

OPINION 6

DELHI SCHOOL BOMB
HOAX REFLECTS RANCOR

WORLD 8

ISRAEL ORDERS CLOSURE OF
AL JAZEERA OFFICES

MONEY 10

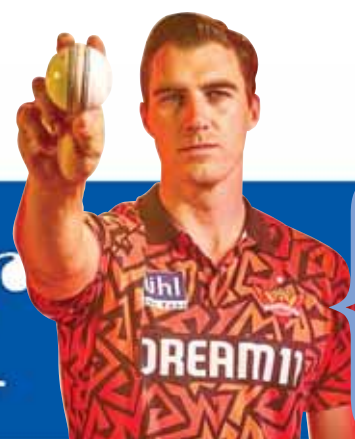
INDIA URGES ADB NOT TO
OVERLOOK ITS FOCUS ON GROWTH

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SRH EYE
CONSISTENCY IN
MUST WIN CLASH
12 SPORTS

Security personnel stand guard during cordon-and-search-operation after one soldier was killed and four injured as terrorists ambushed an IAF convoy in Poonch on Saturday PTI

ATTACK ON IAF CONVOY

Operations launched
to flush out terrorists

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The Indian Army Sunday launched a massive combing and search operation after inducting elite para commandos along with local military units of the Rashtriya Rifles (RR) to avenge the killing of an Indian Air Force (IAF) personnel, who sacrificed his life in the terror attack near Shahsitar in the Surankote area of Poonch district on Saturday. Senior army officers along with Additional Director General of Police, Jammu, Anand Jain visited the ambush spot in the Surankote area to review the ongoing anti-terrorist operations.

A separate meeting was also attended by the senior officers ahead of launching a "hot pursuit" aimed at flushing out foreign terrorists hiding inside natural caves and "safe hideouts". The security forces have also detained several residents to ascertain the whereabouts of these foreign terrorists hiding in the

area. Meanwhile, the deceased IAF personnel has been identified as Corporal Vikky Pahade. A resident of Nonia-Karbal village, Corporal Pahade hailed from Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district. He was supposed to return home to celebrate his son's birthday on Tuesday. According to the family members, Pahade had visited his family last month to attend his sister's wedding and had joined the unit on April 18. Four other injured IAF personnel were undergoing treatment at a command hospital in Udhampur. "The CAS Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari and all personnel of (the) Indian Air Force salute the braveheart Corporal Vikky Pahade, who made the supreme sacrifice in (the) Poonch Sector, in the service of the nation. Our deepest condolences to the bereaved family. We stand firmly by your side in this hour of grief," read a post on the official X handle of the Indian Air Force

Campaign ends for 3rd phase LS polls

LOK SABHA ELECTION PHASE 3 SEATS
2024 LS voting concludes for States marked in red

STATES	NO. OF SEATS	CONSTITUENCY
GUJARAT	26	Kachchh, Banaskantha, Patan, Mahesana, Sabarkantha, Gandhinagar, Ahmedabad East, Ahmedabad West, Surendranagar, Rajkot, Porbandar, Jamnagar, Junagadh, Amreli, Bhavnagar, Anand, Kheda, Panchmahal, Dahod, Vadodara, Chhota Udaipur, Bharuch, Bardoli, Navsari, Valsad
KARNATAKA	14	Chikkodi, Belgaum, Bagalkot, Bijapur, Gulbarga, Raichur, Bidar, Koppal, Bellary, Haveri, Dharwad, Uttara Kannada, Davangere, Shimoga
Maharashtra	11	Baramati, Raigad, Osmanabad, Latur (SC), Solapur (SC), Madha, Sangli, Satara, Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg, Kolhapur, Hatkanangle
Uttar Pradesh	10	Sambhal, Hathras, Agra (SC), Fatehpur Sikri, Firozabad, Mainpuri, Etah, Budaun, Aonla, Bareilly
Madhya Pradesh	8	Bhind, Bhopal, Guna, Gwalior, Morena, Rajgarh, Sagar, Vidisha
CHHATTISGARH	7	Sarguja, Raigarh, Janjgir-Champa, Korba, Bilaspur, Durg, Raipur
Bihar	5	Jhanjharpur, Supaul, Araria, Madhepura, Khagaria
ASSAM	4	Dhubri, Korajhar, Barpeta, Gauhati
West Bengal	4	Maldaha Uttar, Maldaha Dakshin, Jangipur, Murshidabad
GOA	2	North Goa, South Goa
DADRA AND NAGAR HAVELI/DAMAN	2	Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The high-octane campaigning for the third phase of 2024 Lok Sabha polls in 93 Parliamentary constituencies spread in 12 States and Union Territories came to an end on Sunday evening with top leaders of the BJP-led NDA and the Opposition INDIA bloc making a last-gasp effort to woo voters. The end of the campaigning marks the commencement of a 48-hour silence period.

A total 1351 candidates are in fray in this phase. The third phase of Lok Sabha elections is an important round for Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. It will decide the political future of three bigwigs - "Maharaja" Jyotiraditya Scindia, from Guna, "bacchon ke mama and behno ke bhaiyya" Shivraj Singh Chouhan from Vidisha and "raja" of Raghogarh Digvijaya Singh aka Diggy Raja from Rajgarh. Scindia, who lost his family seat of Guna as a Congress candidate in 2019, is hoping to regain the constituency on a BJP ticket this time.

Similarly, this phase will be a test for the Samajwadi Party's (SP) first family as well, with Dimple Yadav, Akshay Yadav and Aditya Yadav contesting from Mainpuri, Firozabad and Budaun respectively. To ensure that the polling percentage is not affected due to the "harsh summer", the poll body has arranged shamanias and tents, additional fans and drinking water facilities to ambulances on standby and using adjacent rooms of the polling booth as waiting areas for the polling days. The stakes are significant for the BJP



in this round as the party had in 2019 won an overwhelming majority of these seats, including all in Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, that will go to polls on May 7.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the BJP charge, asking the Congress to give in writing that it will not hand over the quota for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes to Muslims.

The Congress and its allies accused the BJP of trying to tamper with the Constitution and do away with reservations. The principal opposition party, which has promised to remove the 50 per cent cap on reservations, also asked the BJP to clear its stance on the issue.

Baramati in Maharashtra's Pune district is one of the most keenly watched seats in this phase as it is for the first time that two members of

the influential Pawar family are contesting against each other. Sharad Pawar's daughter and sitting MP Supriya Sule and nephew Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar have been pitted against each other by the two factions of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) from the constituency.

This is also the first major electoral battle between the factions after the party split in July last year. Of the 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat, the BJP's Mukesh Dalal has already won from Surat unopposed after the nomination of Congress' Nilesh Kumbhani was rejected over irregularities in the signature of proposers and other candidates withdrew.

Among the prominent candidates in the fray are Union Home Minister Amit Shah from Gandhinagar, as well as his Cabinet colleagues Mansukh Mandaviya and Parshottam Rupala from Porbandar and Rajkot, respectively. During the campaign, the BJP had to face the ire of the Kshatriya community over a remark made by Rupala in Rajkot. He had claimed several rulers from the community had "roti and beti" (marriage and trade) relations with the British and other foreign invaders.

Rupala is up against former Congress MLA Pares Dhanani, who had defeated him in the 2002 Assembly polls. The Congress has fielded four sitting and eight former MLAs.

It is contesting the polls in alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). As part of the agreement, the Congress got 24 seats (including Surat), while the AAP has been given Bhavnagar and Bharuch.

Jaishankar blasts
Canada for gangland
visas, warns of
Newton's lawPIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday slammed Canada for continually issuing visas to people with connection to organised crimes for political purposes and cautioned there will be pushback against what is happening "out there." Newton's law of politics will apply there also, he said.

Termining them as gangland visas, he also said the country had been giving legitimacy to "extremism, separatism and advocates of violence" in the name of free speech. These terse remarks came a day after Canada claimed to have arrested three Indian nationals allegedly involved in Khalistan terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar's murder. Jaishankar said Justin Trudeau's country thinks there would not be any reaction to its antics of fostering criminals. "In some countries, these kinds of people have organised themselves politically and become a political lobby and in some of these democratic countries, the politicians of these countries are made to believe that if they defer to these people or pander to these people, these people have some ability to get a community to support them. So, they have tried to create space for themselves in the politics of these countries. I mean, at this time, it's not so much a problem in the US," he said. Jaishankar called Canada India's "biggest problem" in this regard. "Our biggest problem right now is in Canada. Because in Canada, actually, today the party in power in Canada, and other parties here have given these kinds of extremism, separatism, and advocates of violence a certain legitimacy in the name of free speech," he said

Complaint against Rahul raises
question over his nominationPIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/RAEBARELI

A complaint has been filed against the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for filing his nomination from the Raebareli seat in Uttar Pradesh. The complaint raises a question about Rahul's nationality and his recent conviction in a defamation case, and how his nomination can be deemed valid by the Election Commission. The complaint was filed by advocate Ashok Pandey on behalf of Anirudh Pratap Singh. The complaint against Gandhi was registered by the advocate with the Returning Officer of Raebareli, demanding the cancellation of the Congress leader's nomination on the basis of two grounds --his nationality and his conviction. "First, Rahul Gandhi has been convicted for two years... He is ineligible to contest elections. Even though the Supreme Court



has put a stay on Rahul Gandhi's conviction, it has not given any verdict like Afzal Ansari saying he can contest again... Since his stay on conviction does not involve permission to contest elections he should back off," Pandey told the media.

"Second, back in 2006, Rahul Gandhi once mentioned his nationality as British. Being a British citizen, he cannot Constitutionally contest elections... After my complaint, Rahul Gandhi's representative was called in and my complaint

has been accepted," the advocate further said.

Congress leader Ajay Pal Singh issued a statement regarding the complaint against Rahul, saying that his nomination was held valid before, and still hold valid now.

"There's a candidate who registered a complaint against Rahul Gandhi after the period of complaining was over... The complainant said he has filed a writ challenging Rahul Gandhi's nationality... Rahul Gandhi's nomination was valid previously as well, and it is valid now also," Ajay added.

Rahul filed his nomination from the Raebareli constituency on Friday, putting an end to the speculation of him contesting the elections from Amethi again. Congress loyalist Kishori Lal Sharma will contest the election from Amethi, against Union Minister and BJP candidate Smriti Irani.

Punia in tight spot: NADA suspends him for missing dope test

RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Wrestler Bajrang Punia once again came into the limelight this time as he was handed suspension from any competition in upcoming events by National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA). The suspension came from his failure to submit the urine sample in the trials held at Sonapat on March 10. This suspension costs Punia any further participation in any

upcoming events or Wrestling competitions until the suspension is lifted by the NADA.

The Olympic bronze medallist took to social media to give his version of the story. Punia said he never refused to give the sample when the officer came to collect the sample in March during which he asked the officials to give an explanation regarding the use of expired kits which they brought to take my sample. Punia

said he was ready to give his sample after they answered his question.

NADA has asked to send his reply by Tuesday to avoid any further disciplinary action. The expired kits concern is from last year in December when Bajrang posted a video in which he stated that the kits being used to take the sample were beyond expiry. Bajrang's lawyer Vidhuspat Singhania said, "Need to access the case file and we'll be filing a



reply to NADA soon" On his suspension, WFI President Sanjay Singh expressed NADA didn't update them about the suspension. In a meeting with DG on April 25 this matter was not shared. Sanjay said he called NADA officials on Sunday morning and had no answers to his questions hence decided to write to NADA and WADA about the matter. "If the wrestler fails to come out clean with his reply he automatically will be out

of the race for the qualification of the French Olympics," Sanjay added. Till now India has not won a Paris Olympic quota in the men's category freestyle 65kg weight. Only Sujeet Kalkal managed to earn one in the Istanbul last qualifier. The World Cup qualifier starts from May 9 in Turkey and this will be the last chance for wrestlers to place themselves for the upcoming summer Olympics.

I have not lost touch with Chandni Chowk people: Aggarwal

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Once attributed the title of "the most active MP in Delhi", the former five times Parliamentary Jai Prakash Aggarwal claims that his touch with the people of the Chandni Chowk constituency hasn't gone despite losing two times to the BJP candidate from 2014 to 2024. Aggarwal also didn't shy away from slamming Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his

comment on "magalsutra" by calling it "inauspicious". The veteran Congress leader, who is contesting the Lok Sabha elections for the eighth time, shared that he felt hurt by PM Modi's speech at a rally in Binswara, aimed to hurt the Congress' prospects in the upcoming Lok Sabha 2024 elections. "What is this language he is using? That too coming from a Prime Minister. The Prime Minister himself sometimes speaks in



Jai Prakash Aggarwal, Congress candidate from Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha constituency with supporters at his residence Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

such a way, which is very inauspicious. I was very hurt by his statements personally," said Aggarwal.

He also attacked the BJP on using central investigative agencies like Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against Opposition leaders like Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. "If someone has done something, let the legal system take its own course and punish the culprit.

What is this approach of the BJP to use a stick to suppress the opposition? Why is the Government involved in this? You ask people on the streets and they will say 'Modi ne bandi kara diya Kejriwal ko' (Modi has locked Kejriwal up). Is this the kind of impression you want to leave?" he remarked. Aggarwal, who is fondly referred to as JP bhai or JP, alleged that no single question has been asked in Parliament

regarding the Chandni Chowk constituency. "This means there is no single problem in the area? They have failed to identify any problems here, that too with seven MPs from the national Capital," he said. The Gandhi confidante said that when he was given the responsibility to fight from the seat, he began with looking at the projects that were pending in the area. However, he claims that no work was started in the area

during the ten years of BJP MP Dr Harsh Vardhan. Despite his opponent Praveen Khandelwal having a considerable connect with the trade groups because of his association to Confederation of All Indian Traders (CAIT), Aggarwal states that he hardly cares about what face is on the opposition and more about the work the party or the candidate has done for the area.

Congress in Punjab grapples with leadership exodus

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Long regarded as a political powerhouse in Punjab, the Congress party is finding itself navigating a turbulent sea of challenges ahead of the ensuing Lok Sabha elections. Stripped of its stalwarts such as Capt Amarinder Singh and Sunil Jakhar, the grand old party is grappling with a relentless stream of defections, with key leaders abandoning the ship for rival camps — be it the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) or the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

The situation has emerged as a formidable challenge for the Congress in the state, especially ahead of the June 1 general elections. Other than struggling with the exodus of its top leaders, the Congress is embroiled in internal discord characterized by strong factionalism and a leadership in flux. The party's struggle with indiscipline is palpable, particularly under the helm of a state party chief who fails to command the same authority and respect as Capt Amarinder Singh once did. This continuous power struggle has left the party vulnerable, with its unity hanging by a thread and its electoral prospects uncertain.

The trend of leaders defecting from the Congress to rival political outfits, particularly the BJP and AAP, gained momentum in recent months, posing a formidable threat to the grand old party's prospects in Punjab. The wave of defections gained traction following the unceremonious exit of two-time Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh from the Congress in September 2021, marking a watershed moment in the state's political landscape.

Over the period since then, families with deep-rooted ties to the Congress, spanning decades of allegiance, including Sunil Jakhar, Ravneet Singh Bittu, Mohinder Singh Kaypee, Rana Gurmeet Singh Sodhi, Karamjit Kaur Chaudhary, Kewal Singh

Dhillon, among others have jumped the ship to the BJP, altering the political calculus in Punjab.

Once synonymous with Congress loyalty, these families are now forging new paths, aligning themselves with rival political entities like the BJP. The prominent Patiala Royal family, comprising Capt Amarinder Singh, his wife and former Union Minister Preneet Kaur, along with their children Jai Inder Kaur and Raninder Singh, known for their generations-long association with the Congress, has joined the BJP. Similarly, Sunil Jakhar, son of Congress stalwart Balram Jakhar, now leads the state BJP, while his nephew Sandeep Jakhar remains a Congress MLA from Abohar.

The Chaudhary family's legacy in Doaba's Dalit politics spans three generations, reflecting their enduring influence in Punjab's political arena. Originating in 1936, their tradition of public service was spearheaded by the late Master Gurbanta Singh, a seven-time Congress MLA and former Punjab Agriculture Minister. Following his footsteps, his son Chaudhary Jagjit Singh served as a former Local Government Minister, and his brother Santokh Singh Chaudhary upheld the family's political heritage by winning multiple electoral battles. Now, their allegiance has shifted to the BJP, with Santokh Chaudhary's widow Karamjit Kaur Chaudhary embracing the saffron party, with their son Vikramjit Singh Chaudhary, Phillaur MLA, is facing suspension for "anti-party activities".

Even Ludhiana MP Ravneet Singh Bittu, grandson of former Chief Minister Beant Singh, has defected to the BJP, while his cousin Gurkirat Singh Kotli and uncle Tej Parkash Singh, and other family members

remain with the Congress.

The absence of these stalwart leaders has left the party grappling with a crisis of leadership and unity. Capt Amarinder and Jakhar, who wielded considerable influence and commanded respect within the party, are now on the opposition's (read BJP) side, further weakening the Congress' position in Punjab.

Capt Amarinder, a towering figure in Punjab politics, commanded considerable influence within the Congress ranks, and always managed to defuse the crisis with his political acumen. His exit dealt a severe blow to the party's organizational structure and electoral prospects. Similarly, the departure of a seasoned politician like Jakhar, who had enjoyed widespread popularity among the party members, has not only diminished the party's leadership pool but has also bolstered the BJP's cadre strength.

Furthermore, the Congress' inability to address internal fissures and bridge the growing schism within the party has exacerbated its woes. While yesteryears' political stalwarts, like Capt Amarinder and Jakhar, enjoyed widespread support, respect, and loyalty among the party members, the current leadership, including state party chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring, lacked the same gravitas, making it challenging to rally support and maintain cohesion within the party ranks.

The leadership vacuum within the Congress has been compounded by the appointment of state unit in-charge like Devendra Yadav, whose political clout pales in comparison to his predecessors. Before him, the Congress had relied on heavyweight state unit in-charges like Asha Kumari, Harish Rawat, or Harish Chaudhary to steer the ship, their towering stature providing a semblance of stability amid

Deserting Cong Ship

- Capt Amarinder Singh
- Sunil Jakhar
- Ravneet Kaur
- Preneet Singh Bittu
- Mohinder Singh Kaypee
- Rana Gurmeet Singh Sodhi
- Karamjit Kaur Chaudhary
- Kewal Singh Dhillon
- Arvind Khanna
- Dr Raj Kumar Chabbawal
- Dalvir Singh Goldy
- Gurpreet Singh GP

turbulent waters. This fragmented leadership has hampered the party's efforts to navigate the choppy waters of Punjab politics and present a united front to voters.

The exodus of stalwart leaders and the erosion of the Congress' traditional support base have cast a pall over the party's prospects in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. With each defection of a prominent figure, the task of rebuilding the party and reclaiming lost ground becomes increasingly daunting, raising doubts about the Congress's resilience and relevance in Punjab's evolving political landscape.

In the face of mounting dissent and the steady exodus of leaders, the Congress finds itself at a crossroads, with its electoral fortunes hanging in the balance. The party's ability to reconcile internal differences, restore unity, and project a cohesive front will be pivotal in determining its success at the polls. However, with the spectre of defections looming large and the challenge of rebuilding trust and credibility among voters, the road ahead for the Congress in Punjab appears fraught with obstacles and uncertainties.

Heat wave advisory issued by UT Health Dept

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

As temperatures begin to soar in the upcoming summer months, Chandigarh-UT Health Department on Sunday took proactive measures by issuing a comprehensive heat wave advisory. The aim is to mitigate the risks associated with extreme heat and safeguard the health of residents amid the anticipated heat waves from April to June.

The advisory, prepared by the Health Department, outlined several key recommendations to raise awareness among the general public and minimize the impact of soaring temperatures on health.

The residents are advised to stay indoors in well-ventilated and cool areas, particularly during peak heat hours. Lightweight, light-colored, and loose-fitting cotton clothes are recommended to stay cool. Additionally, utilizing umbrellas, hats, and sunglasses can provide protection from direct sunlight. It is essential to stay hydrated by regularly consuming fluids and seeking cooler environments when necessary.

To reduce indoor temperatures, residents are encouraged to keep windows and curtains closed during the day, especially on the sunny side of buildings. Opening windows at night allows for cooler air circulation and can help alleviate indoor heat.

Underlining that adequate hydration is crucial during hot weather, the residents are advised to consume plenty of fluids, including water, natural juices, and coconut water, while avoiding alcoholic and caffeinated beverages, as well as sugary drinks. Including fruits and vegetables with high water content in the diet is also recommended.

Special attention should be given to vulnerable individuals such as infants, elderly individuals, outdoor workers, and those with pre-existing health conditions. It is imperative never to leave anyone, especially children or pets, in a closed, parked vehicle, as temperatures can quickly rise to dangerous levels.

Hry CEO asks officials to lay special focus on monitoring social media platforms

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Stressing the importance of closely monitoring social media platforms in all districts, Haryana Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Agarwal on Sunday directed the officers of the social media monitoring teams to pay special attention to social media platforms. He said that the expenditure of advertisements on social media will also be added to the account of the concerned candidate or the party.

Informing about the guidelines of the Election Commission of India, he said that just like newspapers, television, and radio, election campaigning also takes place on the social media platforms, involving expenses. "Teams formed in the districts under the ECI's guidelines will closely monitor social media during the upcoming Lok Sabha general elections and ensure that any advertisements found are reported along with the expen-

diture details to the monitoring team. Based on the report, the cost of that advertisement will be added to the account of the concerned candidate or the party," he said.

The CEO, emphasizing the significance of monitoring social media during the Lok Sabha general elections, said: "Often, candidates and parties promote their campaigns on platforms like YouTube videos during elections. If monitoring teams come across channels or videos supporting any candidate or political party, spreading communal content, or violating the Model Code of Conduct, in that case, action will be taken against the operator of the respective YouTube channel under the IT Act."

Certification of Print Media Ads Published One Day Before Voting is Mandatory

Agarwal said that as per the ECI, candidates or political parties must obtain a certificate from the Media Certification and Monitoring Committee

(MCMC) before publishing advertisements in print media on the day of voting and one day before voting. "Voting for the Lok Sabha will take place on May 25, hence candidates must obtain certification from the MCMC before publishing proposed advertisements in print media on May 24 and on the day of voting, May 25. Otherwise, it will be considered a violation of the Model Code of Conduct," he said.

"For broadcasting advertisements on TV and local cable TV, certification must be obtained from the MCMC as soon as enrollment is done. To obtain certification for advertisements, the prescribed proforma must be submitted to the MCMC two days before the scheduled date of printing and broadcasting. As per the instructions of the Election Commission of India, a Media Monitoring and Certification Committee has been constituted under the chairmanship of the District Election Officer," he added.

Channi's Poonch Attack Remark Sparks Outcry, Draws BJP Condemnation

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH/JALANDHAR

Punjab's former Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Charanjit Singh Channi on Sunday ignited a controversy with his comments regarding the recent terror attack in Poonch, alleging it to be a "pre-election stunt by the BJP" — drawing severe criticism and condemnation from various quarters.

The attack, which occurred on Saturday, resulted in the loss of life of an Air Force soldier and injuries to four others.

Campaigning in Jalandhar, the constituency from which he is contesting, Channi asserted, "These are all stunts and not terrorist attacks. There is no truth in it. BJP is playing with the lives of people and bodies."

He went on to suggest that such incidents are orchestrated to benefit the BJP during elections, citing the Pulwama attack

in 2019 as a similar example. "These attacks are not really happening but just meant to benefit the Bharatiya Janata Party. Whenever elections take place, such stunts are played like it happened last time," he said.

The terror attack in Poonch targeted two Indian Air Force vehicles in the Bakrabal (Sanal) area, resulting in the death of Corporal Vikky Pahade and injuries to four other soldiers.

Swift to condemn Channi's statement, BJP leader and the Union Minister Anurag Thakur labeled it as a reflection of the "Congress party's mentality". Accusing the Congress of prioritizing brokerage over strengthening the armed forces, Thakur said: "This is a poor statement. This reflects their mentality."

He further highlighted India's surgical strike following the Pulwama attack and criticized the Congress for allegedly attempting to delay the hanging

of the accused in the Parliament attack case. Thakur also pointed out the loss of territory, including Aksai Chin and a portion claimed by Sri Lanka, emphasizing that such actions would not be forgotten by the people.

Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar also strongly condemned Channi's remarks. Calling it a "ghastly statement", Jakhar asserted that belittling the valour of India's brave soldiers is "an insult to the nation".

Labeling Channi's comments as shameful and indicative of bankruptcy and frustration, Jakhar emphasized that the nation would not forgive such statements and urged Channi to apologize immediately. Additionally, he called upon the Congress and its allies to publicly disassociate themselves from Channi's statement and demand an apology on behalf of the nation.

No division within Cong, No major development in last 10 years: Raj Babbar

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Actor-turned-politician Raj Babbar, who has been fielded by the Congress party from the Gurugram Lok Sabha constituency, on Sunday denied reports of infighting within the party, asserting that the party is fighting the ongoing Lok Sabha elections with full strength and will again come to power.

Babbar, interacting with media in Gurugram, said that fellow Congress leaders Capt (retired) Ajay Singh Yadav and Rewari MLA Chiranjeevi Rao are in contact with him and they are providing full support to him.

Asked about the BJP's Gurugram candidate Rao Inderjit Singh's comments lampooning him, Raj Babbar said: "I am thankful to him at least he said that I can entertain that means I am talented because you have to work hard to entertain someone."

While asking about his election campaign issues, Babbar said: "Gurugram is generating huge revenue to the State Government but despite this, people are forced to clear garbage on their own. No foolproof plan

to deal with the monsoon, no better infrastructure, no accountability of the civic bodies." While attacking Rao Inderjit Singh, Babbar said that simply constructing the six-lane Dwarka Expressway cannot be termed development. "It was the Centre's plan to make a project like this. The BJP government here failed to connect Nuh district from the railway network, they failed to start Rapid Metro project here and even failed to develop better infrastructure during the past years regime," he said.

Babbar said that the people of Gurugram and Haryana have decided to vote for the Congress party in the Lok Sabha elections and also to bring in a Congress Government in the State under the former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda.

When asked about being an outsider in Gurugram, Babbar said: "I am not an outsider. I have a lot of experience in politics. Yes, from Mumbai, one cannot consider people's problems. So I want to stay here to address people's problems." The electoral landscape in Gurugram Lok Sabha constituency is currently embroiled in a fierce battle char-

acterized by a clash between local and outsider candidates. Representing the Congress party is actor-turned-politician Raj Babbar, who, despite hailing from outside the region, asserted familial connections to Haryana. On the opposing end stands BJP's Rao Inderjit Singh, who underscores his deep-rooted local ties and track record of developmental accomplishments.

Babbar's campaign pivots on promises of transformative change and a steadfast commitment to addressing pressing infrastructural concerns plaguing the constituency. Meanwhile, Singh positions himself as a seasoned leader deserving of reelection, leveraging his extensive experience and past contributions to Gurgaon's advancement.

Notably, Babbar's candidacy marks a departure from the Congress' conventional reliance on Yadav candidates in the area, signaling a strategic shift in their electoral approach. Conversely, Singh, having previously served as a Congress MP before joining the BJP, emphasizes his pivotal role in fostering the growth and development of Gurgaon over the past decade.

Mann seeks votes on Govt's two-yr work; Slams Modi's 'mangalsutra' pitch

PNS/Kharar/Chandigarh

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday rallied support for the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Anandpur Sahib Lok Sabha candidate Malvinder Singh Kang in Kharar underscoring the party's governance achievements and vision for the state's future. Addressing a massive gathering, Mann articulated the core principles guiding his campaign and highlighted the transformative initiatives undertaken by the AAP Government during its two-year tenure.

Maintaining that he and his party was seeking votes in the name of the two-year work, Mann emphasized the centrality of development that benefits all segments of society, from farmers to businessmen and labourers. He decried what he termed as the divisive politics of the BJP, accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of exploiting religious sentiments for electoral gains.

"I am asking for votes on



the basis of my work in Punjab in two years, in Delhi we are asking for votes in the name of our work of eight years, because we do the politics of work. It is a matter of great shame that Narendra Modi who was the Prime Minister for 10 years is asking for votes in the name of mangalsutra and religion," said Mann.

Stating that the BJP does the politics of hatred and fear, Mann appealed to the people of Punjab to not let the BJP put its

roots in Punjab. "Punjab is known for its communal harmony, we celebrate Gurburabs, Eids and Navamis together. The langar started by Guru Nanak Dev Ji with Rs 20 is 'sarab sanjha' for all humankind," he said.

Enumerating AAP Government's accomplishments, Mann cited the creation of over 43,000 government jobs, provision of free electricity, and irrigation facilities to farmers. He hailed the estab-

lishment of Aam Aadmi clinics offering free medical treatment and medication as a testament to the government's commitment to accessible healthcare. Mann also touted significant investments from corporate giants like Tata Steel and pledged support for the establishment of new industrial units to spur job creation.

Positioning Punjab's youth as the vanguard of economic growth, Mann exhorted them to become "job-givers" rather than "jobseekers". He extended assurances of governmental support to budding entrepreneurs and underscored his administration's efforts to foster a conducive environment for business growth.

Taking a swipe at rival parties, Mann portrayed himself as a leader accessible to the people, contrasting it with the alleged elitism and corruption of other politicians. He depicted his Government as a champion of transparency and accountability, committed to serving the interests of Punjab and its people.

Vote without Inducement: Punjab CEO appeals to voters

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab's Chief Electoral Officer Sabin C on Sunday made a fervent appeal to all voters in the state to exercise their franchise without succumbing to any form of inducement or freebies. In the latest episode of the Podcast released by the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Sabin C emphasized the importance of voting with integrity and without any external influence. Highlighting the issue of distribution of freebies, cash, and other incentives during elections, Sabin C urged the voters to make their choices independently, based on their conscience and the merit of the candidates.

Moreover, Sabin C provided valuable insights into the significance of the 'NOTA' (None of the Above) option, encouraging the voters to use it if they find none of the candidates suitable for their vote. Addressing questions from the listeners, Sabin C assured that district authorities have taken significant measures to ensure voter convenience at polling booths.

Poll Buzz

BJP mulling to change Bittu from Ludhiana: Warring

Ludhiana: Punjab Congress president and party's candidate for Ludhiana parliamentary constituency Amrinder Singh Raja Warring on Sunday stated that the BJP was considering to replace its Ludhiana candidate Ravneet Singh Bittu, owing to high personal anti-incumbency against him revealed in a latest survey of the party. "During a fresh survey by the party, after the appointment of observers from outside, BJP had found that Bittu faced a lot of personal anti-incumbency for 10 years...BJP's internal survey had found him completely out of the fight in Ludhiana that he may end up well behind every-one else in the contest," he said, adding that the BJP, in a next couple of days, may end up announcing a different candidate as the party's own observers feel that there still was time to make some amends.

Expressing confidence that no matter whom the BJP fields, he will not only end up on the fourth or fifth position, he will also lose his security deposit, Warring said: "Even if the Prime Minister comes to fight here personally, he also can't save his security deposit."

BJP confusing HP state employees on pension issue: Revenue Minister

Shimla: Himachal Pradesh's Revenue Minister Jagat Singh Negi on Sunday criticized the state's BJP leaders for spreading false information among the state workers about pension schemes. Negi, during a media briefing in Shimla, slammed the BJP for trying to criticize the Congress Government's decision to bring back the old pension scheme, a promise they fulfilled right after winning the 2022 assembly elections. "However, despite our efforts, around Rs 9,000 crore of pension funds are still stuck with the Central

Government, leaving state employees empty-handed," said Negi, while accusing the Centre of unfairly withholding these funds, despite them rightfully belonging to state employees. He emphasized that if Congress came to power nationally, they would change the pension rules to ensure all states get their fair share.

Tewari jibes Tandon over making football ground at Dadu Majra dump in 3 months

Chandigarh: Senior Congress leader and INDIA bloc candidate from Chandigarh parliamentary constituency Manish Tewari on Sunday took a dig at his BJP rival Sanjay Tandon for claiming to turn Dadu Majra dump into a football ground within next three months. "Were you playing cricket all the time?" Tewari shot back at Tandon, pointing out that BJP has been in power for 10 years, with an

MP and Municipal Corporation there and still the party candidate was asking for three months more. "What his party could not do in 10 years, Tandon is claiming to get that done in three months," he quipped.

People of Sirsa ready for change: Selja

Sirsa: Congress' national general secretary and party candidate from Sirsa constituency Kumari Selja on Sunday alleged that the BJP Government has deceived the entire country with wrong policies. "The Modi government has forced every section of people to despair. However, times are changing, and people in the country also want change; in a democracy, the voter has significant power. There is a tremendous wave of Congress throughout the country, and people have made up their minds to show the Modi government the exit through the power of their vote," she added while visiting several villages in

Ratia assembly constituency. Evoking his father, Selja said: "Just as people have lovingly preserved the letters of my father Chaudhary Dalbir Singh, I vow to nurture their every dream with the same dedication. This is the time to strengthen the hand of Congress and strengthen the country."

Experimenting between one Delhi-based party and another has cost Punjab dearly: Sukhbir

Dera Bassi/Zirakpur: SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal on Sunday said that experimenting between one Delhi-based party and another had cost Punjab dearly with all its core issues, including federal autonomy, being thrown on the back burner. He urged the Punjabis to put their faith in SAD to ensure the State's voice reached parliament. Sukhbir, campaigning in favour of party's Patiala candidate NK Sharma as part of the Punjab Bachao Yatra,

said: "Our experiments have cost us dearly. Earlier the Congress misled you with false promises of a loan waiver, 'ghar ghar naukari' and Rs 2,500 per month to unemployed youth but did nothing. Then AAP went a step further and promised Rs 1,000 per month to women besides promising to eradicate the menace of drugs within 10 days. This promise was also false and AAP stands thoroughly exposed as it has bankrupted the State by taking on a loan of Rs one lakh crore besides discriminating against the farmers, scheduled caste and weaker sections and trade and industry."

AAP has betrayed people's faith: BJP's Parampal Kaur

Bathinda: Lashing out at AAP on Sunday, BJP Lok Sabha candidate from Bathinda retired IAS Parampal Kaur Sidhu Maluka said that the people of Punjab gave a chance to AAP on its promise to bring change in the state. "But contrary to this, the AAP

Government did nothing. It betrayed the state people and dashed all their hopes, which it set with its fake promises," she said, adding that now Punjab government is making lack of funds excuses for carrying out development in the state but its draining state exchequer for its poll campaigns in other states.

ECI allows shifting of 7 polling stations in Kullu, Mandi, Shimla, Kinnaur

Shimla: The Election Commission of India (ECI) has approved the relocation of seven polling stations across Kullu, Mandi, Shimla, and Kinnaur districts, as per proposals submitted by the respective District Election Officers (DEOs). In Kullu district, two polling stations were shifted, while two have been shifted in Mandi district. Additionally, in Shimla district, one polling station will be relocated; while one polling station was shifted in Kinnaur district. An election department spokesperson said

that the decision to relocate these polling stations aimed at enhancing accessibility and convenience for voters.

Tandon promises to press "Reset Button" to rid city of archaic laws

Chandigarh: Making a strong appeal to the city voters to press the EVM button in BJP's favour, the party nominee from Chandigarh Sanjay Tandon on Sunday said that he would ensure to press the "Reset Button" for the administrative reforms to help the people. "The reset button needs to be pressed to resolve all long-pending issues of the city of the last 50 years. With the rising aspirations of the city, we need to revisit and reframe outdated laws as per the current demands to take the city to new heights of growth," emphasized Tandon, underlining the urgent need to review the administrative provisions that have become a pain for the people.

Poonch attack part of worrying trend: INDIA bloc

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Members of the Opposition and particularly the INDIA bloc partners led by Congress on Sunday said the attack in Poonch is part of a worrying trend of terror attacks in the area and asserted that after Lok Sabha election results the party and its INDIA bloc partners will leave no stone unturned in strengthening the counter-terrorism grid in Jammu and Kashmir.

While Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the Congress strongly and unequivocally condemns this "dastardly terror attack" and joins the nation in standing together against terrorism, former party chief Rahul Gandhi said the cowardly ter-

rorist attack on the security personnel convoy in Poonch, Jammu and Kashmir is "very shameful and sad".

"I pay my humble tribute to the martyred soldier and express my condolences to his bereaved family. I hope for the speedy recovery of the soldiers injured in the attack," he said on X on Saturday.

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah said the menace of terror is still alive in the Union Territory. Abdullah, a former chief minister, said the BJP government's claim that Article 370 was responsible for terrorism now stands exposed, reiterating his stand that only dialogue between India and Pakistan can end the threat in the region.

"That area has been disturbed for many months. Incidents



Security personnel check vehicles during a search operation after terror attack on IAF convoy

PTI

have taken place in Rajouri, Surankote and other adjacent areas," he said and paid his tributes to the dead and prayed for early recovery of the injured.

Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh claimed that

while there were "no major incidents of terrorism in this area between 2007 and 2014", the Surankote terrorist attack is part of a worrying trend of terror attacks, particularly against security personnel, in the hilly Rajouri-Poonch areas

situated near the Line of Control.

After June 4, the Congress and its INDIA bloc partners will leave no stone unturned in strengthening the counter-terrorism grid by fully supporting our brave soldiers, Ramesh

asserted.

AAP leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj also condemned the attack, calling it "despicable, shameful and cowardly act of the terrorists". He also prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured soldiers.

Part of the INDIA bloc, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut hit out at the prime minister over the attack in Jammu and Kashmir. "Yesterday, in broad daylight, our soldiers were attacked and killed. He will not talk about this in Ayodhya. (He will) just seek votes in the name of Lord Ram," Raut said.

RJD leader and former Bihar Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav condemned the militant attack and said he and his party join the nation in standing together against terrorism.

FSSAI refutes claims about permitting higher pesticide residue levels in spices

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has refuted recent media reports claiming that it has permitted higher pesticide residue levels in herbs and spices. Labeling these reports as "false and malicious," the food safety regulator said.

"Some media reports are claiming that the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) allows ten times more pesticide residue in herbs and spices. Such reports are false and malicious," FSSAI said in a statement here.

The top food authority emphasised that India upholds some of the most stringent Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) in the world. The authority explained that the MRLs for pesticides are established specifically for various food commodities based on thorough risk assessments. This approach ensures the safety standards are tailored to the dietary consumption patterns of the Indian population and address health concerns across all age groups.

"India has one of the most stringent standards of Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) in the world. Additionally, a pesticide registered on many food commodities with different Maximum Residue Levels (MRL) is based on risk assessment data," it added.

The FSSAI, a statutory body under the Union Health Ministry, said the MRL of 0.01 mg/kg was applicable in case of pesticides. The limit was increased to 0.1



mg/kg only in cases of spices and is applicable only for those pesticides which are not registered in India by Central Insecticides Board & Registration Committee (CIB & RC). The move was recommended by the Scientific Panel on Pesticide Residues. As per FSSAI, the MRLs fixed by CODEX for Myclobutanil used for Chilli is 20 mg/kg whereas the limit set by FSSAI is 2mg/kg. For Spiromesifen, used for Chilli, Codex limit is 5 mg/kg whereas FSSAI limit is 1 mg/kg. Similarly, Codex standards for Metalaxyl and Metalaxyl-M used for black pepper is 2mg/kg whereas the limit set by FSSAI is 0.5 mg/kg.

The new Codex MRLs for Dithiocarbamates, Phorate, Triazophos and Profenophos for Fennel is 0.1 mg/kg. FSSAI aligns with the updated standards of MRLs set by Codex Alimentarius Commission (an International Food Safety and Quality Standard setting body created by WHO and FAO of UN) and the European Union, it said.

The MRLs are dynamic in nature and regularly revised based on the scientific data. This practice is aligned with global standards and ensures that MRL revisions are made on a scientifically valid basis, reflecting the latest findings and international norms.

Priyanka to lead LS poll campaign in Raebareli, Amethi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will lead the Lok Sabha poll campaign in Raebareli and Amethi, and camp in these parliamentary constituencies in Uttar Pradesh from Monday to ensure the party's victory in the two high-profile seats, according to sources.

Ending days of suspense, the Congress on Friday announced that Rahul Gandhi will contest the Lok Sabha elections from Raebareli, the constituency held by his mother Sonia Gandhi for the last two decades, and Kishori Lal Sharma, a close aide of the Gandhi family, will fight from Amethi. AICC sources said Priyanka Gandhi has already taken command of the campaigns and will remain camped



in Raebareli and Amethi from Monday onwards, till the end of polls. She will campaign aggressively to ensure the victory of her brother Rahul Gandhi and Sharma.

With Rahul Gandhi campaigning across India, Priyanka Gandhi has taken it upon her-

self to take charge of the campaigns in the two family bastions. The Congress has resolved to ensure victory from Raebareli with a big margin and also take back Amethi where BJP leader Smriti Irani had defeated Rahul Gandhi in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, they

said.

"She (Priyanka Gandhi) will spearhead the campaign in Amethi and Raebareli. She will be there in the two constituencies till the election in both the constituencies," a source said. Priyanka Gandhi will be holding hundreds of 'nukkad sabhas', meetings and door-to-door campaign programmes, the sources said.

"The centre will be Raebareli where she will be stationed at a guest house. From booth management to outreach, everything would be handled by her," the source said.

Already outreach has started with freedom fighters' families and those who have had familial ties with the Gandhi family for decades, the sources said. She will also monitor the digital and social media campaign in the two constituencies, they said.

Many discrepancies in Vermula death: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday said there were many discrepancies in the investigation conducted previously into Rohith Vemula's death in 2016 and asserted that its government in Telangana will leave no stone unturned to ensure justice for his family.

Police in Telangana have filed a closure report before a court in its probe into the death of Rohith Vemula, a student of the University of Hyderabad, claiming he was not a Dalit and died by suicide in 2016 as he feared that his "real caste" would be discovered.

Congress general secretary, organisation, K C Venugopal, said Rohith Vemula's death

was a grave atrocity that completely exposed the "anti-Dalit mindset" of the BJP.

"The Congress, including Rahul Gandhi ji, has stood with Rohith Vemula's family through this difficult period," he said in a post on X.

As has been clarified by the Telangana Police, the closure report concerned was prepared in June 2023, Venugopal said.

"There were many discrepancies in the investigation conducted previously. The Congress government in Telangana will leave no stone unturned to ensure justice for Rohith's family," he asserted.

The Congress came to power in the state last year by defeating the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS).

Courts should not act as mere tape recorders, says SC; flags role of public prosecutors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Courts have to take a participatory role in a trial and not act as "mere tape recorders", the Supreme Court said here and lamented that there is "practically no effective and meaningful cross-examination" by public prosecutors of any hostile witness during hearings of criminal appeals.

The apex court said a judge has to monitor the proceedings in aid of justice and, even if the prosecutor is remiss or lethargic in some ways, the court should control the proceedings effectively so that the truth is arrived at.

Observing that relations between the public prosecution service and the judiciary are the very cornerstone of the criminal justice system, a bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said time and again, the top court has said

that there should not be any element of political consideration in matters like appointment to post of public prosecutor etc.

The observations by the bench, also comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, came in a judgement while upholding the conviction and life sentence awarded to a man for murdering his wife in 1995.

"It is the duty of the court to arrive at the truth and subserve the ends of justice. The courts have to take a participatory role in the trial and not act as mere tape recorders to record whatever is being stated by the witnesses," the bench said in its verdict delivered on Friday.

It said the court must be conscious of serious pitfalls and dereliction of duty on the part of the prosecuting agency.

The bench said a judge is expected to actively participate in the trial, and elicit necessary

materials from the witnesses in the appropriate context which he feels necessary for reaching the correct conclusion.

It said any crime committed against an individual is a crime against the entire society and in such circumstances, neither the public prosecutor nor the presiding officer of the trial court can afford to remain remiss or lackadaisical in any manner.

The apex court said while making appointments, like for the post of public prosecutor, the only consideration for the government should be the merit of the person.

"The person should be not only competent, but he should also be a man of impeccable character and integrity. He should be a person who should be able to work independently without any reservations, dictates or other constraints," it said.



The bench noted that public prosecutors, who are responsible for conducting prosecutions and may appeal against the court decisions, are one of the judges' natural counterparts in the trial proceedings and also in the broader context of management of the system of criminal law.

Observing that free and fair trial is the very foundation of criminal jurisprudence, the bench said, "There is a reasonable apprehension in the mind of the public at large that the criminal trial is neither free nor fair with the prosecutor

appointed by the state government conducting the trial in a manner where frequently the prosecution witnesses turn hostile".

It noted that over a period of time, the apex court has noticed while hearing criminal appeals that there is practically no effective and meaningful cross-examination by the public prosecutor of a hostile witness.

"The only thing that the public prosecutor would do is to bring the contradictions on record and thereafter prove such contradictions through the evidence of the investigating officer. This is not sufficient," it said.

"What we are trying to convey is that it is the duty of the public prosecutor to cross-examine a hostile witness in detail and try to elucidate the truth and also establish that the witness is speaking a lie and has delib-

erately resiled from his police statement recorded under section 161 of the CrPC," the bench said.

The top court was dealing with an appeal filed by the convict challenging the May 2014 judgement of the Delhi High Court which had affirmed his conviction and life term awarded to him by the trial court.

According to the prosecution, the appellant had married in 1982 and in December 1995, he murdered his wife due to their strained marital relationship. The police had claimed that his minor daughter, who was five years old at the time of the incident, was the sole eye-witness to the incident.

The bench noted that during the trial, the minor failed to support the prosecution's case and was declared a hostile witness.

While dismissing the appeal, the apex court noted it should

not overlook the fact that the appellant had inflicted 12 blows with a knife on the deceased who was unarmed and helpless.

"For all the foregoing reasons, we have reached to the conclusion that the high court committed no error in affirming the judgment and order of conviction passed by the trial court, holding the appellant guilty of the offence of murder of his wife," it said.

Noting that the appellant has undergone almost 11 years of imprisonment so far and is about 65 years old, the bench granted him liberty to prefer an appropriate representation addressed to the state government praying for remission of sentence.

It said if any such representation is filed by the appellant, the state shall look into it and take an appropriate decision in accordance with law within four weeks.

Low organ donation: States told to monitor cases of brain stem deaths in ICU patients

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Center has instructed States to monitor cases of brain stem deaths in ICU patients, citing poor identification and certification of such cases as a factor contributing to low organ donation rates in the country. The advisory aims to boost organ donation rates, which are currently less than one donor per million population.

"The organ donation rate in India continues to be low (less than one donor per million population in a year). One of the key challenges identified in this is poor identification and certification of brain stem death (BSD) cases despite availability of many such potential cases," Director of National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO) Dr Anil Kumar stated in the letter to the states.

As per provisions of "The Transplantation of Human Organs Tissues Act, 1994", it is required to identify potential brain stem death cases in the ICU.

Further, it is mandatory to enquire whether such potential donors had pledged for organ donation and if not to make the family members aware of the opportunity to



donate organs before the heart stops under the law, he said.

The doctor on duty, with the help of transplant coordinator, is required to make the above-mentioned inquiry after certification of such BSD cases, Kumar said in the letter sent to all states and UTs and directors of regional and state organ and tissue transplant organisation (ROTTOs and SOTTOs) last month. Kumar said every institution is requested to facilitate and monitor the certification of BSD cases to ensure compliance of provisions of the Act and Rules.

In his letter, the official attached a template of "required request display board" that is to be placed outside ICUs, emergency or any other strategic location in the

hospital. He also attached a list of information to be collected from the hospitals on a regular monthly basis.

The head of the institution and respective SOTTO should analyse the collected information and the corrective actions must be taken with the aim to maximise organ donation from all potential donors, he said.

Further, all SOTTOs are requested to collect such information as per the list from each registered hospital and send it to the NOTTO by the seventh of every subsequent month, the letter said.

"I seek your cooperation and support for augmenting the organ donation rate in the country so as to achieve self-sufficiency in the field of deceased organ donation," the letter added.

Researchers develop plant based biocompatible bandage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A team of Italian researchers has developed a biocompatible bandage made of plant-based materials that, loaded with vitamin C, can accelerate the healing process of burn wounds. Published in the journal ACS Applied Bio Materials, these findings offer potential for the development of similar products to treat various types of skin injuries, including lacerations and ulcers.

Additionally, the new bandage represents a promising, environmentally sustainable alternative to skin patches.

Following a burn, the affected area typically undergoes redness and swelling as a result of inflammation, the body's natural defense mechanism. Yet, excessive inflammation can counterproductively trigger the generation of oxygen free radicals, impeding the healing process.

Addressing this concern, researchers at Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia (IIT) devised a biocompatible bandage capable of blocking an excessive increase in the level of inflammation and reducing the number of free radicals, thus shortening the time needed for healing. Furthermore, the bandage naturally degrades



within a few days, mitigating concerns about additional waste generation.

The bandage is made from a new biodegradable material developed by the team, consisting of zein, a protein obtained from maize; pectin, a sugar found in the peel of many fruits, like for example an apple; and soy lecithin, a substance sourced from the like-named plant.

Exploiting its porous texture, the bandage is impregnated with Vitamin C, renowned for its innate anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Once applied to the burn, it gradually releases Vitamin C, thereby stabilizing inflammation levels and mitigating the production of free radicals.

The product's compatibility with human cells, a key feature determining its possible future use on human beings, has been demonstrated by in

vitro laboratory tests on keratinocytes, the cells that constitute the skin.

These tests have also shown that the levels of three key molecules linked to inflammation (interleukins IL-1β, IL-6, and tumor growing factor TNF-α) decreased by 50% in the presence of the bandage, compared to when it was not in place. To validate these results, a series of pre-clinical tests were performed.

"For this bandage, we began with the idea of using solely materials of natural origin, but now we would like to go even further," said Fabrizio Fiorentini, researcher at the Smart Materials laboratory.

"The objective will be to create a very similar product, but using substances derived from food waste in order to satisfy the circular economy concept."

"This is just one of the possible applications for this category of smart materials," said Athanassia Athanassiou, Principal Investigator of IIT's Smart Materials Unit. "We are working on other devices capable of speeding up healing, not only of burns, but also various other types of wounds such as lacerations or skin ulcers, pathologies that affect over half a million people in Italy and often limit personal independence."

Rotavirus jabs do not cause outbreaks in NICUs: Report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rotavirus vaccines do not cause significant outbreaks of the disease in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs), according to a report to be presented at the ongoing Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) 2024 Meeting, being held in Toronto. The findings are important, study authors say, because many NICUs avoid vaccinating against rotavirus due to a theoretical risk of transmission, yet some infants are too old to receive the vaccine once discharged from the NICU. The study conducted at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia evaluated the risk of vaccinated patients transferring rotavirus to unvaccinated patients in NICUs that administer the vaccine.

According to researchers, preterm infants are at higher risk of the highly contagious but preventable virus, yet few receive the vaccine in hospital settings. The rotavirus vaccine contains a weakened form of the virus to produce a stronger immune response.

The study found that 99.3% of non-vaccinated patients exposed to vaccinated patients did not test positive for the disease. < Non-vaccinated patients that contracted rotavirus had no

symptoms after 14 days, according to the study.

"Immunization with rotavirus vaccine has been standard practice in the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia NICU since 2007, and the safety of this practice was supported by retrospective clinical data published in Pediatrics in 2014 – however this remains an uncommon practice in NICUs across the United States," said Kathleen Gibbs, MD, the study's lead neonatologist from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

"Our yearlong, prospective study done in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that benefits of vaccinating NICU patients against rotavirus outweigh risks. Inpatient vaccination allows protection of a vulnerable population against a common, preventable cause of severe diarrheal illness."

The study analyzed 3,448 weekly stool samples from 774 patients between January 2021-January 2022.

Rotavirus spreads easily among infants and young children. The virus can cause severe watery diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and abdominal pain. Children who get rotavirus disease can become dehydrated and may need to be hospitalized.



Congress playing with fire by attempting Hindu, Muslim divide: Rajnath

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rahul Gandhi has "no fire but the Congress is playing with fire" by attempting to create a Hindu-Muslim divide for electoral gains, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said here even as he asserted that the NDA will cross the 400-seat mark in Lok Sabha polls and the BJP will improve its tally in most of the states.

In a free-wheeling interview to PTI, Singh also indicated that the BJP will implement its big-ticket plans like rolling out of Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and the 'One Nation One Election' push in its third consecutive term.

The defence minister, who has been vigorously campaigning across the country, said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi does not have the fire in his belly to put up a spirited fight in the polls. Singh also said that the BJP government will never change the Constitution or end reservations, and accused the Congress of creating "fear psychosis" and resorting to spreading misinformation for "vote-bank" politics.

The defence minister blasted Congress for spreading "canards" that the BJP will change the Constitution if it returns to power and especially stressed that there was no question of changing the Preamble of the Constitution.

His assurance that the Preamble will not be changed

addresses concerns among critics that the word 'secular' to describe India could be removed by the BJP if it retains power.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has been alleging that BJP will "tear up and throw away" the Constitution if it retains power. Some other Congress functionaries had expressed apprehensions that the BJP may drop the word "secular" from the Preamble of the Constitution.

"Congress brought constitutional amendments 80 times. They changed the Preamble during the Emergency," the defence minister said.

"The BJP will never change the Constitution. Constitution-makers never imagined that there would be changes in the Preamble. You (Congress) only acted to hurt the core idea of the Constitution," he said in the interview on Saturday.

"There is no question of changing the Preamble of the Constitution. They changed it and now they are making baseless allegations against us," the BJP leader added.

The Preamble to the Constitution of India presents the basic principles of the Constitution. The 42nd Amendment in 1976 changed the description of India from a "sovereign democratic republic" to a "sovereign socialist secular democratic republic".

"They (Congress) are trying to get people's support by



instilling fear among the citizens," Singh said.

Attacking Congress, he said former Pakistani minister Chaudhry Fawad Hussain's "praise" of Rahul Gandhi is a matter of "grave concern" and his party must explain the "deep love" for its leader from a country that always attempted to destabilise India.

"There must be a reason behind this deep love (agadh prem) from a country that has been trying to destabilise India. It is a matter of grave concern and India wants to know the reason behind this love," he said.

Chaudhry -- infamous for boasting about Pakistan's hand in the 2019 Pulwama terror attack -- had on May 1 posted on 'X' excerpts from a speech by Gandhi with the caption "Rahul on fire" that drew sharp criticism from BJP leaders.

"If a former minister of a country that has been attempting to destabilise India praises (Rahul), then it is a matter of concern. The Congress owes an explanation about its relationship with Pakistan," the defence minister said.

On the overall political landscape, the defence

minister accused the Congress of attempting to disturb social harmony and trying to create tensions on the religious lines.

"They are attempting to create a Hindu-Muslim divide for electoral gains. The Congress is trying to create tensions on the religious lines," he alleged.

"The Congress wants to disturb social harmony. They look at the Muslim community only as a vote bank. I have a suggestion for them -- politics should not be done only for forming governments. The aim of politics should be for nation-

building," he said. "Rahul Gandhi has no fire but the Congress is playing with fire," he said.

The defence minister also said that he was confident that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would cross 400 seats and the BJP would get over 370 as these projections were made after a detailed assessment of the ground situation and not made only for public consumption.

Singh said the people of the country will repose their faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP's tally will improve significantly based on the performance of the government in the last five years. "Our seats will increase in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal and we will get some seats in Tamil Nadu. Our account will open in Kerala as well. We are winning a good number of seats in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana," he said.

"We will increase our tally in Odisha, Jharkhand and Assam. We are sweeping Chhattisgarh," he said, noting that BJP will cross the 370-mark.

The defence minister said the BJP is set to win up to 75 seats in politically crucial Uttar Pradesh.

Asked whether the BJP's seats in Maharashtra will come down, he did not give a direct reply but said there may be some adjustments here and there.

The BJP leader also came

down hard on the Congress for its plan to "redistribute" wealth, saying it will have disastrous consequences for the country's economy.

"The concept of redistribution of wealth will trigger recession. Argentina and Venezuela implemented it and faced disastrous consequences. The investors will lose confidence in India," Singh said.

On the BJP's big-ticket plans like the implementation of UCC and 'One Nation One Poll' push in if it retains power, Singh said his party fulfils promises that it makes to the people of India.

In its manifesto, the BJP pledged to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) if it returns to power after the general elections. It also mentioned that the party will move forward with a resolve to realise the idea of 'One Nation, One Election'.

"We always fulfil our commitments. We will never allow any question mark on our credibility and will not compromise on the country's unity and integrity. We implement whatever we say in our manifesto. We have to do whatever we say," Singh said.

"We will go for 'One Nation One Election. We will take views of every quarter including all political parties on it," he said.

On UCC, the defence minister said even the Constitution-makers felt a need for it, as it is mentioned in the directive principles.

"The Congress wants to create fear psychosis; they want to use the Hindu-Muslim card," he said.

"They do not have any issue. They want to form a government by dividing the society in the name of caste, creed and religion and they have always done it," he alleged.

Asked about the relatively lower voting percentage that ranged from 66-67 per cent in the first two phases of the elections, Singh said it was not a matter of concern for the BJP.

The defence minister said the opposition parties are not being able to enthuse their supporters to come out and vote.

On the issue of reservation, Singh alleged that the Congress is misleading the nation.

"The Congress is trying to mislead people. There will not be any end to reservations. They are making false allegations against us," Singh said.

The Congress has also asked the BJP leaders to clear the party's stance on whether it would remove the 50 per cent cap on reservation for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, and the Other Backward Classes.

"We will not tinker with the reservations at all," Singh said while replying to a query.

The Congress has promised to remove the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SC, ST and OBC.

Blue corner notice issued against Prajwal Revanna: Karnataka Home Minister



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara on Sunday said a Blue Corner notice has been issued and Interpol's help is being taken to bring NDA's Hassan Lok Sabha candidate Prajwal Revanna, who is facing sexual harassment cases, back to India.

A Blue Corner Notice is issued by the international police cooperation body to collect additional information from its member

countries about a person's identity, location or activities in relation to a crime.

The minister said the Special Investigation Team formed to probe the sex scandal will decide on how to bring Prajwal back.

"Already Blue Corner notice has been issued. The Interpol will inform all the countries and locate him," Parameshwara told reporters here.

Appreciating the work of SIT, formed to probe the case, he said the team is doing its job

and has acted as per law on the complaints it has received.

He recalled it has arrested the 'accused,' apparently referring to Prajwal's father HD Revanna, who was apprehended in an abduction case.

Prajwal's father Revanna, a JD(S) MLA, is also facing molestation and kidnapping charges, and has been arrested by the SIT on Saturday.

He was arrested by the sleuths of SIT on Saturday in the kidnapping case linked to sexual abuse allegations against his son Prajwal. He was picked up soon after a court here rejected his anticipatory bail plea.

Explicit video clips allegedly involving the 33-year-old Prajwal, grandson of JD(S) patriarch and former Prime Minister Deve Gowda, had started making the rounds in Hassan in recent days, following which the state government constituted the SIT to probe the sexual abuse allegations against the MP.

Tents, fans, ambulances set up at booths to help voters beat heat



PTI ■ BENGALURU

With just two days left for the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls in Karnataka, the Election Commission has made elaborate arrangements to increase voter turnout amid the soaring temperatures in the 14 constituencies that go to the polls on May 7.

The first phase of the general elections in 14 of Karnataka's 28 Lok Sabha constituencies was held on April 26, and the second, for the rest of the 14 segments, is on May 7.

From arranging shamianas and tents, additional fans and drinking water facilities, to keeping ambulances on standby and using adjacent rooms of the polling booth as waiting areas, the Election Commission is making efforts to ensure that the polling percentage

is not affected due to the "harsh summer". There are 28,269 polling stations in these 14 constituencies - Chikkodi, Belgaum, Bagalkot, Bijapur, Gulbarga, Raichur, Bidar, Koppal, Bellary, Haveri, Dharwad, Uttara Kannada, Davangere and Shimoga -- which are going to the polls on May 7. In this first phase, Karnataka recorded 69.56 per cent voter turnout. Speaking to PTI, Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Meena said the constituencies where polling will take place on May 7 are in North Karnataka region and the temperature is slightly high there, "so we have made all necessary arrangements to ensure that people aren't deterred from coming out of their homes to vote." He further said, "It is a harsh summer, so we are making special arrangements to mitigate this temperature, (and the

possibility of) stroke, dehydration... So, we are making special arrangements for shades, drinking water, fans wherever required at the polling stations." The poll body has also roped in ASHA workers and Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) workers to handle any medical emergency that may arise at the polling stations. "We also have local-level health workers including ASHA workers and ANMs from primary health centres, so they will have basic medical kits to ensure that first aid is given to voters and polling officials in case of any medical emergency," he said.

Ambulances have also been kept ready in a cluster of polling stations so that patients requiring more than first aid can be quickly taken to hospital, he added.

The priority is to ensure the safety and well-being of poll officials and voters, especially senior citizens and persons with disabilities. Adequate number of tents and umbrellas for shade, and chairs to seat the officials and voters have been provided at the polling stations to ensure that they are not exposed to direct sunlight. "All arrangements are being done to ensure that people have a pleasant experience and that the harsh summer will not deter them from coming to vote. We will do our best to see that people will not face any problem," the CEO said. There are a total of 2,59,52,958 electors in these 14 constituencies, out of which 1,29,83,406 are male, 1,29,67,607 are female and 1,945 are others.



Congress has no support left, not even in its bastions: Dhami

PTI ■ BUDAUN (UP)

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Sunday said Congress has no support left in its once-considered bastions.

Attacking Rahul Gandhi for not contesting from the Amethi Lok Sabha seat this time, Dhami said, "No ground has left for Congress anywhere in the country on seats once considered their traditional seats."

On Fire incidents in Uttarakhand, Dhami, who was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a rally here, said the authorities have filed more than 350 FIRs in this connection.

"We conducted a review meeting on Saturday and responsibilities have been given to officers. We are also working on the Char Dham Yatra, which is about to start," he said.

Asked about giving a ticket to Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's son from the Kaiserganj seat, he said the Samajwadi Party is a dynastic party and not the BJP. Former Wrestling Federation of India chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh is accused of sexually assaulting several female wrestlers. A case was filed against him by the Delhi Police last year.

Congress to approach courts for disqualification of MLAs involved in anti-party activities

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Congress general secretary in-charge of Assam Jitendra Singh on Sunday said the party will approach the courts for disqualification of its MLAs who are involved in "anti-party" activities after the Assembly Speaker "failed" to act on its petitions to cancel their membership of the House.

"We have already written to the Speaker seeking disqualification of Congress MLAs indulging in anti-party activities. That the Speaker is not acting against them shows that the BJP government is not following rules," Singh said, addressing a press conference here.

He said the party will now approach the high court and even the Supreme Court, if needed, to get these legislators disqualified.

The state's principal



opposition party has submitted multiple petitions to Assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary seeking disqualification of at least five MLAs for various "anti-party" activities, like lending support to the government, voting against party nominee

in Rajya Sabha poll and campaigning against the party candidate in Lok Sabha elections.

On recent show-cause notice to Goalpara (West) MLA Abdul Rashid Mandal, Singh said, "There was a complaint against him and he was

served show-cause notice. He has given his reply. It is being studied and follow up action will be taken."

AICC general secretary Ajoy Kumar, also speaking at the same press meet, claimed that Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma wants to return to the Congress, which he had left for the BJP in 2015.

"We hear that he wants to return and is evaluating the options, once Narendra Modi loses this election. But the Congress will never accept a turncoat like him," Kumar, the party in-charge for Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, claimed.

Alleging large-scale corruption against Sarma, he said, "I have come from the second most corrupt state (Odisha) to the most corrupt state (Assam) in the country." He claimed that the BJP-led government has "failed" the

state on all fronts, with rising unemployment and corruption in the name of building roads and other infrastructure, among others.

"Unemployment has increased by 7 per cent on one hand, and liquor shops are mushrooming on the other hand. The youth, who have no jobs, are getting addicted to the easily available liquor. Sarma has become the 'liquor man of India,'" Kumar alleged.

The AICC leader alleged that the Modi government has "failed" on economic, employment and national security fronts.

Money is concentrated at the hands of a few people leading to a greater rich-poor divide, unemployment is rising and the PM remains silent on China and Pakistan-based militants continue to carry out attacks, he claimed.

One more opportunity for Andhra staff on poll duty who missed voting: CEO



PTI ■ VIZIANAGARAM (ANDHRA PRADESH)

Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena on Sunday said that the Election Commission will facilitate another opportunity to vote for employees on election duty who missed exercising their franchise.

During a visit to Vizianagaram to check voting facilities, the CEO

noted that such employees will be given the opportunity on May 7 and 8.

"We are working with the goal to ensure that every employee discharging election duties will be offered the postal ballot facility," said Meena in a press release.

In the event of eligible employees not finding their names on the postal ballot list and also in case of not applying for this facility,

Meena said they can still go ahead and include their name to vote by producing the election duty order and identity card at their relevant facilitation centres.

"Home voting and postal ballot voting for all will be completed by (the) 9th of this month (May)," the CEO told PTI. Further, he highlighted that minimum facilities and helpdesks have been arranged at all facilitation centres.

Besides making all the necessary arrangements for conducting polls in the southern state, Meena observed that election staff have already undergone two rounds of training.

Moreover, he noted that cash, liquor and other inducements worth Rs 450 crore have been seized in the run-up to polls until now.

Elections for the 175-member Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh are scheduled on May 13.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Nepal plays the hardball

Nepal is flexing its muscles by depicting Indian territories on its currency notes

In a recent development that has stirred regional tensions, Nepal has included certain disputed territories in its new currency notes. The move not only challenges India's sovereignty claims but also signals a significant alignment shift towards its northern neighbour, China. This seemingly innocuous act of updating currency notes has escalated into a diplomatic standoff and the growing influence of external powers in the region. The inclusion of the disputed territories, namely Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura, has sparked outrage in India, with officials condemning Nepal's actions as a violation of bilateral agreements and provocative steps that can further deteriorate the relations between the two countries. India has urged Nepal to respect sovereignty, return to dialogue and refrain from unjustified assertions. Earlier the relationship between New Delhi and Kathmandu became strained following Nepal's release of a political map in mid-May 2020, which incorporated territories like Lipulekh,



Kalapani and Limpiyadhura, previously depicted in India's November 2019 map. At the heart of the dispute lies historical ambiguity and differing interpretations of border demarcations. While Nepal claims that the territories rightfully belong to it based on historical treaties and cartographic evidence, India maintains control over these regions, citing its historical precedents and strategic imperatives. The dispute has simmered for decades, occasionally flaring up but never fully resolved.

The present move by Nepal has a lot to do with its new political leadership which is deliberately leveraging its proximity with China to browbeat India.

Besides, many other issues have also cropped up which have been a cause of concern for Kathmandu. India's Agniveer policy has also not gone down well with Nepal. What makes Nepal's move particularly noteworthy is its perceived alignment with China. Over the past few years, Nepal-China relations have strengthened considerably, fuelled by mutual economic interests and strategic cooperation. China has invested heavily in Nepal's infrastructure projects, including roads and telecommunications networks, enhancing connectivity between the two countries. Furthermore, Nepal's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has deepened its economic dependence on Beijing, providing an alternative to traditional ties with India. Against this backdrop, Nepal's decision to incorporate disputed territories in its currency notes could be interpreted as a strategic gesture signalling its independence from Indian influence. It is indeed a reason to set off alarm bells in New Delhi and it should take some immediate steps to stop the drifting away of Nepal and becoming part of Chinese hegemony. It would be India's loss if Nepal also walked the Maldives' path. It is time to leverage historical India-Nepal ties and convince the new leadership that China is only going to use Nepal and suck it dry as it did many other nations.

PICTALK



Anganvadi workers take part in a voting awareness campaign ahead of the polling for Lok Sabha elections, in Jalaun PTI

Mastering self-leadership during work from home

As work dynamics evolve towards multi-location, knowledge-driven autonomy, employees' proactive task management is essential

While some suggest that work from home (WFH) offers greater autonomy, leading to increased family time and reduced commuting, others argue that it blurs the boundaries between work and home, potentially diminishing productivity. The co-location of work and home during WFH blurs the traditional separation between the workplace and the family domain. This integration can exacerbate conflicts between work and home responsibilities, resulting in heightened levels of job dissatisfaction, anxiety and disengagement from work.

As individuals possess finite personal resources such as energy and attention, focusing on one role often depletes resources for another. For instance, individuals working from home full-time may frequently transition between work responsibilities and home duties, such as pausing work to attend to childcare or household tasks. These transitions can further strain individuals' capacity to effectively manage both work and personal responsibilities. Boundary theory has become



increasingly relevant in the context of WFH. Expanding upon this theory, it is observed that employees are more likely to transition between different roles on days when they are telecommuting compared to when they are physically present in the office. When employees work from home, both their work and home roles converge within the same physical space, creating a unique dynamic.

According to boundary theory, the nature of these role transitions can significantly impact conflicts between work and home domains. Certain types of role transitions may facilitate the blending of work and home responsibilities. For example, interrupting work to attend to familial duties, such as picking up children from

school, can lead to conflicts arising from the home encroaching upon work time (home-work conflict). Subsequently, resuming work after attending to such responsibilities may trigger conflicts stemming from work encroaching upon home life (work-home conflict).

Organisations play a pivotal role in supporting employees by offering flexibility, particularly on days when they work from home, thereby assisting them in managing conflicts that arise when their work and home roles intersect. However, relying solely on organisational support may not offer a comprehensive solution.

The concept of self-leadership becomes invaluable during periods when employees face challenges arising from the blurred boundaries between work and home, particularly on remote workdays. The considerable expansion of remote and hybrid work in the aftermath of the pandemic underscores the importance for employees to proactively manage their responsibilities. Although remote work was not unprecedented,

Delhi school bomb hoax reflects rancor

The extremists might be unaware that their malicious actions could jeopardise the safety of their community. It falls upon the responsible segment of the community to rein in the extremists



PRAFULL GORADIA

The bomb hoax received by up to 285 schools in and around Delhi, reflects the burning anger among extremists. Although the threatening message from a Quranic text was dispatched from a Russian electronic source, evidently, the email identities were sent from Delhi, most probably from Indians. The email was most offensive to quote; "Did you real think that there would be no answer for all the evil you have done? Since childhood, the fire of jihad has been lit in our hearts, we have become this fire, Inshallah who preside over just retribution". The extremists may not realise that their nefarious activity can endanger the safety of their community. It is for the responsible section or the community to control the extremists. If they think that it is for the law-and-order authorities only to deal with such mischief, they are mistaken. The police and others can do so only much and no more. In short, it is not their function to protect the goodwill of the responsible section of the minority. If they do not do so, the Indian people almost would gain the impression the responsible section is also somewhat sympathetic towards the extremists' activity.

Remember Partition is not a forgotten chapter of India's recent history. Pakistan and Bangladesh are standing minarets of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Two Nation Theory whereby Hindus and Muslims cannot coexist in the same country. Hardly any Hindus have been allowed to remain in Pakistan, wherein Bangladesh non-Muslims are reducing in numbers by the week. Mohandas Gandhi told Dr Syama Prasad Mookherjee and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur the day before he was assassinated that India was a secular country because the division was a territorial and not religious one. This may have been a kind human gesture to protect the minority, but it was not the truth. Most Hindus, do not believe that it was not a division based on religion. The Hindu heart believes that it was the final settlement between Hindus and Muslims. Yes, Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi



and their followers are free to hold their views but that era has passed and a new age has dawned in India.

Following in step with the moving train of time is wise and not getting stuck in the mud of the past. Here, it is also wise to remember that Europe no longer welcomes emigrants and the USA is reportedly slow and shows of much reluctance. The only open space appears to be Africa. One of the loud messages of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza is that emigrants are no longer welcome even in a West Asian country, whether Egypt, Jordan or any other. No neighbour has lifted their fingers toward the trigger for saving the Gaza Heights. One reminded of the ghazal by Talat Mahmood "Jayein to Jayein Kahan".

Mughal emperor Akbar understood clearly even as a boy it could be easy to rule India if he made Hindus who were 95 per cent of his empire safe, happy and well-treated. As a sign of his impartiality between religions, he went, for Muslims to the extreme extent of not performing sunnat or circumcision on his son Salim who rose to become Jahangir,



PARTITION IS NOT A FORGOTTEN CHAPTER OF INDIA'S RECENT HISTORY. PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH ARE STANDING MINARETS OF MUHAMMAD ALI JINNAH'S TWO NATION THEORY, WHEREBY HINDUS AND MUSLIMS CANNOT COEXIST IN THE SAME COUNTRY

the future emperor. This Islamic king, if he were not emperor, would have been accused of being a murtad; or apoState, fit for the death penalty. His eventual innovation was called Din-e-Ilahi. By implication, he was replacing Islam with a synthetic religion that would include people of all faiths. In practice, not a great deal happened but it was a gesture especially to the Hindus, how much he was prepared to go forward to placate their sentiments. This was not the end of his vision but in a way only the beginning. He abolished the vexatious, jaziya tax which Hindus had to pay to receive protection from the State. Whenever he conquered a Rajput territory Akbar offered the Hindu prince his territory back under the Mughal suzerainty, provided the prince was prepared to align with and even fight for the empire. That indeed was a generous gesture by not dispossessing the Rajput of the kingdom completely and ensuring him of a place in the empire. He often offered to marry a princess of the principality. If his hand was accepted, he did not ask the lady to convert to Islam. There was no better way of touching the

hearts of the Rajputs. In recorded history, no Muslim conqueror was this generous. In contrast, Aurangzeb was the opposite. He went down to desecrating and demolishing Hindu temples like Vrindavan, Mathura and Banaras. Humiliating Hindus and breaking their hearts was the preferred point in his agenda. To many, it would seem that being emperor and ruling Hindu India was merely his pastime. Alamgir Aurangzeb's vicious cruelties extended much beyond the demolition of temples. When he brought down the Kashi Vishwanath temple at Banaras, he left the western gate of the Hindu edifice as it was, so that every worshipper would be reminded of what the Mughals had done. When he desecrated the Govind Dev temple at Vrindavan, he demolished the top two floors only, leaving the bottom two for the Hindus to see and feel the humiliation. What benefit could such conduct bring to a ruler? Only Aurangzeb could have known.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLITICAL DIATRIBE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Modi's advice to RaGa: 'Daro mat, bhaago mat'" published on May 5, this is my response. Contesting from Wayanad as well as Rae Bareilly is "cowardice" of 'Shehzada' indeed. Still, contesting from Vadodara as well as Varanasi was an act of "supreme bravery" by a certain "Hindu Hriday Samrat"! Relentless stalking of the much-maligned "Pappu" and consistent character assassination of him provide direct testimony of who is in relentless fear of Rahul Gandhi!

If Sonia Gandhi's adoption of the Rajya Sabha route proves her "escapist" mindset; hope this very same formula applies to S.Jaishankar to Ashwini Vaishnaw also! Lots of thanks for shedding a deluge of tears for the "atrocities" upon women in Sandeshkhali; but please let at least a single teardrop make an appearance for the spine-chilling gangrape murder and forced cremation of the Dalit girl in Hathras, murder of the little Kathua girl after gangrape and torture for days within a temple, mass gangrape and murder of women in 2002 Gujarat and gangrape and murder of Kuki women in Manipur after getting paraded naked! A Constitutional representative claimed that Hindus are "second class citizens" in Bengal, implying which community is "first class." This is blatant communalism in our diverse democracy.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

RAHUL'S STRATEGY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Rae Bareilly Rahul's new battlefield," published on May 4, this is my response. Gandhis have ended weeks of suspense with a twist and chose Rae Bareilly over Amethi for Rahul Gandhi, there is no doubt Rae Bareilly is a safer seat than Amethi in the current electoral context. Putting Kishori Lal Sharma in Amethi, who is an old Congress loyalist and served both Amethi and RaeBareilly in

Pakistan on Indian elections



Apropos, "Pak wants Rahul as PM to weaken Govt: Modi," The Pioneer, May 3, this is my response. Whatever may be the political rhetoric of PM Modi linking the Congress party to Pakistan, the fact is that the latter desperately wants the Modi-led NDA Government to lose in the ongoing elections for many reasons. In contrast to the Congress party's soft approach against terrorism sponsored by Pakistan, the

Modi Government's zero-tolerance stance has triggered the surgical strike on the Balakot, the den of terrorists, in retaliation to the Pulwama attack in 2019. The abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir by the Modi Government has rattled Pakistan and it even failed to garner the support from the international community on the matter.

Add to this, the NDA Government's categorical stand to not initiate the talks to break the logjam between India and Pakistan as long as the latter aids and finances the terrorists to target India has put Pakistan in a disadvantageous position, even as it is embroiled in the economic turmoil - while it badly needs the trade with India. In these contexts, Pakistan strongly believes the BJP Government under Modi has severely jeopardised its machinations to target India and its interests as well.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

Gandhi's absence, has in a sense provided a cakewalk to the Smiriti Irani. It will be after 25 years that there are no Gandhis in the fray from Amethi. Gandhis not contesting from either of these seats would have been a bad political message and would have shattered the confidence of Congress workers. In the eventuality of Rahul Gandhi winning both Wayanad and Rae Bareilly, he has to leave either of the two and it would be better if he retains Wayanad to concentrate on the 2026 Kerala assembly elections and leave Rae Bareilly for his sister Priyanka Vadhra to contest in the by-poll. With this strategy, Gandhi would be able to revive the Congress in Uttar Pradesh because, without any Gandhi at the helm, Congress could not expect to revive itself in the State.

Bal Govind | Noida

ALLEGATION RESPONSE

Madam — Apropos to news report, "Woman staffer files complaint against Bengal Governor," published on May 3,

this is my response. A Raj Bhavan employee who works in the telephone room and stays at the residential quarters on the campus itself, complained of molestation against West Bengal (WB) governor C V Ananda Bose on Thursday evening, introducing an element of the unprecedented in Bengal politics and pitting the Trinamool Government and the governor's office in direct conflict in the middle of an election season. It's important to investigate the allegations against Bose carefully.

A central agency should investigate under a Supreme Court judge. If the TMC Government is found to be trying to defame him, it should be scrapped. If there is any truth to the allegations, the Governor should also be punished. The truth must be revealed and the innocent must be treated with full dignity.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

SUDARSHAN KRIYA: A KEY TO A PEACEFUL LIFE

A transformative path overcoming addiction with redemption



RAVI VALLURI

Some years ago, while I was posted at Gorakhpur, an Art of Living devotee happened to read my maiden book, *The Matter of the Mind*, wherein I narrated the efficacy of the Sudarshan Kriya technique and how it extricated me from the cesspool of alcoholism. Today by the grace of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and the breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya I am sober. The devotee connected me to a psychiatrist and soon along with two other faculty members, we began conducting courses for alcoholics and drug addicts at a rehab centre. They were around 40 and we were three. Some looked menacing, others disenchanted, a few engulfed by ennui. But in our arsenal was the potent cassette of Sudarshan Kriya enveloped with the divine benediction of Gurudev.

We began with gentle warm-ups. This was followed by pranayama and finally Sudarshan Kriya. A few hardened addicts attempted to derail the Kriya. But the febrile minds gradually settled as the rhythms of Soham resonated in the dingy hall.

Meaning of Sudarshan Kriya

The unique breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya is the fulcrum of the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living. Su means proper, Darshan implies vision and Kriya is a purifying action.

Through the actions of our breath, we appreciate a proper vision of who we are. It is momentous to understand that nature runs on a rhythm. For instance, the sun rises and sets at a particular time, similarly, seasons arrive and exit at predetermined times.

Our emotions, feelings and thoughts are all cast in the symphony of rhythm. We are unable to distinguish between cacophony and symphony in this frenetic pace of life which is cannonaded by innumerable thoughts. When sounds are harmonised by the syllable of Soham we can term it as magical music.



Enlightenment is not accruing anything providential but harmonising our whole being rhythmically. During the breathing process participants feel varied sensations, emotions, laughter and weeping among others.

Chanting "Soham" to match one's breath with a Guru's guidance is a relaxation technique that releases stress and promotes relaxation. Studies show that it can improve heart rate, cognitive function, breathing patterns and calmness in both mind and body. It may also have positive impacts on the endocrine system and potentially prevent Alzheimer's disease. This technique increases the body's energy levels.

This wonderful knowledge and wisdom have triggered humaneness to blossom. Every cell and particle of the body overflows with jollity and life is abundant with the glow of love and the body becomes the wick. Love and belongingness become a natural process of our inner being if practised unflinchingly.

Several practitioners feel they can practice the breathing technique at home. But that is only walking half the path. It is indispensable and paramount that one must practice the technique daily and attend the follow-up once a week, where a certified Art of Living teacher plays the chant of Soham in Gurudev's voice as it reinvigorates the body and mind. One should also be wary of imitations available on YouTube these days. Breath is the very kernel of our very existence.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Consequences of illusionary conspiracy



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

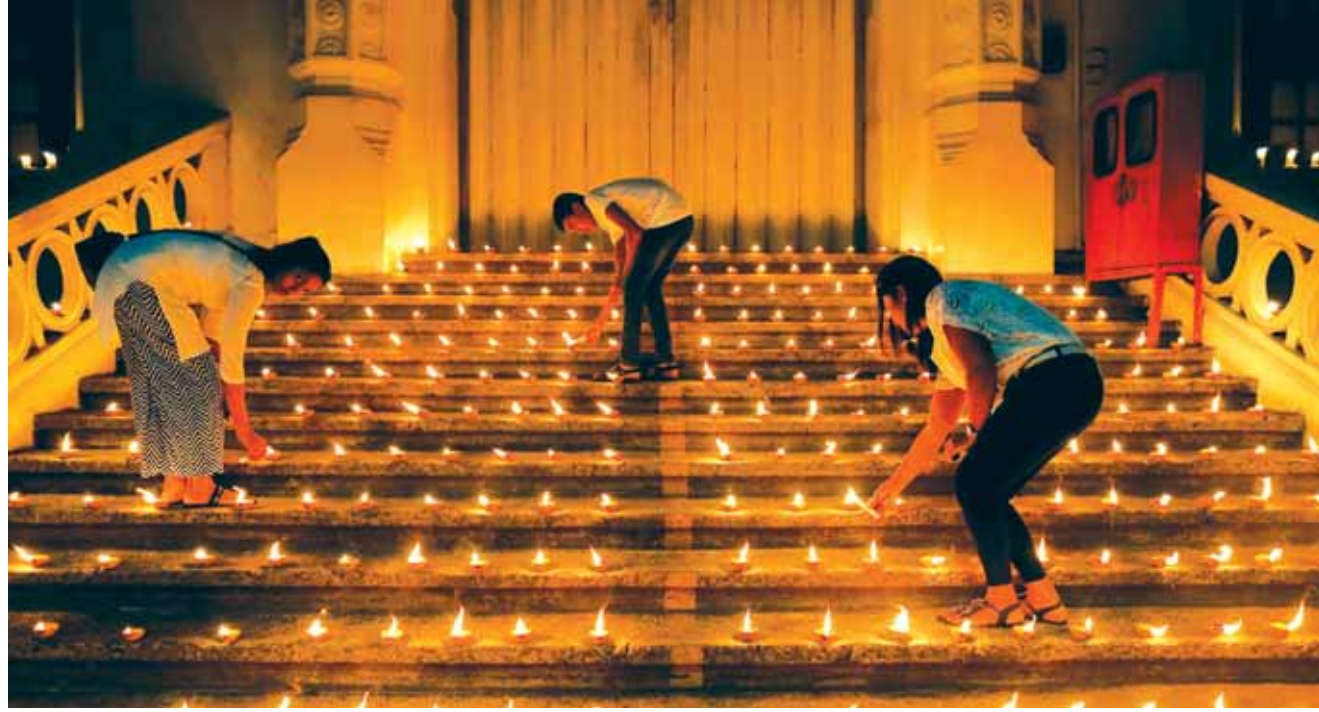
The wounds from the Easter Sunday Massacre linger, but within Sri Lankans' resilience lies a beacon of hope, illuminating a path forward amidst profound despair

After the Easter attack tragedy, there arose a chorus, delving into the search for a "mastermind" behind the barbaric attack. Known as the Easter Sunday Massacre, on 21st April 2019, eight suicide bombers detonated themselves, targeting selected places in Colombo and Batticaloa, resulting in the deaths of over 260 innocent people and injuring hundreds more. A former Attorney General, a key figure in this discourse, ignited speculation by suggesting a possible hidden agenda. However, his evasion of the court and avoidance of investigators seeking clarification on his previous statements only intensified suspicions. Politicians, social activists, journalists and even ordinary citizens unwittingly propagated a conspiracy theory based on prejudices and unverified media reports.

From my perspective, this conspiracy theory inadvertently served a unique purpose amid the chaos and irregularities. It acted as a temporary balm, diluting the rising tide of animosity against Muslims and briefly restoring social equilibrium. Without it, the nation risked a recurrence of the 1983 ethnic riots, albeit on a larger scale. Yet, as the conspiracy theory gained traction, it altered the societal psyche, fostering normalcy among diverse ethnic groups, albeit with attempts by some to exploit the situation. What remains lamentable is that this theory misled the public and squandered an opportunity to establish a socio-legal framework for preventing future occurrences.

During my conversation with Malith Jayathillake, former National List Member of Parliament and head of the Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security appointed by then-President Maithripala Sirisena, the overlooked reality became stark. The report he presented in February 2020 outlined proposals for formulating and implementing laws to ensure national security, eradicate new terrorism and extremism by fostering unity among races and religions. Regrettably, this invaluable contribution by lawmakers was largely ignored. Jayathillake dismisses the notion of a conspiracy behind the attacks, recognising instead a meticulously planned suicide mission inspired by the ideology of the Islamic State.

Concurrently, Dr Ameer Ali from Murdoch University's School of Business and Governance dispels conspiracy notions, attributing the attack to subsequent political manipulation. Yet, in probing the roots of extremism, he identifies a turning point in 1977 when the country embraced the free market. Within certain segments of the Muslim communities, exclusivism emerged, alienating inclusivism and sowing the seeds for the proliferation of extreme ideas within the societal fabric. In the aftermath of the tragedy, about a month later, I engaged in an interview with Jonah Blank, a Principal Investigator and Senior Political Scientist for RAND Corporation. Blank astutely highlighted two critical aspects of the Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka. Firstly, he emphasised that the attack was a result of political negligence rather than being solely classified as an intelligence failure by various parties. Secondly, Blank pointed out that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) did not choose Sri Lanka; rather, Sri Lankan extremists opted for allegiance to ISIS. Addressing the ongoing political crisis in the country, Blank remarked, "When the



AMID THIS TURBULENT PERIOD, THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EASTER MASSACRE SERVES AS A DISTRESSING REMINDER OF THE COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY TO LEARN FROM THE PAST AND FORTIFY THE NATION AGAINST POTENTIAL THREATS

nation's two top officials are locked in open conflict, they can't cooperate to ensure the safety of the citizens." Despite my interview with Blank becoming a talking point in various media circles and social groups, rational arguments and factual information struggled to counter the persistence of conspiracy theories.

Complicating matters further, a full four years following the tragic incident, a British television channel not only fuelled baseless speculation but later begrudgingly admitted to a shocking lack of substantial evidence backing the allegations. These unfounded claims stemmed from a lone source purportedly recruited by a United Nations agency, casting a dark shadow over the entire narrative.

Amidst the discourse, I observed a political theatre unfolding, overshadowing the much-needed societal discussion. Those involved seemed more focused on accusing one another rather than earnestly seeking the truth. In the last five years since this barbaric attack, committees appointed by the President and Parliament have conducted investigations, producing lengthy reports. However, there is a noticeable absence of dialogue about future threats and the potential aftermath.

The tragic events unfolded against the backdrop of a nation grappling with its political identity and leadership struggles. Blank's insights into political negligence shed light on a systemic issue that extended beyond intelligence failures. Sri Lanka's socio-political terrain, marred by internal conflicts and power struggles, created an environment ripe for extremist ideologies to take root. The intricate web of political discord, coupled with a failure to prioritise national security, laid the groundwork for the devastating Easter Sunday attacks. As the media frenzy surrounding conspiracy theories intensified, genuine efforts to understand the

root causes of the attack were drowned out. Blank's observations about the political crisis resonated deeply, underscoring the importance of unity among leaders during times of national peril. However, the cacophony of blame-shifting and finger-pointing persisted, hindering the nation's ability to address the multifaceted challenges posed by this emerging social phenomenon.

Amid this turbulent period, the fifth anniversary of the Easter massacre serves as a distressing reminder of the collective responsibility to learn from the past and fortify the nation against potential threats. The committees' findings, though crucial, must be more than backdated analyses; they should serve as a foundation for proactive measures and policies to safeguard Sri Lanka's future. The narrative must evolve beyond the immediate aftermath to address the lingering societal scars and instil a renewed sense of resilience and preparedness.

After spending nearly five years immersing myself in a myriad of materials and conducting extensive interviews with numerous sources on this heinous crime, I am compelled to acknowledge the absence of any substantive facts supporting conspiracy theories. Instead, what emerges is the chilling reality of negligence and deliberate ignorance in addressing extremism and the imperative need for robust deradicalisation efforts. I opt to accentuate the triumph of our adversaries—a triumph exacerbated by the gross negligence and underestimation displayed by defenders of national security and political stability.

Our genuine focus must now pivot resolutely towards preventing the recurrence of such crimes and sculpting a secure future for our nation, a nation that has too often lived amidst violence rather than peace, grappling with both internal and external threats. The repercussions of the Easter massacre extend

far beyond the economic sphere, infiltrating into an unprecedented degeneration of societal values.

Regrettably, as we mark the fifth anniversary of the attacks, a pressing and profound necessity emerges for a narrative shift—one that moves beyond unsubstantiated accusations aimed at specific individuals. We must transcend the cycle of blame and retrospective scrutiny, opting instead for thorough approaches that delve into the underlying causes of extremism, fanaticism and terrorism regardless of ethnic or religious affiliations. This calls for a holistic approach, encompassing not only the reinforcement of intelligence and security protocols but also the fostering of a society that celebrates inclusivity, empathy and constructive discourse.

The journey toward healing and rebuilding necessitates a sincere effort from all corners of society. Ultimately, the aftermath of the Easter Sunday bombings underscores the resilience of the Sri Lankan people in the face of immense adversity. Looking forward, it is paramount to harness this collective strength and channel it into comprehensive strategies. These must not only confront immediate threats but also lay the foundations for a future characterised by security and harmony. The lessons distilled from this tragedy should propel the nation towards a collective commitment—a commitment to unity, understanding and the prevention of recurring horrors. Otherwise, in a society where the majority languishes in a deep slumber, indulging in unproven conspiracies and scapegoating a select few, we will only rouse from our stupor when the next tragedy inevitably befalls us.

(This is the second part of the article on five years of Easter attack in Sri Lanka. concluded (The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist. Views are personal)

Pakistani YouTubers: The art of subtle propaganda

As consumers of digital content, it is crucial to discern between genuine discourse and agenda-driven narratives

Today's warfare is increasingly characterised by information warfare tactics. Social media serves as an ideal weapon for conducting modern conflicts where the battle for narratives and perceptions plays a crucial role in shaping outcomes. In this digital context, the emergence of Pakistani YouTubers has garnered significant attention in India over the past five years. Their channels span various genres from reaction videos to those featuring interactions with common people in Pakistan and podcasts and discussions on geopolitics. However, a closer look reveals a subtle yet concerning trend in their content. Initially, these YouTubers sought to attract Indian viewership by praising India



SULAGNA MOHANTY

unabashedly. They lauded India's policies and economic growth and even expressed admiration for Prime Minister Modi and the BJP. Their narratives echoed sentiments of unity and regret over the partition, portraying India's economic liberalisation in the 1990s as a commendable move. This strategic approach garnered them millions of Indian subscribers. Even edu-

cated Indians appreciated such rare, seemingly sane views and analyses from Pakistani youth.

At first, it was perplexing to witness the sudden change in tune from Pakistan, a country historically marred by animosity towards India. Suddenly, Pakistani YouTubers were singing praises for Jawaharlal Nehru as the best Prime Minister and socialism as the ideal policy for India. This abrupt shift raised eyebrows, especially considering Pakistan's track record of hostility towards India over the past 70 years. So, it begged the question how was it that Pakistan has only now discovered virtues in Indian leadership and policies that they previously overlooked or actively opposed? But still, these

YouTubers were embraced by Indians with open arms, evident from the predominance of views and comments on their videos from India.

However, as time passed, their mask began to unravel. Channels focusing on geopolitics gradually began to push their agenda subtly. Considering Pakistan's precarious economic situation, these YouTubers advocated for the resumption of trade with India which was halted by their Prime Minister Imran Khan in 2019 as a protest against India's decision to revoke Article 370 in Kashmir. They openly criticised Imran Khan's decision, labelling it as foolish given the adverse impact it had had on Pakistan's economy. However, recently when the

Indian Government did not reciprocate to the India-Pak trade agenda, these YouTubers' tones shifted dramatically towards anti-India and pro-China propaganda. Suddenly, they started painting India as a regressive Hindu country with an authoritarian Government where minorities as well as the democracy are allegedly in grave danger. Now, they consistently invite guests onto their channel providing them with a platform to perpetuate anti-India and anti-Indian narratives.

It is striking how these Pakistani YouTubers seldom address the pressing issues within their own country. They seem conspicuously silent on the plight of minorities particularly the violence perpetrated against them.

While they are quick to produce videos condemning alleged injustices against Muslims in Palestine and India, they conveniently overlook similar atrocities within Pakistan.

Some YouTubers remain silent on the oppression of Muslims in China, despite evidence of human rights abuses against Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang. This raises questions about the sincerity of their activism and suggests geopolitical influences on their narrative.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that these Pakistani YouTubers also openly criticise their Government and army, a rarity in Pakistan where dissent against the establishment is often met with severe repercussions. This raises suspi-

cions about their affiliations, true intentions and ulterior motives behind their digital presence. One cannot help but wonder if these YouTubers are planted by some foreign agencies to serve as mouthpieces for their agenda.

Here, the concern is that many Indian youths, unaware of this shift, continue to consume their content, inadvertently perpetuating the agenda. Many Indian intellectuals and geopolitical experts have begun to criticise these YouTubers for their manipulative tactics. Interestingly, this manipulation is not only limited to India but has been extended to Bangladesh too as these podcasters churn out videos portraying the 1971 war as a mistake. They label West Pakistan's attempt to

suppress and colonise East Pakistan as evil and this new narrative aims to attract Bangladeshi viewers first and subtly push their agenda later. In the era of information, overload critical thinking is our best defence against manipulation.

Hence, it is imperative to recognise and address this subtle propaganda and analyse the content the Indians consume. As consumers of digital content, it is crucial to discern between genuine discourse and agenda-driven narratives. Everyone needs to realise and understand that India stands for peace and brotherhood but not at the expense of its national security.

(The writer is an academician; views are personal)

Israel orders closure of Al Jazeera offices as Qatar mediates Hamas talks

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israel ordered the local offices of Qatar's Al Jazeera satellite news network to close Sunday, escalating a long-running feud between the broadcaster and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line government as Doha-mediated ceasefire negotiations with Hamas hang in the balance.

The extraordinary order, which includes confiscating broadcast equipment, preventing the broadcast of the channel's reports and blocking its websites, is believed to be the first time Israel has ever shuttered a foreign news outlet.

The network has reported the Israeli-Hamas war nonstop since the militants' initial cross-border attack Oct. 7 and has maintained 24-hour coverage in the Gaza Strip amid Israel's grinding ground offensive that has killed and wounded members of its own staff. While including on-the-ground reporting of the war's casualties, its Arabic arm often publishes verbatim video statements from Hamas and other militant

groups in the region, drawing Netanyahu's ire.

"Al Jazeera reporters harmed Israel's security and incited against soldiers," Netanyahu said in a statement. "It's time to remove the Hamas mouthpiece from our country."

Al Jazeera issued a statement vowing it will "pursue all available legal channels through international legal institutions in its quest to protect both its rights and journalists, as well as the public's right to information."

"Israel's ongoing suppression of the free press, seen as an effort to conceal its actions in the Gaza Strip, stands in contravention of international and humanitarian law," the network said. "Israel's direct targeting and killing of journalists, arrests, intimidation and threats will not deter Al Jazeera from its commitment to cover, whilst more than 140 Palestinian journalists have been killed since the beginning of the war on Gaza."

Israeli media said the order allows Israel to block the channel from operating in the country for 45 days. The Israeli gov-

ernment has taken action against individual reporters over the decades since its founding in 1948, but broadly allows for a rambunctious media scene that includes foreign bureaus from around the world, even from Arab nations. That changed with a law passed last month, which Netanyahu's office says allows the government to take action against a foreign channel seen as "harming the country."

Immediately after the announcement, Al Jazeera's English arm began broadcasting a prerecorded message from one of its correspondents from a hotel the channel has used for months in east Jerusalem, which the Palestinians hope to one day have for their future state.

"They're also banning any devices — that includes my mobile phone," respondent Imran Khan said. "If I use that to do any kind of newsgathering, then the Israelis can simply confiscate it."

Al Jazeera went off Israel's main cable provider in the hours after the order. However, its

website and streaming links across multiple online platforms still operated Sunday. The ban did not appear to affect the channel's operations in the occupied West Bank or Gaza Strip, where Israel wields control but which are not sovereign Israeli territory.

The decision threatens to heighten tensions with Qatar at a time when the Doha government is playing a key role in mediation efforts to halt the war in Gaza, along with Egypt and the United States.

Qatar has had strained ties with Netanyahu in particular since he made comments suggesting that Qatar is not exerting enough pressure on Hamas to prompt it to relent in its terms for a truce deal. Qatar hosts Hamas leaders in exile at a political office in Doha.

The sides appear to be close to striking a deal, but multiple previous rounds of talks have ended with no agreement.

In a statement Sunday, Hamas condemned the Israeli government order, calling on international organizations to take

measures against Israel. Shortly after the government's decision, Cabinet members from the National Unity party criticized its timing, saying it "may sabotage the efforts to finalize the negotiations and stems from political considerations."

The party said that in general, it supported the decision.

Israel has long had a rocky relationship with Al Jazeera, accusing it of bias. Relations took a major downturn nearly two years ago when Al Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh was killed during an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank. Those relations further deteriorated following the outbreak of Israel's war against Hamas on Oct. 7, when the militant group carried out a cross-border attack in southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage.

Since then, the Israeli military campaign in Gaza has killed over 34,000 people, according to local health officials there, who don't break figures down into civilians and combatants.

In December, an Israeli strike

killed an Al Jazeera cameraman as he reported on the war in southern Gaza. The channel's bureau chief in Gaza, Wael Dahdouh, was wounded in the same attack. Dahdouh, a correspondent well-known to Palestinians during many wars, later evacuated Gaza but only after Israeli strikes killed his wife, three of his children and a grandson.

Al Jazeera is one of the few international media outlets to remain in Gaza throughout the war, broadcasting bloody scenes of airstrikes and overcrowded hospitals and accusing Israel of massacres. Israel accuses Al Jazeera, funded by Qatar's government, of collaborating with Hamas. Criticism of the channel is not new, however. The US government singled out the broadcaster during America's occupation of Iraq after its 2003 invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein and over airing videos of the late al-Qaida chief Osama bin Laden.

Al Jazeera has been closed or blocked by other Mideast governments.

Protesters at USC comply with school order to leave their encampment

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Protesters left a Palestinian encampment at the University of Southern California early Sunday after they were surrounded by police and told they could face arrest if they didn't go. The move, days before commencement events are set to begin on the Los Angeles campus, came after the university said campus safety officers, assisted by the Los Angeles Police Department, were clearing the area.

"If you are in the centre of campus, please leave. People who don't leave could be arrested," USC said on the social media platform X at about 4:15 am.

Livestream video from student journalists showed the encampment had emptied out as police formed a line to move remaining protesters away and stop people from re-entering the area.

The encampment had restarted after the LAPD first arrested 93 people on April 24. The atmosphere on the private university campus had largely remained calm since, while attention turned to arrests at the University of California, Los Angeles.

At the University of Virginia, 25 people were arrested Saturday for trespassing after police clashed with pro-Palestinian protesters who refused to remove tents from campus, and demonstrators at the University of Michigan chanted anti-war messages and waved flags during commencement ceremonies.

USC, a private university, has been the subject of student protests over the war in Gaza as well as the administration's decision to cancel a commencement speech by the valedictorian, a Muslim student who had expressed support for Palestinians. The university made that decision in mid-April, saying they had safety concerns after receiving threats.

Some Jewish groups had criticised the student's selection as speaker.

Administrators later cancelled the entire main-stage commencement planned for May 10, when 65,000 people were expected to gather to celebrate graduates. Other commencement activities, including graduation ceremonies for individual schools and colleges, are still scheduled from Thursday through Sunday. Access to the private campus has largely been restricted for people not affiliated with the university since late April.

Videos posted online Saturday evening showed some demonstrators engaging in calm songs and chants in preparation for expected police activity. The encampment has been set up on a campus green space, with dozens of tents surrounded by makeshift fencing covered in signs with various messages of support for Palestinians and criticism of the university and law enforcement.

A university representative read a statement nearby the encampment Saturday saying that it had to come down, according to Annenberg Media, a student-run campus publication, saying the encampment and unspecified acts of vandalism and theft of university property violated the law. Early Friday, several dozen counter-protesters had set up outside the encampment, playing scenes from the October 7 Hamas attack in Israel on a screen, Annenberg Media reported. In Virginia, student demonstrators began their protest on a lawn outside the school chapel Tuesday. On Saturday, video from WVAV-TV showed police wearing heavy gear and holding shields lined up on the campus in Charlottesville. Protesters chanted "Free Palestine," and university police said on the social platform X that an "unlawful assembly" had been declared in the area.

Driver dies after crashing into WH security barrier

Washington (AP): A driver died after a vehicle crashed into an outer perimeter gate of the White House complex, and the incident late on Saturday was being investigated as a traffic crash, police said.

President Joe Biden was spending the weekend in Delaware, and the Secret Service said there was no threat to the White House.

The male driver, who was not immediately identified, was found dead in the vehicle following the crash shortly before 10:30 pm, according to a Secret Service statement.

The Metropolitan Police Department said the vehicle crashed into a security barrier at the intersection of 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW. Police were called to the scene at 10:46 pm and said one adult male was pronounced dead from the crash into a security barrier around the complex.

Shooting in Los Angeles area injures 7

Long Beach (AP): A shooting in the Los Angeles area has left seven people injured, including four who were listed in critical condition.

Long Beach Police Department officers responded to a reported shooting around 11:15 pm Saturday in the area of South Street and Paramount Boulevard, the department said in a statement posted on social media.

At least seven victims suffered gunshot wounds and were transported by emergency responders or self-transported to area hospitals.

In addition to the four critical victims, three people had injuries that were not life-threatening, police said.

Sunak promises to work 'as hard as ever' after local elections

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Sunday promised to work "as hard as ever" after a disastrous set of election results saw his Conservative Party being unseated across several local authorities and even losing a mayoralty stronghold in the West Midlands region of England. The British Indian leader admitted his disappointment after Andy Street, the party's popular Mayor of West Midlands, narrowly lost to Labour rival Richard Parker by a mere 1,508 votes after a recount had to be ordered for the knife-edge result. This leaves Sunak with a solo sliver of hope in Ben Houchen, who had held on to the party's mayoralty in Tees Valley on Friday amid a virtual sweep for the Opposition parties, with Labour in the lead.

"It's been disappointing of course to lose dedicated

Conservative councillors and Andy Street in the West Midlands, with his track record of providing great public services and attracting significant investment to the area, but that has redoubled my resolve to continue to make progress on our plan," Sunak said in a statement.

"So we will continue working as hard as ever to take the fight to Labour and deliver a brighter future for our country," he said.

While Tory rebels have begun circling, the echo this time does not seem to be around replacing Sunak as party leader but piling pressure on him to get tougher on the party's core issues like setting a cap on legal migration and dramatically cutting taxes. Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman is leading this charge and issued a stinging rebuke in "The Daily Telegraph" to demand that it was time for Sunak to move on from "managerialism" and

show strong leadership.

"Let me cut to the chase so no one wastes time over-analysing this: we must not change our leader. Changing leader now won't work: the time to do so came and went. The hole to dig us out is the PM's, and it's time for him to start shovelling," writes the sacked Indian-origin ex-minister, who is at the forefront of the backbench rebellion. "Either we start fighting to win now, or we'll have no one else to blame when this week's political earthquake is made to look like a mere tremor come the general election night," she said. Others have chimed in to say it was time for Sunak to "wake up and smell the coffee" because the local election results show that the Labour Party is on course to stomp to victory in a general election, expected later this year.

Opposition leader Sir Keir Starmer has hailed his party's "phenomenal result", which included Labour's Sadiq Khan

being re-elected for a record third term as London Mayor on Friday. But Starmer also appealed to the voters who had punished the party over its weak stance on the Israel-Gaza conflict, after analysis showed that Labour suffered losses to independents and the anti-war Worker's Party of Britain in areas with large Islamic populations as a result. "I have heard you. I have listened. And I am determined to meet your concerns and to gain your respect and trust again in the future," said Starmer. But on the whole, the Labour camp will be celebrating this weekend as it virtually swept the mayoral elections across England, winning in Liverpool, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, and Greater Manchester.

With most of the results now in for the elections held for local councils on Thursday, Labour looks set to have grabbed over 1,100 seats.

Trudeau touts Canada as a 'rule-of-law country' after arrest of three Indians

PTI ■ TORONTO

Canada is a "rule-of-law country" with a strong and independent justice system and a fundamental commitment to protect its citizens, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Saturday at a Toronto gala celebrating Sikh heritage and culture.

"As the RCMP stated, the investigation remains ongoing, as does a separate and distinct investigation not limited to the involvement of the three people arrested yesterday," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) quoted Trudeau as saying.

He said that many in Canada's Sikh community are feeling unsafe following Nijjar's killing, adding: "Every Canadian has the fundamental right to live safely and free from discrimination and threats of violence in Canada."

The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Trudeau's allegations in September last year

of the "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of 45-year-old Nijjar, a Khalistan separatist.

India has dismissed Trudeau's charges as "absurd" and "motivated."

The presence of Sikh separatist groups in Canada has long frustrated India, which had designated Nijjar a "terrorist." After three Indian nationals were arrested in connection with the murder, Police in Canada said they had worked with US law enforcement agencies, without giving additional details. The police suggested more arrests might be coming.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Assistant Commissioner David Teboul, the force's commander for the Pacific region, said Friday that he wouldn't comment on the alleged links between the three men arrested and Indian offi-

cial but noted the force is "investigating connections to the government of India."

Meanwhile, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday said what is happening in poll-bound Canada over the killing of Nijjar is mostly due to their internal politics and has nothing to do with India.

He said a section of pro-Khalistan people are using Canada's democracy, creating a lobby and have become a vote bank.

The ruling party in Canada has no majority in Parliament and some parties depend on pro-Khalistan leaders, he said.

"We have convinced them several times not to give visa, legitimacy or political space to such people which is causing problems for them (Canada), for us and also for our relationship," Jaishankar said.

Panamanians began voting Sunday in an election that has been consumed by unfolding drama surrounding the country's former president, even though he is not on the ballot.

Before the sweltering sun set in, voters in the normally sleepy Central American nation lined up outside of polling stations, set to weigh promises of economic prosperity and migratory crackdowns with a corruption scandal.

"Panama's election will be one of the most complex in its modern history. The vote is marked by increased political fragmentation and social discontent under outgoing President Laurentino Cortizo," said Arantza Alonso, senior analyst for the Americas at the risk consulting firm Verisk

Panamanians vote in election dominated by ex-president

AP ■ PANAMA CITY

Maplecroft before the polling. The presidential race remained in uncertain waters until Friday morning, when Panama's Supreme Court ruled that leading presidential contender José Raúl Mulino was permitted to run. It said he was eligible despite allegations that his candidacy wasn't legitimate because he wasn't elected in a primary.

Mulino joined the race late, replacing former President Ricardo Martinelli as the candidate for the Achieving Goals party. The fiery Martinelli was barred from running in March after he was sentenced to more than 10 years in prison for money laundering. Martinelli has dominated much of the race, campaigning for his former running mate from inside the walls of the Nicaraguan Embassy, where he took refuge in February after receiving political asylum.

While lacking Martinelli's spunk, Mulino has coasted on his connection to the ex-president. He is rarely seen without his blue "Martinelli Mulino 2024" cap and promised to help Martinelli if elected. Juan José Tinoco, a 63-year-old bus driver, was among those in line outside a polling station in a seaside area of Panama City.

He said he planned to vote for Mulino, because it was the closest thing he could get to Martinelli, adding that he earned a decent amount of money under the former president's leadership. "We have problems with health services, education, we have garbage in the streets ... and corruption that never goes away," Tinoco said. "We have money here, this is a country that has lots of wealth, but we need a leader who dedicates himself to the needs of Panama."

German teen surrenders for assault on EU candidate

Berlin (AP): A teenager surrendered to police on Sunday over an attack on a candidate from the party of Chancellor Olaf Scholz that fueled concern about intimidation and violence in the run-up to next month's election for the European Parliament. The 17-year-old, accompanied by a parent, turned himself in at a police station in the eastern city of Dresden at 1 a.m., Saxony state police said. "He admitted the act but didn't go beyond that," police spokeswoman Silvine Reiche said. Matthias Ecke, a candidate for the Social Democrats in the June 9 election, was attacked by four people while putting up posters in Dresden on Friday evening. The party said he was taken to a hospital and required surgery for his injuries.



A seagull flies by as Pope Francis recites the Regina Coeli noon prayer from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square, at the Vatican, Sunday. AP/PTI

Deadly floods ravage southern Brazil: 39 lives lost

AP ■ SAO PAULO

Heavy rains in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul killed 39 people, with another 68 still missing, the state civil defence agency said Friday, as record-breaking floods devastated cities and forced thousands to leave their homes. It was the fourth such environmental disaster in a year, following floods in July, September and November 2023 that killed 75 people in total.

The flooding statewide has surpassed that seen during a historic 1941 deluge, according to the Brazilian Geological Service. In some cities, water levels were at their highest since records began nearly 150 years ago, the agency said.

On Thursday, a dam at a hydroelectric plant between the cities of Bento Gonçalves and Cotipora partially collapsed and entire cities in the Taquari River valley, like Lajeado and Estrela, were completely overtaken by water. In the town of Feliz, 50 miles (80 kilometers)

from the state capital, Porto Alegre, a massively swollen river swept away a bridge that connected it with the neighbouring city of Linha Nova. Operators reported electricity, communications and water cuts across the state. More than 24,000 people had to leave their homes, according to the civil defence agency. Without internet, telephone service or electricity, residents struggled to provide updates or information to their relatives living in other states. Helicopters flew continually over the cities while stranded families with children awaited rescue on the rooftops. Isolete Neumann, 58, lives in the city of Lajeado in the Taquari River valley and told The Associated Press she has never before seen a scenario like the one she is now experiencing.

"People were making barricades in front of hospitals with sand and gravel. It felt like a horror movie," she said by phone. Some people in her region were so desperate, she



A firefighter carries a girl rescued from an area flooded by heavy rains in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil, Saturday. AP/PTI

added, that they threw themselves into the water currents. Neumann's own neighbourhood wasn't inundated, but has no running water and she hasn't showered since Tuesday. She said she's collecting rainwater in a basin to be able to cook. A clothing store she owns in the

city's central area is flooded, she added.

"I don't even know how it must be. There must be nothing left."

The downpour started Monday and is expected to last at least through Saturday, Marcelo Seluchi, chief meteorologist at

the National Center for Monitoring and Alerts of Natural Disasters, told Brazil's public television network Friday.

On Thursday night, Gov. Eduardo Leite alerted the state's population — known as gauchos — about the persistence of rains and floods. The situation was expected to worsen in Porto Alegre, he said.

"As a human being, I am devastated inside, just like every gaucho is," he said. "But as governor, I am here steadfast and I guarantee that we will not falter. We are doing everything with focus, attention, discipline, and outrage, to ensure that everything within our reach is done."

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva acknowledged the flood victims at a press conference on Friday alongside Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Brasilia.

"The first words from Minister Fumio Kishida in the meeting we held were of solidarity with the people of the state of Rio

Grande do Sul, who are victims by one of the largest floods we have ever known. Never before in the history of Brazil had there been such a quantity of rain in one single location," Lula said. Weather across South America is affected by the climate phenomenon El Niño, a periodic, naturally occurring event that warms surface waters in the Equatorial Pacific region. In Brazil, El Niño has historically caused droughts in the north and intense rainfall in the south. This year, the impacts of El Niño have been particularly dramatic, with a historic drought in the Amazon. Scientists say extreme weather is happening more frequently due to human-caused climate change. Karina Lima, a 36-year-old scientist and PhD candidate in climatology at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, told The Associated Press that the state is located in a region with certain characteristics that amplify El Niño's destructive potential.

Putin entering a new era of extraordinary power

AP ■ MOSCOW

Just a few months short of a quarter-century as Russia's leader, Vladimir Putin on Tuesday will put his hand on a copy of the constitution and begin another six-year term as president wielding extraordinary power.

Since becoming acting president on the last day of 1999, Putin has shaped Russia into a monolith — crushing political opposition, running independent-minded journalists out of the country and promoting an increasing devotion to prudish "traditional values" that pushes many in society into the margins.

His influence is so dominant that other officials could only stand submissively on the sidelines as he launched a war in Ukraine despite expectations the invasion would bring international opprobrium and harsh economic sanctions, as well as cost Russia dearly in the blood of its soldiers.

With that level of power, what Putin will do with his next term is a daunting question at home and abroad.

The war in Ukraine, where Russia is making incremental though consistent battlefield gains, is the top concern, and he is showing no indication of changing course.

"The war in Ukraine is central to his current political project, and I don't see anything to suggest that that will change. And that affects everything else," Brian Taylor, a Syracuse University professor and author of "The Code of Putinism," said in an interview with The Associated Press.

"It affects who's in what positions, it affects what resources are available and it affects the economy, affects the level of repression internally," he said.

In his state of the nation address in February, Putin vowed to fulfill Moscow's goals in Ukraine, and do whatever it takes to "defend our sovereignty and security of our citizens." He claimed the Russian military has "gained a huge combat experience" and is "firmly holding the initiative and waging offensives in a number of sectors." That will come at



huge expense, which could drain money available for the extensive domestic projects and reforms in education, welfare and poverty-fighting that Putin used much of the two-hour address to detail.

Taylor suggested such projects were included in the address as much for show as for indicating real intent to put them into action.

Putin "thinks of himself in the grand historical terms of Russian lands, bringing Ukraine back to where it belongs, those sorts of ideas. And I think those trump any kind of more socioeconomic-type programs," Taylor said.

If the war were to end in less than total defeat for either side, with Russia retaining some of the territory it has already captured, European countries fear that Putin could be encouraged toward further military adventurism in the Baltics or in Poland.

"It's possible that Putin does have vast ambitions and will try to follow a costly success in Ukraine with a new attack somewhere else," Harvard international relations professor Stephen Walt wrote in the journal Foreign Policy. "But it is also entirely possible that his ambitions do not extend beyond what Russia has won — at enormous cost and that

The regime "is at permanent risk of crumbling overnight, as its Soviet predecessor did three decades ago."

Putin is sure to continue his continue animosity toward the West, which he said in his state of the nation address "would like to do to Russia the same thing they did in many other regions of the world, including Ukraine: to bring discord into our home, to weaken it from within."

Putin's resistance to the West manifests not only anger at its support for Ukraine, but in what he sees as the undermining of Russia's moral fiber.

Russia last year banned the notional LGBTQ+ "movement" by declaring it to be extremist in what officials said was a fight for traditional values like those espoused by the Russian Orthodox Church in the face of Western influence.

Courts also banned gender transitioning.

"I would expect the role of the Russian Orthodox Church to continue to be quite visible," Taylor said. He also noted the burst of social media outrage that followed a party hosted by TV presenter Anastasia Ivleva where guests were invited to show up "almost naked."

"Other actors in the system understand that that stuff resonates with Putin. ... There were people interested in exploiting things like that," he said.

Although the opposition and independent media have almost vanished under Putin's repressive measures, there's still potential for further moves to control Russia's information space, including moving forward with its efforts to establish a "sovereign internet."

The inauguration comes two days before Victory Day, Russia's most important secular holiday, commemorating the Soviet Red Army's capture of Berlin in World War II and the immense hardships of the war, in which the USSR lost some 20 million people.

The defeat of Nazi Germany is integral to modern Russia's identity and to Putin's justification of the war in Ukraine as a comparable struggle.



Russian APC and S-400 anti-aircraft missile system launchers roll during the Victory Day military parade dress rehearsal at the Red Square in Moscow, Russia, on Sunday. The parade will take place at Moscow's Red Square on May 9 to celebrate 79 years since the victory in WWII

Ukraine marks third Easter at war under fire from drones

Kyiv (AP) — As Ukraine marked its third Easter at war, Russia launched a barrage of drones concentrated in Ukraine's east where the situation on the front line is worsening.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged Ukrainians in an Easter address to be united in prayer and called God an "ally" in the war with Russia.

Ukraine's air force said on Sunday that Russia had launched 24 Shahed drones, of which 23 had been shot down by air defenses.

Six people, including a child, were wounded in a drone strike in the eastern Kharkiv region, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said. Fires broke out when debris from drones that were shot down fell on buildings in the neighboring Dnipropetrovsk region. No casualties were reported.

Officials in Kyiv urged residents to follow Orthodox Easter services online due to safety concerns. Serhiy Popko, head of the Kyiv city administration, warned that "even on such bright days of celebration, we can expect evil deeds from the aggressor."

Zelenskyy called on Ukrainians to unite in prayer for each other and soldiers on the front line. In a video filmed in front of Kyiv's Saint Sophia Cathedral, wearing a traditional Vyshyvanka embroidered shirt, Zelenskyy said that God "has a chevron with the Ukrainian flag on his shoulder." With "such an ally," Zelenskyy said, "life will definitely win over death."

A majority of Ukrainians identify as Orthodox Christians, though the church is divided. Many belong to the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The rival Ukrainian Orthodox Church was loyal to the patriarch in Moscow until splitting from Russia after the 2022 invasion and is viewed with suspicion by many Ukrainians.

In Moscow, worshippers including President Vladimir Putin packed Moscow's landmark Christ the Savior Cathedral late Saturday for a nighttime Easter service led by Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church and an outspoken supporter of the Kremlin.

Aus police shoot 16-yr-old boy after he stabs man

AP ■ MELBOURNE

A 16-year-old boy armed with a knife was shot dead by police after he stabbed a man in the Australian west coast city of Perth, officials said on Sunday.

The incident occurred in the parking lot of a hardware store in suburban Willetton on Saturday night. The teen attacked the man and then rushed at police officers before he was shot, Western Australian Premier Roger Cook told reporters on Sunday.

"There are indications he had been radicalized online," Cook told a news conference.

"But I want to reassure the community at this stage it appears that he acted solely and alone," Cook added.

A man in his 30s was found at the scene with a stab wound to his back. He was taken to a hospital in serious but stable condition, a police statement said.

Police and Australian Security Intelligence Organization agents have been conducting a counterterrorism investigation in the east coast city of Sydney since another 16-year-old boy stabbed an Assyrian Orthodox bishop and priest in a church on April 15.

That boy has been charged with committing a terrorist act. Six of his alleged associates have also been charged with a range of offenses, including conspiring to engage in or planning a terrorist act. All remain in custody.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he had been briefed on the latest stabbing in Perth by Australian Federal Police Commissioner Reece Kershaw and ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess, who heads the nation's main domestic spy agency.

"I'm advised there is no ongoing threat to the community on the information available," Albanese said.

"We are a peace-loving nation and there is no place for violent extremism in Australia," he added. Police received an emergency phone call after 10 p.m. from a teenager saying he was going to commit acts of violence, Western Australian Police Commissioner Col Blanch said. The boy had been participating in a program for young people at risk of radicalization, Blanch added.

"I don't want to say he has been radicalized or is radicalized because I think that forms part of the investigation," he said. Police said they were later

alerted by a phone call from a member of the public that a knife attack was underway in the parking lot. Three police officers responded, one armed with a gun and two with conducted energy devices.

Police deployed both conducted energy devices but they failed to incapacitate the boy before he was killed by a single gunshot, Blanch said.

Blanch said members of the local Muslim community had raised concerns with police about the boy's behavior before he was killed on Saturday.

The Imam of Perth's largest mosque, the Nasir Mosque, condemned the stabbing.

"There is no place for violence in Islam," Imam Syed Wadood Janud said in a statement. "We appreciate the effort of the police to keep our communities safe. I also want to commend the local Muslim community who had flagged the individual prior with the police," Wadood added. Some Muslim leaders have criticized Australian police for declaring last month's church stabbing a terrorist act but not a rampage two days earlier in a Sydney shopping mall in which six people were killed and a dozen wounded.

Indian Embassy in China holds first meeting with students hit hard by COVID visa bans

PTI ■ BEIJING

The Indian Embassy here has held its first interactive session with the Indian students who suffered the most during the three-year COVID-19 period following China's visa bans prolonging their academic periods for several years.

Around 80 old and new students from more than 13 Chinese universities took part in the "welcome and interaction ceremony" held on May 4. Indian Ambassador to China Pradeep Kumar Rawat, and Counsellor Nitinjeet Singh interacted with the students and heard their grievances and experiences during Saturday's meeting. The meeting also included a detailed presentation by Amit Sharma, Second Secretary (Education) on various services offered by the Embassy, Dos & Don'ts for students, the Embassy posting on X said. Until the coronavirus struck China in early

2020 over 23,000 Indian students mostly studying medicine in Chinese universities constituting the second-highest number of foreign students after Pakistan. Currently, the numbers reportedly come down to around 10,000 across China.

Chinese medical universities became preferred destinations in the past as private medical colleges in India charged exorbitant fees while admissions to government institutions became extremely competitive. However, they have to write the Foreign Medical Graduates Examination in India to qualify for practice in India. When COVID-19 struck China, most of the Indian students left for home at the height of lockdowns and could not return until early last year due to China's visa bans and restrictions. Many of them started returning in the latter part of 2022 while the Chinese universities began a new intake of students last year.

Japanese foreign minister holds talks with Nepalese counterpart

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko on Sunday met Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Narayankaji Shrestha here and discussed issues of bilateral and mutual interests.

Kamikawa arrived in Nepal earlier Sunday on a day-long visit at the invitation of Shrestha - her first trip to Nepal since assuming office. During the meeting at the Foreign Ministry, the two ministers discussed matters related to strengthening relations and cooperation between Nepal and Japan, sources said.

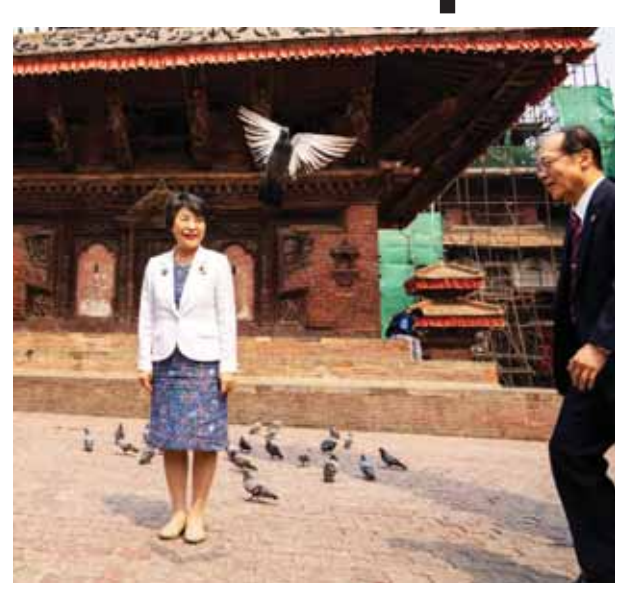
Talking to reporters after the meeting, Shrestha said they dwelt on broadening economic cooperation between the two countries besides deliberating on various international affairs. The Japanese Foreign Minister will pay courtesy calls on President Ramchandra Paudel and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal

'Prachanda' separately, according to the sources.

The Japanese embassy in Kathmandu last week expressed hope that the foreign minister's visit "will give a good impetus for further strengthening our friendly relationship towards the year 2026, the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Nepal."

She was the fourth Japanese foreign minister to visit Nepal post-September 1956 when the two countries established diplomatic relations. The Kathmandu Post newspaper last week quoted a joint secretary at Nepal's Foreign Ministry as saying the discussions will revolve around broader issues of bilateral and mutual interests, including Nepal's vote and support in several international elections at the United Nations and other multilateral forums where Japan is contesting.

"There is also a strategic motive



A pigeon flies past as Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa takes a walk at the Basantapur Durbar Square, one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Sunday

behind the visit as Japan is embracing its role as a middle power and wants to expand its

footprint in Asia. This is not solely focussed on bilateral relations," the official said.

King Charles III's openness about cancer has helped him connect with people

London (AP)

King Charles III's decision to be open about his cancer diagnosis has helped the new monarch connect with the people of Britain and strengthened the monarchy in the year since his dazzling coronation at Westminster Abbey. Charles has used his illness to highlight the need for early diagnosis and treatment, showing leadership at a time of personal hardship. And in the process, people have begun to see him as a more flesh-and-blood character who faces the same challenges as them, not just an archetype of wealth and privilege.

"Ultimately, the great leveler is health," said Anna Whitelock, a professor of the history of the monarchy at City University, London. "And the fact is, the royal family, like so many other families, are coping with a cancer diagnosis. And I think that has ... taken the energy out of big challenges to the king." Questions still remain. Can a 1,000-year-old inherited

monarchy represent the people of modern Britain? How will the institution address concerns about its links to empire and slavery? Should the monarchy be replaced with an elected head of state?

But for now, at least, those issues have been largely set aside as the 75-year-old king undergoes treatment for an undisclosed type of cancer. Of all the things experts expected the royal family to face in the year following Charles' coronation, the events of the last five months took Britain by surprise.

First, Charles was treated for an enlarged prostate, then he revealed his cancer diagnosis. That was followed quickly by the announcement that the Princess of Wales, Prince William's wife, Kate, also had cancer. Both retreated from public duties to focus on their health. William followed suit so he could support his wife and the couple's three young children.



People pose for photos among the tulips as they bloom in Commissioner's Park in Ottawa, Ontario, a week before the opening of the Canadian Tulip Festival, on Saturday

Saree tradition, elegance celebrated at Times Square

PTI ■ NEW YORK

The iconic Times Square there was awash with varied hues and styles of sarees as hundreds of women from the Indian-American community as well as other nations showcased the timeless elegance, heritage and cultural diversity of the garment at a special event.

The 'Saree Goes Global' event was held in the heart of Times Square Saturday, with participation from over 500 women from the Indian community as well as those from at least nine countries where the nine-yard garment is popular and much-loved, including Bangladesh, Nepal, the UK, the USA, the UAE, Uganda, Trinidad and Guyana.

Adorning colourful sarees with exquisite embellishments,

embroidery, styles and fabrics, including Khadi, the women proudly showcased their collection as they waved the national flags, danced together, took pictures and shared stories about their sarees, culture and heritage.

The event, hosted by 'British Women in Sarees' in partnership with Uma, showcased the timeless elegance of the saree through music, dance and a vibrant Saree Walkathon.

'British Women in Sarees' is dedicated to raising awareness of the saree while supporting handloom artisans in India through global events. As an organisation, Uma focuses on empowering underprivileged girls, youth, and women through educational and cultural resources, with a global presence headquartered in

New York City.

A press release here said that building on the success of global events like the 'Royal Ascot Ladies' Day' and the historic 'Saree Walkathon' at Trafalgar Square in London, the Saree Goes Global event was not just a "celebration of cultural diversity but also a platform to support artisans in rural India, preserving traditional craftsmanship."

President of Uma Global Dr Rita Kakati-Shah and Chairperson of British Women in Sarees Dr. Dipti Jain highlighted the importance of the saree as a symbol of unity and the empowerment of women worldwide.

Jain, a geriatrician by profession, shared her passion for sarees and her commitment to raising awareness of this garment globally.

Kakati-Shah, a medic turned entrepreneur and philanthropist, emphasized Uma's dedication to empowering underprivileged girls, youth, and women, both in New York City and beyond.

On the occasion, Deputy Commissioner for International Affairs New York City, Dilip Chauhan honoured Kakati-Shah and Jain with a Proclamation on behalf of New York City Mayor Eric Adams for their work, further highlighting the significance of their contributions.

Chauhan said the vision of Kakati-Shah and Jain has "brought us together to celebrate the elegance of the saree and the unity it represents."

"The saree not only represents beauty but also symbolises the importance of preserving traditional craftsmanship and

supporting artisans worldwide. It serves as a powerful reminder of our commitment to heritage and cultural exchange," he said.

Chauhan added that such events provide a platform for cultural exchange and underscore the strength of the global community.

"As we come together to celebrate Saree Goes Global in New York City, let us embrace the spirit of unity and collaboration. Let us celebrate our differences and find strength in our diversity," he added.

Shruti Pandey, Consul (Political, Press, Information and Culture) at the Consulate General of India in New York highlighted that the saree transcends borders with its versatility and beauty, not just in India, but across the globe.

India urges ADB not to overlook its focus on growth and shared prosperity

PTI ■ TBILISI (GEORGIA)

India on Sunday urged the Asian Development Bank (ADB) not to overlook its focus on reduction of remaining poverty while promoting sustainable growth for the member nations in the Asia Pacific region. Making intervention at the Board of Governors Business Session at the 57th Annual Meeting of ADB, India's Temporary Alternate Governor Vikas Sheel said the bank has played a critical role in facilitating measures of faster economic development, reducing poverty and promoting regional cooperation while effectively addressing the challenges and delivery of global public goods. "We note with concern that economic growth and dealing with the remaining poverty do not find a place in the enhanced focus areas of the ADB in the review of its Strategy 2030. We urge ADB not to overlook the

ADB's charter mandate on growth and shared prosperity," he said. He assured India's continued support to work towards accelerated inclusive and sustainable growth in Asia and the Pacific. Due to ongoing general elections in India, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman who is Governor on the board of the ADB could not attend the meeting. Observing that ADB is expected to grow bigger, better and bolder in line with the New Delhi declaration of the G20, Sheel said, it can thus play a much bigger role in addressing the ambitious climate agenda. "Based on the detailed recommendations made by the Independent Expert Group, appointed under India's G20 presidency, we are happy to note that ADB is proactively implementing recommendations of IEG to live up to the aspirations of being the trusted development partner of the fast-



growing economies of Asia and of transforming itself into a climate bank," he said. "A bigger and bolder ADB can produce better results if it transforms its business processes such as moving away from isolated and smaller individual projects-based funding towards multi-year transformation, and strategic and programmatic funding approaches. We hope that the ADB's new operating model will result in better operational efficiencies and a significant reduction in processing time and lending operations," he said. ADB shall have to not only continue to pursue these reform measures but would also have to assist members in catalyzing significant private sector investments, especially for

climate finance in addition to concessional financing, coupled with technology transfer in line with the global challenges funding mechanism recommended by the G 20, he added. In line with the commitment to support the smaller economies in the region, he said, India has increased its contribution to the Asian Development Fund (ADF) 14 through USD 58.17 million. "We are confident that the larger pool of much-needed sources resulting from a successful replenishment of ADF shall be deployed effectively and lend much-needed support to the smaller economies in the region, especially for tackling the challenges posed by the climate change," he said. ADF is ADB's largest source of grants for operations in its poorest and most vulnerable developing member countries and is replenished every four years. During the meeting, ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa

said, the bank committed USD 23.6 billion in loans, grants, guarantees, equity investments, and technical assistance in 2023, a 15 per cent increase from the previous year. This included a record USD 9.8 billion in climate finance from ADB's own resources, representing 41.5 per cent of our total commitments," Asakawa said. ADB's Private Sector Operations Department committed USD 3.8 billion for non-sovereign operations, with a significant increase in lending for frontier economies. "ADB met its corporate financing targets for health, gender, and education, and we are on track to meet our ambition for food security financing. Asian Development Fund commitments reached USD 721 million in 2023, and we project this to increase to USD 865 million in 2024," he said. ADB also introduced favourable concessional lending terms to small island developing members.



India, Ghana agree for early operationalisation of UPI system

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and Ghana are working to link their payment systems - Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Ghana Interbank Payment and Settlement Systems (GHIPSS) respectively to permit users to make instant, low-cost fund transfers on a reciprocal basis. The two countries have also delved into discussions regarding the possibilities of a Memorandum of Understanding on Digital Transformation Solutions; Local Currency Settlement System and the opportunities offered by African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). "They agreed to work expeditiously towards the operationalisation of NPCI's (National Payments Corporation of India) UPI on Ghana's GHIPSS within a period of 6 months," the Department of Commerce said on the social media platform X (formerly twitter). India's UPI has already reached countries including Singapore and the UAE. Talks are also on with Nigeria for the same. These issues were discussed during the visit of a seven-member Indian delegation led by Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce Amardeep Singh Bhatia to Accra, Ghana on May 2-3. NPCI International has recently announced its partnership with Bank of Namibia to support them in developing a UPI-like real-time payment system in the African nation. The bilateral trade between India and the West African nation Ghana has increased to USD 2.87 billion in 2022-23 from USD 2.6 billion in 2021-22. The trade gap is in the favour of Ghana mainly due to imports of gold by India which accounts for nearly 80 per cent of total imports from Ghana.



UPSIDA revenue in FY24 hits record ₹1,359 crore

PTI ■ NOIDA

Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) has recorded an operating revenue of ₹1,359 crore in financial year 2023-24 -- the highest ever for the public sector undertaking in UP, according to an official release. "This achievement marks a doubling of revenue compared to financial year 2018-19, indicating a robust trajectory towards industrial growth in the state," the government release said. Kanpur-headquartered UPSIDA has made significant strides in realizing Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's vision of transforming Uttar Pradesh into an industrial powerhouse, the statement said. Moreover, UPSIDA's strategic emphasis on bolstering infrastructure in industrial zones to attract investors resulted in a fourfold increase in infrastructure development expenditure. This allocation soared from ₹104 crore in FY 2017-18, to ₹415 crore in FY 2023-24, it said. UPSIDA's CEO Mayur Maheshwari said the authority is committed to expanding Uttar Pradesh's industrial landscape. "UPSIDA is also doing significant work in the area of land allocation. As a result, there has been an increase in land allocation, with 693 plots allocated in 2023-24. This initiative has benefited investors on one hand and strengthened the

authority's financial position on the other," he said. In addition, UPSIDA has succeeded in gaining the trust of investors by transparently allocating land through e-auctions and Nivesh Mitra, the IAS officer said. "As a result, a record number, more than 1,600 plots, have been allotted to investors in the last three years, helping Uttar Pradesh become the engine of industrial development of the country," he added. Maheshwari further said digitization has played a crucial role in the economic development of UP and through Nivesh Mitra, UPSIDA is currently providing 34 online e-services, which were only two before COVID-19. "As a result, more than 31,000 applications have been disposed of with a satisfaction rate of 96 per cent," he noted. Additionally, to promote skill development and increase women's participation in the workforce, UPSIDA has developed women-centric facilities like Pink Toilets and Pink Dormitories under initiatives like Atal Industrial Infrastructure Mission (AIIM) and Secure Industrial Zone Projects. As a result of these efforts, there has been an increase in women's participation and employment in industrial parks, he pointed out. Furthermore, he said the authority has established a citizen-facilitation centre to address the issues faced by investors and entrepreneurs.

Mahindra Finance reports 10 per cent drop in Q4 net profit at ₹619 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mahindra & Mahindra Financial Services has reported a 10 per cent decline in standalone profit and tax to ₹619 crore for the January-March quarter of 2023-24. The non-banking finance company also said that in a fact-finding assessment of the fraud in its Aizawl branch during the quarter identified 2,887 loan accounts as potentially fraudulent in nature. "These loans had an outstanding net recoverable balance of ₹135.9 crore as of 31st March 2024, which have been fully provided," Mahindra Finance said in a regulatory filing.

The NBFC, which last month delayed disclosure of its financial statement due to fraud at one of its branches in the north-eastern states, said that the fraud relates to retail vehicle loans disbursed by the company and is a case of extreme collusion between the company's employees, with segregated duties, and external parties including vehicle dealers and bank employees. The fraud involved forgery of KYC and other asset-related documents leading to the embezzlement of company funds. Following this, the company appointed a law firm and an accounting firm to undertake a fact-finding assessment of the suspected irregularities.



The company has carried out an exhaustive analysis of customer contracts across the portfolio at an all-India level and has confirmed no instances of similar fraud elsewhere. "As a proactive step, the company has identified a few key initiatives

to further strengthen controls, including but not limited to accelerating the timeline for centralization of document reviews and implementing digital due diligence tools for customer onboarding," Mahindra Finance said. During the March quarter of 2023-24 fiscal, Mahindra Finance posted a total income of ₹3,706 crore, up 21 per cent over ₹3,057 crore in the year-ago period. Net interest income rose 14 per cent to ₹1,971 crore during the fourth quarter of FY24. For the 2023-24 fiscal, the profit after tax declined 11 per cent to ₹1,760 crore. Total income rose 23 per cent to ₹13,562 crore in FY24.

Home loan outstanding reaches ₹27 lakh crore in March: RBI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Credit outstanding to the housing sector rose by nearly ₹10 lakh crore in the last two fiscals to reach a record ₹27.23 lakh crore in March this year, according to RBI's data on 'Sectoral Deployment of Bank Credit'. Experts from banking and real estate sectors attributed this growth in housing credit outstanding to a strong revival in the residential property market post-

COVID pandemic on pent-up demand. According to the data of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on sectoral deployment of bank credit for March 2024, the credit outstanding to the housing (including priority sector housing) stood at ₹27,22,720 crore in March 2024, up from ₹19,88,532 crore in March 2023, and ₹17,26,697 crore in March 2022. The data also showed that the credit outstanding

towards commercial real estate stood at ₹4,48,145 crore in March 2024. It was at ₹2,97,231 crore in March 2022. According to reports from various property consultants, housing sales and prices have surged significantly in the past two financial years. When contacted, Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist with Bank of Baroda, said the high growth in home loans can be attributed to the

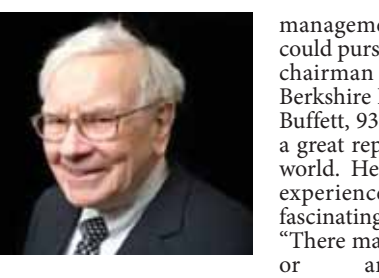
uptick due to the government push. "There was also some pent up demand for buying homes in the last two years following COVID which is getting reflected here," he said. Sabnavis said the home loan growth would remain robust, but might taper down to 15-20 per cent due to a higher base. Commenting on the RBI data, Samir Jasuja, CEO and MD of PropEquity, a leading

real-estate data and analytics company, said the rise of housing loans outstanding is primarily due to the significant increase in the quantum of properties launched and sold in the last two fiscal years. "Major Tier-1 cities have witnessed high rates of price appreciation ranging between 50-100 per cent since FY 2021, which has contributed to an increase in average loan size per property," he explained.

India has unexplored opportunities: Warren Buffett

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Billionaire investor Warren Buffett said that the Indian market has "unexplored" opportunities which his conglomerate holding company, Berkshire Hathaway, would like to explore "in the future". Buffett's remarks came at Berkshire's annual meeting on Friday when Rajeev Agarwal of DoorDarshi Advisors, a US-based hedge fund that invests in Indian equities, asked him about the possibility of Berkshire exploring in India, the world's fifth-largest economy. "It is a very good question. I am sure there are loads of



opportunities in countries like India," he said. "The question, however, is whether we have any advantage or insights into those businesses in India or any contacts that will make possible transactions that Berkshire would like to participate in. That is something a more energetic

management at Berkshire could pursue," the co-founder, chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway said. Buffett, 93, said Berkshire has a great reputation around the world. He said, his Japanese experience has been fascinating enough. "There may be an unexplored or an unattended opportunity...But that may be something in the future," he said about India. Buffett said the question is if Berkshire has some kind of advantage in pursuing those unattended opportunities, particularly against people who are managing other people's money and getting paid based on assets.

Thermal power plants have 68 per cent of normative coal stocks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 184 thermal power plants with a total generation capacity of 211 GW have 68 per cent of normative coal stock levels amid rising electricity demand due to soaring temperatures in the country. According to the Central Electricity Authority's (CEA) May 3 daily report, 184 plants, that are monitored by the CEA, have 47.78 million tonnes of coal stocks against the normative level of 70.55 million tonnes. This assumes significance in view of power ministry projections that peak demand will be 260 GW during this summer. The peak power

demand was at an all-time high of 243 GW in September 2023. Peak power demand met or the highest supply in a day rose to 224.18 GW in April 2024 against 215.88 GW in April 2023. The highest supply in a day has already touched 223.84GW on May 3, 2024, which is higher than 221.42 GW recorded in May 2023. The peak power demand met was 219.37GW on May 1 and 222.03GW on May 2 this year. In view of the projected high demand for electricity, the power ministry has taken many steps which include mandatory running of imported coal-based plants in the country to bridge the demand-supply gap. The ministry has also asked the domestic coal-based power plants to import coal for six per cent blending. The power sector experts say that power demand could have been more than 224GW recorded in April but the unseasonal spell of rain reduced the requirement for cooling appliances like air conditioners and desert coolers.

LG gears up for All India K-POP Contest 2024

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Buoyed by last year's success, LG Electronics India is gearing up for the 14th edition of the 'All India K-POP Contest 2024', in collaboration with the Korean Cultural Centre India (KCCI). With LG's support, the event promises to be an exhilarating journey for K-pop enthusiasts across India, offering finalists a chance to visit Korea. Last year witnessed the record-breaking participation of 11,071 teams, reflecting the

growing passion for K-pop nationwide. Jeon Hong Ju, Managing Director of LG Electronics India, expressed pride in the collaboration with KCCI, anticipating another remarkable response this year. "We are proud to collaborate with KCCI to launch the All India K-POP Contest 2024," he said at an event here which saw a section of media personnel enthusiastically participating in various Korean traditional performances like 'Samulnori', traditional Korean instrumental

performance, a Taekwondo performance as well as a K-pop cover dance. Samul nori is a genre of percussion music that originated in Korea. The word samul means 'four objects', while nori means 'play' said a representative of the KCCI. Hwang Il Yong, director of the Korean Cultural Centre India, said, "In a survey held regarding the preference for Korean cultural content abroad, India ranked as one of the highest nations around the world." "This year, in addition to the main event, we plan to hold

various participatory events that everyone can enjoy, such as 'K-POP On Street'. I hope it will become a festival venue where Indians who love the 'Korean Wave' can come out and enjoy," he added. At the event, Park Seung Tae from the Korea Tourism Organisation said that there has been a rising interest in South Korea as a tourist destination, driven by the growing influence of K-pop and K-dramas. He hoped Indians would discover more about South Korea's rich history beyond its pop culture.

States should support decarbonisation of aluminum industries: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

States should support the decarbonisation of aluminium industries by waiving or reducing open access charges for renewable power, a study has said. Open access charges are levied by power distribution companies (discoms) on those consumers which buy electricity from any other source. State governments should also prioritise giving right of way to

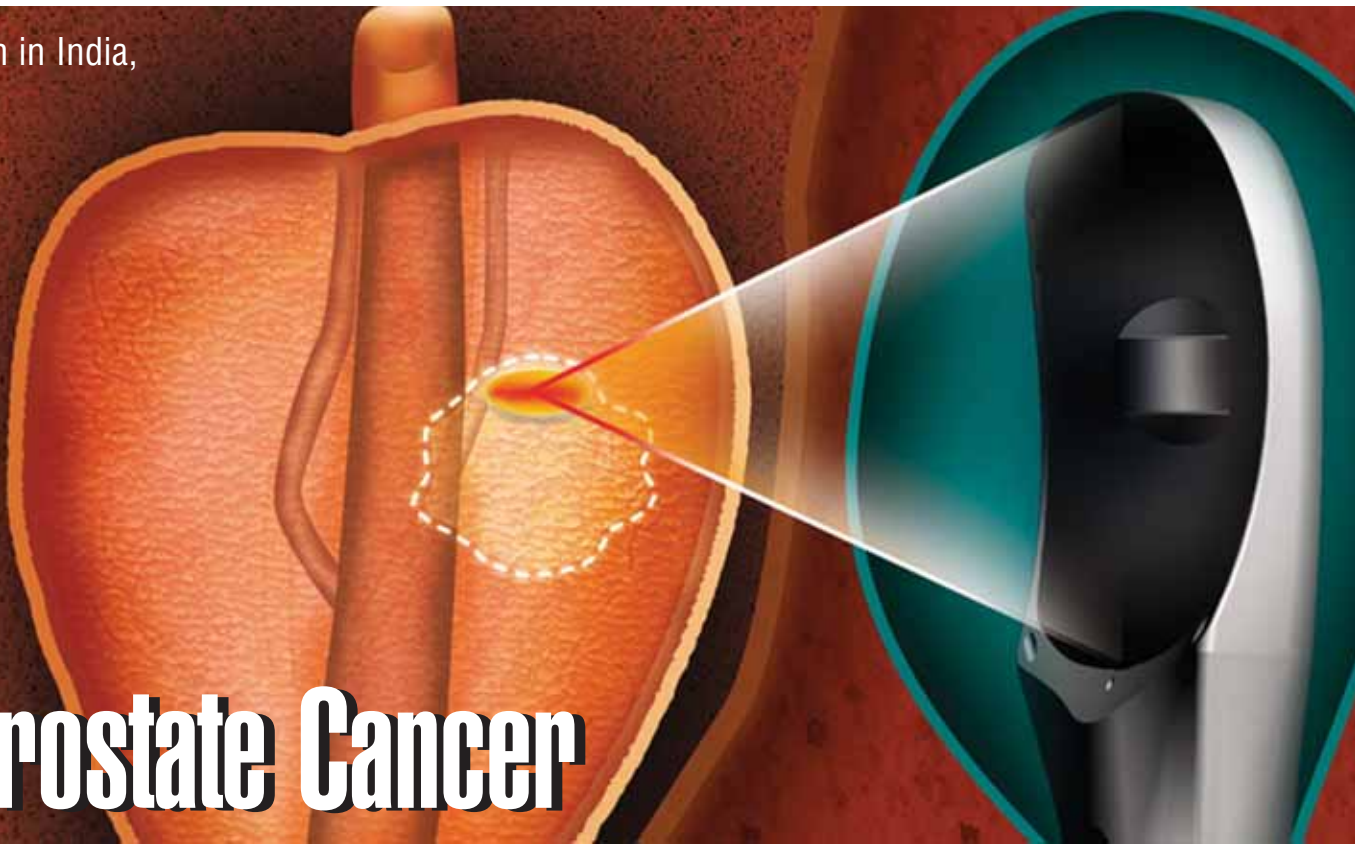
the industry for setting up their own evacuation infrastructure for transmission of renewable power, the study said. Pitching for incentivising renewable energy as it plays a crucial role in decarbonisation, the study said that as per estimates aluminium plants need 3.94 GW of renewable energy round-the-clock to meet their power demand even after the adoption of all energy-efficient technologies. Round-the-clock renewable

energy projects comprise both wind and solar power capacities. A major share of aluminium smelting plants is in states that do not have optimal wind power potential, the study by public policy research think tank Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW) said. It further said decarbonising aluminium production, unlike cement and steel, cannot be achieved with a reduction in the price of aluminium. Energy efficiency, which is easily achievable, would result in a price increase of 1.5 per cent and reduce emissions. The switching over from captive power plant (CPP) to renewable power (RE) would steeply reduce the emission intensity of aluminium and will also increase the cost of aluminium. In order to manufacture net-zero aluminium while still maintaining economic viability, certain policy interventions are essential, it said.



Prostate cancer poses a significant health concern in India, with 33,000-42,000 new cases annually. A recent Lancet report has warned of a sharp surge in cases in India by 2040, with many men being diagnosed in advanced stages, leading to fatal outcomes. Dr. Sudhir Kumar Rawal, a leading oncologist from RGCIRC, Delhi discusses advancements in treatment like HIFU therapy, with ARCHANA JYOTI

HIFU for Treatment of Prostate Cancer



NEWS BRIEFS

AIIMS Resident Doctors' annual academic conclave held

Resident Doctors Association (RDA) of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Delhi, hosted its annual academic conclave, RDACON 2024, bringing together an assembly of professionals in healthcare, health technology, and artificial intelligence. Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud who graced the occasion, in his address emphasized the essential collaboration between the medical and legal professions, underlining their complementary roles in society. He also spoke on the rights of the LGBTQ community, sharing personal anecdotes and stressed on the importance of inclusivity in healthcare. He also emphasized the crucial role that medical professionals play in shaping a more equitable society. The conclave commenced with poster and oral presentations by AIIMS residents and researchers, showcasing the latest advancements in medicine and research. The RDA AIIMS said it remains committed to fostering collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity in healthcare, and looks forward to building on the success of RDACON 2024 in future editions.

Kids and adolescents find joy in learning new words: Study

A new research from Royal Holloway University, led by Professor Saloni Krishnan, suggests that children and adolescents, aged 10 to 18, derive intrinsic joy from learning new words. The study involved 345 participants who deduced word meanings from sentence contexts across 40 trials. Notably, participants reported positive emotions like happiness and excitement during word acquisition, highlighting the motivational aspects of language learning. The findings, published in Developmental Science, underscore the importance of leveraging these emotional rewards to enhance educational strategies, particularly in neurodivergent populations like children with dyslexia.

Dr Rawal, kindly provide us an overview of prostate cancer and its prevalence in India vis-à-vis the world.

Prostate cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in men. As per the GLOBOCON report on prostate cancer, an estimated 1.4 million diagnoses and 375,000 deaths worldwide in 2020. The incidence is low in Eastern and South-Central Asia but rising. In India, the projected number of cases for 2020 was 51,979 and the numbers are only increasing. It is pertinent to note that there is an underestimation of incidence in India due to a lack of a population-based cancer registry, underreporting, and social stigma of cancer detection among others.

The prevalence rate of prostate cancer is higher in certain geographies within the country. As per the latest ICMR data Delhi-NCR reported the highest incidence rate of over 11.8 cases/million adults registered followed by Kamrup region of Assam with 10 cases/million adults and Thiruvananthapuram with 9 cases/million adults.

Unfortunately, there is no conclusive data that could support specific preventive or dietary measures that reduce the risk of developing prostate cancer. In such circumstances, individuals should immediately reach out to a urologist in case of any urinary problem and those above 50 years of age should regularly undertake Blood Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) Test.

What are some of the key risk factors associated with prostate cancer, particularly in the context of India?

Prostate cancer is directly linked



DR. (PROF) SUDHIR KUMAR RAWAL
Medical Director and Chief of Genito Uro-Oncology Services, Super Speciality Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute and Research Centre (RGCIRC), Delhi.

with genetic mutation. So, it can be hereditary as well as familial. In different studies association of different environmental and dietary factors have been found with prostate cancer. Hypertension, obesity, and hypercholesterolemia factors have increased risk. Dietary factors like high alcohol intake, coffee, fried fatty food, red meat as well as processed meat have been linked with increased association of prostate cancer. However, no conclusive data exist that could support specific preventive or dietary measures that can reduce the risk of developing prostate cancer.

How do you approach the diagnosis and staging of prostate cancer in your practice? Prostate cancer is usually suspected when a patient presents with urinary symptoms and has raised PSA (Prostate-specific antigen) or abnormal digital rectal examination. With increasing awareness, many asymptomatic people regularly do blood PSA testing as part of

routine health checkups. Prostate cancer diagnosis requires prostate biopsy. We have the facility of the latest prostate biopsy techniques including the most precise MRI fusion transperineal biopsy (Artemis System). For local staging we do biparametric/multiparametric MRI. Metastatic staging requires a PSMA PET CT scan.

What treatment options are available for patients with prostate cancer, and how do you decide on the most appropriate approach for individual patients?

We have all possible treatment options for various stages of prostate cancer. We offer robotic radical prostatectomy/ High intensity-focused ultrasound ablation/ Hormonal therapy + radiotherapy for localized prostate cancer. For metastatic prostate cancer, treatment is hormonal therapy along with novel antiandrogens chemotherapy or radionuclide therapy. We are currently running a few trials for metastatic prostate cancer. The appropriate approach is individualistic for each patient. It depends on the patient's age, physical performance status, associated comorbid conditions, and disease stage. We always make shared decisions with patients after discussing the merits and demerits of each therapy option suitable for them.

Are there any emerging trends or advancements in prostate cancer treatment that you find particularly promising?

With the evolution of medical sciences, there are rapid advancements in prostate cancer treatment in India. There are advancements in the incorporation of genetic testing

SYMPTOMS

Prostate cancer may cause no signs or symptoms in its early stages.

More advanced prostate cancer may cause signs and symptoms such as:

- Trouble urinating
- Decreased force in the stream of urine
- Blood in the urine
- Blood in the semen
- Bone pain
- Losing weight without trying
- Erectile dysfunction

and related therapy, robotic technologies, more targeted radiation therapy, non-invasive treatment like HIFU, availability of newer antiandrogens, oral hormonal agents, and gene-directed radionuclide therapy. I am hopeful for new gene-directed therapy that can increase the survival of patients with metastatic disease.

Can you provide an overview of what HIFU (High-Intensity Focused Ultrasound) treatment entails and how it works as a treatment option for prostate cancer?

HIFU works by treating only the portion of the organ affected by cancer with a safe margin while sparing the remaining normal healthy tissue. It precisely delivers ultrasound waves inside the prostate. Ultrasound energy gets converted into thermal energy inside the prostate. Thus, cancer cells get killed by heat. HIFU is typically used as a treatment option for localized prostate cancer. It is also used as a palliative therapy option after the failure of hormonal therapy and radiation therapy

What are the typical eligibility criteria for patients considering HIFU treatment for prostate cancer?

HIFU is a treatment option for a select group of prostate cancer patients. Although there are no strict criteria, it is best suited for low-risk and intermediate-risk prostate cancer patients. Typically, it is done for patients whose PSA is less than 20 ng/ml, Gleason score ≤ 7 , disease has not spread outside the outline of the prostate.

What are the potential benefits of HIFU compared to traditional treatment options such as surgery or radiation therapy?

- Usually done as a daycare procedure
- Does not require any skin cuts /incisions
- Relatively painless procedure
- Recovery is usually quick and most men return to their normal activities within two-three weeks.
- Treats the small cancer areas with little damage to nearby tissue, nerves and muscles. Consequently the rates of urinary leakage and erectile dysfunction are significantly lower than radical treatments
- Even after recurrence, the patient remains eligible for repeat sessions of focal therapy or other options (surgery/radiation)

What are the potential risks and side effects associated with it?

HIFU is a relatively safe procedure and has no significant risks associated with it. Long-term cancer survival data (after 10 years) is not yet available for focal therapy. About 20-30% of patients may need a second session of

focal therapy for recurrent cancer. Less than 1% of patients may develop a hole between the rectum and the urinary passage (termed a rectourethral fistula). This may need urethral catheter placement for a few months or surgical repair in case it does not heal on its own.

Can HIFU be used as a primary treatment for localized prostate cancer, or is it typically recommended as a salvage therapy after other treatments have failed?

HIFU is typically used as treatment for localised prostate cancer. It is also used as salvage therapy after the failure of hormonal and radiation therapy.

Are there any long-term considerations or follow-up care that patients should be aware of after undergoing HIFU treatment?

Follow-up is very important after HIFU like any other intervention. After HIFU, the patient's PSA level is expected to fall and then remain low. PSA testing is performed at 3-6 monthly intervals for the first few years after the procedure. The Urologist may perform imaging in the form of mpMRI at frequent intervals to track the response of the lesion to treatment, and the development of new lesions in the treated area or elsewhere in the prostate. A rising PSA may indicate that the prostate cancer has returned.

Finally, what advice would you offer to men regarding prostate cancer prevention and early detection?

If you feel any urinary problems, immediately visit a urologist to get evaluated. Start blood PSA screening from 50 years of age.

CHHAYA: A contraceptive beyond family planning

Introduction of the CHHAYA pill, approved by the Government, marks a significant step in expanding contraceptive options for women, enhancing accessibility and reproductive autonomy, says DR ASHWINI ANIL KUMAR SIRAPANASETTY

The Government's approval of new contraceptive methods, particularly the non-hormonal contraceptive pill Centchroman, marks a pivotal moment in advancing women's reproductive health rights. Centchroman, known as "Chhaya" in public health facilities, offers women a hormone-free contraceptive option, expanding their choices and accessibility to family planning services. It is available in the market as a "SAHELI" tablet.

Who can use it?

- Can be safely used by all women once it is confirmed that they are not pregnant.
- Can be used by women of any age, including those who are unmarried or who do not have children.
- Women who had side effects with Mala-N/Mala-D can also opt for this method.
- It can be used by postpartum women who are breastfeeding as soon as they feel comfortable after delivery but before 4 weeks. Centchroman does not affect the quantity, quality and composition of breast milk.

BENEFITS

- It causes less bleeding during the monthly period, and also makes the interval between two menstrual cycles longer. This is beneficial for anaemic women.
- Can be adopted as postpartum (earlier than 4 weeks of delivery) or post-abortion contraception



- (within 7 days of completion of abortion).
- It does not impact the quality or quantity of breast milk.
- Woman can become pregnant immediately after discontinuing the method.
- Women who are not recommended to use hormonal methods can use this method.
- No interference with sexual intercourse/pleasure.

LIMITATIONS

- It does not protect from HIV and RTI/STI.
- Every client should be screened by a trained provider before starting Centchroman, just like other oral pills.

Where can a woman get it and how it should be taken?

- It is available in all public health facilities. It is also part of the

ASHA kit. However, the first dose can be provided only after proper screening at a health facility by a trained provider (doctor, CHO, SN, LHV, ANM).

The non-hormonal contraceptive comes in a strip of 8 tablets. To begin the use of Chhaya, the woman is advised to take the first pill on the first day of the period (which is the first day of bleeding) and the second pill three days later (on the 4th day of bleeding).

This pattern of days are repeated through the first 3 months. Starting from the fourth month, the pill is to be taken once a week on the first pill day and should be continued on the weekly schedule regardless of her menstrual cycle.

What in case of 'missed pills'?

You should tell the woman that if she forgets to take the pill, she should take the missed pill as soon as she



DR ASHWINI ANIL KUMAR SIRAPANASETTY
Obstetrics/ Gynecologist Surgeon and Senior Counsellor in Army Wives Welfare Association

remembers that it has been missed. If she misses taking the tablet by 1-2 days (less than 7 days), she should take the missed pill as soon as she remembers and continue the normal schedule. In addition, she should use a backup method like a condom till the next period, just to ensure complete protection.

If she forgets to take pills for more than 7 days, then the current pack should be discarded, condoms should be used till she has her monthly bleeding and then she should start taking a new pack like a new user; that is, twice a week for the first 3 months followed by once a week thereafter. Unlike traditional contraceptive pills, Centchroman does not contain hormones, making it suitable for women of all ages and reproductive stages. This inclusivity is particularly

significant as it accommodates unmarried women and those without children, empowering them to take control of their reproductive decisions.

Centchroman's safety profile further enhances its appeal. Women who have experienced adverse effects with other contraceptive methods, such as hormonal pills, can turn to Centchroman without concerns about hormonal side effects. Moreover, its compatibility with breastfeeding ensures that women can use it without compromising their lactation or the health of their newborns.

Needless to say Centchroman's introduction reflects India's commitment to promoting reproductive rights and gender equality. By offering women a safe, effective, and accessible contraceptive option, the government aims to empower women to make informed choices about their reproductive health. Moreover, it underscores the government's recognition of family planning as a fundamental human right and a key driver of social and economic development.

Moving forward, continued efforts to raise awareness about Centchroman and other contraceptive options will be crucial. Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education programs can help dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding contraception while empowering women to make informed decisions about their bodies and futures.

TOP 10 ANTI-AGING FOODS

Anti-aging foods and intermittent fasting could also promote metabolic health by improving insulin sensitivity, reducing inflammation, and enhancing mitochondrial function, which are all implicated in the aging process.

Courtesy: @OrganicLiveFood





SRH EYE CONSISTENCY IN MUST WIN IPL CLASH AGAINST FRAIL MI



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Confident Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to produce a dominant show against a frail Mumbai Indians outfit and move up in the Indian Premier League points table when the two teams clash here on Monday. Placed fourth in the IPL points table with 12 points in 10 matches with six wins and four losses, SRH will be desperate to produce an all-round show and make improvements especially in their bowling department. The Pat Cummins-led side is in the midst of an intense battle between multiple teams who are bidding for spots in the final four, with Rajasthan Royals (16 points), Kolkata Knight Riders (14 points) and Lucknow Super Giants (12

points) placed above SRH. Chennai Super Kings (5th with 10 points) and a resurgent Delhi Capitals (6th with 10 points) are breathing down SRH's neck, a scenario that would force the 2016 winners to shrug off any rust and get ready for an intense mid-table battle. If a two-paced pitch at the Wankhede Stadium for the previous clash against KKR was an aberration, the free-flowing SRH batters would look to make merry and pile up a huge score as they have done several times this year. The pitches here generally are batting-friendly and short boundary lengths at this venue make scores in excess of 200 a norm, but the MI-KKR contest played out on a sluggish surface last Friday

challenged the batters to dig deep. SRH would be high on confidence having pipped the table-toppers RR by just one run in their previous outing, a game in which their bowlers pulled off a thrilling win. Travis Head (396 runs), Abhishek Sharma (315) and Heinrich Klaasen (337) remain the enforcers in SRH's batting but South African Aiden Markram would be keen to make a big score of his own, having had a mixed run so far. Nitish Kumar Reddy (219 runs) has emerged as one of the most promising players for SRH in last few games which takes a significant amount of pressure off the key batters. T Natarajan's (15 wickets) accuracy would be handy for

SRH as the left-arm pacer is chasing Mumbai Indians' Jasprit Bumrah (17) for the purple cap. Five-time winners Mumbai slipped to the bottom of the pool again when Royal Challengers Bengaluru trumped Gujarat Titans on Saturday night. With only three wins in 11 matches, MI's challenge is all but over and there is only "pride and name" left to play for by their own admission. However, all is not lost as MI's key India players for the upcoming T20 World Cup, Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav and Hardik Pandya would remain in focus for their individual form. Rohit's all-out aggressive approach has not yielded many big scores whereas the world number 1 T20 batter

Suryakumar would be eyeing consistency after a fine half-century against KKR a few nights ago. India vice-captain Pandya has been consistently on the receiving end due to his ordinary form with both bat and ball and also his on-field decisions as MI skipper. The all-rounder, however, would be keen to make amends and put an end to the criticism that he has been facing ever since this IPL edition got underway.

TEAMS (FROM)
Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalki Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai (wk), Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Aiden Markram, Abdul Samad, Nitish Reddy, Shahbaz Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips (wk), Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Upendra Yadav (wk), Jhathavedh Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijayakanth Vijayakanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaj Singh, Mayank Agarwal.

Leader Siraj regains swing, aggression as RCB, India hopes rise high

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The change in Mohammed Siraj's fortunes has played a critical role in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's late surge in this IPL, and the pacer's good run might also have put the Indian thinktank at ease ahead of next month's T20 World Cup. In the latest show of his metamorphosis, Siraj wrecked Gujarat Titans with a two-wicket burst in the Power Play, grabbing the wickets of Shubman Gill and Wriddhiman Saha. Siraj's figures at that stage was a superb 2-0-9-2, and as someone who is marked to share the new ball with Jasprit Bumrah in the ICC showpiece, it's certainly a shot in the arm for the national team as well. RCB assistant coach Adam Griffith, who has worked with Siraj for the last five years, placed that transformation to him "swinging the ball again." "He's the leader of our group. He's played a lot for India in the last few years and has done really well. It's not just him bowling well. It's his aggression, his body language, him taking the batters on to try and get wickets is such an important part of what we're trying to do." "Having him up and going, swinging the ball again, bowling with good pace, and being aggressive is so important to us," said Griffith in the post-match press meet here on Saturday after RCB defeated GT by four wickets. The Royal Challengers bowling unit's performance - a collective economy rate of 10.28 and 45 wickets - was the

worst in this season of IPL. In a way, it was Siraj's responsibility to inspire the rest of the pack as the leader and he did put his hand up. Perhaps, the nine-day break he was given between April 12 and 20 refreshed his mind and helped him regain his sharpness. The match he missed in the interim was the one in which Sunrisers Hyderabad racked in an IPL record of 287 for three in Bengaluru. Griffith explained the thought process behind giving some leisure time for Siraj. "He's like any other player when they are fatigued. It's very important to give them that break. That's just as important as the training component, sometimes even more important. He is a rhythm bowler - his run-up is so important to what he does. So, we want him fresh and running in hard," he said. Post his return from the break, Siraj played four matches against Kolkata Knight Riders, SRH and two against GT. While RCB lost by one-run against the Knight Riders in a high-scoring match, they won the other three. In those three matches, Siraj had figures of 4-0-20-0, 4-0-34-1 and 4-0-29-2. Griffith said Siraj has found a good balance between off-time and preparation. "He knows his body really well. He knows what he needs to do to prepare and every now and then we might need to give him a little bit of a push in that direction." "I've been with him now for five or so years, so I can tell when he's going well and when he needs a rest," he added.



CSK pacer Matheesha Pathirana returns to SL with hamstring injury

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings' Matheesha Pathirana's outing in the ongoing IPL is all but over as the pacer will return to Sri Lanka to recover from a hamstring injury. The right-arm slinger played six matches in this IPL, picking up 13 wickets at an economy of 7.68. "Chennai Super Kings wishes Pathirana a quick recovery," the CSK stated in a media release on Sunday. Pathirana last played for CSK during their 78-run win over Sunrisers Hyderabad, where he bowled two overs and picked up the wickets of Aiden Markram and Heinrich Klaasen. Pathirana missed the match against Punjab Kings at Chennai on May 1 with England pacer Richard Gleeson replacing him. The unavailability of Pathirana is a big setback to CSK as their bowling stocks have dwindled drastically in the last few days. Pace bowler all-rounder Deepak Chahar too is set to miss the remainder of the IPL with a niggle he sustained during the match against Punjab at Chepauk.

OTHER SPORTS

Indian men's 4x400m team fails to finish World Relays heat race

PTI ■ NASSAU (BAHAMAS)

Second leg runner Rajesh Ramesh spilled out due to cramps as the Indian men's 4x400m team failed to finish its heat race at the World Athletics Relays here on Sunday, during round one of Paris Olympics qualifications. The Indian quartet of Mohammed Anas Yahiya, Rajesh Ramesh, Mohammed Ajmal and Amoj Jacob was hoping to book a Paris ticket with a top-two finish in heat number four, but in a utter heartbreak, Ramesh left the race midway while clutching his left leg. Anas had already run the first leg. "The men's 4x400m relay team had a good start. Muhammad Anas

clocked 45.93 seconds in the first leg, but the second runner -- Rajesh Ramesh -- fell down due to cramps in leg muscles at the first bend," Athletics Federation of India (AFI) said in a statement. Ramesh had run the mixed 4x400m race three hours before the men's event. India will have another chance on Monday during round two of Olympics qualifications where all the other teams which finished outside top-two in their respective heats on Sunday will try their luck for another shot at the Paris Games. The teams are expected to be divided into three heats and top two from each of them will book Paris ticket.



The same quartet had set an Asian record of 2 minutes and 59.05 seconds at the 2023 Budapest World Championships. India had failed to get past the heat round in the Tokyo Olympics. India also failed to make the Paris Olympics cut in women's 4x400m and mixed 4x400m relays on the first day of qualifications. Both the Indian teams of mixed 4x400m and women's 4x400m will have to wait for Monday's round two of Olympics qualifications. In the mixed 4x400m event, the Indian quartet of Rajesh Ramesh, Rupal Chaudhary, Avinash Krishna Kumar and Jyothika Sri Dandi ran a poor race to finish sixth in heat number two with a time of 3

minutes and 20.36 seconds. Later, the Indian quartet of Vithya Ramraj, M R Poovamma, Jyothika Sri Dandi and Subha Venkatesan finished fifth in heat number one with a time of 3 minutes and 29.74 seconds. The top two teams in each of the four heat races here qualify for the Paris Olympics to be held from July 16 to August 11. The remaining teams in all the heats will compete again on Monday in another qualification round for another six Paris Olympics spots. The format is the same for all the five relay races -- men's and women's 4x100m, men's and women's 4x400m and mixed 4x400m -- being held here.

Ronaldo scores his 4th hat-trick of Saudi Pro League season

AP ■ RIYADH

Cristiano Ronaldo scored his fourth hat trick of the Saudi Pro League season as Al-Nassr thrashed Al-Wehda 6-0. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner now has 32 league goals this season, two short of Abderrazak Hamdallah's record tally of 34 back in the 2018-19 campaign, with four goals still to play. Ronaldo opened the scoring in Riyadh in the fifth minute after intercepting a poor clearance from goalkeeper Munir Mohamedi. Seven minutes later, the former Real Madrid and Manchester United star grabbed his second, heading home a cross from Marcelo Brozovic. Early in the second half, Ronaldo's shot from just inside the area secured his hat trick in Al-Nassr's seventh successive win. His fellow Portuguese star Otavio also scored as did Senegal forward Sadio Mane and Mohammed Al-Fatih. The win moves nine-time Saudi Arabian champion Al-Nassr to nine points behind leader Al-Hilal.

Vivaan bows out in shoot-off as Indian trap shooters disappoint in Baku WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian trap shooters failed to enter the title round of the ongoing ISSF World Cup in Baku after Vivaan Kapoor bowed out 2-3 in a shoot-off with Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist Matthew John Coward-Holley of Great Britain.

Vivaan shot 120 in qualification round to get into a three-way shoot-off for the sixth and final qualifying spot with Ireland's former junior world champion Ian O'Sullivan, besides Coward-Holley. While Ian missed his very first shot to exit first, Vivaan kept fighting only to miss his third

shot as Coward-Holley nailed all three targets to go through. Vivaan had to settle for the seventh place. Besides Vivaan, Prithviraj Tondaiman (score 117, rank 24th) and Bhowneesh Mendiratta (score 116, rank 39th) also had a disappointing outing in men's trap event.

China wins Uber Cup for 16th time, beats Indonesia 3-0 in final

AP ■ CHENGDU (CHINA)

China underlined its supremacy by beating Indonesia to win the Uber Cup for the 16th time on Sunday. China, which lost the final to South Korea in Bangkok two years ago, routed Indonesia 3-0, playing its first Uber Cup final since 2008.

Olympic champion Chen Yu Fei provided China with a perfect start when she defeated Gregoria Mariska Tunjung 21-7, 21-16. The Chinese pair of world No. 1 Chen Qing Chen and Jia Yi Fan then outplayed Siti Fadia Silva Ramadhanti and Ribka Sugiarto 21-11, 21-8 for a commanding 2-0 lead. Teenager Ester Nurumi fought



"Last time it was a shame that we couldn't win the Uber Cup, so over the last two years we were always ready, and we were playing at home," said He. Later on Sunday, both nations will meet in the Thomas Cup final. It is for the first time since 2012 that the same countries will be playing in both the men's and women's finals.

Verstappen ties Prost's record with 6th pole winning run to open an F1 season

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS

Max Verstappen inched closer to a third consecutive win at the Miami Grand Prix by continuing his long domination of Formula 1 qualifying. The three-time reigning F1 champion won his seventh consecutive pole, but first at Miami, where Verstappen failed to earn the top starting spot in the first two races around Hard Rock Stadium, yet still won them both. "I don't know what it is, every single year we come here I find it extremely difficult to be consistent with the car feeling, with the tire feeling over one lap," Verstappen said. "I think we did OK. It's not the most enjoyable lap of my career, but we're on pole and that's the most important."

The pole-winning run tied Verstappen with Alain Prost in opening the season with six consecutive poles. Prost did it in 1993. "Good start," Verstappen radioed his team. "Let's keep it going." Verstappen opened Saturday with a win in the sprint race and ended the day with his 38th career pole. The Red Bull driver turned a lap at 1 minute, 27.241 seconds to best the Ferraris of Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz Jr. And will lead the field to green on Sunday for the first of F1's three races this year in the United States. Verstappen has won four of the first five F1 races this season. Sergio Perez, Verstappen's teammate at Red Bull, qualified fourth and was followed by McLaren teammates Lando



Norris and Oscar Piastri, who were likely disappointed after upgrades brought to Miami has the team hoping to move closer to competition with Red Bull and Ferrari. Mercedes drivers George Russell and Lewis Hamilton qualified sixth and seventh and were followed by Nico Hulkenberg of Haas and Yuki Tsunoda of Red Bull's junior team. It was a terrible session for Tsunoda teammate Daniel Ricciardo, who was having a decent weekend until he failed to advance out of the first qualifying group. Ricciardo was strong in Friday qualifying for the sprint race and finished fourth in the warm-up race Saturday. He qualified 18th in the 20-driver field but will start last because he

must serve a three-spot grid penalty earned in F1's last outing, in China. It was also a poor qualifying day for American driver Logan Sargeant of Pompano Beach. At his home track, and while his job with Williams is in clear jeopardy, Sargeant qualified 17th. "Are we in? Please tell me we are in," he radioed his team in hopes he'd advanced out of the first group. When told he was eliminated, the 23-year-old replied, "that's a shame." Kevin Magnussen of Haas is under FIA investigation for unsportsmanlike behavior for how he raced earlier Saturday in the sprint race. Magnussen was penalized three times in the sprint race and said after that all were fair.