the result was put on hold after India lodged a protest that Herath was ineligible to compete in the category. In para sports, athletes are classified into groups with similar levels of physical ability to allow fair competition. The F46 classification is for athletes with arm deficiency, impaired muscle power or impaired passive range of movement in arms, with athletes competing in a standing position. "He (Herath) was not classified properly and did not belong to F 46 category," said an official

from Paralympic Committee of India. India got a favourable decision and Herath was disqualified. Rinku, who originally finished third with an effort of 62.77m, was upgraded to second while Ajeet (62.11m) was handed a bronze. "We won the protest against the Sri Lankan, who had also won gold at the Tokyo Paralympics, that he should not have been eligible to compete," head coach Satyanarayan told PTI. "Now, Rinku is the silver winner from original third and Ajeet was upgraded from fourth place to bronze." With the silver and bronze, India's tally swelled to 14 medals (5 gold, 5 silver, 4 bronze) to be in sixth position overall. This is India's best-ever performance, having surpassed the earlier record medal haul of 10 medals (3 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze) it won in the 2023 edition in Paris.

Simran wins India's sixth gold in World Para Athletics Championships

PTI ■ KOBE (JAPAN)

Simran Sharma won gold Smedal in women's 200m T12 event with a personal best time of 24.95 seconds to fetch the sixth yellow metal for India on the final day of the World Para Athletics Championships here on Saturday. Simran shaved off around one-fifth of a second from her earlier personal best of 25.16 seconds to win the gold. Darlenys De La Severino (25.08) of Dominica and Lorraine Gomes De Aguiar (25.40) won the silver and bronze respectively. The T12 category is meant for athletes who have vision impairment. India now has 15 medals (6 gold, 5 silver, 4 bronze) to be at sixth place in the standings. Earlier, India were awarded the silver and bronze in men's javelin throw F46 event after winning a protest against second-place finisher Dinesh Priyantha Herath of Sri Lanka. Rinku Hooda and Ajeet Singh on Friday finished third and fourth respectively in the men's F46 javelin throw final but the result was put on hold after India lodged a protest that Herath was ineligible to compete in the category. In para sports, athletes are

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Abhimanyu beats Nikolov to advance in boxing's Olympic qualifiers

PTI ■ BANGKOK

National championships bronze medallist Abhimanyu Loura displayed his never-say-die attitude to pack off Bulgaria's Kristiyan Nikolov in a thrilling 80kg category first round clash in the Boxing World Qualifiers for Paris Olympics here on Saturday. Loura started slow as the 10-time Bulgarian national champion took an upper hand in the opening round. But the 21-year-old Indian quickly switched gears and went on the offensive in the second round and earned the bragging rights for the round with four of



the five judges voting in favour of him. The Indian continued the flurry of punches in the third and final round to finally clinch the bout 3-0 and ensure two wins out of two for the Indian contingent in the Thai capital.

On Friday, Sachin Siwach opened India's account with a win in the 57kg category against Alex Mukuka of New Zealand. India have fielded seven men and three women in the second world qualifiers and Abhinash Jamwal (63.5kg) and Nishant Dev (71kg) will take the ring on Sunday for the first time. Jamwal faces Andriejus Lavrenovas of Lithuania in his opening bout while Nishant takes on Amando Bighafa of Guinea-Bissau. Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti (54kg), and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) have already secured their spots for Paris through their performances at the Asian Games.

Kolkata Knight Riders face spirited Sunrisers Hyderabad in mega IPL final

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Tactician par excellence Gautam Gambhir couldn't have envisaged a battle of brains with a more different kind of adversary than the smiling yet ruthless Pat Cummins as Kolkata Knight Riders face a spirited Sunrisers Hyderabad in a mega IPL final here on Sunday.

Marquee sporting clashes always pit one leader against another but this IPL final will be about Gambhir's brain, which is always ticking against a captain who has transcended boundaries to turn into a leader of men.

Somewhere along the line, KKR's Shreyas Iyer, who is playing his second final as captain, has turned into bit of a side-show as a global cricketing royalty in Cummins faces an IPL czar in Gambhir. A decade ago, no one would have placed a bet on Cummins being a captain and winning the ODI World Cup, World Test Championship and Ashes in a space of six months, and now, leading SRH to their maiden IPL title would be the icing on the cake.

"A very practical guy, very humble, very empathetic to his fellow teammates and coaching staff. He is into the

statistics and gets the information that he needs against a particular opposition in certain conditions," SRH assistant coach Simon Helmot described the skipper in a nutshell after the team's win against Rajasthan Royals in the second Qualifier.

"He doesn't waste time in (team) meetings. Our team meeting today was 35 seconds. But, a lot of information has already been spoken about," he said.

The two teams met in the first qualifier in which KKR outwitted SRH with clever bowling plans on a massive Motera ground and in Chennai, Iyer's men will again start as favourites.

The last time KKR played an IPL final in Chennai, it was against Chennai Super Kings in 2012 in one of the most epic contests, which established Gambhir's credentials as an astute leader of men.

He not only had the right game plan but also had his heart in the right place during those heady years.

Gambhir went on to win another title in 2014, which made him a sentimental favourite and now he is on the cusp of becoming the man, who as captain and mentor has won the IPL trophy for the



same team. Obviously a bigger perk in Indian head coach's assignment awaits Gambhir and a trophy would not only burnish his credentials but also raise the demand to have him in that Indian dressing.

If one looks at man-to-man comparison, KKR tick more boxes in terms of overall match-winners with Sunil Narine, Andre Russell, Rinku Singh, the two Iyers — Shreyas and Venkatesh — the two Ranas — Nitish and Harshit —

and spinner Varun Chakravarthy in their ranks. However, SRH's uncapped domestic stars like Abhishek Sharma, Nitish Reddy have done really well along with out-of-favour India internationals such as

Bhuvneshwar Kumar, T Natarajan and Jaydev Unadkat. SRH's 36-run win over Royals on a difficult track will certainly boost their confidence but they also must realise that the Chepauk wicket will be tailor made for Varun

(20 wickets) and Narine (16 wickets), who have been in stellar form through the season.

SRH's spin department might be short on confidence but not in terms of heart as Abhishek and Shahbaz Ahmed showed during their cumulative haul of 5 for 37 in 8 overs, which changed the course of the second qualifier.

Any target between 180 to 200 could be a very competitive one if the pressure of playing the final is also factored in.

Travis Head and Heinrich Klaasen did get runs on a tricky surface but the likes of Abhishek, Rahul Tripathi and Reddy would need to play the match of their lives for SRH to emerge triumphant.

On a track where taking the pace off deliveries will be the key, young KKR pacers Harshit and Vaibhav Arora will have to think out of the box against Head, who has so far amassed 567 runs.

One interesting aspect of the IPL final is that the match features no member from India's main T20 World Cup squad. The only Indian player associated with the final will be Rinku Singh, who is in the reserves.

That again tells a story that IPL is won mostly by teams where

'Orange Cap' or 'Purple Cap' doesn't get much precedence in the face of team culture developed by Gambhir and Cummins.

TEAMS (FROM):

Sunrisers Hyderabad: Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Aiden Markram, Abdul Samad, Nitish Reddy, Shahbaz Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umrang Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips (wk), Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Upendra Yadav (wk), Jhathavedh Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijayakanth Vijayakanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Mahesar Singh, Mayank Agarwal.

Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain and Mujeeb Ur Rahman.



KKR will be favourites in IPL title clash, say Hayden and Pietersen

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Kolkata Knight Riders are better equipped to lift the IPL title on Sunday because of a superior spin attack and a better record against their rivals Sunrisers Hyderabad, reckon experts Matthew Hayden and Kevin Pietersen. KKR had trumped SRH in league stage matches and it will give them an edge going into Sunday's summit clash, they say.

"I'm very confident that KKR are going to win here, as having a few days off, having the ability to watch this match, and understanding what the strengths and weaknesses of Sunrisers Hyderabad are will be helpful," Hayden said on Star Sports Cricket Live.

"KKR, having defeated SRH, is going to have great momentum. I also just feel that the quality spin of (Sunil) Narine and Varun Chakaravathy on the red clay is going to make a difference."

"It's about just getting it right, really as simple as that. You've done all the hard work, traversed the country, been in and out of planes, buses, different hotels, and different beds. It's a really challenging, rigorous tournament, and only the strong-hearted get a chance to lift that trophy at the end."

"Luck will always play a little role in a sportsperson's life, no question, but more than anything, it's about making sure you're committed to your team on the day. What I saw from Rajasthan Royals was that while they were committed on one side of the match, they didn't fully believe when it came to batting (on Friday)," he said.

"They felt the strain and tension, and they succumbed to it. On the other hand, Sunrisers Hyderabad bounced back. It's not easy to bounce back in big matches after a loss. We were just talking about that with India and Pakistan. Finals are not about

retreating into your shell.

"Finals are about sticking your chest out, owning your space, understanding your role, and going for the jugular. That's the mentality you need in a final. It's a hunt, and you need to be in it to win it," he added.

Former England cricketer Kevin Pietersen too believes KKR are front-runners to win the IPL crown this time.

"I didn't like the way the Sunrisers threw in the towel the other evening in Ahmedabad, and I think it's going to put them on the back foot for the start on Sunday.

"The way they just finished that game off, Pat Cummins gave Travis Head the ball, and Shreyas Iyer just went bang, bang, bang. It'll give KKR a lot of confidence going into the finals knowing that they've already beaten SRH a couple of days ago," Pietersen said.

"So it's going to be really hard for the Sunrisers to get up, but I think they will because they won the SA20, so they know how to win. They've got a structure that knows how to win, and when you've got that belief within the franchise, that belief within the ownership, then momentum has its own way."

Pietersen feels toss will play a crucial factor but KKR's positive mindset will definitely hand them an edge over SRH.

"The toss is 50-50. I actually think that you have to consider the possibility of dew and also be prepared if it doesn't come. It's all about the mindset and confidence coming into this fixture.

"That's where I think KKR have an advantage, given the way they've played, their convincing win in qualifier one, and their preparation over the last three or four days.

"Also, look at their key players: the form of Sunil Narine at the top of the order, the batting form of Venkatesh Iyer, the skipper Shreyas Iyer's unbeaten 50 in the last game, and their impressive bowlers, especially the spinners Varun Chakaravathy and Narine. They have a squad full of match-winners," he said.

Fatigue played a part at back end of IPL, admits RR's director of cricket Sangakkara

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Rajasthan Royals' Director of Cricket Kumar Sangakkara has admitted that fatigue played a big part in their poor run at the back end of the ongoing IPL, which possibly derailed their campaign.

RR, who won eight out of their opening nine matches, were firmly in contention to finish in the top two.

But, the Sanju Samson-led side endured a four-match losing streak besides a washout tie, which forced the side to settle for a third-place finish.

Although they bounced back with a win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Eliminator, Sunrisers Hyderabad got the better of RR in Qualifier 2 here on Friday.

"I think it was a great season for us. We started well, and then we lost a close game to SRH in Hyderabad and (in) Delhi also, we put ourselves in winning positions," he said during the post-match media interaction after their 36-run loss to SRH.

"Sometimes you have streaks. RCB lost almost every game at the start and then caught up. That's how T20 goes. All we can do is put ourselves in positions of playoffs and vying for finals, which we did.

"I think all the guys throughout the season played phenomenal cricket. There was a little bit of fatigue at the back end, but it doesn't matter when you're in games like this. You gotta turn up and perform."

Chasing a target of 176, RR were 65 for two by the eighth over, but kept on losing wickets in clusters thereafter, leading to their downfall.

Commenting on the defeat, Sangakkara felt the middle-order could have done better.

"It was just a case of being smart and keeping our composure. Unfortunately, when you lose wickets in clusters, it becomes hard," he said.



"Even in the RCB chase, if you lose wickets, it gets tense and close. Unfortunately, we needed a little bit more from our middle-order."

RR were also without Jos Buttler, who has been a force for the team in the top order.

While Sangakkara said that international scheduling was something that they couldn't control, he felt that other batters should have stepped up.

"We always say that the best ability is availability, and unfortunately, we lost Jos. He is a big loss, without a doubt," he said.

"When you're in a playoff like this, and you've got that start without Jos, we expect the other batters to also step up."

RR have a few players travelling to the Americas for the T20 World Cup next month, namely Avesh Khan, Sanju Samson, Yuzvendra Chahal and Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Avesh has been the side's highest wicket-taker for the season, with 19 wickets in 15 innings at an economy of 9.59, and

Sangakkara was all-praise for the fast bowler. "We traded Devdutt Padikkal (to Lucknow Super Giants) for Avesh because we knew how good he was, and he's shown that throughout this tournament. And, that's why he's a travelling reserve as well for the World Cup for India," he said.

"He's got a great presence and good clarity. He's very good at finishing off in the death. I think he's been phenomenal for RR.

"And, we couldn't ask for a better trier. He bowls a lot in training. He's always up for a game. I thought again today he was outstanding."

"Don't have time to commit full-time to an India coaching job"

Sangakkara clearly refused any intention of applying for the India head coach's job, citing time issues.

"I have not been approached, and I don't have time to commit full-time to an India coaching job. Happy with my stint with Royals, and let's see how it goes," he concluded.



Hetmyer fined for breaching IPL Code of Conduct

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Shimron Hetmyer of Rajasthan Royals has been fined 10 per cent of his match fee for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during the Qualifier 2 against Sunrisers Hyderabad here.

SRH won the match by 36 runs on Friday.

While the organisers did not specify why Hetmyer was fined, it could be because of his reaction following his dismissal. After Abhishek Sharma bowled him in the 14th over of the chase, Hetmyer tried to smash the stumps in frustration.

"Shimron Hetmyer of the Rajasthan Royals has been fined 10 per cent of his match fees for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during the Qualifier 2 of the TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024

against Sunrisers Hyderabad at the MA Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai on May 24," the IPL said in a statement.

"Hetmyer committed a Level 1 offence under Article 2.2 of the IPL Code of Conduct. He admitted to the offence and accepted the Match Referee's sanction. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding."

Sent in to bat, SRH posted 175 for nine, riding on Heinrich Klaasen's 34-ball 50 and contributions from Travis Head (34) and Rahul Tripathi (37).

The spinners then joined the party with Shahbaz Ahmed (3/23) and Abhishek Sharma (2/24) sharing five wickets as RR could manage just 139 for 7 in 20 overs. Cummins (1/30) and T Natarajan (1/13) also scalped one each.

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Riding on skipper Pat Cummins' cricket smarts, Sunrisers Hyderabad will come back all guns blazing against Kolkata Knight Riders in the final of Indian Premier League, asserted the team's assistant coach Simon Helmot.

Emboldened by their 36-run win over Rajasthan Royals in the Qualifier 2 on a slow track here on Friday, Helmot said there won't be any change to the team's style of play in the summit showdown against KKR. The final will be played at Chepauk on Sunday.

"We must stick to our philosophy. We have done it all season, and it has got us into the situation we are now. There won't be any change in our method in the final," Helmot said at the post-match presser.

"I'm very proud of the way the team has taken into that even under pressure, and Rahul Tripathi upheld that today. He, Trav, and Klaasen continued that momentum throughout the innings."

Travis Head, Rahul Tripathi and Heinrich Klaasen shone with the bat as SRH posted 175/9 after batting first. The total proved to be enough as they restricted RR to 139/7 in the stipulated 20 overs.

SRH, who finished in the top two, had failed in Qualifier 1

There will not be any change in our method in final, says SRH assistant coach Helmot



against KKR before prevailing in Qualifier 2 against Rajasthan Royals.

Speaking about the track, he said, "The wicket looked good and shiny. We got to a fairly good start, and we probably lost an extra wicket.

"As the innings got on, the slower off-cutters and bouncers started working. We got that information into the second innings.

"We wanted the ball to get a bit older and bowl it hard into the wicket so that we might get some reaction. And obviously, the spin came into play."

Rajasthan Royals' talented

batters miserably failed as SRH's unfancied spin twins Abhishek Sharma and Shahbaz Ahmed spun a web to set-up a 36-run win.

Helmot praised skipper Cummins for his decision-making abilities and relationship with head coach Daniel Vettori.

"The credit goes to the captain. He made decisions at a time when he felt that conditions were conducive to spin.

"There were two right-handers at the time, and he felt that a left-arm orthodox spinner would be a good option. As for Abhishek, it might have been

his gut feeling, and if it is, what a wonderful decision it was because it changed the complexion of the game.

"Pat and Dan have a very good relationship and are keen to explore different ideas. They give the players the freedom to do what they want to do on the field, and we saw that today."

Speaking further on Cummins, Helmot said he loves to give freedom to his teammates and doesn't engage much in team meetings.

"A very practical guy, very humble, very empathetic to his fellow teammates and coaching staff. He is into the statistics and gets the information that he needs against a particular opposition in certain conditions.

"He doesn't waste time in (team) meetings. Our team meeting today was 35 seconds. But a lot of information has already been spoken about.

"There has been a lot of one-on-one with the fielding coach, bowling coach and the batting coach. We try to limit the large group meetings."

THE DECISION-MAKERS WERE VERY WISE IN

MAKING SHAHBAZ AHMED'S TRADE: All-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed has been a top acquisition by SRH this season and Helmot hailed him as a multi-skilled player.

"Don't know the background about how it was done, but I do know he is a multi-skilled

Election to Member of Parliament From-05-Mayurbhanj (S.T) P.C			
I. Naba Charan Majhi S/o Late Dhuma Majhi of At-Mahuldiha, Ward No.01, Rairangpur, Po/Ps- Rairangpur Town, Dist-Mayurbhanj in the state of Odisha.			
As per the judgment Dt.25 th Sept 2018 of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in WP(C) No.536 of 2011 in the matter of public interest foundation and others Vrs-Union of India.			
The following criminal case is/ are pending against me.			
1.			
(a)	F.I.R No with name of the police station	F.I.R No.92/2010 Rairangpur Town P.S	
(b)	Case No. with name of the Court	G.R. case No.443/2010 Court of the S.D.J.M, Rairangpur	
(c)	Section(s) of concerned Acts/ codes involved	u/s 342, 186 and 34 of I.P.C	
(d)	Brief description of offence	u/s 342-Wrongfully confinement to any person u/s 186-Voluntarily obstructs any public servant in discharge of his public function u/s 34-Common intention	
(e)	Whether charges have been framed ?	No	
(f)	Whether any appeal/ application for revision has been filed against the proceedings	No	
			Naba Charan Majhi

"Until you dig a hole,
you plant a tree, you
water it and make it
survive, you haven't
done a thing. You are
just talking"
— Swami Vivekananda



As we navigate life’s twists and turns, we can draw inspiration from the timeless wisdom from nature to embrace the changes that come our way, always making room for new growth and opportunities, write **BKP SINHA** and **ARVIND KUMAR JHA**

GENESIS OF GROWTH FROM BUD TO BRANCH

As you stand beneath the towering majesty of a tree, your gaze is naturally drawn upwards, captivated by the intricate network of branches that crisscross the sky. Each branch, unique in pattern and structure, defines the tree's character and beauty. Yet, behind this awe-inspiring spectacle lies a more fascinating tale of growth and transformation. The narrative unfolds with the emergence of a bud from the tree's trunk. Given the right balance of sunlight, water, and nutrients, this bud slowly grows and develops into a mature branch. The genesis of a bud, or bud set, is initiated in regions of the plant rich in meristematic cells. These cells, found at the tips of stems and roots, have the unique ability to divide and differentiate into various types of plant cells, leading to the formation of new organs such as leaves, flowers, and branches. When these meristematic cells, or apical buds, are exposed to sunlight, they initiate new growth. This is where the plant hormones auxin and cytokinin come into play. Auxin, originating from the shoot apex, inhibits the outgrowth of axillary buds, allowing the apical bud to grow faster and taller. This phenomenon, known as apical dominance, ensures that the central stem of the plant grows more strongly than the side stems. Cytokinin, on the other hand, which is stimulated by the removal of the shoot apex, promotes the outgrowth of axillary buds by providing them with more nutrients. This tug-of-war between auxin and cytokinin is crucial for the plant's growth strategy. It allows the plant to adapt to its environment, growing taller to reach for sunlight or spreading out its branches to occupy more space. As the bud grows, the meristematic cells divide and differentiate, giving rise to different types of cells that constitute the branch. Some cells form the outer layer, transforming into bark cells, while others form the wood, turning into the xylem and phloem. As the cells continue to divide and differentiate, the bud gradually elongates, evolving into a twig. Over time, the twig undergoes lignification, a process involving the deposition of lignin, a complex organic polymer that provides rigidity to the plant's cell walls. This process gradually transforms the flexible, green twig into a hard, brown branch. Lignin is a key component of the plant's defense mechanism. It forms a physical barrier in the cell walls that protects the plant against pathogens and pests. This barrier also makes the plant resistant to decay, thereby increasing its lifespan. Moreover, lignin is essential for the plant's water transport system. It makes the plant's vascular tissues waterproof, preventing the leakage of water and nutrients, and facilitating their upward movement from the roots to the leaves. This waterproofing property also prevents the absorption of excess water, protecting the plant from waterlogging and associated diseases. The anatomy of a branch reveals a marvel of plant architecture. At its very base lies the branch collar, a swollen area where the branch attaches to the main trunk. This specialized structure houses tissues that are instrumental in wound healing and act as a protective shield against the invasion of pathogens. Progressing from the branch collar, we come across the branch junction. This crucial juncture signifies the point where the branch diverges from the trunk, paving the way for the branch's outward expansion. From this point, the branch unfurls, giving rise to lateral shoots known as secondary branches or twigs. These offshoots, in turn,



BKP SINHA



ARVIND K JHA

“OVER TIME, THE TWIG UNDERGOES LIGNIFICATION, A PROCESS INVOLVING THE DEPOSITION OF LIGNIN, A COMPLEX ORGANIC POLYMER THAT PROVIDES RIGIDITY TO THE PLANT'S CELL WALLS. THIS PROCESS GRADUALLY TRANSFORMS THE FLEXIBLE, GREEN TWIG INTO A HARD, BROWN BRANCH. LIGNIN IS A KEY COMPONENT OF THE PLANT'S DEFENSE MECHANISM. IT FORMS A PHYSICAL BARRIER IN THE CELL WALLS THAT PROTECTS THE PLANT AGAINST PATHOGENS AND PESTS”



branch out into finer limbs, culminating in the production of leaves, flowers, or fruits. Branching patterns in trees are an intriguing aspect of plant biology, reflecting both the genetic makeup of the species and the environmental conditions in which they grow. One such pattern is 'alternate branching', seen in certain species. In this arrangement, branches are staggered along the main stem, reducing overlap and creating spaces between branches. This results in a more open canopy structure, which is not only an architectural marvel but also a strategic adaptation. The open structure allows sunlight to penetrate evenly, reaching the lower branches and the forest floor. This not only benefits the tree itself by ensuring all parts receive adequate sunlight for photosynthesis but also nurtures the understory plants with filtered light. However, this strategy is not without its challenges. The staggered arrangement of branches creates a less rigid framework, which, while potentially allowing for more movement during wind events, might also increase the tree's susceptibility to structural damage in severe storms. On the other hand, some species showcase 'opposite branching', with pairs of branches sprouting in symmetrical opposition. Trees with opposite branching patterns often experience higher levels of shading within their canopies due to the symmetrical arrangement of branches. This leads to a denser and overlapping canopy structure, akin to a natural umbrella that provides shade and conserves moisture. The increased density results in shading between opposite branches, limiting the penetration of sunlight to lower branches and the interior of the canopy. However, this denser structure often provides increased mechanical stability against wind or storms. Branches inherently exhibit negative geotropism, meaning they grow in the opposite direction of gravity, reaching upwards and outwards for sunlight. This strategic adaptation enables them to maximise their exposure to sunlight and secure their place in the fierce competition for resources. In dense forests, where sunlight is scarce, trees adopt a different strategy known as 'self-shading avoidance'. They grow more vertically to minimize the shading of their lower leaves and reach toward the scant light available in the canopy. Wind, the invisible sculptor, also plays a significant role in shaping tree growth. In windy environments, trees often adopt narrower branching angles, resulting in a more streamlined shape that reduces wind resistance. These branches, often perceived as mere offshoots, are in fact, the vital lifelines of trees. Much like arteries in the human body, branches serve as crucial conduits within the arboreal world, playing an indispensable role in the survival and well-being of the tree. They perform the critical function of transporting water and nutrients from the roots to the leaves, while also carrying back the sugars produced during photosynthesis from the leaves to the rest of the tree. They also provide habitat and support for a diverse range of organisms. Birds build nests on them, insects and lichen find refuge on the bark and leaves, and mammals use branches for shelter and as a pathway for movement. This biodiversity creates a mini-ecosystem within the branches themselves, contributing significantly to the overall health of the tree and the complex web of life that surrounds it. Many trees have flowers and fruit on their branches, which are essential for reproduction. Flowers attract pollinators, and fruits, containing seeds, are eaten by animals who then disperse the seeds in their droppings, aiding in the spread of the tree species. Some seeds are even equipped with wings or fluff, enabling them to be carried by the wind, thus allowing plants to disperse

their offspring over a wide area. In some remarkable instances, branches themselves become the genesis of new life. This is observed in the process of vegetative propagation, where fragments of branches can give birth to entirely new trees. This form of asexual reproduction results in a new tree that is genetically identical to the parent tree. Trees, in their wisdom, are active architects of their growth. They strategically shed lower branches that are no longer efficient at photosynthesis. This calculated act of self-pruning allows trees to channel their energy and resources toward the higher branches, which are better positioned to capture more sunlight. But how does the tree accomplish this? When a branch becomes unproductive, the tree gradually severs its supply of water and nutrients. The branch then loses its bark and becomes frail and susceptible to fungi. Eventually, the branch falls off, leaving behind a stump that is sealed by resins or gums. This seal protects the tree from harmful pathogens that could infect the wounded area and jeopardize its health. As the fallen branch decomposes, it bestows its accumulated nutrients back into the soil, a final act of nourishment for the tree that once gave it life. This process enriches the surrounding ecosystem, fostering new life and affirming that in every ending, there is a new beginning. This ongoing cycle of growth and retreat mirrors life's profound truth: Change is the only constant. It serves as a reminder that life isn't merely about relentless growth, but also about the wisdom of knowing when to let go. Much like a tree that sheds an unproductive branch to conserve energy for new growth, we too should find the courage to let go of what no longer serves us. As we navigate life's twists and turns, we can draw inspiration from this timeless wisdom from nature to embrace the changes that come our way, always making room for new growth and opportunities.

(Former Principal Chief Conservators of Forests, UP and Maharashtra)

A SYMPHONY OF DREAMS, LOSS AND A NATION'S AWAKENING

KAMINI PURI'S words breathe life into the pages of *The Red Munia* as she intricately interweaves the personal and the political, offering readers an exploration of love, loss and the human spirit amidst India's transformative history, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**

The *Red Munia* by renowned author Kamini Puri delves into the history of India, beautifully exploring the themes of family, love, Indian history and loss amidst a transforming nation. Puri's novel is a compelling journey of self-discovery set against the vibrant landscapes of India. The story is as much about the characters as it is about the cultural and natural beauty that surrounds them. The novel reflects contemporary reality, illustrating how "Politics is something we are unknowingly growing up on without even understanding the meaning of it." The novel's charm lies in its rich descriptions and the deep emotional resonance of its characters as they navigate the complexities of love, identity, and freedom. In the prologue, Puri introduces the *red munia* bird, an enchanting creature with deep red wings speckled with brown and white. This bird, despite its beauty is often captured and caged, symbolising India's own history of being subjugated for its riches and splendour. The red munia's plight mirrors the nation's suffering under British rule establishing a resonant and evocative framework for the story. Laila, the vibrant heart of the novel, takes readers on a voyage from her

childhood in Kapurthala, Punjab. Her determination is well-portrayed by Puri, showcasing her dreams and emotional connection with her sister. As Laila grows up, she leaves her sheltered life in Kapurthala to pursue journalism in Bombay. Her quest for independence and self-expression leads her to London, where she dreams of meeting the Queen of England. In London, she meets Jai, whose carefree attitude and understanding of love transform her perspective on life. Their romance faces numerous challenges, reflecting the complexities of cultural integration and personal ambitions. The first chapter, 'Childhood Bliss,' introduces readers to the blissful world of Laila in 1942 Kapurthala, Punjab. Laila, her sister Dia, and their friend Maya live a life filled with joy and adventure epitomised by their games, horse riding and the warmth of family traditions. The vivid descriptions of their home, particularly the beloved divan in the verandah, evoke a sense of nostalgia and comfort. Laila's narration brings to life the household dynamics, with Papaji's morning rituals and Bijji's attachment to old furniture adding layers of authenticity to the family portrait. The playful interactions between Laila and Dia, their mimicry of Papaji's shaving routine and their

THE RED MUNIA
Author: Kamini Puri
Publisher: StoryMirror Infotech
Price: ₹349



uncontrollable laughter highlight the innocence and joy of childhood. However, beneath this idyllic surface, there are hints of the larger political context. Laila's awareness of her father's concerns about the anarchic state of India adds a layer of depth to her character, foreshadowing her eventual journey toward personal and political awakening. At 18, Laila leaves her hometown to pursue journalism in Bombay (Mumbai), a decision that marks the beginning of her journey toward self-discovery. The portrayal of Bombay in the 1940s is vivid and immersive, showcasing the city's bustling streets, diverse culture, and vibrant atmosphere. The chapter 'Bombay Dreams' is particularly special for every reader as it captures Laila living in the city of dreams to pursue her ambitions. Through Laila's experiences, Puri masterfully captures the essence of the city, highlighting its role as a melting pot of dreams and aspirations. One of the novel's most compelling aspects is Laila's relationship with her family. Despite her physical distance from them, Laila's emotional connection to her family, particularly with her sister Dia, is heartwarming, as it serves as a source of strength and support for both sisters as they navigate life's challenges.

Central to the novel is the theme of grief, portrayed with raw honesty and sensitivity. The protagonist's struggles to come to terms with loss, both personal and collective, is depicted with heartbreaking realism. Puri explores different facets of grief - anger, denial and eventual acceptance — with nuance, making it a deeply relatable and poignant read. In the chapter 'Unforgettable Meeting,' where Laila interviews Jawaharlal Nehru, her achievement is significant, yet she misses the sharing that comes from a soulful relationship. This moment describes the emotional depth of the book, as she has no one to share her accomplishment with apart from her father, highlighting the emptiness she feels despite her success. The novel also shines in its portrayal of the impact of historical events on individual lives. Through the protagonist's journey, Puri illuminates how larger political events, such as India's struggle for Independence and the assassination of Gandhi, reverberate in the lives of ordinary people, shaping their choices and beliefs. Character development is another strong suit of the novel. The protagonist's growth and transformation are beautifully rendered, making them fully realised and empathetic characters

The novel is more than just a personal journey, as it explores the complexities of finding your voice and chasing your dreams amidst societal constraints. Laila's burning ambition to become a journalist is juxtaposed against the expectations placed upon young women of her times. This internal conflict is further amplified as she grapples with the cultural shifts and social changes sweeping across India. The titular red munia bird emerges as a powerful symbol. Is it a representation of the freedom and resilience that Laila aspires to? Or perhaps, a reminder of the beauty and fragility of her homeland? The ambiguity adds depth to the story, inviting readers to contemplate the symbolism throughout the narrative. Arguably, *The Red Munia* is a beautifully written novel that offers a compelling portrait of pre-Independence India. Through its vivid imagery, well-developed characters and touching storytelling, Kamini Puri creates a narrative that is both appealing and thought-provoking. It is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the enduring power of hope and determination, making it a must-read for anyone interested in journeys of self-discovery and the rich history and culture of India.

At His Majesty's Service

Chander Lall's book offers a panoramic view of the Constitution, the history of India's Independence movement, and the social milieu of that era in an inimitable style, writes **KUMAR CHELLAPPAN**

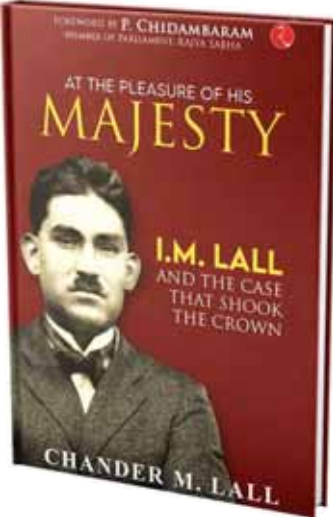
Having worked with Central Government establishments for close to a decade and a half, this writer has come to the conclusion that a Government job is a safe haven for those with an IQ below par. Apart from the obvious security and regular salaries that accompany such a job, it also leads to some individuals barely doing any work worth its name. In fact, it is this sense of security that draws countless aspirants to seek a position in State/Central Government departments. Recently, I came across the case file of a driver employed with the Andaman Lakshadweep Harbour Works whose service was terminated following unauthorised absence from duty for a period of eight years. It took years for the Central Administrative Tribunal to concur with his superiors that his continuous absence from duty for such a long period was devoid of any justification and uphold their decision to terminate his services. This is just one such instance of the freedom enjoyed by Government servants who are blissfully unaware of the landmine-paved paths of the private sector. While modern-day Government employees are fortunate to enjoy complete freedom at their work places, things were not as smooth during the tenure of the British administration. Anyone, including officers of the high profile and elite Indian Civil Services, could be relieved of their responsibilities for the most innocuous of reasons. It took a daredevil ICS officer like Inder Mohan Lall to take on the British administration by the horns and tutor them on the fact that there is due procedure to be followed in taking disciplinary

action against any errant Government officer or lower staff. The Civil Service Regulations had given enough power to the then Federal Public Service Commission as well as the Government of India's Home Department under the Government of India act 1935 to "fire" anyone accused of misconduct while in service. The draconian rule did not have any provision to furnish the accused with a chargesheet, his version of the story holding no relevance. This rule was challenged by Lall, taking on His Majesty's Government from 1939 to 1948. The case culminated in Lall's victory as the Court ordered that the Government of India Act should have Article 311 which ensures that "no person who is a member of the civil service of the Union or an all India Service or a civil service of a State shall be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to that by which he was appointed." No such person as aforesaid shall be dismissed or removed or reduced in rank except after an enquiry in which he has been informed of the charges against him and given a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of those charges, the Court ordered. Lall had faced a series of charges for his decision to appoint Sundar Das, his wife's nephew, as a subordinate staff in the court where he worked as district judge of the Hoshiarpur district. This antagonized some of the junior staff members who had eyed the post for themselves. Lall had taken stringent action against many Government employees for their corrupt practices so they were waiting for an opportunity to strike back. Sundar Das came served as the right opportunity for them to take it up with the Secretary of

State. The latter appointed two commissions of enquiry, one after another, to foist cases on Lall in order to get rid of him from His Majesty's Service. The enquiries and the ensuing legal battle form the plot of his book. What author Chander M Lall has done is to chronicle the events in a reader-friendly manner. He commences with his family history that includes Lall's life as a soldier in the British Indian Army during the First World War and how he made it to the ICS from where he was removed, based on the reports submitted by the enquiry commissions. We seldom go into the details of a new legislation enacted by law making

bodies like the Parliament or legislative assemblies. However, each and every law enacted addresses a specific concern. The first time the Constitution was amended was to address certain difficulties arising out of rulings by the Supreme Court. Famous cases like Golak Nath versus State of Punjab or Keshavananda Bharati versus State of Kerala were a follow up to the restrictions placed on the land ownership of individuals. Henry and William Golak Nath, two brothers, owned hundreds of acres of prime land in Jalandhar. But the Punjab Government declared that each brother could own only 30 acres of land and declared the rest as surplus land. The brothers challenged the Act and the apex court upheld the decision of the State of Punjab. Similarly, Keshavananda Bharati, the pontiff of Edneer Mutt, challenged the Kerala Government's move to take over vast stretches of land owned by the Mutt (monastery) as per the Land Reforms Act. A constitutional Bench in a split verdict upheld the Kerala Government decision but ruled that Parliament cannot amend the basic structure of the Constitution while making such legislations. The Kerala Government's action was a specific move against Hindus as it left untouched thousands of acres of plantations belonging to other communities. No surprise that the title of Fali Nariman's last book was, *You Must Know Your Constitution*. Chander Lall's *At the Pleasure of His Majesty* is an important work. It offers the readers a panoramic view of the Constitution, history about India's Independence movement, and the social milieu of that era in a truly splendid style.

AT THE PLEASURE OF HIS MAJESTY
Author: Chander M Lall
Publisher: RUPA
Price: ₹295

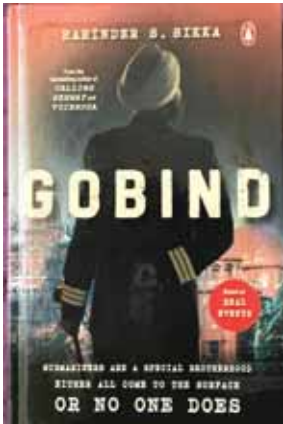


TALE OF VALOUR, LOVE, AND REDEMPTION

HARINDER SIKKA tells Gobind's story with rare passion and candor, highlighting the protagonist's ability to uphold his promises, says **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

Harinder Sikka, the acclaimed author whose book *Calling Sehmat* inspired the 2018 film *Raazi* starring Alia Bhatt, explores the depths of human emotion and resilience in his latest novel, *Gobind*. This compelling story is set against the dual backdrops of Bihar's poverty and the valorous spirit of the Indian Navy. Through a rich narrative, Sikka delves into themes of love, loyalty, and redemption, offering readers a deeply personal and stirring literary experience. For Sikka, *Gobind* is more than just a story; it is a personal literary voyage. "It's a very personal literary voyage that weaves together themes of love, selflessness, and unwavering determination," he explains. The novel is based on true events that transpired between the late 1970s and early 1990s, providing a rare and profound insight into the disciplined and highly motivated Armed Forces of India, particularly the Indian Navy. Through meticulous storytelling, Sikka highlights the rigorous training, passion, and dedication of naval officers, weaving in shocking incidents that occurred in St Petersburg, Russia, and India. *Gobind* centres around its titular character, a man born into abject poverty to parents who held deep faith in Guru Gobind Singh. Named after the revered saint, Gobind realises early on that it is up to him to change his family's circumstances. With no means or support beyond the values instilled by his parents, Gobind works tirelessly to gain admission to the Indian Military Academy (IMA), eventually qualifying for recruitment into

CALLING SEHMAT
Author: Harinder Sikka
Publisher: Penguin
Price: ₹499



the Indian Navy. Although Gobind achieves professional success, his personal life is marred by tragedy. The girl he loves commits suicide after her landlord father arranges her marriage to another man. This devastating loss leaves Gobind shattered, despite being celebrated in his village for his professional achievements. Yet, he rises from this personal devastation with renewed determination. Gobind's journey takes him to Russia as part of a team tasked with purchasing submarines for the Indian Navy. Despite the immense responsibility, he performs his duties with unwavering integrity. His integrity shines through when a

senior officer, compromised by a Russian honey trap, approves the quality check on a submarine. Gobind refuses to concur, standing firm in his commitment to duty and integrity. His moral fortitude is further tested when he falls in love with a Russian girl, a relationship that challenges his fundamental rights. Sikka tells Gobind's story with rare passion and candour, highlighting the protagonist's ability to uphold his promises and appeal to the higher principles of those around him. Through Gobind's journey, Sikka presents a thrilling yet deeply sensitive narrative that provokes thought while delivering a profound message. The story inspires and entertains, making it a multifaceted read. *Gobind*, published by Penguin, was recently launched and has already garnered significant attention. Harinder Sikka, who was commissioned into the Indian Navy in January 1981 and took premature retirement in 1993 as a Lieutenant Commander, brings his firsthand experience and insights into the narrative. Besides *Calling Sehmat*, Sikka has also authored *Vichhoda*, further establishing his prowess in weaving powerful stories. In *Gobind*, readers will find a powerful tale of a man who dared to challenge the world for the principles he stood for. Sikka's narrative not only tells the story of a determined naval officer but also explores the broader themes of love, selflessness, and unwavering determination, offering a deeply enriching reading.



EXPLORING THE GARDEN OF JADE

PAWAN SONI
embarks on a
delightful journey
through Chinese
cuisine
with innovative
twists adding a
new dimension to
the experience



Reminiscing about my unforgettable dining experience at Jade under the mastery of Chef Vivek Rana, I recently revisited this iconic Chinese restaurant, now under the stewardship of Chef Ankur Gulati. The restaurant has undergone a transformation, now boasting a spacious layout flooded with natural light, offering a refreshing and open ambience. As I settled into one of the three Personal Dining Rooms (PDRs), I pondered if the meal would succeed in replicating my prior experience. Skipping drinks and soup, we dove straight into the Golden Fried

FACT SHEET

Address: Jade, 102, The Claridges, 12, Dr APJ Kalam Road, New Delhi Phone: 011-39555000

RATINGS

Food: 4.25/5 | **Service:** 4/5 | **Ambience:** 4.5/5 | **Overall:** 4.25/5



Prawns, a new addition to the menu of this classic dish. The large sized prawns were perfectly chunky, coated in a light batter of potato starch, and paired excellently with a spicy-sweet pineapple chili sauce. A variety of dim sum followed, each a masterpiece in its own right. The soupy pork and ginger, steamed lobster and scallop, lettuce wrapped prawn, truffle mushroom, and cream cheese in a carrot-shaped skin were all exquisite. The lettuce wrapped prawn stood out for its subtle flavors, although the chicken dim sum in coconut milk-based broth, while delicious, seemed more suited to Thai cuisine. The lamb chops, a departure from traditional cumin based Chinese fare, were a surprising delight. Paired with a Chinese-style sauce featuring butter, garlic, ginger, and a hint of ketchup, they offered a unique and satisfying blend of flavors. For the mains, the steamed Chilean seabass in a wine-based soy sauce was a standout, offering a light yet flavorful experience. The mushroom crab, while promising, fell short due to the use of frozen crab meat, which compromised its sweetness and freshness. The meal concluded with a serving of coconut ice cream accompanied by liquid jaggery, a sweet yet refreshing end to a memorable dining experience. However, the single scoop served for Rs 695 felt slightly lacking, and I would have appreciated a larger portion. The meal at Jade was a delightful journey through Chinese cuisine, with Chef Ankur Gulati's innovative twists adding a new dimension to the experience. The ambience, now more spacious and airy, complements the culinary offerings, making Jade a must-visit destination for aficionados of Chinese cuisine.

Home Chefs push Food Frontiers

FOODFREAK



PAWAN SONI



In the dynamic world of gastronomy, a fascinating trend is unfolding: the ascent of home chefs transitioning into the professional sphere, offering a taste of home to professionals far from their roots. This trend not only reshapes the culinary landscape but also enriches the dining experience for food enthusiasts globally. Eleven years ago, recognising the talent of home chefs and bakers, I created a platform through our awards — The Big F Awards. While most awards still focus on restaurants and hotels due to their financial considerations, the role of home-based chefs is gaining recognition, with professional platforms like ChefPin becoming the Zomato of the home chef arena. ChefPin app help diners discover hidden talents by using the app that can be downloaded from Android playstore and Apple Appstore. Rocky Mohan, founder of ChefPin says, "Platforms like ChefPin are leading this culinary revolution, dedicated to discovering and showcasing talents from home kitchens. Through ChefPin's innovative approach, home chefs not only display their culinary skills but also immerse themselves in the world of professional cooking. Collaborating with seasoned chefs in renowned hotels such as Shangri-La, these aspiring cooks learn high-end cuisine intricacies, refine their techniques, and gain invaluable experience." I have personally attended many of these pop-ups at hotels, particularly Shangri-La, and have been impressed by the regional cuisines they offer. Recently, I experienced a pop-up by home chef Sai Priya, unveiling hidden Oriya cuisine dishes. Past events featured Rekha Rigo's South Indian flavours, Surabhi Bhandari's vegetarian Marwadi cuisine, including traditional gluten-free dishes, mango peel-based delicacies, and

Gul Ali's Awadhi dishes. Such pop-ups help document many unknown dishes, preserving their heritage. Abhishek Sadhoo, General Manager at Shangri-La Eros, New Delhi, highlights, "As a part of bringing the World on a Platter at Tamra, these collaborations not only allow a gourmet of multiple cuisines of home food for our guests but also enhances culinary team members to explore new regional cuisines, techniques, and ingredients, enriching their culinary knowledge and adding a new dimension to their expertise." Furthermore, these pop-up events offer hotel guests a unique dining experience, indulging in homely, traditional dishes prepared with love and care by home chefs. This break from the standard hotel menus not only enhances the hotel's appeal but also creates a buzz among food enthusiasts, attracting more guests to experience this culinary fusion. Over the years, I have witnessed many home chefs grow and achieve professional success. One such example is Abhilasha Jain, also known as *Marwadi Khana*. From preparing authentic Rajasthani cuisine at home, she now operates a small professional setup, offering deliveries, *laddoos*, *gujiya*, and stylish catering while maintaining a homely touch. The emergence of home chefs in the professional culinary scene, facilitated by platforms such as ChefPin, demonstrates the evolving nature of gastronomy. It breaks barriers, fosters cultural exchange, and redefines the food experience. As this trend continues, it promises to bring new levels of creativity and diversity to the world of fine dining.

— Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com

DREAMY DARJEELING

Serene Himalayan Hideaway

For many years, filmmakers have been captivated by the enchanting allure of DARJEELING nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas. It possesses a charming blend of grandeur, cinematic appeal, and intimacy, making it ideal for both visual storytelling and as a muse for writers seeking creative inspiration.



BY **AKANKSHA DEAN**

Since childhood, I dreamed of visiting Darjeeling. Nestled in the Himalayan foothills in West Bengal, India, it captivates with lush tea gardens stretching over rolling hills, set against snow-capped mountains. Perched high at 6,710 feet, towering above its neighbouring regions. I imagined myself enjoying tea amidst the mountains, enveloped by the serene beauty of nature. After a two-hour flight and a two-hour drive from steamy Delhi, I find myself in Ghoom, where staff dressed in charming smiles graciously serves me delightful tea besides breath-taking views of the Kanchenjunga, India's loftiest peak at 28,169 feet (8,586 meters) at this lavish 6.4-acre haven aka The Sterling Darjeeling, just steps from Yiga Choeling Monastery, making it a dreamy retreat for my getaway. To my surprise, Darjeeling's history wasn't always intertwined with tea.



Back in 1835, the British obtained the lofty ridge, standing tall at 7,000 feet (2,134 meters), from the rulers of Sikkim. Initially intended as a sanctuary to rejuvenate weary colonialists fatigued by the plains' sweltering heat, this haven quickly transformed into a popular destination for the elite British community from Kolkata (Calcutta), seeking respite and breath-taking views of Kanchenjunga. The infusion of tea culture didn't grace Darjeeling until the 1840s, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Campbell, a Scottish physician who introduced tea bushes from China to the region.

PLAYING TOURIST

Apart from being located at an amazing location with brilliant services, The Sterling Darjeeling boasting 101 rooms has easy access to a number of tourist attractions. My Privilege Suite at the Sterling has a valley view that I never get tired of rising to, while giving the warmth of a heritage hotel with the luxuries of a slicker. Embarking on a holiday at Sterling also means a delightful array of exclusive Discoveries & Experiences, both within the resort's confines and beyond, allowing you to immerse yourself in the rich tapestry of local art, culture, cuisine, history, nature, and activities. From

savouring authentic culinary delights to embarking on enlightening culture trails, Sterling is dedicated to providing guests with a multitude of avenues to enjoy a distinctive and memorable holiday experience. As I begin my day at the bustling Batasia Loop Market, I find myself mesmerized by the vibrant displays of jewellery and colourful clothing that flank the Gorkha War Memorial and Batasia Eco Garden. Immersing myself in the local culture, I embark on a nostalgic journey aboard the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, known fondly as the Toy Train, evoking precious

childhood memories that inspire me to capture the essence in my writing. Thrill-seekers can opt for a thrilling rafting adventure on the Teesta River, while history enthusiasts will be enchanted by the remarkable architecture of Zang Dhok Palri Phodang perched on Durpin Hill.

CHILL ZONE

Chowrasta, the lively hub situated on Nehru Road in the old town became our favourite haunt and we would go there literally every evening. This bustling area features a promenade where visitors and locals gather to shop, dine, or simply enjoy the scenery. Seizing the opportunity to observe people, I savoured a cup of tea amidst the vibrant atmosphere. As Bollywood tunes filled the air and families interact with vendors, I soak in the sights and sounds of the bustling streets. Amidst the fragrant pine trees, I encounter women vendors selling corn on the cob. Engaging with one, I learn about Chowrasta's significance: symbolizing an intersection, the four roads branching out from the mall lead in different directions. The days gracefully wind down at Glenary's bakery and café, where we watch the sun set beyond the panoramic windows, savouring a comforting cup of tea as we reflect on the remarkable experiences of the day. Back at the Sterling Resort, in the evenings the Holiday Activity



Centre offers a plethora of entertainment options, from engaging in table tennis and carrom to diving into board and fun group games. Upon my request, I am treated to enchanting themed nights and have the pleasure of attending events at the charming amphitheatre, adding a touch of magic to my stay.

THE LAST LEG

For those seeking to delve into Darjeeling's tea culture, a stay at upscale tea estates like the Glenburn Tea Estate offers an unrivalled retreat steeped in rich heritage. Beginning from its 1860 inception under the stewardship of the esteemed Prakash family,

this working tea estate seamlessly blends tradition with modern luxury. Nature envelops you here, with 1,000 acres of private forest and two rivers meandering through the estate. Choose between the Burra Bungalow and the Water Lily Bungalow, each offering four elegant suites. We enjoy our days hiking, fishing, and exploring the tea-growing process and embracing the tranquillity with a book and a calming cup of tea. Crossing to Sikkim via a charming hanging bridge unveils a world of ancient forests and village life awaiting exploration. While winding our way back to the airport, we pause at Timboor on the Trail, renowned for its Nepalese cuisine amidst a garden ablaze with azaleas and petunias. Yearning for a taste of traditional Nepalese thali, I sought to revisit cherished meals from my travels among Nepalese friends. Perfect ending to my Darjeeling trip. Akanksha Dean is an independent food & travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at Osteria Francescana, in Modena, Italy, rated as the world's best restaurant in the World's 50 Best Restaurants, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the Best of The Best Category.



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