

**OPINION 6**  
AN OPEN LETTER TO  
SHEHBAZ SHARIF

**WORLD 8**  
YEMEN'S HOUTHİ REBELS CLAIM TWO  
ATTACKS IN GULF OF ADEN

**MONEY 10**  
HOUSEHOLD SAVINGS DECLINE DUE TO  
RISING HOME, AUTO, PERSONAL LOANS

DEHRADUN, FRIDAY MAY 10, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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## ED stonewall for Kejriwal

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who has sought 'relief' from the Supreme Court to enable him to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls, faced opposition from the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which is probing the AAP leader's role in a multi-crore excise policy. In a fresh affidavit filed on Thursday in the apex court, the ED opposed interim bail for Kejriwal, stating that the right to campaign for elections was "not fundamental" and that no political leader has ever been granted interim bail for campaigning, even if they are not contesting polls. The move comes a day before the Supreme Court is set to hear Kejriwal's interim bail plea in the case on Friday. Sources also said the ED is preparing to file a chargesheet in the liquor scam in which Kejriwal has been named as the kingpin. Interestingly, the ED said such an approach would incentivise every criminal to become a politician and being in campaign mode throughout the year while committing rampant offences and violations of laws in the country. "Around 123 elections have taken place in the past three years and if interim bail is granted for election campaigning then no politician could be arrested



File Photo: PTI

and kept in judicial custody since elections take place all year round," the ED said. It said there are numerous examples where politicians contested elections in judicial custody and some have even won but were never granted interim bail on this ground. "It is relevant to note that the right to campaign for an election is neither a fundamental right nor a constitutional right and not even a legal right," the agency said. It said to its knowledge, "no political leader has been

granted interim bail for campaigning even though he is not the contesting candidate. Even a contesting candidate is not granted interim bail if he is in custody for his own campaigning". "In light of the above, any special concession in favour of the arrestee enlarging him on interim bail for campaigning in general election would, in the humble submission of the respondent, amount to anathema to the rule of law and equality and create a precedent which would

unscrupulous politicians to commit crimes, avoid investigation under the garb of one election or the other be it municipal election, or panchayat election or Assembly election or general election and thereafter upon being arrested, seek interim bail to campaign for one election or the other thereby creating two separate classes in the count viz. ordinary people who are bound by the rule of law as well as the laws of the country and politicians who can seek exemption from the laws in

the hope of securing interim bail to campaign for elections. In this regard, it may be noted that in the past five years, 123 elections have been held in various states in India," it said. The ED said in a federal structure, no set of election is more significant than another and therefore, every politician at every level would argue that if he is not let out on interim bail, he would suffer irreversible consequences. "Under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act alone presently there are many politicians who are in judicial custody and their cases are examined by competent courts upholding their custody. "There must be several political leaders in judicial custody throughout the country in non-PMLA offences. "There is no reason why a special prayer for a special treatment by the petitioner be acceded to". "Grant of interim bail merely for political campaigning would militate against and will be discriminatory to the rule of equality as work/business/ profession or activity of every citizen is equally important to him or her. It would not be possible to hold that work of a small farmer or a small trader is any less important than political campaigning of a political leader who admittedly is not contesting.



File Photo: PTI

## Testing times ahead for BJP in Haryana

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Just a few days ahead of the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections in Haryana, the BJP-led Nayab Singh Saini Government has been trying to keep its flock together, while there has been a demand for a floor test by JJP leader Dushyant Chautala, who not very long ago was a partner with the BJP in the Manohar Lal Khattar Government. While Dushyant wrote Governor Bandaru Dattatreya seeking a floor-test for the present Haryana Government to prove its majority on floor of the House, the Congress, which had earlier demanded the imposition of President's rule and early Assembly elections in the State, also sought time from the Governor for a meeting with a party delegation. This comes days after three Independent MLAs withdrew support from the

BJP Government, extending support to the Congress. However, Saini maintained that his Government is not in trouble. He told reporters in Karnal that his Government won a confidence vote in March and "if it comes to seeking the trust vote, I will do it again when the time comes". The BJP currently has 40 MLAs in the Assembly, shy of the majority mark of 45 in the now 88-member House. Technically, the BJP Government has the support of 43 MLAs (including Independents) now, though it claimed on Tuesday that four JJP MLAs too may offer "tactical assistance" to the Government if needed", taking its strength to 47. The JJP had pulled out of the BJP coalition Government in March 2024. Of the JJP's 10 MLAs, at least six have distanced themselves from Chautala.

## Russia says US poking nose into India affairs

PTI ■ MOSCOW

The US has not yet provided any reliable evidence of the involvement of Indian citizens in the murder plot of a Khalistani terrorist in that country, Russia has said, as it accused Washington of meddling in India's domestic affairs and the ongoing elections. In November last year, US federal prosecutors charged Indian national Nikhil Gupta with working with an Indian Government employee in the foiled plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. Pannun, wanted in India on terror charges, holds dual citizenship of the US and Canada. He has been designated as a terrorist by the Union Home Ministry under the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, when asked to respond to a report by *The Washington Post* claiming that India is trying to adopt the policies as Russia and Saudi Arabia, said, "According to the information we have, Washington has not yet provided any reliable evidence of the involvement of Indian citizens in the preparation of the murder of a certain GS Pannun.

## Sandeshkhali rape victim turns 'hostile'



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

After Saturday's "fake video", on Thursday, emerged the 'fake FIR' in the Sandeshkhali mass rape case, threatening to dent and disturb the BJP's soaring graph in the Basirhat parliamentary constituency. Things tended to boomerang against the saffron outfit, even as the Trinamool Congress' sting teams worked overtime to turn the Sandeshkhali rape-and-land-grab cases upside down. Some women on Thursday said the police complaint that they were made to sign on blank sheets were not about rape but about non-payment of hundred days' work schemes. "We were tricked into signing the blank papers ... we were told that the signed papers would be used to claim the 100-days' work dues ... we had no idea that rape stories would be written

there. We discovered later that rape complaints had been lodged in our names. This is a blatant lie," they said. The woman said the incident took place on the day the National Commission for Women visited the island. "A woman called Piyali who is an outsider did it all ... we told them that we had not received money as part of the 100 days' job scheme. But in the name of getting us to write a complaint to that effect she made us sign on a blank sheet," she said. The BJP immediately rose up to control damage by saying the TMC is threatening the women to change their versions. "Earlier they showed a fake and paid video and now they are coming up with this ... The leadership will have to say what has to be said but it is clear that it is the same TMC which has been threatening the villagers into submission for the past 10 years once again have started doing so ... though I haven't seen it ... if the video is true then the women are being threatened to contradict their statements," a local BJP leader at Basirhat said on conditions of anonymity. State BJP leader Priyanka Tibrewal asked, "What the TMC was doing for the past several months ... why they have suddenly brought this fake video and fake FIR issue ... this is an afterthought ... but the damage has already been done ... earlier they said the women were lying and now they are saying they were tricked to lie."

## INDIA Bloc to meet EC over turnout figures



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leaders of the Opposition INDIA Bloc are likely to meet the Election Commission on Friday over their demand to promptly release the absolute voter turnout figures in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls after each phase. The Opposition leaders will also raise the issue of alleged "use of religious symbols" by the BJP in its campaign, sources added. INDIA Bloc parties, including the Congress, Trinamool Congress and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), have written to the poll panel separately so far, expressing concern over the alleged "delay" in the release of the voter turnout data in the first two phases.

Various Opposition parties have also approached the poll panel over speeches made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders during poll campaigns, alleging that the Model Code of Conduct had been violated. Amid the Opposition's allegations, the poll watchdog had asserted that booth-wise data of the "actual number of votes polled" is available to the candidates soon after the voting ends. Opposition parties have also sought the details of the number of voters who exercised their franchise. In a statement issued last week, the EC also said it attaches "due importance" to the timely release of voter turnout figures after each phase of the poll, and said not just constituency, but booth-wise data of the actual number of votes polled is available with the candidates, which is a statutory requirement. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had written to leaders of various Opposition parties on the issue of alleged "discrepancies" in the voting data released by the EC. In his letter, Kharge urged that the INDIA Bloc leaders to "collectively, unitedly and unequivocally" raise their voice on the issue. The EC officially shared the turnout figure for the first two phases of Lok Sabha polls on April 30.

## HOLY DAYS AHEAD



Kedarnath temple being decorated ahead of its opening for the 'Char Dham Yatra' in Rudrapurag PTI

## Deadlock over, Air India Express will take to the skies again

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After two and a half days of stalemate, Air India Express and the crew reached a middle ground on Thursday, putting an end to the suffering of hundreds of flyers. The Air India Express cabin crew has decided to withdraw strike and join back for duty after the airline assured to look into all the issues raised by the cabin crew. Besides, the airline has agreed to withdraw the termination letters issued to 25 cabin crew and the management will review the cases as per service regulations, they added. The Tata Group-owned airline has cancelled more than 170 flights since Tuesday night after the cabin crew started

reporting sick to protest against the alleged mismanagement at the airline. Following the cancellation of several flights and the inconvenience to passengers, the Government had to get involved. At the request of the Regional Labour Commissioner Ashok Perumalla, a meeting was held on Thursday between Air India Express Union and the airline CEO to reach a solution. Apparently, after the meeting, a middle ground has been reached and the strike will end, much to the relief of the travelers. In the email notice of termination it sent to the affected employees, the airline added that the widespread sick leave "violated the Air



Air India and other planes parked at the airport in Mumbai on Thursday. Air India Express on Thursday cancelled 85 flights or around 23 per cent of the total daily capacity as the disruptions due to the cabin crew shortage continue. Air India will operate services on 20 of its routes to minimise inconvenience to passengers PTI

India Express Limited Employees' Service Rules as are applicable" in addition to breaching the relevant laws. The emailed statement followed Air India Express CEO Aloke Singh's announcement that the airline was curtailing flight services until May 13 as a result of the cabin crew crisis. A section of the cabin crew

has alleged mismanagement and lack of equality in the treatment of staff. A conciliation process is happening under the Industrial Disputes Act after a union representing a section of the Air India Express cabin crew had filed a complaint before the labour department last year. Room sharing, lack of proper support, revised salary structure and alleged differential treatment of experienced crew members of Air India Express are among the issues being flagged by the striking cabin crew. On Wednesday, the Civil Aviation Ministry sought a report from Air India Express on the cancellation of flights and also asked the airline to resolve the issues

promptly. Discontent has been brewing among a section of staff at Air India Express since the start of the process to merge AIX Connect, formerly AirAsia India, with itself. Regardless of the actions taken by Air India Express, such as the dismissal of employees who went on mass leave without notice, it is ultimately the passengers who bear the brunt. The situation with Air India Express is even more dire, as many passengers are finding out about flight cancellations only after completing security checks. Soon after 30 crew members were sacked for staging mass sick leave, the Air India Express on Thursday announced that the airline

has cancelled 85 flights as flight operations were disrupted by shortage of cabin crew members. "We will be operating 283 flights today. We have mobilised all resources and Air India will support us by operating on 20 of our routes. However, 85 of our flights stand cancelled and we urge our guests booked to fly with us to check if their flight is affected by the disruption before heading to the airport," said the airline in the statement. In case their flight is cancelled or delayed beyond three hours, the Air India Express said the passengers may opt for a full refund or reschedule to a later date without any fees.

# STF arrests five cyber criminals for duping families of Kargil martyrs

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The cyber crime unit of the Uttarakhand Special Task Force (STF) exposed a national-level cyber crime by arresting five members of a gang from Delhi-NCR who were allegedly scamming the families of Kargil martyrs. They used to pose as the officials from the Defence Ministry to scam victims under the pretext of providing special grants, increased pensions and other financial facilities to the families of Kargil martyrs, the STF senior superintendent of police Ayush Agrawal said in a Press conference on Thursday. He said that this fraud came to light after a family of a Kargil martyr living in the Gumanwala area of Dehradun was scammed by the gang.

The victim registered a complaint stating that the gang duped them of Rs 45 lakh in the name of a file processing fee and other charges to get benefits from the government. Agrawal said that a team led by the deputy superintendent of police of the cyber crime police station of STF Ankush Mishra started an investigation. They found in the investigation that the gang was operating from a fake call centre in the Lakshminagar area of Delhi. The



team went there and arrested them late on Wednesday. The STF also recovered eight mobile phones and laptops, 42 SIM cards and 42 debit cards along with several fake identity cards, Aadhaar cards, PAN cards and an amount of more than Rs 1.07 lakh from the gang's possession. The authorities have also frozen the bank accounts of all the accused.

The arrested accused have been identified as Kapil Arora (33) from Delhi, Rahul Kumar Dutta (33) from Bijnor, Ravi Saini (33) from Ghaziabad, Rajesh Kumar Yadav (32) from Gorakhpur

and Anurag Shukla (33) from Kanpur. The SSP said that the accused revealed during the interrogation that they had been running fake call centres in Delhi NCR for the past six months to scam the families of martyrs and retired senior citizens. Some of the accused had worked in a call centre of an insurance company in 2016 from where they got the idea to scam people across the country. They have claimed to get the details and information of the martyrs' families from Google. The STF is working to identify all the victims of the gang and will act further accordingly, SSP added.

# Report on scam in registration of sanitation workers submitted to DM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun district magistrate Sonika will soon review the report regarding the alleged scam in the registration of fake sanitation workers under Mohalla Swachhata Samiti in the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD). The chief development officer Jharna Kamthan handed over the report to the DM recently after analysing the MCD's report in the matter. The corporation had formed Mohalla Swachhata Samiti to carry out works like sweeping and others on a regular basis in all 100 wards. Each ward was allocated about 10 to 12 sanitation workers under the Samiti. The corporation also

issued a Rs 15,000 salary for each worker through the Samiti. However, many claimed that Samiti headed by the councillors concerned has not been paying the same salary to every worker. Many people including several sanitation workers alleged that there were several irregularities regarding information about sanitation workers listed under the Samiti. They claimed it to be a fraud worth crores of rupees. When this matter reached the DM in January, she formed a committee under Kamthan to investigate the matter. The committee conducted physical inspections and found some irregulari-

ties. They also allegedly failed to find the listed sanitation workers during the physical verification process. The district administration then sought a report from MCD on the matter regarding several points. The corporation submitted the report to CDO in March and after analysing the report for about two months, she submitted the report to the DM. The administration allegedly found irregularities in the registration of about 100 sanitation workers. However, Sonika said that she is yet to review the report but will take appropriate action if finds any irregularity.

# Jewellers back with discounts and offers on Akshay Tritiya

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Jewellers in Dehradun have come up with discounts and varied offers to attract people to buy gold and jewellery on the occasion of Akshay Tritiya which falls on May 10. They are offering attractive discounts and offers to customers to entice them to buy jewellery and other

the post-Covid financial stability. Owner of a jewellery shop in Dehradun, Harkirat Singh said that traditionally, the sale of gold and diamond jewellery tends to increase significantly during Akshay Tritiya. To attract more customers, jewellers often introduce new designs and

received numerous pre-booked orders for gold and diamond jewellery for the occasion.

Another jeweller Vinod Verma said, "We are receiving between 30 to 40 per cent of bookings ahead of purchasing gold on special occasions. We are currently providing a 25 per cent discount on the making of gold jewellery and a 10 per cent discount on the making of diamond jewellery."

He further added that due to the financial stability that has been regained after the Covid pandemic, the sale on Akshay Tritiya this year will be better than in past years.

Owner of a jewellery shop in Paltaan Bazaar, Rajeev Kumar stated that they have launched many new designs of gold and diamond jewellery with attractive offers and discounts. Kumar said that people consider this day more auspicious for buying jewellery. As a result, many customers have already selected their products beforehand to avoid any hassle while collecting their items, he said.

offer attractive discounts and promotions on this special occasion. Singh said that the average rate of gold on Akshay Tritiya this year is Rs 65,000 per 10 grammes. To further entice customers, on May 10, they are offering an enhanced discount on gold-making charges as well as a zero per cent making charge on diamond jewellery. He added that they have already re-

gold items. Several jewellers in Dehradun have stated that numerous residents have already placed orders with them and booked gold and diamonds ahead of the festival to avoid any last-minute rush.

Apart from this, many gold jewellers believe that the sale of gold may surpass the sale on Akshay Tritiya in past years as a result of

# Rains douse forest fires, more succour from heat forecast today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

With the weather having come as a major relief dousing out most of the forest fires in various parts of the State especially in Bageshwar, Uttarkashi, Rudrapur and other areas, more succour from the heat is in store in some parts of the State on Friday. According to the Forest Survey of India, there were zero large forest fire events active on Thursday. The State meteorological centre has forecast that light to moderate rain/thunderstorms are likely to occur at

accompanied with lightning/gusty wind (40-50 kmph) are likely to occur at isolated places in the plain districts of the State.

The provisional State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a partly cloudy sky. Light rain/thunderstorms accompanied with lightning/gusty wind (40-50 kmph) are likely to occur in some areas. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 34 degrees Celsius and 23 degrees Celsius respectively in



few places in the mountainous regions of the State today. Very light to light rain/thunderstorms are likely to occur at isolated places in the plains too. The meteorological centre has also issued a yellow warning (Watch) regarding the possibility of thunderstorms accompanied with lightning/hail/gusty wind (40-50 kmph) likely to occur at isolated places in the mountainous districts of the State. Thunderstorms

Dehradun today. The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in various parts of the State on Thursday were 33.5 degrees Celsius and 22.6 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 35.5 degrees Celsius and 23.4 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 18.2 degrees Celsius and 11 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 23.7 degrees Celsius and 13.8 degrees Celsius in New Tehri.

# Explosion in scrap dealer's shop seriously injures 8 men

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Eight men sustained serious injuries in an explosion that occurred in a scrap dealer's shop in Raipur block of Dehradun on Thursday. A 19-year-old young man Anuj also lost his left hand below the wrist in the blast. He was the one who was hitting the explosive to extract metal when it exploded in the afternoon, the Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said. He informed that as per the investigation so far, some scrap dealers who had rented a shop in lane number 3 of the Kidduwala area found an explosive used by police or armed forces for training. They possibly found it near the firing range located in the Maldevta area of Raipur.

ical College (GDMC) hospital and the Deen Dayal Upadhyay (Coronation) Hospital. They have been identified as Anuj (19), Abhi (20), Shivam (20), Bablu (25), Yogesh (27), Rohit (30), Buddh Kumar and Sameer. Out of all these, Anuj's condition was critical the most possibly because he was quite near to the explosive when the blast happened. The health of others appeared to be stable till late on Thursday. Singh said that the owner of the shop Ramesh Kumar Khadka told the police that he had given his shop on rent to a man named Shubham about a month ago. The SSP said that BDS also searched the shop to en-

the claims and possibilities that caused this fatal incident which can be done only after interrogating the victims. They all sustained injuries and were unable to communicate after the blast. The police will question them soon after the doctors declare them fit enough to talk, he added.



When Anuj repeatedly hit the explosive, it possibly got triggered and exploded. The police got information about the incident in the afternoon and reached the spot along with the bomb disposal squad (BDS) and fire tenders. The injured men were admitted to the Government Doon Med-

sure no other similar explosives were there that could cause further damage to lives and property. The police also registered a case under relevant sections at the Raipur police station regarding the incident. Singh said that the police are yet to verify all

# Pitroda's statement part of Cong conspiracy to break nation: BJP

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Bharatiya Janata Party has alleged that Congress leader Sam Pitroda's racist comments are part of a conspiracy to break the nation. The BJP State spokesman Suresh Joshi said that the Congress which itself traces its roots to foreigners is insulting Indians by referring to them as people of foreign descent. Addressing the media at the BJP State office here on Thursday, Joshi said that Pitroda's comment is anti-national and strongly condemnable. He said, "The Congress has never accepted India as one nation. It is due to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel that all States united under one flag. Jawaharlal Nehru was given the responsibility of bringing only one State- Kashmir into the national fold but even in this task he worked to divide the nation by imposing Article 370."

Joshi further said that the nation was partitioned due to the political ambitions of the Congress. A part of Kashmir was occupied by Pakistan and a large area of the nation was handed over to China by the Congress. "The latest statement of the Congress think tank signals towards the party's plan to divide the nation and hand it over to foreign powers. As the Lok Sabha election progresses, the real face and intentions of the Congress party are coming to the fore for the public to see. This is not just about a party's politics but about a foreign mentality versus a Swadeshi ideology," the BJP State

# Shri Venkateshvara University hosts workshop on stress management

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Shri Venkateshvara University hosted a one-day national workshop on stress management during which the speakers expressed concern over a large number of people across the world falling prey to stress-triggered depression and stressed on boosting self-confidence to combat stress. Senior director of the Ministry of Railways Manish Pratap Singh, who is also a life management teacher, was the chief guest on the occasion. He laid emphasis on self-confidence, time management, positive attitude towards life and constant up-gradation of oneself to keep stress at bay. He termed meditation as the biggest tool for stress relief. While addressing the workshop, the Venkateshvara Group chairman Sudhir Giri said that happiness must be found deep inside oneself and discovering this fount of happiness inside ensures enduring freedom from stress. The pro-chancellor, Shri Venkateshvara University Rajeev Tyagi also spoke on occasion.



spokesman said. Taking a dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Joshi said that the x-ray which he talks about has been clarified by Pitroda's statement. "He wants to divide the Indians on the basis of east, west, north and south along with their appearance and colour of their skin. Instead of relying on the x-ray the Congress leaders should clear their minds to witness the unity in diversity which is the character of India.

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I, Sushma Rawat spouse of No 4083937A Rank Hav Name Mahabir Singh Rawat presently residing at, Vill Bhatwari, PO Ukimath, Teh - Ukimath, Distt-Rudraprayag (UK), PIN-246469 have changed my name from Shushma Rawat to Sushma Rawat vide Affidavit dated 02.05.2024 place Joshimath

In my service record, my son's incorrect name ANSHU SINGH has been recorded, as per his Aadhar No.61763320043 his correct is ANSH S/o Army No.4090670Y L/NK RAGHUVIEER SINGH, residing at KOTI MAYA MAGARO, TEHRI GARHWAL, UTTARAKHAND - 249161.

I, PRIYANKA W/o Army No.2809018L L HAV JADHAV SANDIP KACHARU, VILL- SILLOD, POST- SILLOD, TEH- SILLOD, DIST- CHHATRAPATI SAMBAHAI NAGAR, Maharashtra- 431112. I have changed my name PRIYANKA to PRIYANKA SANDIP JADHAV inclusion of middle and last name as per Aadhar No.997306019175 vide affidavit sworn before notary and advocate Sanjeev Kumar dated 09.05.2024 UK.GOI.

I, SHOBHA W/o Army No. JC-461431W SUB PHADATARE SHIVAJI HANMANT, VILL-DHARPUDI, POST-DHARPUDI, TEH-KHATAV, DIST- SATARA- Maharashtra-415505. I have changed my name SHOBHA to SHOBHA SHIVAJI PHADATARE inclusion of middle and last name as per Aadhar No.997306019175 vide affidavit sworn before notary and advocate Sanjeev Kumar dated 09.05.2024 UK.GOI.

I Rishiv, is son of JC-415229K Ns Sub Ranveer Singh Bhandari, permanent residing at Rajeshwaripuram Lower Nathapur, PO-I.I.P, Teh- Dehradun and Dist-Dehradun (UK) PIN-248005 have changed my name from RISHIV to RISHABH BHANDARI vide affidavit dated 26 April 2024 before notary, Dehradun.

I Rakhi, legally wedded spouse of JC-415229K Ns Sub Ranveer Singh Bhandari, permanent residing at Rajeshwaripuram Lower Nathapur, PO-I.I.P, Teh- Dehradun and Dist-Dehradun (UK) PIN-248005 from RAKHI to RAKHI BHANDARI vide affidavit dated 26 April 2024 before notary, Dehradun.

I have actually lost the original copies of my high school mark sheet & pass certificate Index No T/7312/063 and Intermediate mark sheet Index No B/8623/072 somewhere and not found yet. Kapil Kumar S/o Ravinder Nath R/o 305/14, East Patel Nagar, Dehradun

In my Husband Service record my name is mistakenly recorded as MAHESHWARI whereas my correct name is MAHESHWARI DEVI as mentioned in all other documents. Army No-4089751M EX L/NK SUDHIR RAWAT R/O B-3 BALAJI RESIDENCY KANWALI G.M.S R O A D D E H R A D U N U T T A R A K H A N D. vide IN-UK19102106847190W Affidavit 09.05.2024 before Dehradun.

In my Army Record my daughter's name is mistakenly recorded as AYRA whereas her correct name is ANANYA RAWAT as mentioned in all other documents. Army No-4089751M EX L/NK SUDHIR RAWAT R/O B-3 BALAJI RESIDENCY KANWALI G.M.S R O A D D E H R A D U N U T T A R A K H A N D. vide IN-UK19102106847190W Affidavit 09.05.2024 Dehradun.

I Ganesh Singh, s/o Jagdish Singh, address Vill Jiwangarh, PO Ambari, District Dehradun, Uttarakhand declare that my father died on 30.07.2012.

**Public Notice**  
 I Ganesh Singh, s/o Jagdish Singh, address Vill Jiwangarh, PO Ambari, District Dehradun, Uttarakhand. In my service records my wife's name ARCHANA, my mother's name MANJU RAM and her DOB 30.06.1956 have been mistakenly recorded. My wife's correct name is ARCHANA RAJWARI, mother's correct name is MANJU DEVI and her correct Date of Birth is 01.01.1957 as mentioned in their aadhar card and other documents. It should be updated in my service records for all future purposes.

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## CM directs forest personnel to work in tandem with villagers to control fires

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has directed the officers and employees of the Forest department to work in coordination with villagers to control forest fires in the State. He was presiding over a review meeting with the officers of Forest, Peyajal and Power departments at the Uttarakhand Forestry Training Academy in Haldwani on Thursday. He instructed senior officials to remain in the field for effective control and prevention of forest fires and to maintain the morale of the employees. He said that the fire lines of the British era, which are still in existence, should be restored.



The CM also directed the personnel of the Forest department to maintain better coordination with the villagers. This will help to a great extent in reducing the impact of disaster and the villagers will also feel connected to their forests, he said.

Dhami said that although the Forest department is making efforts to deal with the incidents of forest fires, it should prepare an inclusive plan for the state so that the number of fires occurring every year can be minimised.

In this regard, he laid emphasis on studying the models developed within the country as well as abroad and said that efforts should be made to include them in the plan of our state. The CM directed that the Forest department should focus on strengthening its organisational structure as well.

The chief conservator of forests PK Patro informed the CM that all fire watchers have been instructed to collect

Pirul ( pine needles).

Dhami directed the road construction agencies to pay special attention to the quality in the construction of roads. He said that saplings should be planted along with the crash barriers on the roads. The CM also instructed the officers to ensure that people do not face drinking water problems during the summer season. He said that if the drinking water line is disrupted due to any reason,

arrangements for supply of drinking water should be made by use of tankers.

The Nainital district magistrate Vandana Singh claimed that the incidents of forest fires this year are lesser in the district compared to the incidents of forest fire from February 2019 to May 2024. Lalkuan MLA Mohan Bisht, DIG of Kumaon range Yogendra Rawat, SSP PN Meena and others were present in the meeting.

## No new incident of forest fire in U'khand in past 24 hours: Raturi

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Participating in a review meeting on forest fire incidents in the State under the chairmanship of Home secretary, Government of India on Thursday, chief secretary Radha Raturi informed that no new incident of forest fire has occurred in Uttarakhand in the past 24 hours. The incidents of forest fire have been consistently decreasing for the last two days. About 0.1 percent of the forests in Uttarakhand have been affected by forest fire and legal action will be taken against those who propagate wrong figures in this regard, she said.

Raturi averred that the government has put all its efforts into forest fire control. Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami is consistently conducting review and monitoring meetings regarding forest fire control. The chief secretary and principal chief conservator of forests are also holding meetings with the officials and field staff regarding the situation.

Raturi informed that the fire alert received from Forest Survey of India (FSI) is immediately sent in the related WhatsApp groups and the crew team is sent to the spot at the same time. With special monitoring of the large number of fire alerts received from FSI, success has been achieved in controlling forest fires in the shortest possible time, she claimed.



The chief secretary further said that by making the active Van Panchayats, forest fire management committees, Mahila Mangal Dals, Yuva Mangal Dals aware and responsible, success has been achieved in controlling forest fires in the forest areas near the villages. From April 28 to May 1, the 15th battalion of NDRF assisted in controlling forest fires in Nainital forest division and on Thursday this battalion reached Garhwal forest division. An Indian Air Force Mi-17 helicopter sprayed 44,600 litres of water in Garhwal forest division between May 6 and 8.



### CANDID NOTES

Gajendra Singh Negi

#### Shubh Yatra

Amidst the ongoing process of the Lok Sabha elections in the country, the world famous Char Dham Yatra is starting on a grand scale in Uttarakhand. Going by the rush of pilgrims on the opening day and the number of registrations, the Yatra this year is set to break all the previous records in terms of the visitor footfall. A day before the start of the Yatra, a whopping 22,76,969 pilgrims have registered which has kindled expectations that the record created by the arrival of about 50 lakh pilgrims in last year's Yatra is set to be broken this year. The tremendous response for the Yatra - often referred to as the backbone of Uttarakhand's economy - augurs well for the tourism industry and the State. However, on the flip side, the huge rush of pilgrims poses a major burden on the infrastructure and resources of the small Himalayan State. The management of traffic and huge pilgrim flow aside from providing necessary facilities to the pilgrims and ensuring their safe stay in the State will doubtless put the administration on a critical test during the Yatra period.

#### Rainy rescue

Even as the Supreme Court opined that depending on rain is not an answer for the raging forest fires in Uttarakhand, the rain god finally came to the rescue of a beleaguered forest department of the Himalayan State. The rains finally did what the gargantuan machinery of the state government failed to accomplish. The planners should understand that frequency and intensity of the wildfire increased after the local people started disowning forests due to strict and archaic laws which view them as invaders and foes rather than friends of the forests. There is an urgent need for revising these laws to increase community participation in saving forests from blaze. A modern, effective, integrated and holistic plan is needed to be set in place to combat the forest fire menace. Though the long-raging forest fire has been doused to some extent, one wonders why some of the decorated environmentalists and one politician - a self-professed champion of forest rights of locals with 'Jal, Jungle & Jamin' slogan - are maintaining stony silence when the ravaging fire is consuming the State's precious forest cover. It appears that the fire earlier blazing inside this leader zealously championing forest rights of locals has dampened down completely after he shifted political allegiance before the 2022 assembly elections.

#### Sting stink

The corridors of power in the Himalayan State are agog with talk of a sleaze video ostensibly showing a young lawmaker in compromising position with a woman. Though everyone is talking about the existence of the video it mysteriously has not gone viral yet. Uttarakhand has a history of stings and the State paid the price in terms of the political instability and loss of credibility of the political class.

In the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) - powered deep fake pictures and video clips, the authenticity of such stings has come under a cloud. However, these stings can still rip up the personal reputation and family life of the targeted individual. In the current case, the grapevine has it that the young Netaji has been honey-trapped and subsequently blackmailed, which, if true, is unfortunate.

## Kedarnath, Gangotri & Yamunotri to open today, 22 lakh register to visit Char Dham

### Panch Mukhi Doli of Lord Kedarnath reaches temple township

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

At least 22 lakh people have registered for the Char Dham Yatra slated to start today. The Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri temples will be reopened ceremoniously to the devotees today,

Kedarnath reached Kedarnath on Thursday evening along with throngs of devotees.

According to information provided by the Tourism department, 22,76,696 people had registered till Thursday to visit the Char Dham shrines and Hemkund Sahib. According to official data, 7,83,107 people have registered to visit Kedarnath, 6,83,424 to visit Badrinath, 4,06,263 to visit Gangotri and 3,56,134 to visit Yamunotri. Apart from the Char Dham shrines, 48,041 people have registered to visit Hemkund Sahib Gurudwara. Out of these people who have registered, 17,60,749 have registered on the website, 3,10,294 through the mobile phone application and 2,05,926 through WhatsApp.



marking the start of the Char Dham Yatra. Meanwhile, the Panch Mukhi Doli of Lord

## Transport department issues green cards to over 8,644 vehicles for Char Dham Yatra

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Transport department has issued green cards to over 8,644 vehicle operators to operate on Char Dham routes since April 4 ahead of the Char Dham Yatra that is scheduled to commence on May 10. The department has collected a revenue of over Rs 56 lakh so far. Out of 8,644 green cards issued so far, 7,849 have been issued to operators from Uttarakhand and 795 green cards to operators of other states. The department has issued 1,344 green cards to buses, 1,226 to mini buses, 1,566 to maxi cabs and 4,510 to taxis, the nodal officer of Char Dham Yatra and the regional transport officer (Administration) Sunil Sharma said. Besides this, the department has so far issued trip cards to 601 vehicles carrying

5,661 passengers. He said that enforcement teams have established four main checkpoints on Char Dham routes at Brahmepuri, Bhadrakali, Kuthal Gate and Damta and have started conducting regular checkings of vehicles. The teams have



checked over 354 vehicles and penalised 37 vehicles. The department has also deployed 20 enforcement squads on Char Dham routes to ensure safe journeys for tourists and pilgrims in mountainous areas.

## All arrangements made for a convenient and safe Yatra

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The control room set for the Char Dham Yatra will remain operational throughout the pilgrimage period. It will function daily from 7 AM to 10 PM, the State Tourism and Culture minister Satpal Maharaj said. A system of tokens and slots has been introduced so that pilgrims do not have to wait in queues for long to pay obeisance to the deity. Officials of the executing agency for this purpose and the Tourism department have already conducted field inspections along with the police and district administration officials to ensure proper facilitation of the system. The implementation of this system will mean that no devotee will have to wait for more than an hour in the queue to pay obeisance to the deity in the Char Dham shrines.



number 1035-1364 and by WhatsApp. In addition to this, counters have also been opened in Rishikesh and Haridwar for offline registration of pilgrims. For any information related to the Char Dham Yatra, a person can phone on 0135-2552627, 2559898. Further, the authorities have appointed 115 personnel through Uttarakhand Purva Sainik Kalyan Nigam Limited (UPNL) and Prantiya Rakshak Dal (PRD) for the safety and assistance of pilgrims during the Char Dham Yatra.

According to officials, necessary arrangements have also been made to ensure sanitation during the pilgrimage. Bookings worth crores of rupees have been made in the 94 guest houses of the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam on the Yatra circuit. It is pertinent to mention here that at least 22 lakh persons have registered so far to visit the Char Dham and Hemkund Sahib Gurudwara.

## Mahara demands better arrangements on Char Dham Yatra routes

PNS ■ DEHRADUN


The Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Karan Maharaj said that government arrangements on the Char Dham Yatra routes are pathetic. In a letter sent to the chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, Maharaj said that there is an urgent need to revamp the arrangements in the Yatra route. In the letter he said, "The Char Dham Yatra and the tourism season in the State has started. Tourism is one of the major sources of income of the people of the State but arrangements at the start of Yatra this year are poor. The pilgrims coming from other States are facing problems in registration."

sibility of the officers of administration and tourism department should be fixed in this regard.

The PCC president added that with rising mercury the drinking water crisis has set up in many parts of the State. He said that 50 per cent water sources providing drinking water to the people residing in mountainous areas get dried up in the month of April due to which scarcity of drinking water occurs.

Maharaj said that apart from the local population the hotel owners and tourists visiting the State face problems from drinking water scarcity. He demanded that the assessment of drinking water shortage should be immediately done and efforts should be made to tackle the issue.


Maharaj suggested that the arrangement of registration should be made at major entry points of Yatra such as Rishikesh, Chinyalisaur, Rudraprayag and Uttarkashi and respon-



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# Chardham Yatra




**Yamunotri**

Opening Date - 10 May, 2024




**Gangotri**

Opening Date - 10 May, 2024



**Kedarnath**

Opening Date - 10 May, 2024






**Badrinath**

Opening Date - 12 May, 2024

#### MODES OF REGISTRATION

- [registrationandtouristcare.uk.gov.in](http://registrationandtouristcare.uk.gov.in)
- +91-8394833833 (Type 'yatra' on WhatsApp)
- Toll Free Number 0135-1364

Download the App:

[touristcareuttarakhand](#)

#### IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS

- REGISTRATION for the Yatra is compulsory.
- Enter **Correct MOBILE Number** during Registration.
- Collect "**DARSHAN TOKEN**" at the Dhams.
- Keep adequate **woolens** and **rain protection** with you.
- Keep adequate stock of **essential medicine** with you.
- Take adequate rest for **weather acclimatisation** during the Yatra
- Please halt your Yatra if you are **feeling unwell**.
- **Avoid offers** of Heli Tickets and Special Darshan from unscrupulous elements.
- **Help us** to keep the Dhams and Yatra Route clean.
- **Drive carefully** and park vehicles at designated parking areas.
- To book helicopter tickets visit: [heliyatra.irctc.co.in](http://heliyatra.irctc.co.in)

**For further information, please contact**

Phone: 0135-1364, 0135-2559898, 0135-2552627

E-mail: [touristcare.uttarakhand@gmail.com](mailto:touristcare.uttarakhand@gmail.com)

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# India, Maldives ties based on mutual interests: Jaishankar

# BJP expresses concern over rise in Muslim population

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The BJP on Thursday expressed concern over the pace of increase in Muslim population in the country and wondered its impact on the reservation provided to SCs, STs and OBCs, claiming the Congress is "hell bent" on providing quota to the minority community if voted to power.



answer," the BJP spokesperson said. Senior BJP leader and Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar said that the EAC-PM's report raises many questions because one particular community is "increasing its population in a manner where demography of India is being altered, changed". "This leads to some questions that need to be asked and answered," he said, adding "How much of growth in Muslim community is being caused by illegal immigration and conversion?" he asked. "What is the impact of this significant increase in the minority community's (Muslims) population on the rights and opportunities (available) for the other minority communities? There are Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and Christians. Is there any crowding out of these minority communities as a consequence of this (rise in Muslim population)?" Chandrasekhar asked. He alleged that some political parties including the Congress are making "huge attempt to alter the Constitution and bring religion based reservation". "So, what will be the consequence when you have the Muslim community increasing its population so rapidly, from 9 per cent to 14.5 per cent and there are political forces that want to give them reservation," he said.

The ruling party's reaction came after a recent working paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) said the share of the Hindu population decreased by 7.82 per cent between 1950 and 2015 in India, while that of Muslims increased by 43.15 per cent, suggesting that there is a conducive environment in the country to foster diversity. The paper titled 'Share of Religious Minorities: A Cross-Country Analysis (1950-2015)' further said the share of Jains in the population of India decreased from 0.45 per cent in 1950 to 0.36 per cent in 2015. The report comes ahead of the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha polls. "It's a very well-known fact, which has been in the public domain for around a decade. If you see the 1951 census, Hindus were having 88 per cent population and Muslims 9.5 per cent. In the 2011 census, Hindus (population) reduced to 79.8 percent from

80 percent while Muslims' percentage went up by more than 14.5," BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said. "But, the question arises that if by this pace the population is increasing and Congress is hell bent upon giving reservation to the Muslims on the basis of population, they will cut the share of the SCs, STs and the OBCs," he added. Trivedi said the Congress, if voted to power will, then keep on "changing" the share of reservation in future with increase in the Muslim population, "which is more likely because they (Muslims) are having possibility of multiple marriages". Muslims share in the reservation will keep on increasing also because of "conversion and infiltration because they are having a secular cover from them (the Congress)," he added. "So this is a bigger question and a bigger challenge which they (Congress) have to



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Maldives Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer at a meeting in New Delhi

PTI

of our perspectives in various domains," he said. The ties between the two countries came under severe strain in view of Muizzu insisting on withdrawal of Indian military personnel operating three military platforms in the island nation. Zameer is New Delhi in the first high-level trip from Male after the Maldives' pro-China president Muizzu assumed office six months ago. "As close and proximate neighbours, the development of our ties is obviously based on mutual interests and reciprocal sensitivity," Jaishankar said in his opening remarks in his meeting with Zameer.

Muizzu had set May 10 as the deadline for withdrawal of the Indian military troops from his country. Nearly 50 personnel have returned. In all more than 85 Indian personnel were deployed in Maldives. "India has been a key provider of development assistance to the Maldives. Our projects

have benefited the people of your country; contributed to the quality of life. They range from infrastructure projects and social initiatives to medical evacuation and health facilities," Jaishankar said. "We have also extended financial support on favourable terms in the past.

India has been a First Responder on numerous occasions for Maldives," he said. "Our cooperation has also enhanced the security and well-being of your country through shared activities, equipment provisioning, capacity building and training," Jaishankar added.

# Defence Secretary urges firms to support border areas development

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane on Thursday here emphasised on the need to achieve self-reliance in every field to deal with future challenges and urged infrastructure firms to contribute in Government's effort towards development of border areas. He made these assertions while inaugurating a national symposium and industry meet on 'Emerging Technologies in Infrastructure Development' organized by the Defence Research and Development

Organisation (DRDO). The two-day event, with the participation from the Armed Forces, academia, industry and DRDO, aims to foster dialogue, exchange knowledge and explore innovative approaches to address the challenges and opportunities presented by emerging technologies in infrastructure development in line with the vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. In his address, the Defence Secretary emphasised on the need to achieve self-reliance in every field to deal with future challenges. He stated that India is a country with a significant

percentage of young population, and self-reliance will ensure gainful employment to them. Underlining the importance of achieving 'Aatmanirbharta' in defence, Aramane asserted that there is no trusted trend in geopolitics, and India cannot depend on other countries for its security and safeguarding national interests. He stressed that self-reliance will help the country take giant strides on the path of becoming a developed nation by 2047. Highlighting the emphasis being laid by the Government on infrastructure development along the borders, the Defence



Secretary exhorted the infrastructure firms to contribute in further strengthening the apparatus. He added that while the Armed Forces personnel are

being provided with latest weapons and equipment, the private sector should contribute in bolstering the infrastructure set-up in the border areas. He referred to the Vibrant Villages Programme which aims to motivate people to stay in their native locations in border areas, and urged the firms to set up a separate section, within their respective organisations, which focuses on development in far-flung areas. Aramane stated that the DRDO is extending support to the private sector in Research and Development, and

together they can come up with new innovations to build faster and better in the times to come. He called upon the industry to walk hand-in-hand with the government, and focus more on the mass production of quality products in a time-bound manner. He also urged the industry to collaborate with the academia to enhance the skills of the workforce, which can help realise a technology into a product. Speaking on the occasion, DRDO chief Samir V Kamat emphasised on the importance of infrastructure in the development of a nation. He

stated that India is witnessing a phenomenal growth in the field of technical infrastructure, which is required to maintain the country's strategic deterrence. The DRDO Chairman added that technology is evolving rapidly, and the necessity of sustainable infrastructure and green infrastructure is now becoming a part of technical domain. The Defence Secretary also inaugurated the industry-partner exhibition, organised on the sidelines of the event, showcasing latest technologies and products developed by the various industry partners.

# Effective Defence industry ecosystem taking shape in country, says Army Chief

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Army Chief General Manoj Pandey has said an effective defence-industry ecosystem is taking shape in the country and veterans with their field experience are "ideally suited" for incorporation into indigenous research and manufacturing of technological solutions required by the force. In his address at the Army Welfare Placement Organisation (AWPO) Summit 2024 held at the Manekshaw Centre here on Wednesday, he said the Army's responsibility towards its veterans remains a "sacred commitment". The aim of the summit was to bring

together different stakeholders on a common platform, to narrow down the gap between enterprise requirements, veteran competencies and the pursuits of AWPO. "While the demand for skilled and experienced workforce exists at the industry end, at the same time, a human resource pool of veterans with adequate experience and unique skill sets is also available, after they exit from active service each year. "The endeavour is to synergise the two as well as strengthen the linkages that can facilitate veteran absorption into not only the industry but also PSUs and quasi-government organisations," the Army chief said. He said the veterans with their field



experience and insights into operational conditions, logistics of the systems and weapon platforms "are ideally suited for incorporation into indigenous research, development, innovation and manufacturing of

technological solutions required by the Indian Army". They also bring to the table, leadership qualities, and a very sound understanding of the human element and can contribute towards ergonomics and user interface design, aspects which are critical to produce user-friendly equipment, General Pandey said. He emphasised the invaluable contributions of veterans to the nation's prosperity. The Army chief said services to the nation by the veterans "do not end" when they bid farewell to military life, instead it transitions into "a new chapter" or second innings of commitment to society and nation building.

He underscored that the Army has undertaken the process of holistic skill certification, as per the core competency of each individual, in collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. He also mentioned initiatives such as 'Project KAUSHALVEER' that help serve personnel in acquiring certification for skill sets according to the established industry standards. General Pandey praised the "Veer Nari", who he said also bring with them unparalleled determination and resilience. He urged the entrepreneurs to integrate them too as part of their initiatives on human capital intake.



# National Archives acquires private paper collection of Rafi Ahmad Kidwai

**ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI**

India's rich repository of archival records received a significant enhancement on Thursday as the National Archives of India (NAI) acquired freedom fighter Rafi Ahmad Kidwai's private paper collection comprising original correspondences between Kidwai and other eminent leaders such as Jawahar Lal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, and PD Tandon. These documents hold historical importance and provide a unique perspective on the deliberations, decisions, and collaborations that shaped India's journey towards independence and its early years as a sovereign nation. NAI Director General (DG) Arun Singhal told The Pioneer that the family of the late leader had approached them a month ago, seeking to preserve the documents that were contained in three big boxes. After examining the documents, they were found to be historically significant, and now they will be scanned and made available on the abhilekh portal for public viewing, free of cost, he said. Singhal further said that various historical documents including correspondence and circulars related to leaders like Gandhi, Subash Chandra Bose and other freedom fighters have been preserved in the

portal and if anyone wishes to download them, they have to pay a nominal amount. Access to these primary sources benefit researchers, historians, and the public alike, deepening their understanding of India's past and its journey towards progress and development. The papers related to Rafi Ahmad Kidwai were handed over to Singhal by late leader's family members led by Faiz Ahmad Kidwai who happens to be Additional Secretary, Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Tazeen Kidwai, daughter of late Hussain Kamil Kidwai, youngest brother of Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and Sarah Manaal Kidwai. Now the NAI has ensured that valuable historical materials are safeguarded for future generations and made accessible for research and study about the personality who has left an indelible mark on India's history. Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, born on February 18, 1894, in Masauli, Uttar Pradesh, hailed from a middle-class zamindar family. His political journey began with his involvement in the Khilafat Movement and the Non-Cooperation Movement, leading to imprisonment. Known for his vivacity, brilliance, and charm, Kidwai dedicated himself to India's independence and fought against communalism and superstitions.

# India, UK review strategic ties

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

India and United Kingdom on Thursday here reviewed the entire spectrum of their bilateral strategic ties during talks with visiting British National Security Advisor (NSA) Tim Barrow and his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval. Barrow also held extensive talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar. Jaishankar and Barrow discussed various bilateral, regional and global issues. "Good to meet UK NSA Tim Barrow today in Delhi. Discussed a range of regional and global issues of importance. Also reviewed the progress in our bilateral ties," Jaishankar said on X. It is understood that Jaishankar and Barrow delved into the overall situation in West Asia. Barrow is on a two-day visit to India. Talks between Doval and Barrow reportedly focused on Technology and Security Initiative, a major bilateral mechanism aimed at enhancing collaboration in critical and emerging technologies between India



and the UK. The two NSAs also deliberated on bilateral issues of mutual interest and exchanged views on regional and global matters. Barrow arrived in India on a two-day visit to participate in a high-level dialogue led by the NSAs of both countries, which aims to deepen cooperation on various fronts, including security, technology, and regional affairs. This visit is also expected to strengthen and further broaden the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries. In 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his then-British counterpart Boris Johnson agreed to the India-UK 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' and India-UK Roadmap 2030 to steer cooperation for the next 30 years.

# Nearly 12 per cent of eligible Indian children missed measles vaccine: Study

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Nearly 12 per cent of eligible children in India have not received any recommended double-dose vaccination for measles, highlighting a significant gap in measles vaccination coverage among the beneficiaries. This deficiency is particularly pronounced in northeastern States like Nagaland, where the share of zero-dose cases is as high as 26 per cent. In contrast, Tamil Nadu was found to report the lowest at 4.6 per cent. Researchers from the Union Health Ministry and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in Varanasi investigated previously overlooked critical aspects of measles vaccination, focusing on zero-doses, partially vaccinated, and those fully immunised. They analysed data of over 43,000 children aged 2-3 years, collected through the National Family Health Survey 2019-21 (NFHS-5). The team found that close to 30 per cent of the eligible children have received only one measles-containing vaccine (MCV1), while about 60 per cent have been fully immunised (MCV2). The findings are published in the journal Vaccine. In 2017, India adopted the National Strategic Plan for Achieving and Sustaining Measles and Rubella Elimination. The researchers acknowledged that disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the risk



of measles in vulnerable populations. While immunisation programmes were eventually resumed in a phased manner, measles zero-dose children pose a significant obstacle to achieving goals of eliminating the acute and highly contagious viral disease, the researchers said. Occurring primarily in children, symptoms can include high fever, cough, runny nose and a rash all over the body. Being vaccinated is the best way to avoid getting sick and spreading the disease, according to the World Health Organization. The analysis also revealed huge inter-district variations, according to the researchers. They found that in Uttar Pradesh, while Prayagraj and Banda districts were found to have about 34 per cent and 32 per cent of these cases, respectively, Hapur and Etawah have 2.6 per cent and 2.1 per cent of zero-dose cases. The researchers said Arunachal Pradesh

was another such example, where the West Siang district had the greatest share with almost 50 per cent of eligible children receiving no dose of the vaccination, while the Lower Dibang Valley district had only 2.8 per cent of such cases. Socio-demographic factors were analysed to influence the measles vaccination status of children, with those born later in the family being less likely to have received no dose. Low levels of wealth and mother's education too were found to increase the odds of children not receiving any dose of the vaccination. "Socioeconomic factors play a significant role in measles transmission, with individuals from lower socioeconomic classes experiencing higher attack rates resulting in outbreaks," the authors wrote. The findings underscored the need for tailored strategies, especially within districts displaying close to 10 per cent variability in zero-dose cases, the researchers said. "The identification of a notable percentage (11.5 per cent) of children receiving zero-doses signals a concerning gap in immunisation coverage," the authors wrote and pointed out that, this "highlights the importance of last mile effort and application of big push theory in terms of more frequent rounds of campaigns mode vaccine delivery for the target of 95 per cent vaccine coverage for population-level immunity."



# LS poll contest between vote for development, vote for jihad: Shah

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the 2024 election is 'Rahul Gandhi vs Narendra Modi' and that it is a contest between vote for development and 'vote for jihad'.

Addressing an election rally in Bhongir Lok Sabha constituency of Telangana, he said the election is between Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Bharatiya guarantee' against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's 'Chinese guarantee'. Describing the Congress, BRS and AIMIM as a triangle of appeasement, he said the parties don't let Ram Navami procession to take place and that they also oppose CAA. "These people don't allow the celebration of Hyderabad Liberation Day" (September 17). These people oppose CAA. These people want to run Telangana on the basis of Sharia and Quran," he said. BJP would secure nearly 200 seats in the three phases of Lok Sabha elections held so far and Telangana needs to vote to help the party cross the target of 400 seats, Shah said. Observing that BJP had won four of the 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana in 2019, he asked Chief Minister



A Revanth Reddy to realise that BJP would win more than 10 seats in the present elections. The double digit score in Telangana would make PM Modi cross 400 seats, he predicted. Referring to Congress' allegation that BJP would change the Constitution and abolish reservations, he said Congress wants to fight elections by telling lies. Congress says Modi would scrap quotas but he has not done so despite being in power for the last 10 years with full majority, he said. But, Congress in Telangana robbed the reservations of SC, ST and OBCs by providing four

tional schools in every tehsil, but they have not been implemented, Shah said. Congress withheld the construction of Ram temple for 70 years, but Modi, in just five years, won the case, performed 'bhumi puja' and later participated in the consecration, he said. AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge said that though people from Rajasthan and Telangana don't have anything to do with Kashmir, the people of Bhongir would be ready to sacrifice their life for the sake of Kashmir, he said. Highlighting the abolition of Article 370, Shah also said Modi has ended terrorism, Naxalism and made the country secure. He alleged that AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi, BRS and Congress are "ABC of appeasement".

Modi removed triple talaq, but Congress, BRS and AIMIM want to bring it back, he said, adding that the parties also boycotted the consecration of the Ram temple. He also alleged that Revanth Reddy made Telangana the "ATM" of Congress. Shah highlighted the various development works undertaken by the Modi government in the Bhongir LS constituency, including establishment of AIIMS.

# Amid exodus, Congress faces uphill task to breach BJP stronghold of Dhar in MP

PTI ■ INDORE

Battling the exit of some key leaders in poll season, the Congress in Madhya Pradesh is facing a formidable challenge of penetrating the Dhar Lok Sabha seat -- a BJP stronghold -- where tribals and farmers play a decisive role in determining the outcome of elections.

Reserved for tribal candidates and having around 19.5 lakh eligible voters, the Dhar seat has been held by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the last 10 years. It will go to polls in the fourth phase of the seven-phase election on May 13. The BJP has fielded former MP Savitri Thakur (45) from Dhar, denying renomination to sitting MP Chhatar Singh Darbar, while the Congress has nominated Radheshyam Muvel (47), a supporter of the leader of opposition in the state assembly Umang Singhar.

While Muvel claimed the exit of some leaders would not affect his poll prospects, Thakur expressed confidence in winning the election, saying her party has worked for the region's development.

Muvel, who is contesting a Lok Sabha election for the first time, asserted that he would win by a margin of at least 1.5



lakh votes.

"Dhar voters have been asking what Thakur did for the constituency when she was an MP between 2014 and 2019. Tribals are still forced to migrate from the district due to unemployment," Muvel told PTI.

"The BJP candidate had 'nothing to show' as her own achievements and was banking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to win the seat, even though there was no 'Modi wave' this time, Muvel said.

The Modi government has failed to tackle basic problems like price rise and unemployment, the Congress candidate claimed.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the Congress suffered a

of the voters of Dhar where the prime minister addressed a huge rally on May 7, by highlighting -- "Modi ki guarantee". She claimed the Congress could not provide any benefit to the tribals despite being in power in the country for 70 years.

"Under the Congress rule, wells, roads and ponds were built only on paper due to rampant corruption in tribal areas. During the Modi government's tenure, concrete work has been done on the ground in these areas," Thakur said.

The Dhar Lok Sabha constituency comprises eight assembly segments, including Mhow in the Indore district. In the 2023 state assembly elections, the Congress bagged five of these segments while the BJP won three.

Political analyst Prakash Hindustani said, "The Congress cannot have high hopes in the Lok Sabha election even after a good performance in Dhar in the last assembly polls because the arithmetic of both the elections is completely different."

Interactions with voters in Dhar suggest that in addition to national issues, the Bhojshala dispute, railway projects and priority to local people in employment in industrial areas are also important issues for them in the Lok Sabha polls.

# Modi to hold rallies in Odisha tomorrow

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address three election rallies in Odisha on Saturday, a state BJP leader said. Modi will also take part in a roadshow in Bhubaneswar on Friday, Odisha BJP vice-president Golak Mohapatra said.

"On May 11, he will address three public rallies - the first in Kandhamal at 9.30 am, the second in Bolangir at 11.30 am and another in Bargarh at 1 pm," he said.

"The PM will also hold a roadshow in Bhubaneswar from 8 pm on Friday. He will stay the night at the Raj Bhavan," Mohapatra said.

The roadshow will start from BJP's state headquarters near Sri Ram Mandir and end at Vani Vihar Square.

Tight security arrangements have been made for the roadshow and the poll rallies, police said.

Modi had last visited Odisha on



May 6, when he addressed two public meetings in Berhampur and Nabarangpur.

Simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections will be held in Odisha in four phases, starting May 13.

# How Centre determined Hindu, Muslim population without Census: Tejashwi

PTI ■ PATNA

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Thursday cast doubts on the EAC-PM report, questioning how the Centre could determine the Hindu and Muslim population without even conducting a Census.

The report of the Economic Advisory Council to the PM (EAC-PM) stated that there has been a rise in Muslim population and a fall in Hindu percentage.

The former deputy chief minister of Bihar alleged that the ruling dispensation at the Centre was creating a rift between Hindus and Muslims to divert attention from "real issues".

"You arrived at numbers without holding a Census? Wasn't Census due in 2021? You are the prime minister of the country... Please give up your Hindu-Muslim binary and talk about issues," Yadav said.



The RJD leader made the remark while replying to questions from journalists on the EAC-PM report.

The working paper by the EAC-PM, titled 'Share of Religious Minorities: A Cross-Country Analysis (1950-2015)', stated that the share of Hindus in the country's population decreased by 7.82 per cent (from 84.68 per cent to 78.06 per cent) between 1950 and 2015, while that of Muslims

increased from 9.84 per cent to 14.09 per cent during the period.

Yadav said, "Neither PM nor BJP leaders will talk about growing unemployment, price hike and several other important issues. The PM will not talk about special status to Bihar. The Modi-led central government is just trying to create a rift in the society. They want to change the Constitution. We will not allow divisive forces to create rift in the society."

When asked about PM Modi's scheduled roadshow in Patna on May 12, Yadav said, "Let him (PM) do roadshows or airshows, nothing is going to change. The NDA will face a humiliating defeat in the country as well as in Bihar. We (INDIA bloc) are talking about 'jobshow'... We will provide one crore jobs to unemployed youth after coming to power at the Centre."

# Srinagar: 52,100 Kashmiri migrants eligible to vote

PTI ■ JAMMU

As many as 52,100 Kashmiri migrant voters across the country are eligible to exercise their franchise in the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir's Srinagar constituency on May 13.

The constituency is gearing up for an intense electoral showdown. As many as 17.4 lakh voters, including 8.7 lakh women, will decide the fate of 24 candidates in the fray.

Over 1.13 lakh Kashmiri migrants are registered to cast their votes for the Lok Sabha elections for three seats in the Valley, officials said.

"As many as 52,100 Kashmiri migrants will exercise their right to franchise from Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency on May 13. Of these, 25,760 are male voters and 26,340 are female voters," Assistant Returning Officer (ARO), Migrants, Riaz Ahmed told



PTI Video here.

He said there are 1,13,873 registered voters, including 56,290 men, 57,582 women and one transgender person, in three parliamentary constituencies of Srinagar, Baramulla and Anantnag.

A total of 26 polling stations have been set up for the migrants, out of which 21 are in Jammu, four in Delhi and one in Udhampur.

"We have set up 21 polling stations in Jammu. In view of the increase in voters, we have to set up some more auxiliary polling stations. For the

Srinagar constituency, we have increased them to 23 polling stations," Ahmed said.

The Election Commission (EC) has arranged pick and drop facility for Kashmiri migrant voters. It will be available from 6 am to 6 pm, he said.

"The transport facility will be available where there is more concentration of migrant voters on polling dates," he said.

Special awareness camps were held in Jammu, Udhampur and Delhi to ensure maximum participation of Kashmiri migrants in elections.

# BJP insecure so discussing non-existent aspects of Congress manifesto: Prithviraj

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

The Bharatiya Janata Party has turned insecure amid the Lok Sabha polls and was discussing issues that are not even mentioned in the Congress' manifesto, former Maharashtra chief minister Prithviraj Chavan said on Thursday.

Chavan was here to campaign for Chandrakant Khaire, Lok Sabha candidate of the Shiv Sena (UBT), which is an ally of the Congress and the NCP(SP) in the Maha Vikas Aghadi. "The BJP raises the slogan of 'abki baar 400 paar' but is insecure. That is why it is discussing issues (to attack the Congress) that are not even mentioned in our manifesto.



We have said we will give Rs 1 lakh to poor women annually. Now this is something the BJP will not discuss," he said.

Queried about merger of parties, Chavan asserted people in Maharashtra generally do not like the presence of too many outfits. "Even I think small political parties will merge with other parties post Lok Sabha polls," he claimed,

# EC orders repolling at polling booth in Gujarat

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The Election Commission (EC) has ordered fresh voting on May 11 at a polling station under the Dahod Lok Sabha seat in Gujarat from where a man live-streamed voting on May 7, the video of which went viral, an official said Thursday.

Four election officials, including a presiding officer, an assistant presiding officer and two polling officers as well as a police constable were suspended in connection with the incident, the office of the Gujarat Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said in a release.

The ECI declared null and void the voting which took place at Parthampur polling station at Santarampur taluka in Mahisagar district after taking into account a report submitted by the Returning Officer and Observer regarding irreg-



ularities, the CEO said. As soon as the irregularities were reported, the CEO sought a report from the RO regarding the incident, it said. The report was sent to the Election Commission, which under section 58, sub-section 2 of the Representation of the People Act, declared the polling held at the polling station on May 7

as null and void. A fresh polling has been scheduled at the polling station between 7 am and 6 pm on May 11, it said.

"The presiding officer, assistant presiding officer, two polling officers and one police constable have been suspended in connection with the incident," it added.

Of the 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat, polling was held in 25 constituencies on Tuesday in the third phase of the general elections. The BJP candidate in Surat has won unopposed. The Congress had lodged a complaint with the EC about "booth capturing" and "bogus voting" by submitting a copy of the viral video, and demanded repolling. The accused, Vijay Bhabhor, had stayed in the polling booth for five minutes, during which he went live on Instagram and also allegedly cast votes on behalf of two other electors, resorting to bogus voting, officials said.

Prabha Taviad is the Congress candidate in the constituency. She is pitted against incumbent MP Javantsinh Bhabhor. The Congress claimed that the person who relayed the "booth capturing" video on Instagram is the son of a local BJP leader. The video shows Vijay Bhabhor purportedly focusing the camera on EVM (electronic voting machine) and VVPAT (voter verifiable paper audit trail) machine and seeking five to ten minutes from a poll official even when he is asked to leave. Bhabhor purportedly also says that "only the BJP works here". His accomplice was also seen in the video. "The machine belongs to my father. Only one thing works - that is BJP," says Bhabhor before pressing a button on the EVM, as per the video. "Only Vijay Bhabhor works here," he purportedly says. He was later detained on the charge of bogus voting.

# Repolling at four booths in Betul LS seat in MP on May 10

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Repolling at four booths in Madhya Pradesh's Betul Lok Sabha seat will be held on Friday, an official said on Thursday.

The Election Commission on Wednesday ordered re-election at the four booths after a few electronic voting machines (EVMs) were damaged when a bus ferrying them and polling personnel post-voting on caught fire on Tuesday night near Sonora Gaula village in Betul, the official said.

Repolling would be held from 7 am to 6 pm on Friday at the Government Integrated High School, Rajapur, Government Integrated High School, Raiyat, Government Primary School Kunda, Raiyat, and Government Integrated High School, Chikhlimal, the official said. These booths come under Multai assembly segment of the Betul parliamentary seat.

The middle finger on left hand of voters will be inked during the repolling, the official said. A dry day and holiday have been announced in the areas where repolling will be held, he said.

Polling parties left on Thursday after collecting the necessary material from the Government Integrated High School at Betul Ganj to conduct the exercise, the official said.

An estimated 72.65 per cent polling was recorded in the Betul Lok Sabha seat on Tuesday, a poll official earlier said.

Betul was among nine seats in Madhya Pradesh which voted in the third phase of Lok Sabha elections.

# Uddhav Thackeray has lost mental balance: Fadnavis

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Reacting to his former ally's diatribe, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday said Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray had lost his mental balance.

Thackeray, at a campaign rally a day before, had said that Fadnavis and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde were "intoxicated monkeys" speaking on the instructions of those sitting in Delhi.

"Uddhav Thackeray has lost his mental balance. He needs treatment by a psychiatrist. He is talking like this because he can see defeat in the elections clearly," Fadnavis told reporters



here.

The people have rejected the Sena (UBT) chief, therefore he was using foul language, the BJP leader further said.

Thackeray parted ways with the old ally BJP after the 2019 assembly elections and joined hands with the undivided NCP and Congress to form a government.

# Congress leaders Vikramaditya Singh, Anand Sharma file nominations from Mandi, Kangra

PTI ■ SHIMLA

Congress leaders Vikramaditya Singh and Anand Sharma on Thursday filed their nomination papers from the Mandi and Kangra Lok Sabha seats, respectively.

While Singh attacked BJP candidate Kangana Ranaut in an oblique reference, Sharma shunned the "outsider" tag, and said they had never questioned why Prime Minister Narendra Modi, hailing from Gujarat, contested elections from Varanasi.

"We are doing politics of development, she is doing politics of entertainment," said Singh,

adding that this "picture" directed by Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur would fail at the "box office" on June 1. Singh, who was accompanied by his mother and state Congress chief Pratibha Singh, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and Congress Working Committee (CWC) member and Himachal in-charge Rajiv Shukla, said, "Kangana is abusing Congress leaders from the stage but in the past 20-25 days, she had not even once spelled out her vision for the constituency.

"Kangana had started her campaign 20-25 days back and from morning to evening, she

used abusive words for us but has not uttered a single word on her vision for this parliamentary constituency," he said, adding that she should tell people what she wanted to do.

Mandi would be made a smart city and Jalori Jot tunnel would be constructed on the line of the Rohtang tunnel. The remote Pangi area of Chamba would also be connected through the tunnel, Singh told PTI.

"I would take forward the long and deep relation with the people of Mandi," the Congress candidate, who is the son of late chief minister Virbhadra Singh, said. Scion of erstwhile Rampur

estate, Singh is pitted against actor and BJP candidate Kangana Ranaut.

Elaborating on the achievements of the Congress, Singh said the party has opened IIT at Mandi, a medical college at Nerchowk and been instrumental in construction of the Kirathpur-Nerchowk four lane.

"We stood with the people of Mandi during the worst monsoon disaster last year and will continue to be with them, and I have got Rs 3,500 crore for the state from the Centre," he added.

Besides the development agenda, long pending matters related to Good and Service tax,

revenue deficit grant and old pension scheme would also be taken up with the Union government after the party wins, he assured the people of Mandi.

"Change of winds are visible in the country and after the first three phases of Lok Sabha polls, the BJP has been washed out in the South and halved in the North," he claimed.

The Congress government in the state would continue with its development and welfare agenda for the next three-and-a-half years, he said while exuding confidence that his party would also win all the six assembly seats in the bypolls.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Air turbulence

Air India Express cabin crew's moody 'sick leave' hits operations, leaves fliers high and dry

In the realm of air travel, few situations are as frustrating as flight cancellations. The anticipation of reaching a destination is replaced by uncertainty and inconvenience. Such was the case recently when Air India Express, the low-cost subsidiary of Air India, found itself in a crisis, leading to a wave of flight cancellations. The flag carrier of India has long been grappling with financial woes and operational challenges. Despite various restructuring efforts, the airline has struggled to stay afloat in a fiercely competitive industry. The latest crisis began when over 300 senior cabin crew members of Express flights reported sick at the last minute, resulting in the cancellation of more than 90 flights since Tuesday night, leaving airports in disarray and passengers seething with frustration. Of course, Air India has now lent a helping hand to its subsidiary, deciding to operate 20 flights against 74 Express cancellations on Thursday, and sacking 30 crew members over "sick leave". The root cause of this crisis stems from longstanding grievances articulated by Air India Express Employees Union (AIXEU). They have voiced concerns about unfair treatment, citing instances where internal job postings were filled with external candidates, bypassing qualified internal staff. The owners, on their part, do not recognise AIXEU. The Regional Labour Commissioner in New Delhi has also criticised the management for alleged violations of labour laws, highlighting a lack of responsible decision-making. Adding to the turbulence is Air India's ongoing financial struggles and operational challenges.



Air India Express, despite its parent company's losses, remained profitable. In 2021, it was sold to the Tata Group, which merged it with AirAsia India. It aimed to capture the budget aviation market with a focus on non-trunk routes and ancillary services. It is the only profitable airline in the Tata Group's aviation stable — AirAsia India, Vistara and Air India — incurred a combined loss of Rs 15,530 crores. The fallout from these cancellations has been significant, with passengers expressing their frustration on social media platforms. Long queues, missed connections and inadequate communication have characterised the scenes at airports. In response, Air India Express has issued apologies and promises of improved services, but the damage to passenger trust has been done. The Indian aviation sector has huge potential but the issues of mismanagement are galore. The Govt must proactively ensure that the fliers are not taken for a ride and the airlines also do not incur losses. Besides, the pandemic years were very traumatic for the industry and it is slowly recovering. The Govt must resolve the crisis before it snowballs into a crisis and takes down the whole sector. Looking ahead, the fate of Air India and its subsidiaries remains uncertain. Only time will tell whether Air India Express and its counterparts can rise above the chaos and emerge with flying colours.

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### PICTALK



Students perform during the celebration of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary, in Nadia

# An open letter to Shehbaz Sharif

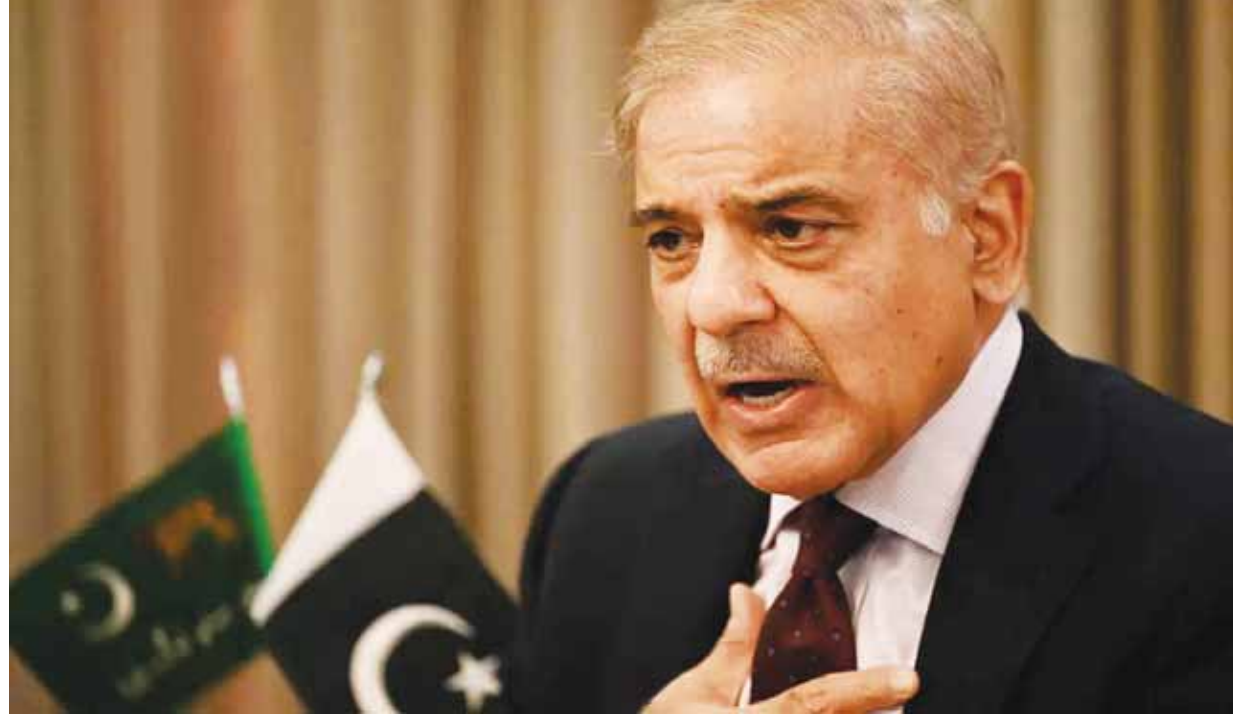


PROFULL GORADIA

We tolerated terrorist violence for many years but when we could no longer tolerate it, we went to Parliament to do away with Article 370. But we did not resort to violence

Dear Vazir-e-Azam Shehbaz Sharif Sahab, I have taken the privilege of writing to the Prime Minister of our neighbouring country, which, till 76 years ago, was part of us, but separated in acrimonious circumstances. I'm sure that you're aware, as a lot of in India are, that this separation and the aftermath it gave rise to continues to not only cast its shadow over the subcontinent but also torment relations between various communities. This open letter to you is a humble attempt, not to hark back to the events of those decades and apportion blame, but to address the contentiousness of modern-day issues that continue to trail in their wake.

Whenever the issue of Ayodhya, the Gyan Vapi temple (Varanasi) or the Krishna Janmabhoomi (Mathura) comes up, my mind travels to Lahore and the Gurudwara Shaheed Gunj at the Naulakha Bazar locality of your splendid city. The ownership of the place was disputed by the local Muslims who claimed that the place had originally been a mosque. It had been converted into a gurudwara by the local Sikhs during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. When opportune in the 19th century, the people of the city, led by some Muslim Leaguers, went to court over this. They did not win their case for the re-conversion of the gurudwara into a mosque. Legal counsel argued that an appeal could be filed if necessary, right up to the Privy Council. However, the then premier of Punjab Sir Sikanandar Hayat Khan advised against any further action as it might open a Pandora's Box across the subcontinent, which was then undivided. Sikanandar Hayat also advised against any further litigation. Any use of the argument of adverse possession might cause the return of many of the temples that had come into Muslim possession. What was then perhaps overlooked was that a Hindu temple is a residence of the divine and not merely a prayer hall. The pratimas (icons) are the first step in the quest for spirituality. Ultimately, spirituality can be



active by having a darshan of the avatar of the divine. In Sikhism, they do not have an icon nor the scope of spirituality in the same way as in a Hindu temple. Prophet Moses, the founding prophet of Judaism, the first of the three Semitic religions—also called Religions of the Book—known in Islam as Hazrat Moosa, had expressly forbidden any idol worship by the second of his Ten Commandments; "Thou shalt not make any graven image of thy lord the god". Your faith has rigidly adhered to this particular Commandment. However, it does pain me no end to state that you have carried this adherence way too far. In your country, over 75 temples have been desecrated or pulled down after independence in 1947, a sordid trend that is continuing. From my Urdu teacher who was a scholar, I have learnt that it is your bounden duty as a momin (believer) to desecrate butts (idols) installed by kafirs (infidels). But for the sake of friendly relations between us two neighbours, your people should desist from such desecrations. I am saying this after



POLITICAL LEADERS OF YOUR GENERATION MIGHT STILL FIND COMFORT IN THE NOTION THAT INDIANS ARE A PEACEFUL AND DORMANT LOT AND THEREFORE WON'T REACT MUCH. THAT MIGHT INDEED HAVE BEEN THE CASE A COUPLE OF DECADES AGO, BUT IT IS NO LONGER SO

accepting the fact that Islam detests parasti (idol worship) and insists on majahab parasti (adherence to the faith) alone. But we live in a world where adherents of other religions too have equal rights to profess and practice their faith, without hurting others. I appeal to you to care for our sentiments and not target the temples and idols that still survive. Political leaders of your generation might still find comfort in the notion that Indians are a peaceful, and also dormant, lot and therefore won't react much. That might indeed have been the case till a couple of decades ago but is no longer so. India and Indians are changing. Real change in our civilizational journey was heralded in December 1992, of which I was fortunate to be a humble part. In India, we have begun a movement to restore the temples that were casualties of the medieval age. I shall shortly be writing to Madam Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of our eastern neighbouring country. Dozens of temples continue to be desecrated in her country every year. You would agree that good neigh-

bours do not hurt each other. Kindly, remember that there are thousands upon thousands of mosques built upon the ruins of ancient temples. So far, we have preferred to approach the courts of law and minimize unilateral action. I appeal to you to also eschew violence.

In Kashmir too, over 130 temples were attacked and desecrated even as India continued to hold control over the state's territory. I am aware that Pakistan took great umbrage when we abrogated Article 370, but it is my wonder that we had to do so? We tolerated terrorist violence for many years, but when we could tolerate it no longer, we went to Parliament to do away with Article 370. But you would certainly appreciate that we did not resort to violence even on this issue. Our Muslim compatriots are cooperating to a moderate degree, even in the state of Kashmir. This is a trend which we hope continues.

(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 manoeuvring



Apropos the news article, "Modi, Lalu in a tug of war on Muslim quota," published on May 8, this is my response. The recent political discourse surrounding reservations in India has taken a contentious turn, with various parties embroiled in a heated debate over extending reservation benefits to Muslims. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vehemently opposed such a

move, labelling it as a ploy to undermine existing quotas for SC, ST, and OBC communities. The BJP accuses its rivals of attempting to appease a specific vote bank by advocating for Muslim reservations while disregarding the principles of social and educational backwardness outlined in the Constitution and the Mandal Commission report. Conversely, opposition figures argue that denying reservations to Muslims would be unjust and tantamount to disenfranchisement. Amidst these exchanges, accusations of conspiracy and attempts to manipulate voter sentiments loom large. The charged rhetoric underscores the high stakes of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, where competing visions of governance, identity, and social justice are at play. As citizens, it's imperative to critically engage with these debates and hold our leaders accountable for their promises and policies.

Kiara Sharma | Mumbai

a mere whisper against the cacophony of electoral fervor. Expenditure limits crumble under the weight of unchecked spending, leaving us disillusioned with the integrity of the process. The impact of elections extends beyond just voting, as they can turn schools into battlegrounds, with political theatre taking centre stage and the future suffering while the eloquence of our founding luminaries seems lost amidst the mudslinging and vitriol of contemporary discourse. Yet, amidst the chaos, there is a glimmer of hope embodied by figures like APJ Abdul Kalam, whose legacy reminds us of the transformative power of leadership rooted in humility and service.

Arya Kapoor | Kolkata

BEGGING IS AN EPIDEMIC Madam — Apropos the news article, "Benevolent hearts: Dynamics of begging and household donations," published on May 8, this is my response. Begging has been ingrained in the roots of Indian society for ages. This sickening culture has become a fashion, a compulsion, a profes-

sion and even a kind of recreation in our country. Beggars in India easily outnumber their ilk in other big countries. To the Westerners, India is a land of mendicants. Beggars are found everywhere—on roads, crossings, footpaths, etc. But their favourite hangouts are bathing ghats, temples, religious fairs, railway stations, trains and bus stands. It is a real nuisance to be confronted by street beggars in all places. Like the Almighty, they seem to be omnipresent. You are waiting for a bus or walking down a road with your friend, and beggars suddenly appear from nowhere and start an endless volley of supplications until you give them a few coins out of sheer disgust and helplessness. The monstrous practice of begging cannot be eradicated from our society because millions are living 'below the poverty line, yearning for a morsel of food. Unfortunately very little has been done by our past and present governments to obliterate the social illness of begging.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

# Enigma of copyright in the digital world

Policy-makers face the formidable challenge of revising copyright laws effectively to tackle the complexities presented by AI



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

People often say that in this digital world, nothing remains secret. Even personal details can be accessed through the Internet. The quantum of information on the Internet is so vast that, despite the security measures, it is not cent per cent foolproof. In such a scenario, one must critically examine copyright's relevance in the digital world. Copyright rules and laws traditionally protect every creation or innovation, so the original creator retains credit for their work and is aptly rewarded through monetary benefits. When an author creates a book, they automatically own the copyright. This gives them the exclusive right to reproduce, distribute, perform, and display the book and create derivative works based on it. In most countries, copyright protection for a book typically lasts for the author's lifetime plus 50-70 years. During this time, others generally cannot reproduce or distribute the book without the author's permission unless their use falls under a specific exception, such as fair use or fair dealing. Within the realm of music,



this signifies that the individual responsible for creating a song, the writer of the lyrics, the composer, or the performer, possesses the sole entitlement to utilise, disseminate, and capitalise on that song. In India, organisations such as the Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS) and Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL) administer the rights of copyright owners and collect royalties on their behalf for the public performance and broadcast of songs. Copyright also extends to research works, protecting and monetising one's creations through patents. Unfortunately, journal publishers own the copyright for research publications. The publishers amass massive amounts through subscriptions and advertisements without providing any monetary benefit to the authors. Most of the reputed journals

do peer reviews free of cost, take processing charges from authors, and get subscription fees and advertisements as revenue. What does the poor researcher get? A mental satisfaction of getting published in a high-impact journal? In a way, it's not fair. A few magazines, of course, practice giving honorariums to the authors. Despite having stringent copyright rules and regulations, its efficacy is questionable in the rapidly evolving digital age landscape. The widespread availability of digital content and the simplicity of sharing information on the Internet have presented unprecedented difficulties and intricacies for existing copyright rules. Today, one can easily copy content from online resources without crediting the original creator. Content available on social media sites, including photographs, is widely reproduced. Identifying the original content creator, be it literary or artistic works, is often difficult. Even stringent protective measures like user authentication mechanisms such as passwords, multi-factor authentication (MFA),

and role-based access controls (RBAC) to restrict access to authorised individuals or groups and watermarking techniques often fail to prevent the infringement of copyrights. The advent of AI in digital platforms has complicated the situation. As AI systems become more sophisticated, their ability to create, replicate, and modify content raises intricate legal questions regarding ownership and authorship. Though AI can do any role, it lacks the human touch in its creation that connects human minds. While individuals are accountable for creating and instructing these algorithms, the AI system autonomously produces the outcome, erasing the distinction between human and machine authorship. The current necessity lies in incorporating ethical, cultural, and economic considerations while crafting a new policy that effectively balances the rights of creators and AI developers.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)

### EVOLUTION OF MONETARY POLICY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Evolution of Monetary Policymaking in India," published on May 8, this is my response. The journey of India's monetary policy from its inception to the present day is a saga of adaptation and evolution. From the establishment of the Reserve Bank of India to the modern era of inflation targeting, each phase has been marked by its unique challenges and responses. The nationalisation of banks in 1969 marked a pivotal moment, transitioning monetary policy towards a more centralised, planned approach. However, external shocks like the oil crises of the 1970s tested the resilience of this system, necessitating revisions and reforms.

The introduction of the Multiple Indicator Approach in 1998 reflected a shift towards a more holistic understanding of economic dynamics. Yet, the global financial crisis of 2008 exposed vulnerabilities, prompting a recalibration towards inflation targeting. While inflation targeting has its merits, recent disruptions such as demonetization and the pandemic have highlighted its limitations in addressing supply-side pressures. As the landscape of inflation evolves, a nuanced and comprehensive policy framework is imperative, one that combines the principles of inflation targeting with proactive measures to mitigate supply-side disruptions. In essence, the history of India's monetary policy underscores the need for continual adaptation in the face of evolving economic realities.

Vihaan Reddy | Bengaluru

### REFLECTIONS ON ELECTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Elected leaders need to rethink," published on May 8, this is my response. Election times unveil a complex tapestry of our democracy, woven with threads of hope, disappointment, and societal reflection. As citizens, we witness the ritual dance of power, where promises collide with reality, and ideals meet the harsh edges of pragmatism. The model code of conduct, ostensibly a guardian of fair play, often feels like



## FIRST COLUMN

### EU-CHINA RELATIONS AT A CROSSROADS

Xi embarks on a strategic journey across Europe, a move laden with symbolism



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Geo-political adjustments are getting done, bilaterally and plurilateral, even as the world's largest democracies are busy calming their domestic constituencies, where a key rallying agenda is China. The two largest democracies, India and the US, both of whom have their own set of issues with China, are in the middle of some of the most competitive election processes, ever seen across the globe. Meanwhile, the EU, or at least many of its member countries, not to mention US allies such as Australia are carefully recalibrating the entangled web of engagement with China.

It is by no coincidence that Chinese Premier Xi Jinping, was on a strategic three-nation tour of Europe, earlier this week. This tri-nation tour, during which the Chinese premier, also met the European Union president Ursula Von der Leyen, comes after a gap of almost 5 years and is also a time when many European nations have been blaming China for pushing highly subsidised electric vehicles into their markets, making several European auto factories redundant. The Europeans also wanted to focus on China playing a larger role in stabilising its "friends without limits" Russia, in the war against Ukraine, pushing up fuel-aided inflation across the region. The Europeans in the plain speak, they are known for, outlined clearly in the president's press statement, "the first topic where we exchanged views on was the geopolitical situation. We especially discussed Ukraine and the conflicts in the Middle East. We agree that Europe and China have a shared interest in peace and security. We count on China to use all its influence on Russia to end Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. President Xi has played an important role in de-escalating Russia's irresponsible nuclear threats, and I



am confident that President Xi will continue to do so against the backdrop of the ongoing nuclear threats by Russia. We have also discussed China's commitment not to provide any lethal equipment to Russia. More effort is needed to curtail the delivery of dual-use goods to Russia that find their way to the battlefield. And given the existential nature of the threats stemming from this war for both Ukraine and Europe, this does affect the EU-China relations. "The message from the EU to China was, don't help Russia in its unjust war on European soil, or else the bilateral relation would be in trouble. No surprises, Ukraine and the Middle East didn't feature, till the bottom three paragraphs of the press statement issued by the Chinese team, post the trilateral meeting.

Also no surprises with the language which read "On the Ukraine crisis, President Xi pointed out that China, France and the EU all wish to see an early ceasefire and return of peace in Europe, and support political settlement of the crisis. China has been working vigorously to facilitate talks for peace. China's objective and just position and its constructive role have been widely recognized by the international community. China is ready to stay in communication with relevant parties." The other significant element of these conversations was traded, as all parties involved are feeling the constraints of escalating fuel costs, the volatile geo-political environment and, the post-Covid, supply chain mismatch. The EU provided sharp pointers on Chinese subsidised products, free and fair access to each other's markets and supply chain resiliency in their conversations. A defensive China maintained that the two sides have extensive common interests and broad space for cooperation in green and digital transition. It is necessary that they properly address economic and trade frictions through dialogue and consultation, and accommodate each other's legitimate concerns." China has started making, the right moves to woo back some of its largest market partners, at a time when India and the US, the other key stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific theatre, are busy with their elections. India will get over elections in about a month, and an agile nimble China policy outlook awaits.

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

# Economic progress in India: A reality check

Despite notable achievements, economic progress falters due to the neglect of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Public Sector Undertakings and agricultural reforms



ATUL SEHGAL



India has come a long way since 2014 in the matter of various indices and parameters of economic development. Consider this. India has increased her per capita income through this decade from USD 1560 to USD 2500, a 60 per cent increase. It has purportedly lifted 400 million persons out of poverty during the decade. Its foreign exchange kitty has increased from USD 322 billion to USD 640 billion during the same period. These are impressive figures. Large figures are always impressive, but they need to be checked, compared and corroborated to be sanctified. Consider this now. The per capita income of India increased from USD 600 to USD 1560 for the period from 2004 to 2014 which is a bigger increase of 160 percent. Its foreign exchange reserves increased from USD 107 billion to USD 322 billion between 2004 and 2014. Whereas the surge from 2004 to 2014 was 200 per cent, it was only 100 per cent in the next decade.

The above comparative figures talk aloud about India's poor economic development in the last decade. This is not an overall performance report on the current NDA government. This government has many unprecedented achievements to its credit. But on the economic front, it doesn't seem to have delivered. Why has the NDA not been able to deliver on the economic front? There are several reasons.

**Neglect of MSMEs:** The micro, small and medium enterprises sector in the country did not receive the attention due to it. This sector is the main source of employment generation. Imports from China continued to swell and many manufacturers closed down their factories to become traders and distributors. Poor implementation of the Make in India programme: The Make in India was a well-conceived ambitious programme



THE GOVERNMENT DID WELL TO BLUEPRINT REFORMS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR—THOSE RELATED TO MSP AND PROCUREMENT OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE. BUT THE GOVERNMENT FAILED TO IMPLEMENT IT BY CAPITULATING IN FRONT OF FAKE PROTESTERS MASQUERADING AS FARMERS

to boost indigenous manufacturing. The scheme had its points of deficiency but regrettably, the major driving points of the grandiose scheme remained largely on paper and were never implemented properly. The result—share of manufacturing in the economy continues to stagnate at 14 percent.

**Absence of bureaucratic reforms:** Our obsolete, corruption-ridden colonial bureaucratic system had never delivered earlier and cried for reforms. But the reforms did not come. The result was a failure of key developmental programmes like the 100 Smart Cities Programme. The government did a remarkable job of establishing GST and promulgating the IBC. This enabled a clean-up of banks and a sharp decline in their NPAs. However, the failure of the government to increase the ease of doing business by cutting down on bureaucratic red tape is a big reason behind the continuing lack of a suitable ecosphere for business and big investment.

**Failure to implement Agricultural Reforms:** The government did well to blueprint reforms in the agricultural sector—those related to MSP and procurement of agricultural produce. But the government failed to implement the same by capitulating in front of fake protesters masquerading as farmers.

**Neglect of PSUs:** The government paid very little attention to the state and central PSUs which account for 15 per cent of the total economic activities in the country. It kept on harping on the absence of the need for the government to be in business. This

was an impractical approach to handling the Indian economy and failed to tap the big PSUs in which so much of public money had been invested.

**Failure to bring about judicial reforms:** Justice in this country continues to be delayed, denied and derailed. Despite big talks to the contrary, the government did nothing in the direction of judicial reforms. This was and remains a big dampener to FDI and even domestic investment in new business.

Notwithstanding the above, we must bear in mind that most of the previous governments had left deep pits in our economy that needed to be filled to prepare the ground for the rapid holistic development of the country. The UPA government, between 2004 and 2014 did produce better numbers for FE reserves and economic growth rate but the money generating that investment and growth was preponderantly from the huge proportion of parallel-black money economy out of the overall economy. Money was meagrely flowing for the critical sectors of defence and infrastructure and even for some important socialistic schemes. Modi 1.0 and Modi 2.0 changed this by bringing economic discipline and curbing corruption and economic malfeasance. It brought GST and IBC and did the clean-up of Banks by bringing down drastically the NPAs. It severely dented the black money economy. These were the pits filled by the Modi government that have prepared fertile soil for the fast-track economic progress of the country now. Given the above, it is imper-

ative and is also expected that the Modi government, if returned to power, will take the undermentioned steps to boost real progress on the economic front. Economic progress is the foundation of the overall progress of a country. Progress on other fronts like defence, foreign affairs, etc. has been significant but sustainable multifaceted development can only be achieved on the foundation of a strong and healthy economic bottom line.

The country needs drastic institutional and bureaucratic reforms. It needs urgent implementation of the farming sector reforms which were shelved after so much drum beating. The education sector calls for a thorough overhaul to replace the colonial Macaulay established system with an indigenous system in tune with the nation's ethos and tradition.

Sloganeering and political gamesmanship need to be replaced by serious, earnest and committed steps for boosting investment, trade, manufacturing and exports. India has a huge potential for becoming an economic powerhouse in quick time but we need to go about building our economy with due seriousness and dedication, rising above narrow interests of caste, class, political affiliations and last but not least, political expediency. It is very much hoped that Modi 3.0, with a two-thirds majority, will usher in the much-needed administrative, bureaucratic and judicial reforms for the speedy economic progress of the country.

(The author is a management consultant; views are personal)

# India and Armenia strengthen defence ties amidst regional instability

As the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis looms, the growing Indo-Armenia partnership emerges as a vital defence against destabilising forces

In recent years, the strategic partnership between India and Armenia has undergone a remarkable transformation—fired by their shared commitment to fortify defence capabilities and confront regional security challenges head-on. Against the backdrop of Armenia's enduring struggle with Azerbaijan and Turkey's support for Azerbaijan's advantages, the precipitating connection between Armenia and India stands for recognition. Armenia's proximity to India and both agreeing to diversify their strategic alignment, deserves special attention on the global stage.

**Military Cooperation:** Armenia's imperative to diversify its security alliances and bolster its military capabilities,



PADMALOCHAN DASH

particularly amidst the enduring conflict with Azerbaijan, is evident through heightened defence spending and collaborations with nations such as India and France. India's involvement with Armenia's military not only strengthens its defensive capabilities but also serves to counterbalance external-internal influences like Turkey and Pakistan in the South Asian region. The expanding Indo-Armenian

partnership encompasses various facets, including the exchange of weaponry, joint military exercises, and strategic consultations, all aimed at enhancing defence readiness and security in their respective regions.

**Advanced Weaponry and Joint Exercises:** The acquisition of state-of-the-art weaponry highlights the growing defence cooperation between India and Armenia. Reports indicate ongoing provision of military hardware from India to Armenia, including multiple-launch rocket systems, anti-tank missiles, and radar systems. Additionally, joint military exercises and training programs are underway to enhance preparedness and interoperability between their

armed forces. These collaborative efforts facilitate the exchange of expertise and tactics, fostering effective coordination for potential future operations, from joint exercises to intelligence sharing, both nations are committed to showcasing their military capabilities and strengthening their strategic partnership.

**Geopolitical Determinations:** Armenia's pivotal role in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) offers India diversified trade routes and enhanced access to Eurasian markets, bolstering strategic interests in economic resilience and geopolitical balancing. Conversely, India's military support for Armenia underscores its commitment to preserving regional peace and countering aggressive

manoeuvres by the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis. Through the realisation of mutual interests, India and Armenia can reshape security dynamics in the South Caucasus region by challenging the dominance of larger geopolitical actors and their support for rogue powers.

**Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan Axis:** The Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis poses a substantial threat to regional stability, with Turkey's unwavering support for Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict then raising concerns about potential escalations. The longstanding military partnership between Turkey and Pakistan, characterised by defence production, joint training exercises, and high-level military dialogues, under-

scores their concerted efforts to advance mutual geopolitical goals and exert influence in the regions. This axis represents a significant challenge to the security and stability of the South Caucasus and South Asian regions, as that axis seeks to consolidate its power and undermine the influence of other regional stakeholders. Responses and Ongoing Efforts: In response to the burgeoning influence of the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis, India's steadfast support for Armenia signifies a resolute stance against their aggressive manoeuvres in the region. Aimed at preserving a delicate balance of power, India and Armenia are all set to intensify their collaboration to address these threats. While Turkey's stance on

Kashmir validates the burgeoning Indo-Armenia defence cooperation, the nexus between Turkey's involvement in the Kashmir issue and Pakistan's alignment with Azerbaijan's agenda cannot be seen as a mere happenstance, rather a meticulously orchestrated strategy with far-reaching intention. In this backdrop, the urgent need for a meticulously planned multilateral defence partnership underscored. This becomes essential to counter the unholy Turkey-Pakistan-Azerbaijan axis thereby ensuring stability in both the Caucasus and South Asian regions.

**The Promising Prospects:** The emerging strategic cooperation between India and Armenia holds immense promise for enhancing region-

al security and advancing shared interests. Both nations are poised to deepen their partnership and address prevailing challenges through concerted efforts in military collaboration and strategic alignments. India's steadfast support for Armenia underscores its dedication to maintaining peace and stability in the Caucasus region. With far-reaching implications for global geopolitical outcomes, the Indo-Armenia partnership has the potential to redefine the regional balance of power and contribute significantly to the stability and prosperity of both the Caucasus and South Asian regions.

(The writer is working with an Independent Think Tank, views are personal)

# First shipment of aid to floating pier in Gaza departs from Cyprus

**AP ■ NICOSIA**  
A shipment of humanitarian aid left a port in Cyprus on Thursday morning and was on its way to the US-built pier in Gaza, the first delivery to the newly built ramp, Cyprus' foreign minister said.  
The relief is desperately needed, with the United Nations saying people in Gaza are on the brink of famine and as Israeli troops have ordered the evacuation of 1,00,000 Palestinians from Gaza's southern city of Rafah. Earlier this week, Israel sent tanks to seize Gaza's nearby Rafah crossing with Egypt, shutting down a vital border entry point needed to get assistance into the battered enclave. It remains uncertain whether Israel will launch an all-out invasion of Rafah as international efforts for a cease-fire continue. Israel has said that an assault on Rafah is crucial to its goal of destroying Hamas after the militant group's October 7 attack on southern Israel that left 1,200 dead and 250 seized as hostages

and abducted to Gaza.  
The United States, which opposes a Rafah invasion, has said Israel has not provided a credible plan for evacuating and protecting civilians now crammed in Rafah. The war has killed over 34,800 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and has driven some 80 per cent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes. President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he would not supply offensive weapons that Israel could use to launch an all-out assault on Rafah, over concern for the well-being of the more than 1 million civilians sheltering there.  
Biden, in an interview with CNN, said the US was still committed to Israel's defense and would supply Iron Dome rocket interceptors and other defensive arms, but that if Israel goes into Rafah, "we're not going to supply the weapons and artillery shells used." In response, far-right Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir

implied in a post on the social platform X that Hamas loves Biden, using a heart emoji in the tweet. Ben Gvir has pushed for a punishing military response and has threatened to leave the government if Israel does not carry out a wide-ranging military operation in Rafah. The US vessel Sagamore, loaded with much needed humanitarian assistance, departed from the port of Larnaca early on Thursday with the aim of transferring as much aid to Gaza as possible through the maritime corridor, said Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos. The vessel's voyage comes about two months after Biden gave the order for the building of the large floating platform several miles off the Gaza coast to be a launching pad for deliveries since not enough aid was getting in through land crossings, which require stringent checks by Israel, and by air drops.  
The US military finished the construction of the temporary pier and causeway,

Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said Tuesday, but plans to move it into place on the shore were on hold due to weather and other logistics. Singh told reporters that US military ships and the assembled pier were at the Ashdod port and that high winds and sea swells made it too dangerous to install the pier at the Gaza beach.  
An official from Cyprus told The Associated Press that if conditions didn't allow for the vessel to offload directly onto the pier, it would load smaller vessels, which would transport the aid directly to Gaza. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the details of the operation. Still, humanitarian workers say aid coming by sea won't be enough to alleviate the dire humanitarian suffering in Gaza and that the most effective way to get assistance in is by land. But the closure of the Rafah crossing and the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing this week cut off the entry of food, supplies and fuel for aid trucks and generators.

International aid groups warned Wednesday that a distribution network is at risk of collapse across the territory because fuel shipments into Gaza were cut off. Israel's threat of invasion of Rafah itself, where many of the aid groups have based their warehouses and staff, is also further disrupting distribution, the groups said. Israel said it reopened on Wednesday the Kerem Shalom crossing, shut after Hamas mortars killed four Israeli soldiers nearby in an attack on Sunday, but aid groups said no trucks were entering the Gaza side.  
Trucks let through from Israel must be unloaded and the cargo reloaded onto trucks in Gaza, but no workers in Gaza can get to the facility to do so because it is too dangerous, the UN says.  
Meanwhile, attacks continued across Gaza with Israeli airstrikes on a residential building killing eight people, including four children, late Wednesday, according to hospital records.



Protestors carry a model of the Dome of the Rock during a Stop Israel demonstration, between Stortorget and Malmåttor, Sweden, Thursday. There have been calls for Israel to be excluded from the Eurovision Song contest because of its conduct in its war against Hamas. AP/PTI

## 'US won't supply weapons for Israel to attack Rafah, in warning to ally'

**AP ■ WASHINGTON**  
President Joe Biden said that he would not supply offensive weapons that Israel could use to launch an all-out assault on Rafah — the last major Hamas stronghold in Gaza — over concern for the well-being of the more than 1 million civilians sheltering there.  
Biden, in an interview with CNN on Wednesday, said that the US was still committed to Israel's defence and would supply Iron Dome rocket interceptors and other defensive arms but that if Israel goes into Rafah, "we're not going to supply the weapons and artillery shells used."  
Biden acknowledged that "civilians have been killed in Gaza" by the type of heavy bombs that the US has been supplying — his first validation of what administration critics have been loudly protesting, even if he still stopped short of taking responsibility. His threat to hold up artillery



shells expanded on earlier revelations that the US was going to pause a shipment of heavy bombs.  
The US has historically provided enormous amounts of military aid to Israel. That has only accelerated in the aftermath of Hamas' October 7 attack, which killed some 1,200 people in Israel and led to about 250 being taken captive by militants.  
Biden's comments and his deci-

sion last week to pause the shipment of heavy bombs to Israel are the most striking manifestations of the growing daylight between his administration and Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government. Biden said on Wednesday that Israel's actions around Rafah had "not yet" crossed his red lines, but has repeated that Israel needs to do far more to protect the lives of civilians in Gaza.  
The shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 500-pound (225-kilogram) bombs, according to a senior US administration official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The focus of US concern was the larger explosives and how they could be used in a dense urban area.  
"Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those bombs and other ways in which they go after population

centres," Biden told CNN.  
"I made it clear that if they go into Rafah — they haven't gone in Rafah yet — if they go into Rafah, I'm not supplying the weapons that have been used historically to deal with Rafah, to deal with the cities, that deal with that problem."  
"We're not walking away from Israel's security," the Democratic president continued. "We're walking away from Israel's ability to wage war in those areas." Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin earlier Wednesday confirmed the weapons delay, telling the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense that the US paused "one shipment of high payload munitions."  
"We're going to continue to do what's necessary to ensure that Israel has the means to defend itself," Austin said. "But that said, we are currently reviewing some near-term security assistance shipments in the context of unfolding events in Rafah."

## UK PM Sunak asks university chiefs to fight antisemitism

**PTI ■ LONDON**  
British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Thursday urged university chiefs to address the rise in antisemitic abuse on campus and disruption of learning in reaction to the Israel-Hamas conflict. Sunak and his ministers will meet with university vice-chancellors to ensure a zero-tolerance approach to antisemitic abuse is adopted on all campuses, Downing Street said. The government said it wants to make it clear that debate and the open exchange of views in universities is essential but that this can never tip over into hate speech, harassment or incitement of violence.  
"Universities should be places of rigorous debate but also bastions of tolerance and respect for every member of their community," said Sunak. "A vocal minority on our campuses are disrupting the lives and studies of their fellow students and, in some



cases, propagating outright harassment and antisemitic abuse.  
"That has to stop," he said. The meeting is to also help to inform planned government guidance on combatting antisemitism on campus. Meanwhile, the Office for Students (OfS) has committed to publishing the response to its consultation on a new condition of registration, which could give OfS the power to impose sanctions where there is clear evidence that universities are failing to take sufficient or appropriate

action to tackle harassment, including antisemitic abuse. "I have made it absolutely clear that universities must crack down on antisemitism and ensure that protests do not unduly disrupt university life," said Education Secretary Gillian Keegan.  
In the Budget last year, the government announced GBP 7 million of extra support to tackle antisemitic abuse in educational settings, and GBP 500,000 of this will be dedicated to supporting the work of the University Jewish Chaplaincy, boosting support for Jewish students on campus.  
The University Jewish Chaplaincy helps students deal with incidents of antisemitism and intimidation and currently supports over 8,500 students at over 100 universities in 13 regions. The Union of Jewish Students (UJS) have criticised the "toxic environment" faced by Jewish students across the country.

## China criticises US for ship's passage through Taiwan Strait

**Taipei (AP)**: China's military criticised a US destroyer's passage through the Taiwan Strait, which occurred less than two weeks before the island's new president takes office and while Washington and Beijing are making uneven efforts to restore regular military exchanges.  
Navy Senior Capt. Li Xi, spokesman for the Eastern Theater Command, accused the U.S. of having "publicly hyped" the passage of the USS Halsey on Wednesday.  
In a statement, Li said the command, which oversees operations around the strait, "organized naval and air forces to monitor" the ship's transit and handle matters "in accordance with laws and regulations."  
The Navy's 7th Fleet said the Halsey "conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit on May 8 through waters where high-seas freedoms of navigation and overflight apply in accordance with international law."  
The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer transited through a corridor in the Strait that is "beyond the territorial sea" of any coastal state, the fleet's statement said.  
"Halsey's transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the United States' commitment to upholding freedom of navigation for all nations as a principle," it said. "No member of the international community should be intimidated or coerced into giving up their rights and freedoms. The United States military flies, sails, and operates anywhere international law allows."  
The last such passage was April 17, a day after U.S. and Chinese defense chiefs held their first talks since November 2022 in an effort to reduce regional tensions. Military-to-military contact stalled in August 2022, when Beijing suspended all such communication after then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan.  
China responded by firing missiles over Taiwan and staging a surge in military maneuvers, including what appeared to be a rehearsal of a naval and aerial blockade of the island.

## Trump-linked group unveils national security book for second term

**Washington (AP)**: Making future military aid to Ukraine contingent on the country participating in peace talks with Russia. Banning Chinese nationals from buying property within a 50-mile radius of US government buildings. Filling the national security sector with acolytes of Donald Trump. One of several groups trying to lay the groundwork for a second Trump administration if the former Republican president wins in November is out with a new policy book that aims to articulate an "America First" national security agenda.  
The book, shared with The Associated Press before its release Thursday, is the latest effort from the America First Policy Institute.  
Like the Heritage Foundation's "Project 2025," the group is seeking to help Trump avoid the mistakes of 2016, when he entered the White House largely unprepared.  
Beyond its policy efforts, the institute's transition project has been working to draft dozens of executive orders and developing a training program for future political appointees. Heritage has been building an extensive personnel database and offering its own policy manuals.  
Both groups stress they are independent from Trump's campaign, which has repeatedly tried to distance itself from such efforts, insisting that the only Trump-backed policies are those the candidate articulates himself.  
Still Fred Fleitz, the book's editor, noted that he and retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, who served for a time as Trump's acting national security adviser and wrote several of the chapters, have been in frequent touch with the former president, soliciting feedback and discussing topics such as Ukraine at length.  
"We hope this is where he is. We're not speaking for him, but I think he will approve,"



said Fleitz, who formerly served as the National Security Council's chief of staff. He said he hopes the book will serve as "a guidebook that will be an intellectual foundation for the America First approach" to national security "that's easy to use."  
"It's a grand strategy," added Kellogg. "You don't start with the policies first. You start with the strategies first. And that's what we've done."  
The group casts the current trajectory of US national security as a failure, thanks to a foreign policy establishment it accuses of having embraced an interventionist and "globalist" approach at the expense of America's national interests.  
While short on specifics, the book offers some guideposts to how a future Trump administration could approach foreign policy issues such as Russia's war against Ukraine.  
Trump has said, that if elected, he would solve the conflict before Inauguration Day in January, but has declined to say how.  
The book's chapter on the war spends more time discussing how the conflict unfolded than how to end it.  
But it says the US should make future military aid contingent on Ukraine participating in peace talks with Russia. It predicts the Ukrainian army will likely lose ground over time and advises against the US continuing "to send arms to a stalemate that Ukraine will eventually find difficult to win."

## Yemen's Houthi rebels claim two attacks in Gulf of Aden

**Jerusalem (AP)**: Yemen's Houthi rebels on Thursday claimed two missile attacks in the Gulf of Aden on two Panama-flagged container ships that caused no damage, while also saying they targeted a ship in the Indian Ocean in a previously unreported assault.  
The claims by Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree come as the tempo of the rebel attacks have waned in recent weeks as they've been targeted by repeated airstrikes launched by a U.S.-led coalition warship in waterways crucial to international trade. The Houthis insist their assaults will continue as long as Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip goes on. Saree in a pre-recorded statement claimed attacks on the MSC Diego and MSC Gina. The Joint Maritime Information Center, a U.S.-led coalition of nations operating in the Mideast, said those two missile attacks happened early Tuesday.

"Neither were hit and all crew on board are safe," the center said. "The vessels were last reported proceeding to next port of call."  
The center added that the vessels were "likely targeted due to perceived Israeli affiliation."  
Both vessels were operating for Geneva-based Mediterranean Shipping Co., which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.  
Saree did not say why it took the rebels two days to claim the attacks. He also claimed the Houthis targeted the MSC Vittoria, another container ship, in the Indian Ocean. An attack on that vessel, however, has not been acknowledged by any authorities. The Houthis say their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are aimed at pressuring Israel to end its war against Hamas in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians there.

## Chinese President Xi receives ceremonial welcome in Hungary

**AP ■ BUDAPEST**  
Chinese President Xi Jinping received a ceremonial welcome in Hungary's capital on Thursday ahead of a day of talks with Hungarian officials which are expected to result in further Chinese investments in the Central European country.  
Hungarian President Tamás Sulyok received Xi in an opulent courtyard of Budapest's Buda Castle, where the two men walked down a red carpet beside a ceremonial honor guard and listened to the Chinese and Hungarian national anthems. Numerous Chinese and Hungarian officials attended the ceremony, including Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Hungary's long-serving populist leader who has pursued deeper ties with Beijing while distancing himself from his more mainstream partners in the European Union.



Xi arrived in Hungary late Wednesday in a European tour that also took in Serbia and France. He will hold talks later in the day with Orbán and other officials on potential Chinese investments in Hungary in infrastructure, energy and electric vehicle manufacturing.  
Beijing has invested billions in Hungary and sees the EU member as an important foothold inside the 27-member trading bloc. In December, Hungary announced that one

of the world's largest EV manufacturers, China's BYD, will open its first European EV production factory in the south of the country — an inroad that could upend the competitiveness of the continent's auto industry.  
Hungary is also hosting several Chinese EV battery plants and hopes to become a global hub of lithium ion battery manufacturing, and has undertaken a railway project to connect the country with the Chinese-controlled port of Piraeus in Greece as an entry point for Chinese goods to Central and Eastern Europe.  
Both governments have been careful to keep the contents of any potential deals secret until their official announcement. But unconfirmed media reports suggest China could announce additional investments in EV manufacturing and in developing Hungary's railway network.

## Passengers, crew evacuated after plane's tyre burst

**Ankara (AP)**: A total of 190 people were safely evacuated from a plane in Turkey on Thursday after one of its tyres burst during landing at a southern airport, Turkey's transportation ministry said. No one was hurt. The Boeing 737-800, belonging to Turkey-based Corendon Airlines, stopped safely on the runway after landing at Gazipasa airport near the Mediterranean coastal town of Antalya, the company said. The plane, which carried 184 passengers and six crew members, was on a flight from Cologne, Germany. Corendon Airlines denied Turkish media reports that the aircraft had landed on its nose. Turkey's Transport and Infrastructure Ministry reported damage to the plane's front gear but did not provide details. The runway was not damaged but flights were diverted to the nearby Antalya airport while the aircraft was being removed.

## Stormy Daniels to return to stand in hush money trial

**AP ■ NEW YORK**  
Stormy Daniels will return to the witness stand in Donald Trump's hush money trial on Thursday, two days after she spent hours recounting in sometimes graphic detail the alleged 2006 sexual encounter with the former president that she was eventually paid to keep quiet about during the 2016 presidential election.  
The former president's attorneys aggressively sought to poke holes in Daniels' credibility during cross-examination, accusing the porn actor of trying to extort Trump and rehearsing her testimony — two assertions she forcefully denied. The defense also made a failed attempt to have a mistrial declared, arguing that Daniels' morning testimony had "nothing to do with this case and is extremely prejudicial."  
Trump denies the two ever had sex. Prosecutors say Trump and two of his associates orchestrated a scheme to influence



the 2016 election by purchasing and then burying stories that might damage his campaign. Daniels' testimony is a build-up to the prosecution's star witness Michael Cohen, who arranged the USD 130,000 payment to Daniels and later went to prison for orchestrating the payments and other

charges.  
Trump is accused of falsifying internal business records to cover up the hush money payments and instead recording them as legal expenses. He has pleaded not guilty.  
The case is the first-ever criminal trial of a former US president and the first of four prosecutions of Trump to reach a jury. Over the first few weeks of Donald Trump's hush money trial, the scene outside the courthouse has largely settled into a routine — a few dozen members of the public, a typically small group of demonstrators and the journalists covering the day-to-day developments.  
But the arrival of Stormy Daniels seems to have shifted that equilibrium.  
With Daniels set to re-take the stand on Thursday, a far larger share of the public has amassed outside 100 Centre Street, alongside new ranks of media from the US and abroad.  
A few minutes before 8 a.m., as

lines swelled to their longest since the start of the trial, court officers said they had no choice but to turn people away.  
Among the members of the public in line was Rose Brennan, a 63-year-old woman wearing a hand puppet meant to resemble Donald Trump.  
"He has accompanied me on many adventures," she said of the puppet. "Even though I hoped he would have been retired by now."  
She said she and the puppet travelled from New Jersey, arriving outside the courthouse at 5:30 a.m. because "I just want to be a witness to history."  
A Georgia appeals court on Wednesday agreed to review a lower court ruling allowing Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis to continue to prosecute the election interference case she brought against the former president.  
On Tuesday, the federal judge in Florida presiding over the classified documents prosecution of Trump has canceled

the May 20 trial date, postponing it indefinitely. As former President Donald Trump remains stuck in the courtroom listening to salacious details of an extramarital sexual encounter he denies, another spectacle is playing out in the background as his vice presidential tryouts get underway.  
The dynamic was on full display in Florida at a fundraiser at his Mar-a-Lago club that doubled as a VP audition.  
"This weekend, we had 15 people... They're all out there campaigning," Trump told Spectrum News 1 Wisconsin on Tuesday. "It might actually be more effective this way because, you know, every one of them thinks they could be chosen, which I guess possibly is so."  
For now, the presumptive GOP nominee is happy to revel in the attention as reporters parse his choices and prospective candidates jockey and woo him in an "Apprentice"-style competition.



# Putin accuses West of fueling global conflicts

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia on Thursday wrapped itself in patriotic pageantry for Victory Day, as President Vladimir Putin celebrated the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II by hailing his forces fighting in Ukraine and blasting the West for fueling conflicts around the world.



Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Ground Forces Oleg Salyukov, left, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, centre, and Russian President Vladimir Putin leave Red Square, walk, after the Victory Day military parade in Moscow, Russia, Thursday, May 9, 2024, marking the 79th anniversary of the end of World War II. AP/PTI

Even though few veterans of what Russia calls the Great Patriotic War are still alive 79 years after Berlin fell to the Red Army, the victory remains the most important and widely revered symbol of Russia's prowess and a key element of national identity. Putin has turned Victory Day — the country's most important secular holiday — into a pillar of his nearly quarter-century in power and a justification of his military action in Ukraine. Two days after beginning his fifth term in office, he led the festivities across Russia that recall the nation's wartime sacrifice.

“Victory Day unites all generations,” Putin said in a speech in Red Square that came on the coldest May 9 in decades amid some snow flurries. “We are going forward relying on our centuries-old traditions and feel confident that together we will ensure a free and secure future of Russia.” As battalions marched by and military hardware — both old and new — rumbled over the cobblestones, the sky cleared briefly to allow a flyby of warplanes, some of which trailed smoke in the white, red and blue of the Russian flag. Putin hailed the troops fighting in Ukraine as “our heroes” for their courage, resilience and self-denial, adding that “all of Russia is with you.” He accused the West of “fueling regional conflicts, inter-ethnic and inter-religious strife and trying to contain sovereign and independent centers of global development.”

With tensions with Washington over Ukraine soaring to their highest level since the Cold War, Putin issued another stark reminder of Moscow's nuclear might. “Russia will do everything to prevent global confrontation, but will not allow anyone to threaten us,” he said. “Our strategic forces are in combat readiness.” Nuclear-capable Yars intercontinental ballistic missiles were pulled across Red Square, underscoring his message. The Soviet Union lost about 27 million people in World War II, an estimate that many historians consider conservative, scarring virtually every family. Nazi troops overran much of the western Soviet Union when they invaded in June 1941, before being driven back all the way to Berlin, where the USSR's hammer and sickle flag was raised above the ruined capital. The US, UK, France and other allies mark the end of the war in Europe on May 8. The immense suffering and sacrifice in cities like Stalingrad, Kursk and Putin's native Leningrad — now St Petersburg — still serve as a powerful symbol of the country's ability to prevail against seemingly overwhelming chal-

lenges. Since coming to power on the last day of 1999, Putin has made May 9 an important part of his political agenda, featuring missiles, tanks and fighter jets. Medal-bedecked veterans joined him Thursday to review the parade, and many — including the president — wore the black-and-orange St George's ribbon that is traditionally associated with Victory Day. About 9,000 troops, including about 1,000 who fought in Ukraine, took part in Thursday's parade. Although the US and UK ambassadors did not attend, Putin was joined by other dignitaries and presidents of several former Soviet nations along with a few other Moscow allies, including the leaders of Cuba, Guinea-Bissau and Laos. In his speech, he accused the West of “revanchism ... hypocrisy and lies” in seeking to play down the Soviet role in defeating Nazi Germany. Putin described Victory Day as “very emotional and poignant.”

# Taliban sound warning to journalists, experts

AP ■ KABUL

The Taliban on Thursday warned journalists and experts against working with Afghanistan International TV. It's the first time they have told people not to cooperate with a specific outlet. Afghanistan International TV, which is headquartered in London, is accessible through satellite, cable and social media. A spokesman for the Taliban-controlled Ministry of Information and Culture alleged the station was committing professional violations and violating moral and legal boundaries. The Media Violations Commission wanted all journalists and experts in Afghanistan to cease their collaboration with the station, said ministry spokesman Habib Ghofran. “At the commission's meeting held yester-

day (Wednesday), it was decided that participating in discussions and facilitating the broadcast of this media outlet in public places is prohibited,” added Ghofran. He didn't give further details, including what would happen to those who cooperated with the station. The director of Afghanistan International TV, Harun Najafizada, said the decision would not affect the channel because it had no employees or freelancers in the country. “We don't have anyone on the ground and rely on the reporting of Afghan citizens,” said Najafizada. “That's more challenging, but we have tough verification. It's a threat to free media, to other media, and to put pressure on us to forgo out professional standards. It's not going to work.” Afghanistan fares abysmally in terms of press freedom. The latest index from Reporters

without Borders ranked the country 178 out of 180. It ranked 152 last year. RSF said that three radio reporters were arrested in April for broadcasting music and receiving calls from female listeners during shows. Local authorities weren't available to confirm the arrests. Also last month, the Taliban suspended two TV stations for failing to “consider national and Islamic values.” The director for one of the suspended stations, Barya TV, rejected the Taliban's allegations. The station is still off air. Latif Sadiq said the station wasn't informed about the suspension. “The reports that they repeatedly warned (Barya) are absolute lies,” Sadiq said on Thursday. “They have decided on their own that (Barya) television is off, broadcasting is off, and they said the case will go to court.”

# Japanese aircraft makes emergency landing after glitch

Tokyo (AP): A Japanese defence aircraft carrying eight people made an emergency landing at a commercial airport in central Japan on Thursday after a cockpit window inadvertently slid open during its training flight, officials said. No damage or injuries were reported. The Japan Air Self-Defence Force said its C-2 transport aircraft experienced the window glitch on Thursday afternoon after taking off from the Iruma Air Base north of Tokyo for a training flight. The incident caused the pilot to request an emergency landing at the nearby Niigata airport, about 300 kilometers (186 miles) north of the air base. The aircraft landed safely and there was no damage or injury from the mishap, officials said. The JASDF said the roughly 20-inch square window on the left side of the cockpit, which is designed to slide open only manually, did not fall off the aircraft.

# Spanish court shelves tax probe against Shakira

AP ■ MADRID

Madrid (AP): A Spanish investigative magistrate on Thursday provisionally shelved the latest probe into an alleged case of tax fraud by pop star Shakira following recommendations by prosecutors. The Colombian singer had been under investigation for the alleged evasion of 6.7 million Euros (USD 7.2 million) in taxes on her 2018 income via an offshore company. She denied wrongdoing. State prosecutors who initially brought the allegations said Wednesday “there is not sufficient evidence” of a possible fiscal crime and recommended that the probe be closed. In a statement Thursday, the investigating court said that given that there is no accusation on behalf of prosecutors or the regional government of Catalonia in northeastern Spain, there was no cause to proceed further with the case. The court said “there is no indication that can prove that Shakira Isabel M R had consciously and voluntarily omitted information and documentation with tax significance.”

# IS group claims bombing in Afghanistan

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a bombing in Afghanistan's northeast that killed police officers who were part of an anti-poppy crop campaign. A motorcycle was booby-trapped and exploded, targeting a Taliban patrol in Faizabad town in Badakhshan province, killing and wounding 12 members of the patrol as well as destroying a four-wheel drive vehicle, the group said in a statement late Wednesday. Abdul Mateen Qani, a spokesman for the Interior Ministry, said the officers were on their way to destroy poppy crops in the area. The Islamic State group's affiliate in Afghanistan, a major Taliban rival, has conducted attacks on schools, hospitals, mosques and Shiite areas throughout the country. In March, the group said one of its suicide bombers detonated an explosive belt among Taliban gathered near a Kandahar bank to receive their salaries. The Taliban pledged to wipe



out the country's drug cultivation industry and imposed a formal ban in April 2022, dealing a heavy blow to hundreds of thousands of farmers and day laborers who relied on proceeds from the crop to survive. Opium cultivation crashed by 95% after the ban, a report from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime said last November. Protests are rare in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, but there was a backlash

in Badakhshan last week in response to the poppy eradication campaign. It prompted a high-ranking delegation led by the chief of military staff Fasihudin Fitrat to visit the region and negotiate with protesters. Protests erupted last Friday after a man was shot and killed by the Taliban for resisting poppy eradication attempts in Darayum district. Another was killed on Saturday during a protest in Argo district.

# Pak leadership vows not to allow May 9 'executors' to get away

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

Pakistan's top civil and military leadership Thursday strongly condemned the unprecedented violence by the supporters of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on May 9 last year and vowed not to allow its “executors” to get away with their acts which were aimed at establishing an “individual's dictatorship.” On May 9 last year, violent protests erupted after the arrest of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf chief Imran Khan by paramilitary Rangers from the premises of the Islamabad High Court. His supporters vandalised a dozen military installations, including the Jinnah House (Lahore Corps Commander house), Mianwali airbase and the ISI building in Faisalabad. The Army headquarters in Rawalpindi was also attacked by the mob for the first time. On the first anniversary of the riots, the Pakistan Army issued a statement saying its entire leadership “strongly condemn the criminal acts perpetrated on 9th May 2023.”

Terming May 9 (Black Day) as one of the “darkest days in our national history”, the Inter-Services Public Relations - the media wing of the army - said that the politically motivated and brainwashed miscreants in an act of rebellion deliberately resorted to violence against state institutions and vandalised sacred symbols of the state and the sites belonging to national heritage. The army said that after failing to undermine national harmony and stability, the planners, facilitators and executors of this conspiracy embarked upon a sinister campaign of hate against the Armed Forces and the state with an intent to twist the narrative to their advantage and shift the blame on the state institutions. “It is precisely for this reason there can neither be any compromise with the planners, facilitators and executors of the 9th May tragedy nor they would be allowed to hoodwink the law of land,” it said. “Bringing the real culprits of 9th May to justice is para-

mount to ensure that in future, no one dares to desecrate the memories of our heroes and the symbols of our unity through such unwarranted conduct in future,” it added. Addressing a meeting of the cabinet, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that the real aim of the May 9 violence was to end democracy and establish kingship and an “individual's dictatorship.” He said that the May 9 violence was not just a rebellion against Pakistan but against the state, including the army and its chief Gen Asim Munir to create a divide in the country. “There can absolutely be no soft-peddalling of what happened on May 9 and there can be no absolution for those who orchestrated, supported, and assisted the attempt to damage the foundations of our nation,” he said in a post on X. In a message, President Asif Ali Zardari said, “May 9, 2023, will always be remembered as a dark day in Pakistan's history when a politically instigated mob ran amok across the country, damaging public

property and military installations.” Condemning the violence, he said that the incidents “severely tarnished” the country's image and thus only “served the interests of Pakistan's enemies.” Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said that the accountability of the perpetrators and conspirators of the May 9 violence would be taken to its logical conclusion because the characters behind the violence were known to everybody. Information Minister Atta Tarar said there was evidence about who was involved in the May 9 acts, emphasising that these need to be brought to justice. The violence was also condemned by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz who emphasized “bringing the plotters to justice was necessary.” Pakistan Peoples Party chief Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari condemned the May 9 acts as “yet another dark chapter in the nation's history.” He said the “instigator behind the strongly condemnable events of May 9 is well-known to

everyone.” Meanwhile, Imran Khan refused to apologise for the May 9 riots, a day after the military ruled out dialogue with his party unless they tendered a public apology over the unprecedented violence. Khan, who spoke to the media after the court proceedings in the 190 million pounds Al Qadir corruption case at Adiala jail on Wednesday, said that he was ready to face an inquiry into the sit-in that his Pakistan Tehreek-Insaf party staged in 2014. “I condemned the May 9 incidents in front of (former) chief justice Umar Ata Bandial,” the 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician said when asked whether he would apologise for the May 9 violence. Khan has been incarcerated since August last year after he was booked in several cases ranging from corruption to violating the Official Secrets Act. Following the May 9 violence last year, Imran Khan and hundreds of his party workers are being tried under multiple

cases, including one under the stringent Official Secrets Act in connection with the violence. The government organised several events on the first anniversary of May 9 violence to honour victims whose monuments were defiled by the protestors. A heavy contingent of police was deployed outside the residence of Imran Khan in Lahore and his party offices across Punjab province to prevent any protest by the party on the first anniversary of the May 9 violence. PTI Secretary-General Omar Ayub Khan said the government launched a crackdown against his party workers to stop them from taking to the streets but they would hold demonstrations. “Regardless of the crackdown, peaceful rallies and protests will be held all across Pakistan in the morning (of May 9),” he said. A Punjab police officer told Press Trust of India that Khan's party would not be allowed to hold any rally in the province on May 9. Authorities in Islamabad have declared all gatherings as illegal.

# Prez pins Sri Lanka's economic stability on IMF programme

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Thursday told lawmakers that there was no “alternative path” to economic recovery for the island nation other than the IMF-prescribed reform plans. Sri Lanka has been facing the worst economic crisis, leading to a sharp rise in the prices of essential commodities, including fuel, since its independence from the British in 1948. President Wickremesinghe's address to Parliament came on the second anniversary of the public uprising against President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government over handling the unprecedented economic crisis in the country. On May 9, 2022, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa was forced to resign following anti-government protests. Ranil Wickremesinghe replaced him as prime minister. Two months later, Wickremesinghe replaced Gotabaya Rajapaksa as the president to save the balance term until the end of 2024. Wickremesinghe succeeded to steer the bankrupt economy. “When I assumed leadership, our nation was in crisis, the economy was severely contracted with inflation soaring to 70 per cent,” Wickremesinghe, also the finance minister, told

Parliament. The president said the budget deficit had surged to over 10-12 per cent, resulting in an increase of interest rate to 30 per cent. He added that there were insufficient funds to import food and essential goods even for a week and the “majority of the population found themselves on the streets with some enduring lengthy queues for necessities.” He said under the IMF bailout of USD 2.9 billion, the government implemented economic discipline. He said he anticipated a growth of 3 per cent this year. He said the interest rates had also decreased substantially to as low as 10-13 per cent. “I reiterate once more there exists no alternative path to reconstructing our economy. No other programme rivals the efficiency of the one currently in place, nor does any other plan offer a viable alternative,” he said. Separately, the Election Commission of Sri Lanka said on Thursday the island nation will hold a presidential election between September 17 and October 16. Although the two main opposition leaders and several others had already announced their candidature for the presidential poll, Wickremesinghe has not announced his intention to seek a second term.

# Yoon rejects S Korean opp calls for probe against wife, top officials

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's president on Thursday dismissed calls for independent investigations into allegations involving his wife and top officials, drawing quick, strong rebukes from his political rivals. After his conservative ruling party suffered a heavy loss in the recent April 10 parliamentary elections, President Yoon Suk Yeol faces what appears to be his biggest political challenge yet as opposition parties would extend their control of the National Assembly to 2028. The opposition has recently stepped up its demand for an independent investigation into first lady Kim Keon Hee over various scandals, such as her

alleged involvement in a stock price manipulation scheme and the release of spy camera footage showing her receiving a luxury bag from a Korean American pastor. In a news conference marking his two years in office, Yoon said he apologizes for what he calls “my wife's unwise behavior” in accepting the Christian Dior bag but refused to elaborate because the scandal is under investigation by prosecutors. Yoon described the demand for a new, special investigation on Kim's shares price allegation as a political offensive, as Kim wasn't charged or convicted from investigations that began when the Democratic Party was in power. Yoon already in January

had vetoed a bill calling for the appointment of an independent counsel to investigate his wife's stock price allegation. During Thursday's conference, Yoon also made it clear that he opposes another Democratic Party-led push for a special investigation into suspicions surrounding the death of a marine who drowned during a search for flood victims in 2023. Yoon called the marine's death heartbreaking, but stressed that police and an anti-corruption investigation agency have already been examining the case. Yoon said he would approve a new independent investigation if police and the anti-corruption investigation agency fail to address public suspicions over the case.

# House rejects Greene's effort to remove Speaker Johnson

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Hardline Rep Marjorie Taylor Greene tried and failed in sudden action Wednesday to oust Speaker Mike Johnson, her long-shot effort swiftly and resoundingly rejected by Democrats and Republicans tired of the political chaos. One of Donald Trump's biggest supporters in Congress, Greene stood on the House floor and read a long list of “transgressions” she said Johnson had committed as speaker. Colleagues booed in protest. Greene of Georgia criticized Johnson's leadership as “pathetic, weak and unacceptable.” No sooner than Greene triggered the vote on her motion

to vacate the speaker from his office, the Republican Majority Leader Steve Scalise countered by calling first for a vote to table it. An overwhelming majority, 359-43, kept Johnson in his job, for now. It's the second time in a matter of months that Republicans have tried to oust their own speaker, an unheard-of level of party turmoil with a move rarely seen in U.S. history. As Greene pressed ahead despite pushback from Republicans at the highest levels, GOP lawmakers filtered towards Johnson, giving him pats on the back and grasping his shoulder to assure him of their support. “We need steady hands at the wheel,” Johnson said after-

ward. “The country desperately needs a functioning Congress.” The Georgia Republican had vowed she would force a vote on the motion to vacate the Republican speaker if he dared to advance a foreign aid package with funds for Ukraine, which was overwhelmingly approved late last month and signed into law. But in recent days it seemed her effort had cooled, as she and Johnson met repeatedly for a potential resolution. Johnson of Louisiana marched on, saying he had been willing to take the risk, believing it was important for the US to back Ukraine against Russia's invasion and explaining he wanted to be on the “right side of history.”

**BABA FARID UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, FARIDKOT**

(Admission Branch)  
**Admission Notice for PPMET (Basic B.Sc. Nursing) Course, session 2024**

Online applications are invited alongwith requisite fee for admission to Basic B.Sc. Nursing course in all the Govt./University constitute/Private colleges of Punjab through University website from **09.05.2024 to 23.05.2024**. Prospectus for admission to Basic B.Sc. Nursing course will be available on university website from **09.05.2024**. The **Entrance Test (PPMET- 2024) for admission to Basic B.Sc. Nursing course will be conducted on 05.06.2024**

**Note:-** Any Notification/Corrigendum/Amendment by Govt. of Punjab will be followed. For Prospectus/fee details/schedule/online counseling/details & updates visit us at: [www.bfhs.ac.in](http://www.bfhs.ac.in)

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# Household savings decline due to rising home, auto, personal loans

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Household savings are estimated to have declined for the third year in a row in FY24 as liabilities on account of interest towards housing and vehicle loans have continued to rise, but the trend could reverse in 2024-25 on account of the impact of RBI's curbs on personal loan. The net household savings declined sharply by Rs 9 lakh crore to Rs 14.16 lakh crore in three years to 2022-23, as per the National Account Statistics 2024 data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). Explaining the data, ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar attributed the declining trend in household savings to a sharp 73 per cent year-on-year increase in liabilities during 2022-23. She further said that as per the indication the trend of decrease in household savings has continued in 2023-24, the data for which is likely to be released later. However, the trend could reverse in 2024-25 as Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has taken measures to curb unsecured personal loans, she told PTI. Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran



attributed the decline to a shift in portfolio where savings were being channelised to real assets. "Household net financial savings flows were lower in FY23 and there were some concerns around that, which said households are saving less. But, in reality, it was a portfolio shift where the savings were going into real assets," Nageswaran had said at a NCAER event on Wednesday. Following is an explainer of what household savings means, the historical data and the outlook for 2024-25.

1. What does households mean? Households include everything that is not government or corporate within the national accounts statistics system of classification. It can include partnership and sole proprietorship. 2. How has the household savings been historically? Household savings had touched a peak of Rs 23.29 lakh crore in 2020-21 — the year which saw the second wave of the Covid pandemic. Following that it has been on a decline. It then fell to Rs 17.12 lakh crore in 2021-22 and further to Rs 14.16 lakh crore in 2022-23. 3. What are the liabilities that erode household savings? Liabilities are mainly the housing, auto, personal and other loans that an entity takes from financial

institutions. Loans to households by financial corporations and NBFCs increased four-fold to Rs 3.33 lakh crore in 2022-23 from Rs 93,723 crore in 2020-21. It grew 73 per cent in 2022-23 over Rs 1.92 lakh crore worth of loans in 2021-22. 4. Why are the liabilities going up? According to Nayar, a part of this is towards housing loans. We have seen the housing market recover after Covid and housing sales have touched highs in the next few years post Covid. But it is not just housing loans where household liabilities have gone up. It also includes vehicle and education, agri and business loans. "It looks quite likely that household liabilities will go up in FY24 so some of these trends may continue. However, with the recent tightening of regulation by RBI, we do expect that some categories of personal loans will see slower growth in FY25. And that will augur well for household savings rate for the current fiscal," Nayar said. Seeing a surge in personal loans, the RBI in November last year, raised the provisioning requirement for unsecured loans, including personal loans.

# Sensex tumbles over 1,000 points Nifty falls below 22,000 amid poll uncertainties

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex on Thursday crashed over 1,000 points while the Nifty dived below the 22,000 level due to across-the-board selloff amid general election uncertainties. Besides, persistent foreign fund outflows and heavy selling pressure in HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Reliance Industries weighed on investor sentiment, traders said. Declining for the third day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 1,062.22 points or 1.45 per cent to settle at 72,404.17. During the day, it tanked 1,132.21 points or 1.54 per cent to 72,334.18. The NSE Nifty dived 345 points or 1.55 per cent to 21,957.50. It tumbled 370.1 points or 1.65 per cent to 21,932.40 during the session. "The broader market witnessed volatility, underscoring caution on account of Q4 earnings and general election uncertainties, which led investors to stay on the sidelines. We expect the trend to continue in the short term as the market slid below the physiological level of 22,000. The global indices are trading with mixed cues ahead of the BOE policy meeting later today and US inflation figures due next week," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.



From the Sensex basket, Larsen & Toubro tanked over 5 per cent after March quarter earnings. Asian Paints, JSW Steel, ITC, Bajaj Finance, IndusInd Bank, Tata Steel, NTPC, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and Power Grid were among the laggards. In contrast, Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, State Bank of India, Infosys and HCL Tech were the gainers. Meanwhile, the country's largest lender SBI reported 18.18 per cent growth in the March quarter consolidated net profit to Rs 21,384.15 crore against Rs 18,093.84 crore in the year-ago period. Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) on Thursday posted a 25 per cent fall in its March quarter net profit on lower refining margins and announced one free bonus share for every two

shares held. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 2.41 per cent and midcap index dropped 2.01 per cent. Among the indices, oil and gas lost 3.41 per cent, capital goods dropped 3.37 per cent, metal tanked 3.13 per cent, industrials (2.92 per cent), utilities (2.59 per cent) and commodities (2.39 per cent). On the other hand, auto emerged as the major gainer. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 6,669.10 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. "Nifty ended sharply lower led by institutional selling and traders squaring up due to nervousness on election progress. World shares were mostly lower on Thursday ahead of the Bank of England's policy decision and after the US market's pause stretched

into a second day and as Chinese stocks rose after China reported better-than-expected trade figures for April," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains, while Seoul and Tokyo ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street closed mixed in overnight trade on Wednesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.48 per cent to USD 83.89 a barrel. "The market is continuously witnessing pressure ahead of the election outcome. We don't have any global reason for this correction, while some uncertainty ahead of the big event is causing profit-booking in the market. Our market has been largely driven by domestic investors, including both HNIs and institutional investors, for the last few months. "Now, they are sitting on the sidelines for the last couple of days and taking some profit off the table ahead of the big event, while FIIs are continuously selling in our market, which is pushing the market lower. The Volatility index, India VIX, has risen 70 per cent from its lows, which is also creating some uncertainty among traders and investors," Santosh Meena,

# Fairfax backed Go Digit to float IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Go Digit General Insurance Ltd, a firm backed by Canada-based Fairfax Group, is set to launch its initial public offering on May 15. The initial share sale will conclude on May 17 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on May 14, according to the Red Herring Prospectus (RHP). Go Digit's proposed IPO comprises fresh issuance of equity shares worth Rs 1,125 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of 5.47 crore equity shares by a promoter Go Digit

Infoworks Services and existing shareholders. At present, Go Digit Infoworks Services owns an 83.3 per cent stake in the company. Proceeds from the fresh issuance have been proposed to be utilised for the augmentation of the company's capital base and maintenance of solvency levels and general corporate purposes. Cricketer Virat Kohli and his wife and actor Anushka Sharma are among the investors in the firm. They are not selling any shares in the IPO.

In March, Go Digit secured approval from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to float the IPO. The company had first filed the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with the Sebi in August 2022 to raise funds through an initial share sale. However, it was thwarted primarily due to certain compliance requirements pertaining to the employee stock appreciation rights scheme. Sebi returned Go Digit's draft IPO papers on January 30, 2023, and asked the company to refile the documents with

certain updates. Following this, the company again filed the preliminary IPO papers with Sebi in April 2023. Go Digit offers motor insurance, health insurance, travel insurance, property insurance, marine insurance, liability insurance, and other insurance products, to meet the needs of the customers. It is one of the first non-life insurers in India to be fully operated on the cloud and has developed Application Programming Interface (API) integrations with several channel partners.

# IHCL expands partnership with CG Hospitality

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) on Thursday announced a strategic partnership with CG Hospitality with a plan to grow its portfolio in the Indian sub-continent to 25 hotels by 2025, involving a total investment of around Rs 4,000 crore. The portfolio of 25 properties by 2025, will include 11 operating hotels with 900 keys and will add

another 14, which will be under one platform — 'Ekyam' — to pursue opportunities in destinations that offer adventure experiences across the Indian Ocean and Greater Himalayan regions and wildlife escapes, IHCL Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Puneet Chhatwal told reporters. IHCL's Vice President Commercial Ram Maheshwari will lead the 'Ekyam' platform, he added.

# Maruti Suzuki to re-energise small car segment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Betting big on the entry-level segment, Maruti Suzuki India on Thursday said it will continue to "re-energise" the small car segment as the automaker expects the vertical to revive over the next few years, according to MD & CEO Hisashi Takeuchi. Speaking at the launch of the new generation Swift here, he noted that the automaker aims to cater to the diverse needs of customers as it aims to sell 40 lakh units by 2030-31. Takeuchi noted that the entry-level segment continues to be a high volume vertical accounting for around 28 per cent of the overall domestic passenger vehicle sales. "For us to maintain our leadership position, it is important to cater to diverse customer segments. The hatchback segment in India continues to be a high-volume segment, accounting for approximately 28 per cent of total passenger vehicle sales," Takeuchi said. Interestingly, the premium hatchback segment contributes nearly 60 per cent of total hatchback sales, he noted. "As a market leader, we took the responsibility to re-energise the hatchback segment at a time when this segment really needs a



catalyst for growth," Takeuchi said. He noted that the company has a strong belief in India's growth story. "As the government aims to make India a developed country by 2047, we can expect increased economic activity and robust demand for automobiles in the coming years," Takeuchi stated. With only 32 vehicles per 1,000 people compared to over 600 in developed countries like Japan, India presents a vast pool of car aspirants, he said. "As car ownership rises, the hatchback segment will serve as an entry point for many customers, and thus shall expand," Takeuchi noted. Therefore, the hatchback segment will continue to remain relevant for India, and the company's focus on this segment will persist, he added.

# Fitch affirms ratings of Axis Bank, ICICI Bank on supporting operating environment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings on Thursday affirmed the ratings of Axis Bank and ICICI Bank with a stable outlook citing supportive operating environment and large domestic franchise. Fitch Ratings has affirmed India-based Axis Bank and ICICI Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'BB+', the global agency said in two separate rating commentaries. Fitch has also affirmed the banks' Government Support Rating (GSR) at 'bb+' and Viability Rating (VR) at 'bb'. Fitch said its IDR ratings reflect expectation of a moderate probability of extraordinary state support from the government relative to large state banks.

The agency said its expectation of a supportive operative environment is on account of India's robust medium-term growth potential. Fitch expects GDP growth of 7 per cent in 2024 and 6.5 per cent in 2025, supported by investment prospects. "The economy has been resilient as healthy business sentiment, steady financial markets and the government's capital spending buffered global economic headwinds and inflation. These factors are conducive for banks to sustain profitable business, provided risks are well-managed," Fitch said. With regard to Axis Bank, Fitch said the bank's appetite for growth is likely to remain above the sector average, albeit similar to other large private banks.

# HPCL Q4 net falls 25 per cent, records ₹16,000 profit in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) on Thursday reported a 25 per cent fall in its March quarter net profit on lower refining margins and announced one free bonus share for every two shares held. Its consolidated net profit of Rs 2,709.31 crore in January-March - the fourth quarter of the 2023-24 fiscal year - compares to Rs 3,608.32 crore in the same period of the previous financial year, according to a company's stock exchange filing. The firm earned USD 6.95 on turning every barrel of crude oil into fuel in the quarter against USD 14.01 per barrel gross refining margin a year back and USD 8.50 per barrel margin in the preceding quarter. HPCL board also approved a



1:2 bonus issue - 1 free share for every 2 shares held. Turnover was higher at Rs 1.22 lakh crore when compared to Rs 1.15 lakh crore in January-March 2023. For the full 2023-24, HPCL reported a record net profit of Rs 16,014.61 crore as opposed to a loss of Rs 6,980.23 crore in the previous year. The annual profit benefited from the nearly two-year-long freeze in petrol and diesel prices. While the freeze was affected when crude oil (the input used for making fuels like petrol and diesel) started rising in 2022 post-Russia's invasion of Ukraine, international rates moderated in most of 2023, helping companies like IOC book handsome profits. It was only in mid-March that petrol and diesel prices were cut by Rs 2. The rate cut, which came just before the

general elections, happened when crude oil prices started inching up. For FY2023-24, the revenue from operations stood at Rs 4,61,638 crore (Rs 4,66,192 crore during the previous year). The average gross refining margin (GRM) for 2023-24 (April 2023 to March 2024 fiscal) was USD 9.08 per barrel as opposed to USD 12.09 per barrel during the previous financial year. "The reduction in GRMs is in line with the trend of international product cracks," the company said in a statement. The Board of Directors has recommended the issue of bonus shares in the ratio 1:2 - one new bonus equity share of Rs 10 each for every two existing equity shares of Rs 10 each fully paid up, subject to the approval of shareholders.

# India's exports rise in 115 nations out of 238 destinations in 2023-24: Data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's exports have increased to as many as 115 countries out of the total 238 destinations during 2023-24 despite the global economic uncertainties, according to commerce ministry's data. These 115 export destinations, which account for 46.5 per cent of India's export basket, include the US, UAE, Netherlands, China, UK, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Bangladesh, Germany and Italy. The country's merchandise exports dipped by 3 per cent to USD 437.1 billion in the last fiscal. However, services exports rose to USD 341.1 billion in 2023-24 as against USD 325.3 billion in 2022-23. The data showed that despite persistent global challenges, overall exports (goods and services together) hit the

highest level in 2022-23. Overall exports reached USD 778.2 billion in 2023-24 as compared to USD 776.4 billion in 2022-23, registering a marginal growth of 0.23 per cent. The share of India's merchandise exports has also increased marginally from 1.70 per cent in 2014 to 1.82 per cent in 2023. India's rank in world merchandise exporters too has improved from 19th to 17th during the same period. Further, India's export to its top 10 destinations witnessed a 13 per cent year-on-year increase in 2023-24. The UAE has emerged as the primary destination, with a substantial 12.71 per cent growth in export value at USD 35.6 billion. Similarly, exports to Singapore that surged by 20.19 per cent to USD 14.4



billion, to the UK (up 13.30 per cent to USD 13 billion), and to China (up 8.70 per cent to USD 16.7 billion) also recorded healthy growth indicating a sustained demand for Indian products. The data showed that the exponential growth rates observed in countries like Russia (35.41 per cent), Romania (138.84 per cent),

and Albania (234.97 per cent) underscore the exploration of new markets. "Strengthening trade relations with these nations could unlock untapped opportunities and bolster India's overall export competitiveness," an official said. The country's outbound shipments to regions including CIS (commonwealth of independent states, Oceania and Europe too witnessed expansion during 2023-24 over 2022-23. The top five export destinations driving export growth in CIS region during 2023-24 are Russia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Armenia and Tajikistan. Similarly, the top five destinations driving India's export growth in Oceania region in the last fiscal are

Australia, Timor Leste, Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Island. And in Europe, the major countries where Indian exporters recorded healthy growth in their shipments during 2023-24 are the UK, Romania, Albania, Netherlands and Greece. On the commodities front, as many as 17 items have registered an increase in exports in 2023-24 over the last financial. These sectors constitute 48.4 per cent of India's export basket. These sectors include engineering, electronic goods, pharmaceuticals, and cotton yarn/fabrics/handloom products. However, there were notable decline in key sectors in the last fiscal such as petroleum products (- 13.66 per cent) and gems and jewellery (- 13.83 per cent).

According to the data, of the 229 source nations, India's imports have declined from 124 countries in 2023-24. The top 10 source countries, which constitute 59.3 per cent of India's import basket, include China, USA, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Russia, and Switzerland. Decline in imports are reported from countries like the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman and it highlights the need for India to bolster its trade relations, especially with GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) member countries, the official said. "While some declines may stem from market dynamics or economic conditions, they also present opportunities for policy makers to reconsider trade strategies, prioritize domestic production, and foster indigenous industries," the official added.

Meanwhile, India Exim Bank on Thursday projected that India's merchandise exports would rise by 12.3 per cent to USD 116.7 billion during April-June this fiscal. "Positive growth in India's exports could be as a result of India's strong GDP growth fundamentals and outlook, sustained momentum in manufacturing and services sector, backed by expected global easing of monetary tightening spurring global demand, and to some extent due to base effect," it said in a statement. The outlook is, however, subject to risks of uncertain prospects for advanced economies, geopolitical shocks, the Middle East crisis leading to the intensification of the Red Sea crisis and deepening geo-economic fragmentation, among other factors, it added.

# Russian Cultural Centre celebrates victory day with the Cottage



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In commemoration of the 179th Anniversary of the Victory Day of the Russians, a delegation led by Eliana Burman, president of Indian Association of Russian Compatriots, along with families of various Russian citizens living in India visited "the cottage", Tolstoy Marg, Janpath to pay homage to the eminent luminary and renowned Russian writer Leo Tolstoy.



Photos: Pankaj Kumar/Pioneer

# THE ENCHANTING TAPESTRY OF INDIAN CULTURE

The Kendra Dance Festival mesmerised audiences with its captivating blend of dance and storytelling, showcasing India's rich heritage. From spiritual explorations to mythological tales, each performance left a lasting impression, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



Step into a world where art transcends boundaries and narratives come alive through graceful movements. The Kendra Dance Festival 2024, hosted at the prestigious Kamani Auditorium in New Delhi, was a mesmerising journey through the rich tapestry of Indian culture. Over three enchanting evenings from May 3 to May 5, 2024, this festival promised and delivered an unforgettable exploration of Indian culture through the captivating art of dance drama.

Each night unfolded a unique dance drama, transporting audiences to a different realm. The festival opened with *Parikrama*, a production that transcended the boundaries of entertainment to delve deep into the human psyche. Through a harmonious blend of direction, choreography, lighting, costumes and production *Parikrama* entranced the audience. The choreography, a brilliant fusion of movements mainly derived from the Chhau dance form, drew a standing ovation, highlighting the dedication and skill of the performers. Principal performer artist Shivam Sahni, essaying the challenging role of Atma, spoke of the difficulty in portraying a non-being showcasing the depth and complexity of the production.

The visionary direction of Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh transformed the



stage into a realm of spiritual exploration. The production beautifully depicted the cyclical nature of existence, from birth to liberation, drawing from the profound concepts of Indian philosophy. The audience was taken on a journey from the potentiality symbolised by *Hiranyagarbh* to the manifestation of the soul as *Atma*, exploring the soul's struggle against the senses and its quest for liberation, ultimately achieving *Moksha*. The innovative use of lighting and sound coupled with a thoughtful script added layers of depth to the performance making it a profound theatrical experience.

The second night brought the epic *Mahabharata* to life with *Karna*. This captivating dance drama delved into the complexities of human existence through the lens of the enigmatic Karna. We stood witness to his struggles and triumphs, his unwavering ideals, and the timeless questions of morality and righteousness that his life embodied. The choreography, expressive and evocative, brought Karna's life to vibrant life on stage, evoking both sympathy and admiration from the audience. The performance was a visual masterpiece, with every detail from the expressive dance to the exquisite costumes contributing to its exceptional excellence. The unwavering support from the audience filling every seat in the auditorium further solidified the importance of celebrating and preserving Indian culture.

The final evening culminated with *Meera*, in vibrant portrayal of renowned saint

poetess. This dance drama, titled after its central figure, delved into her life and legacy. Meera's poetry bursting with vibrancy and effervescence resonated with audiences carrying messages of liberation and inner awakening. The performance challenged societal norms and redefined Meera's image offering an introspective exploration of the struggles faced by women. Drawing inspiration from Rajasthani dance styles, the choreography beautifully captured Meera's enduring influence. The Kendra Dance Festival's success was solidified by the audience's profound engagement with the performances evident in the thunderous applause and heartfelt comments such as "heaven for the eyes" and "a soulful performance."

Throughout the festival, the commitment of the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra to preserve and promote India's rich cultural heritage was evident. Their tireless efforts in organising this exceptional dance festival have not only enriched our lives but also provided a platform for these alluring stories to be shared with the world. The choreography for all three performances by Shashidharan Nair, combined with Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh's visionary direction, created an alluring experience that celebrated the timeless beauty of Indian culture.

As Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh aptly stated, "The Kendra Dance Festival's productions are not just performances; they are reflections of our cultural essence and timeless wisdom." The Dance Festival was

a testament to the power of artistic expression and a celebration of the enduring relevance of Indian culture in today's world. It was an unforgettable journey that left a lasting impression on all who were fortunate enough to witness its magic. The deepest appreciation is reserved for Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh for her visionary leadership and unparalleled artistic direction. Under her guidance, the Kendra Dance Festival has transcended mere entertainment to become a transformative and unforgettable experience showcasing the profound beauty and depth of Indian culture to audiences worldwide.

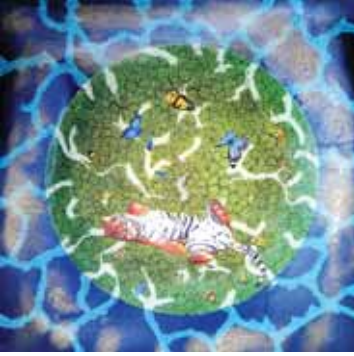
The three-day celebration of dance was an enduring and compelling experience where storytelling, acting, dance, drama, and music converged to create an unforgettable spectacle. The festival beautifully showcased the rich tapestry of Indian history and mythology weaving together narratives that resonated with audiences and left a lasting impression. The performances were a testament to the cultural heritage of India offering a glimpse into its vibrant traditions and timeless stories. This festival was a celebration of artistic excellence and a tribute to the depth and beauty of Indian culture. This festival wasn't just a celebration of dance; it was a celebration of heritage, a testament to the enduring power of storytelling and a glimpse into the soul of India.



## A Journey through Creativity and Appreciation

SAKSHI PRIYA explores the world through the eyes of master artists and emerging talents whose works redefine the boundaries of creativity

Embark on an alluring journey into the vibrant world of art with *Detente: A Haven of Artistic Rhapsody*, an exhibition that celebrates the spirit of creativity and cultural diversity. This exhibition showcase of modern and contemporary Indian and international art invites spectators to explore a variety of artistic themes and narratives, each piece offering a unique perspective on evolution, culture, and society. Stepping into the gallery feels like entering an enchanted world where each painting tells a captivating story, inviting viewers on a journey of emotions and creativity. The exhibition, featuring works by renowned master artists such as MF Hussain, SH Raza, GR Santosh, Satish Gujral, Manu Parekh, B Prabha, Anjali Ela Menon, Ajay Samir, Anup Kumar Chand, Ashok Bhowmick, alongside contributions from contemporary and participating artists like M Narayan, Bahaar Dhawan Rohatgi, Sanuj Birla, Aditee Garg and more, is a testament to the richness and diversity of contemporary Indian and international art. The artwork demands to be seen and appreciated by all, showcasing the exquisite talent of each artist. Visitors stand before the paintings, interpreting and admiring the work in their unique way, captivated by the details, patterns,



and colours. This experience highlights the immense value and appreciation for art in today's world. The gallery itself feels like a journey through memory lane which continues to resonate even after they are no longer with us. Their art speaks volumes, as the saying goes, "an artist's work always stays with us." Artists like SH Raza, GR Santosh, MF Husain, B Prabha, and Satish Gujral demonstrate their mastery through their paintings, with each piece reflecting their profound skill and artistic vision. The walls of the gallery

exude a mesmerising aura, showcasing the true worth and beauty of these artworks. M. Narayan's artwork, with its focus on equestrian aesthetics, captures the power and speed of horses through expressionist strokes and dynamic lines. His paintings convey the thrilling energy and elegant beauty of horses and polo players, drawing viewers into a world of vivid colours and bold strokes. Satish Gujral's canvas delves into the depths of history, channelling an expressionist grandeur of gesture and space. Bahaar Dhawan Rohatgi's art invokes a sense of calmness with abstract explorations

that blend various mediums. Her pieces unlock the immensity within her artistic journey, revealing layers of emotion and dreams through intricate brushstrokes. Manu Parekh's work echoes the rich tradition of Indian folk art fused with modernist sensibilities. His paintings evoke a rousing provocation known for their vibrant and dynamic composition that captures the essence of painting. Aditee Garg's sculptures are praised for their cultural resonance and narrative depth with graceful curves that become

performative in nature. Her work invites viewers to join in transporting them to the realm of magnificent creatures through intricate narratives and expansive spaces. The artwork of Anup Kumar Chand is described as a tribute to the majesty of nature, particularly awe-inspiring tigers. His paintings create a world of fantasy shapes where colours seamlessly blend with the background resulting in a harmonious visual symphony. Sanuj Birla's exceptional painting is noted for its excellence in art, creating dreamy visions inspired by movies and comic books holding a special place in everyone's heart. Each artist's work is celebrated for its uniqueness and ability to evoke a range of emotions and interpretations making the exhibition a truly immersive and inspiring experience for all visitors. The exhibition is not just about showcasing art; it is about honouring the legacy of artists and the impact of their work. It is a celebration of power, grace, and beauty. As visitors immerse themselves in this artistic journey, they

are transported to a world where time slows down and the boundaries between reality and fantasy blur. The gallery becomes a testimony to the immersive experience that art can offer, where every piece evokes a beautiful sense of emotion and reality. Sumer Raj Chadha, the founder of Gallery West End reflects on his appreciation for art, nurtured over the years by his grandmother, Santosh Raj Chadha, a passionate art collector. He says, "This exhibit is a tribute to a true art aficionado and a fervent connoisseur of beauty, our vanguard, late Santosh Raj Chadha, my beloved grandmother. She sowed the seed of love for art and has been a custodian of creative curiosity in our family." Chadha's dedication has transformed this exhibition into a platform for artists to showcase their talent and connect with enthusiasts. His commitment to honoring artistic legacies and encouraging creativity shines in every aspect of this remarkable exhibition. 'Detente: A Haven of Artistic Rhapsody' is more than just an art exhibition; it is an incredible source of inspiration and an immersive journey into the artistic vision of modern and contemporary artists. It is a place where art speaks to everyone, inviting them to delve into realms of exploration, connection, and inspiration.

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Photos: Pankaj Kumar/Pioneer



# CSK AIM TO CONTINUE ASCENT TO TOP THREE

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Despite being hit by the absence of key bowlers due to injuries as well as international commitments, Chennai Super Kings will still like to display their on-field ruthlessness while taking on wooden spooners Gujarat Titans in a 12th round IPL encounter here on Friday. Caught in a mid-table logjam with 12 points from 11 games, the away match against Gujarat will be very important for Rituraj Gaikwad's men as they are still not assured of a play-off berth and a defeat could really dent their chances. With Deepak Chahar and Matheesha Pathirana out of the tournament due to injuries and Mustafizur Rahman back on national duty, CSK's bowling attack sans Ravindra Jadeja and Tushar Deshpande can at best be termed second string. A lot will depend on how the three CSK spinners — Ravindra Jadeja, Mitchell Santner and Moeen Ali bowl on a two-paced track. Yet, the manner in which CSK defended a total of 167 in

Dharamsala against Punjab Kings will give their fans hope of upping the ante against Titans, who have already lost seven in the tournament so far. A win will take them to third place in the standings, ahead of Sunrisers Hyderabad by virtue of better net run-rate. Among the three teams stuck on 12 points, only CSK (+0.700) enjoys a positive net run-rate. On paper, bottom-placed Titans are still in the mix but with a maximum tally of 14 points, it would be very difficult for the Shubman Gill-led side to get into the top four. The side is low on confidence having managed just one win from their last five matches and has struggled in all departments of the game. Their bowling has lost firepower in absence of the injured Mohammed Shami, while the captaincy responsibility has weighed down heavily on the talented opener Gill, who has three single digit scores and a highest of 35 in his last five outings. Sai Sudharsan, Shahruckh Khan and David Miller have also been inconsistent.



The bowling unit needs to improve its performance as the likes of Mohit Sharma and Josh Little have been leaking runs in the Powerplay. While defending a paltry 147, their bowlers gave away 92 runs in the Powerplay against RCB, who chased down the target in just 13.4 overs. With no support from the new ball bowlers, the Afghan spin duo of Noor Ahmad and Rashid Khan also seemed less effective. CSK, on the other hand, have no such concerns with skipper Rituraj Gaikwad leading by example. He has been their top run-getter with 541 runs from 11 innings, just one run away from Virat Kohli in the race for the Orange Cap. Daryl Mitchell was also among runs in a 19-ball 30 against PBKS in their last match as they would just hope that Shivam Dube returns to form after capping successive golden ducks. Their biggest plus in the win over PBKS has been the addition of Simarjeet Singh. Making his debut for CSK as an impact player, Simarjeet

clocked 140-plus consistently and returned with 2/16 from his three overs.  
**TEAMS (FROM)**  
**Gujarat Titans:** Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Kane Williamson, Abhinav Manohar, B. Sai Sudharsan, Darshan Nalkande, Vijay Shankar, Jayant Yadav, Rahul Tewatia, Noor Ahmad, Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan, Joshua Little, Mohit Sharma, Azmatullah Omarzai, Umesh Yadav, Shahruckh Khan, Sushant Mishra, Kartik Tyagi, Manav Suthar, Spencer Johnson, Sandeep Warrier and BR Sharath.  
**Chennai Super Kings:** Rituraj Gaikwad (c), MS Dhoni (wk), Aravely Avanish, Ajinkya Rahane, Shaik Rasheed, Moeen Ali, Shivam Dube, RS Hangargekar, Ravindra Jadeja, Ajay Jadav Mandal, Daryl Mitchell, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Nishant Sindhu, Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, Mukesh Choudhary, Simarjeet Singh, Prashant Solanki, Shardul Thakur, Maheesh Theekshana and Sameer Rizvi.

## Will KL Rahul step down from LSG captancy for last two games?

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All but out of contention for the IPL play-offs, KL Rahul's future as Lucknow Super Giants skipper is uncertain for the remaining two games after the team received a pasting at the hands of Sunrisers Hyderabad at home on Wednesday. It is a foregone conclusion that the LSG skipper, who was roped in before the auction in 2022 for a record Rs 17 crore, is unlikely to be retained before the mega auctions in 2025. However, there is speculation that the skipper might step down on his own and concentrate on batting during the next two games. "There is a five-day gap before the next game against DC. As of now, no decision has been taken but it is understood that if Rahul plans to just concentrate on his batting for the remaining two games, the management won't mind," an IPL source told PTI on conditions of anonymity. Videos of LSG owner Sanjiv Goenka's agitated conversation with Rahul emerged on social media after Sunrisers Hyderabad openers Travis Head (89 not out off 30 balls) and Abhishek Sharma (75 off 28 balls) reached a target of 167 in less than 10 overs. This was after the home team batters struggled to get going on the same track. Worse, Rahul's (29 off 33 balls) batting in the Powerplay has been one of the biggest reasons for LSG's below-par show in the cash-rich league and it seems that Goenka has finally run



out of patience. The India star has scored 460 runs in 12 games and could again cross the 500-run mark for the season but it is his strike-rate of 136.09 which is the problem. LSG are still mathematically in contention as they can reach 16 points by winning their remaining two games — vs Delhi Capitals in New Delhi on May 14 and vs Mumbai Indians at Wankhede on May 17. However, it will be very difficult to massively improve upon the net run-rate (-0.760). In case, Rahul decides to step down, vice-captain Nicholas Pooran, easily the team's most impactful batter in the season, is likely to take over for the remaining two games.

## Backing of captain Cummins, SRH support staff matters a lot: Abhishek Sharma

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The unwavering support of skipper Pat Cummins and the entire think-tank played a big role in his success in the on-going IPL, reckoned Sunrisers Hyderabad opener Abhishek Sharma. The 23-year-old Punjab left-hander fired from all cylinders for Hyderabad this season, making 401 runs from 12 matches and those runs have come at an awesome strike-rate of 205. "Our support staff and Pat (Cummins), the way they think, I have never seen anyone else think like that," Abhishek said on JioCinema Match Centre Live after their record 10-wicket win over Lucknow Super Giants here on Wednesday. "They're like, 'Go out there and express yourself. Play as aggressively as you can, we'll back you.' I think that matters a lot," said Abhishek, who has hit 35 sixes so far, highest by



any batter this season. The SRH openers Abhishek (75 not out off 28 balls) and Travis Head (89 not out off 30

balls) scaled down 166 in just 9.4 overs, rewriting the record for the quickest chase of 150-plus in T20 cricket. SRH's total of 167 was also the highest by any team by the end of the tenth over in men's T20s. "I think this approach was something I took on during the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy," said Abhishek who played a key role in Punjab winning the domestic T20 title last season. Abhishek (485 runs from 10 matches) was the second highest run-getter behind Riyan Parag (510) of Assam in last season's SMAT. "I feel when I play this way, look at the ball, and react, my shots come off better and the bowler comes under pressure. I always thought if I play in the IPL, I'll try to maintain this," he added. 'BIG FAN OF HEAD': With Head at his explosive best, SRH have smashed many batting records this season including the highest ever IPL total of 287/3 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru. Abhishek hailed the way Head played spin. "I don't think anyone plays spin better than Travis. The

shots he hit off (Krishnappa) Gowtham, normally batters can't do that, that shows how special he is. "He's very clear, whenever I talk to him, the way he compliments me, I have always been a big fan of him over the last year that I have followed him. "When our understanding was established and our partnership improved, we became good friends off the pitch and have started spending more time," he added. Abhishek then touched upon his strategy against the LSG bowlers, especially pacers. "They were bowling cutters in the middle. I thought the cutters could slow down on their way, but Travis and I had planned to play it the way you would hit a spinner with the spin. "So, if it's an off-cutter, we look to hit towards long-off covers. If it's a leg cutter, obviously we look at mid-wicket or mid-on," he added.

### OTHERS SPORTS

## UWW suspends Bajrang; SAI approves his training stint abroad but wrestler cancels trip

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wrestling's world governing body UWW has suspended Bajrang Punia till the end of this year following NADA's decision to hand him a provisional suspension for refusing to undergo a dope test. However, in a rather surprising decision, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) sanctioned close to Rs nine lakh for his training abroad despite being well aware of NADA's order. Bajrang, one of the country's most successful wrestlers, was suspended by NADA on April 23 after being served a whereabouts failure notice on April 18. In his defence, the Tokyo Olympics bronze-medallist

said he never refused to give his sample for testing but merely asked the Dope Control Officer to explain the presence of expired kits which were brought to take his sample. Bajrang told PTI that he has not received any communication from the UWW about his suspension but the world governing body while updating its internal system clearly mentions that he stands suspended. "Suspended for the following reason until Dec 31, 2024," reads the update on Bajrang's profile. "Provisionally suspended by NADO IND for alleged ADRV (Anti-Doping Rule Violation)," was the reason mentioned. Interestingly, the Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), in its



April 25 meeting, was informed that Bajrang has been sanctioned Rs 8,82,000 plus air fare (actual) for his proposal to train at Dagestan, Russia from May 28. Bajrang's initial proposal was for a 35-day training trip from April 24 but, as per the minutes of MOC meeting, due to "conflicting travel dates due to

his whereabouts failure, he chose to defer the travel plans from 24th April, 2024 to 28th May, 2024." The proposal also included training with strength and conditioning coach Kaazi Kiron Mustafa Hasan and his sparring partner Jitender. Neither Sandip Pradhan, the SAI Director General, nor Col. Rakesh Yadav, joint CEO TOPS, responded to calls or messages, when PTI reached out for an explanation for the decision to sanction his training. Bajrang confirmed that he had given a proposal for approval to SAI. "I am also surprised that SAI cleared it. I have actually cancelled my plan, I am not going anywhere for training

now," Bajrang said, adding that his lawyer has filed the reply to NADA. In the same MOC meeting Sarita Mor, who competes in the women's 57kg category, was sanctioned Rs 5,96,000 for her training stint in the USA along with her husband and coach Rahul Mann from May 5. Anshu Malik had locked the women's 57kg category Paris Olympics quota during the Asian Qualifiers in Bishkek. Anshu's training stint in Japan, along with her father and coach Dharamveer Malik, was also approved at a cost of Rs 14,67,000. If WFI decides to hold one final selection event, Sarita will have to emerge winner in the trials to challenge quota-winner Anshu.

## Diksha set for landmark 100th start on LET



PTI ■ SEOUL

Diksha Dagar will become the first Indian woman golfer to play 100 events on the Ladies European Tour when she tees up at the Aramco Team Series Korea, her first appearance in the series. Diksha, who turned pro in 2019 and won on LET in her first full season, has been a regular on LET since then. Currently ninth on the LET Order of Merit, Diksha turned 23 in December. She is one of the three Indians to tee off at the New Korea Country Club. The other two Indians in the field are Pranavi Urs and Vani Kapoor. Diksha will also lead the team of Czech Tereza Melecka and

Korean Do Yeon Park, while Pranavi and Vani are in the team led by Singaporean Shannon Tan, who has already won once in her rookie season. Diksha was part of the winning team in the Aramco Team Series in London in 2021. That was the year when the series was played across five countries. Diksha has finished in the Top-10 of the individual section only once. That first Top-10 came this year in Tampa Florida, where she was tied sixth. Diksha, a lock-in for the Olympic Games in Paris, is ranked 147th in the world and the second best Indian after Aditi Ashok (53rd). A gold medallist at the 2021

Deaflympics, Diksha is also a recipient of the Arjuna Award in 2023. "Representing India is the biggest honour one can have so I am looking forward to my second Olympic appearance," said Diksha, who is the only golfer to have played at both the Summer Olympics (2021 Tokyo) and the Deaflympics (2017 and 2021). Diksha is one of only two Indian women to have won on the LET and she has done it twice — once in Investec South African Women's Open in 2019 and in Czech Ladies Open in 2023. "For the present my focus is the LET, where I have won twice and I want to do better," said Diksha, who is also aiming to get to the LPGA Tour in the United States. Diksha, who won once in the Tipsport Czech Ladies Open and was T-3 at the Amundi German Masters and Hero Indian Open last year, was also third in the Order of Merit. She had nine individual Top-10 finishes and one more in the team event in Hong Kong. This season she has had Top-10 finishes in Lalla Meryem Cup in Morocco (9th) and in Tampa Florida (T-6). The busy part of the season is still ahead of her. Vani has been around for some years but is still looking for her first win on the LET, as is Pranavi Urs, who is playing her first full season on the Tour. Meanwhile, the French star Pauline Roussin-Bouchard, who produced a fine winning effort at the Aramco Series event in Singapore last year, is all set to take on winners Danielle Kang and Lydia Ko.

## Real Madrid rallies late to beat Bayern 2-1 and reach another Champions League final

AP ■ MADRID

After yet another magical night at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium, Real Madrid is back in the Champions League final. The 14-time European champion pulled off another thrilling comeback on Wednesday, rallying to defeat Bayern Munich 2-1 and reach the final for the second time in three seasons. Like it happened so many times in 2022, Madrid needed some late drama to advance. Joselu scored in the 88th minute and then in stoppage time as Madrid advanced 4-3 on aggregate to set up a final against Borussia Dortmund on June 1 in London. "Well, it has happened again what has



happened so many times before," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "It's inexplicable. Fans who push us on, a fantastic stadium, players who never stop believing - it's simply something magical." Bayern had taken the lead on an Alphonso Davies goal in the 68th - and then deep in stoppage time thought it had equalized

but hadn't because of an offside call that Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel described as "disastrous" and "against the rules." Joselu's first goal was a tap in after Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer spilled an easy save. The second was initially called off for offside but was eventually allowed after video review. "You always dream of being part of moments like this," the 34-year-old Joselu said. "Not even my best dreams were as good as this." It will be Madrid's record-extending 18th European Cup final, and ninth in the Champions League era, also a record. Madrid beat Liverpool when it last made it to the final in 2022, a season marked by several late comebacks like that one it pulled off on Wednesday.

Madrid at the time pulled off thrilling comebacks at the Bernabeu against Manchester City in the semifinals, Chelsea in the quarterfinals and Paris Saint-Germain in the round of 16. Six-time European champion Bayern was looking to return to the final for the first time since winning the competition in 2019-20. The loss meant there will be no rematch of the all-German final in 2013, when Bayern beat Dortmund to win its fifth European title. "It hurts. It'll take a while to recover, but on the one hand it's a loss where we left it all out on the pitch," Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel said. "Of course, it's tough to accept. It's part of reality. No regrets." Dortmund, the 1997 European champion, eliminated Paris Saint-Germain 2-0 on aggregate on Tuesday. It was a mostly even match but Madrid created the most significant scoring chances. But it had not been able to get past what was a terrific performance by Neuer, who had made a series of difficult saves to keep Bayern in the match.