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FOURTH DAY ON PROFIT TAKING

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Baked Delhi waits to exhale

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

It's raining fire in the national Capital as the city recorded its highest temperature of 46.8 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, surpassing its 79-year-old record of 46.4 degrees Celsius set in 1945. While Mungeshpur logged the highest ever temperature in the city at 52.9 degrees Celsius, 13 degrees above normal, areas like Narela and Najafgarh saw temperatures reaching 49 degrees Celsius. To get relief, heat-stricken residents were seen drinking ORS-laced drinks, using wet towels, and taking multiple baths a day.

Delhi broke all previous records in the country as the previous highest temperature in India was recorded in Rajasthan's Phalodi in 2016 at 51 degrees Celsius.

It is also just 3.8 degrees behind the highest temperature ever recorded on Earth of 56.7 degrees Celsius at the Greenland Ranch in California's Death Valley, which is now aptly referred to as the Furnace Creek Ranch.

The maximum temperature in Delhi was recorded at 46.8 degrees Celsius, which is six degrees above the normal, while the minimum temperature settled at 29.4 degrees Celsius.

However, the weather



Reprieve, heat, repeat

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Northwest and Central India, which have been in the grip of unprecedented heatwave conditions in the last few days, may get some respite gradually from Thursday. However, don't breathe a sigh of relief as unfortunately, after the respite, the region will again witness a higher number of heatwave days in June.

"Normally, northwest India

and the adjoining areas record two to three heatwave days in June. But this time, we expect four to six days of heatwave in this region," said IMD chief Mrutyunjay Mohapatra. The IMD has issued a red warning for six States in this region — Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi-NCR, East Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh — indicating severe heatwave conditions. It downgraded the red alert to an orange alert over these

States on May 30 but it will persist in Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi-NCR until May 31, as per the IMD.

Heatwave to severe heatwave conditions are very likely in most/many parts of Punjab, Haryana-Chandigarh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh on May 29 and gradual reduction thereafter with heatwave conditions in isolated/some parts till June 1, 2024, as per the IMD.

experienced a sudden change on Wednesday evening as the sky turned cloudy and witnessed light drizzling in some parts, providing short relief to Delhiites. But the short respite was followed by more discomfort due to the humidity caused by light rain.

The roasting heat has led to the Delhiites taking several measures to ensure their well being along with trying to stay indoors as much as possible. However, some residents said it is not easy to be indoors all the time as one has to go and earn a livelihood. People were seen flocking air conditioned buses and preferring the metro for their journey while also spending their time inside air-conditioned shopping malls.

In Delhi's ITO metro station, many, who came to get their passports from the office nearby, were seen taking refuge in the station to beat the heat amid long queues. A 40-year-old woman sitting at the entry passage said it is the best way she could escape the scorching summer heat.

With temperatures nearing 50 degrees Celsius in Mungeshpur and Najafgarh in the last few days, residents said they have been constantly falling ill despite taking many measures to beat the heat.



SC cold to Kejriwal bail extension plea

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a major setback to AAP Iconvener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Supreme Court registry on Wednesday refused to list his plea to extend his interim bail by a week to undergo certain medical tests.

During their campaign, the BJP questioned Kejriwal for seeking yet another relief from the court. They took a jibe at the AAP leader, stating that he can campaign in the Lok Sabha polls in intense heat but complains of illness when mandated by the judiciary to surrender soon after the campaign ends.

The development comes a day after a vacation bench refused to allow the urgent hearing, saying it would be appropriate if the Chief Justice of India takes a call on this. Kejriwal is on out bail in the liquor policy linked money laundering case and the same will expire on June 1. Kejriwal will have to surrender before the Tihar jail authorities on June 2. Kejriwal is currently campaigning in

Punjab which will go to polls on June 1. In a related development, his aide Bibhav Kumar has also moved the Delhi High Court challenging his arrest in connection with the alleged assault on AAP MP Swati Maliwal at the CM's residence earlier this month.

Kejriwal has sought extension of his interim bail by seven days to undergo a host of medical tests, including a PET-CT scan, in view of his "sudden and unexplained weight loss coupled with high ketone levels", which are indicative of kidney, serious cardiac ailments and even cancer. The Chief Minister, in his fresh plea filed on May 26, said he will surrender before jail authorities on June 9 instead of June 2, the scheduled date for his return to prison. The top court had on May 10 granted 21-day interim bail to the chief minister, who was arrested in a money laundering case linked to the excise policy 'scam', to enable him to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls.

Prajwal books return ticket, date with SIT

PNS ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

Suspended JD(S) leader Prajwal Revanna, who is facing sexual abuse charges, has booked a return flight ticket to Bengaluru from Munich on May 30, official sources said on Wednesday. According to sources in the Special Investigation Team (SIT), the 33-year-old grandson of JD(S) supremo HD Deve Gowda is expected to land in Bengaluru in the small hours of May 31. Revanna on Wednesday moved a Special Court seeking anticipatory bail in the rape case registered against him. His advocate filed an anticipatory bail application in the Special Court for cases involving MPs/MLAs. He reportedly left for Germany on April 27, a day after Hassan LS seat went to polls, and is still at large.

The SIT is maintaining vigil at the Kempegowda Airport to arrest him as soon as he lands. The MP, who is seeking re-election as the NDA candidate from Hassan Lok Sabha segment, fled to a foreign country as soon as the news broke out that the Karnataka State Commission for Women requested Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to order an investigation into the huge cache of explicit videos showing several women being sexually assaulted allegedly by him.



Police personnel and civilians near the escort vehicle, part of the convoy of Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's son and BJP leader Karan Bhushan Singh, that allegedly hit a biker, in Gonda, on Wednesday. At least two people were killed in the accident, according to officials PTI

SUV in Brij Bhushan son's convoy mows down two, injures 2

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In an incident similar to that reported in Lakhimpur Kheri in which Union Minister of State for Home Ajay Mishra Teni's son went crushing farmers, a vehicle of the convoy of the son of Bharatiya Janata Party MP from Kaiserganj in Gonda district, Brij Bhushan Saran Singh, crushed two youths, including a 17-year-old, to death and critically injured an old woman.

As Brij Bhushan, the former president of Women's Wrestling Federation, is facing charges of sexual assault of women wrestlers, the BJP gave its ticket for the Kaiserganj Lok Sabha seat in the ongoing elections to his son Karan Bhushan Singh.

According to eyewitnesses, the convoy of vehicles was of BJP candidate from Kaiserganj, Karan. A large number of policemen are deployed at the spot. Police have seized the SUV involved in the accident and have also arrested the driver of the escort vehicle. There is no confirmation yet whether Karan was travelling with the cavalcade at the time of the accident.

Reports said Karan was going to Huzurpur with his convoy of vehicles that included a Fortuner with 'police escort' written on it. When the convoy reached near Chhatarpurwa on Bahraich Huzurpur road, the Fortuner, in an attempt to overtake other

vehicles, crushed two youths - 17-year-old Rehan and 21-year-old Shahzad Khan - who were coming to Karnailganj market on a motorcycle from Nidura village to purchase medicines. The Fortuner later broke the electric pole and also crushed 60-year-old Sita Devi, who was sitting in front of her house, critically injuring her. She has been admitted to hospital.

Soon after the accident, hundreds of local residents gathered at the spot and started raising slogans against the police administration, demanding action against the MP's son.

They also blocked the road and tried to burn the Fortuner, leading to heated arguments between the police and the people, who were adamant on not allowing cops to take the bodies of the youths for post-mortem. Seeing the situation becoming violent, police from many police stations, Additional Superintendent of Police, police circle officer, sub-district magistrate, tehsildar and many other officers reached the spot and somehow calmed down the agitated people. After much struggle and persuasion, the police sent the bodies for autopsy.

A complaint regarding the incident has been filed in the police station by Chanda Begum, a woman among the family members of one of the deceased youth.

'Why you aren't calling me to know my health'

Naveen asks Modi

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday strongly reacted to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pointed remarks about his health.

"I understand that the Prime Minister, at a public meeting, has stated that I am in a bad health and he wants to institute an inquiry into this matter. If he is so concerned about my health and he has stated publicly before that I am



a good friend of his, all he has to do was pick up a telephone and ring me up and ask me about my health," he told the media.

Patnaik stated that a number of BJP people from Odisha and Delhi have been spreading rumours about my health for the last 10 years. "Let me assure the PM that I am in perfect health and I have been campaigning for elections for the last month in the heat...Instead of concerning himself over such rumours, the PM should concentrate on the revision of coal royalty for Odisha and the Special Category State status, which we have been demanding for years," he said.

(Modi's earlier remark is on Page 2)

Balangir hottest in State at 46.3 deg

BBSR records 39.8 degree

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

An intense heat wave has gripped Odisha with the maximum temperature recorded at 46 degree Celsius or more at four places in the State on Wednesday.

Balangir recorded a maximum temperature of 46.3 degree and became the hottest

place in the State, the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here said

It was followed by Sonepur at 46.2 degree, Titilagarh and Jharsuguda with 46 degree each.

Sambalpur recorded a temperature of 45.5 degree, Boudh 45.3 degree and Dharamkud 45.1 degree.

Though Bhubaneswar recorded only 39.8 degree, high

humidity made life uncomfortable for the residents.

The day temperature is likely to rise by 3-5 degree Celsius during the next two days, the IMD predicted.

Heat wave to severe heat wave conditions are very likely to prevail in the districts of Boudh, Subarnapur, Kandhamal, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur and Balangir till May 31, the weather office said.

Sop 'Khatakhath' draws women to Bengaluru GPO

PTI ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

An otherwise silent General Post Office (GPO) in Bengaluru is witnessing an unprecedented rush of women hurrying to open India Post Payment Bank accounts, anticipating a monthly deposit of Rs 8,500 into their accounts if the INDIA Bloc comes to power at the Centre.

The elections are still in the process but women, largely from the minority communities sporting burqas, stood in long queues to open the account. Some of them believed that opening the IPPB account would ensure that they get Rs 8,500 per month. A woman said she stood in queue early in the morning itself.

Another said everyone in her neighbourhood was saying that money would start coming from the day the account is opened, so she too came to open an account.



Most of the women PTI spoke to were from Shivajinagar, Chamarajpet and surrounding places in the city.

reporters, Chief Post Master of GPO Bengaluru H M Manjesh said people have been coming to the office to open IPPB accounts in the

belief that the Department of Post would credit Rs 2,000 or Rs 8,500 into their accounts.

"Actually it is a rumour. Somebody has spread this rumour. The department will not pay any amount to them. However, this account can be used for any type of online transaction or even Direct Benefit (Transfer) scheme," Manjesh clarified.

He said the department has already informed the customers about this. "We have displayed some posters also. In spite of that, customers are requesting that we open IPPB accounts for them." There was such a rush that more counters were opened outside the GPO building, under the open sky, he added.

"Earlier we used to open 50 to 60 accounts in a counter. Now we have made separate arrangements. We have brought our postmen for this

purpose and regularly we are opening around 500 to 600 accounts, sometimes even 1,000 accounts in a day," Manjesh said. According to sources in the department, this rush has been witnessed for the past three days. It is learnt that some Congress MLAs spread the rumours, believing that the women made a beeline for the GPO. The MLAs said the women will start getting money after June 4 "when the INDIA Bloc will come to power". The Congress has made a promise to launch the Mahalakshmi scheme under which Rs 8,500 will be directly credited into the account of women heads of families belonging to Below Poverty Line (BPL) category. It is similar to the Gruha Lakshmi guarantee scheme started by the Karnataka government in which Rs 2,000 is paid to women heads of BPL families.



to the Swaccha Bharat Abhijan by using waste materials to make household articles. Kamala was very much impressed by the gesture of Modi. As she has a disabled brother, she made up her mind to call Modi her brother and prepared an attractive Rakhi from waste and sent it to the PM to wear on the Rakhi Purnima as a token of love and respect from her younger sister.

The other woman was Pratima Patra, a successful beneficiary of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana who accompanied Kamala to the dais.

"I was shocked when the PM touched the feet of a common woman like me. May Lord Baladevjew bless my elder brother to be sworn in as PM for a third time," stated Kamala with tears of joy rolling down her cheeks.

Modi expresses concern over Naveen's health

Addresses election meeting

RAJESH BEHERA ■ BARIPADA / KENDRAPADA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, addressing public meetings at Baripada in Mayurbhanj district and Baro in Kendrapada district on Wednesday, expressed concern over Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's health.

Modi said that if the BJP forms government in Odisha, it would order a probe to ascertain if there is a conspiracy behind Patnaik's ill health. "Is there a conspiracy behind



Naveenbabu's deteriorating health? Is a lobby running Odisha in the name of Naveenbabu responsible for the poor health condition of the CM? People of Odisha

have every right to know the truth," Modi said.

He said everyone wants to know how his health deteriorated so much in the last one year. Those close to the CM

say that he is not able to do anything on his own.

"Therefore, a special committee would be constituted to investigate the reason behind the sudden deterioration of the health of the Chief Minister if BJP is voted to power in Odisha," Modi said,

Coming down heavily on the BJD government, he accused it of having looted and betrayed the people who gave it the opportunity to govern for 25 years.

Modi said that if the BJD comes to power again, it would snatch away the land of tribals as it looted the mineral resources in the State. "Those

who have looted the people of Odisha will have to pay for it," he stated.

Claiming that people of Odisha have decided to put a full stop to the BJD's 25-year rule, Modi said people now want an Odia Chief Minister and 'Modi ki Guarantee'.

"History is going to be created after 25 years. Whole Odisha is saying that an Odia will be the State's Chief Minister. People of the State want Modi ki Guarantee," he said.

Stressing that India would become the third largest economy in five years, he said States like Odisha would immensely benefit from this.



The Chaka Dera ritual of the chariots for this year's Rath Yatra in Puri is undertaken on the Grand Road on Wednesday.
Ranjan Ganguly

Jailed MLA Jagdev shifted to SCB

PNS ■ KHORDHA

Chilika MLA Prashant Jagdev, who was arrested on the charges of breaking an EVM during the third phase of polling held in the State on May 25, has been admitted to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack.

As per reports, Jagdev's health condition deteriorated in jail, following which he was admitted to the hospital. He is undergoing treatment in the ICU of the Medicine Ward of the SCB Hospital.

Though Jagdev was arrested, scores of villagers of Kaunripatana under Bolagarh block in Khordha district claimed that the allegations levelled against him were politically motivated.



The arrest of Jagdev has spread outrage in the area as locals expressed resentment and termed it a conspiracy by the ruling party.

On Saturday, the MLA had gone to a booth to cast his vote along with his wife when it was alleged that he toppled the EVM. Based on the complaint filed by the Presiding Officer, police detained Jagdev from Begunia.

In city

Drunk SUV driver tries to mow down cops



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Police personnel, including some senior officials, had a close shave as a drunken SUV driver smashed several police barricades and allegedly tried to run over the cops while they were trying to stop him in Chandrasekharpur in the capital city on Wednesday.

The police personnel deployed at OMFED Square were checking the vehicles when the speeding SUV came from the Damana Square side and rammed through the bar-

ricades. When the police personnel tried to stop the driver, he tried to mow them.

There were more than 20 police personnel, including DCP (Traffic) and ACP, on duty. They had a narrow escape when the SUV driver smashed the check-post and also dragged a barricade stuck under the wheels. Police efforts to stop him failed as he quickly escaped from the spot.

The cops then were scrutinising CCTV footage to identify the vehicle and nab the culprit.

'Action against IPS officers is BJP's design'

Saffron party unable to digest imminent poll defeat: Pandian

UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ BALESWAR



BJD star campaigner and 5T Chairman VK Pandian on Wednesday pointed fingers towards the BJP over the Election Commission of India's (ECI) action against two senior IPS officers in Odisha on the allegation of interfering in the election process.

On Tuesday, the ECI suspended senior IPS officer DS Kutey, who was working as Special Secretary to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. Kutey was charged with di-

rectly exerting undue influence on the conduct of the elections in the State. He was asked to report at the office of Resident Commissioner, Odisha, at New Delhi on Wednesday.

Similarly, IPS officer Ashish Singh, who is working as IG (CM security), was asked to

present himself for a detailed examination by a special medical board constituted by the Director of AIIMS Bhubaneswar, not later than May 30. He has been on medical leave since May 4. Terming the ECI's action as unfortunate, Pandian alleged that these steps were taken as per "a design of the BJP, which is unable to digest imminent defeat" in the elections in the State.

"I would say that these two officers are outstanding officers of Odisha and both of them have played a great role in controlling Naxalism risking their lives. They have been awarded by the highest authorities in the country for their commitment, dedication and sacrifice. This (action against them) is

taken as per the design of BJP which cannot digest imminent defeat in the hands of BJD and it cannot stand against the popularity of Naveenbabu," Pandian told the media here.

Hitting out at the BJP-led Central Government over the coal royalty issue, Pandian said the Centre is taking Rs 60,000 crore from Odisha and repaying only Rs 4,000-5,000 crore, thereby taking away all the profits.

Exuding confidence in the BJD's win in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the State, Pandian said the people of Odisha would not be swayed away by the statements of central leaders and Chief Ministers who are coming to the State for their campaign.

'Adopt new tech to boost productivity of crops'

3-day Research & Extension Council Meet of OUAT ends

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR



A three-day State level Research and Extension Council Meeting 2024-25 organised by the Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT), Bhubaneswar, ended here on Tuesday.

The plenary session was graced by Director, ICAR-NRRI, Cuttack, Dr AK Nayak as the chief guest. He opined that developing sustainable food systems contributes to the sustainability of the human population and the contribution of the OUAT towards the

growth of agriculture transformation is tremendous. He also suggested technological adoption in agricultural growth.

Vice-Chancellor, OUAT Prof Pravat Kumar Roul in his presidential address, emphasized on adoption of new and improved technologies to increase production and productivity of crops. "This has also helped in reducing the production cost. The use of technol-

ogy has also made the process of farming easier and more efficient," he said, adding that the 3-day meeting will be helpful for the upcoming progress of the university. He suggested to all Krishi Vigyan Kendras to adopt one village each for making them smart villages.

The session was started with the welcome address by Dean, Research, OUAT Prof Sangram Keshari Swain and

ended with vote of thanks by Dr Amaresh Khuntia, JDE. During the session Prof PJ Mishra, Dean Extension Education, presented an overview of the OUAT at SLREC 2024-25. Some university level research publications were also inaugurated by the dignitaries on the dais. All Deans, Directors, Registrar, Comptroller and other senior officers of OUAT were present.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

Naveen unbeatable, but rogues in the fold may cause trouble

As elections are coming to a close on June 1, the Odisha people are getting increasingly anxious. Super experts say Naveen's BJD will form government though with a diminished number of seats touching around 100. The BJP is likely to improve its tally, particularly for the Lok Sabha. Odia voters do not mind Modi ruling at the Centre yet again. They are happy with Naveen.

Odisha, undoubtedly, is one of the best-governed States of India as top-grade political observers have marked severally. When the Congress regime was brought down in 2000, Odisha was in a pitiable state. Apart from unforgivable corruption, the Janaki Ballav Patnaik government had ruined the State on most human development index fronts. 'Quality of life' was frighteningly poor. Infrastructure and public goods were hardly visible. Come Naveen Patnaik and 'spring' followed soon enough. The rest is history.

Naveen could never become a hardcore political figure as he saw



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

life differently. He was keen to see the poor being pulled out of misery, the State becoming wealthier and, above all, the public officials turning servants of the people as expected constitutionally. He picked high-integrity, experienced individuals as advisors and aides to help him achieve noble goals. He cleansed the murky political system as far as possible by tossing out all the branded rascals and crooks from within the BJD fold, including a few of the founders and front-liners, to

make sure trouble never happened again. Naveen became highly acceptable among the masses all over the country for he never uttered a word against any adversary or detractor. People found in him a messiah and brought him back to power for five consecutive terms. As time rolled by, the aides who had showed him the initial paths, disappeared for reasons known to all and new, mostly younger energetic characters, emerged to guide him along. Naveen has invariably trusted smart, loyal bureaucrats more than rank politicians as he has known always that the political community is mostly composed of self-serving rascals. Maybe only ten per cent of the gang is clean, humble and noble-minded. This very guiding sentiment has kept Naveen a rabid politician hater. The other bigger reason is that politicians are populist, illiterate and do not understand the nuances of the 'rule of law'. Bureaucrats, no matter how wicked, would not commit a glaring Constitutional blunder to invite trouble.

It is also disturbingly true that

Naveen eliminated a good number of political crooks in the first two tenures, for which people adored him all the more for this had never happened anywhere in India before.

Come 2024. Elections will be over only the day after. Much water has flowed between 2019 and now. During the current stint ending now, Covid took a big toll on multiple fronts. It changed the way people look at pandemics for the way lockdown was imposed globally bringing life to a literal standstill. Up to this day, fear has not dwindled down to zero. Ever since then, Naveen has drastically reduced his public appearance as doctors advised him due to advancing age. He rightly chose to work from home rather than his executive chamber in the secretariat building. By the time the Covid panic vanished completely, Naveen made occasional public appearances only when unavoidable. That is believably the reason why he delegated most routine and some critical tasks to his immensely trusted young bureaucrat VK Pandian. VK has not be-

trayed or cheated his master even once. VK has been exercising shared power discreetly until this day. This young, highly-skilled guy was working very efficiently from behind the curtain for long. But the day Naveen told him to go out in the open and begin performing like a highly-placed frontline politician, the public got apprehensive even though women and some men thronged to have a glimpse of the man who had done so much for the poor. Eventually, he resigned from the IAS comfort to become a fulltime politician. Naveen made him the de facto head of the party and let him take decisions as the latter felt fit.

VK had somehow mastered the poll craft too well while helping Naveen strategise for two electoral battles. This time around too, he occupied centre-stage during campaigns as most party fellows are spineless, headless, directionless legislators and front-liners who let him whip them for being ineffective on all critical poll fronts. This was realised by them since the 2014 elections. So, they never dared question

VK even if they felt he was erring or taking the wrong path once in a while.

Incidentally, VK is a unique human individual. He works hard for nearly eighteen hours a day for keeping Naveen's enviable image intact, which others cannot do even if they intended to for the simple reason of extreme laziness and lack of basic skills.

As tasks mounted for VK, he turned to a few self-styled strategists like Amar Patnaik and, more significantly, the specially-inducted IT Secretary Manoj Mishra. Insiders are distressed because both these believably well-intentioned chaps have been committing grave mistakes to bring the image of Naveen horrifically down by devising faulty plans and inferring errantly from data collected from surveys made to ensure winnability of aspiring candidates. The survey reports finally analysed by Manoj are forty-per cent imperfect. By the time the polls got around the corner, the survey findings had become obsolete and misplaced as circumstances had

changed greatly influencing people's perception quite differently. Amar Patnaik is kind of crazy for he wrote to top psychiatrists of the State to pick several routinely ranting BJP leaders to undergo test for madness as they had made some usual election-time statements which had irked and enraged Amar. This single mean public demand has destroyed thirty per cent of the BJD's massive victory prospects. The BJD will only win with a slender margin.

Most disturbingly, it is rumoured that there are inside enemies who will defect en masse to the BJP after winning on Naveen's ever-popular brand. Allegedly, a Central intelligence official has reported clandestinely that the BJP will bag around 60 seats to steal away 25 from the BJD to form government.

All the same, it seems true that the know-all IT genius, talkative Amar Patnaik and a few political pinheads managing media are likely to cause disaster for the BJD, which is the most adored political outfit in Odisha even at this moment.

CM and ministers of Jharkhand are involved in corruption

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, while addressing public meetings organised in support of BJP candidates at Sahibganj district of Jharkhand's Rajmahal Lok Sabha seat, Kerabani of Dumka (Jharkhand) Lok Sabha seat, said that Congress has ruled the country for 70 years after independence, but they have defamed the country. Terrorism and Naxalism were at their peak in the country during Congress rule, but now Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given a new identity to the country.

This election is between those who give identity to India and those who erase India's identity. All the Chief Ministers and Ministers of Jharkhand are involved in corruption. When

Prime Minister Modi is sending these corrupt people to jail, they are asking why are they being sent to jail. The place of corrupt people is in jail only. When we worship Gods and Goddesses, Congress people have problems. Congress is against religion. Religion means truth, in our country relations are decided on the basis of religion. This is the time of Lord Shri Ram, no power in the world can stop Narendra Modi from becoming the Prime Minister. Earlier, Chief Minister Dr. Yadav reached Barodiya Nonagir in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh and met the tribal victim family here. Yadav said that when we worship our gods and goddesses, Congressmen have a problem with it. They ask us why are we worshipping them. We are people who worship Lord Ram,

Shri Krishna, Lord Birsa Munda, but Congress has always been against religion. The land of Jharkhand is the holy land of Lord Birsa Munda. When the whole country was saying that the temple of Lord Shri Ram should be built in Ayodhya, but the leaders of Congress and its arrogant alliance were creating obstacles in it. They were filing petitions in the Supreme Court that the temple should not be built, but they could not stop it. Congress has always not allowed the construction of the temple for vote politics. Congress and its arrogant alliance opposed as much as they could, but their opposition did not work. What is not of Ram is of no use. The temple was built under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and now Shri

Ram is smiling in his sanctum sanctorum. Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that Congress has always been anti-religion like the British. They have always created hurdles in the matters of our religion. They have also been against Sanatan. Their aim has always been to humiliate Hindus, abuse the followers of Sanatan Dharma. They compare the followers of Sanatan Dharma with mosquitoes and Covid germs. They do not even know the true meaning of religion. Religion means truth, everyone has to be taken along. In our country, relationships are decided on the basis of religion and then they are maintained throughout life. Yadav said that the work done by the British before independence was done by the Congress Party after indepen-

dence. The British promoted western culture by removing gods and goddesses from our school-college curriculum. Lord Macaulay distanced us from our gods and goddesses, but after gaining independence in 1947, changes could have been made in the education policy, which the Congress did not do. They have also furthered the power of the British. After this, when BJP came to power under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a new education policy was introduced in 2020. We got an opportunity through Prime Minister Modi and included the incidents of our gods and goddesses in the curriculum. If we do not include the incidents of Lord Rama-Krishna, then how will we get the education and sanskar of good deeds.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav during an election campaign in support of BJP candidate for Lok Sabha elections in Jharkhand on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

141 miscreants violating externment orders

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Under the campaign against habitual offenders serving externment across the state 141 miscreants were found violating externment. During the recent law and order review meeting, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav had given instructions to take strict action by running an intensive campaign against anti-social elements, goons and miscreants. In this connection, DGP Sudhir Saxena had instructed all the Superintendents of Police of the state to run a campaign and conduct a thorough investigation of district banished miscreants and take strict action if violations are found. Criminals who are externed due to a continuous criminal record, often spend

time hiding in their home or area during the serving of externment. There is also a possibility of criminal activity by them during this period. To investigate this, an intensive campaign was conducted in all the police station areas of the state on the night of May 28. All senior officers participated in this action that went on throughout the night. During the campaign in the entire state, 2428 criminals who were expelled from the district were checked, out of which 141 criminals were found violating the law. Strict legal action is being taken against all the 141 accused who violated the order. To control crime in the state, campaigns have been run from time to time against criminals. Along

with this, action is also being taken to arrest such absconding warrants of the districts who have gone and hidden in other districts by gathering information about them. This is being implemented at the campaign level across the state. In this sequence, with the aim of maintaining law and order in all the districts of the state and tightening the noose on criminals, the police took action against those who violated the action of district ban and the criminals were arrested. This action taken suddenly at night created panic among the criminals. DGP Saxena has given instructions to run such checking campaigns from time to time in future to maintain the strength of law and order in the state.

CM expresses grief over Chhindwara incident

Bhopal: Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has expressed condolence over the incident of a youth killing 8 members of his family and then committing suicide in Chhindwara. Yadav said that he stood with the family in this hour of grief. The state government will provide all possible assistance to the affected family. The Chief Minister has instructed the Public Health Engineering Minister Sampatiya Uike to leave for Chhindwara and visit the kin of the affected family. It may be noted that in the preliminary investigation, the deceased accused youth has been described as mentally disturbed. The Chief Minister has given instructions to investigate the incident.

Ensure flawless arrangements and seamless counting: Bhadoo

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Deputy Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India, Ajay Bhadoo on Wednesday conducted a review of the arrangements regarding the preparations for the counting of votes for the Lok Sabha elections 2024 by interacting with all the officers of the state through video conferencing. Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan joined this VC from NIC Indore and apprised about the preparations and arrangements made for the counting of votes in all the Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies of the state. Returning Officers and Collectors and District Election Officers of all 29 Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies of the state

participated in the VC virtually. In the VC, Deputy Election Commissioner Bhadoo directed that preparations and necessary arrangements related to the vote counting should be finalized promptly, ensuring counting of votes is completed swiftly. All necessary resources and arrangements should be available at the counting place. Train all counting personnel by May 31. Allow only authorized persons to enter the counting venue. The Deputy Election Commissioner discussed with all the Returning Officers and Collectors and District Election Officers and Police Officers and obtained feedback on the preparations made so far for counting and directed them to conduct smooth counting.

Chief Electoral Officer Rajan briefed the Deputy Election Commissioner about the preparations being made for the counting of votes to be held on Tuesday, 4 June in all the districts. Rajan informed that all the preparations for counting have been completed by all the Returning Officers and District Election Officers by establishing better coordination with the police administration. The first phase of counting randomization has also been completed. The final training of counting personnel will be completed by 31 May in all the districts. He informed that all the guidelines and protocols of the Election Commission of India are being strictly followed regarding counting of votes. There will be a three-tier security system at

all the counting venues. For smooth and uninterrupted counting of votes, arrangements for adequate tables, counting personnel, micro observers and other necessary resources have been completed. Arrangements are being made so that the counting results are available promptly. He informed that on June 4, the counting of postal ballots will be done by the Returning Officers in a separate room at the counting venue itself. Additional Chief Electoral Officer Rajesh Kaul, Inspector General of Police and State Police Nodal Officer Anshuman Singh, Joint Chief Electoral Officer Shri Basant Kurre and Tarun Rathi and other officers were also present in the VC.



Mahila Congress state president Vibha Patel leads a party workers protest against the alleged atrocities on a Dalit family in Barodiya, Nounagir Sagar district, at PCC headquarters in Bhopal on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

Special attention should be paid to safety of witnesses: Dubey

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Principal Secretary of Home Department, Madhya Pradesh Government Sanjay Dubey, while addressing the officers in the training program on new codes for prosecution officers organized at CAPT, in view of the scorching heat, said that all of you should keep paying attention to your and your family's health along with performing your duties. He also emphasized on the training of electronic and scientific evidence and said that the coming era will belong to this. Along with this, the Principal Secretary Home expressed that all the prosecution officers will have to continuously increase their knowledge on new electronic and scientific evidence and cyber law, so that they can be presented better in the court. He also expressed that special attention should be paid to the safety of the witnesses and it should be our duty to free them

Principal Secretary Home expressed that all the prosecution officers will have to continuously increase their knowledge on new electronic and scientific evidence and cyber law, so that they can be presented better in the court

from any kind of fear. Regarding speedy trial of the case, he expressed that, if a witness is present in the court for evidence, then the witnesses should not be sent back without giving evidence except for extremely unavoidable reasons. Wishing a bright future for the prosecution officers, he praised who have organized training programs for prosecution officers on new subjects in an integrated manner, so that the prosecution officers will be able to assist the police in relation to the new penal codes to be implemented from July 1, 2024 and will

be helpful in providing justice in the court. On this occasion, Joint Director Rameshwar Kumar, M.P.S.J.A. Special Officers of C.A.P.T., Dharmendra Tada, Amit Sisodia and Assistant Director C.A.P.T. Prakash Badolia and Rajendra Upadhyay, District Planning Officer, Bhopal were present. On Tuesday in compliance with the instructions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court and Hon'ble High Court Jabalpur, Government of India and Government of Madhya Pradesh to organize training programs for

the knowledge enhancement of its officers and employees regarding the new laws, the Director Mrs. Sushma Singh, Public Prosecution Directorate, Madhya Pradesh, in coordination with the Director of State Judicial Academy, Krishnamurthy Mishra and Director of CAPT Anil Kishore Yadav, a training program for the prosecution officers of Madhya Pradesh regarding the new criminal codes is being organized at the Police Training Institute, Bhopal. The new criminal laws Indian Civil Defence Code 2023, Indian Justice Code 2023, Indian Evidence Act 2023 which will come into effect from July 01, 2024. Training program for prosecution officers on new codes is being organized from May 28 to June 12. The program was inaugurated by the Chief Guest Honorable Director Madam Sushma Singh, Public Prosecution Directorate, Madhya Pradesh.

Study visit to waste paper recycling unit and film show for students

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Regional Museum of Natural History, Bhopal (A Regional Centre of National Museum of Natural History, New Delhi) is organizing various activities under Summer Nature Study Programme-Green Teen for the students of class 8 to 10. In continuation of the environmental educational programmes; Films like Kanha, Effects of Climate Change were screened during the Film Show on Wednesday. A study visit of Waste Paper Recycling Unit at Environmental Planning & Coordination Organization (EPCO), Bhopal was arranged for the participants to provide the knowledge about Waste Paper Recycling. Rajesh Mishra and their team demonstrated the process of waste paper recycling in to useful paper and told that the collected waste paper are being turned into small pieces with the help of Rag Cutter and those small pieces are poured with water in to Hydra Pulper to get



Paper Pulp. 25% of Hosiery Cloth and Deodar gum are being mixed in to paper pulp to get stronger paper and this mixture is being transferred in to Beater for better mixing and finally that pulp can be spread on the mesh of Auto Vat to get Wet Paper. Wet Paper is being pressed under Screw Press Machine to extract 60% of water and remain 40% water evaporates during Sun Dry. Final product of paper is processed after pressing and cutting in desired sizes. Participants of the programme prepared paper under practical session of the programme. Manik Lal Gupta, Scientist-C was the coordinator of this programme.

AIIMS Bhopal launches emergency OPD

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

AIIMS Bhopal has become a pioneering institution by launching the first Emergency Outpatient Department (OPD) service within the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) network. This significant milestone was marked by an inauguration ceremony led by Professor (Dr.) Ajai Singh, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal today on Wednesday. Professor Singh highlighted the importance of timely and accurate medical interventions in saving lives. He stated, "Through this emergency OPD, patients will receive quick and efficient medical services, ensuring better treatment at a lower cost. By effectively managing our resources, we aim to enhance the overall healthcare experience and satisfaction for our patients." In connection with "Emergency Medicine Day" the emergency OPD was inaugurated in the Trauma deptt and Emergency Medicine at AIIMS Bhopal. The event featured key discussions by Dr Yunus head of Trauma & Emergency Medicine department and Dr. Bhupeshwari on the impact of climate change on emergency medicine, particularly focusing on summer-related illnesses.

Project 'Sustainable Indore- waste to wealth' successfully completed

PNS ■ INDORE

In a significant achievement, students of Prestige Institute of Management and Research (PIMR), Indore, have completed an innovative live project titled "Sustainable Indore - Waste to Wealth." This remarkable initiative, undertaken by students Ocean Jain and Pratham Mishra under the guidance of Prof. (Dr.) Nitin Girdharwal, explores Indore's pioneering waste management technologies, providing invaluable insights. The project highlights best practices and policy implementations that have positioned Indore as a leader in sustainable waste management. It showcases the economic benefits of waste-to-wealth initiatives, demonstrating how these efforts can attract investment and foster economic growth. Additionally, the project's findings illustrate how Indore's success story can serve as an educational case study, demonstrating the transition to sustainable waste management. By drawing parallels with global waste management challenges, the research offers valuable lessons applicable beyond Indore.

In recognition of their exceptional work, Indore Mayor Pushya Mitra Bhargava awarded a certificate of appreciation to the PIMR students. Mayor Bhargava commended them for their critical thinking, research skills, and ability to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world issues, unraveling the complexities of waste management and emphasizing the importance of sustainability. Dr. Davish Jain, Chairman of the Prestige Education Foundation, praised the students' research, noting its significance in addressing real-world problems. He highlighted this project as a milestone for PIMR Indore, reflecting the institution's commitment to providing quality education and fostering research and innovation. Dr. Jain added, "The 'Sustainable Indore - Waste to Wealth' project exemplifies how academic research can drive practical solutions for environmental sustainability, setting a benchmark for future initiatives in Indore and beyond." Col. Dr. S. Raman Iyer, Director of PIMR (UG Campus), emphasized that the students' research has also supported the Ahilya City Forest Project in Indore, which aims to create a green urban space.

Class 12 meritorious students felicitated in Gwalior

PNS ■ GWALIOR

A ceremony to honour meritorious students of class 12 was organized at Optimus Mahavidyalaya situated in the middle of Gwalior city, in which students from many government and non-government schools of the city participated enthusiastically. The program started with the worship of Goddess Saraswati by the guests. Chief Guest Swami Rishabhdev Anand Ji, Manager Adarsh Gaushtala; Guest of Honour Dr Keshav Pandey, social worker and senior journalist and Dr Sanjeev Gupta, Professor Govt SLP College were present in the program. Swami ji congratulated all the meritorious students and said that this era is what people call Kali Yuga in which Shri Krishna is called butter thief; despite this many research works are going on in Bhagwat Geeta. Researchers are getting attracted towards spirituality. He further said that students have to be saved from the ill effects of mobile in this digital age. Swaminji stressed that while focusing on digital education, youth power will have to emphasize on real knowledge also, and only then we will achieve success in the true sense. Addressing the meeting,



Dr. Keshav Pandey told the students to stay optimistic and focus on their goals. He told the students that they are being honored here today for the marks they have secured in the 12th examination, and added that they should achieve success in their life and bring glory to the country, society and family. Professor Dr. Sanjeev Gupta of Govt. SLP College praised Director Vinod Agarwal for the efforts being made by Optimus College in the field of education. He said that last year also the college had organized a Big Idea Contest, in which science model projects were displayed by the children of the schools. He said that Swami Ji is present among us who has gained fame in the field of cow service. Programs are organized to see

the innovations being done in Adarsh ??Gaushtala and many researches are still going on. He further asked the students and parents present to visit Adarsh ??Gaushtala once and see how much innovation and better management can be used in cow service. The program was presided over by Mr. Vinod Agarwal, Director Optimus College. In the program, certificates were distributed to 150 talented students of the city by the guests. Parents along with teachers of schools and coaching institutes were present. The guests were thanked by Shri Mahamaya Prasad, Vice Principal and the program was conducted by Shri Basant Singh Rathore. All the teachers and staff of the college were present on this occasion.

Female candidates in LS polls rise from 7 per cent in 2009 to 9.6 per cent in 2024

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

From 7 per cent in 2009 to 9.6 per cent in 2024, the number of female candidates contesting the Lok Sabha elections saw a steady rise in 15 years, according to an analysis by the poll rights body Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR). This year, 797 women are in the fray, constituting 9.6 per cent of the total 8,337 candidates. This marks an increase from previous general assembly elections which recorded female representation of 9 per cent in 2019, 8 per cent in 2014, and 7 per cent in 2009, the analysis by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) showed. In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, there were 556 female candidates, making up 7 per cent of the total 7,810 candidates. This number increased to 640 (8 per cent of 8,205) in 2014 and further to 716 (9 per cent of 7,928) in 2019. This year, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leads among the major parties with 69 female Lok Sabha nominees out of 440, making up 16 per cent of its total candidates. The Congress follows with 41 women out of 327 candidates, constituting 13 per cent. Significantly, smaller parties and regional players exhibit higher proportions of female



candidates. For instance, the Naam Tamlar Katchi has an equal gender representation with 20 out of 40 candidates being women, translating to 50 per cent. The Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) and the Nationalist Congress Party each have 40 per cent female candidates, with two out of five being women. Among prominent parties, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and the All India Forward Bloc have the lowest levels of female representation at 3 per cent. Some parties with notable female representation in this year's parliamentary polls include the Jharkhand Mukti

Morcha (JMM) and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), each with 33 per cent, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) with 29 per cent. The Samajwadi Party (SP) has 20 per cent female representation, and the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) 25 per cent. Thirteen per cent of the Lok Sabha candidates of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) are women and the figure stands at 8 per cent for the Bahujan Samaj Party. Parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) has female representation at 14 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively.

The Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)) and Shiv Sena each have 13 per cent female candidates, while the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha has 33 per cent women nominees. Both candidates of the Apna Dal (Sonelal) are women, TDP and BRS each have 6 per cent female candidates, Shiromani Akali Dal and Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar each have 8 per cent female contestants, while Shiv Sena (UBT) has 10 per cent. Independents, comprising a significant portion of the candidate pool, have 276 women out of 3,903 Lok Sabha nominees, representing a modest 7 per cent. Other parties collectively account for 252 women

out of 2,490 candidates, which is about 10 per cent. This is the first election since the passage of the women's reservation bill to reserve one-third of seats in Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women, reviving a bill pending for 27 years for want of consensus among parties. The bill is yet to come into effect. The current figure of 797 female candidates in 2024 represents a 9.6 per cent share of the total candidate pool of 8,337. Only two candidates from the third gender category are contesting the polls this year, both as independents. During the first phase of the elections held on April 19, out of 1,618 contesting candidates, only 135 were women. This pattern continued in the subsequent phases, with women candidates remaining a small fraction of the total. The second phase held on April 26 saw 1,192 candidates of which 100 were women. The phase 3 polling on May 7 had 1,352 candidates, including 123 women. In phase 4 on May 13, of the 1,710 contestants, 170 were women. Phase 5 on May 20 had the fewest candidates at 695, with 82 women, while the sixth phase 6 had 92 women out of 866 candidates. In the last phase scheduled for June 1, there will be 904 candidates, with only 95 women.

ADR: 104 per cent rise in number of parties fighting LS polls from 2009 to 2024



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

There has been an increase of 104 per cent in the number of political parties contesting Lok Sabha elections from 2009 to 2024, according to an analysis by poll rights body Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR). According to the analysis, 751 political parties are participating in 2024 as compared to 677 who participated in 2019, 464 in 2014, and 368 in 2009. This surge represents a staggering 104 per cent increase from 2009 to 2024. The ADR and National Election Watch have conducted a comprehensive analysis of the self-sworn affidavits of 8,337 candidates vying for seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha 2024 elections. Out of the total 8,360 contesting candidates, the breakdown reveals a diverse landscape of political representation: 1,333 from national parties, 532 from state parties, 2,580 from registered unrecognised parties and 3,915 independent candidates.

The analysis also sheds light on the prevalence of criminal cases among candidates. Among national parties, 443 out of 1,333 candidates have declared criminal cases, with 295 facing serious criminal charges. State parties exhibit a higher proportion, with 249 out of 532 candidates facing criminal cases and 169 facing serious charges. Registered unrecognised parties show comparatively lower figures with 401 out of 2,580 candidates having criminal cases and 316 facing serious charges. Independent candidates fall in between with 550 out of 3,915 candidates facing criminal cases and 411 facing serious charges. Additionally, the analysis reveals financial assets of the candidates with 2,572 out of all 8,337 candidates being crorepatris or millionaires. Among national parties, 906 out of 1,333 candidates are crorepatris, followed by 421 out of 532 in state parties, 572 out of 2,580 in registered unrecognised parties, and 673 out of 3,915 among independent candidates.

Average increase of 43 per cent in assets of 324 MPs recontesting LS polls in last five years

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

There has been an average increase of 43 per cent over the last five years in the assets of 324 MPs who have entered the poll fray again in this Lok Sabha election, according to an analysis by a poll rights body. The average assets of these MPs in 2019 was around Rs 21.55 crore while in the current electoral cycle, the average asset value has increased 'significantly' to Rs 30.88 crore, marking an increase of Rs 9.33 crore over the past five years, the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said in a report. It analysed the financial growth among Members of Parliament (MPs) recontesting in the 2024 general elections. The counting of votes for the seven-phase polls will be taken up on June 4.

The percentage growth in assets for these 324 MPs between the 2019 and 2024 polls averages at 43 per cent, the ADR said. The report said a comparative analysis of party-wise average assets between 2019 and 2024 further elucidates this trend. It said among the major parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party saw a 39.18 per cent increase in the average assets of its re-contesting 183 MPs (Rs 18.40 crore to Rs 25.61 crore). It was 48.76 per cent for 36 Congress MPs (Rs 44.13 crore to Rs 65.64 crore). For re-contesting 10 MPs of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam it was 19.96 per cent (Rs 30.93 crore to Rs 37.10 crore), 48.13 per cent for eight Shiv Sena MPs (Rs 19.77 crore to Rs 29.28 crore), 20.53 per cent for five Samajwadi Party MPs (Rs 20.56 crore to Rs 24.78 crore) and 84.13 per cent for eight Yuva Janas Samika Rythu

Congress Party MPs (Rs 28.66 crore to Rs 52.78 crore). The report said the average increase in assets of 16 re-contesting MPs of the Trinamool Congress was 53.84 per cent (Rs 15.69 crore to Rs 24.15 crore), 35.54 per cent for 11 Janata Dal (United) MPs (Rs 4.55 crore to Rs 6.17 crore), 14.34 per cent for one Nationalist Congress Party MP (Rs 12 crore to Rs 14 crore), 52.94 per cent for three Bharat Rashtra Samithi MPs (Rs 38 crore to Rs 59 crore), 21.05 per cent for three NCP (Sharad Chandra Pawar) MPs (Rs 48 crore to Rs 58 crore), 52.94 per cent for three Bharat Rashtra Samithi MPs (Rs 38 crore to Rs 59 crore) and 317 per cent for one Janata Dal (Secular) MP (Rs 9 crore to Rs 40 crore). The increase for recontesting MPs of the Bahujan Samaj Party was 25.37 per cent (Rs 8.46 crore to Rs 10.61 crore), 68.4 per cent for the Shiv Sena

(Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) (Rs 7.01 crore to Rs 11.80 crore), 184.02 per cent for the Biju Janata Dal (Rs 2.41 crore to Rs 6.85 crore), 143.2 per cent for the Telugu Desam Party (Rs 18.90 crore to Rs 45.97 crore), 104.9 per cent for the Indian Union Muslim League (Rs 13.07 crore to Rs 26.78 crore) and 3000.51 per cent for the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (Rs. 4.78 lakh to Rs 1.48 crore), the report said. t said the increase was 35.12 per cent for recontesting MPs of the All India Majlis-E-Itehadul Muslimeen (Rs 10.43 crore to Rs 14.09 crore), 97.61 per cent for the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (Rs. 85.40 lakh to Rs 1.68 crore). It was 117.36 per cent for the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi, the report said and added that the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) saw a slight decrease of three per cent in assets of recontesting MPs.

Unpredictable import, export policies caused losses to farmers: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday claimed that farmers have suffered huge losses due to "unpredictable" import-export policies of the Modi Government and asserted that under an INDIA Bloc Government such policies would be decided only after consultations with farmers and their organisations. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the Congress has given five guarantees to the farmers -- legal guarantee for Minimum Support Prices (MSP), loan waiver, transforming PM Fasal Bima Yojana, new import-export policy and making farmers GST-free. "On import-export policy, I want to say that we need to put restrictions on imports and encourage exports. We ban exports repeatedly like the ban on export of rice is not in favour



of the farmers in Punjab and it is benefitting the farmers of Pakistan," Ramesh said in a video statement on X. The Congress has given a guarantee that the import-export policy will be decided upon only after consultations with farmers and their organisations, the Congress general secretary said, adding imports and exports should be beneficial for farmers not traders. In his post on X along with the video statement, Ramesh said farmers have suffered huge losses due to the "unpredictable"

import-export policies of the Modi government. "The Congress has guaranteed that we will make a concrete law on import and export of agricultural products which will support farmers and farmer organisations and increase their income," he said. The Congress' Lok Sabha polls manifesto has stated that it will formulate and implement a sound import-export policy for agricultural commodities, which will give paramount importance to protecting the interests and concerns of farmers.

Expedition to Mount Kang Yatse-II peak flagged off

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Cadet Corps (NCC) boys and girls mountaineering expedition to Mount Kang Yatse-II peak was flagged off here by Director General NCC Lt General Gurbirpal Singh. The peak is located in the Ladakh region at an altitude of 6,250m/20,505ft, and this is the 87th NCC Cadets mountaineering expedition since 1970. The team comprises five Officers, 17 Permanent Instructors and 24 Cadets (12 Boys & 12 Girls) from various NCC directorates. The team will attempt to scale Mt Kang Yatse-II by the end of June. The DG NCC wished success to the team and highlighted the pivotal role of the NCC in youth development and the opportunities provided to the cadets to engage in diverse adventure activities.

Matter of honour: Indian peacekeeper Major Radhika to get UN award

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/UNITED NATIONS

Major Radhika Sen, an Indian peacekeeper who will be honoured by United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres with a prestigious gender advocate award in UN, has said it is a matter of honour and privilege to represent India at the multilateral forum. Major Sen, who served with the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), will receive the prestigious '2023 United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award' from Guterres on May

30 on the occasion of International Day of UN Peacekeepers. She is the second Indian peacekeeper to receive the prestigious award after Major Suman Gawani, who had served with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and was honoured in 2019. Meanwhile, the Indian Army commemorated the 76th International Day of United Nations (UN) Peacekeepers on Wednesday by paying homage to the fallen comrades by laying a wreath at the National War Memorial, New Delhi. Lieutenant General Rakesh Kapoor, Deputy Chief of the Army Staff (Information Systems and Coordination), officials of United Nations

Organisation, Staff from Ministry of Defence and Ministry of External Affairs laid wreaths. This is the day when in 1948 the first UN Peacekeeping Mission, "UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO)" began operations in Palestine. Each year on this day, the UN and countries across the globe pay rich tributes to the professionalism, dedication and courage of men and women who have served/are serving in UN Peacekeeping Missions. This day also honours the memory of sacrifices of those who have laid down their lives for the cause of peace. India has a rich legacy of contribution to UN Peacekeepers



operations and is one of the largest contributors of troops. India has contributed services of approximately 2,87,000 troops to peacekeeping missions. Indian Army personnel have operated under difficult, challenging terrain and operational conditions and have displayed exemplary courage and valour,

to the extent of making the supreme sacrifice to uphold the UN mandates. It is noteworthy that 160 Indian Army soldiers have made the supreme sacrifice to ensure peace across the globe. Presently, Indian Armed Forces are deployed across nine countries in peacekeeping missions, namely UNDOF, UNIFIL,

UNTSO, UNFICYP, MONUSCO, UNMISS, UNIFSA, MINUSCA and MINURSO. India has been at the forefront of capacity development for the UN, host nations and partner nations. India has always strived to support UN initiatives by providing agile and flexible units, peacekeeper training, logistic support, enhancing gender parity and contributing to technological enhancements. India has provided active support for host nation capacity development by providing training, infrastructure development and Civil Military Coordination (CIMIC) activities. In addition, Veterinary Detachments of the Indian Army have displayed note-

worthy performance in various UN Missions. Efforts made to bring a significant improvement in the health of livestock in Abyei by Lieutenant Colonel Gurpreet Singh Bali, Commander of the Veterinary Detachment in Sudan were appreciated by the UN Headquarters. The Indian Army has established a Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK) in New Delhi to impart niche training in peacekeeping operations. This Centre trains more than 12,000 troops every year. CUNPK undertakes a multitude of activities from contingent training to national and international courses for potential peacekeepers and trainers. It also hosts foreign delegations

as part of sharing best practices. The Centre regularly dispatches Mobile Training Teams to Friendly Foreign Countries as part of capacity building in the field of UN peacekeeping training. The Institute has evolved in the last two decades as a Centre of Excellence and repository of experience and best practices. In order to ensure operational efficiency and sustainability of Indian contingents in UN missions, the Indian Army has deployed state-of-the-art equipment and vehicles. These vehicles and equipment are manufactured in India and have successfully withstood the vagaries of difficult terrain, weather and operational conditions in the mission areas.

Aiyar remarks on IFS creates row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader and former diplomat Mani Shankar Aiyar sparked yet another row over his calling the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) of yore an "upper caste" service comprising "Macaulay ki ulad", which he claimed is becoming more democratic now with the flavour of the country getting into it. BJP claimed that Aiyar's description of the Chinese attack on India in 1962 as an "alleged" invasion shows the "anti-India" mindset of the Congress and is an signal to

"enemy" countries to interfere in the electoral process here as the opposition is facing a "rout". Aiyar, though, immediately issued an apology to defuse the crisis, while the Congress also distanced itself from the veteran leader. Speaking at the launch of a book "Nehru's First Recruit", Aiyar, who literally describes himself as the "last IFS recruit" of the first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, said the country has overcome the "bad features" of its first generation recruits. At the event, Aiyar also referred to the 1962 Indo-China war as an alleged "Chinese invasion" but soon "unreservedly apolo-

gised" on the usage of the word 'alleged'. In a brief statement late Tuesday, Aiyar said, "I unreservedly apologise for having mistakenly used the word 'alleged' before 'Chinese invasion' at the Foreign Correspondents Club this evening." His phraseology, which has now triggered into a fresh controversy, saw the Congress disassociating itself with the Aiyar's statement. "Allowances must be made for his age. The INC distances itself from his original phraseology. The Chinese invasion of India that began on October 20, 1962, was for REAL. So too were the Chinese incursions in

Ladakh in early May 2020 in which 20 of our soldiers were martyred and the status quo disturbed," Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said in a statement. BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia alleged that Aiyar could not have made such a statement without the concurrence of Rahul Gandhi and also took a swipe at Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge for his "silence" over the issue. Aiyar had made the remarks at a book launch event on Tuesday, kicking up a row and embarrassing his party and handing over an issue to the BJP for yet another time with his controversial comments.

RudraM-II air to surface missile test fired successfully

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a boost to indigenisation in defence manufacturing, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Wednesday successfully flight-tested the RudraM-II air-to-surface missile from Su-30 MK-I platform of IAF off the coast of Odisha at around 1130 hours, defence ministry said here. Giving details, officials said the flight-test met all the trial

objectives, validating the propulsion system and control and guidance algorithm. The performance of the missile has been validated from the flight data captured by range tracking instruments like electro-optical systems, radar and telemetry stations deployed by Integrated Test Range, Chandipur at various locations, including the on-board ship. RudraM-II is an indigenously-developed solid-propelled air-launched missile system meant



for Air-to-Surface role to neutralise many types of enemy assets. A number of state-of-the-art indigenous technologies developed by various DRDO laboratories have been incor-

porated in the missile system. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated DRDO, IAF and industry on the successful test-flight of RudraM-II. The successful test has consolidated the role of the RudraM-II system as a force multiplier to the Armed Forces, he said. Chief of DRDO Samir V Kamat complimented the DRDO team for their untiring efforts and contribution culminating into the successful flight test.

Choice between those who constructed Ram Temple and those who opened fire at Ram bhakts: Shah

PTI ■ MAHARAJGANJ/DEORIA (UP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday asserted that this Lok Sabha election is a contest between those who constructed the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and those who opened fire at Ram bhakts.

At a poll meeting in Deoria in support of BJP candidate Shashank Mani Tripathi, he accused the opposition of stalling the construction of the Ram Temple for over 70 years and said the temple could only be built because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"This election is between the one who constructed Ram Temple and those who opened fire on Ram Bhakts," he said referring to the firing at karsevaks in 1990 when

Mulayam Singh Yadav was the Uttar Pradesh chief minister. Earlier at a rally in Maharajganj, Shah took a jibe at the Samajwadi Party and Congress, saying they have decided to blame electronic voting machines for their defeat in the Lok Sabha polls.

"The counting is on June 4. In the afternoon the two 'shehzade' (Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav) will hold a press conference and say we lost the election because EVM was defective," he said.

"Modi has crossed 310 seats in five rounds. Rahul baba you will not get even 40 seats and the other 'shehzade' (Akhilesh Yadav) will just get four seats," he said at the rally in support of party candidate Pankaj Chaudhary.

He said the opposition does not have a PM candidate and



say they will have five PMs in five years.

"This is not a general store but a nation of 130 crore people. Can such a PM work?" he asked.

Targeting the opposition, he said Congress leaders say that Pakistan has an atom bomb but BJP people are not scared of atom bombs.

"Pakistan occupied Kashmir is and will remain part of India and we will take it back," he asserted.

Referring to the Sahara scam, Shah claimed it occurred when the opposition was in power.

"Arre Akhilesh (Akhilesh Yadav) the scam took place in your government. Modi ji started the process of refund," he said.

Sahara group firms were accused of circumventing

regulations with Ponzi schemes. The group has denied the charges.

Seeking to strike a chord with farmers, Shah said, "It is the death anniversary of Chaudhary Charan Singh today. Narendra Modi did the work of giving him Bharat Ratna and gave respect to all the farmers of Uttar Pradesh."

The senior BJP leader also accused the previous governments of shutting down sugar mills and promised that a new mega sugar mill will be constructed in Maharajganj if the BJP comes to power again.

Claiming that terrorist attacks were rampant in the Congress government, Shah said at the rally in Deoria, "When Narendra Modi came to power, we did surgical strike and air strike and hit Pakistan

in their home and ended terrorism."

The senior BJP leader also spoke on the issue of reservation and accused the opposition parties of trying to end reservation for SC/ST/OBC in order to appease its vote bank.

"I want to give a Modi guarantee, no one can lay hands on the reservation of SC/ST and OBC till even a single MP of BJP is in Parliament. These people have reduced the reservation of backward classes for appeasement politics," he said.

He also praised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and said, "Yogi ji has cleared the mosquitoes with cleanliness and the mafia from Uttar Pradesh with his style."

Polling in Maharajganj and Deoria will be held on June 1.

Rahul lacks experience, not even worth a matchstick before Modi: MP CM

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said former Congress president Rahul Gandhi lacks political experience and is not even worth a "matchstick" in front of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In an interview to PTI on Tuesday night, Yadav slammed Gandhi and RJD chief Lalu Prasad over their claims that the Modi government would be ousted after the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, and said there was no bigger joke than this.

He also said Gandhi was dreaming of becoming prime minister but lacked the courage to contest from their stronghold Amethi in Uttar Pradesh.

Asked if the Wayanad MP, like his grandmother Indira Gandhi, should have gained some experience of governance, Yadav said, "He neither had the experience of a minister nor party president (before he held the post) and not even politics. The way he talks...Even the opposition should have some level, especially before a personality (referring to Modi). He (Gandhi) is not even a lamp before the sun."

"His (Gandhi's) strength is not even worth a matchbox stick but he wants to show himself as light of the sun...So it is like daydreaming and no one can stop him from doing so," Yadav said.

The BJP leader said Rahul Gandhi was proved wrong twice, apparently referring to Congress' debacle in the 2014 and 2019 polls.

"On the contrary, Modiji said before 2014 that he will form government with absolute



majority as people are blessing him and it happened," he said.

It was for the first time in 60 years that a non-Congress majority government came to power in the country, he said.

"Second time also, the BJP leadership set the target of 300 (seats) and it happened. This time, the target is 400 and it is already visible as only one phase (of general election) is left now," Yadav said.

He said PM Modi is putting things before people with humility.

"People are watching them (opposition). Now even leaders from Pakistan are supporting them. I myself and Modiji have not taken the name of Pakistan even once during several interviews, but see their (opposition's) seriousness," he said.

People of the country want to make "an India of 21st century". They want to take the nation forward and it is not possible for them (opposition) to do it, he said.

Further targeting Rahul Gandhi, Yadav said, "The kind of low-level language he is using against Modiji, people of the country have already given him a befitting reply in six phases and the same will



be reflected in the last phase also on June 1."

On Rahul Gandhi and Lalu Prasad claiming the BJP-led government will be ousted on June 4, the vote counting day, Yadav said, "I don't consider a bigger joke than this. Just see who is saying this. You mentioned Rahul Gandhi...Before 2014, they were in power with more than 235 MPs of their own. But under his leadership it was reduced to 115, which was an impossible thing at that time." They used terms like "Maut ka Saudagar" for Modi, but people defeated their government and their seats were reduced to 115, he said.

In 2019, they used filthy language and were reduced to the "size of a 52-seater bus" from 115, Yadav remarked.

The CM also said Rahul Gandhi "ran away" from Amethi (Lok Sabha contest) in 2024.

"You have your own two seats- Amethi and Rae Bareilly. You are dreaming of becoming prime minister, but you don't have courage. Your mother (Sonia Gandhi) also lacked the courage to contest. First, you declined to contest (from Amethi) and later, your mother also refused to fight

(from Rae Bareilly)," he said.

"So what message are you giving to your partymen?" Yadav asked.

Rae Bareilly was won by Congress, he noted, adding that Gandhi has now "run away" from Wayanad and is coming back (to contest from Rae Bareilly instead of Amethi).

"Neither you are contesting from Amethi, nor you are able to field your sister (Priyanka Gandhi Vadra) from there. Instead, you are contesting from Rae Bareilly, which means they are very much afraid from inside and they are not saying but it is their fear which is coming out (in their speeches)," he said.

Targeting Lalu Prasad, the CM said the RJD chief is unable to talk about any other (state) and in Bihar also, he is unable to contest a single seat because of his track record.

Asked if he considers Rahul Gandhi a mature leader, Yadav said "Not just me but the entire country doesn't consider him (mature). How can a person rectify mistakes of former PMs like Indira, Nehru, his mother and father (Rajiv Gandhi)." During an election rally in Rae Bareilly, Rahul Gandhi was recently asked when is he getting married? Soon, he assured.

Yadav said, "He (Rahul) is lying that he will get married soon. He is already 55, when he will get married is not known. But why is he lying and why doesn't he say it's not possible to get married and he will do so in his next birth. Why doesn't he want to say this?" "Still if he marries, my best wishes are with him, but for marriage also there is an age bar. But it is his personal matter and I shouldn't meddle in it," he added.

Demography in Bengal's border areas changing due to infiltration, says Modi

PTI ■ KAKDWIP (WB)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday alleged that demography in the bordering areas of West Bengal is changing because of infiltration while illegal entrants are snatching away the opportunities meant for local youths.

Modi also claimed that the Trinamool Congress government in the state was giving away the rights of "original" OBCs to Muslims by issuing false caste certificates.

He said, "The demography in the bordering areas of Bengal is being changed. The TMC is against giving citizenship to religiously persecuted minorities. Why are they opposing the CAA so much? Why are these people (TMC leaders) lying about the CAA?"

The prime minister alleged that the TMC has indulged in the politics of appeasement so that illegal infiltrators could settle in Bengal.

He asserted that the Matua community members would get Indian citizenship with all the respect that's due to them.



The TMC does not want the Hindus and Matuas to stay in Bengal, Modi alleged while addressing his last election rally in the state in this election at Kakdwip.

"To appease a section of the society, the TMC government is openly attacking the Constitution, which has given reservations to Dalits and backward castes. Reservations were looted in West Bengal and false OBC certificates were issued to Muslims," Modi said.

He referred to the May 22 Calcutta High Court order

that struck down the Other Backward Classes (OBC) status of several classes in West Bengal granted since 2010, finding such reservations to vacancies in services and posts in the state are illegal.

"But the TMC cannot accept this verdict. They are misguiding Muslims by spreading wrong information regarding the court's verdict. Just imagine to what end they can go for appeasement," Modi added.

"Today, infiltrators are snatching away the opportunities provided for

the youths. They are encroaching on your properties and land and the entire country is worried about that," he said.

After counting of votes on June 4, these TMC people will run out of steam, the prime minister claimed.

Modi attacked the TMC, accusing it of preventing the implementation of central schemes for fishermen, and other programmes such as Ujjwala Yojana and Ayushman Bharat.

He also accused the TMC government of compromising national security by allowing unchecked infiltration in West Bengal from across its borders.

"TMC and INDIA bloc are pushing West Bengal in the opposite direction of development. Trinamool Congress even takes cut money from PM Awas and mid-day meal projects," he alleged.

He charged "TMC goons" of attacking Bharat Sevashram Sangha and Ramakrishna Mission establishments in the state.

"To enforce 'Viksit Bharat', we need a 'Viksit Bengal'," he said.

Mizoram MP urges EC to allow over 1,000 police personnel to cast votes

PTI ■ AIZAWL

Mizoram's Rajya Sabha MP MK Vanlalvena has urged the Election Commission of India to allow 1,047 police personnel to cast their votes as they were away on poll-related duties in other states.

The police personnel failed to cast their votes at the time of elections to the lone Lok Sabha seat in Mizoram held on April 19 as they had gone to Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh on poll duty.

Vanlalvena in a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday said that currently 15 companies of Mizoram Armed Police comprising 1,047 personnel are on election duty in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. He alleged that the police personnel were denied their legitimate right to exercise their franchise.

The Mizoram MP said that the Mizoram police nodal officer had requested the state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) to make the necessary arrangements earlier, which was duly conveyed to the Election Commission.

However, the poll panel conveyed its regret to the state CEO that the police personnel could not be allowed to cast their votes citing 'technical reasons,' he said.

Meanwhile, the state election department said the CEO



office on March 28 had written to the EC asking about the possibility of sending postal ballots to 12 companies of the State Armed Police Force (SAPF) at their duty places in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The CEO office also sought permission for opening of felicitation centre for another 3 companies of SAPF, who were bound to leave for Madhya Pradesh on April 4, it said.

The Election Commission sent its reply on April 6 and said that postal ballots were not allowed to be sent to the police personnel at their duty places outside the state as they were required to exercise their franchise in a facilitation centre in their native state, it said.

Although the EC told the state election department to arrange facilitation centres for the personnel, no such

arrangement could be made for 12 companies of SAPF due to the date of induction fixed by the Ministry of Home Affairs on April 1.

As the date of induction was fixed on April 1, the 12 companies have to leave for Bihar and Uttar Pradesh on March 28 and March 29, it said.

Subsequently, the state election department wrote to the Election Commission on April 23 requesting it to arrange voting facilities for 1,047 police personnel before June 4.

However, the poll panel rejected the request and informed the CEO office that the police personnel would not be able to exercise their voting rights as polling for Mizoram Lok Sabha seat was already held on April 19, the election department said.

Rahul, Akhilesh will blame EVMs for poll defeat: Shah

PTI ■ MAHARAJGANJ (UP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday took a jibe at the Samajwadi Party and Congress, saying they have decided to blame electronic voting machines for their defeat in the Lok Sabha polls.

At a public meeting in support of party candidate Pankaj Chaudhary here, he also claimed that the BJP has crossed the majority mark in the first five rounds of polls.

"The counting is on June 4. In the afternoon the two 'shehzade' (Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav) will hold a press conference and say we lost the election because EVM was defective," he said.

"Modi has crossed 310 seats in five rounds. Rahul baba you will not get even 40 seats and the other 'shehzade' (Akhilesh Yadav) will just get four seats," he said.

He said the opposition does not have a PM candidate and say that they will have five PMs in five years. "This is not a general store but a nation of 130 crore people. Can such a PM work?" he asked.

Targeting the opposition, he said Congress leaders say that Pakistan has an atom bomb but BJP people are not scared of atom bombs.

Rahul: In Punjab, drug problem exists even today, increasing

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said the drug problem in Punjab "exists even today and is increasing," and called for strict action against the menace.

Gandhi is the second senior Congress leader to raise the issue of the drug problem in Punjab, which is ruled by the AAP government, after Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge.

Addressing a poll rally in favour of Congress' Ludhiana candidate Amrinder Singh Raja Warring in Ludhiana's Dakha, Gandhi also spoke about his party's poll promises, including the Mahalakshmi scheme, loan waiver for farmers and ensuring legal guarantee on minimum support price if the INDIA bloc comes to power.

Gandhi raked up the issue of the drug menace during the rally and said, "The drug issue in Punjab exists even today and it is increasing.

"Strict action needs to be taken against it. Punjab should fight against drugs with full authority and aggression," he said.

On Tuesday, Kharge in Amritsar said the drug problem has become the biggest challenge for the future of Punjab.

"Because of this, the law and order situation is deteriorating day by day. After selling land, farmers are sending their children abroad, fearing that they will not fall prey to drugs. Each one is forced to migrate as employment opportunities are not available," the Congress president had said.

The Congress and the AAP, which are the constituents of the INDIA bloc, are fighting the Lok Sabha polls separately in Punjab.

Taking on the BJP government, Gandhi said,



"For the first time, any party and their leaders have said that they will change and scrap the Constitution if they win the election."

Holding a copy of the Constitution, he said it was not only a book but the voice of the poor.

"Be it reservation, the public sector or rights of the poor. Whatever you get it, it is from the Constitution and the BJP wants to finish the Constitution, alleged the Congress leader.

Attacking Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Gandhi said he "lied" about giving two crore jobs every year.

The Modi government has "finished" small traders, and small-medium businesses with demonetisation and GST (goods and services tax) just to benefit, "Adani ji and Ambani ji," he said.

The situation is such that the country's youth are not getting employment, he claimed.

Slamming the Agnipath scheme, he said it was an "attack" on jawans and the army. "They are insulting jawans of the country," he alleged.

"They want to make two types of martyrs with this scheme. One martyr will get pension and martyr status while an Agniveer, who has been turned into a labourer, will get six-month training and after martyrdom, no pension, compensation and martyr status," he said.



Counting of votes for Arunachal Assembly poll to begin at 6 am on June 2

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Counting of votes for the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly elections will begin at 6 am on June 2, an official said here on Wednesday.

Assembly and Lok Sabha elections were held simultaneously in Arunachal Pradesh on April 19.

"Over 2000 officials will be deployed for counting of votes on both the days - (June 2 Assembly election and June 4 Lok Sabha)," the official said.

Counting of votes for assembly elections will start from 6 am on June 2 while that for Lok Sabha polls would start from 8 am on June 4. Chief Electoral Officer Pawan Kumar Sain said.

"This time we have decided to conduct counting for all constituencies in a district simultaneously and will try to announce the results by noon," Sain said, adding that media centres would be set up in all counting centres to disseminate information on counting updates.

Counting of votes for 50 assembly seats out of a total of 60, will be held in 24 centres in the state on June 2 while that for Lok Sabha seats would be conducted in 25 centres on June 4. Joint Chief Electoral Officer Liken Koyu said.

The ruling BJP has already won 10 seats in the 60-member assembly unopposed.

The second round of training for officials for counting of votes ended on Tuesday, an official said. "A three-tier security barricade have been

made in all the counting centres comprising personnel of central paramilitary forces, state armed police and state civil police, available in the state," the CEO said.

"I had already convened a coordination meeting with all the district electoral officers (DEOs) and superintendents of police (SPs) to review the law and order situation along with chief secretary and director general of police, where the DGP directed all SPs to ensure peaceful counting process," Sain said.

The CEO said that the DEOs have been instructed to ensure that counting agents of various political parties enter the counting centres without cell phones.

A total of 133 candidates contested in the assembly seats while 14 in the two Lok Sabha seats.

In the Arunachal West Parliamentary seat, eight candidates including Union Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijiju and state Congress president Nabam Tuki contested the elections.

Sitting BJP MP Tapir Gao and state Congress vice-president Bosiram Siram are among the six candidates who contested from Arunachal East Lok Sabha seat. The BJP had won both the Lok Sabha seats in the 2019 elections while in the assembly the party had bagged 41 seats. The JD (U) had won seven seats, NPP in five, Congress in four while the PPA had secured one seat and Independent candidates got two.

Heed caution

All may seem lost in the Israel-Palestine war, but there is still time to save humanity in Gaza

The city of Rafah, which translates into wellbeing or prosperity in Urdu, experienced the trauma of seeing at least 45 people — including children — killed at a refugee camp in its midst following an Israeli airstrike in Gaza. Understandably, the act caused international indignation and further isolated Israel over the war with Palestine, coming only days after the International Court of Justice ordered the Jew nation to cease its operation in Rafah. Although the top UN court ordered Israeli forces last week to stop their operations, they persisted in their assault on the border town, which was long thought to be the last remaining shelter in the territory. Meanwhile, as international solidarity poured in for the Palestinians impacted by the Israeli strikes, the slogan “All Eyes On Rafah” has become popular on social media. The expression alludes to the continuous slaughter occurring in Gaza city, and several famous people have posted condolences along with the hashtag #AllEyesOnRafah. The cry for awareness of the ongoing battle has gained traction with the use of this slogan. Prior to Israel intensifying its military operation on the Gaza side of the border earlier this month and seizing control of the crossing, Rafah served as a primary port of entry for humanitarian aid. Over one million Palestinians have fled the fighting in Rafah; the majority of them were already displaced due to the conflict between Israel and the Hamas. Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden does not seem to be changing his stance on Israel, according to the White House, because the incident “did not cross a red line” that would require adjustments in US support.

This is despite the fact that Israeli tanks have been seen rolling down central Rafah for the first time since the war began on October 7 last year. In another setback to Israel globally and perhaps as part of a larger signal for it to stop bloodying the Gaza Strip with the murder of innocent people — nobody actually minds if only the Hamas terrorists are annihilated — Spain, Norway and Ireland have acknowledged Palestine's independence. The three countries did not recognise the existence of a State; they just acknowledged its potential. As a result of the change, the Palestinian Authority and the three nations will have closer diplomatic ties. Everyone has declared that they will acknowledge Palestine based on its pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem serving as its Capital. Already, 143 of the 193 members of the UN General Assembly have recognised Palestine. The latest acknowledgments are the most compelling proof to date that the concept might be gaining support in the economically and diplomatically powerful western European States. The West Bank, which Israel has occupied, and the Gaza Strip, which is under siege and where Israel is conducting a war that has claimed more than 36,000 lives, make up what is left of ancient Palestine. However, it must be recorded to his credit that Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the Rafah incident was a “tragic mishap”.



Electric vehicles lead eco-friendly commute

Electric two-wheelers, with their zero tailpipe emissions, are providing an efficient and sustainable transport option for urban mobility

In the 1980s, the introduction of Maruti 800 changed the landscape of the automobile industry in India for decades to come. Cut to 2024 and we are heading towards a similar revolution in the years to come - but with a little twist. Countries worldwide are addressing climate change by striving to reduce their carbon footprints. The adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), particularly electric two-wheelers (E2Ws), has emerged as a significant step in this effort. Understanding the environmental impact of E2Ws compared to conventional counterparts is crucial. There is compelling evidence supporting their widespread adoption as part of the transition towards sustainable transportation systems. Traditional internal combustion engine (ICE) motorcycles and scooters contribute to air and noise pollution. E2Ws have zero tailpipe emissions and thus, help in mitigating pollution levels significantly. In urban settings, they help in alleviating noise levels as well. Another advantage is that their powertrain is more efficient when compared to ICE vehicles. Since the conversion of electrical energy into mechanical energy is more effective, E2Ws have minimal energy wastage and a diminished carbon footprint. E2Ws also operate quietly and without vibrations or petrol fumes. There is ongoing innovation to close the performance gap between electric and their conventional fuel-powered counterparts. While ICE engines require warm-up for optimal performance in cold weather, E2Ws operate at full capacity instantly. This makes the ride hassle free in any condition. Their advanced features like Android-based instrument clusters and mobile app connectivity further enhance the overall experience. In contrast with conventional ICE vehicles, there is a notable difference in the energy efficiency of E2Ws. The electric motors are great at converting a larger portion of electrical energy from the grid into power at the wheels. This makes them highly effective in utilising



energy. The heightened efficiency indicates that they require less energy to travel the same distance, thereby reducing their environmental footprint even more. The production and upkeep of electric two-wheelers requires fewer resources and less energy. Their minimal maintenance requirements lead to decreased energy usage and a smaller environmental footprint. E2Ws are a promising solution for reducing carbon footprints and advancing towards a more sustainable transportation paradigm. There is a need to address certain challenges such as those around infrastructure and accelerating the transition to renewable energy sources. This will help realise the full potential of E2Ws in mitigating environmental impact. With concerted action from policymakers, industry stakeholders and consumers, E2Ws are set to play a significant role in shaping a greener, more sustainable future for transportation. (The writer is Founder & CEO, Motovolt Mobility; views are personal)

Spiritual institutions under attack in Bengal

The assaults on the Ramakrishna Mission raise serious concerns about the State's political climate and its impact on religious harmony

West Bengal is again in the news and again for the wrong reasons. The premises of the venerable Ramakrishna Mission at Jalpaiguri have been vandalised by the goons of the State's ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC). That hasn't been the only incident of attacking a religious or spiritual centre. The ISKCON temple premises in the State have also been the target of the TMC brigade, as the State's chief minister Mamata Banerjee suspects the organisation's monks of being BJP sympathisers. So too have the premises of the Bharat Sevashram Sangh (BSS) at Beldanga in the district of Murshidabad suffered the ire of the ruling party's rough-necks. One of the BSS monks Kartik Maharaj has drawn Mamata Banerjee's ire as he is thought to be working towards influencing voters in favour of the BJP. Banerjee also believes that the ISKCON is playing a similar role. The Ramakrishna Mission or RKM, as it is also known, headquartered in Kolkata's Belur Math was founded in 1897, by the great spiritual Ramakrishna Paramahansa's most renowned disciple, Swami Vivekananda. The latter was truly a global icon of modern Hinduism and planted the flag of Sanatana Dharma in the West, beginning with his spiritual conquest in Chicago in 1893 at a conference of the World Parliament of Religions. Though the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was founded in New York, its founder Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada or Srila Prabhupada was born in Calcutta and ventured to the US only in his old age, at 69, to spread the message of Krishna to America and the rest of the world. To vandalise such highly regarded institutions such as the venerable Ramakrishna Ashram and the internationally respected ISKCON, which has over 160 temples across the globe and that too by some citizens of a country that is predominantly Hindu, is unthinkable and unpardonable. It is possible that the perpetrators of these attacks are not



Hindus but people belonging to another religion. Nevertheless, the message that comes out from these recent episodes of temple vandalism is of the Hindus as a people being religious-suicidal. This is all the more unfortunate for two reasons. The Ramakrishna Mission is world famous since it was Swami Vivekananda who single-handedly informed the world of the wonder that Hinduism is. It is ISKCON that enables so many countries, with its magnificent temples, to worship in the Hindu way of “Hare Rama, Hare Krishna”. Secondly, it has been only a few years since the image of Hindu India began to shine, after centuries of suppression. We now have the sordid spectacle of temple and ashram premises being attacked by goons with guns, in West Bengal of all places. It was just over a century ago that Congress leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale had said, “What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow”. It signified the province of Bengal was a leader. Is this what leaders do and that too for winning some seats in four or five constituencies? Just look back at the Renaissance, which in many ways, was comprehensively

“ONE COULD GO ON AND ON ABOUT BENGAL'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COUNTRY. MODERN INDIA'S GREATEST POET WAS RABINDRANATH TAGORE, AGAIN A GIFT OF BENGAL. HIS LYRICS ARE TODAY'S NATIONAL ANTHEM

led by Bengal. But before that, let us not forget Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who is considered by many to have been an avatar of Krishna. Chaitanya saved at least a part of Bengal for Bharat; but for him, the whole of the province would have been swallowed by Pakistan and then ruined. He stood between the conversion of the poorer Bengalis to Islam and saving them so that today they can worship Krishna. Ramakrishna Paramahansa was also a divine gift of Bengal, who himself had a glimpse of the divine. One could go on and on about Bengal's contributions to the country. Modern India's greatest poet was Rabindranath Tagore, again, a gift of Bengal. His lyrics are today are national anthem. One cannot ever forget Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and his stirring song Vande Mataram, which became the freedom anthem of India's national movement and inspired countless revolutionaries to armed action for combating the colonial raj, as well as to embrace the gallows in their supremely inspired quest. Bengal is a virtual encyclopaedia of the 19th and 20th-century, greats of India. It would need an entire volume to describe how and when the

saga began to sour. From the climbing of lofty heights of art, culture, literature and industry, Bengal began to slip towards an existence that wouldn't be envied in the least. The late Nirad Chaudhari, one of the finest writers the English language world has seen, gave vent to this angst by saying that the people of his are the “finest virtuosi of factiousness”, not a flattering comment, though this writer, having being raised in Bengal and able to speak fluent Bengali, is wont to take a much more positive view. The sense of being Bengali is of course very pronounced, but the unity a common language can foster cannot stand before the pull of religion, as has been the historical experience throughout most significant parts of the world. That the State that led India's renaissance in the 19th century has fallen into this travesty is a sad tale, but Bengal has been known to come back strongly towards nationalism every time it is felt that the province might have gone astray. Perhaps therein lies the silver lining. (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TAIWAN STAYS STRONG AMID TENSIONS

Madam — Apropos the news story “Taiwan tracks dozens of Chinese warplanes and navy vessels off its coast on the 2nd day of drills,” published on May 24, this is my response. It's concerning to witness the escalation of tensions between Taiwan and China. Taiwan's tracking of Chinese military activity showcases their vigilance in the face of increasing pressure from Beijing. Despite the provocative displays from China's People's Liberation Army, Taiwan remains steadfast, with President Lai Ching-te affirming the nation's commitment to freedom and democracy. The ongoing dispute in Taiwan's parliament underscores the internal challenges they face, yet life continues in Taipei uninterrupted. China's aggressive stance, citing the one-China principle, only adds to the volatility of the situation. The international community must closely monitor these developments to ensure stability in the region and uphold Taiwan's sovereignty. Avani Singhania | Kolkata

TACKLING E-WASTE THROUGH ACTION

Madam — Apropos the news story “Mitigating the e-waste crisis,” published on May 28, this is my response. As technology advances, our reliance on electronic devices deepens, yet the consequences of our digital age loom large. E-waste, a byproduct of our tech obsession, poses a multifaceted threat to both environment and health. The toxic cocktail of substances found in discarded electronics, if not handled properly, can seep into soil, water and air, wreaking havoc on ecosystems and human well-being alike. The staggering statistics from the Global E-Waste Monitor 2020 paint a grim picture of our unsustainable habits. However, solutions are within reach. Governments must enforce stringent regulations on e-waste management, while manufacturers bear responsibility for the entire lifecycle of their products.

Hospital fire prompts safety overhaul



Apropos the news story “Once burned, Govt orders fire audit of all hospitals,” published on May 28, this is my response. Reading about the tragic fire at the neonatal hospital in Delhi, which resulted in the deaths of seven newborns and injuries to five others, is heartbreaking. This incident starkly highlights severe lapses in hospital management and safety protocols. The hospital was operating on an expired license and lacked fire department clearance, which is both shocking and unacceptable.

Investing in innovative recycling technologies and promoting eco-friendly design can mitigate the e-waste crisis. Ultimately, individual action is paramount. From conscientious disposal practices to advocating for systemic change, each of us holds the key to a cleaner, greener future. Let's embrace the challenge of recycling our e-waste and pave the way for a more sustainable tomorrow. Aryan Malhotra | Chandigarh

SCIENCE ARCHIVES DRIVE PROGRESS

Madam — Apropos the news story “Science Archives Preserve Our Scientific Legacy,” published on May 28, this is my response. As an ever-evolving discipline, science continually shapes our understanding of the world and our place within it. Reading the newspaper daily, I'm constantly reminded of how each discovery and innovation contributes to our present and builds the foundation for future generations. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, highlighted the power of scientific advancements in real-

The prompt action by the Delhi Government to mandate a fire audit for all hospitals by June 8 is a necessary step to prevent such tragedies in the future. However, it's deeply concerning that previous directives for fire preparedness and audits were not enforced rigorously. The revelation that the hospital was refilling oxygen without proper authorisation further underscores the negligence. It's encouraging to see the authorities committing to stringent new safety regulations and inspections, but these measures should have been in place long before this tragedy occurred. The bravery of the nurses and locals who risked their lives to save the babies deserves commendation, but such heroism should not be necessary in a properly regulated and safe environment. This tragic event serves as a grim reminder of the critical importance of strict compliance with safety standards in healthcare facilities. Anaya Patel | Pune

time, transforming our lives and becoming a part of history. Scientific knowledge is inherently cumulative, with each generation of scientists building upon the work of their predecessors. This continuity drives not only intellectual progress but also economic and societal growth. The significance of preserving scientific archives cannot be overstated, as they store invaluable materials—research notes, experimental data and historical correspondence—that offer insights into the development of scientific thought. In India, initiatives like the Archives at NCBS play a crucial role in preserving our scientific heritage. However, with the risk of losing digital data, systematic conservation efforts are vital. Governments should mandate the periodic submission of research documents to ensure the longevity and impact of scientific work, safeguarding it from becoming lost to time. Devika Menon | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

MICROMANAGEMENT AND UNDERMANAGEMENT

It is crucial to balance these extremes by ensuring employee empowerment



In the realm of leadership and management, micromanagement and under management represent two extreme ends of a spectrum posing significant challenges to organisational success. While micromanagement leads to decreased autonomy, innovation and job satisfaction, under management results in a lack of direction, motivation and accountability. By understanding the impacts of these management styles and implementing strategies that balance oversight with empowerment, organisations can foster a productive, innovative and satisfying work environment. Micromanagement involves excessive control and oversight while under management is characterised by a lack of adequate supervision and support.

In the spectrum of management styles, micromanagement and under management represent two extremes, each with distinct characteristics and consequences for the workplace. In an organisation, if one is micromanaging the team and not giving its employees the freedom to work, will eventually drive away great talent while settling for mediocrity resulting in fostering anxiety and ultimately leading to negative impacts on overall organisational productivity and job satisfaction. Along with this, decreased employee morale, reduced creativity and innovation, lower productivity, increased stress and burnout, high turnover, poor performance and accountability are some of the impacts of both micromanagement and undermanagement that can be detrimental even though they manifest differently. Various research studies have shown that micromanagement stifles creativity and innovation.



It is negatively correlated with job satisfaction and positively correlated with stress and burnout. Employees under micromanagement reported lower engagement and higher intentions to leave their jobs. While on the other hand, the effects of under management found that employees lacking adequate supervision and feedback exhibited lower job satisfaction and performance.

It becomes of utmost importance to strike a balance between the two by adopting management practices that provide appropriate oversight while empowering employees. Balancing between micromanagement and under management involves adopting a management style that provides appropriate oversight while empowering employees. By fostering a culture of trust and empowerment; setting clear goals and expectations; and promoting a results-oriented culture can help the organisation create a positive and productive workplace where both managers and employees thrive. There is no denying the fact that balancing micromanagement and undermanagement is crucial for creating a productive, positive and effective workplace. By finding the middle ground, managers can provide the necessary support and oversight while empowering employees to take initiative and innovate.

Remember, be it micromanagement or undermanagement, both can have far-reaching negative effects on both the employees as well as the organisation. By understanding the causes and impacts and then implementing strategies to promote trust, autonomy and effective communication, organisations can create a more positive and productive work environment. Moving away from micromanagement not only enhances employee satisfaction and performance but also contributes to the long-term success and health of the organisation. Micromanagement and undermanagement, as opposite ends of the management spectrum, both present significant challenges to organisational effectiveness and employee well-being. While micromanagement stifles autonomy and innovation through excessive control, under management leaves employees directionless and unsupported. Both styles can lead to significant issues within an organisation, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to effective leadership.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Relevant skill sets can combat unemployment

The rapid digital shift necessitates comprehensive strategies to address skill gaps and ensure inclusive growth. Public-private partnerships are essential



The service sector has undeniably been the primary driver of India's growth since 2000. The exceptional performance of certain modern services has unequivocally contributed to the creation of more productive and decent employment. The reliance on services for economic growth unequivocally demands a fully developed job market, enabling a free flow of the workforce. The absence of such mechanisms will undoubtedly lead to rigidity in the services sector, curtailing growth against the backdrop of the increasingly important position of the services sector. The key focus areas include the pivotal role of technology in shaping the services sector and stimulating job growth in other sectors through multiplier effects.

The momentous transformation of the Indian economy is irrefutably being spearheaded by the service sector, which unequivocally contributes more than 50 per cent of the GDP. The sector's expansion is not happening in isolation but is deeply intertwined with global technological advancements. Technological progress has undeniably been a catalyst for efficiency, customer satisfaction, market expansion and data-driven decision-making within firms. It has also undeniably given rise to new service categories, such as e-commerce and other tech-based services like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT), revolutionising the sector. The relationship between the service sector's growth and technological innovation is undeniably mutually beneficial. As the service sector expands, it undeniably fuels further innovation in technology-based solutions. New ventures and their technological needs undeniably push for continuous technological advancements to gain the competitiveness needed to maintain their foothold in the dynamic industry. This competition and need for differentiation undeniably lead to increased investments in research and development (R&D) and open innovations, benefiting both the firms involved and the public. The introduction of 5G and the ongoing development of 6G technologies have significantly enhanced connectivity, service



THE SERVICE SECTOR UNEQUIVOCALLY OFFERS BOTH ABUNDANT OPPORTUNITIES AND FORMIDABLE CHALLENGES. ADDRESSING CHALLENGES DEMANDS A RESOLUTE, COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH WITH ASTUTE POLICIES AND UNWAVERING IMPLEMENTATION

delivery speed and overall efficiency in India. Efforts to improve digital literacy have further accelerated technology adoption, with 70 per cent of businesses identifying as "Digital Businesses" and the country exhibiting the highest fintech adoption rate at 87 per cent. The application of AI in business operations has markedly improved operational efficiency, customer satisfaction and decision-making, positioning India as a global leader in AI adoption. However, the rapid digital transformation necessitates a balance between creating employment and providing the relevant skill sets for technology-demanding jobs for a new generation is a national need.

The service sector unequivocally offers both abundant opportunities and formidable challenges. Addressing challenges demands a resolute, comprehensive approach with astute policies and unwavering implementation. Public-private partnerships and policies aimed at bridging the skill gaps must be executed with unwavering effectiveness. Educational institutions must urgently revamp their curriculum to directly align with the market's skill demands.

Technological advancement, while propelling economic growth, undeniably necessitates relentless skill development. To fully exploit technological progress, educational institutions must steadfastly ensure their curriculum is consistently updated and in sync with the latest innovations.

Skill Gap: In India, the skill gap in the labour force is a significant challenge, with only 51 per cent of the youth deemed employable due to a lack of necessary skills. This issue is exacerbated by the country's diverse socio-economic conditions, particularly affecting those in rural areas and from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who lack

access to quality education and training. This situation perpetuates cycles of poverty and aggravates wage inequality. Moreover, inadequate emphasis on developing non-technical skills such as communication, critical thinking and leadership, which are increasingly in demand, further compounds the problem. The absence of these skills from the curriculum of most educational institutes compels employers to choose candidates only from a handful of premier institutes. Additionally, there is a significant mismatch between the skills taught and those required by employers, leading to unemployment even among the formally educated.

Efforts to bridge this gap must include public-private partnerships (PPPs), such as the initiative to upgrade Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to train 150 million people by 2024. These initiatives are crucial steps toward aligning educational outcomes with market needs, emphasising the vital importance of both technical and non-technical skills development to enhance employability.

Gender Inequality: Female employability in India has consistently exceeded male employability from 2020 to 2023, but there was a drop in 2024. Furthermore, it has been higher for seven out of eleven years of the Wheebiz India Skills Reports. However, there has been a persistent gap between female and male labour force participation, indicating a clear bias against employing women over men. This bias is diminishing as female labour force participation has risen over the years, but substantial improvement is still necessary.

The Indian Government has implemented various initiatives to foster gender-inclusive employment, aim-

ing to bridge the gender gap in the workplace, making employing female labourers more lucrative while also ensuring it does not come at the cost of pay disparity. One significant legislation is the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, designed to eliminate the wage gap between genders by ensuring equal pay for equal work. However, the act faces challenges, such as the narrow interpretation of the same work or work of a similar nature and the onus on employees to prove discrimination, which is difficult due to workplace power dynamics and legal complexities. Additionally, the Government has launched schemes like Mission Shakti and the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojna-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), focusing on women's skill development and employability. These initiatives include exclusive training institutes for women, industry-oriented courses and partnerships with private sector bodies and NGOs. To encourage female participation in skill development, 30 per cent of seats in ITIs and ITCs are reserved for women.

These measures represent a comprehensive and assertive approach to promoting gender equality in employment, highlighting the crucial importance of legislative support, skill development and financial empowerment in achieving a more inclusive workforce. These unwavering steps will guarantee the complete realisation of the Indian economy's potential and the equitable distribution of the benefits of skills development.

(The writer is Co-Founder and MD, of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Network Member, of India International Skill Centres, an initiative of GoI. Views expressed are personal)

The dawn of AI: Balancing innovation and prudence

As AI advances, it is essential to strike a balance between harnessing its advantages and addressing its challenges to ensure a sustainable future

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the ex-novo computer technology that essentially deals with developing machines capable of imitating human behaviour. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines AI as the "ability of a computer or robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings such as perception, critical thinking and decision-making". As far as the human mind is concerned, first, it processes the information, analyses the processed information from various angles and finally arrives at a logical conclusion. On the contrary, AI is a software programme that solely relies on pre-fed computer data to answer a query. In the entire process, the computer system behaves like



a human mind. AI is the order of the day and admittedly, holds the potential to bring about revolutionary changes in communications, defence, healthcare and agriculture. In fact, till recently, the task that was considered impossible even for a machine to perform now AI has turned into a reality. AI has considerably brought computers very close to imitating the human mind, thus, diminishing the gap

between man and machine. Today AI has found its application in a variety of fields such as education, finance, defence, agriculture and healthcare. Leading medical research institutions use AI for experiment, diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of deadly diseases. AI facilitates high-quality tissue sample analysis that paves the way for precise prognosis. In this day and age pharmaceutical companies are using AI for drug discovery and chemical analysis. With the help of AI doctors and healthcare professionals can precisely diagnose serious medical conditions such as cancer and stroke. In the education sector too, AI plays an important role. AI has proved to be an extremely handy tool to develop study material, student

evaluation, grading and monitoring. Thus, teachers save their precious time which they can utilise in productive academic pursuits as well as engage in meaningful discussions with students. AI-powered virtual educator robots substantially improve teaching and learning outcomes. Now let us see some of the imminent dangers of AI. The picture is not as rosy as it appears for the AI. Widespread indignant use of AI in almost every sphere of human activity is bound to raise some serious concerns concerning privacy, data security and transparency. Psychological well-being and social issues warrant our immediate attention. Companies are gradually replacing humans with AI-powered robots to perform

specific tasks at the workplace. This causes anxiety among employees and adversely affects their mental and emotional well-being. The technical dexterity of computers also is a major challenge for humans in the workplace. Of late AI AI-driven Deepfake videos and online Bots have spread at an alarming pace. Deepfake videos and online Bots are capable of orchestrating a fabricated consensus and manipulating public opinion. Fake news spreads like wildfire disturbing peace and leading to social unrest. Another disadvantage of AI is that it makes it extremely tough to distinguish between the original and the fake. AI-induced human rights violations should be stopped at the earliest. AI-powered changing

technology landscape has jeopardised data security, privacy, dignity, employment, equality, political rights and secrecy. Experts and sociologists have expressed reservations regarding the detrimental impacts of over-reliance on AI and human robots in important sectors like healthcare, law, marketing, accounting, education, management, technology and workplaces. AI's technological diligence, incredible analysis power and the ability to perform repetitive tasks may lead to huge layoffs. Consequently, this gives rise to a disproportionately high unemployment rate. Employees and the labourers may be subjected to discrimination and disparities and their professional and social security may be at stake. To

check the AI misuse a well-defined and comprehensive technological-labour policy is the need of the hour. Some of the measures that help workers survive in the AI-driven landscape are regular up-gradation of employee skills through appropriate training, honing up of technical skills and developing Soft skills. Lo and behold! Let's not lose sight of the fact that AI is completely devoid of human temperament, comprehension and creativity. The human mind is blessed with infinite creative power and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). These supreme attributes propel human beings to an elevated plane and place them on a higher pedestal than machines. On the contrary, AI is data-driven and follows a defined tra-

jectory, thus, fails to capture human emotions, perception and the ability to perform tasks by adapting to a given environment. Since AI is in its nascent stage, therefore, it is too soon to assume that AI can take over humans shortly as humans continue to be the *fons et origo* of originality and innovation. Another threat that scares us is that if ever in the future technologically advanced machines take Man as their enemy then the entire human race may face existential crises. Pre-empting these dangers the US and the European countries have taken a locus standi to oppose AI and have taken stringent legal measures to curb AI's capricious use.

(The writer is a professor; views are personal)

Three Israeli soldiers killed in booby trap explosion in Rafah

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Three soldiers have been killed in Rafah, the Israeli military said Wednesday. Israeli media reported that the soldiers were killed when a booby trap exploded Tuesday, and three other soldiers were wounded. The military says at least 290 soldiers have been killed since the ground operation in Gaza began in October. Israel says it is carrying out limited operations in eastern Rafah along the Gaza-Egypt border. Palestinians in Rafah reported heavy fighting Wednesday as Israeli forces pressed their assault on the border town once seen as the territory's last refuge. The United States and other allies of Israel have warned against a full-fledged offensive in the city. Israeli leaders say their forces must enter Rafah to dismantle Hamas and return hostages taken in the October 7 attack that triggered the war. Fighting in Rafah has caused more than 1 million Palestinians to flee, most of whom had already been displaced in the war between Israel and Hamas. They now seek refuge in squalid tent camps and other war-ravaged areas, where they lack shelter, food, water and other essentials

for survival, the UN says. Israeli bombardments and ground offensives in Gaza have killed more than 36,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians. Israel launched its war in Gaza after Hamas' October 7 attack in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250. Israel says around 100 hostages are still captive in Gaza, along with the bodies of around 30 more. **IFRC JOINS GROWING CALLS FOR A CEASE-FIRE:** The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies joined growing calls Wednesday for a cease-fire and humanitarian aid access to the Gaza Strip, saying these were critically needed to ease the horrific suffering of civilians trapped in the seven-month conflict. "It's absolutely imperative," IFRC President Kate Forbes told The Associated Press in an interview in the Philippine capital, Manila, where she was to hold a series of meetings. "First, we have to have a government solution to get a cease-fire so that we can get access and then, we will give aid to both sides."

US condemns loss of life, says no policy changes

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The White House on Tuesday condemned the loss of life of dozens of civilians as a result of an Israeli airstrike in Rafah, but said it is not planning any policy changes as a result of the Israeli actions. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters that Israel had not violated Biden's "red line" for withholding future offensive arms transfers because it has not, and it appears to the US that it will not, launch a full-scale ground invasion into the city. "Everything that we can see tells us that they are not moving into a major ground operation in population centres in the centre of Rafah," Kirby said. Kirby called the loss of life "heart-breaking" and "horrific," and said the US was monitoring the results of an Israeli investigation into the strike, which suggested the civilian deaths were the result of a secondary explosion after a successful strike on two Hamas operatives. "We understand that this strike did kill two senior Hamas heads who are directly responsible for attacks," Kirby said. "We've also said many times Israel must take every precaution possible to do more to protect innocent life." Asked whether the strike would result in any US policy changes, Kirby said, "I have no policy changes to speak to."

Some areas need "psychosocial support and in some, it's going to be absolute aid," said Forbes, who rose to the presidency of the world's largest humanitarian network in December. "I've said this is both a sprint and a marathon. We need to get aid

immediately in Gaza for people who have malnutrition, there's not adequate sanitation," she said. "But it's going to be a marathon in that there's going to be aid that's going to be needed for decades to repair Gaza and the people there."

Sweden assures USD 1.23b aid to Ukraine

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

The Swedish government said on Wednesday that it will donate military aid to Ukraine worth 13 billion kronor (USD 1.23 billion) in the largest help package Sweden has so far donated. "It consists of equipment that is at the top of Ukraine's priority list," Deputy Prime Minister Ebba Busch said. It included air defense, artillery ammunition and armoured vehicles. Sweden's Defense Minister Pål Jonsson reiterated that the country has ruled out for now sending any Swedish-built JAS 39 Gripen jets to Ukraine, saying the focus on the Ukrainian side is on implementing the F-16 program. Several countries have said they want to donate F-16 fighter jets. On Tuesday, Belgium pledged 30 F-16 jets to Ukraine. Jonsson said Sweden "is still working on possibly being able to contribute with the Gripen system later."

US officials in Ukraine to discuss seizing Russian assets

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A senior US Treasury official is in Kyiv this week to talk with government officials about US financial support for Ukraine, efforts to tighten sanctions on Russia and plans to use immobilized Russian sovereign assets for the benefit of Ukraine as it fends off Russian forces. Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo's trip comes as Russia gains territory on the battlefield after an especially lengthy delay in US military aid left Ukraine at the mercy of Russia's bigger army and as the outlook for Ukraine's state finances is on shakier ground. Adeyemo is set to meet with officials in Ukraine's finance ministry and president's office. He's also planning a stop at the Kyiv School of Economics to speak with faculty and civil society groups working on sanctions policy and ways to make sanctions on Russia more effective. President Joe Biden signed legislation in April that allows the administration to seize the roughly USD5 billion in Russian state assets located in the US. However, a majority of the USD 260 billion in frozen Russian assets are in Europe, and US officials are hoping for a consensus from their European allies on how to spend that money. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen met in Stresa, Italy, with her counterparts from the Group of Seven nations last week to discuss how to squeeze money out of the frozen Russian assets to support Kyiv's war effort. She said loaning Ukraine USD 50 billion from the assets "has been mentioned as a possible number that could be achieved," but that the specific approach was still under discussion.



Major Radhika Sen of India stands near the Gandhi Statue at UN HQ. Sen will receive the prestigious '2023 United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award' from UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres during a ceremony at the world body's headquarters on May 30, 2024 to mark International Day of UN Peacekeepers.

PTI

Police search European Parliament over suspected Russian interference

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Belgium's federal prosecutor's office said on Wednesday that police carried out searches at the residence of an employee of the European Parliament and at his office in the Parliament's building in Brussels over suspected Russian interference. Prosecutors said in statement that the suspect's office in Strasbourg, where the EU Parliament's headquarters are located in France, was also searched in partnership with the EU's judicial cooperation agency, Eurojust, and French judicial authorities. The raids took place less than

two weeks before Europe-wide polls on June 6-9 to elect a new EU parliament. The investigation was announced last month by Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, who said his country's intelligence service has confirmed the existence of a network trying to undermine support for Ukraine. "The searches are part of a case of interference, passive corruption and membership of a criminal organization and relates to indications of Russian interference, whereby Members of the European Parliament were approached and paid to promote Russian propaganda

via the Voice of Europe news website," prosecutors said. Prosecutors said they believe the employee played "a significant role in this." De Croo said last month that the probe showed that members of the European Parliament were approached and offered money to promote Russian propaganda. "According to our intelligence service, the objectives of Moscow are very clear. The objective is to help elect more pro-Russian candidates to the European Parliament and to reinforce a certain pro-Russian narrative in that institution," he said.

Algeria proposes SC resolution seeking Israel halt Rafah

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

Algeria is circulating a proposed UN Security Council resolution that would demand an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and order Israel to halt its military offensive in the southern city of Rafah immediately. The draft resolution, obtained on Wednesday evening by The Associated Press, also demands that the cease-fire be respected by all parties. It also calls for the immediate release of all hostages taken during Hamas' attack in southern Israel on October 7. Some diplomats said they hoped for a quick vote, even as early as Wednesday. "It is our hope that it can be done as quickly as possible because life is in the balance," Chinese Ambassador Fu Cong told reporters. US Ambassador Linda Thomas-

Greenfield said: "We're waiting to see it and then we'll react to it." The United States has vetoed multiple resolutions demanding a cease-fire in Gaza. The draft demands compliance with previous Security Council resolutions that call for the opening of all border crossings and humanitarian access to Gaza's 2.3 million people who desperately need food and other aid. The proposed resolution says that "the catastrophic situation in the Gaza Strip constitutes a threat to regional and international peace and security". It expresses grave concern at "famine spreading throughout the Gaza Strip" and the suffering of Palestinians who took refuge in Rafah. The resolution would demand that Israel "immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in Rafah". The draft condemns what it calls "the indiscriminate target-

ing of civilians, including women and children, and civilian infrastructure" and reiterates the council's demand for all parties to comply with international law requiring the protection of civilians. Algeria's UN ambassador, Amar Bendjama, who is also the Arab representative on the Security Council, told reporters after emergency closed council consultations Tuesday that he would be sending the draft resolution to the 15-member council later in the evening. Algeria called the emergency council meeting as Israel pushed ahead with its military operation in Rafah, where over a million Palestinians had sought refuge. It followed Sunday night's Israeli airstrikes that triggered a fire engulfing tents in a camp for displaced Palestinians west of Rafah, killing 45 people and injured over 100 others.

Two more held in Lanka for ISIS links

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan police have arrested two more suspects allegedly linked to the Islamic State (ISIS) from the country's north-western region, officials said on Wednesday. The development comes days after the Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad arrested four Sri Lankans with links to ISIS at the airport in Ahmedabad. The four men had taken an Indigo flight out of Colombo to Chennai on May 19. Sri Lankan security forces suspect that a 46-year-old man - identified as Osmad Gerrard - acted as their handler and facilitated their movement from Lanka to India. Sri Lanka Police recently announced a cash award of Rs. 2 million for any credible information on the whereabouts of the wanted suspect. The CID has arrested two peo-

ple in Bangadeniya, Chilaw for their alleged links with ISIS members, officials said. Investigations conducted so far have not confirmed that the two are ISIS members, they added. Meanwhile, the Colombo magistrate's court on Wednesday granted bail to a university lecturer who had stated to the media that four individuals who had been arrested in India were part of a list in the presidential commission report which said that they must be put through a programme of de-radicalisation. He was arrested on Tuesday to record a statement to verify his claim, the police said. Despite his television statement, he denied any knowledge of such a thing when quizzed by the police, the police said. The exchange of information between Sri Lanka and India

has commenced concerning the Sri Lankans arrested in India. This collaborative effort involves both the Sri Lanka Army Intelligence Division and the Police Terrorist Investigations Division, the local media said on Tuesday. Among the arrested individuals, Mohammed Nusrat is a businessman involved in importing telecommunication devices and electrical equipment from countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Dubai, the news portal said. Nusrat operated within Colombo, where he sold these imported goods. Mohammad Nafran, 27, who was also arrested, has been identified as the son of the first wife of Niyas Nauffer aka 'Potta Nauffer' the notorious underworld criminal who was sentenced to death for the killing of High Court Judge Sarath

Ambepitiya. The other two Sri Lankans are 35-year-old Mohammad Faris from Maligawatte, Colombo and 43-year-old Mohammad Rashdeen from Colombo 13. Mohammad Faris had worked as a 'Nattami' or cart puller in Pettah, and was arrested by the Colombo Crimes Division on March 11, 2023, and November 1 of the same year. On May 21, his close associate Hameed Amir was arrested by the Terrorist Investigations Division. Mohammad Faris left for Chennai, India on May 19. The other suspect is Mohammad Rashdeen, a three-wheeler driver. Security forces suspect that he is linked to trafficking crystal meth or ICE. Last week, the Sri Lankan authorities launched a high-powered operation to investigate the four Sri Lankans arrested in Gujarat.

Sherpa concerned about garbage on higher camps of Mt Everest

AP ■ KATHMANDU

One of the greatest Mount Everest guides on Wednesday expressed concerns about the peak's growing piles of garbage, as he was honoured by his government to mark Everest Day. Sherpa guide Kami Rita, who has scaled Mount Everest a record 30 times, was honoured by Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Kathmandu on the anniversary of the first successful summit by New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Nepali Sherpa Tenzing Norgay in 1953. Kami Rita said he was deeply worried by the accumulation of garbage that's been surfacing as ice and snow melt from the

peak. "It is very necessary to immediately direct our attention to this," he said, adding that Everest Day should really be celebrated by government funding campaigns to clean up the camps near the summit. There have been clean up campaigns on the mountain almost every year. A team of Nepali soldiers were still on the mountain picking up trash left behind by previous expeditions. "At the moment, not enough garbage has been taken out from Camp 3 or 4," Kami Rita said. "There had been cleanup campaigns but all of that have been for either Camp 2 or below." Kami Rita also said Sherpa

guides working on the mountain should have better conditions and benefits. "There needs to be increased amount of insurance up to 6,000,000 rupees (USD 45,000) and there should be a provident fund," he said. The 54-year-old guide had scaled the 8,849-meter (29,032-foot) peak twice this month, breaking his own record for the most successful climbs. His closest competitor is fellow Sherpa guide Pasang Dawa, who has 27 successful ascents. Kami Rita first climbed Everest in 1994 and has been making the trip nearly every year since. He is one of many Sherpa guides whose expertise and skills are vital to the safety and success each year of foreign

climbers aspiring to stand on top of the world. His father was among the first Sherpa mountain guides. In addition to his Everest climbs, Kami Rita has scaled several other peaks that are among the world's highest, including K2, Cho Oyu, Manaslu and Lhotse. Several climbers and people in the community were honoured alongside Kami Rita. Kaamya Karthikeyan, the youngest Indian Mount Everest summitter, was also felicitated by Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' at a special function here on the International Everest Day along with other veteran international sum-mitters.

Melinda French Gates to donate USD 1 billion over next 2 years in support of women's rights

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Melinda French Gates says she will be donating USD 1 billion over the next two years to individuals and organisations working on behalf of women and families globally, including on reproductive rights in the United States. It's the second billion-dollar commitment French Gates has personally made in the past five years. In 2019, she pledged over ten years to expand women's power and influence. Earlier this month, French Gates announced she would step down from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and vowed to focus on women and families. As a part of leaving the Gates Foundation, French Gates received USD 12 billion from Bill Gates for her philanthropy going forward. French Gates, one of the biggest philanthropic supporters of gender equity in the US, said on Tuesday in a guest essay for The New York Times that she's been frus-

trated over the years by people who say it's not the right time to talk about gender equality. "Decades of research on economics, well-being and governance make it clear that investing in women and girls benefits everyone," she wrote. French Gates said over the last few weeks she's started directing what will total USD 200 million in new grants through her organisation, Pivotal Ventures, to groups working in the US to protect women's rights and advance their power and influence. The grants are for general operating support, meaning they are not earmarked for specific projects. The groups include the National Women's Law Centre, the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the Centre for Reproductive Rights. Teresa Younger, the president and CEO of the Ms. Foundation for Women, who also received a grant, has long called on donors to give unrestricted, multi-year funding to organizations. She praised French Gates'

new commitment as a part of a larger trend of major women donors giving generously to nonprofits. "If philanthropy took lessons from the way that women are moving money, we would see more money in the field having greater impact," Younger said. Her organisation learned of the grant, which is the first they've received from Pivotal Ventures within the last week, and Younger said there was no application process. She declined to disclose the amount of the grant but said it would help expand their work with organisations in the South and Midwest. The nonprofit MomsRising Education Fund also received a grant that will extend to the end of 2026, with Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, its executive director and CEO, saying, "We're deeply honored and enormously grateful that Melinda French Gates is stepping up for women and families in a time when the rights of our daughters may be significantly less than of ourselves or our own mothers."

French Gates also pledged to give 12 individuals USD 20 million each to distribute to nonprofit organisations of their choice before the end of 2026. Those funds will be managed by the National Philanthropic Trust, one of the largest public charities that offers donor-advised funds, a spokesperson for Pivotal Ventures said. In total, French Gates announced \$690 million in commitments out of the promised USD 1 billion, which also include an "open call" for applications that the organisation Lever for Change will administer this fall. French Gates said USD 250 million will be awarded to fund organisations working to improve women's mental and physical health globally. French Gates' Pivotal Ventures is a limited-liability company that also manages investments in for-profit ventures, so there is little public information about its grant-making or the assets it manages. Pivotal Ventures has focused on a number of avenues to increase women's economic and political participation and power, like

closing the wage gap, compensating care work often done by women, and encouraging women to run for political office. Pivotal Ventures said it has committed USD 875 million of the USD 1 billion that French Gates pledged in 2019 to a mixture of venture and philanthropic funding. Additionally, the Gates Foundation has funded research and interventions to improve maternal mortality and women's health more broadly for years. In 2020, it hired its first president for its gender-quality division and in 2021, the foundation pledged USD 2.1 billion to gender equity efforts convened by UN Women. In her essay Tuesday, French Gates touched upon the high maternal mortality rates in the US, noting that Black and Native American mothers are at the highest risk. "Women in 14 states have lost the right to terminate a pregnancy under almost any circumstances. We remain the only advanced economy without any form of national paid family leave. And the number of teenage girls experiencing suicidal

thoughts and persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness is at a decade high," she said. French Gates will be leaving the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation next week. She helped co-found the organisation nearly 25 years ago. The Associated Press receives financial support for news coverage in Africa from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and for news coverage of women in the workforce and state governments from Pivotal Ventures. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will change its name to the Gates Foundation. It is one of the largest philanthropic organisations in the world. As of December 2023, its endowment was USD 75.2 billion, thanks to donations from Gates and the billionaire investor Warren Buffett. While it works across many issues, global health remains its largest area of work, and most of its funding is meant to address issues internationally rather than in the US.

Georgian parliament overrides presidential veto

AP ■ TBILISI (GEORGIA)

The Georgian parliament on Tuesday overrode a presidential veto of the “foreign agents” bill that has prompted weeks of massive protests by critics who say it will restrict media freedom and obstruct Georgia’s chances of joining the European Union. The legislature, controlled by the ruling Georgian Dream party, dismissed the veto of President Salome Zourabichvili, an independent. The president now has five days to endorse the bill. If she doesn’t do so, the parliament speaker will sign it into law. The bill that was approved by the parliament earlier this month requires media, non-governmental organizations and other nonprofit groups to register as “pursuing the interests of a foreign power” if they receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad. Zourabichvili, who is increasingly at odds with the governing party, vetoed the bill on May 18. She has accused the

governing party of jeopardizing the country’s future and “hindering the path toward becoming a full member of the free and democratic world.” The veto was rejected by an 84-4 vote in a contentious parliament session, during which a Georgian Dream deputy doused the leader of an opposition party with water while he spoke from the rostrum. Opponents of the bill thronged outside the parliament building and some shouted “Slaves!” as the vote was announced. The crowd swelled in the evening and a lengthy procession of protesters marched past Georgian Dream headquarters. “We have realized that our government is ready to throw this country off a cliff. The feeling, when I talk to my friends and people here, is that in the 21st century, our country is once again going under Soviet occupation,” said demonstrator Giorgi Natroshvili. The government says the bill is needed to stem what it deems to be harmful foreign actors

FOREIGN INFLUENCE BILL

trying to destabilize the South Caucasus nation of 3.7 million, but many Georgian journalists and activists argue that the bill’s true goal is to stigmatize them and restrict debate ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for October. Opponents denounce the legislation as “the Russian law” because it resembles measures pushed through by the Kremlin to crack down on independent news media, nonprofits and activists. Critics say the measure may have been driven by Moscow to thwart Georgia’s chances of further integrating with the West. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, however, contended the law will aid that integration. “The law on transparency will create better grounds for ensuring the membership of Georgia in the EU,” he told a news conference after the vote, adding that the law

would strengthen Georgia’s sovereignty. But opposition parliament member Khatia Dekanoidze said: “Now we have an absolutely new reality ... Probably, the window for integration into European Union will be closed.” The bill is nearly identical to one that the ruling party was pressured to withdraw last year after massive street protests. Renewed demonstrations again gripped Georgia as the bill made its way through parliament. Demonstrators scuffled with police, who used tear gas and water cannons to disperse them. The European Union’s foreign policy arm has said that adoption of the law “negatively impacts Georgia’s progress on the EU path.” Last week, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that travel sanctions would be imposed on

Georgian officials “who are responsible for or complicit in undermining democracy in Georgia.” He noted that “it remains our hope that Georgia’s leaders will reconsider the draft law and take steps to move forward with their nation’s democratic and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.” The EU offered Georgia candidate status last December, while making it clear that Tbilisi needs to implement key policy recommendations for its membership bid to progress. The opposition United National Movement has described the bill as part of efforts by Georgian Dream to drag the country into Russia’s sphere of influence — claims it vehemently denies. Georgian Dream was founded by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a former prime minister and billionaire who made his fortune in Russia. Zuka Elbakidze, a student who was among protesters rallying in Tbilisi ahead of Tuesday’s vote, said “this day will determine the fate of our country,” adding that “we are making a

choice between Europe and Russia, and all the people gathered here, except the policemen, want Europe and the West.” “We are physically witnessing, literally witnessing, how Georgian citizens, how members of the Georgian Parliament are selling out our country,” said another protester, Mariam Geguchadze. Russia-Georgia relations have often been rocky since Georgia became independent after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2008, Russia fought a brief war with Georgia, which had made a botched attempt to regain control over the breakaway province of South Ossetia. Moscow then recognized South Ossetia and another separatist province, Abkhazia, as independent states and strengthened its military presence there. Most of the world considers both regions to be parts of Georgia. Tbilisi cut diplomatic ties with Moscow, and the regions’ status remains a key irritant even as Russia-Georgia relations have improved in recent years.

Missing Kashmiri poet traced to PoK police custody

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A missing Kashmiri poet has been traced to be in the custody of police in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), the Islamabad High Court was informed on Wednesday, two weeks after he disappeared from Rawalpindi. Ahmad Farhad’s wife had filed a petition in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) claiming that he had been abducted from his home. When neither police nor any intelligence agency claimed responsibility for his custody, Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, who was hearing the case, on May 24 issued an eight-page written order, summoning Law Minister Azam Tatar along with the sector commanders of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Military Intelligence (MI) and director of Intelligence Bureau (IB) as well as the defence and interior secretaries in person before the court on May 29. On Wednesday, the officials of intelligence agencies did not appear but Attorney General Mansoor Usman Awan told the court that Farhad was currently in the custody of Kashmir police. Awan also presented a police report from Dhirkot police station in PoK, which had reg-

istered a case against him. The Islamabad police chief told the court that since the poet was in the custody of Kashmir police, the area was out of the jurisdiction of the Islamabad police. During the hearing, Justice Kayani ordered the Attorney General to ensure that “no one gets picked up from Islamabad.” “If a person is not recovered, it will be a failure of the state,” the judge said. The judge also observed that he would dispose of the case if Farhad’s family was satisfied but the case about the missing persons would continue. “I will send the file for the formation of a larger bench on the missing person’s issue,” Justice Kayani remarked before adjourning the hearing. In conversation with journalists outside the IHC, Law Minister Tatar said the police are investigating the Kashmiri poet’s case. “Ahmad Farhad is in PoK, I assisted on constitutional matters as a judicial assistant,” he said, explaining his presence at the court. Farhad, known for his defiant poetry, was allegedly abducted and his location was not shared with the court until the judge showed his mettle to summon the powerful intelligence agencies.



Former President Donald Trump reacts as he walking back into the courtroom after a break during closing arguments in his hush money trial at Manhattan criminal court in New York on Tuesday. AP/PTI

Former Thai PM faces indictment for royal defamation: Prosecutors

AP ■ BANGKOK

Thai prosecutors said Wednesday former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra will be indicted for defaming the monarchy, three months after he was freed on parole on other charges. Thaksin will not yet be indicted because he had filed a request to postpone his original appointment on Wednesday with proof that he has COVID-19, Prayuth Bejraguna, a spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General, said at a news conference. The attorney general’s office scheduled a new appointment for Thaksin’s indictment on June 18, Prayuth said, adding that Thaksin will also be indicted for violating the Computer Crime Act. The law on defaming the monarchy, an offense known as lese majeste, is punishable by three to 15 years in prison. It is controversial not only because critics consider it harsh, but also because they charge it is used for political purposes to punish government critics.

Thaksin was ousted by a military coup in 2006. His opponents then had accused him of disrespecting King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who died in 2016. Thaksin’s ouster set off years of struggle between his supporters and his opponents, who were generally staunch royalists. The political polarization led to unprecedented public debate about the monarchy’s role, which sharpened when student-led protests for greater democracy took the the streets in 2020. Thaksin had been in self-imposed exile since 2008, but returned to Thailand in August last year to begin serving an eight-year sentence on charges related to corruption and abuse of power. He was released on parole in February from the hospital in Bangkok where he spent six months serving time for corruption-related offenses. On his return, he was moved almost immediately from prison to the hospital on grounds of ill health, and about a week after that King Maha Vajiralongkorn reduced his sentence to a single year. Thaksin was granted parole

because of his age - he is 74 - and ill health, leaving him free for the remainder of his one-year sentence. Thaksin’s return was interpreted as part of a political bargain between the Pheu Thai Party, the latest in a string of parties that he has supported, and their longstanding rivals in the conservative establishment to stop the progressive Move Forward Party from forming a government after its victory in last year’s general election. But shortly after his return, the attorney general’s office said it had revived an investigation into whether Thaksin almost nine years ago violated the law against defaming the monarch. Thaksin was originally charged in 2016 with violating the law for remarks he made to journalists when he was in Seoul, South Korea, a year before that, but the investigation could proceed only after he was presented with the charge in person in the hospital in January, officials said. Thaksin had denied the charges and submitted a statement defending himself.

Europe’s cybersecurity chief says disruptive attacks have doubled

AP ■ ATHENS (GREECE)

Disruptive digital attacks, many of which have been traced to Russia-backed groups, have doubled in the European Union in recent months and are also targeting election-related services, according to the EU’s top cybersecurity official. Juhan Lepasaar, head of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, or ENISA, told The Associated Press in an interview that attacks with geopolitical motives have steadily risen since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022. “The number of hacktivist attacks (against) European infrastructure — threat actors whose main aim is to cause disruption — has doubled from the fourth quarter of 2023 to the first quarter of 2024,” Lepasaar said late Tuesday at the agency’s headquarters in Athens. “It’s quite a significant increase,” he said. Citizens from the EU’s 27 member states will vote June 6-9 for lawmakers in the

European Parliament in an election that will also shape the EU’s executive branch, the European Commission. Elections, also due in the United States, Britain and multiple other countries, have alerted security agencies to the threat of disruption campaigns funded by adversaries. ENISA has led exercises and intense consultations to harden the resilience of election-related agencies in the EU for the past seven months. In an annual report for 2023, the agency noted a surge in ransomware attacks and incidents targeting public institutions. Lepasaar said that attack methods — while mostly unsuccessful — were often tried out in Ukraine before being expanded to EU countries. “This is part of the Russian war of aggression, which they fight physically in Ukraine, but digitally also across Europe,” he said. Experts warn that artificial intelligence tools are also being used to target Western voters at accelerating speed and scale with misleading or false information, including hyperrealis-

tic video and audio clips known as deepfakes. “It’s been emphasized, also by member states’ cybersecurity agencies, that AI-enabled disinformation and information manipulation is a big threat,” Lepasaar said. His comments echo a warning made this month by US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines that technological progress will make more nations and groups able to launch effective disinformation campaigns. US and European experts are helping security agencies to try and anticipate emerging digital threats and vulnerabilities over this decade, with ENISA identifying food production, satellite management and self-driving vehicles as areas requiring attention. Cybersecurity, Lepasaar argues, will inevitably need to become second nature to designers and consumers. “I do believe that we have a societal challenge ahead of us to understand digital security in the same way that we understand, security in the everyday traffic environment,” he said.

Bushra Bibi’s ex-husband assaulted by Imran’s lawyers outside court

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The ex-husband of Imran Khan’s third wife Bushra Bibi was attacked by one of the lawyers of the former Pakistan prime minister outside a court here as he appeared for a hearing on appeals against the couple’s conviction in the un-Islamic marriage case. Khan, 71, and Bibi, 49, were sentenced to seven years in prison each on February 3 by a trial court for contracting the marriage during iddat, a mandatory period for a woman in Islam to wait before a second marriage after the death of her husband or divorce. The case was filed by Bushra’s ex-husband Khawar Maneka against the couple in November

2023, alleging that they married without Bushra observing the mandatory waiting period of iddat. He asked the court to declare the marriage null and void. The court, on May 23, reserved the verdict on the appeals which was to be announced on Wednesday. During the hearing of appeals filed by Bushra and her husband and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan against conviction in the case, Islamabad District and Sessions Judge Shahrukh Arjumand went into his chamber without announcing the verdict. Following the development, PTI lawyers hurled bottles in the courtroom which prompt-

ed Maneka’s lawyers to escort him out. However, while being escorted out, a PTI lawyer attacked Maneka within the court premises after which he fell to the ground. The couple had married in 2018, the year Khan went on to win elections and become prime minister. Bushra was ostensibly his spiritual guide but the two developed affection for each other during their meetings. She got a divorce from her husband of 28 years with whom she had five children. She is the third wife of Khan, a former cricketering hero, who during his heydays of sporting career had a playboy reputation.

28 killed in Pak bus mishap

PTI ■ KARACHI

At least 28 people, including women and children, were killed on Wednesday in Pakistan after a speeding passenger bus veered off the road and fell into a ravine in the remote Balochistan province, according to media reports. The bus, heading from Turbat to Quetta, fell into the ravine near Washuk town, around 700 kilometres from Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province. The accident was a result of overspeeding, according to the report, which said that women and children were among the deceased. The accident took place after the tyre of the passenger bus burst, Geo News reported quoting rescue officials. About 22 people sustained injuries in the accident.



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak buys breakfast for the travelling media as he arrives at a railway station for a Conservative general election campaign event in the South West of England on Wednesday. AP/PTI

S Africans begin voting in crucial elections

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africans began voting Wednesday at schools, community centers and in large white tents set up in open fields in an election seen as their country’s most important in 30 years. It could put the young democracy in unknown territory. At stake is the three-decade dominance of the African National Congress (ANC) party, which led South Africa out of apartheid’s brutal white minority rule in 1994. It is now the target of a new generation of discontent in a country of 62 million people — half of whom are estimated to be living in poverty. Africa’s most advanced economy has some of the world’s deepest socioeconomic problems, including one of the worst unemployment rates at 32 per cent. The lingering inequality, with poverty and joblessness disproportionately affecting the Black majority, threatens to unseat

the party that promised to end it by bringing down apartheid under the slogan of a better life for all. “I take voting as something serious because as communities, it is difficult to complain about services when you have not voted,” said Samuel Ratshalingwa, who was near the front of the queue at a school in the Johannesburg township of Soweto, where President Cyril Ramaphosa was expected to vote. “Our main issue here in our community is the lack of jobs. We have to use the vote to make our voices heard about this problem,” said Ratshalingwa. After winning six successive national elections, several polls have the ANC’s support at less than 50 per cent ahead of this one, an unprecedented drop. It might lose its majority in Parliament for the first time, although it’s widely expected to hold the most seats. The ANC won 57.5 per cent of the vote in the last national

election in 2019, its worst result to date and down from a high of nearly 70 per cent of the vote 20 years ago. Ramaphosa, the leader of the ANC, has promised to “do better.” The ANC has asked for more time and patience. Any change in the ANC’s hold on power could be monumental for South Africa. If it does lose its majority, the ANC will likely face the prospect of having to form a coalition with others to stay in government and keep Ramaphosa as president for a second term. The ANC having to co-govern has never happened before. South Africans vote for parties, not directly for their president. The parties then get seats in Parliament according to their share of the vote and those lawmakers elect the president after the election. The ANC has always had a majority in Parliament since 1994. The election will be held on one day across South Africa’s nine provinces, with nearly 28 mil-

lion people registered to vote at more than 23,000 polling stations. Final results are expected by Sunday. The opposition to the ANC in this election is fierce, but fragmented. The two biggest opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance and the Economic Freedom Fighters, are not predicted to increase their vote by anything near enough to overtake the ANC. The DA is part of an agreement with other smaller parties to combine their vote in an effort to remove the ANC completely, but that’s not seen as likely. Disgruntled South Africans are moving to an array of opposition parties; more than 50 will contest the national election, many of them new. One is led by South Africa’s former President Jacob Zuma, who has turned against his former ANC allies. Zuma was disqualified from standing as a candidate for Parliament but his MK Party is still contesting and is the wild card.

The ANC says it is confident of retaining its majority and analysts have not ruled that out, given the party’s decades of experience in government and its unmatched grassroots campaigning machine. It still has wide support, especially among older voters and those in more rural areas. “I woke up at 4 am this morning, took a bath and made my way,” said 68-year-old Velaphi Banda, adding he has voted for the ANC since 1994 and would do so again. “I was never undecided about which party I will vote for. I have always known.” Ramaphosa has pointed out how South Africa is a far better country now than under apartheid, when Black people were barred from voting, weren’t allowed to move around freely, had to live in certain areas and were oppressed in every way. This election is only South Africa’s seventh national vote in which people of all races are allowed to take part.

IMF upgrades forecast for China’s economy

AP ■ NEW YORK

The International Monetary Fund has upgraded its forecast for China’s economy, while warning that consumer-friendly reforms are needed to sustain strong, high-quality growth. The IMF’s report, issued late Tuesday, said the world’s second-largest economy will likely expand at a 5% annual rate this year, based on its growth in the first quarter and recent moves to support the property sector. But it warned that attaining sustained growth requires building stronger social safety nets and increasing workers’ incomes to enable Chinese consumers to spend more. The IMF also said Beijing should scale back subsidies and other “distortive” policies that support manufacturing at the expense of other industries such as services.

The ruling Communist Party has set its annual growth target at “around 5%,” and the economy grew at a faster-than-expected 5.3% in the first quarter of the year, boosting the global economy. The IMF said its upgraded forecast also reflects recent moves to boost growth, including fresh help for the property industry such as lower interest rates and smaller down-payment requirements on home loans. But it said risks remained, with growth in 2025 forecast to be 4.5%. The IMF praised the Chinese government’s focus on what it calls “high quality” growth, including increased investment in clean energy and advanced technology and improved regulation of financial industries. But it added that “a more comprehensive and balanced policy approach would help China navigate the headwinds facing the

economy.” Job losses, especially during the pandemic, and falling housing prices have hit the finances of many Chinese. The report echoes opinions of many economists who say more must be done to provide a social safety net and increase incomes for workers so that Chinese families can afford to save less and spend more. The IMF report’s longer-term assessment was less optimistic. It said it expected China’s annual economic growth to fall to 3.3% by 2029 due to the rapid aging of its population and slower growth in productivity as well as the protracted difficulties in the housing sector. Use of industrial policies to support various industries such as automaking and computer chip development may waste resources and affect China’s trading partners, it said, alluding to a key point of contention between Washington and Beijing.

Stock markets fall for fourth day on profit taking

Sensex down 667 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined nearly 1 per cent on Wednesday, falling for the fourth day running amid profit-taking by cautious investors ahead of the results of the Lok Sabha polls.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 667.55 points or 0.89 per cent to settle at 74,502.90. It went below the 75,000 mark to hit the day's low of 74,454.55, plunging 715.9 points or 0.95 per cent. The BSE benchmark hit its all-time peak of 76,009.68 on May 27.

The NSE Nifty dropped 183.45 points or 0.80 per cent to 22,704.70. The 50-share barometer hit its lifetime high of 23,110.80 on Monday.

From the Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, UltraTech Cement, Axis Bank, Reliance Industries and Infosys were the biggest laggards.

Power Grid, Sun Pharma, Nestle, ITC and Bharti Airtel were the gainers.

"Weak global cues prompted investors to take profits ahead of the US core PCE data, a key gauge of inflation that is anticipated to rise," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended with gains. European markets were trading lower. US markets ended on a mixed note on Tuesday. The last phase of polling is scheduled for June 1. The results of the ongoing general elections will be declared on June 4.



Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.88 per cent to USD 84.94 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 65.57 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

After gyrating between gains and losses during the day on Tuesday, the BSE benchmark finally ended 220.05 points or 0.29 per cent lower at 75,170.45. The NSE Nifty dropped 44.30 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 22,888.15.

Giving thumbs up to the economic management of the Modi government, S&P Global Ratings after a gap of 14 years upgraded India's sovereign rating outlook to positive from stable on robust growth, improved quality of public spending in last 5 years and expectation of broad continuity in reforms and fiscal policies.

S&P, however, retained India's sovereign rating at the lowest investment grade of 'BBB-'. He emphasised that ARCs' potential for resolving stressed assets within the system can only be realised with sound governance and adherence to ethical practices by responsible ownership and professional management.

Adopt regulation plus approach; comply with regulation in letter and spirit: RBI DG to ARCs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank Deputy Governor Swaminathan J has expressed concern over the increasing regulatory violations and warned Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) to ensure compliance without needing the regulator to point out the issues to them.

Addressing a conference attended by top management of ARCs in the country on May 17, he said, "I would urge you all to adopt a regulation plus approach where you not only comply with the letter of the regulation but also its spirit."

Very often, he said, "We get representations to our observations stating this is industry practice or clarifications are pending from the RBI. Sometimes there are incorrect or intelligent interpretations of the circulars."

These are not acceptable excuses for failing to do the right thing, he said, adding that the boards of ARCs should ensure that they do the right thing without needing the regulator to point it out to them.

He emphasised that ARCs' potential for resolving stressed assets within the system can only be realised with sound governance and adherence to ethical practices by responsible ownership and professional management.



During the course of onsite examinations, he said, "We have come across instances where ARCs have been used or allowed themselves to be used, if I may say so, as a conduit to evergreen distressed assets."

In many cases, there is a lack of transparency and consistency in the issuance and periodical valuation of Security Receipts (SRs), he said.

It is also observed that a few entities find new ways of achieving their designs once a particular practice has been called out as a violation or deviation, he said.

Swaminathan emphasised that setting the right tone from the top is crucial in fostering a culture of integrity and ethical conduct.

Deputy Governor also said boards should accord due importance to assurance functions, namely, risk management, compliance and internal audit. These functions play a critical role in identifying and mitigating risks, ensuring compliance with laws and regulations as well as safeguarding the organisation's reputation.

Another area that is receiving closer scrutiny and attention of supervisors is the process followed for the disposal of assets. At times, the proposals are not even placed before the independent advisory committee, contrary to regulatory instructions, he said.

Assets are sold to group entities without following the arms-length principle and without subjecting them to scrutiny under related party transactions, he said.

Another surprising behaviour is the 'Swiss challenge', which often goes unchallenged! This has become a routine affair giving rise to a suspicion that there may be some implicit understanding among the various participants, he said.

It will not be out of place to mention that such happenings are necessitating the supervisors to lift the veil and examine the transactions more closely, he added.

S&P upgrades India's rating outlook to positive on growth, improved Government spending

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

S&P Global Ratings on Wednesday upgraded India's sovereign rating outlook to positive from stable while retaining the rating at 'BBB-' on robust growth and improved quality of government expenditure.

S&P said it could upgrade India's sovereign rating in the next 2 years if the country adopts a cautious fiscal and monetary policy that diminishes the government's elevated debt and interest burden while bolstering economic resilience.

"The positive outlook reflects our view that continued policy stability, deepening economic reforms, and high infrastructure investment will sustain long-term growth prospects," S&P said.

S&P revised outlook on India to positive from stable. At the same time, it affirmed BBB-long-term and 'A-3' short-term unsolicited foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings, it said.

BBB is the lowest investment grade rating. The agency had last upgraded the rating outlook to stable from negative in 2010. The US-based agency said it may raise the ratings if India's fiscal deficit narrows meaningfully such that the general government debt falls below 7 per cent of GDP on a structural basis.



based agency said it may raise the ratings if India's fiscal deficit narrows meaningfully such that the general government debt falls below 7 per cent of GDP on a structural basis.

"The protracted rise in public investment in infrastructure will lift economic growth dynamism that, combined with fiscal adjustments, could alleviate India's weak public finances.

We may also raise the ratings if we observe a sustained and substantial improvement in the central bank's monetary policy effectiveness and credibility, such that inflation is managed at a durably lower rate over time," S&P said.

All three major global rating agencies — S&P, Fitch and Moody's — have accorded the lowest investment grade rating to India. However, Fitch and Moody's still have stable outlook on their ratings. The ratings are looked at by investors as a barometer of the country's creditworthiness and has impact on borrowing costs.

It is also observed that a few entities find new ways of achieving their designs once a particular practice has been called out as a violation or deviation, he said.

Swaminathan emphasised that setting the right tone from the top is crucial in fostering a culture of integrity and ethical conduct.

Deputy Governor also said boards should accord due importance to assurance functions, namely, risk management, compliance and internal audit. These functions play a critical role in identifying and mitigating risks, ensuring compliance with laws and regulations as well as safeguarding the organisation's reputation.



Inox Wind Energy raises ₹900 crore through stake sale to trim debt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Inox Wind Energy has raised Rs 900 crore through equity share sale of Inox Wind Ltd, a subsidiary of the INOXGFL Group.

It is a significant step towards completely deleveraging external debt in Inox Wind Ltd, according to a regulatory filing.

Inox Wind is India's leading wind energy solutions provider, while Inox Wind Energy Ltd (IWEL) is one of the promoters of Inox Wind Ltd.

The funds raised will be used to pare down debt of Inox Wind and augment the working capital needs of the company thereby, strengthening its balance sheet further.

"The transaction was executed via block deals on the stock exchanges and witnessed participation by several marquee institutional investors," IWEL said in the filing on Tuesday evening.

As of March 31, 2024, Inox Wind's net external interest debt stood at Rs 655 crore.

On Tuesday, Inox Wind Energy divested a 4.6 per cent stake in its subsidiary company Inox Wind Ltd for Rs 904 crore through open market transactions.

INOXGFL Group is operating across two key verticals -- chemicals and renewable energy. It has four listed entities namely Gujarat Flourochemicals Ltd, Inox Wind Ltd, Inox Green Energy Services and Inox Wind Energy Ltd.

Earlier in May, Inox Wind Ltd reported a consolidated profit of Rs 36.72 crore for the March quarter, mainly due to increased income.

It had posted a net loss of Rs 119.04 crore in the January-March period of the preceding fiscal.

During the fourth quarter of FY24, the company's total income surged to Rs 563.07 crore from Rs 193.83 crore a year ago.

Design, analytics, programming top skills for entry level roles: LinkedIn

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

For fresh graduates looking to enter the job market, skills like design, analytics and programming can open up a wealth of career opportunities, according to the leading professional network LinkedIn.

Software Engineer, System Engineer and Programming Analyst are the top jobs for bachelor's degree holders, as per LinkedIn data.

Utilities is the fastest-growing industry for young professionals with a bachelor's degree, as per LinkedIn's Career Starter 2024 report.

Other top industries hiring fresh graduates include Oil, Gas and Mining, Real Estate, Equipment Rental Services, and Consumer Services.

Regardless of educational background, various job functions are experiencing rapid growth.

Ample opportunities are available for bachelor's degree holders in fields like Community and Social Services, Legal, Marketing and Media and Communication, it said.

"Entering a tight job market can be tough, especially at the start of a career journey. Staying updated on industry trends and in-demand jobs, and exploring roles that might not seem obvious at first, can widen options," says Nirajita Banerjee, LinkedIn Career Expert



& India Senior Managing Editor.

Moreover, many skills are transferable across industries, and the rise of AI is creating more tech-related roles across various fields, leading companies to seek professionals with diverse educational backgrounds, Banerjee added.

"To expand their horizons, job seekers must keep strengthening their skills and networking with professionals," Banerjee noted.

According to LinkedIn, the trend towards more flexible working arrangements is growing significantly. Solely on-site roles are declining by 15 per cent and hybrid positions are surging by 52 per cent for entry-level roles year-over-year.

To compile this report, data scientists on LinkedIn's Economic Graph team analysed millions of member profiles and job postings.

Power Mech Projects bags order worth ₹563 crore to construct nuclear power plant from BHEL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Power Mech Projects on Wednesday said it has bagged an order worth Rs 563 crore from state-owned BHEL to construct a nuclear power plant.

The Power Mech Projects Ltd (PMPL) has secured its first construction project in the critical nuclear power sector, the company said in a regulatory filing.

According to the filing, the company has been awarded a significant order valued at Rs 563.23 crore from BHEL-Power Sector Southern Region for Civil, Structural, and Architectural works of turbine island package of 2x700 MWe, PHWR (pressurized heavy-water reactor), Kaiga Atomic Power Project (units 5 and 6) in Uttar Kannada district, Karnataka.

The scope of work includes a number of segments covering civil, electrical, and structural works, including TG (turbine generator) building, foundation for all equipment,



chemical lab, storage tanks, peripheral drains, and sewage network.

The duration of the contract is 32 months, plus 12 months of guarantee period.

This order represents Power Mech's expansion of its existing industrial civil works capability into the nuclear power projects sector.

"In securing this project, another door opens for PMPL to further its establishment in the nuclear power sector and contribute to the nation's growing sustainable energy needs," Sajja Kishore Babu, PMPL Chairman and Managing Director, said in a statement.

While nuclear power currently contributes a modest 3 per cent to the national grid, the government's bold vision is to triple the capacity to 22,480 MW by 2031, making it nearly 9 per cent of electricity generation by 2047, Babu noted. It would translate into a 10-fold increase in nuclear power's contribution, he added.

Power Mech Projects Ltd (PMPL) is among the leading companies in project & infrastructure-construction.

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BUSINESS BRIEF

PFC RECEIVES CSR CHAMPION AWARD

Gurugram: Power Finance Corporation Ltd (PFC) has been honoured with the prestigious CSR award in the NF (Non-Fossil Fuel) business category at the Outlook Planet Sustainability Summit & Awards 2024 held in Goa. Parminder Chopra, Chairman & Managing Director, PFC, received the Award from V Srinivas, secretary, DARPG, Government of India in presence of dignitaries from DPE, IIT Goa and Outlook.



NMDC'S STEELY PERFORMANCE IN FY24

Hyderabad: India's largest iron ore mining company, NMDC declared its FY24 results on Monday. Delivering unprecedented volumes, the company produced 45.02 million tonnes and sold 44.48 million tonnes of iron ore in FY24. Realising a 10% growth in production and 16% growth in sales compared to FY23 volumes, NMDC is now the first mining company in India to cross the 45 Mnt milestone in iron ore production.

REC WINS SUSTAINABILITY CHAMPION AWARD

Gurugram: REC Limited, a Maharatna CPSE under the Ministry of Power and a leading NBFC, has been honored with the 'Sustainability Champion - Editor's Choice Award' at the 'Outlook Planet Sustainability Summit & Awards 2024'. The Award ceremony was organised by Outlook Group, in collaboration with IIT Goa. Saraswathi, Senior General Manager, REC's Mumbai Office, received the award at an event held in Goa. This award recognises REC's commitment to sustainability initiatives and its efforts in driving progress towards a greener future.



Rupee falls 21 paise to close at 83.39 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee settled 21 paise lower at 83.39 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking a negative trend in domestic equities and elevated crude oil prices.

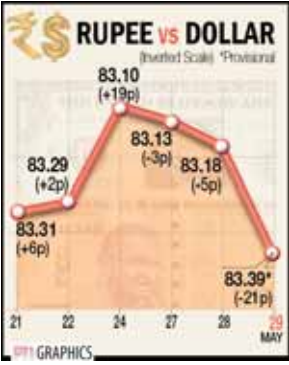
Forex traders said dollar demand from importers and oil marketing companies (OMCs) also weighed on the rupee.

However, foreign inflows in the bond markets ahead of inclusion on India's government bonds in global bond index cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.22 and finally settled for the day at 83.39 (provisional), down 21 paise from its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee pared initial gains to settle 5 paise lower at 83.18 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on month-end dollar demand from OMCs and importers to meet their obligations. Risk aversion in global markets and a strong US dollar may further pressurize the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. However, fresh foreign inflows in FPIs and bond markets may support the rupee at lower levels.

Traders may take cues from Richmond manufacturing index and speeches from US Fed officials. Investors may remain cautious ahead of core PCE price index data later this week, Choudhary added.



Brewers Association of India launched

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's largest beer-makers, United Breweries (a Heineken company), AB-InBev, and Carlsbergtoday jointly announced the launch of Brewers Association of India ("BAI"), a new industry body focused on growing the beer category in India, and drive innovation, moderation, and sustainability in the Indian beer market.

BAI is being established in partnership with the World Brewing Alliance (WBA), the global industry body consistingof brewers and brewing trade associations from Australia, Canada, the UK, the USA, Europe, Japan, Korea, Latin America, Brazil, New Zealand, Nigeria and now India. The goal of WBA is to exchange knowledge and best practices among brewers and other stakeholders. It is the global, unified voice of the industry to various audiences and stakeholders.

Cost of living does not influence salaries; Pune among safest cities for talent: KPMG survey

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Cost of living in a particular city does not influence the compensation packages for talent, a survey of recruitment leaders undertaken by a consultancy firm revealed.

Around 95 per cent of human resources leaders and talent acquisition heads from 40 companies across 10 sectors said "cost-of-living differences across Indian cities do not affect compensation decisions", as per the survey by KPMG in February and March.

Earlier, there used to be a city compensatory allowance to compensate for a higher cost of living in metros or tier-I cities, but HR heads say very few employers are offering it now, it said, adding the compensation range is more or less the same for the same roles across the country.

Employees consider residential rent, property indices, local purchasing



power, and overall cost of essentials like goods, utilities, and transportation when evaluating the cost of living, it said.

The survey found Pune among the cities to be excelling on the safety aspect. "Chennai, Navi Mumbai and Pune excel in safety, attracting those seeking secure environments," the survey said.

Apart from safety, key factors which influence the quality of living include connectivity, commute time, healthcare, and air quality, the survey

said.

Navi Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Chennai lead the cities with competitive commercial leasing prices, it said. The survey report also said that companies tapping into talent pool in satellite cities like Gurugram, Navi Mumbai and Noida are highly satisfied, and added that the attrition rates are low in such cities.

It said tactical and transformational work takes place in tier-I and satellite cities, while the tier-II cities have to contend with transactional roles.

Praggnanandhaa loses to World Champion Liren

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa lost to World Champion Ding Liren in the Armageddon tie-breaker after the two played out a draw under normal time control in the second round of the Norway Chess tournament here. The second round of the prestigious event saw all three classical games ending up in a draw once again. Magnus Carlsen, Alireza Firouzja and Liren won with white in the subsequent Armageddon games to grab 1.5 points each. India's prodigy Praggnanandhaa, who went with a 2-0 head-to-head lead against Liren, played out his first classical draw in the main event. But the Chinese GM then emerged victorious in the Armageddon tie-breaker. In the highly anticipated pairing of the day, Carlsen and Hikaru Nakamura played out a closely contested classical game that ended in a draw. Carlsen, demonstrating his exceptional skill under pressure, managed to secure a crucial victory, adding to his impressive Armageddon record and taking the lead of 3 points in tournament standings. Meanwhile, Firouzja and Fabiano Caruana also drew their classical



game after a complex struggle. Firouzja's abilities in speed chess shone through in the Armageddon game as he bagged crucial 1.5 points. In the women's section R Vaishali defeated fellow Indian Koneru Humpy to register her first classical win in the tournament.

Despite Humpy's slight advantage in the opening, a critical blunder under time pressure allowed Vaishali to claim victory, and claimed her first ever win against India's number one female player. With the win, Vaishali became India's number two female player on the live

rating list. The other two classical matches between Lei Tingjie and Pia Cramling along with Ju Wenjun and Anna Muzychuk ended up in hard-fought draws. The Chinese duo of Wenjun and Tingjie emerged victorious in their respective Armageddon games.



Vaishali beats Humpy to move into sole lead at Norway chess

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)

India's R Vaishali came up with a stupendous effort to beat compatriot Koneru Humpy and jump into sole lead in the women's section of the Norway chess tournament here. With each victory under classical time control worth three points, Vaishali got an early advantage moving to four points after the second round and her first-round loss against Wenjun Ju of China under faster time control does not matter so much right now. India's third and latest Grandmaster among women, Vaishali with four points is at the helm followed by the Chinese duo of Tingjie Lei and Ju, Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine and Pia Cramling of Sweden share the fourth spot in the six-players double round robin event, while Humpy currently is languishing at the bottom on 1.5 points. In the men's section, World number one Magnus Carlsen emerged as the sole leader on another day that had only Armageddon to decide the winners. The Norway Chess features a distinctive format where drawn classical games lead to Armageddon tiebreakers to ensure a winner after every round. While 10 minutes are provided to white, black gets 7 minutes to determine the winner of the contest. Black pieces win if the game ends in a draw. Carlsen proved superior than Hikaru Nakamura of United States in the Armageddon. It is no secret anymore that the world's best player and five times world champion does not enjoy Classical chess as much as before. Carlsen drew in the Classical for the second day in the running and then romped home in the faster time control over Nakamura. The lone Indian aspirant Praggnanandhaa had a tough day in office as he lost to reigning World champion Ding Liren of China in the tiebreaker. After drawing the first game confidently, Pragg somehow could not resist the perseverance of Liren who was like a man on a mission.

Later this year, Ding Liren is set to play a match against D Gukesh of India for the world championship crown. Carlsen took his tally to three points in all and came across as the sole leader after the second round thanks to all results going his way. India's Praggnanandhaa lost to Liren in the faster game, which left him with 2.5 points out of the opening round. Having Carlsen in front on three points, Praggnanandhaa is close behind on 2.5 along side Firouzja Alireza of France, Nakamura, and Liren. Fabiano Caruana is currently at the bottom on two points. Firouzja and Caruana also drew their classical game after a complex struggle but the former's abilities in speed chess shone through in the Armageddon game as he bagged crucial 1.5 points. The highlight of the day was Vaishali's fine victory over Humpy in an actual game. Humpy is known to be the queen of Indian chess for over a decade now and she was also ranked number two in the women's candidate that finished recently. Playing the white side of an Italian opening, Vaishali did not get much with her first move advantage and cashed in when the strongest ever Indian woman player made an error to find her queen entrapped. Vaishali also became the first player to score a victory in either section. The other two classical matches between Lei Tingjie and Pia Cramling along with Ju Wenjun and Anna Muzychuk ended up in hard-fought draws. The Chinese duo of Wenjun and Tingjie emerged victorious in their respective Armageddon games. Results men: Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 3) beat Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 2.5) 1.5-1 ;Ding Liren (Chn, 2.5) beat R Praggnanandhaa (2) 1.5-1; Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 2.5) beat Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 2) 1.5-1. Women: R Vaishali (Ind, 4) beat K Humpy (Ind, 1.5); Tingjie Lei (Chn, 3) beat Pia Cramling (Swe, 2); Wenjun JU (Chn, 3) beat Anna Muzychuk (UKR, 2).

Arundhati advances to pre quarters, Narender bows out of Olympic qualifiers

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Reigning national champion Arundhati Choudhary registered a convincing victory to move to the 66kg pre-quarterfinals while Asian Games bronze medallist Narender Berwal (+92kg) bowed out of the second Boxing World Olympic Qualifiers here on Wednesday. While Choudhary won by a 5-0 unanimous decision against Stephanie Pienheiro of Puerto Rico, Berwal went down 2-3 to

Ecuador's Gerlon Gilmar Congo Chala. Choudhary began her campaign with a clinical round 1 against her opponent. She was slightly conservative in Round 2, consolidating her position before again dominating the next round to get a unanimous verdict in her favour. Later, Berwal put up a strong fight but it was not enough to advance to the next round. The 2022 Asian Games bronze winner started slow in round 1 and was then forced to catch

up. He did well to impress three of the five judges with his punches in the second and third round of the round of 32 bout. However, his efforts were not enough to overturn the overall deficit. In the evening session, Ankushita Boro, will face Rimma Volossenko of Kazakhstan in 60kg pre-quarters while Nishant Dev (71kg) will be up against Thailand's Peerapat Yeasungnoen to earn a spot in the quarterfinals.

Djokovic begins his bid for a 25th Grand Slam title with a first-round French Open win

AP ■ PARIS

Ignore the straight-set score: Novak Djokovic was not quite at his impervious best in the first round of the French Open, and his 6-4, 7-6 (3), 6-4 win over Pierre-Hugues Herbert was not enough to alter the defending champion's "low expectations" at this tournament. "I don't want to get too excited," Djokovic said. "I thought it was a good performance for me. Solid. Of course, I could have done better, I think, on return games, but also credit to him for serving very well, for changing things up." It's been a rougher-than-usual season so far for Djokovic, and while there were some signs of breaking out of his 2024 funk during the course of the contest at Court Philippe Chatrier, he still has room for improvement as he attempts to become the first player in tennis history to claim 25 Grand Slam singles trophies. There's no doubt he cares about such things. "Grand Slams are the ones that are basically getting me up from the bed every day. Knowing that I have to hit the practice courts, I always think about what I can do in Grand Slams," he said. "So here I am. Hopefully I can have another deep run." That's what Herbert expected to see. "I knew, from the beginning," Herbert said, "that I'm going to have in front of me the Novak of the Grand Slams: ... It's just the intensity of concentration." Djokovic is a three-time title winner at Roland Garros who needs to return to the final to retain his No. 1 ranking. But he arrived in Paris without having done that at any tournament this year. He is 0-3 in semifinals - including a loss last week at the lower-tier Geneva Open on red clay -



and this victory across 2 1/2 hours only served to make his overall record 15-6. So when he spoke at a news conference on Sunday, Djokovic described his mindset heading into the French Open this way: "Low expectations and high hopes." Then he pointed out, "Anything but a title, for me, is not satisfactory," which is understandable given his remarkable resume. "In the moments when it mattered, I think I delivered. Played a great tiebreak. Stayed focused," Djokovic said about Tuesday's performance. "I'm glad that I started the way I started, the way I felt on the court. Comparing to the previous weeks of tournaments I played, I felt good. Better. So I'm moving in a positive direction. Yeah, it's just the beginning." He seemed a bit edgy at moments against Herbert, a 33-year-old Frenchman who owns a career Grand Slam in doubles but never has been past the third round at any

major in singles and is currently ranked 142nd. The home crowd tried to push Herbert, repeatedly calling out his name, even imploring him in English at one point by chanting, "Let's go, Pierre-Hugues! Let's go!" They jeered Djokovic late in the third set when he went to the sideline to towel off after he slipped, stumbled and tumbled onto the clay chasing a ball. A day after sitting in the Chatrier stands to watch rival Rafael Nadal's first-round loss against Alexander Zverev, Djokovic was competing in the chill of a 60-degree evening (15 Celsius), and he did not always look happy. He rolled his head back after one miss while making four groundstroke mistakes to get broken early in the second set. He repeatedly gestured to ballkids to give him tennis balls so he could prepare to serve. Although Herbert's game did not demand a maximum expenditure of energy from

Olympic boxing medalists in Paris promised cash prizes by rogue governing body

AP ■ GENEVA

The boxing governing body declared rogue by the International Olympic Committee said Wednesday it will pay \$50,000 in prize money to each gold medalist at the Paris Games.

The cash promise is doubly confrontational for the IOC, which has severed ties with the International Boxing Association and does not approve of governing bodies paying prize money to Olympic medalists.

The IBA said it has a \$3.1 million prize money fund for each male and female boxer who reaches the quarterfinals in 13 total weight classes, plus their coaches and national teams. The coach and national team of each Olympic boxing champion will both get \$25,000, and the scale of payments goes down to \$10,000 in total for each quarterfinalist.

The source of the money is unclear but the IBA led by its Russian president Umar Kremlev has been supported by the country's state energy firm Gazprom. The IBA promised \$200,000 for gold medalists at its 2023 world championships and committed to future increases.

"As IBA president, I will always fight for our athletes' well-being, and this step is consistent in terms of the existing commitments we have already taken," Kremlev said in a statement.

The Olympic body did not support a pledge in April by World Athletics to pay \$50,000 prize money to each of the 48 gold medalists in track and field in Paris. It has promised also to pay silver and bronze medalists in 2028 at the Los Angeles Olympics. The IOC has de-recognized the IBA, which will not be involved in



organizing bouts in Paris for the second straight Summer Games. The IOC cited its concerns about the boxing body's governance, reliance on funding from Gazprom, and the integrity of judges and bouts at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics. Those games were organized when the boxing body was led by a longtime IOC member, C. K. Wu. Paris medalists are set to be rewarded at "a special awards ceremony," IBA said, after "successful passing of respective anti-doping procedures." The IOC was contacted for comment. Prize money to Olympic medalists has traditionally been paid by state governments and national teams though not directly from money sourced to the IOC, which prefers governing bodies invest in developing their sport below the elite level. World Athletics said its \$2.4

million prize fund for champions in Paris would come from its share of the IOC's revenues. Track's \$39.5 million payment for the Tokyo Olympics held in 2021 was the largest amount of a \$540 million fund allocated by the IOC. Boxing's share of Olympic revenues from Tokyo was due to be more than \$17 million but was held back by the IOC, which had to oversee running the qualifying and finals tournament bouts. The IBA also will not get money from the IOC's Paris revenues and a rival organization of national federations, called World Boxing, is being established to become the recognized governing body of Olympic boxing. "We are setting a clear example for many," the IBA's chief executive Chris Roberts said, "on how international federations should be treating their champions."

India bids to host Gukesh-Liren World Chess Championship match

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has submitted its bid to host the much-anticipated World Chess Championship clash between teen sensation D Gukesh and defending champion Ding Liren of China in November-December this year. The 17-year-old Gukesh became the youngest ever challenger for the world title by winning the Candidates Tournament last month. He will face Liren between November 20 to December 15 in Chennai if the country gets the hosting rights. The bid has been submitted by the Tamil Nadu government.

"We have received the bid from India," Chess' global governing body FIDE CEO Emil Sutovsky told PTI. As of now, FIDE hasn't received any other bids but the deadline to enter the race is May 31. It is learnt that Singapore is expected to compete with India but has not yet officially submitted the bid documents.

"As of now no other country has bid for it but the deadline is till end of this week. Post that we will have a FIDE Council meeting next week. And after that due procedure will be followed and we will decide about the hosting rights," Sutovsky added. If AICF wins the bid, it will have to shell out close to Rs 71 crore.

The basic criteria outlined by FIDE for a prospective bidder for the 2024 edition is a budget of Rs 8.5 million (Rs 71 crore approx) and a facilitation fee of USD 1.1 million (Rs 9 crore) for the global body. The duration of the tournament is 25 days and approval of regulations will be completed by July 1. The total prize money awarded by FIDE would be



around USD 2.5 million (Rs 20 crore plus) after the fund was increased from the USD two million (Rs 17 crore) in 2023. Gukesh's historic achievement at the Candidates has spurred a renewed wave of interest in chess. The Chennai-based teen, who has been mentored by five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand, bettered Russian legend Garry Kasparov's 40-year-old record to become the youngest Candidates champion. The Russian great was 20 when he qualified in 1984 to clash with compatriot Anatoly Karpov. India has hosted the prestigious showpiece in 2000 and 2013. In the 2000 edition, Viswanathan Anand claimed the first of his five world titles by winning the event played in a tournament format with 100 players. Anand defeated Alexei Shirov in the final. In 2013, Anand lost to Norwegian challenger Magnus Carlsen.

arch-rivals Pakistan on June 9. They take on hosts USA on June 12 before the cricket caravan moves to familiar Lauderhill in Florida for the game against Canada on June 15.