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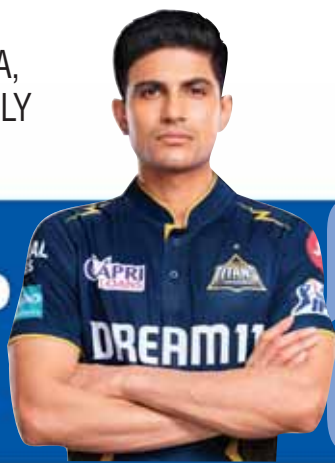
MONEY 10
NEXT ROUND OF TALKS FOR INDIA,
ASEAN TRADE PACT REVIEW IN JULY

DEHRADUN, MONDAY MAY 13, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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INDIAN ELECTIONS TOUCH HALFWAY

Phase IV Voting Today

Delhi Voters on Vacation

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After a high-decibel campaign, the Lok Sabha elections will, on Monday, cross the halfway mark in its fourth phase of voting out of the seven-phase general elections, with 96 seats across 10 States and Union Territories going to the polls. This includes the Srinagar Lok Sabha seat in Kashmir, which will witness its first major election after the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019. After Monday, 379 seats will have completed the polling.

The electoral fate of several prominent candidates like Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, Union Minister Giriraj Singh, TMC's firebrand leader Mahua Moitra, AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi, former cricketers Yusuf Pathan, Kirti Azad, Bollywood actor Shatrughan Sinha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Ajay Kumar Mishra, Nityanand Rai, Madhvi Latha, Pankaj Munde, YS Sharmila, will be decided in the fourth phase. The BJP-led NDA has MPs from over 40 of these 96 seats.

According to the Election Commission, over 17.70 crore voters, including 8.97 crore male and 8.73 crore women will cast their vote for the 96 parliamentary constituencies in 10 States and Union Territory. Data showed



over 19 lakh polling officials have been deputed across 1.92 lakh polling stations. So far, voting has taken place in 285 constituencies since April 19. The voter turnout in the last phase stood at 64.4 per cent, which was the lowest compared to the preceding phases (66.14 per cent and 66.71 per cent respectively). Uttar Pradesh recorded the lowest turnout, while Assam saw the highest.

The fourth phase voting will be held in all 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana, all 25 seats in Andhra Pradesh, 13 in Uttar Pradesh, five in Bihar, four in Jharkhand, eight

in Madhya Pradesh, 11 in Maharashtra, four in Odisha, eight in West Bengal and one in Jammu and Kashmir. Additionally, this phase marks the commencement of polling in Jharkhand and Odisha. According to the EC, the heatwave conditions are one of the reasons for lower voter turnout in the last three phases as compared to the 2019 parliamentary polls. Citing an India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast, the poll authority on Sunday said that "there is no significant concern regarding hot weather conditions for the polling in Phase 4".

Keeping in mind the hot weather conditions and people's reluctance to step out in the afternoon, the EC has increased poll timing in some Telangana seats. While the usual hours of voting are from 7 am to 6 pm, they are curtailed keeping in mind the terrain, time of sunset and security situation. Voting will simultaneously be held in all 175 Assembly seats in Andhra Pradesh, which is witnessing a triangular contest involving ruling YSRC, the Congress-led INDIA Bloc and the NDA, comprising the BJP, Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP and Pawan Kalyan-led Jana Sena Party (JSP).

The run up to the fourth phase polling saw the EC and Opposition INDIA Bloc entering into a spat over delay in release of voter turnout data.

STARS IN FRAY

| CONSTITUENCY | CANDIDATE | PARTY |
|--------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| Kannauj | Subrat Pathak | BJP |
| | Akhilesh Yadav | SP |
| Begusarai | Giriraj Singh | BJP |
| | Awdhesh Kumar Rai | CPI |
| Krishnanagar | Amrita Roy | BJP |
| | Mahua Moitra | TMC |
| Asansol | SS Ahluwalia | BJP |
| | Shatrughan Sinha | TMC |
| Hyderabad | Jahanara Khan | CPI (M) |
| | Madhvi Latha | BJP |
| Bardhaman-Durgapur | Mohammad Waliullah Sameer | Congress |
| | Asaduddin Owaisi | AIMIM |
| Hindupur | Dilip Ghosh | BJP |
| | Kirti Azad | TMC |
| Baharampur | Nandamuri Balakrishna | TDP |
| | Tippe Gowda | YSR |
| Kadapa | Narayan Deepika | Congress |
| | Nirmal Kumar Saha | BJP |
| Khunti | Yusuf Pathan | TMC |
| | Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury | Congress |
| Kadapa | Y S Sharmila | Congress |
| | Y S Avinash Reddy | YSR |
| Khunti | Arjun Munda | BJP |
| | Kali Charan Munda | Congress |

ADITI SHARMA/ABHI SINGHAL/SAMAR PANDEY/RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI

As the Delhi Lok Sabha elections approach on May 25, residents and families face a tough choice between prioritising holiday getaways and fulfilling their civic responsibilities. With a long weekend on the horizon, starting from Buddha Purnima on May 23, until Sunday, May 26, residents might opt for travel over voting. People said keeping in mind the dynamic tariff in the hospitality industry they booked their travel and lodging plans much before the announcement of the Lok Sabha election schedule was announced and now they feel that to meet the obligation of voting they will have to incur a financial loss.

The national Capital, however, has a history of low voter turnout. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the total voter turnout in Delhi was 65.1 per cent, which declined to 60.5 per cent in 2019. The most upscale areas consistently record the lowest voter turnout rates, especially in the New Delhi and South Delhi constituencies.



Conversations with parents, teenagers, adults, children, mothers, and college students reveal Delhiites' divided priorities. With school summer vacation excitement building up, many families have eagerly organised trips to visit relatives or explore other destinations, seeking a much-needed break from their daily routines, as summer vacation starts around May 20. The onset of summer vacations in Delhi's schools is likely to see a possibility of a dip in voter turnout for the Lok Sabha elections in the national Capital. People's pre-planned trips and travel arrangements due to children's vacations could

potentially hamper the participation of many voters.

Dharmendra Kumar, father of a boy who goes to Jaspal Kaur Public School, said, "Vacations will start from May 18, so me, my wife and children are travelling to Ujjain on May 23." When asked if he would miss the voting, he said he had already made plans and the dates of the elections were announced after booking the tickets.

Another family head Parmod Garg, who has a daughter studying in Sachdeva Public School, where the vacations start on May 16, said he is also travelling outside of Delhi, but their train tickets are still waiting.

He said if their tickets get confirmed, they will skip the voting. Many families said they would travel to different cities outside of Delhi as a tradition of visiting the nani's (maternal grandmother) house during summer vacations.

Delhites plan their trips during May and June to cooler regions of the country such as Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh to escape the hot weather.

Kejriwal back with guarantees



Delhi Chief Minister and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal with party leaders Bhagwant Mann during a Press conference, in New Delhi, on Sunday. Kejriwal on Sunday announced 'Kejriwal ki Guarantee' — a list of promises for Lok Sabha elections

RAJESH KUMAR/SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Days after walking out of Tihar jail, Delhi Chief Minister and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal gave a renewed push to the Aam Aadmi Party's Lok Sabha polls campaign, announcing "Kejriwal ki Guarantee", listing 10 works (guarantees) that will be done on a war footing.

These include giving full independence to the Indian Army to reclaim India's land currently occupied by China, scrapping the Agniveer scheme, providing free electricity, education, and health, and creating two crore jobs in the next year if the Opposition's INDIA Bloc forms the Government at the Centre.

With polling yet to take place in 18 of the 22 Lok Sabha constituencies that the AAP is contesting — four in Delhi, 13 in Punjab, and one in Haryana — the Delhi Chief Minister pitted his vows to the people of India, called "Kejriwal ki guarantee", against the Prime Minister's "Modi ki guarantee".

The Opposition bloc, which has parties such as Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Congress, Trinamool Congress, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam among others as its members, was formed to

- **First guarantee:** 24-hour electricity
- **Second guarantee:** Free education for everyone
- **Third guarantee:** Mohalla clinics
- **Fourth guarantee:** Land occupied by China will be freed
- **Fifth guarantee:** Discontinue the Agniveer scheme
- **Sixth guarantee:** Farmers to be provided MSP
- **Seventh guarantee:** Full statehood to Delhi
- **Eighth guarantee:** Employment generation
- **Ninth guarantee:** End corruption
- **Tenth guarantee:** GST will be simplified

take on the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance in the Lok Sabha polls.

Interestingly, the Congress manifesto and all parties that are part of the INDIA Bloc have not mentioned anything related to reclaiming the country's land currently occupied by China.

Addressing a Press conference at the AAP headquarters, Kejriwal reiterated his promise of full statehood to Delhi and also claimed that the INDIA Bloc will form the next Government and his AAP will be part of it. "The BJP has always failed on its promises; my guarantees

have proven track record," Kejriwal said. People have to take a call whether to go for the Kejriwal ki Guarantee or Modi Guarantee, he said. On the announcement of his guarantees, Kejriwal said this was delayed due to his arrest but there are still many phases of elections left. "I have not discussed it with the rest of the INDIA Bloc but this is like a guarantee that no one will have any problems with. I take this guarantee that after the INDIA Bloc comes to power, I will make sure that these guarantees are implemented," he said while making the announcement, adding he will press upon INDIA Bloc partners to fulfill these guarantees.

"Out of the 10 guarantees, the first guarantee is that we will provide 24-hour electricity in the country. The country has the capacity to generate 3 lakh MW of electricity but the usage is only 2 lakh MW. Our country can produce electricity more than the demand. We have done it in Delhi and Punjab, we will do it in the country also. We will provide up to 200 units of free electricity to all the poor. It will cost ₹1.25 lakh crore, we can arrange it..." Kejriwal said while the AAP has fulfilled its "guarantees" of free power, good schools and Mohalla Clinics in Delhi, "(Prime Minister Narendra) Modi has not fulfilled his guarantees". The AAP's second guarantee is that it will arrange good and excellent free education for everyone. Government schools will provide a better education than private schools. "The country can progress only if children get access to proper education. "Today, the condition of schools is very poor. Over 18 crore children study in 10 lakh schools across the country and they have no future. In Delhi and Punjab, we have shown that we can do it and we will do it across the country," the AAP chief said.

Modi rallies around allies

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with, his Cabinet colleague and candidate for Patna Lok Sabha constituency Ravi Shankar Prasad, Bihar Chief Minister and BJP's ally Nitish Kumar at a road show in Patna on Sunday evening. Earlier in the day Modi held a roadshow in Barrackpore in West Bengal PTI



Ladakh stands alone in Lok Sabha roll call

PTI ■ LEH

What should have been a direct contest between the BJP and the Congress in the Ladakh Lok Sabha constituency is now a three-corner fight with an alliance of local groups fielding an Independent to challenge the national parties.

The seat, the largest in the country in terms of area (173,266 square kilometers), goes to polls on May 20 — the first major electoral battle in the region after it was carved out of Jammu and Kashmir and granted Union Territory status in 2019.

While the BJP has fielded Tashi Gyalson, chief executive councillor-cum-chairman of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (Leh), from the seat after dropping sitting MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, the Congress has nominated Tsering Namgyal as its candidate. Springing a surprise, the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) fielded Haji Haneefa Jan, the Kargil district president of the National Conference (NC), which like the Congress is a constituent



of the INDIA Bloc.

The Congress has won the seat for the highest number of times — six — and had fielded Tsering Namgyal, the leader of opposition in the LAHDC, according to an agreement with the NC, as they were members of the INDIA Bloc and the Leh Apex Body (LAB).

It was the LAB and the KDA that were spearheading the agitation in support of various demands of the Ladhaki people, including Statehood and sixth schedule of the Constitution, for the past four years. But it hit a block in March after the BJP-led Centre did not agree with the

demands.

However, now with the KDA fielding Jan, the challenges for the Congress as well as the BJP has increased in this seat that has more than 1.84 lakh voters -- a majority (95,926) in Muslim-dominated Kargil district and 88,877 in Leh district.

The resentment against the BJP over its Government at the Centre not fulfilling the demands is palpable and the party, which is eyeing a third consecutive term from Ladakh, has rushed Union Minister Kiren Rijiju to handle the situation. He arrived in the Union Territory (UT) on Saturday.

The agitation had intensified on March 6 with Leh observing a complete shutdown followed by a 66-day hunger strike which was suspended three days ago in view of the Lok Sabha elections. Renowned educationist and social reformer Sonam Wangchuk, who was also part of it, ended his 21-day hunger strike on March 26. Talking to reporters after arriving here on Saturday, Rijiju said, "...All the big demands of the people can only be fulfilled by the central government. I have come here to convey the message that any pending issue will be resolved by the (Narendra) Modi Government alone."

Seeking cooperation and support of the people of Ladakh, Rijiju said it is imperative for the BJP to win the seat because "if we lose the elections, we will be sad after doing so much for the region over the years, including fulfilling the dream of UT status". He said it is the right of the

people to raise their issues and "it is our responsibility to safeguard the future of Ladakh which is a very sensitive and fragile region having distinct culture, traditional practices, customs and language..."

Thupstan Chhewang won the seat for the BJP for the first time in 2014. However, he resigned from the party's basic membership in 2018 and is currently heading the LAB.

"The BJP managed to retain the seat in 2019 with Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, who was denied the ticket by the party this time and who openly revolted against the decision. However, he joined the campaigning for Gyalson after being persuaded by the BJP leadership. Trouble for the Congress candidate started when the KDA unanimously decided to field Jan as an Independent and also persuaded two others, who were contesting as Independents, to withdraw their candidature in his support.

GUEST COLUMN

The alarming phenomenon of forest fires in U'khand



MM Semwal Mayank Uniyal

"Some say the world will end in fire, some say in ice."

In these famous lines Robert Frost has imagined the end of the world in fire or ice. Nothing can be said about snow but what is said about fire fits Uttarakhand. People from across the country and abroad are attracted to Uttarakhand due to its unique natural wealth. But for some time now, the State's natural beauty has been facing serious threats. Life and ecology are in danger due to many natural and man-made disasters. Among these disasters, forest fires is a problem that has been showing its impact consistently for some time. Its intensity is so high across the State that during the fire season, almost the entire governance machinery of the State gets involved in controlling it. According to an estimate, about 63 per cent of fire incidents are man-made, while the remaining 37 per cent are sparked by natural causes. The fact that both of them have in common is that, as a result of both, a terrible disaster comes into existence. Incidents of forest fire have become a cause of concern all over the world. The incidents in California, Amazon and Australia in the past few years are some of the well known examples of this.

At present, while on the one hand the State government is busy facilitating the Char Dham Yatra and attracting tourists and pilgrims, forest fires continue to pose a problem though recent rains have provided relief. The situation got so serious that the help of the IAF's Mi-17 helicopter had to be taken to extinguish the fire in Nainital and Pauri districts.

In April 2024 alone, a total of more than 600 incidents of fire were recorded. In these reported incidents more than 800 hectares of valuable forest wealth has been destroyed. More than 60 per cent of the fires were recorded in the Kumaon region. About 71 per cent of

the total land area in Uttarakhand is forest covered, which shows the richness in biodiversity and that the economy of the State is also directly or indirectly dependent on forests. Therefore, any change taking place in forests has a direct impact on the ecology, environment, economy and above all, the lives of common people. It is noteworthy that earlier, very worrying records of forest fire were recorded in the years 2016 and 2021 as well.

Due to the continuity of fire incidents in Uttarakhand, the time period from February 15 till the end of May is generally considered the fire season in which there is a sudden increase in the incidents of forest fires due to dryness in the environment and less rainfall.

Uttarakhand is home to about 700 species of birds and animals, more than half of the bird species in the whole of India are found here. Along with this, the Ganga-Yamuna river system of the State is in the form of a 'water tower' for most of the States of north India. The forest fires threaten the existence of living beings and plants. Besides, due to frequent forest fires, natural water sources are consistently drying up, which is creating a water crisis for the large population dependent on them.

Research conducted in 2021 revealed that the quantity of harmful elements like ozone, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide rises sharply in the atmosphere during the fire season leading to severe health hazards. It is particularly difficult for peo-

ple suffering from serious respiratory diseases. According to expert SP Sati, "The ash from forest fires blows with the wind and sticks to the glaciers, due to which a layer of black carbon gets deposited on them. Due to this, they absorb heat and start heating rapidly and melting." Warming glaciers, decreasing forest cover and drying water sources are creating an endless cycle of climate change. This is why the Indian Meteorological Department has recently declared April, 2024 as an unusually hot month.

Given these alarming facts, it is evident that if forest fires occur consistently for three to four months in a year, the entire ecosystem would be

soon and causes havoc. Due to past fire incidents, some of the prominent causes of fire have been identified so that lessons can be learned to prevent such incidents in the future. Mainly three factors are responsible for forest fire - heat (conflagration, increase in global temperature, deforestation and construction of concrete forests), fuel (dry wood and leaves, resin) and oxygen.

Since 2016, forest fire has been showing its worst form in the State during the fire season, but even today we seem to be ignorant towards the matter of disaster management and prevention. The main reason for this disappointing situation is the lack

of response, a solid plan and preparation on part of the administration is very important.

Therefore, there is a need to find quick but far-reaching solutions to stop forest fires. For this, there is a need to divide the strategies into two parts: pre-disaster response and during and post disaster response. On the basis of past data before the disaster, highly sensitive areas should be identified and mapped. The most important step is to empower people at the rural level with resources, power and knowledge. The indigenous knowledge and experience of the local people about that particular area can also be utilised effectively. They should be seen as the solution and not the problem. Along with empowering the Van Panchayats, there is a need to link the local forests with the economy so that people conserve them from the point of view of employment as well.

Pine trees are the biggest cause of fires. Forests comprising large quantities of pine trees are spread over a large area of the State. These forests catch fire two-three times in a single season because these forests are comparatively dry and the temperature fluctuates multiple times. Secondly, the resin (leesa) of pine trees works as fuel for fire. In place of pine trees, broad-leaved perennial trees should be promoted for the region, which not only keep the environment cool and conserve water but are also safe from fire. Awareness programmes should be promoted in schools, colleges, villages and cities. Looking at the situation in Uttarakhand, it can be said that if efforts are not made in time, Robert Frost's prediction might come true within a hundred years of writing the above-mentioned lines.

(Semwal is head of political science department in HNB Garhwal University, Uniyal is a research scholar; views expressed are personal)



negatively affected, the long-term consequences of which are more worrying. Uttarakhand also remains in the news due to frequent landslides during the monsoon once the fire season subsides. It would not be wrong to say that forest fires are indirectly responsible for the landslides. As the trees catch fire and are reduced to ashes, the land gets exposed and its water-holding capacity is destroyed. As a result, a large amount of soil gets washed away with rainwater during the mon-

soon and administrative efficiency. Even in the past years, it has been observed that the administration remained hesitant at the decision-making level most of the time because it neither had the experience nor the expertise to deal with such a crisis. The second problem is the ability of the government and administration to tackle the situation. Unfortunately the machinery often becomes active only after such incidents increase to a disastrous level. Instead of a post-dis-

aster response, a solid plan and preparation on part of the administration is very important.

Citizens oppose planned felling of 2K Sal trees for WTP at Khalanga

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

A large number of concerned citizens demonstrated on the second consecutive day at Khalanga on Sunday against the plan to axe about 2,000 Sal trees for construction of a water treatment plant. The protesters said that it is common knowledge that trees help in balancing the groundwater and help to recharge groundwater. Dehradun is bursting at its seams, overloaded beyond its carrying capacity. Various areas in the city are facing water scarcity. With concretisation on the rise, heat island effect is also evident in the city. The need of the hour is preservation of our existing forests, plantation of new trees and less concretisation within the city, they stressed.

The protesters said that the water treatment plant was earlier proposed in the Kulhan Mansingh area but the site was shifted to Khalanga. Citizens are questioning the selection of the said lush forest area. Addressing the gathering, representatives of various groups questioned why a barren area was not selected for the plant. They also asked why the existing forests and natural water sources are not being conserved and why mega projects which will eventually lead to major

crises down the line are being favoured. Representatives of different groups spoke on the issue spreading

awareness and urging everyone to think of viable solutions. The protesters also tied 'Rakshasutra' on the trees marked for felling and



awareness and urging everyone to think of viable solutions.

Samiti, SFI, Ecogroup, UBT Cares, Toy Foundation, Proud Pahadi, Save Soil, Shradhanjali, MAD, Pahadi Peddlers and others were present on the occasion.

Youths clear 100 sacks of garbage from Tapkeshwar

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Youths engaged in the Chalo Tapkeshwar campaign cleared about 100 sacks of garbage from the Tapkeshwar area. Organised by Making a Difference by Being the Difference (MAD), the event on Sunday witnessed the participation of about 70 young volun-

waste and varied trash including plastic bangles from the riverbed. The Municipal Corporation Dehradun provided essential support by facilitating the transportation of the collected waste.

Parivartan organisation also joined in the effort.

Sundays. The group has also taken the initiative to communicate its suggestions and recommendations to both the cantonment board and the temple administration. This collaborative approach aims to streamline and enhance its collective efforts towards the rejuvenation of the



teers. The cleaning initiative focused on the Tamsa river, situated within the precincts of Tapkeshwar temple. Commencing at 6 AM, the volunteers started the cleanup effort equipped with gloves and other necessary gear. The collective endeavour resulted in the removal of damaged statues, plastic

Committed to river revitalisation initiatives, MAD emphasised the need for sustained efforts at a larger scale. It was collectively resolved to intensify endeavours aimed at environmental conservation. The organisation has undertaken river cleaning activities along the Tamsa river for the past two

Tamsa river, the group stated. Aryan Koli,

Ambika, Daksh, Aryan Arora, Khushi, Mehak, Arpit Garg, Piyush Singh Khushboo, Rohit, Nikhil Mehra Abhijay Negi, Snigdha, Devyash and other volunteers participated in the effort.

DGP tells CO to stay in Mussoorie till May 31 to tackle traffic issues

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In view of the increasing traffic pressure in Mussoorie, Kempty Fall and surrounding areas due to the movement of pilgrims and tourists, the officiating director general of police Abhinav Kumar directed the circle officer of police in Mussoorie to stay there till May 31 to manage traffic related issues. With the commencement of Char Dham Yatra and the onset of summer vacations for school children, the number of tourists and pilgrims are expected to increase exponen-

tially in the next two weeks. The authorities also observed severe traffic issues in Mussoorie and surrounding areas during the weekend. Considering this, the DGP directed the CO to stay for duty in Mussoorie to handle traffic jams and associated issues at the ground level.

He also directed the police to regularly monitor traffic and safety arrangements by drones in Mussoorie and nearby areas. He asked them to continuously

take feedback on the traffic in all these areas from the control room. In case of increased traffic pressure, the traffic police officers concerned must make appropriate decisions to either stop or divert the traffic as per the situation before the situation deteriorates.

The CO must coordinate with other departments concerned to ensure effective implementation of traffic and other arrangements, Kumar added.

Police bust fake international call centre in Doon

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police busted a fraudulent call centre situated in the Patelnagar area of Dehradun and apprehended a man and a woman on the weekend. The arrested accused scammed people living in foreign countries by pre-

fied as Haryana native Vivek Kumar and West Bengal native Nikita who had allegedly employed 15 people in Dehradun to run a call centre inside a commercial complex, Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said.

the call centre included eight women and seven men who told the police that they worked for Vivek and Nikita. According to them, they used to call foreigners claiming to be support staff of a software company and send them virus infected emails along with their numbers. "When their targets would call them, they would access the computers using a software and get access to their banking details apart from asking for payments in gift cards and crypto," Singh said. He informed that the police also recovered 14 laptops with chargers, several head-phones, seven mobile phones and other equipment related to the broadband connection. Besides this, the police also found seven scripts which were being used for fraud by the callers at the call centre. The police are investigating their criminal history and for how long they have been scamming people. The SSP said that the police have registered a case in the Patelnagar police station under sections 321/24 and 120B/420 of the Indian Penal Code and section 75/66C/66D of the Information Technology Act. The accused will be presented before the court soon, he added.



tending to fix issues on their computers and obtained gift cards and crypto currencies from them as payments. The arrested accused were identi-

He said that the police conducted a raid after getting confidential information about the call centre. The 15 employees who were found at

SCPCR to act against private schools humiliating students

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The chairperson of the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) Geeta Khanna stated that the commission will take strict action against private schools that humiliate students for non-payment of fees. She said this in response to a recent incident wherein a parent in Dehradun reported a private school for humiliating their child over unpaid tuition fees. A parent submitted a formal complaint to the chief education officer and SCPCR recently, urging them to take strict action against the school. Khanna emphasised that any form of student humiliation is unacceptable and that no school is allowed to engage in such actions to seek fees. In response to the incident, the SCPCR issued a notice to the school, requesting its presence before the commission along with all relevant documentation. She further said that no one has the right to humiliate students because students have the right to education and parents are responsible for paying the fees. The school is allowed to send a warning letter to parents regarding fees but should not punish the students for this. She said that if parents do

not pay the fees even after receiving a warning, the school can file a case in the civil court for non-payment of fees. She stressed that if any school is found to be humiliating children for not paying school fees, the commission will take strict action against them. The head of the Principals Progressive Schools' Association of Uttarakhand Prem Kashyap asserted that a private school does not receive financial assistance from the government, therefore it has to cover all school expenses on its own. These expenses encompass infrastructure upgrades, teacher salaries and various other costs, all of which are funded by the fees paid by parents for their children's education. He emphasised the importance of timely fee payment, stating that it is crucial for the school management's continued operation. He condemned any instances of student humiliation due to unpaid fees, attributing the responsibility to the parents. Instead of resorting to humiliation, Kashyap suggested that the school should notify parents by letter that failure to pay fees will result in their child's dismissal from school.

Badrinath reopened for devotees with Vedic rituals

PNS ■ BADRINATH

The portals of Badrinath temple were reopened to the public at 6 AM on Sunday with Vedic rituals. Thousands of devotees were present on the occasion which marks the full-fledged start of the Char Dham Yatra with the three other temples- Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri having been reopened to the public on May 10.

and traditional right holders then opened the portals of the shrine ritually.

The Rawal Isvari Prasad Namboodari conducted a special prayer of lord Badrinath in the Garbh Grah. Thousands of people witnessed the Akhand Jyotish which is lit at the time of the temple's closing in winter and paid obeisance to the lord

Brahmakapal, Mata Murti Mandir, the neighbouring Mana village, Bheempul, Vasudhara and other locations in the region. According to official data, 18,39,591 people had visited Badrinath last year.

Tourism department officials informed that more than 25 lakh people have so far registered to visit the Char

Police appeal to pilgrims to postpone pilgrimage to Yamunotri

Gate system enforced on narrow routes to streamline traffic

PNS ■ DEHRADUN/UTTARKASHI

The police on Sunday appealed to devotees to postpone their pilgrimage to the Yamunotri shrine in Uttarkashi district for the day. The police made this appeal because the number of devotees visiting the shrine had already reached its capacity. The authorities intervened after pictures and videos of a large crowd on the bridge path to Yamunotri went viral on Saturday citing a danger to the safety of devotees in case of a stampede. The Uttarakhand police made the appeal to the people through X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook on Sunday and stated, "Today, enough devotees have reached the Yamunotri shrine, reaching its capacity. Sending more devotees now would be risky. It is a humble appeal to all devotees planning their Yatra to postpone it for today." According to the officials, the police made the appeal to ensure the safety of the devotees. The police had also stopped the vehicles near the Jankichatti area as the parking spaces were already full due to the rush. The police again posted on X and Facebook in the evening that the situation was under control and the pilgrims could resume their pilgrimage to Yamunotri again. The post stated, "The pilgrimage is going smoothly again. The traffic is being run through the gate and one way system at sensitive and narrow places between Paligad and Jankichatti on the Yamunotri route for safe and smooth



operation of traffic. All devotees should travel with a raincoat, umbrella, warm clothes and other necessary items considering the rainy season in Dham and nearby high altitude areas. Pilgrims can resume their journey. Uttarakhand Police wishes you a safe and enjoyable journey." Earlier, the Uttarkashi superintendent of police Arpan Yaduvanshi also inspected traffic and safety arrangements on the Yatra routes late on Saturday. He also interacted with pilgrims on the route and informed them that they might have to face traffic issues on some narrow and vulnerable routes. The police will ensure smooth traffic on such routes in Gangotri and Yamunotri using the gate system. The police have also been offering refreshments to people stuck in traffic for a long time. The officials said that police are consistently working to ensure that no devotee faces any inconvenience due to the rush and endangers their safety.

Mismanagement, traffic jams greet pilgrims on Char Dham route

GAJENDRA SINGH NEGI ■ JOSHIMATH

The world famous Char Dham Yatra considered as the backbone of the economy of Uttarakhand which is also deeply associated with the State's culture and social fabric has started on a high note with huge crowds of people thronging the sacred shrines of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri. However the surging crowds coupled with a spell of rains in mountains has exposed the claims of proper arrangements made by the State government. Traffic jams are being witnessed at many places on the Yatra route making the spiritual journey of the devotees a harrowing ordeal.

has further aggravated the situation.

On Saturday, a five-kilometre long jam was witnessed between Dhari Devi temple and Sirohbadad landslide zone on the Badrinath national highway. Overnight rain had activated the Sirohbadad landslide which partially blocked the road.

one to manage the traffic at many places. Complete chaos exists on the entire route," Sanjay Singh Negi of Dehradun said.

Rajat Sharma of Delhi said that the government should immediately intervene and order the administration to manage traffic and crowds in the Char Dham.



The Haridwar-Rishikesh-Devprayag-Srinagar-Rudraprayag road on which the pilgrims heading for Badrinath and Kedarnath travel is witnessing massive traffic jams at many places. Apart from the usual traffic bottlenecks at Rishikesh, Devprayag, Srinagar and other locations, the rains have activated slide zones enroute. The checkpoints set up by the authorities have created additional hindrances in the flow of traffic.

The apparent lack of will on part of the administration to manage things on ground has compounded the problems of pilgrims and local residents. The mismanagement of administration and foolhardiness of some of the vehicle drivers who break traffic discipline and lanes

Two ambulances were also being trapped in the long serpentine jam of vehicles. The travellers had a harrowing time as their journey became arduously long and painful.

The arrangements made by the administration at the Char Dhams have become inadequate to manage the huge flow of pilgrims. Stampede like situation was witnessed many times in Badrinath on the portal opening day on Sunday.

"It took more than 15 hours for us to reach Badrinath from Rishikesh. There was no



Amidst light rain in the temple township, the army band played tunes even as local women sang and danced to devotional folk songs. As per tradition, Kuber, Uddhav and the Gadu Ghada were brought into the temple complex from the southern door. The Rawal, Dharmadhikari

on the day of its reopening. The temple was decorated in about 15 quintals of flowers. With the reopening of Badrinath, pilgrims and tourists have also started visiting other nearby sites including the Narad Kund, Sheshnetra Jheel, Neelkanth, Urvashi Mandir,

Dham shrines and Hemkund Sahib. According to official data, 8,58,979 people have registered to visit Kedarnath, 7,65,950 for Badrinath, 4,52,689 for Gangotri and 3,97,232 for Yamunotri. Further, 55,263 people have registered to visit Hemkund Sahib.

Separate help desk opened in Rishikesh for foreign visitors on Yatra

PMS ■ DEHRADUN

The administration on Sunday set up a separate help desk at the Char Dham Yatra transit camp in Rishikesh to help foreigners regarding Char Dham registration and related works. Several persons from Germany, Russia and America have gone to Char Dham shrines after registration on the weekend. Besides this, the administration is also displaying weather information of each Char Dham shrine on four LED screens in the transit camp in coordination with the Meteorological department to keep the pilgrims updated about the weather, the Dehradun district magistrate Sonika said. She said that the administration has also made arrangements to provide chairs and drinking water to people waiting in line for a long time

Besides this, facilities like a waiting room, drinking water, toilets, canteen and restroom are also available in the camp for pilgrims. A Bhandara was also organised on the weekend to ensure pilgrims can have food for free. So far, the administration has received a positive

response from pilgrims, Sonika said. The Rishikesh municipal commissioner Shailendra Singh Negi informed that the Municipal Corporation of Rishikesh (MCR) has also installed 10 mobile toilets in the transit camp and ISBT, Rishikesh. All these toilets have 100 seats with 50 per cent of them being for women. The corporation has arranged water for the toilets with the help of Jal Sansthan. He informed that these mobile toilets are cleaned twice daily to ensure the pilgrims get clean toilets. He said that officials concerned are inspecting every arrangement on a daily basis to ensure pilgrims and tourists do not have to face any inconvenience in Rishikesh before they commence their journey to the Char Dham.

Garhwal commissioner conducts surprise inspection of Char Dham Yatra transit camp

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Garhwal commissioner Vinay Shankar Pandey reached Rishikesh on Sunday to conduct a surprise inspection of the Char Dham Yatra transit camp. He took stock of the Char Dham Yatra arrangements and reviewed the arrangements with the officials concerned on the spot. He instructed them to ensure there is no lax-

officials concerned must fully commit to their duties to make this possible. He said that both online and offline registration systems are available for the convenience of passengers and officials concerned should help them in the registration process as per the requirement. He also inspected places like offices, restrooms, health facility



ity in providing basic facilities to the travellers. He said that it is the primary responsibility of the government and the administration to provide a smooth and safe journey to every pilgrim arriving in the State for Char Dham Yatra. The

centre, and space set up for passengers' rest and registration rooms among others. He also interacted with the pilgrims and tourists at the camp and wished them good luck for their journey.

Crowds beyond capacity due to enthusiasm of devotees, says Bhatt

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Bharatiya Janata Party State president Mahendra Bhatt expressed concern at crowds beyond capacity reaching the Char Dham shrines. He appealed to the pilgrims and locals to follow the government's guidelines and cooperate with the administration. Greeting the people on the reopening of the Badrinath temple on Sunday, Bhatt alleged that the Congress is not in favour of the rising popularity of the Sanatan temples in Uttarakhand and the economic benefit from this.

The limit for online and offline registration has also been fixed considering the carrying capacity of the Char Dham. However, the number of devotees reaching the Char Dham is much higher than expected due to their enthusiasm to pay obeisance to the lord. The activeness and sensibility of the police and administration are appreciable considering the manner in which they controlled the crowds of

devotees and made the pilgrimage systematic," Bhatt said.

Considering the experience of the initial days of the Yatra, he appealed to pilgrims coming from outside the State and the locals to follow the government guidelines. The guidelines are issued considering past experiences, accommodation and traffic capacity in the Char Dham and their routes along with other essential facilities so the cooperation of travellers is essential for a safe experience. Referring to the locals, especially the business fraternity, he said that the government wants to strengthen the State's economy with a successful Yatra. "We must understand that the pilgrimage should be safe in order to succeed.

Everybody's cooperation is essential to enable the authorities to maintain the system and control the traffic. Considering the numbers witnessed in the initial days, it is clear that the number of pilgrims this year will break all past records," he said.

Addressing allegations levelled by the opposition, Bhatt said that while in office, the Congress remained apathetic towards the development of Char Dham. The Congress did not even consider improving the roads leading to these important centres of Sanatan Dharm. He alleged that the Congress is spreading propaganda regarding the Yatra to dent the image of the State. This will also impact the economy, in accordance with the Congress' policy, Bhatt said.

The BJP State president also took a serious note of the jam on the routes to Yamunotri and other Char Dham while opining that the enthusiasm of Sanatanis is at peak and that good arrangements have been made for road transport,

Mountains lashed by rain, plains continue to swelter

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Various places in the mountainous regions of the State witnessed light to moderate rain while the plains witnessed another day of comparatively high temperatures on Sunday. The weather is likely to remain similar on Monday. The State meteorological centre has forecast that very light to light rain is likely to occur at isolated places in Uttarkashi, Rudraprayag, Chamoli, Bageshwar and Pithoragarh districts today. Dry weather is likely to prevail in the remaining districts of the State.

The provisional State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a mainly clear to partly cloudy sky. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 37 degrees Celsius and 22 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today.

Meanwhile, various places in the mountainous districts witnessed light to moderate rain on Sunday. In the evening, the Rudraprayag district police also took to social media to warn the people travelling to Kedarnath. The police

informed that most places in the district were experiencing light to moderate rain with windy conditions. Considering this, the travellers were advised to avoid unnecessary travel at night and to seek accommodation for the night near their current location.

Rain and hail were also reported in some other mountainous regions during the day and evening. According to the meteorological centre, there was 23.5 millimetres rain in Didihat, 15.5 millimetres in

Ukhimath, 14.5 millimetres in Agastyamuni, 11 millimetres in Nainbagh and trace rain in Mussoorie. The maximum and minimum temperatures in various places on Sunday were 36 degrees Celsius and 21.8 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 36.3 degrees Celsius and 21.5 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 22.6 degrees Celsius and 11.5 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 24.9 degrees Celsius and 11.5 degrees Celsius in New Tehri.



Local women dance to a devotional folk song in Badrinath to celebrate reopening of the temple on Sunday
Pioneer photo

Below normal temperatures likely in regions going to polls today: IMD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Normal to below normal temperatures are likely in areas going to polls on Monday, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Voting will be held in 96 constituencies spread across 10 states and union territories in the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections. While the usual hours of voting are from 7 am to 6 pm, they are curtailed keeping in mind the terrain, time of sunset and security situation.

In view of the hot weather conditions and people's reluctance to step out in the afternoon, the Election Commission has increased the poll timing in some Telangana seats.

The voter turnout in the first three phases of the Lok Sabha elections was 66.14 per cent, 66.71 per cent and 65.68 per cent, respectively.

The EC believes that the heatwave conditions are one of the reasons for lower voter turnout in the last three phases as compared to the 2019 parliamentary polls.



Citing the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast, the poll authority said on Sunday that "there is no significant concern regarding hot weather conditions for the polling in phase 4". The weather forecast indicates that the parliamentary constituencies going for polls "are likely to experience normal to below normal temperatures (± 2 degrees) and there will be no heatwave-like conditions in these areas on polling day", it said.

In the last three phases, polling has been concluded in 283 seats out of 543. For Monday, over 19 lakh

polling officials have been deployed at 1.92 lakh polling stations for over 17.70 crore eligible voters, including 8.73 crore women.

Polling will be held on Monday in all 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana, all 25 seats in Andhra Pradesh, 13 in Uttar Pradesh, five in Bihar, four in Jharkhand, eight in Madhya Pradesh, 11 in Maharashtra, four in Odisha, eight in West Bengal and one in Jammu and Kashmir.

As many as 175 assembly seats of Andhra Pradesh and 28 assembly seats of Odisha are also going to polls in this phase.

SC to hear Kejriwal's plea against summons in defamatory video case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging a Delhi High Court order upholding the summons issued to him in a criminal defamation case for retweeting an allegedly defamatory video circulated by YouTuber Dhruv Rathee in May 2018.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta is likely to hear the matter in which Kejriwal has admitted that he "committed a mistake" by retweeting the alleged defamatory video.

On March 11, the top court asked Kejriwal whether he wanted to give an apology to the complainant in the matter. Kejriwal on February 26 told the apex court that he made a mistake by retweeting an allegedly defamatory video circulated by YouTuber Rathee related to the BJP IT Cell. The counsel appearing for complainant Vikas Sankritayan has told the top court that Kejriwal may issue an apology on social media platforms like microblogging platform 'X' or Instagram.

On February 26, the apex court, without issuing notice on Kejriwal's plea challenging the high court order, had asked the complainant whether he wanted to close the matter in view of the petitioner accepting it was a mistake. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Kejriwal, had said, "I can say this much that I made a mistake by retweeting."



The top court had asked the trial court not to take up the defamation case involving Kejriwal till further orders. In its February 5 verdict, the high court said that reposting alleged libellous content would attract the defamation law. It said a sense of responsibility has to be attached while retweeting content about which

one does not have knowledge and added that retweeting defamatory content must invite penal, civil as well as tort action if the person retweeting it does not attach a disclaimer. The high court, while refusing to quash the trial court's 2019 order summoning Kejriwal, had said when a public figure tweets a defamatory post, the ramifications extend far beyond a mere whisper in someone's ears.

It had said if the act of retweeting or reposting is allowed to be misused as it is still considered to be a vacant grey area of law, it will encourage people with ill intentions to misuse it and conveniently take a plea that they had merely retweeted a content.

Only 12 per cent of candidates in phase V are women, says ADR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The gap between the perception of women as significant vote banks and their actual representation as candidates in political parties is indeed stark, as has been revealed by the latest data analysed by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) which shows that only about 12 per cent of candidates in the fifth phase are female.

In the first phase of the elections, 135 (8 per cent) female candidates contested while 100 (8 per cent) women candidates fought in the second phase. Similarly, in the third phase of the elections, 123 (9 per cent) female candidates contested while in the fourth phase, as many as 170 (10 per cent) such candidates were in the fray.

The ADR analysis also showed that nearly 23 per cent have declared criminal cases against themselves and about 18 per cent have serious criminal cases pending.

Out of the total 695 candidates in the fifth phase on May 20, only 82 of them are women, the Association for Democratic

Reforms (ADR) said.

Out of the 695 candidates under scrutiny in the fifth phase, 18 per cent (122 candidates) have serious criminal cases pending, including that of murder, attempt to murder, crimes against women, and hate speech. Three candidates have declared convictions against them.

The ADR and National Election Watch analysed self-sworn affidavits filed by the candidates contesting in the phase five to get their criminal backgrounds, financial profiles, education, and gender.

The report also gave a party-wise break-up of criminal cases. According to the ADR report, 29 candidates have declared cases related to crime against women.

Out of 29 candidates, one has declared charge related to rape (IPC Section 376) and 10 have declared cases related to hate speech against themselves.

A notable 33 per cent of the candidates are 'crorepatris' (those with assets exceeding Rs 1 crore). The average asset per candidate stood at Rs 3.56 crore.

TMC complains to EC against NCW chairperson, BJP leaders

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tinamool Congress on Sunday filed a complaint with the Election Commission against National Commission for Women (NCW) Chairperson Rekha Sharma and BJP leaders including Piyali Das, alleging that they committed "criminal conspiracy by exploiting" innocent women of West Bengal's Sandeshkhali for political gains. In a letter to the EC, the TMC said they are filing a complaint against Sharma and Das for

"commission of serious offences of forgery, cheating, fraud, criminal intimidation and criminal conspiracy upon innocent women of Sandeshkhali and the entire electorate in general".

"This is to draw your urgent attention to a deeply distressing turn of events, wherein, BJP leaders along with member(s) of the NCW have criminally conspired against the entire electorate and hence, warrants your immediate intervention," the TMC said. The complaint referred to an interview of a

woman from Sandeshkhali which was shared on social media on May 10.

"It reveals that Sharma, Das have committed serious offences of forgery, cheating, fraud, criminal intimidation and criminal conspiracy by exploiting innocent women of Sandeshkhali for political gains. A link showcasing the said interview is provided herewith for your ready reference and in support of this complaint," the TMC said.

The TMC said during the interview, a woman from



Sandeshkhali alleged she was coerced through threats of violence by Sharma and Das, to

sign a blank paper without knowing its purpose. "Later, when the police issued her a

notice, she learnt that she had been made a de-facto complainant in a rape case. She realised that her signature was used to file a false rape complaint without her consent," it said.

"...Such an act of obtaining a signature on blank paper through coercion to file a false rape complaint is not only an abuse of law and power, but also amounts to offences of forgery, cheating, fraud, criminal intimidation and criminal conspiracy. The exploitation of women for political gain is

a reprehensible tactic that undermines their rights and dignity. Such manipulation not only violates the rights of these women but also damages the integrity of democratic institutions," the TMC said in the complaint. The TMC said the actions suggest a calculated effort by the BJP leaders to undermine the reputation of the Mamata Banerjee-led party and an attempt to manipulate their way to power in West Bengal through illicit means, thereby disregarding the principles of level playing field.

The party also demanded the poll panel to issue directions to respective station house officers of competent police stations to initiate criminal proceedings against Sharma, Das and other unknown BJP leaders, and also to give directions restraining the BJP and its members from threatening the women of Sandeshkhali "who wish to withdraw false complaint". The TMC also sought orders restraining the BJP and its leaders from making any further false allegations concerning the Sandeshkhali incident.

DG DIA on official visit to Tanzania to boost ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Director General Defence Intelligence Agency (DG DIA) Lieutenant General DS Rana has proceeded on an official visit to the United Republic of Tanzania. The aim of this visit, scheduled from May 13-15 is to further reinforce the robust defence ties between the two nations and discuss opportunities for regional security collaboration, defence ministry said here on Sunday.

Giving details of his visit, officials said during his visit, the DG DIA is scheduled to interact with senior military leadership of Tanzania, including the Chief of Defence Staff of Tanzania Peoples' Defence Force, General Jacob John Mkunda, and his counterpart Major General M N Mkeremy, Chief of Defence Intelligence.

In his visit to the Tanzanian National Defence College, he will discuss India's Security Perspective with future leaders



of the TPDF. The meetings will be aimed to foster mutual understanding and strengthening bilateral defence cooperation.

Rana will also inaugurate the newly set up Defence Wing at the High Commission of India, Dar Es Salaam. As a gesture of goodwill towards expanding military cooperation, he will present the TPDF with Indian manufactured Bullet Proof Jackets. At the Command and Staff College CSC Arusha the DG DIA will

inaugurate the Library and lay the foundation stone for gymnasium that are being facilitated through Government of India assistance.

India shares close, warm and friendly relations with Tanzania, which is bolstered by robust capacity building and avenues for defence cooperation. The visit of the Indian Military delegation is expected to further strengthen the elevated Strategic Partnership with Tanzania.

Poor muscle health common in obese people: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Poor muscle health is common in people living with obesity – and increases the risk of an early death, according to a study to be presented at the European Congress on Obesity (ECO) in Venice, Italy (12-15 May).

Individuals with adverse muscle composition were up to three times more likely to die during the course of the study than those with healthy muscles, the Swedish study of people in the UK concluded.

"We found that just by looking at muscle composition we can predict which individuals with obesity are most likely to die during the next few years," said lead researcher Dr Jennifer Linge, of AMRA Medical, a health informatics company in Linköping, Sweden. Weight loss is increasingly recommended in the management of chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease and weight loss drugs are allowing people to lose larger amounts of weight than in the past.



However, with drugs now achieving weight loss close to the magnitudes seen with surgery, the concern for potential adverse effects on muscle health, such as significant loss of muscle mass and reduced mobility, is growing.

"Research has shown that although individuals with obesity have more muscle mass, their muscles are, in general, relatively weaker," said Dr Linge. "They also have lower

muscle quality, as well as reduced mobility and function."

"Accurate assessment of muscle composition, assessing both quantity and quality of the muscles during evaluation these treatments will teach us whether significant and rapid weight loss is safe – especially for the more vulnerable patients, such as those with sarcopenic obesity or of older age." To find out more, Dr Linge and

colleagues used AMRA* Researcher (software that provides body composition measurements from MRI scans) to analyse scans from 56,109 participants in the UK Biobank study.

Muscle volume (muscle quantity) and muscle fat (indicating muscle quality) were quantified and a personalised muscle volume z-score (an indication of how their muscle volume compares to the average for their

sex and body size) was calculated.

Participants were partitioned into four groups according to whether they had normal muscle composition, high muscle fat only, low muscle volume z-score only or adverse muscle composition (both high muscle fat and low muscle volume z-score).

The participants were followed-up for an average of 3.9 years, during which time 174 died. The most common causes of death were ischaemic disease (coronary heart disease) and hypertensive disease (primary hypertension, hypertensive heart disease and hypertensive renal disease).

While having low muscle volume z-score or high muscle fat alone was not significantly associated with a higher risk from death from any cause, adverse muscle composition (having both low muscle volume z-score and high muscle fat) was. This underlines the importance of assessing the amount of fat in muscle, as well as muscle volume, when evaluating muscle health, say the researchers.

Food insecurity rising among India's elderly: NITI Aayog

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a disturbing revelation, a report by the country's top think tank, NITI Aayog has said food insecurity is on the rise among India's expanding elderly population who seem to be battling between hunger and financial constraints along with negligence by their caretakers.

Shockingly, nearly 6 per cent of individuals aged 45 and above are forced to reduce meal portions or skip meals entirely, while 5.3 per cent go without food even when hungry. Despite the proposed Poshan Abhiyan for the elderly by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, its implementation is yet to see the light of the day, the report 'Senior Care: Reimagining the Senior Care Paradigm' pointed out.

Studies have shown that between 50 and 80 years, muscle mass declines by around 30 per cent, and muscle strength reduces by 50 per cent. The BMR is 10-20 per cent lower in older adults compared to younger adults. The prevalence of underweight is almost



threefold (32 per cent) higher in rural areas than in urban areas (12 per cent) while overweight (27 per cent) and obesity (12 per cent) are more common among the elderly in urban areas, noted the report. Moreover, rural elderly face compounded challenges, with 71 per cent residing in areas lacking adequate medical infrastructure and essential facilities like electricity and communication.

"Out of the total population of

the elderly in India, a very high proportion of them reside in rural India. Rural India still lacks medical infrastructure and other basic facilities such as electricity, communication, etc. Further, rural seniors reflect low healthcare utilization, along with poor financial cover," said the report.

Medical expenses incurred by seniors are financed primarily out of pocket, and there is an urgent need for increased financing in senior care. The

report noted that "Only 1/5th of the older population (over 45 years) is covered by health insurance, which falls to 18 per cent of the people over 60 years."

"The Government provides subsidies for healthcare through various schemes for seniors, but the coverage is limited to medical care upon hospitalization, limited cover for OPD, physiotherapy, medicines, memory care, home care, home-based palliative care, etc."

The elderly in India currently comprises a little over 10% of the population, translating to about 104 million, and is projected to reach 19.5% of the total population by 2050.

The authors of the report were not impressed with the benefits being doled out under the central flagship Ayushman Bharat Scheme under the Union Health Ministry. They said that though it covers all eligible low-income elderly, its utilization is limited.

"Moreover, coverage of private sector insurance for seniors remains poor." The report also exposes alarming rates of abuse and ill-

treatment among the elderly. "Nearly 32 per cent of the elderly reported low life satisfaction while 5 per cent of the elderly reported to have suffered abuse and about 2/5th of them were ill-treated by their sons, daughters, and sons-in-law, and daughter-in-law," said the document.

On the literacy front, the government's report stated that more than 55 per cent of the elderly population was illiterate. "The proportion of the elderly population that has never attended school increases with age. A higher proportion of elderly men (65 per cent) attended school than elderly women (35 per cent). "Also, literacy levels are higher among older adults living in urban areas than those living in rural areas. Nearly 60 per cent of older adults from rural areas do not have any formal schooling, compared to 29 per cent of those living in urban areas," said the document.

Comprehensive policies and interventions are essential to ensure their dignity, well-being, and inclusion in society, the report summed up.

India ranks third globally in forest area gain from 2010-20

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Showcasing its achievements in increasing forest cover over the past fifteen years, India informed the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) that it ranks third globally in net gain in average annual forest area from 2010 to 2020.

During the 19th session of the UN body held at the UN headquarters in New York from May 6 to May 10, India said it gives high priority to biodiversity and wildlife conservation, having expanded the network of protected areas to over a thousand wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, tiger reserves, biosphere reserves, and other wildlife habitats.

The recent celebrations marking 50 years of 'Project Tiger' and 30 years of 'Project Elephant' underscore India's commitment to species conservation and habitat protection, the Union Environment



Ministry said in a statement. India also highlighted the creation of the International Big Cat Alliance, a global initiative aimed at protecting and conserving the seven big cat species worldwide through collaborative efforts.

The country also informed the UNFF about the introduction of the 'Green Credit Program', a market-based mechanism rewarding voluntary environmental actions by individuals, communities, and the private sector.

Previously, in October 2023, India hosted the Country Led

Initiative under UNFF in Dehradun, attended by representatives from 40 countries and 20 international organisations, focusing on forest fire management and forest certification. The recommendations from this initiative were presented during UNFF 19.

The Ministry also organised a side event on 'Principles and Strategies for Landscape Integrated Fire Management through Collaborative Governance', in partnership with the Agency for Integrated Rural Fire Management, Portugal, Korea Forest Service, and International Tropical Timber Organization at UNFF 19.

UNFF 19 culminated in a declaration to take urgent and accelerated actions to halt deforestation and forest degradation and to prevent land degradation, including the implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests and the achievement of the Global Forest Goals.



Sonia spent more than 70 per cent of MP funds on minorities, claims Shah

PTI ■ RAEBARELI/PRATAPGARH (UP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday launched a blistering attack on senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, accusing her of "spending more than 70 per cent of her MP funds on minorities" and the Gandhi family of being experts in lying. Rahul Gandhi is fighting the Lok Sabha elections from Raebareli the seat held by his mother Sonia Gandhi for the last two decades. She recently moved to the Rajya Sabha. Rahul Gandhi has also been fielded from Wayanad in Kerala. Raebareli will vote in the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections on May 20. Shah also addressed an election rally in Pratapgarh where he said that Rahul Gandhi can be scared of Pakistan's "atom bomb" but the BJP is not, and that Pakistan-occupied Kashmir belongs to India and "we will take it". He was referring to Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar's remarks on Pakistan having the atom bomb. At an election rally in Raebareli, Shah said, "You gave the Gandhi family a chance for years, but no development work has been done ... They (Congress) do not believe in development. They do not even come to you in your happiness and sorrows." Asking people to vote for BJP candidate Dinesh Pratap Singh, the Union minister said, "We will connect Raebareli with Modiji's development journey."



"The 'shahzada' (prince) has come here to seek votes. You have been voting for many years. Have you received anything from the MP fund? If you have not received it, then where did it go? It went to their vote bank. Sonia Gandhi has spent more than 70 per cent of the MP funds on minorities," Shah claimed. Intensifying his attack, he said, "This Gandhi family is an expert in lying. They are now promising Rs 1 lakh for every woman. In the Telangana (assembly) elections, they had said that they would give Rs 15,000 to every woman. The women of the state elected them (Congress) ... Forget

about Rs 15,000, they did not even give Rs 1,500." "Many people here told me that this is a family seat... It is true. The people of Raebareli have made the Gandhi and Nehru families win for years. But after getting elected from here, how many times did Sonia Ji and her family come to Raebareli? Okay, Sonia ji's health is not good, but has Rahul baba or sister Priyanka come?" After the rally, Shah visited the residence of Samajwadi Party MLA from Unchahar Manoj Pandey, who

on February 27 resigned from the post of the party's chief whip and cross-voted in favour of the BJP candidate in the Rajya Sabha polls. In Pratapgarh, Shah referred to Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar's remarks on Pakistan and said, "Rahul baba, if you want to be scared of the atom bomb, then be scared, we are not scared. Pakistan-occupied Kashmir belongs to India and we will take it." In a video, Aiyar has been heard saying that India should give respect to Pakistan as it is a sovereign nation and engage with it as it also possesses the atom bomb. He indicated in the video that if a "mad person" comes to power there and uses the atomic bomb, it will not be good and will have its effect here too. While Aiyar said the video was old and dredged up now as the BJP's election campaign is faltering, the Congress said it totally disagreed with the remarks made by Aiyar some months ago. Addressing the rally, Shah said that this time, the people of Kaushambi would have to ensure three hattricks. "First is to make Narendra Modi the prime minister for the third time. The second hatrick in UP is to completely wipe off the SP, BSP and Congress for the third time and the third hatrick is to make my friend (Vinod) Sonkar the MP for the third time," he said. Polling in Kaushambi (SC) Lok Sabha seat too will be held in the fifth phase on May 20. INDIA bloc constituent Samajwadi Party's Pushpendra Saroj is the main challenger to the BJP in this seat.

PM on a hat trick, moving towards target of creating of Viksit Bharat, says Anurag

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR

Asserting that continuity in governance is important for the country's progress, Union minister Anurag Thakur has said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is ready to hit an electoral hat-trick and move towards the target of building "Viksit Bharat" (developed India). In an interview to PTI, Thakur said no charges would be laid by the Opposition can stick on Modi. Dubbing as "laughable" the opposition's claim of victory in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Thakur exuded confidence that the BJP was well on its way to achieving the goal of 370 seats which includes the 303 seats it won last time and 70 seats where it finished second. These 70 seats were part of 160 parliamentary segments that the BJP had identified after 2019 to launch an extensive ministerial outreach. "I can say after the third phase of elections that Modi ji is on a hat-trick. I say this due to one-sided polling. Congress workers have retreated from the battlefield. In Surat and Indore, Congress candidates withdrew from elections. In Odisha, they returned tickets. Rahul Gandhi ran away from Amethi and fled to Wayanad in 2019. Now he has come to Raebareli. I don't know where he will go next," the minister noted. Thakur, a four-time MP from



Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh contesting for the fifth time in a row, said it is in Modi's name that he was seeking people's mandate once again and also in the name of development works initiated over the last few years as MP. "Stability and continuity are key for the country's progress and enable the government to continue with policies and programmes to ensure India remains on track to become the third largest economy just as it has leaped from the 10th largest economy pre 2014 to the fifth largest under Modi rule," he said. The senior minister also flagged an old video of veteran Congressman Mani Shankar Aiyar urging India to respect Pakistan and asked, "How come they remember Pakistan and how come Pakistan remembers Congress?" He also asked why 'tukde

Bihar: Five Lok Sabha seats to go to polls, two Union Ministers in fray

PTI ■ PATNA

Five Lok Sabha seats in Bihar will go to polls on Monday, when 95 lakh voters will decide the electoral fate of 55 candidates, including two Union Ministers. The seats going to polls are Begusarai, Ujijarpur, Samastipur, Munger and Darbhanga. In Begusarai Lok Sabha seat, which has the largest electorate of 22 lakh among the five constituencies, Union minister Giriraj Singh's bid for a second consecutive term has been challenged by CPI's Awadhesh Rai. In 2019, Singh had defeated former JNU students' union president Kanhaiya Kumar, who was a CPI candidate, by a margin of over 4 lakh votes in

the constituency. However, unlike last time, when it ploughed a lonely furrow, the CPI now has a truck with Congress and the mighty RJD, a combination that had paid rich dividends in assembly polls less than three years ago. In Ujijarpur, which has the lowest number of voters at 17.48 lakh but the maximum number of 13 candidates, Union Minister of State for Home, Nityanand Rai, is aiming at a hat-trick. His main challenger is Alok Mehta, a senior RJD leader and former state minister who is the MLA from the eponymous assembly seat. Mehta has also been a former MP from Samastipur, the name by which the Lok Sabha

seat was known before the 2019 delimitation. Samastipur is now the name of a reserved seat, previously known as Rosera, where the battle is primarily between two debutants, both children of senior JD (U) leaders and ministers in the Nitish Kumar cabinet. Congress candidate Sunny Hazari has the benefit of his party representing a broader alliance, besides the fact that his father Maheshwar Hazari had won the seat for JD (U) in 2009. The Hazaris had reportedly earlier approached Chirag Paswan, a close relative, for a ticket of his Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas). However, Paswan fielded Shambhavi Choudhary, daughter of Ashok Choudhary, another

minister known to be very close to the Bihar chief minister. At a recent rally in Bihar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged voters to support the LJP (R) candidate, whom he described as the "youngest" of all fielded by the BJP-led NDA. Another seat with an intense contest is Munger, which former JD (U) president Rajiv Ranjan Singh 'Lalan' hopes to retain. His main challenger is RJD candidate Kumari Anita, who is seen as a proxy to her husband Ashok Mahto. Mahto, a dreaded gangster, is known for political ambitions and a strident anti-upper caste stance. However, conviction in a criminal case has disqualified him from contesting polls.

A widower in his 60s, Mahto tied the knot with Anita two months ago, reportedly upon advice from RJD president Lalu Prasad. The muscle power that Mahto brings to the table seems to have caused some consternation in the NDA camp, though the PM had held a rally in the constituency. A controversy was stoked by the release, on parole, of Anant Singh, a UAPA convict, whose wife Neelam Devi is the MLA from Mokama, falling under Munger Lok Sabha seat, and had crossed over from RJD to JD (U) when the NDA government in Bihar won a trust vote in February. Since walking out of jail, Anant Singh has been holding court at his residence,

predicting before supporters and media a massive win for Lalan, whom his wife had challenged in 2019 as the Congress candidate. In Darbhanga, Gopal Jee Thakur feels confident of retaining the seat for BJP, his prospects having received a boost with a rally of the PM only last week. His main rival Lalit Kumar Yadav is the sitting RJD MLA from Darbhanga Rural and, hence, no pushover. Besides, the RJD has received a shot in the arm with the return of former Union minister Ali Ashraf Fatmi, who had won the Darbhanga seat four times and is now trying his luck from the adjoining Madhubani, which goes to polls in the fifth phase.

DNA of Congress, SP, INDIA Bloc similar to Pakistan, says Yogi



PTI ■ SITAPUR/VARANASI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi securing the position for the third time. "They (INDIA bloc) oppose India, Lord Ram, marginalised communities, including scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, daughters, and businessmen. So the citizens have decided to re-elect PM Modi with overwhelming majority to realise the dream of a developed and self-reliant India," he added. "The Congress-Samajwadi Party didn't have a vision for development during their time was terribly slow as all that they were interested in was commission," he said. Adityanath reiterated his allegation that if elected to power, the Congress and SP are conspiring to tamper with the reservations for backward classes, scheduled castes, and tribes by altering the Constitution framed by Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. He asked the people to not let the opposition interfere with their rights. He further mentioned that RJD's Lalu Prasad Yadav, a key member of the INDI alliance, had said in Bihar during the UPA government that he would give OBC reservation to the Muslims. Adityanath emphasised that Ambedkar had explicitly stated that reservations cannot be based on religion. The chief minister further accused the opposition of aiming to introduce a 'Jizya' tax by imposing inheritance tax on Indians' ancestral property. Continuing his attack on the opposition, Adityanath said they intended to grant the minorities the freedom of eating beef, therefore promoting cow slaughter in the country, which the nation would never tolerate. If the state were governed by the SP and the country by the Congress, Ram devotees would have faced bullets, akin to the events of 1990. Those who target Ram devotees, betray Ram, or support terrorists should not govern this nation, he added.

Vijayawada LS constituency, a battlefield for two brothers

PTI ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Vijayawada Parliamentary constituency has emerged as the battleground between brothers K Srinivas of Andhra Pradesh's ruling YSRCP and K Sivanath, candidate of the main opposition TDP in the May 13 Lok Sabha polls. While Srinivas is a seasoned politician, a transport tycoon-turned-politician, his younger brother Sivanath, also a businessman, is trying his electoral luck for the first time. Srinivas (58), the older brother, was a key TDP leader until some months ago but differences with some party leaders at the local and state level compelled him to jump ship to the Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP in January, according to his supporters. One of the main reasons attributed to the exit of Srinivas from TDP was the party's decision to replace him with Sivanath as the candidate for the Lok Sabha election. Popularly known as Kesineni Nani and the owner of the now defunct Kesineni travels company, Srinivas, a Parliamentarian for nearly a decade, had also resigned as an MP when he had quit the TDP. Vijayawada Lok Sabha constituency encompasses the Assembly constituencies of Tiruvuru (SC), Vijayawada West, Vijayawada Central, Vijayawada East, Mylavaram, Nandigama (SC) and Jaggayyapeta. In the 2019 election, Srinivas secured 5.75 lakh votes, trouncing his YSRCP rival P V Prasad, who secured 5.66 lakh votes while Janasena's M Prasad Babu got 81,650 votes.



Srinivas's poll plank was the "dedication of his life for the city of Vijayawada," located in the heart of the southern state and also a major commercial centre. As a two-time MP, Srinivas did manage to gain some goodwill, said a 70-year-old local resident, K Tata Rao, who regularly spends his evenings on Bandar Road to relax over a cup of tea with friends. "Kesineni Nani (Srinivas) developed flyovers in the city. Kanakadurgamma flyover and a flyover near the Benz Circle. He did a good job, he will come next time as well," Rao told PTI. However, he termed Sivanath contesting against his own brother as a "selfish move." The younger Kesineni brother is testing the political waters and lacks the experience possessed by his older brother. Beyond the sibling rivalry, Rao, a retired government employee, said he and other common people were more worried about the fate suffered by the southern state due to what he described as the "apathy" of the BJP-led Central Government.

He alleged that right from 2014, when Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated, the Central Government did not do anything worthwhile to the residual state. "What did the Congress government do at that time, it said they will give special category status (SCS) for 10 years and the BJP also supported it. BJP came to power and said SCS is a closed chapter. Ten years have passed by and what good did BJP do to Andhra Pradesh?" he asked. Rao reminded that the PM had promised SCS "at the feet of Sri Venkateswara Swamy in Tirupati" in the run-up to 2014 polls and yet he broke his promise. Though the southern state is contributing thousands of crores of rupees worth GST, Rao said the Narendra Modi-led Centre is not "returning its rightful share" of tax revenues. In all issues concerning Andhra Pradesh including the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant privatisation issue, which is opposed by people, Rao claimed the BJP government has done "immense injustice" and continues to do it.

Vasco turnout hit as Goa registered voters headed back to UP for family weddings: MLA

PTI ■ PANAJI

The Lok Sabha poll turnout has been affected in Goa's Vasco assembly segment as many electors registered there left before the polling date for their native places in Uttar Pradesh to attend family weddings, local BJP MLA has claimed. In the May 7 polls to the two Lok Sabha seats in the coastal state, the Vasco assembly segment, which comes under the South Goa Lok Sabha constituency, witnessed the lowest turnout of 68 per cent, as per official figures. Goa recorded 75.20 per cent turnout during polling on May 7. The voting was 76.34 per cent in the North Goa Lok Sabha seat and 73.90 per cent in the South Goa parliamentary constituency, according to data released by the Election Commission of India (ECI). Vasco assembly segment has been the BJP's stronghold. Talking to PTI on Saturday, Vasco MLA Daji Krishna Salkar said during the campaigning, efforts were made to convince voters to stay back till the polling day. "But we could not stop them from going to their native places as this is the wedding season and everyone has to participate in the functions," he said. If elections were held in the non-wedding season, the turnout would have been more, the Vasco MLA claimed. He said Vasco has several voters with transferrable jobs as they work in the Indian Navy, at the Mormugao Port



and other central government establishments. Hence, there are many people whose names are there in the voters' list but they have stopped staying in Goa after transfer, Salkar said. Notably, the Indian Navy's INS Hansa base is located near the Vasco assembly segment. Salkar said he has filed a complaint with the Election Commission of India (ECI), seeking the deletion of names of those who have been transferred elsewhere. A group of voters has two voting cards, one in Vasco and the other at their native place in neighbouring Karnataka, he said. These voters travelled to their native places in Karnataka to exercise their franchise as the date of polling in Goa clashed with that in their state, he claimed. In South Goa, the Congress denied renomination to its sitting MP Francisco Sardinia and fielded Viriato Fernandes against BJP candidate Pallavi Dempo and Revolutionary Goans Party's Rubert Pereira.

Congress, BJP spar after MP CM's gaffe about his party MLA

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Congress has taken a swipe at Chief Minister Mohan Yadav after he apparently forgot the assembly seat of his party MLA from the state during an event. The BJP, however, hit back saying the Congress is upset because of the welfare works done by Yadav's government. A video of CM Yadav, during a programme on Friday at Janapur (the birthplace of Lord Parshuram) under the Mhow assembly seat in Indore district from where Usha Thakur is the BJP MLA, surfaced on social media on Sunday. Yadav, while addressing the gathering, is heard in the video congratulating his cabinet minister Kailash Vijayvargiya on his birthday. "I congratulate Kailash ji Bhaishab. He worked here together with Usha ji. Now even though Usha ji is no longer the MLA here, earlier Usha ji was the MLA here." A voice from the public is then heard saying she is "still the MLA from here (Mhow)". Amid laughter, the CM then said, "Bharat Mata ki Jai. I thought you were shifted to Indore number-3, sorry Didi." The video also shows Indore-3 seat MLA Golu Shukla sitting at the dais where the CM was delivering the speech. The MP Congress shared the video on its X handle and claimed, "Meet the bhulakkad (forgetful) Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. Calling his own sitting legislator a former MLA. The MLA from another area also had to stand up and get his seat confirmed."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Wild card

The interim bail to Kejriwal for campaigning adds yet another layer to an already intricate election

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who had been under judicial custody for 50-odd days after the Enforcement Directorate named him in the multi-crore liquor scam, has made a wild card entry as a participant in electioneering. Known for his dynamic role as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader, his sudden release from incarceration injects a new fervour into an intense electoral situation, particularly impacting the BJP's strategies and reinvigorating the Opposition campaign. As expected, Kejriwal has come down heavily on the ruling party, accusing it of subverting democracy and misusing law-enforcement agencies to imprison the Opposition leaders on one pretext or the other. Interestingly, he also now claims that the BJP's senior leaders are being sidelined and India is being pushed into a "one nation, one leader" paradigm. The situation is indeed ominous for the BJP; Kejriwal's absence had provided it with a temporary advantage to consolidate its support base without facing the AAP challenge in certain regions where it holds influence and sway. Kejriwal's return, however, resumes the battle in earnest and necessitates a reassessment of campaign strategy. The BJP must now recalibrate its outreach efforts to counter AAP's influence, especially in Delhi, Punjab and Haryana (The polling in Gujarat has already concluded). The party poses significant challenge to the BJP with its anti-corruption and populist policies. Though he is not the proverbial all-powerful leader, Kejriwal has the ability to galvanise support, particularly among urban voters and the youth, and his presence significantly boosts the prospects of the Opposition's INDIA bloc. With the voting percentage remaining consistently low and several Supreme Court decisions going against it, the BJP must find new ways to take on its challengers. The party leaders have reached out to satraps Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray in Maharashtra ahead of Phase IV, but the latter have not responded positively to the BJP's overtures. In the light of these developments, the BJP must intensify its efforts to consolidate its support base and mitigate the potential impact of Kejriwal's resurgence. It must rely upon Modi's oratorical skills, aggressive campaigning, targeted messaging and new alliances to win in crucial constituencies. It is time for the BJP to capitalise on its nationalistic agenda and developmental initiatives to appeal to voters, presenting itself as the party best equipped to lead India forward. For the Opposition, Kejriwal's release offers hope and a renewed sense of purpose. By leveraging public dissatisfaction with the status quo, working to heighten the feeling of anti-incumbency among the electorate and raking up issues of public concern such as corruption, inflation and unemployment, the Opposition can cobble up a more cohesive and effective campaign. Given the unpredictable nature of voter preferences, it is hard to tell what resonates with them. They may act emotionally at times but they are not foolish, are they?



the most popular leader and the most despised, it is the latter who are in power, courtesy the Pakistani Military. The obstinate Imran has boxed himself into a corner by pivoting his credentials to grandstanding against the Pakistani Military, and that denies him the realistic chance to return. His only chance to succeed with his current strategy is the Pakistani Military were to become irrelevant, but such a hypothetical situation would also make the survival of Pakistan as a sovereign state, untenable. Faultlines deepen with the Military mouthpiece Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) insisting that dialogue with PTI is only possible if it "earnestly apologises publicly in front of the nation". It added for good measure that PTI must adopt "constructive politics" and avoid, "politics of anarchy". Clearly it would be suicidal for PTI to stoop so low after much theatrical defiance and acceptance of its role would scar PTI with anarchial and unpatriotic attributions (as despite history, Pakistani Military remains the beacon of patriotism, in Pakistani consciousness). This showdown with railing words between the Military and PTI also counters the accusations of 'false-flag operation', as alluded to by the

PICTALK



India Gate lit in red to raise awareness on World Thalassemia Day, in New Delhi

Pakistani military tightens grip

Imran Khan's confrontational stance against the military establishment seems to be leading to his own downfall. Khan's defiance has only served to further isolate him



BHOPIINDER SINGH

American scholar, Stephen Cohen, notes in his article titled 'Pakistan: Army, Society and Security', "There are armies which guard their nation's borders, there are armies which are concerned with protecting their own position in society, and there are armies which defend a cause or an idea. The Pakistan Army does all three". Even though it is a Military that has never won any war (1947-48, 1965, 1971 or 1999) and is struggling miserably to contain elements of religious extremism from across the Durand Line - it remains the last institution that hasn't succumbed to the curse of puritanism that is eating into the already moth-eaten Pakistan. It can be argued that besides the Pakistani Military, the two other pieces of the ruling troika i.e., civilian politicians and the clergy, have failed the sovereign, far more. Counterintuitive as it sounds, the Pakistani 'establishment' (read, Military), despite all its manipulations is still the best bet to protect the Pakistani State from imploding.

Despite vile attempts by unhinged politicians and the clergy to fan divisive passions on the lines of sectarianism, regionalism, or ethnicities - the disciplined and 'monolith' construct of the Pakistani Military inherited from the British Raj integrated its diversities in Baluch Regiment, Frontier Force Regiment, Punjab Regiment, Sindh Regiment et al. Few derelictions like General Zia-ul-Haq or Hamid Gul aside, the institution was relatively westernized, moderate, and inclusive. It zealously protected its ways and interests with disproportionate budgetary allocations and ensuring that it always had the right of the way, formally or informally. It chose dispensations without harbouring any ideological preferences and brazenly chose and dropped those who didn't toe the line. It didn't really care about optics of contradiction and shifting preferences, as it chose between the Bhuttos PPP (Pakistan People's Party) and Sharif's PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz) with impunity. In 2018, the 'establishment' tired



of both the PPP and PML-N brought in and 'selected' Imran Khan's PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) as the face of governance, even though the strings were pulled by the Generals from neighbouring Rawalpindi.

But what they hadn't bargained for was the seriousness and immaturity with which the vainglorious Pathan from Mianwali would start imagining his own prowess. Imran mistakenly thought he had outgrown the need to remain beholden to the Pakistan 'establishment', and that was to be his undoing. A reluctant, screaming, and shouting Imran Khan was ousted from power and the much discredited and familiar faces from the past, ushered in. It was an important lesson in Pakistani politics. When the tide turns, any political force that appeals to the Generals, can stage a comeback. Except perhaps Imran Khan, who dug his heels and refused to learn from history. His cadre perpetuated the 'May 9' riots and plunder that spared no one - not even the 'no-go' zones of cantonments or residences of Generals.

The Pakistani 'establishment' did what it does better - care two-hoots for the popularity of Imran Khan and attacked his party, people and infrastructure. While Imran is arguably



A RELUCTANT, SCREAMING, AND SHOUTING IMRAN KHAN WAS OUSTED FROM POWER AND THE MUCH DISCREDITED AND FAMILIAR FACES FROM THE PAST, USHERED IN. IT WAS AN IMPORTANT LESSON IN PAKISTANI POLITICS

the most popular leader and the most despised, it is the latter who are in power, courtesy the Pakistani Military. The obstinate Imran has boxed himself into a corner by pivoting his credentials to grandstanding against the Pakistani Military, and that denies him the realistic chance to return. His only chance to succeed with his current strategy is the Pakistani Military were to become irrelevant, but such a hypothetical situation would also make the survival of Pakistan as a sovereign state, untenable. Faultlines deepen with the Military mouthpiece Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) insisting that dialogue with PTI is only possible if it "earnestly apologises publicly in front of the nation". It added for good measure that PTI must adopt "constructive politics" and avoid, "politics of anarchy". Clearly it would be suicidal for PTI to stoop so low after much theatrical defiance and acceptance of its role would scar PTI with anarchial and unpatriotic attributions (as despite history, Pakistani Military remains the beacon of patriotism, in Pakistani consciousness). This showdown with railing words between the Military and PTI also counters the accusations of 'false-flag operation', as alluded to by the

PTI. It seems the Pakistani Military is hell bent on making PTI and Imran pay dearly for daring to challenge the 'establishment', and this recent precondition for thawing relationship was meant to harden the divide and make it impossible for PTI/Imran to soften stand. As if on cue, the Pakistani Military is making efforts to normalise its relations with the historical ally, the United States of America (as the same was specifically targeted by Imran Khan). It also acts as a hedge against Chinese support, and it strengthens equations with Arab Sheikdoms, concurrently. As it is, the bloody battle ensuing currently for the Pakistani Military is with the Afghanistan based Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), on whom Imran Khan or 'Taliban Khan' was particularly accommodative. Clearly there is no upside for the Pakistani State to retain the belligerence and extremist stand as championed by Imran Khan in his hustings, and therefore all such policies, PTI infrastructure, and Imran Khan personally must become the sacrificial goat. Imran has none, but himself to blame for the same.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLITICAL TURMOIL

Madam — Apropos the editorial "Testing Times," published on 11th May, this is my response. In Haryana, politics has become a chess game of checkmates who intend to play foul with one another. Consequent to support withdrawal by three independent MLAs, the ruling BJP Government has turned into a minority. JJP has submitted a letter to the Governor's office seeking the floor test for the Saini-led BJP Government.

In this era of political upheaval, JJP is embroiled in party discord. The news of its three MLAs indirectly supporting the BJP is going viral. In defeating the BJP, the chances of JJP breaking up are becoming stronger. At present, it is not only the time of litmus test for the BJP, but the opposition parties are self-indulgent in the dirty game of condemnation and their lust for power has forced them to join hands besides leaving ideological differences aside.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

CENSORSHIP IN CINEMA

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Aamir Khan says he was unsure about censor board passing 'Sarfarosh' over mentions of Pak, ISI," published on May 11, this is my response. Aamir Khan's revelation about the challenges faced during the making of "Sarfarosh" sheds light on the censorship climate of its time. The film's bold portrayal of India-Pakistan tensions, despite concerns, resonated with audiences, earning both critical acclaim and commercial success. Naseeruddin Shah's reminiscence of Pakistani admiration for his role underscores the film's impact beyond borders.

The behind-the-scenes anecdotes, like the censorship of the goat scene, offer intriguing insights into filmmaking challenges. Director John Matthew Matthan's secrecy surrounding the film's theme adds to its mystique. Moreover, the actors' reflections highlight the film's significance in their careers, with Sonali Bendre expressing gratitude for a role that show-

Palestine's struggle



Don't you know that the Palestinians, who were evicted by Israel from their land with the help of America, will not get their own country even in this 21st century? Seeing the suffering and pain of Palestinians, my doubt had changed into belief that, there is no justice anywhere in this world. Be it the United Nations or the International Court of Justice, no one has any right to end injustice. Only one law rules on this earth, and that is 'Might is Right' or "my way or

casual depth. Overall, "Sarfarosh" stands not only as a compelling thriller but also as a testament to cinema's power in addressing complex socio-political issues.

Kiara Sharma | Mumbai

BOUNDLESS HUMAN POTENTIAL

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Traits of a Successful Person," published on May 11, this is my response. Every morning, as I delve into the pages of the newspaper, I find myself drawn to stories that transcend mere information—they ignite a spark within, nudging me to ponder the essence of human existence. The narrative about embracing our fullest potential resonates deeply, reminding me that life is an odyssey from the ordinary to the extraordinary. The analogy of muscles resonates profoundly—the notion that our minds, like muscles, require constant stretching to grow and adapt. It's a call to action, urging us to embrace challenges as catalysts for personal evolution. The tale of Rahul Bajaj's sons repurposing scrap from INS Vikrant for scooters exemplifies this ethos. It's a testament to the power of

highway". Now see, it has been 79 years since the UN was established. The UN General Assembly's recent resolution advocating Palestine's full membership highlights the international community's ongoing efforts to address the long-standing conflict and ensure the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and statehood, despite the lack of progress in the peace process. The Arab and Palestinian-sponsored resolution, which left the world body with 25 members absent, was approved by the bloc of 143 by 9 votes. The United States, along with Israel, Argentina, Czech Republic, Hungary, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, and New Guinea, competed against Papua and opposed it. The overwhelming majority vote will still deny Palestine full membership. Yes, Palestine will now attend some meetings. In some departments of the UN, its officers can be appointed.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

audacious ideas and the willingness to venture into the unknown. Moreover, the concept of the Universe conspiring in our favour strikes a chord of optimism. It's a belief in the interconnectedness of all things, where positive thoughts manifest into tangible outcomes. This aligns with the philosophy of shouldering responsibility with a 'YES MIND', fostering synergy and abundance within teams. At its core, it's about cultivating a mindset of abundance, gratitude and unwavering faith in a higher power. Whether we attribute it to divine intervention or the cosmic dance of energy, the essence remains the same: the power of positive thinking shapes our reality. As I set down the paper, I carry with me a renewed sense of purpose—a reminder to harness the boundless potential within and embrace life's journey with open arms. For in the pursuit of greatness lies the true essence of being human.

Kabir Mehra | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Empowering working mothers financially

The crucial role of insurance in hedging uncertainty and financial planning for working women cannot be overstated

Mother's Day is a truly special day to celebrate the amazing women who have played an irreplaceable role in our lives. Amidst the daily balancing act of career aspirations and family responsibilities, the critical need for securing their financial future often takes a back seat. Despite the gradual increase in insurance buyers, the proportion of women availing themselves of this essential protection remains disproportionately low. This underscores not only a gap in workforce demographics but also highlights a pervasive perception among women that life insurance is not a pressing necessity.

Mothers be it working professionals or homemakers are the unsung heroes of many households. The working mother adeptly managing both professional commitments and familial duties with grace and resilience while the homemaker juggles varying responsibilities within the home to ensure that their families are taken care off. They serve as pillars of strength, providing unwavering support and love to their



families. However, amidst the daily whirlwind of activities, the critical aspect of ensuring financial protection for their loved ones can sometimes be sidelined.

In the realm of financial planning, term insurance emerges as a silent yet formidable shield, offering comprehensive protection against life's uncertainties. Unlike other forms of insurance, term insurance provides pure protection coverage, ensuring that in the unfortunate event of the policyholder's demise during the policy term, their beneficiaries receive the predetermined sum assured. Safeguarding the Future: For working mothers, term insurance holds paramount importance in safeguarding the future well-being of their loved ones. It acts as a safety net, ensuring that in the absence of the primary breadwinner, the family's financial needs are adequately met.

Whether it's covering daily expenses, children's education, or servicing outstanding debts, the lump sum payout from a term insurance policy alleviates financial burdens, allowing the family to maintain its standard of living and pursue future aspirations. One of the key advantages of term insurance is its flexibility and customization options, enabling working mothers to tailor their coverage according to their specific needs and financial goals. By accurately assessing their family's lifestyle, expenses, outstanding debts, and long-term aspirations, mothers can determine the optimal sum assured that adequately addresses their loved ones' requirements.

Life is inherently unpredictable, and while no one likes to dwell on worst-case scenarios, prudent planning for the unexpected is paramount, especially for working mothers. Term insurance provides peace of mind, knowing that irrespective of life's uncertainties, their family's financial security remains safeguarded. Whether it's ensuring continuity of education, preserving the family

home, or securing a comfortable retirement for aging parents, term insurance empowers working mothers to plan for the future with confidence and assurance.

With the constant rise in inflation rates, retirement planning has become increasingly critical, especially for working mothers. It's essential for them to secure their finances before retiring. One effective method is to opt for a term insurance plan with a maturity benefit. This allows them to accumulate a substantial corpus over time, providing a lump sum amount upon maturity, thus ensuring financial stability during retirement. Whether women are achieving greater financial independence or assuming primary roles in caregiving and household management, it's crucial that they recognize the importance of securing their future. They must take proactive measures to align their savings and financial protection with their evolving needs and responsibilities.

(The writer is an insurance professional; views are personal)



LALITHA BHATIA



FIRST COLUMN

POLL RHETORIC: ETHICS TAKE A BACKSEAT

Politicians' spiritual claims and secular pledges belie their true motives



VINOD BEHL

In the heat and dust of national elections marked by the fiercest poll slugfest, we are seeing the ugly face of humanity with ethics getting a big hit. On the face of it, politicians of all hues flaunt their spiritual and secular credentials, making rounds of religious shrines and swearing by the secular constitution. But their public discourses in election rallies and conduct are to the contrary as they take to deception and false narratives with truth being a major casualty. With their poisonous outbursts, they display their unholy behaviour as they don't hesitate even to resort to character assassination to run down their opponents. In this digital age, the rampant use of AI makes matters even worse.

Today in the poll arena where money and muscle power have become a byword, we see dignity, honesty, and nobleness giving way to greed, dishonesty, wickedness and immorality. Seeing the ever-increasing trend of 'turncoats' and election engineering by political parties, we find that society is being divided on the lines of caste, community and religion, with impunity.

Truly speaking, the problem with us is that we humans are in a mad race for power and material possessions. This weans us away from spirituality. So overwhelming is the influence of materialism that we even forget our true identity as 'Spiritual Beings' (a constituent of Super soul /Divine Soul- God). Instead, we consider the physical body and all material assets associated with it as our identity. Blinded by the glitter of materialism, our true nature- purity and nobility gets completely overshadowed and we end up embracing sinfulness. And then we don't mind going to any length in selfish-



ness, cheating, corruption and criminality for material gains and to fulfil ulterior motives. Our intoxication of wealth and power leads to moral bankruptcy, robbing us of happiness and peace.

We may have wealth and high positions. But what's its use if it comes at the cost of our moral values and ethics? Such material success is devoid of bliss. Humans are a crown creation among all species on this planet earth and we have been given this rare birth with a mission to know God and become one with Him. The oneness of God leads to the oneness of humanity. Once that self-realization dawns on us, our negative tendencies gradually give way to divine attributes. Maintaining the purity of our soul leads us to become true human beings, real and everlasting happiness and peace come into our lives when we stay connected with One God, the powerhouse of love, happiness and peace and learn to maintain a balance between spirituality and materialism.

In the midst of heated national elections characterized by intense political rivalry, we witness a disturbing erosion of ethics and morality. Despite politicians' outward displays of spiritual and secular values, their actions tell a different story as they resort to deceit and character assassination for electoral gains. As money and power dominate the political landscape, principles like dignity and honesty are overshadowed by greed and immorality. Political tactics based on division along caste, community, and religious lines further fragment society. Fundamentally, humanity's relentless pursuit of power and material wealth has distanced us from our spiritual essence. We often prioritise material possessions over our true identity as spiritual beings, leading to moral degradation and a pursuit of selfish gains at any cost. However, true fulfillment lies in aligning with our spiritual nature and connecting with the divine, which fosters unity and genuine peace.

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

AMU breaks the gender barrier

Professor Naima Khatoon's historic appointment as AMU's first woman V-C in over a century represents a significant milestone for gender equality in Indian academia



AKHTARUL WASEY



Fortunately, Professor Naima Khatoon has been appointed as the Vice Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University, a moment long-awaited by the Aligarhian community. Professor Khatoon's journey within AMU has been extensive, having served previously as the Principal of the Women's College. Her association with the university spans an impressive 46 years, beginning as an outstanding student who consistently excelled in her examinations. Graduating with a doctorate in Psychology in 1989, Professor Khatoon's rise to the Vice Chancellorship on April 22, 2024, a testament to her dedication and academic prowess. An interesting facet of her appointment is the transition from her husband, Professor Muhammad Gulrez, who held the position of Acting Vice Chancellor prior. Professor Gulrez is recognised for his significant contributions to West Asian Studies and has displayed exemplary integrity and resilience during his tenure. Professor Khatoon's administrative journey within AMU includes noteworthy positions such as Chairperson of the Department of Psychology and Director General, Superintendent, Provost and more. Her appointment as Vice Chancellor also holds historical significance, marking her as the second Muslim woman to hold such a position at a Central University. This achievement follows Dr. Najma Akhtar's appointment as the first Muslim lady Vice Chancellor at Jamia Millia Islamia five years prior. The legacy of women's Leadership at AMU traces



HER STRATEGIC APPOINTMENTS, SUCH AS THAT OF PROFESSOR ANWAR MASUD ALAVI AS PRINCIPAL OF THE WOMEN'S COLLEGE, REFLECT HER COMMITMENT TO ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

back to its inception, with Begum Sultan Jahan being the university's first elected Chancellor in December 1920.

Professor Khatoon's contributions to the field of Psychology are well-documented, with six books and 31 papers, earning acclaim both nationally and internationally. Her academic pursuits have taken her across the globe on various academic assignments, enriching her perspective and expertise. Beyond her scholarly achievements, Professor Khatoon's adeptness in administrative roles underscores her capability as a leader to steer AMU towards greater heights of excellence.

Recognising in the evolving landscape of education, there is a pressing need to boost departments offering professional and technical education while also introducing emerging disciplines. Professor Khatoon's leadership is expected to facilitate the successful launch of these new programmes. Additionally, there is a call to establish new centres for regional and area studies, building upon the foundation laid by previous leaders like Professor Abdul Aleem.

Her strategic appointments, such as that of Professor Anwar Masud Alavi as Principal of the Women's College, reflect her commitment to academic excellence and diversity within the institution.

It is anticipated that Professor Naima Khatoon will leverage the expertise of the internationally renowned scholar, Professor Abdur Raheem Kidwai, Honorary Director of the K. A. Nizami Centre for Quranic Studies. Professor Kidwai, besides being a Professor of English, has earned acclaim for his critiques on the translations of the Quran into English and other languages. The Department of Islamic Studies and the Faculty of Theology at AMU hold the potential to evolve into Think Tanks for Muslims worldwide. Aligarh Muslim University, known not only for its academic excellence but also as a centre of Muslim culture and Civilisation can reshape the narrative. Indian Muslim faculty Members specialising in Islamic Studies and Sunni and Shia theology dedicated to nation-building and community welfare. They are well-positioned to provide guidance grounded in scriptures and to serve as beacons of harmony and unity within the Indian Muslim community.

The AMU Jama Masjid stands out as perhaps the only mosque, besides the Kaaba and the Prophet's mosque, where both Sunnis and Shias offer congregational prayers. This model of fraternity should be emulated across India. Nigerians should take the lead in promoting better understanding and unity among

various schools of thought. Aligarhians take pride in the fact that the first educational institution to impart modern knowledge was established at Aligarh. The election of a Muslim woman as Vice Chancellor of AMU, following in the footsteps of Professor Najma Akhtar, underscores this legacy. Professor Naima Khatoon, who has recently assumed office, brings with her impeccable academic credentials and a commitment to faith. Her success will undoubtedly bring honour to AMU and our nation. The appointment of the first female Vice Chancellors at both AMU and JMI reflects the evolving landscape of our country. Asrarul Haq Majaz, the author of the AMU Tarana (Anthem), an eminent Urdu poet, had expressed the hope that women would one day be the catalysts for social transformation. This hope is gradually being realised. It is heartening to note that Professor Khatoon, in addition to her academic achievements, embodies this spirit as a practising Muslim woman. We extend our best wishes to Professor Khatoon and fervently pray for her remarkable progress.

(The writer is Professor Emeritus, Jamia Millia Islamia & Former Vice Chancellor, Maulana Azad University, Jodhpur; views are personal)

Indian troop withdrawal marks regional paradigm shift

India's strategic redeployment of troops from the Maldives reflects evolving alliances and diplomatic shifts in the Indian Ocean region

In a move that underscores the evolving dynamics of regional geopolitics, the recent withdrawal of Indian military personnel from the Maldives has sparked discussions about the future of Indo-Maldivian relations. This strategic redeployment, marked by the departure of the final batch of Indian troops stationed in the archipelago, comes amidst shifting alliances and diplomatic recalibrations in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The name "Maldives" is believed to have originated from the Sanskrit words "Mala" (meaning "garland") and "dvipa" (meaning "island"). Together, they form "Maladvipa," which translates to "garland of islands." This name reflects the unique



SANTOSH MATHEW

geography of the Maldives, which is an archipelago consisting of numerous coral islands grouped in a chain formation in the Indian Ocean. Over time, the name evolved into "Maldives" in English. The Maldives, a nation comprising 1,192 coral islets strategically positioned across key east-west international shipping routes, has historically been a significant partner for India in its maritime

security endeavours. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Neighbourhood First Policy" and the broader framework of "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR), India has sought to deepen its engagement with its maritime neighbours, including the Maldives.

However, the tenure of President Mohamed Muizzu has witnessed a series of policy shifts, with the Maldives increasingly gravitating towards China while seeking to reduce dependence on India across various sectors, including healthcare, food security and defence cooperation. President Muizzu's "India Out" campaign during the presidential election last year signalled a departure from the traditionally close

ties between the two countries. The concern over the Maldives falling into China's debt trap diplomacy is indeed significant. As the Maldives seeks investments and infrastructure development, it must carefully navigate its relationships with external partners to avoid potential pitfalls. While Chinese investments can offer growth opportunities, they also come with the risk of indebting the nation and compromising its sovereignty.

The withdrawal of Indian military personnel, comprising more than 80 troops responsible for operating helicopters and an aircraft gifted by India, symbolizes a tangible manifestation of this evolving relationship. Muizzu's insistence on the

complete repatriation of Indian troops by the May 10 deadline underscores his administration's commitment to reshaping the Maldives' foreign policy orientation. Simultaneously, the Maldives' burgeoning engagement with China, evidenced by recent agreements on military equipment and training, adds a layer of complexity to the regional dynamics. While the Maldives retains its sovereignty to pursue partnerships that align with its national interests, the strategic implications of deepening ties with China amidst heightened Indo-Pacific tensions warrant careful consideration.

From India's perspective, the withdrawal of military personnel from the Maldives

reflects a pragmatic response to the evolving geopolitical landscape. The decision to respect the Maldivian Government's request for repatriation underscores India's commitment to upholding the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of its neighbours. Moreover, the withdrawal process, facilitated through four rounds of meetings of the India-Maldives High-Level Core Group, highlights the diplomatic maturity and bilateral dialogue mechanisms that underpin Indo-Maldivian relations. Despite divergent policy trajectories, both countries have demonstrated a willingness to engage constructively and find mutually beneficial solutions.

Looking ahead, the recalibration of Indo-Maldivian relations presents opportunities for both countries to reevaluate their strategic priorities and explore avenues for collaboration in areas of mutual interest. Whether it involves maritime security cooperation, economic partnerships, or regional connectivity initiatives, the foundations of the Indo-Maldives relationship remain resilient amidst evolving geopolitical realities.

As the Indian military withdrawal from the Maldives marks the closing of one chapter, it also heralds the beginning of a new phase in bilateral relations—one characterized by adaptability, pragmatism and a shared commitment to fostering stability and prosperity in the Indian

Ocean Region. Amidst the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean lies the Maldives, Asia's smallest nation and South Asia's only archipelago. The Maldives' pivot towards China raises concerns, but a shift towards closer ties with India presents a win-win scenario. Embracing India offers strategic stability, economic growth and cultural affinity, fostering a robust Indo-Maldives partnership. By aligning with India, the Maldives secures regional harmony and safeguards its sovereignty while India gains a trusted ally in the Indian Ocean, reinforcing mutual interests and prosperity for both nations.

(The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)

Israel battles regrouping Hamas in northern Gaza

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli forces pushed deeper into Gaza's southern city of Rafah on Sunday and battled Hamas in parts of the devastated north that the military said it had cleared months ago but where militants have regrouped. Warnings continued against the growing offensive in Rafah, considered the last refuge in Gaza for more than a million civilians as well as Hamas' last stronghold. Some 300,000 people have fled Rafah following evacuation orders from Israel, which says it must invade to dismantle Hamas and return scores of hostages taken in the Oct 7 attack against Israel that sparked the war.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated opposition to a major military assault on Rafah, telling CBS that Israel would "be left holding the bag on an enduring insurgency" without an exit from Gaza and postwar governance plan.

The expanding Rafah operation has drawn warnings from neighbouring Egypt, whose foreign ministry said it intends to formally join South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice alleging Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, which Israel rejects. The statement cited "the worsening severity and scope of the Israeli attacks against Palestinian civilians". "A full-scale offensive on Rafah

cannot take place," United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement, adding he cannot see how it can be reconciled with international humanitarian law. Gaza has been left without a functioning government, leading to a breakdown in public order and allowing Hamas' armed wing to reconstitute itself in even the hardest-hit areas. Israel has yet to offer a detailed plan for post-war governance in Gaza, saying only that it will maintain open-ended security control over the coastal enclave home to about 2.3 million Palestinians.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a Memorial Day speech vowed to continue fighting until victory in memory of those killed in the war. Netanyahu has rejected post-war plans proposed by the United States for the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, to govern Gaza with support from Arab and Muslim countries. Those plans depend on progress toward the creation of a Palestinian state, which Netanyahu's government opposes. The Oct 7 attack killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took another 250 hostage. Militants still hold about 100 captives and the remains of more than 30. Internationally mediated talks over a cease-fire and hostage release appear to be at

a standstill.

Israel's air, land and sea offensive has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants in its figures. Israel says it has killed over 13,000 militants, without providing evidence.

HEAVY BOMBARDMENT IN THE NORTH Palestinians reported heavy Israeli bombardment overnight in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp and other areas in northern Gaza, which has suffered widespread devastation and been largely isolated by Israeli forces for months. UN officials say there is a "full-blown famine" there.

Residents said Israeli warplanes and artillery struck across the camp and the Zeitoun area east of Gaza City, where troops have battled militants for over a week. They have called on tens of thousands of people to relocate to nearby areas.

"It was a very difficult night," said Abdel-Kareem Radwan, a 48-year-old from Jabaliya. He said they could hear intense and constant bombing since midday Saturday. "This is madness."

First responders with the Palestinian Civil Defense said they were unable to respond to multiple calls for help from both areas, as well as from Rafah.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the top Israeli military spokesman, said forces were also operating in Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun. The two towns near Gaza's northern border with Israel were heavily bombed in the opening days of the war.

"Hamas' regime cannot be toppled without preparing an alternative to that regime," columnist Ben Caspit wrote in Israel's Maariv daily, channeling the growing frustration felt by many Israelis more than seven months into the war. "The only people who can govern Gaza after the war are Gazans, with a lot of support and help from the outside."

CIVILIANS FLEE IN THE SOUTH

The United Nations' agency for Palestinian refugees, the main provider of aid in Gaza, said 300,000 people have fled Rafah since the operation began there. Most are heading to the heavily damaged nearby city of Khan Younis or Mawasi, a tent camp on the coast where some 450,000 people are already living in squalid conditions.

Rafah was sheltering some 1.3 million Palestinians before the Israeli operation began, most of whom had fled fighting elsewhere.

Israel has now evacuated the eastern third of Rafah, and Hagari said dozens of militants had been killed there as "targeted operations continued". The United Nations has

Profound sadness and anger grip Israel on its Memorial Day

Tel Aviv : Ruby Chen's son, Itay, was killed in the Hamas attack on October 7. But unlike scores of other families of soldiers killed that day, Chen doesn't have a grave to visit because his son's remains are held captive in Gaza. The absence of a final resting place is being felt acutely now, as Israel marks its Memorial Day for fallen soldiers, when cemeteries are brimming with relatives mourning over the graves of their loved ones.

"Where are we supposed to go?" Chen said. "There is no burial site for us to go to."

Memorial Day is always a somber occasion in Israel, a country that has suffered through repeated war and conflict throughout its 76-year history. But Chen's tor-

ment underscores how this year it has taken on a profound and raw sadness coupled with percolating anger over the failures of October 7 and the war it sparked.

Families of the fallen, along with broad segments of the public, are demanding accountability from political and military leaders over the blunders that led to the deaths of hundreds in the deadliest attack in the country's history. "Too many people were killed on that day because of a colossal misjudgment," said Chen, who for months thought his son was still alive after he was snatched into Gaza, before receiving confirmation earlier this year that he was dead. "People who made the misjudgment need to pay, from

the prime minister down."

Israel marks its Memorial Day for fallen soldiers and victims of attacks beginning at sundown Sunday with an official ceremony and smaller events the following day at military cemeteries across the country. The solemnity is then abruptly interrupted by the fanfare of Independence Day, which begins Monday evening. Grouping the two days together is intentionally meant to highlight the link between the costly wars Israel has fought and the establishment and survival of the state, a contrast that this year will be hard to reconcile at a time when Israel is actively engaged in warfare and Israelis feel more insecure than ever. With the

trauma of October 7 looming large, each day is expected to feel dramatically different from previous years.

More than 600 Israeli soldiers have been killed since Hamas launched its surprise attack on October 7, when thousands of militants rampaged across southern Israeli military bases and sleepy communities on a Jewish holiday. Roughly 1,200 people were killed that day, about a quarter of them soldiers, and another 250 were taken captive into Gaza, according to Israeli authorities. The attack sparked the war, now in its eighth month, which has killed more than 34,700 Palestinians, most of them women and children, according to local health officials.

warned that a planned full-scale Rafah invasion would further cripple humanitarian operations and cause a surge in civilian deaths. Rafah borders Egypt near the main aid entry points, which are already affected. Israeli troops have captured the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing, forcing it to shut down. Egypt has refused to coordinate with Israel on the

delivery of aid though the crossing because of "the unacceptable Israeli escalation," the state-owned Al Qahera News television channel reported.

A senior Egyptian official told The Associated Press that Cairo has lodged protests with Israel, the United States and European governments, saying the offensive has put its decades-old peace treaty with

Israel - a cornerstone of regional stability - at high risk. The official was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity. US President Joe Biden has said he won't provide offensive weapons to Israel for Rafah. On Friday, his administration said there was "reasonable" evidence that Israel had breached international law

protecting civilians - Washington's strongest statement yet on the matter.

Israel rejects those allegations, saying it tries to avoid harming civilians. It blames Hamas for the high toll because the militants fight in dense, residential areas. But the military rarely comments on individual strikes, which often kill women and children.

Fourth Indian held suspected role in killing of Nijjar

PTI ■ WASHINGTON/ OTTAWA

A fourth Indian national has been arrested by Canadian authorities in connection with the killing of Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a week after police arrested three Indians linked with the high-profile case that has severely strained India's relations with Canada.

Amandeep Singh, 22, a resident of Brampton, Surrey, and Abbotsford areas of Canada, has been charged with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder.

Nijjar, 45, was killed outside Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia on June 18, 2023.

The Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said that Singh was arrested on May 11 for his role in the killing of Nijjar. He was already in the custody of the Peel Regional Police for unrelated firearms charges, the release said.

"This arrest shows the nature of our ongoing investigation to hold responsible those that played a role in the homicide of Hardeep Singh Nijjar," said Superintendent Mandeep Mooker, the Officer in Charge of IHIT. "IHIT pursued the evidence and gained sufficient information for the British Columbia Prosecution Service to charge Amandeep Singh with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder," the police statement said.

Investigators said no further details of the arrest can be released due to ongoing investigations and court processes.

Citing a source familiar with the case, the Global News reported that Singh is believed to be one of the two armed men who opened fire on Nijjar. The shooters were then seen running to a

getaway car. Like his co-accused, Singh arrived in Canada on a temporary visa, but was allegedly involved in violent crime, the source said.

The four hitmen are suspected of links to the Bishnoi gang, it added.

Singh was one of five men charged with firearms and drug offences following a traffic stop in Brampton by the Peel police Specialized Enforcement Bureau on November 3, 2023.

During the arrests, police seized an FN 509 9mm pistol with a 24-round extended magazine, and two extended magazines with 24-round capacities containing 9mm ammunition, police said at the time. IHIT investigators on May 3 arrested three Indian nationals — Karan Brar (22), Kamalpreet Singh (22) and 28-year-old Karanpreet Singh — for the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar. All three individuals are Indian nationals living in Edmonton and have been charged with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder. The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in September last year of the "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Nijjar. India has dismissed Trudeau's charges as "absurd" and "motivated." Nijjar was a Khalistani separatist and he was wanted in India on various terror charges.

Days after Trudeau's allegations, India asked Ottawa to downsize its diplomatic presence in the country to ensure parity. Subsequently, Canada withdrew 41 diplomats and their family members from India. India has been asserting that its "core issue" with Canada remained that of the space given to separatists, terrorists and anti-India elements in that country.

Ohio police officer killed after being 'ambushed' on disturbance call; suspect sought

Euclid (Ohio): An Ohio police officer was shot and killed after being "ambushed" while answering a disturbance call over the weekend, and a suspect was being sought, authorities said Sunday. Police in the Cleveland suburb of Euclid said officers were dispatched just before 10 p.m. Saturday to a home due to a reported disturbance.

"While police were investigating, a gunman ambushed an officer, striking him with gunfire," police said. The officer, whose name wasn't immediately released, was taken to a hospital but succumbed to his injuries, police said. "Multiple law enforcement agencies" were involved in a search for the person responsible, authorities said.

The Ohio attorney general's office posted photos online of the 24-year-old suspect and the vehicle being sought.

WKYC reported that residents who live on the street reported hearing about a dozen gunshots. Euclid police asked in a statement early Sunday that people "keep the fallen officer, his family, loved ones, and our agency in your thoughts and prayers." WJW reported that the officer was a military veteran and had been on the force for less than two years. "He was an amazing human being. Just a great heart. Had an incredible smile. The world's a better place with him in it," said Euclid Police Chief Scott Meyer. Mayor Kirsten Holzheimer Gail said in a statement Sunday that "we find ourselves grappling with a profound sense of sorrow and disbelief." The mayor called on the community "to come together in solidarity and support, not only to honour a hero who selflessly served and protected us but also to offer strength to one another in this time of grief."

Trump tells crowd he's being forced to endure 'Biden show trial' in hush money case

AP ■ WILDWOOD

Sandwiched between his appearances in court, Donald Trump headed on Saturday to the Jersey Shore, where he repeatedly blamed President Joe Biden for the criminal charges he's facing as the presumptive nominee prepare to face off in the November election and called his New York hush money case "a Biden show trial."

Blasting the Democratic president "a total moron," Trump before a crowd of tens of thousands repeatedly characterized the cases against him as politically motivated and timed to harm his ability to campaign. "He's a fool. He's not a smart man," Trump said of Biden. "I talk about him differently now because now the gloves are off."



Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, drew what his team called a "mega crowd" to a Saturday evening rally in the southern New Jersey resort town of Wildwood, 150 miles (241

kilometers) south of the New York City courthouse where he has been forced to spend most weekdays sitting silently through his felony hush money trial.

Lisa Fagan, spokesperson for the city of Wildwood, told The Associated Press that she estimated a crowd of between 80,000 and 100,000 attendees, based off her own observations on the scene Saturday, having seen "dozens" of other events in the same space.

Trump was joined on stage by several high-level endorsers including North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum and NFL Hall of Fame linebacker Lawrence Taylor, who is still listed as a registered sex offender after pleading guilty in New York in 2011 to misdemeanor criminal charges of sexual misconduct and patronizing an underage

prostitute.

The beachfront gathering, described by Rep. Jeff Van Drew, R-N.J., as the largest political gathering in state history, was designed to serve as a show of force at a critical moment for Trump, who is facing dozens of felony charges in four separate criminal cases with the election less than six months away. Hours before he was scheduled to take the stage, thousands of Trump loyalists donning "Never Surrender" T-shirts and red "Make America Great Again" hats crowded onto the sand between the boardwalk and carnival rides to greet the former Republican president. "The everyday American people are 100% behind him," said Doreen O'Neill, a 62-year-old nurse from Philadelphia.

Fire burns down almost entire shopping centre

Warsaw (AP): A fire broke out on Sunday morning in a vast shopping centre housing 1,400 shops and service outlets in the Bialoleka district in Poland's capital. The fire brigade said more than 80 per cent of The Marywilka 44 shopping complex was on fire, and 50 teams, including chemical and environmental rescue specialists, were carrying out rescue operations.

A police spokesman told the news agency PAP there were no injuries reported. Authorities also sent a text message warning Warsaw residents about the fire and telling them to stay home with the windows closed. Footage aired by private broadcaster TVN24 showed thick black smoke rising over the area.

Crews prepare for demolition to remove Key bridge structure

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Crews are preparing to use controlled explosives to demolish a large piece of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge atop the cargo vessel Dali that has been stranded since March in Baltimore with its crew of 20 Indians and one Sri Lankan onboard after it collided against the bridge. The Key Bridge Response Unified Command is scheduled to use precision cuts made with small charges to remove a large section of the bridge wreckage from on top of the Dali.

The Key Bridge Response Unified Command said in a statement that the safest and swiftest method to remove the bridge piece from on top of the Dali is by "precision cuts made with small charges. This is an industry-standard tool in controlled demolition that will break the span into smaller



pieces, which will allow the work of refloating the vessel and removing it from the federal channel."

The 2.6-km-long, four-lane Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River came crashing down on March 26 after the 984-foot ship 'Dali' collided against it. The crew onboard the Dali included 20 Indians and one Sri Lankan. The crew has

been on the ship since the accident and has been cooperating with the investigation.

The exact time of the precision cuts will depend on multiple environmental and operational factors. Authorities said that the small charges, a standard controlled demolition tool, will split the large section of truss at specific locations to create multiple, smaller sections, which

allows salvors to use cranes and barges already on scene to remove these sections of the bridge and ultimately remove the Dali from the channel.

"We remain focused on restoring the Marine Transportation System, while ensuring the protection of the public and the environment," said Capt. David O'Connell, Key Bridge Response Federal On-Scene Coordinator. "By using precision cuts, we reduce risks to our personnel and can safely and efficiently continue clearing the channel for the Port of Baltimore."

The Key Bridge Response Unified Command coordinated with Maryland Department of Emergency Management to issue a cellular notification ahead of the controlled demolition to maximize awareness to the communities near the bridge. The Unified Command has advised that hearing protection is not required outside of the 2,000-yard noise radius.

Sound levels outside of the noise radius will be no louder than a standard fireworks show and will last 2-5 seconds.

Similar methods were previously used in the area for the controlled demolition of the Harry W. Nice Memorial Bridge in March 2023 in Charles County, Maryland.

Last month, US authorities opened a criminal investigation into the Baltimore bridge collapse incident that is also looking into whether the ship's crew, which included Indians, left the port "knowing the vessel had serious systems problems." The Washington Post had reported that the FBI opened the criminal investigation "focusing on the massive container ship that brought down the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore last month — a probe that will look at least in part at whether the crew left the port knowing the vessel had serious systems problems."

Rise in UK knife attacks stokes public anxiety

AP ■ LONDON

A familiar horror reached Pooja Kanda first on social media: There had been a sword attack in London. And then Kanda, who was home alone at the time, saw a detail she dreaded and knew all too well. A man with a sword had killed a 14-year-old boy who was walking to school. Two years ago, her 16-year-old son, Ronan, was killed by two sword-wielding schoolmates while walking to a neighbour's to borrow a PlayStation controller. "It took me back," Kanda, who lives near Birmingham, said about Daniel Anjorin's April 30 killing in an attack in London's Hainault district that also wounded four people. "It's painful to see that this has hap-

pened all over again." In parts of the world that ban or strictly regulate gun ownership, including Britain and much of the rest of Europe, knives and other types of blades are often the weapons of choice used in crimes. Many end up in the hands of children, as they can be cheap and easy to get. Although the number of fatal stabbings has mostly held steady in England and Wales over the past 10 years, headline-grabbing attacks and an overall rise in knife crime have stoked anxieties and led to calls for the government to do more. "Knife-enabled" crime — in which knives were used to commit crimes or someone was caught illegally possessing one — rose 7 per cent in England and Wales last year,

the government said last month, noting some localities were not included.

In London, such crimes jumped 20 per cent. The other two UK countries, Scotland and Northern Ireland, keep their own statistics.

With knives so readily available, there's only so much that can be done. Of the 244 fatal stabbings in England and Wales in the 12 months ending with March 2023 — the most recent figures available — 101 were committed with kitchen knives, far surpassing any other type of blade, according to the Office of National Statistics. But the uptick in knife crime and a steady drumbeat of shocking attacks, including those that killed Ronan Kanda, Daniel Anjorin and three people in Nottingham last year, has

pushed the issue to the forefront.

"It seems like every day something like this is reported in the press," Sanjoy O'Malley-Kumar, whose 19-year-old daughter Grace O'Malley-Kumar was among the Nottingham victims, said on "Good Morning Britain" after the recent attack in London.

In last week's local elections, candidates debated policies such as stop-and-search. Even movie star Idris Elba has weighed in.

"I can pick up a phone right now, type in knives and I'll get inundated with adverts for them," the London-born star of "The Wire" and "Luther" said during a protest in January. Guns are heavily restricted in the UK and there's not much debate about it.

Duchess of Sussex, speaks with women about her Nigerian roots

AP ■ ABUJA (NIGERIA)

Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, says it's been "humbling" to find out through a genealogy test that she is partly Nigerian as she met with women in the West African nation on Saturday. On her second day in Nigeria, where she is visiting for the first time with Prince Harry to also promote mental health for wounded soldiers and young girls, Meghan acknowledged Nigeria as "my country". She added: "It's been eye-opening to be able to know more about my heritage."



"Never in a million years would I understand it as much as I do

now. And what has been echoed so much in the past day is, 'Oh, we are not so surprised when we found out you are

Nigerian," she said at the event on women in leadership co-hosted by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a Nigerian economist

and head of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

"It is a compliment to you because what they define as a Nigerian woman is brave, resilient, courageous, beautiful," Meghan told the audience.

The Duchess of Sussex had announced on her podcast in October 2022 that she found out through the DNA-based test that she was "43 per cent Nigerian".

Her first reaction after finding out was to tell her mother, she said at the event in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. "Being African American, part of it is really not knowing so much about your lineage and background... and it was exciting for both of us," she said.

Thousands flee NE Ukraine as Russia renews border assault

AP ■ VILCHA

Thousands more civilians have fled Russia's renewed ground offensive in Ukraine's northeast that has targeted towns and villages with a barrage of artillery and mortar fire, officials said on Sunday. The intense battles have forced at least one Ukrainian unit to withdraw in the Kharkiv region, capitulating more land to Russian forces across less defended settlements in the so-called contested "gray zone" along the Russian border. By Sunday afternoon, the town of Vovchansk, with a prewar population of 17,000, emerged as a focal point in the battle. Volodymyr Tymoshko, the head of the Kharkiv regional police, said Russian forces were in the outskirts of the town and approaching from three directions. A Russian tank was spotted along a major road leading to the town, Tymoshko said, illustrating Moscow's confidence to deploy heavy weaponry.



In this photo taken from video released by the Russian Emergency Ministry Press Service on Sunday, May 12, 2024, Russian emergency services work at the scene of a partially collapsed block of flats authorities said was hit during an attack by Russia. AP/PTI

An Associated Press team, positioned in a nearby village, saw plumes of smoke rising from the town as Russian forces hurled shells. Evacuation teams worked non-stop throughout the day to take residents, most of whom were elderly, out of harm's way. At least 4,000 civilians have fled the Kharkiv region since Friday, when Moscow's forces launched the operation, Gov. Oleh Synyehubov said in a social media statement. Heavy fighting raged Sunday along the northeast front line, where Russian forces attacked 27 settlements in the past 24 hours, he said. Analysts say the Russian push is designed to exploit ammunition shortages before promised Western supplies can reach the front line. Ukrainian soldiers said the Kremlin is using the usual Russian tactic by launching a disproportionate amount of fire and infantry assaults to exhaust their troops and firepower. By intensifying battles in what was previously a static patch of the front line, Russian forces threaten to pin Ukrainian forces in the northeast, while carrying out intense battles farther south where

Moscow is also gaining ground. It comes after Russia stepped up attacks in March targeting energy infrastructure and settlements, which analysts predicted were a concerted effort to shape conditions for an offensive. Meanwhile, a 10-story apartment block collapsed in the Russian city of Belgorod, near the border, injuring at least 19 people. Russian authorities said the building collapsed following Ukrainian shelling. Ukraine has not commented on the incident.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that halting Russia's offensive in the northeast was a priority, and that Kyiv's troops were continuing counteroffensive operations in seven villages around the Kharkiv region. "Disrupting the Russian offensive intentions is our number one task now. Whether we succeed in that task depends on every soldier, every sergeant, every officer," Zelenskyy said. The Russian Defence Ministry

said Sunday that its forces had captured four villages on the border along Ukraine's Kharkiv region, in addition to five villages reported to have been seized on Saturday. These areas were likely poorly fortified due to the dynamic fighting and constant heavy shelling, easing a Russian advance. Ukraine's leadership has not confirmed Moscow's gains. A Ukrainian unit said that they had been forced to retreat in some areas and that Russian forces had captured at least one more village late Saturday. Tymoshko said Russian tactics in Vovchansk mirrored those used in the battles for Bakhmut and Avdiivka in the Donetsk region in which heavy aerial attacks were accompanied by droves of infantry assaults. In a video Saturday evening, the Hostri Kartuzny unit, part of the special forces' detachment of Ukraine's national guard, said that they were fighting for control of the village of Hlyboke. "Today, during heavy fighting,

our defenders were forced to withdraw from a few more of their positions, and today, another settlement has come completely under Russian control. As of 20:00, fighting for the village of Hlyboke is ongoing," the fighters said in the clip. The US-based Institute for the Study of War said Saturday that it believed claims that Moscow had captured Strilecha, Pylna, Pletenivka and Borsivka were accurate, and that geolocated footage also appeared to show that Russian forces have seized Morokhovets and Oliinykove. It described the recent Russian gains as "tactically significant." In the war's early days, Russia made a botched attempt to quickly storm Kharkiv but retreated from its outskirts after about a month. In the fall of 2022, seven months later, Ukraine's army pushed them out of Kharkiv. The bold counter-attack helped persuade Western countries that Ukraine could defeat Russia on the battlefield and merited military support.

IMF mission to meet Pak authorities next week

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

An IMF mission will meet authorities of cash-strapped Pakistan next week to hold discussions for laying the foundation for "better governance" and "stronger economic growth", an official said on Sunday. Last month Pakistan completed a short-term USD 3 billion programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which bailed the country out of any default. On Friday, an advance team of the Washington-based global lender reached the cash-strapped country to hold talks after Islamabad requested a longer and larger bailout package. "A mission team led by Nathan Porter, IMF's mission chief to Pakistan, will meet with authorities next week to discuss the next phase of engagement," said Esther Perez Ruiz, IMF's resident representative for Pakistan. "The aim is to lay the foundation for better governance and stronger, more inclusive, and resilient economic growth that will benefit all Pakistanis," the Dawn newspaper quoted her as saying. Pakistan has sought the next bailout package in the range of USD 6 and USD 8 billion for three years under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing. The News International newspaper reported last month. Meanwhile, the debt-struck country has decided to seek a rollover of around USD 12 billion debt from key allies like China in the 2024-25 fiscal year to meet a whopping USD 23 billion worth of gap in its external financing as the federal government aims to achieve budget targets before the expected arrival of the IMF team to the country. Pakistan narrowly averted default last summer, and the economy has stabilised after the completion of the last IMF programme, with inflation coming down to around 17 per cent in April from a record high of 38 per cent last May.

Cop killed, over 100 injured in clashes during PoK protest

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

One police officer was killed and more than 100 people, mostly policemen, injured in violent clashes between security forces and protesters agitating against high prices of wheat flour and electricity in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, media reports said on Sunday. The disputed region witnessed clashes on Saturday between the police and activists of a rights movement amid a wheel-jam and shutter-down strike across the territory, the Dawn newspaper reported. Mirpur Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Kamran Ali told Dawn.com that sub-inspector Adnan Qureshi succumbed to a gunshot wound in the chest in the town of Islamgarh, where he was deployed along with other police personnel to stop a rally for Muzaffarabad via Kotli and Poonch districts under the banner of the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC). The JAAC, which has traders at the forefront in most parts of the state, has been seeking the provision of electricity as per hydropower generation cost in the region, subsidised wheat flour and an end to the privileges of the elite class. The regional government called in the Rangers and a heavy contingent of policemen to stop the demonstrations. Mobile phone and internet services were suspended in different parts of the PoK on Sunday including

Bhimber and Bagh Towns, Geo News reported. In Mirpur, all the mobile networks and internet service have been suspended, it added. Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has called an emergency meeting related to the situation in the region at the President's House on Monday, said sources. They added that the president instructed stakeholders to bring proposals to resolve the issue. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said that he was "deeply concerned" about the situation in PoK. "Unfortunately, in situations of chaos and dissent there are always some who rush in to score political points. While debate, discussion and peaceful protests are the beauties of democracy, there should be absolutely no tolerance for taking the law in one's own hands and damaging government properties," he said in a post on X. He said that he had spoken to PoK "prime minister" Chaudhry Anwarul Haq and directed his party's office bearers in the region to talk to the leaders of the action committee. "I urge all parties to resort to peaceful course of action for resolution of their demands. Despite best efforts of detractors, the matter will hopefully be settled soon," he added. On Wednesday and Thursday, around 70 JAAC activists were arrested by police during raids at their residences and those of their relatives in Muzaffarabad and Mirpur divisions, triggering

serious clashes in Dadyal on Thursday. The committee had subsequently announced a shutter-down and wheel-jam strike on Friday, a day ahead of its planned long march towards Muzaffarabad Saturday. Amid a crippling strike on Friday, violent clashes took place between police and protesters in different areas of Muzaffarabad, the capital of PoK. On Saturday, authorities placed mounds of earth on arteries leading to Muzaffarabad, apart from making more arrests, to prevent people from heading towards the city. Witnesses said that Muzaffarabad division and Poonch division observed complete strikes. SSP Yasin Baig said at least one police officer and a young boy were injured as police resorted to teargas shelling and aerial firing in some neighbourhoods after stones and bottles were pelted by protesters. Kotli SSP Mir Muhammad Abid said that at least 78 policemen were injured in the district in "attacks of miscreants under the guise of protest". The SSP said 59 policemen, including Deputy Superintendent of Police Ilyas Janjua, and two revenue department officials were injured in Rehan Galli while another 19 policemen were injured in Sehnsa Baroian. A press release from the District Headquarters Hospital Kotli said apart from the 59 wounded policemen, nine injured protesters were also brought for treatment.

Seven security personnel killed in twin attacks in North Waziristan

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

At least seven security personnel have been killed and two injured in two separate militant attacks on security forces in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, authorities said on Sunday. Local officials said five security personnel were killed and two injured during the first attack that took place in the Hassan Khel area of North Waziristan district, bordering Afghanistan, in when an improvised explosive device went off

targeting a bomb disposal unit on Saturday. Militants opened fire on the forces soon after the blast triggered off, Dawn News quoted the official as saying. In another incident, militants stormed a security post in the Seeman area of the same district, killing two security personnel on Saturday, local authorities said. They said the bodies of the security personnel and the injured were airlifted to Combined Military Hospital in Bannu. Security forces cordoned off the areas immediately after the attacks

and launched search operations in the regions. The two attacks come after, a private girls' school was blown up by unidentified militants in Tehsil Shewa of North Waziristan district on the night of May 8, police said. The police said the militants first tortured the watchman and later blew up two rooms of the school. Similar attacks took place in May last year when two government schools for girls in Mirali had been blown up. No loss of life was reported in the incidents.

37 die as flash floods, cold lava flow ravage Sumatra island

Padang (Indonesia): Heavy rains and torrents of cold lava and mud flowing down a volcano's slopes on Indonesia's Sumatra island triggered flash floods that killed at least 37 people and more than a dozen others were missing, officials said on Sunday. Monsoon rains and a major mudslide from a cold lava flow on Mount Marapi caused a river to breach its banks and tear through mountainside villages in four districts in West Sumatra province just before midnight on Saturday. The floods swept away people and submerged more than 100 houses and buildings, National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari said. Cold lava, also known as lahar, is a mixture of volcanic material and pebbles that flow down a volcano's slopes in the rain. By Sunday afternoon, rescuers had pulled out 19 bodies in the worst-hit village of Canduang in Agam district and recovered nine other bodies in the neigh-

boring district of Tanah Datar, the National Search and Rescue Agency said in a statement. The agency said that eight bodies were pulled from mud during deadly flash floods that also hit Padang Pariaman, and one body was found in the city of Padang Panjang. It said rescuers are searching for 18 people who are reportedly missing. Flash floods on Saturday night also caused main roads around the Anai Valley Waterfall area in Tanah Datar district to be blocked by mud, cutting off access to other cities, Padang Panjang Police Chief Kartyana Putra said Sunday. Videos released by the National Search and Rescue Agency showed roads that were transformed into murky brown rivers. The disaster came just two months after heavy rains triggered flash floods and a landslide in West Sumatra's Pesisir Selatan and Padang Pariaman districts, killing at least 21 people and leaving five others missing. The 2,885-metre (9,465-foot) Mount Marapi

erupted late last year killing 23 climbers who were caught by a surprise weekend eruption. The volcano has stayed at the third highest of four alert levels since 2011, indicating above-normal volcanic activity under which climbers and villagers must stay more than 3 km (about 2 miles) from the peak, according to Indonesia's Centre for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation. Marapi is known for sudden eruptions that are difficult to predict because the source is shallow and near the peak, and its eruptions aren't caused by a deep movement of magma, which sets off tremors that register on seismic monitors. Marapi has been active since an eruption in January 2023 that caused no casualties. It is among more than 120 active volcanoes in Indonesia. The country is prone to seismic upheaval because of its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of volcanoes and fault lines encircling the Pacific Basin. AP

Apartment block collapses in Russian border city

Moscow (AP): An apartment block partially collapsed in the Russian border city of Belgorod on Sunday, leaving at least 19 injured. Officials blamed Ukrainian shelling and said there were also likely deaths. Online footage showed rescuers searching for survivors among the remnants of the building's stairwell, then fleeing the scene as part of the roof crashed to the ground. In a statement, Russia's Investigative Committee, the country's top law enforcement agency, said that the 10-story block had been hit by Ukrainian shelling. It said that there were dead and injured among the rubble, but provided no further details. The Russian Defense Ministry wrote on social media that the building had been damaged by fragments of a downed Tochka-U TRC missile. It also said that air defenses had shot down several more rockets over the Belgorod region, as well as two drones that were destroyed in a separate inci-

dent later Sunday. At least 19 people were injured in the building's collapse, said local Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov. Air raid alerts continued across Belgorod as rescuers worked. The city previously came under fire Saturday evening, killing one person and injuring 29 more, Gladkov said on social media. Cities across western Russia have come under regular attack from drones since May 2023, with Russian officials blaming Kyiv. Ukrainian officials never acknowledge responsibility for attacks on Russian territory or the Crimean Peninsula. The Belgorod region, on Russia's western border, has been the target of a large number of strikes. Although most cross-border shelling is seen in rural areas, attacks have also been seen on the region's capital. In December 2023, shelling in the heart of Belgorod city killed 25 people, prompting authorities to start erecting public shelters.

SL Freedom Party elects Rajapakse as chairman after Sirisena resigns

Colombo (PTI): Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakse was elected as the chairman of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) on Sunday after former president Maithripala Sirisena formally resigned from the chairmanship amid reports of heightened tensions between rival factions. The Executive Committee of the Maithripala faction of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party met on Sunday and unanimously voted to appoint 65-year-old Rajapakse as the new Chairman of the party. Nimal Siripala de Silva, an incumbent minister, is the acting chair of the rival faction of the party. De Silva faction's secretary in a letter to the Sirisena faction termed Sunday's purported executive committee meeting "illegal" as Sirisena's party chairmanship is still under a court restraining order.

Floods in Af sweep away livelihoods

Islamabad (AP): Shopkeeper Nazer Mohammad ran home as soon as he heard about flash floods crashing into the outskirts of a provincial capital in northern Afghanistan. By the time he got there, there was nothing left, including his family of five. "Everything happened just all of a sudden. I came home, but there was no home there, instead I saw all the neighbourhood covered by mud and water," said Mohammad, 48. He said that he buried his wife and two sons aged 15 and 8 years, but he's still looking for two daughters, who are around 6 and 11 years old. The UN food agency estimated that unusually heavy seasonal rains in Afghanistan have left more than 300 people dead and thousands of houses destroyed, most of them in the northern province of Baghlan, which bore the brunt of the deluges on Friday. Mohammad said Sunday that he found the bodies of his wife

and two sons late Friday night on the outskirts of Puli Khumri, the capital of Baghlan province. "I hope someone has found my daughters alive," he said, holding back tears. "Just in the blink of an eye, I lost everything: family, home, belongings, now nothing is left to me." Among at least 240 people dead are 51 children, according to UNICEF, one of several international aid groups that are sending relief teams, medicines, blankets and other supplies. The World Health Organization said it delivered 7 tons of medicines and emergency kits. Aid group Save the Children said about 600,000 people, half of them children, live in the five districts in Baghlan that have been severely impacted by the floods. The group said it sent a "clinic on wheels" with mobile health and child protection teams to support children and their families.

More United States parents than ever have paid leave this Mother's Day

AP ■ NEW YORK

More working US parents than ever are celebrating their first Mother's Day with hard-fought access to paid time off to care for newborns. But the majority still must forego pay to care for new babies or other loved ones, even as efforts to expand paid parental and family leave gain traction. Bipartisan groups in the US Senate and House have revived efforts to expand paid family leave to more workers, with momentum building to introduce legislation this year. In the absence of a federal law, 13 states plus the District of Columbia have adopted paid family and medical leave laws, which entitle workers to paid time off to care for newborns or other loved ones who require care.

Still, just 27% of civilian workers in the US get paid family leave, according to the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Workers who can least afford to take unpaid time off are also the least likely to have access to paid leave: According to the BLS, just 14% percent of workers in the lowest 25% wage category get that benefit, compared to 48% of those in the top 10%. For families without paid leave, babies "are going to day care when they are two weeks old. They do not even have immunizations. They're not on regular feeding patterns. Moms are giving up breast-feeding far sooner than they would like to," Elizabeth Gedmark, vice president at nonprofit advocacy organization A Better Balance, said during a recent virtual conference to advocate for federal

paid family leave organized by the WK Kellogg Foundation. The US is one of just of seven countries — and the only industrialized one — that does not have a national paid maternity leave policy, according to the World Policy Analysis Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. Caitlyn Householder has become an advocate for a universal paid family leave law in Pennsylvania since she was forced to quit her job as a floor supervisor of a clothing company five ago when she learned that she was pregnant shortly after being diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's B-Cell Lymphoma. Householder, of Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, could hardly drive herself to work because of agonizing pain in her leg, and it quickly became appar-

ent that her employer wouldn't allow her to take enough time off for her medical needs. "They showed their true colors," said Householder, who shared her story through the Children First, a organization campaigning for Pennsylvania's proposed law. Householder's husband, an oil rig worker, also gets no paid parental or family leave to care for her and their kids. Most of the time, Householder took her baby and stepdaughter with her to the radiation treatments. When her husband did take off work, such as when Householder couldn't hold her baby for 24 hours after radiation, it meant foregoing hundreds of dollars in income. The family fell behind on mortgage payments during the most difficult months. Pennsylvania's House and Senate are consid-

ering legislation that would provide up to 20 weeks of paid family leave through a payroll tax. The proposed measure has bipartisan sponsorship but some Republicans have vocally opposed it because of the cost to taxpayers. Disagreements over how to fund family leave programs have been an obstacle in other states, and have long thwarted efforts to pass a federal law. Democrats generally favour funding such programs through payroll taxes, while many Republicans prefer tax incentives to encourage, but not require, employers to offer paid leave. In January, a House bipartisan group led by Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, a Pennsylvania Democrat, and Rep. Stephanie Bice, an Oklahoma Republican, released a four-part framework to extend paid

family leave to more workers, including funding for state programs or stronger tax breaks for small businesses to do so. In a statement, Bice said the group is "excited about the momentum and will continue working together to craft legislative text which can get across the finish line." In an interview with The Associated Press, Houlahan said she was optimistic that legislation could be introduced this year. While any measure would fall short of a federal paid leave law, Houlahan said it reflects a yearlong effort to find common ground for policies that would extend the benefit to as many workers as possible. Colorado's benefits kicked in on January 1, four years after the state's paid family and medical leave program passed by ballot measure following a

failed effort to move a bill through the legislature. The law gives most Colorado workers the right to take up to 12 week of paid leave to bond with a new baby and other family needs. The new benefits came too late for Carrie Martin-Haley's family. Neither Martin-Haley, a small business owner in Denver who gave birth to her son in September 2023, nor her husband had any paid time off, so Martin-Haley had to put aside her dreams of opening a brick-and-mortar storefront for her business, Summit Sustainable Goods. "That's been hard to sit with," said Martin-Haley, who shared her story through Small Business Majority, an advocacy group that is campaigning for federal paid family leave. "With the lack of sleep and everything else that comes along with new parenthood,

and all of the uncertainties, finances should be the last thing on the totem pole." Women's participation in the US labor force has reached historic highs, but changes such as paid parental leave often come after long-fought campaigns by mothers. Keenan Manzo of Dallas, a mother of three who has worked as a Southwest flight attendant for 18 years, said she launched a Facebook page for mothers at the company after having her first child 11 years ago to galvanize support for paid leave and other policies. She said paid leave often took a backseat to other priorities such as higher pay, but support grew as women shared stories of returning to work too early and struggling to pump during flights, sometimes as impatient passengers knocked on the bathroom stalls.

China largest trading partner of India in FY24 with USD 118.4 billion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

China has emerged as the largest trading partner of India with USD 118.4 billion two-way commerce in 2023-24, slightly edging past the US, according to the data of economic think tank GTRI. The bilateral trade between India and the US stood at USD 118.3 billion in 2023-24. Washington was the top trading partner of New Delhi during 2021-22 and 2022-23. The data showed that India's exports to China rose by 8.7 per cent to USD 16.67 billion in the last fiscal. The main sectors which recorded healthy growth in exports to that country include iron ore, cotton yarn/fabrics/made ups, handloom, spices, fruits and vegetables, plastic and linoleum. Imports from the neighbouring country increased by 3.24 per cent to USD 101.7 billion. On the other hand, exports to the US dipped by 1.32 per cent to USD 77.5 billion in 2023-24 as against USD 78.54



billion in 2022-23, while imports dipped by about 20 per cent to USD 40.8 billion, the data showed. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that from fiscal year 2019 to FY2024, India's trade dynamics with its top 15 trading partners underwent significant transformations, impacting both exports and imports along with the status of trade surplus or deficit

across various sectors. It added that China witnessed a marginal decline in exports by 0.6 per cent, from USD 16.75 billion to USD 16.66 billion, while imports from China surged by 44.7 per cent, from USD 70.32 billion to USD 101.75 billion. "This growth in imports led to an expanding trade deficit, rising from USD 53.57 billion in FY2019 to USD 85.09 billion in FY2024,

highlighting concerns over stagnant exports amidst rising imports," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said. Conversely, it said, trade with the US showed growth, with exports increasing significantly by 47.9 per cent from USD 52.41 billion to USD 77.52 billion. Imports from the US also grew by 14.7 per cent, from USD 35.55 billion to USD 40.78 billion. This resulted in an expanded trade surplus for India, which grew from USD 16.86 billion to USD 36.74 billion. According to the commerce ministry data, China was India's top trading partner from 2013-14 till 2017-18 and also in 2020-21. Before China, the UAE was the country's largest trading partner. The US was the largest partner in 2021-22 and 2022-23. In 2023-24, the UAE with USD 83.6 billion, was the third largest trading partner of India. It was followed by Russia (USD 65.7 billion), Saudi Arabia (USD 43.4 billion), and Singapore (USD 35.6 billion).

Next round of talks for India, Asean trade pact review in July

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior officials of India and the 10-nation bloc of Southeast Asian nations — ASEAN — will hold the next round of talks in July to review the existing free trade agreement in Jakarta, Indonesia, an official statement said on Sunday. The last round of the three-day negotiations concluded on May 9 in Putrajaya, Malaysia. The discussions for review of AITIGA (Asean-India Trade in Goods Agreement) started in May 2023 to make it more trade-facilitative and beneficial for businesses across the region, the commerce ministry said. A joint committee, which is undertaking the review work, has so far met four times. It has finalised its terms of reference and the negotiating structure for the review in its first two meetings and initiated talks for the review from its third meeting, which was held on February 18-19 here. "The fourth Joint Committee meeting for the review of AITIGA was held in Putrajaya, Malaysia from 7-9



May," the statement said. The committee was co-chaired by Rajesh Agrawal, Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce, and Mastura Ahmad Mustafa, Deputy Secretary General (Trade), Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry, Malaysia. India and the 10-nation bloc ASEAN have agreed to conclude talks in 2025. The delegates from India and all 10 ASEAN countries participated in the discussions. The ministry said that 8 sub-committees have been constituted to deal with different policy areas of the agreement in the review, and out of these, five have started their discussions. The issues being negotiated by these committees include

national treatment and market access, rules of origin, standards, technical regulations, conformity assessment procedures and legal and institutional. ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is one of the major trade partners of the country, with a share of 11 per cent in India's global trade. The bilateral trade stood at USD 122.67 billion in 2023-24. "The upgradation of AITIGA will further boost bilateral trade. Both sides would next meet for the fifth joint committee meeting from 29-31 July 2024 in Jakarta, Indonesia," the statement said. The review of the AITIGA was a long-standing demand of Indian businesses.

Large PSUs spend ₹50,200 crore in capex in April

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Large public sector companies have spent a little over Rs 50,200 crore towards capital expenditure in April FY25 alone, which is 6.46 per cent of their full fiscal target of Rs 7.77 lakh crore, an official said. The pace albeit is slower than Rs 54,177 crore capex spent in April FY24, about 7.3 per cent of the full year budget target of Rs 7.42 lakh crore. "The capex spending will pick up going forward. Also, the numbers for April are still provisional and will go up in the revised final numbers," the official told PTI. The capital expenditure during the first month of 2024-25 fiscal was driven by railways, road, and oil and gas sectors. The Indian Railways and sector PSUs spent Rs 26,641 crore in April, followed by National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) at Rs 6,645 crore. Among oil and gas sector PSUs, ONGC incurred capex of Rs 2,318 crore, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) Rs 2,423 crore in the first month of the current financial year. Hindustan Petroleum Corp Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd spent Rs 1,155 crore and Rs 417 crore, respectively in April. Power sector PSU NTPC spent Rs 2,083 crore. The finance ministry tracks capital expenditure of public sector undertakings (PSUs) that have an annual investment target of over Rs 100 crore. The Interim Budget for 2024-25 set a cumulative capital expenditure target of Rs 9.01 lakh crore for all public sector undertakings. Of this, Rs 7.77 lakh crore worth capex is to be spent by PSUs with over Rs 100 crore of annual capital expenditure target. In 2023-24, large PSUs spent Rs 8.05 lakh crore towards capex, exceeding the budget target of Rs 7.42 lakh crore.

Inflation data, Q4 earnings, global trends to drive stock markets this week: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stock markets will be driven by domestic inflation data, ongoing quarterly earnings from corporates and global trends this week, analysts said. News flows around the general election would also be tracked by investors, market experts said. Besides, investors would also take cues from the trading activity of foreign investors, the movement of global oil benchmark Brent crude and the rupee-dollar trend. "Investors will be bombarded with economic data on both domestic and global fronts. Domestically, watch for Consumer Price Index (CPI) and Wholesale Price Index (WPI). Globally, focus will be



on the US Producer Price Index (PPI) and Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures. "Additionally, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's speech will be a key event to watch. China's industrial production data and Japan's GDP figures round out the important releases for the week," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd. Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said that the current trend in the domestic markets is likely to continue in the short-term due to election-led uncertainties. "In the data-hetic week ahead, investors' attention will be focused on the release of India and US CPI data, Europe

and Japan's GDP releases, and the FED chair speech. Furthermore, the next set of Q4 results will also attract market sentiment," he added. DLF, Zomato, Bharti Airtel and Mahindra & Mahindra are among the major companies scheduled to announce their earnings during the week. "The outlook for the market will be guided by major global and domestic economic data, India's WPI inflation data, US PPI data, Core CPI data, initial jobless claims, Japan's GDP data, India Q4 company results and speech by Fed Chairman Jerome Powell," Arvinder Singh Nanda, Senior Vice President, Master Capital Services Ltd, said. "Overall, we expect the market to consolidate in a broader

range and take cues from Q4 results, global factors and news flows around the general election," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head — Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd. Last week, the BSE benchmark tanked 1,213.68 points or 1.64 per cent, and the Nifty declined 420.65 points or 1.87 per cent. Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said, "Despite the negative local sentiment, the strength observed in global markets, particularly in the US, has been instrumental in curbing the pace of decline. It's essential for investors to closely monitor both global market performance and local factors for market cues."

Maruti Suzuki expects over 30 per cent jump in CNG vehicle sales at six lakh units in FY25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki India expects its CNG car sales to rise over 30 per cent to around 6 lakh units this fiscal, according to a senior company official. The country's largest carmaker also aims to export around 3 lakh units in the ongoing financial year. "So CNG, this year, we did about 4,50,000 (units) in passenger vehicles. We are hoping to do something like 6,00,000 vehicles in FY24-25," Maruti Suzuki India Executive Director Corporate Affairs Rahul Bharti said in an analyst call. The company sells CNG trims across various models like WagonR, Brezza, Dzire, and Ertiga, among others in the domestic market. Bharti said the company's capacity expansion by around 1 lakh units per



annum at its Manesar plant, in Haryana largely addresses the Ertiga supply issues. Ertiga CNG demand is huge in the market leading to supply issues, he noted. On overseas shipments, Bharti said the company aims to export about 3 lakh units. "We did about 2,83,000 units in FY24. Despite the fact that we've increased substantially over the usual 1,00,000 units per year that we used to do

just about 4 years ago. We wish to take it further in the future years. "And this year, we should be doing about 3,00,000 units fairly diversified across markets, across products," he noted. Replying to a separate query on the company's upcoming plant at Kharkhoda in Haryana, Bharti said the project is part of the automaker's ambitious growth plan. "Construction is already in progress at Kharkhoda and the first plant with an annual production capacity of 2,50,000 units is on course to be operational in 2025," he said. The company has space to set up four such plants with a total capacity of 10 lakh units in Kharkhoda, he added. Maruti Suzuki aims to produce 40 lakh vehicles per year by FY2030-31, almost double from current levels.

India's coal import rises eight per cent to 268 MT in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's coal import rose by 7.7 per cent to 268.24 million tonne (MT) in FY24 driven by softness in seaborne prices and likelihood of increase in power demand during summer. The country's coal import was 249.06 MT in FY23, according to data compiled by B2B e-commerce company mjunction services. Coal import in March FY24 also rose to 23.96 MT, over 21.12 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal. "Of the total volume recorded in March 2024, non-coking coal import stood at 15.33 MT, against 13.88 MT in March FY23. Coking coal import in March 2024 was 5.34 MT against 3.96 MT a year ago.

Anarock FY24 revenue rises 36 per cent to ₹566 crore on higher earnings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Real estate consultant Anarock Group has posted a 36 per cent increase in its revenue to Rs 566 crore in the last fiscal, helped by better earnings from housing brokerage and other services. During 2022-23, the company posted a revenue of Rs 416 crore. Homegrown Anarock was established by Anuj Puri in April 2017 after serving as country head for 10 years in an international property consultancy firm. In an interview with PTI, Anarock Chairman Puri said, "Real estate markets, particularly residential, across cities, are doing well with sales and launches at a 15-year high." Inherently, he said, this is being driven by a younger working population wanting to buy their first home rather

than rent it. "We are benefiting from this phenomenal growth in housing sales, having established our tech and digital platform," Puri said. All major business verticals contributed to the revenue growth last fiscal, he said. These include housing brokerage, retail, land, capital markets, strategic consulting, hospitality wing HVS-Anarock, and society management brand ANACITY. The chairman said the company would continue to invest for higher growth through organic and inorganic routes, having raised private equity to consolidate players in a similar domain as Anarock. To sustain growth, Anarock said it would significantly increase its headcount in FY 2024-25, especially in the recently launched office

leasing in advisory services. Anarock Group currently has more than 2,200 employees operating across key tier 1 and 2 markets in India and the Middle East. "FY24 has been a phenomenal year for the Indian residential segment, with record sales and new launches across the top 7 cities," Santhosh Kumar, Vice Chairman Anarock, said. He said the company has exceeded its revenue target by 6 per cent "but see that merely as an apt launch-pad for bigger and better things." The company is confident of almost tripling its current revenue to Rs 1,500 crore by 2026-27, he added. "We will penetrate more key markets this year with a vastly amplified services bouquet," Kumar said while outlining future plans. "The Indian economy continues to exhibit strength

and will certainly support our targeted growth. However, we bank even more strongly on our constantly improving technology suite and, of course, the best real estate teams in the business," Kumar said. The company recently raised Rs 200 crore funds from 360 One Asset Management Ltd for deployment into its overall business growth and industry-defining proptech platform. Over the last six years, Anarock has expanded from being a residential-focused organisation to complementary segments, including retail, office, hospitality, logistics, data centres, industrial and land. It also provides strategic advisory, investment banking, research & valuation services, besides offering app-based flexible workspaces and society management platform.

Gold ETFs see first outflow after March 2023 at ₹396 crore on profit booking

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold Exchange Traded Fund (ETF) witness a net outflow of Rs 396 crore last month, making it the first withdrawal after March 2023, owing to profit booking. Despite the decline, the asset under management (AUM) of gold funds rose 5 per cent to Rs 32,789 crore at April-end from Rs 31,224 crore in the preceding month, according to the data with the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi). As per the data, Gold ETFs saw a net withdrawal of Rs 396 crore in April as compared to an inflow of Rs 373 crore in the preceding month. The last time this asset class witnessed net outflow was in March 2023, withdrawing Rs 266 crore. "In INR terms, gold has done fairly well over the last year but dwarfs in comparison to how equities have fared. Given this backdrop, flows in



the Gold ETF category have been somewhat patchy relative to the equity asset class. That said, investors could have opted to book some profits in this segment which has resulted in the asset class witnessing net outflows despite the rise in prices," Melvyn Santarita, Analyst, Morningstar Investment Research India, said. Recently gold prices in US dollar terms as well as INR terms have scaled new highs. With ongoing geopolitical tensions, US inflation still higher than the desired

number, the appeal of gold as a safe haven and hedge against inflation is expected to continue, he added. In 2023, Gold ETFs witnessed an inflow of Rs 2,920 crore, which was way higher than the Rs 459 crore inflow seen in 2022. The attractiveness of gold as a safe haven and a hedge against inflation enhanced significantly during the year. Investors turned to this traditional safe haven owing to rising inflation, subsequent interest rate hikes, and geopolitical events, seeking a

secure investment option. Gold, with its superlative performance over the last few years, has garnered substantial investor interest and the consistent increase in folio numbers serves as a testament to its attractiveness. The folio numbers in gold ETFs rose by over 1 lakh to 51.84 lakh in the month under review from 50.61 lakh in March 2024. This indicates a growing inclination among investors towards funds related to gold. "Investing in gold ETFs offers unparalleled advantages including liquidity, cost-effectiveness, and security," Vishal Jain, CEO, Zerodha Fund House said. Preference for gold during the time of adversity is also notable from the investment inflow into Gold ETFs during 2020 when the world was engulfed with the COVID-19 pandemic. An analysis for the period between 2019 to 2023 shows that yearly growth in AUM of

Gold ETFs has been on the rise. The AUM increased significantly from Rs 5,528 crore in December 2019 to Rs 13,819 crore in December 2020 during the pandemic period. As of December 2023, the AUM was valued at Rs 25,959 crore, marking a substantial increase of 27 per cent from December 2022, 88 per cent from December 2020 and 41 per cent from 2021. Gold ETFs, which aim to track the domestic physical gold price, are passive investment instruments that are based on gold prices and invest in gold bullion. In short, Gold ETFs are units representing physical gold which may be in paper or dematerialised form. One gold ETF unit is equal to 1 gram of gold and is backed by physical gold of very high purity. They combine the flexibility of stock investments and the simplicity of gold investments.

Evaluation of infrastructure requirements for achieving USD one trillion exports by September, says official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A study to assess required infrastructure and identify main industry clusters for achieving the USD 1 trillion merchandise exports target by 2030 may be submitted by August-September to the commerce ministry, an official said. The official said that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is doing that study for the ministry. In 2023-24, India's merchandise exports dipped by over 3 per cent to USD 437 billion. Imports during the last fiscal dipped by 5.7 per cent to USD 675.4 billion. By 2030, the ministry is aiming to more than double the country's outbound shipments of goods. Explaining the rationale behind the exercise, the official said that to take the exports to USD 1 trillion, there will be an

import of about USD 1.5 trillion, so to handle USD 2.5 trillion worth of trade "we need" additional infrastructure and logistics capacity at roads, ports, airports and railways. "If exports will increase, imports will also increase. There is a correlation between higher exports and imports. So we have to create an infrastructure to handle about USD 2.5 trillion worth of merchandise goods," the official added. Besides infrastructure requirements, there is also a need to identify the industry clusters from where there will be a large movement of goods. To query when the ministry is expected to get the report, the official said "by around August-September". After that, the commerce ministry will share the details with ministries concerned, including shipping, aviation, roads and national highways,

and railways. The ministries would see if they need investments for additional capacity development and where all that investment will go. As per rough calculations and estimates, another official said that India may need to create an infrastructure which will support an additional 2,000 million tonne of goods movement in the ports. Similarly in the railways, there could be a need to create an infrastructure which will allow railways to carry on an additional 338 million tonne of goods by 2030. Airports also need to create an additional 5 million tonne of facilities for movement of goods. "The study is trying to identify what kind of infrastructure is required at the exit points and which are the clusters from where there will be the larger movement of goods," the government official added.

AN: PRE-DIABETES ALERT

Certain skin changes can signal underlying health issues like insulin resistance and diabetes. Characterised by dark, velvety patches on the skin, often in body folds like neck and elbow, Acanthosis nigricans (AN) is one such condition. ARCHANA JYOTI gives more details

CASE 1
 Suniti Verma, a 35-year-old woman, noticed dark, velvety patches forming on her neck and underarms. Initially dismissing them as a result of friction or aging, she became concerned when the patches started spreading and became thicker over time. After visiting a doctor, she learned about AN.



DR LAKSHMI NAGENDRA
 Associate Professor, Department of Endocrinology, JSS Medical College, Mysore



DR SUNITA SAYAMMAGARU
 Endocrinologist



DR NAVAL K VIKRAM
 Endocrinologist, Department of Internal Medicine, AIIMS, Delhi



DR ATULA GUPTA
 Dermatologist, Skin Aid Clinic, Gurugram

CASE 2
 Manohar, a 45-year-old man, has been feeling increasingly fatigued and thirsty lately. During a routine check-up, his doctor noticed velvety patches on his neck and suggested testing his blood sugar levels. The tests revealed elevated glucose levels, and Manohar is now diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

CASE 3
 The parents of Maria, a 14-year-old girl, became conscious when they noticed dark patches forming on her armpits and groin area. They initially attributed them to hormonal changes during puberty but became worried when the patches did not fade over time. They took her to a pediatrician, who diagnosed her with AN and recommended lifestyle changes to improve her overall health.



These are just a few cases that several endocrinologists and dermatologists are getting frequently which they say is being often attributed to sweltering heat waves. But health experts warn that in actuality, the AN signals something deeper than just a change in appearance.

Endocrinologist **Dr Lakshmi Nagendra**, Associate Professor, Department of Endocrinology, JSS Medical College, Mysore recently tweeted, "This patient with velvety patches on neck came with cosmetic concerns and was diagnosed with diabetes. This is known as AN and could be a harbinger for underlying diabetes and metabolic disorders. Get yourself tested!"
Dr Sunita Sayammagaru, a renowned Diabetologist and Endocrinologist too highlighted the issue as she posted, "As we navigate through the scorching heat wave in Telangana, it's essential to address concerns regarding our children's skin health. I've noticed quite a few mothers approaching me, mistaking their kids' darkened neck regions for sun tan and seeking creams to alleviate the darkening. AN manifests as darkening of the skin and the appearance of blackish, velvety patches around the neck, armpits, and groin. "Sometimes, skin tags may also be present. Importantly, this condition is frequently associated with obesity and metabolic syndrome, with insulin resistance being a common underlying disturbance. "Insulin resistance is a precursor to developing prediabetes and diabetes, occurring when the child begins producing more insulin than usual. Therefore, addressing AN is not merely a cosmetic concern but a significant health issue that warrants attention. "It's essential to understand that there are no cosmetic treatments for AN. Treatment lies in addressing the root cause, which primarily involves weight loss.

Given the alarming progression of diabetes in India, focusing on weight loss is imperative for the well-being of these children. "I urge all parents to prioritize their children's health by seeking appropriate medical guidance and adopting lifestyle changes aimed at promoting weight loss and improving metabolic health. Together, we can safeguard the future health of our children and mitigate the risk of developing chronic conditions like diabetes. "It is usually seen in Obesity and Metabolic syndrome and the underlying disturbance is Insulin Resistance. Insulin Resistance is a precursor to developing prediabetes and Diabetes and occurs when the child starts

producing more insulin than is usually seen. "The only definitive treatment is lifestyle modification which ensures weight loss. And given the rate at which Diabetes is progressing in India, weight loss is a must for these kids. **Dr Naval Vikram**, a well-known endocrinologist at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi said that insulin resistance, which physically manifests as AN can lead to type 2 diabetes. He explained insulin resistance occurs when the body's cells do not respond effectively to insulin, a hormone that helps regulate blood sugar levels. To compensate, the pancreas produces more insulin,

leading to higher levels in the bloodstream. This excess insulin stimulates the growth and multiplication of skin cells, resulting in the appearance of AN. He said AN can be found in conditions such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, polycystic ovary syndrome, and certain drugs or endocrine disorders. The underlying causes must be identified and treated, as AN itself can be considered a marker for these conditions. **Dr Naval** has conducted several studies in the field of metabolic disorders with special emphasis on insulin resistance and obesity and his work explained insulin resistance also plays a significant

role in the development of type 2 diabetes. Over time, the pancreas becomes unable to maintain sufficient insulin production, leading to consistently high blood sugar levels. **Dr Sunita** added that weight loss mainly happens with diet control. Weight loss doesn't happen much with exercise. There is no point in a child cycling for 45 minutes and eating biscuits and cakes. Food control alone is the mantra. "The easiest way for a child to lose weight is to restrict processed foods and junk foods. Anything that comes out of a packet like chips, crisps, instant noodles, or biscuits to be avoided. Anything made out of maida like bread, burgers, buns, pizza, etc to be avoided. Anything sugary to be avoided like soft drinks, carbonated drinks, sweets, chocolates etc. Anything deep fried, especially deep fried items from outside to be avoided." According to **Dr Atula Gupta**, Dermatologist, Skin Aid Clinic at Gurugram, AN appearance can cause distress and self-consciousness. There is no single "cure" for prediabetic pigmentation or AN, she said, noting that the most effective treatment approach is multifaceted, combining targeted therapies like topical medications or lasers with management of the underlying cause. "While treatments for AN can help improve the appearance of darkened skin patches, they may not eliminate them. "It is essential to have realistic expectations and understand that results may vary depending on the severity of the condition and individual response to treatment. @ Fortunately, there are several treatment options available, including creams and laser therapies, that can help improve this pigmentation.

She said that Retinoids, derived from vitamin A, are commonly used to treat AN by promoting cell turnover and exfoliation of the affected skin. Topical retinoids help to lighten pigmentation and improve the texture of the skin over time. Tretinoin, a topical retinoid, has shown some success in reducing hyperpigmentation and thickening associated with pre-diabetic pigmentation. Similarly, agents like ammonium lactate can help remove excess keratin buildup, a hallmark feature of pre-diabetic pigmentation. "Then we have laser treatments which offer a more targeted approach for managing pre-diabetic pigmentation," she added.

NEWS BRIEF

International Nurses Day celebrated

Organ donation from brain dead patients can indeed be a lifeline for those in need of organs, such as hearts and livers. It's essential to raise awareness about organ donation and encourage people to consider this selfless act that can make a significant difference in the lives



of others, said **Dr Vimal Bhandari**, former Director of the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO). He was speaking at an event held at ESIC Medical College and Hospital, Faridabad recently to mark the International Nurses Day as a part of the Continuing Nursing Education (CNE) program of the College. It was inaugurated by its Dean, Professor Asim Das. The occasion was graced by College Medical Superintendent **Dr AK Pandey**, Dean **Dr. Sandeep**, besides senior administrative staff, including **AK Ranga** Deputy Director. **Dr Bhandari**, who currently heads Kidney Transplant Unit and Department of Surgery, ESIC Medical College also led the organ donation pledge taken by the nurses at the college and hospital. A comprehensive discussion was also held on palliative care, pain management, and psychological aspects of severely ill patients.



A mother's love is everything. It is what brings a child into this world. It is what molds their entire being. A mother's love is the strongest energy known to man."
 —**Jamie McGuire**

"A mother's arms are more comforting than anyone else's."
 —**Princess Diana**

"A mother's love for her child is like nothing else in the world. It knows no law, no pity, it dares all things and crushes down remorselessly all that stands in its path."
 —**Agatha Christie**

Nursing in India: Insights from a Male Nurse

In India, nursing remains predominantly female bastion, but perceptions are changing, breaking stereotypes along the way. Meet **KANISHK YADAV**, a Nursing Officer at AIIMS, Delhi, whose journey into the profession was sparked by his mother's treatment in a hospital, where he witnessed the profound respect given to healthcare staff. In a discussion with **ARCHANA JYOTI**, he offers a glimpse into his role, challenges, and aspirations within this evolving landscape

What inspired you to pursue a career in nursing?
 My mother's gallstone treatment in a hospital during my 10th grade ignited my interest in healthcare, seeing the respect for the staff there motivated me to become a healthcare worker.

Could you describe your typical workday as a male nurse?
 Working in a high-dependency unit, I care for critically ill patients and assist over 50 patients daily with various blood-related treatments across hospitals and departments.

Have you faced any specific challenges or prejudices as a male nurse in a predominantly female-dominated profession in India?
 Despite nursing being female-dominated, I've experienced acceptance and support from colleagues. The increasing presence of male nurses globally has positively influenced acceptance by patients over time.

Do you feel your gender influences your career advancement opportunities in nursing?
 Once one becomes a professional nurse, opportunities are equal for all, irrespective of gender.

How do cultural norms and societal expectations influence

your role as a male nurse in India?
 Nursing has its code of ethics based on cultural norms and societal expectations, emphasizing patient comfort, safety, and privacy. These guidelines are easier to follow now with increased male nurse representation.

How do you navigate gender-specific cultural sensitivities while providing care to patients of different genders?
 We explain procedures to patients and relatives, offering assistance from female colleagues if needed, ensuring compliance with ethical standards during all medical procedures.

Do you believe there's been a shift in societal perceptions regarding male nurses in India in recent years?
 There are few states left where we find only female nurses. Now, we can see representation of male nurses from every corner of the country. This shows the society has accepted male nurses. During Covid-Pandemic we all must have seen many motivational stories of male nurses working tirelessly along with their female colleagues. Many male nurses have received Florence Nightingale for their exemplary work, I think these all have helped us.

What support systems or



KANISHK YADAV, Nursing Officer at AIIMS, Delhi

resources do you feel are necessary to enhance the representation and inclusion of male nurses in Indian healthcare settings?
 Patients' feedback is most important to make our presentation stronger. They all work as ambassadors for us. If they are satisfied with our work then the policymakers will start thinking of us as far as our participation is concerned. Second, our work is teamwork, if my team members from bottom to top feel the same, also helps us a lot. All Policymakers (Health) empower a particular group after getting positive feedback from these two. My

BREAKING THE SHIELD

DR T DILIP KUMAR, serving as the President of the Indian Nursing Council, and **DR. RAMLING B. MALI**, holding the position of President at the Maharashtra Nursing Council, stand as notable examples of male leaders in the nursing profession. **STANLY JONES** is the Chief Nursing Superintendent at the Southern Railways Hospital in Chennai. **Demand for Male Nurses in the Nursing Profession**
 In India, at least 20.5% of nurses in 2018 were male, according to a WHO report.

concern is to give an equal chance to all team members to represent themselves.

How does your workplace promote diversity and inclusion among nursing staff?
 Our workplace reflects "unity in diversity," with staff from various states collaborating effectively, fostering an environment conducive to learning and growth.

Have you observed any gender-specific differences in roles or responsibilities among male and female nurses in your workplace?
 Roles in the medical field are gender-neutral, but as a male nurse, I may have certain responsibilities towards female patients, such as during CPR procedures. During CPR, I am supposed to take charge of giving compressions and a female colleague can be given the responsibility of medication, calling other team members, activating the alarm, etc.

What strategies do you employ to foster collaboration and teamwork among colleagues, irrespective of gender differences?
 We attend training sessions, workshops, and seminars, participate in clinical case discussions, and engage in regular communication to foster a collaborative environment.

What are your career aspirations within the nursing profession?
 I aim to inspire change through exemplary work and community service, believing in the principle of leading by example. I learned this during the COVID-19 pandemic when I requested to deputize in the COVID-19 ICU and the story went viral after one of the faculty members saw this. I received hundreds of messages and calls from every corner of India and my story inspired them a lot to work for the nation in crisis. Same is the story during blood donation, organizing medical camps, etc.

What advancements and best practices do you find in nursing, particularly in the Indian healthcare context vis-à-vis worldwide?
 India's healthcare system is evolving rapidly, with initiatives like the establishment of nursing simulation labs and new nursing colleges, indicating a commitment to producing skilled nurses.

What advice would you give to aspiring male nurses in India, considering the unique challenges and opportunities they might face?
 I encourage aspiring male nurses to master their craft, and work with dedication, compassion, and passion, embracing challenges as opportunities for growth.

How do you envision the role of male nurses evolving in Indian healthcare in the coming years?
 It's not limited to any gender. I would say that the role of Nurses in Indian Healthcare is increasing and becoming demanding day by day. As the healthcare system in India strengthens, it would require more skilled and empowered nurses to fulfill the requirements and upliftment of the healthcare system.

What changes or initiatives do you believe are necessary to further promote gender diversity and inclusivity in nursing in India?
 Recruitment initiatives like the inclusion of male nurses in the Military Nursing Services would promote gender diversity. Exclusionary practices should be addressed to ensure equal opportunities for all nurses.

Do you foresee any specific trends or challenges that might impact the nursing profession, particularly for male nurses, in India?
 Gender-specific reservations in nursing vacancies and the need for specialization present challenges. However, initiatives to address these issues and meet the growing healthcare demand are imperative for the profession's advancement.



GT FACE FORMIDABLE KKR IN MUST WIN IPL GAME

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Shubman Gill's return to form will provide a big boost to Gujarat Titans as they square off against table-toppers Kolkata Knight Riders in their must-win IPL game here on Monday. Gill roared back into form with his fourth IPL hundred to keep GT's slim playoff hopes alive with a comfortable win against Chennai Super Kings at home in their last outing. Gill and Sai Sudharsan's twin centuries were the cornerstone of the hosts' huge total and their role will be crucial once again as they face KKR, which has become the first team to qualify for the playoffs. As many as seven teams are still in the race for the playoffs. While Rajasthan Royals (16) and Sunrisers Hyderabad (14) are well-placed at second and third position, three teams -- CSK, Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants -- are at 12 points each. GT and Royal Challengers Bengaluru are at 10 points and can reach a maximum of 14 points. With a negative net run-rate, GT's chance are the least and it will take a miracle for the former champions to sneak into the top four. However, one thing is clear,



GT will once again have to play out of their skin and register big wins to keep their mathematical chances alive. GT's bowling has lacked teeth this season with the pacers inconsistent and spinners leaking runs. But the bowlers did manage to snap three CSK wickets in the first three overs in their last outing. Mohit Sharma's variations and knuckle balls were effective and Rashid Khan's

guile also stood out and they would hope for another good outing. But it will again boil down to the top-order batting, which has failed to fire in the last few games before Gill and Sudharsan came up with sensational tons en route a record 210 opening stand. KKR, on the other hand, need just one win in their remaining two games to seal a top-two finish after they

qualified for the playoffs with an 18-run win over Mumbai Indians in a rain-hit game last night. Sunil Narine (461 runs & 15 wickets) has carried the team with his all-round brilliance, while fellow West Indian Andre Russell has been another impactful player with 222 runs and 15 wickets this season. Leg spinner Varun Chakaravathy with 18 wickets in his kitty has been in a good

rhythm. Phil Salt too has given the team sensational starts but has been off the boil a bit in the last three innings. Others such as Angkrish Raghuvanshi and Ramandeep Singh have also stepped up when needed as the two-time champions emerged as the most consistent team this season. The venue has proved to be batter-friendly and has witnessed some high-scoring

games. GT has beaten KKR twice in the last three meetings but the hosts can't lower their guard as it was here where Rinku Singh had given them a nightmare when he slammed Yash Dayal for five successive sixes in the final over last year. Teams (from): **Kolkata Knight Riders:** Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat (wk), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakaravathy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Gus Atkinson, Allah Ghazanfar and Phil Salt. **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, Shahrulkhan Khan, Sushant Mishra, Kartik Tyagi, Manav Suthar, Spencer Johnson, Sandeep Warrier and BR Sharath.



KKR's Varun Chakaravathy made things difficult for MI batters: Brett Lee

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Varun Chakaravathy's ability to be consistently among wickets for Kolkata Knight Riders drew praise from former Australian tearaway bowler Brett Lee, who said he made life difficult for Mumbai Indians batters in a rain-shortened low-scoring game. Chakaravathy bowled miserly and took two wickets for 17 runs as KKR won by 18 runs to become the first team to seal an IPL playoff berth on Saturday. Chakaravathy (18 scalps) is the third-highest wicket-taker so far this season behind MI's Jasprit Bumrah and PBKS's Harshal Patel, both of whom are on 20 wickets. "He bowled beautifully. He made efforts to pick the hard length, he banged the ball short in the wicket which did not allow the batsmen to get underneath the ball and

made the cross-bat shots difficult," Lee told JioCinema on Sunday. Former Royal Challengers Bengaluru high-performance director Mike Hesson said KKR batter Venkatesh Iyer seems to be relishing punishing the Mumbai Indians bowlers. Venkatesh has struck two half centuries this season and came close to striking a third before he was dismissed on 42 (21 balls) as he emerged the highest run-getter on both sides at the Eden Gardens on Saturday. "He seems to love playing against Mumbai Indians. He got hit on the knee earlier but that did not seem to stop him. He timed everything beautifully, batted with a strike rate of over 200 and when everybody else was struggling because of the seaming ball, he played a match-winning hand," said Hesson.

We win together, we lose together: Rana reveals KKR winning mantra

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The key to Kolkata Knight Riders' success this season lies in their players' newfound ability to support each other through highs and lows, something that was "missing" over the past two years, feels the team's vice-captain Nitish Rana. The two-time former champions became the first team to seal the playoff berth with a facile 18-run win over Mumbai Indians in a 16-over rain-interrupted IPL match at Eden Gardens on Saturday. This was the first time since 2021 that KKR made the last four stages. "We win together and we lose together; that's the dressing room environment we have. It's very

important to place hands on each other's shoulders, and I feel it was missing for the last one to two years," Rana said in the post-match media interaction here. With this win, they have consolidated their position atop the standings with 18 points. With two games to go, KKR are now well-placed for a top-two finish. The big reality check for KKR had come against Punjab Kings who smashed South Africa's record of the highest successful run-chase by gunning down 262 with eight balls to spare in an IPL fixture at Eden Gardens on April 26. "We felt really bad that day. I was witness to the dressing room, only three-four ate dinner that night," he recalled.



Rana, who led the side the previous season in regular skipper Shreyas Iyer's absence, made a comeback from a finger injury after missing their last 10 matches. Having scored a crucial 23-ball 33 on his return, the lefthander said he had anxiety pangs and had a sleepless night. "To be honest I was not able to touch the bat for 20-22 days because of the injury. Then slowly it started falling into place. I used to play innings in my mind. "I couldn't sleep the whole night yesterday. It seemed I'm playing the first IPL match of my life. I slept only around 7.30-8 am such was the anxiety. "It seemed I was playing my first match, you have to increase your

hunger to do well. Luckily I had that thing in me," he said. Lacked momentum: Piyush Chawla For Mumbai Indians, who are already out of the playoff race, this was their ninth loss as they end their forgettable season facing Lucknow Super Giants on May 17. Veteran leg-spinner Piyush Chawla blamed it on their lack of momentum this season. "T20 is about momentum, and we didn't get that momentum right from the beginning. Some days we bowled well, but our batting didn't click, and sometimes our batters did well, but the bowlers ended up leaking runs," Chawla said. "As a unit, we have failed in a few games, and we have to accept that

as a team. We have a brilliant lineup, but things didn't fall into place. "Today also, we started off brilliantly, but that spell of (Sunil) Narine and Varun (Chakaravathy) actually made the difference. You have to give credit to their bowlers," he added. The 35-year-old, who has played 191 matches in the IPL in four different franchises including KKR, feels it's not over for him yet. To a query if he would be back in action next season, Chawla gave a cheeky reply. "You tell me, if I should be playing with the way I'm bowling? If you have given your permission, of course I will see you somewhere next time," he signed off.

OTHER SPORTS

We are working to be in best shape possible for Paris: India men hockey captain

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Indian men's hockey team has identified areas that "needed attention" following its whitewash by Australia in the five-Test series and is ready for the tough European leg of the Pro League, said skipper Harmanpreet Singh on Sunday. Last month, India, the Tokyo Olympics bronze medallists, lost all their matches to the Kookaburras, raising doubts about their preparations for the Paris Games later this year. But drag-flicker Harmanpreet said the squad has done a lot of high-intensity training and the confidence in the side continues to grow. "We are in the last stages of an intense training block right now. The team has worked on the areas we felt needed attention after the tour of Australia," said Harmanpreet in a Hockey India release. "Soon, we will head to Europe to play some essential matches in the Pro League 2023/24 to test ourselves against some tough opponents like Argentina, Belgium, Germany, and Great Britain. "The chemistry in the squad continues to grow and with only 75 days left for the Paris Olympics we are working to be in the best shape possible," he added. India will begin their Olympic campaign against New Zealand on July 27. The other teams in Pool B are Belgium, Australia, Argentina, and Ireland. Pool A comprises the



Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, South Africa, and hosts France. India vice-captain Hardik Singh said the experience of stalwarts like goalkeeper PR Sreejesh and former captain Manpreet Singh has come in handy while preparing youngsters for the Summer Games. "The team is leaving no stone unturned in our endeavour to change the colour of our previous medal and clinch gold at the Olympics this time. We have players like PR Sreejesh and Manpreet Singh who could be playing their fourth Olympics along with quite a few players who could be playing their third Olympics, including our captain. "Their experience has been instrumental in moulding some of the younger players we have in the squad right now. Only 75 days remain for the Paris Olympics and we cannot wait to begin our Olympic journey," added Hardik.

Praggnanandhaa beats Carlsen but remains third in Superbet chess

PTI ■ WARSAW

India's R Praggnanandhaa scored yet another victory over world number one Magnus Carlsen of Norway to keep himself afloat even as Wei Yi of China stretched his lead to a massive 2.5 points in the Superbet rapid and blitz chess tournament, a part of the Grand Chess Tour. With nine rounds still to come in the blitz event, Wei Yi has amassed 20.5 points with seven wins on the first day of blitz. Ending the day with 7.5 out of a possible nine, Yi, seems like a man possessed and unless a hurricane hits him, is poised to win the first leg of the

Grand Chess Tour. Carlsen, on 18, is a distant second at this point and the main reason behind that is Praggnanandhaa, who has been beating the world number one often these days in the faster version of the game. Praggnanandhaa, however is far behind the leaders with 14.5 points which makes it literally a two-horse race for the title. In fourth spot is Arjun Erigaisi on 14 points while Duda Jan-Krzysztof of Poland is right behind him on 13. Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan stands sixth on 12.5, a full point clear of Vincent Keymer of Germany



and the eighth spot is now taken by early leader Kirill Shevchenko of Romania with 11 points. Anish Giri of Holland improved a little to be ninth on 10.5 while the blitz

remained a cause for worry for world championship challenger D. Gukesh who is languishing at the last spot with 9.5 points in the USD 1,75,000 prize money tournament.

Carlsen notably mentioned that his nervous system had collapsed following his second-round loss against Praggnanandhaa. The world number one ended with six points out of nine, which is by all standards a decent result but following his loss to the Indian he blundered again and went down to Abdusattorov from a winning position. Wei Yi started the day with a loss against Gukesh but recovered in quick time to only concede a draw to Carlsen while winning the rest of the seven games. For Gukesh, it was a tough day despite a great start against the tournament

leader as the Indian could only score 2.5 points in all. With victories over Praggnanandhaa and Gukesh, Arjun ensured he remained in contention for a podium finish. Losing to Wei Yi and Carlsen, Arjun scored five wins and two draws in his other games and will be optimistic on the final day of the event. Final results rapid: 1. Wei Yi 20.5; 2. Magnus Carlsen 18; 3. R. Praggnanandhaa 14.5; 4. Arjun Erigaisi 14; 5. Duda Jan-Krzysztof 13; 6. Nodirbek Abdusattorov 12.5; 7. Vincent Keymer 11.5; 8. Kirill Shevchenko 11; 9. Anish Giri 10.5; 10. D.Gukesh 9.5.

Deeksha sets new Indian record

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian track athlete K M Deeksha set a new national record in the women's 1500m while Avinash Sable finished second in men's 5000m event at the Sound Running Track Fest in Los Angeles. The 25-year-old Deeksha finished third in the final on Saturday after running the distance in 4:04.78, bettering the previous record of 4:05.39 set by Harmilan Bains in 2021 at the National Athletics Championships in Warangal. Deeksha's previous personal best was a 4:06.07 set in the final of the National Inter-State Athletics Championships at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar in 2023, where she upstaged Bains to win gold. Deeksha who is part of Amroha, UP has been part of the MP Athletics academy for the last five years training



under coach S K Prasad. Parul Chaudhary ran 15:10.69s in the women's 5000m to finish fifth. Parul narrowly missed out on improving her national record while compatriot Ankitika ended 10th with a time of 15:28.88. Sable finished second in the men's 5000m with a time of 13:20.37 and not his pet 3000m steeplechase event,

and in the same event, Gulveer Singh ran a 13:31.95. Sable's 5000m national record time is 13:19.30. Kartik Kumar ran the last lap in 62sec in the men's 10000m but that could only fetch him a second-place finish. He clocked 28:07.66s. This is a World Athletics Continental Tour bronze level event.

Messi plays through a scare, Inter Miami rallies past Montreal 3-2 for fifth straight win

AP ■ MONTREAL, (AP)

Lionel Messi played the entire game despite a first-half injury scare, Benjamin Cremaschi broke a tie in the 59th minute and Inter Miami overcame an early two-goal deficit to beat Montreal 3-2 on Saturday night for its fifth consecutive Major League Soccer victory. Luis Suarez got his 11th goal of the season for Inter Miami, and Matias Rojas scored off a free kick. Jules-Anthony Vilsaint and Bryce Duke scored for Montreal (3-5-3). Inter Miami (8-2-3) extended its unbeaten streak to seven matches (5-0-2) despite Messi being held without a goal or an assist for the first time in his nine MLS appearances this season. Inter Miami is 7-0-2 in those nine games; one of its losses came against Montreal in March, a game where Messi didn't play. Playing in Canada

for the first time, Messi briefly left late in the first half after some sort of issue with his left knee after being fouled by defender George Campbell. The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner as the world's best player went down immediately, holding his knee and writhing in pain. Inter Miami's medical staff went onto the field to treat Messi, who got up after about two minutes and walked to the Miami sideline. He was not subbed out, which allowed him a chance to return moments later. And for whatever reason, the match changed in that moment. Inter Miami was down 2-0 when Messi got hurt; it was 2-1 when he returned and tied moments after he got back onto the field. Rojas scored off a free kick - one that Messi would have ordinarily taken - to get Inter Miami on the board, and Suarez tapped in a

goal off a corner kick late in first-half stoppage time. Suarez became the third player in MLS history to score 11 goals in his first 800 minutes of a season, joining Mamadou Diallo (11 in 2000) and Ola Kamara (11 in 2021). The go-ahead goal came when Rojas sent a ball into open space and Cremaschi ran it down - then made a second effort to nudge the ball just clear of two defenders and into the net for a 3-2 lead. Messi had two chances in the final minutes to extend the lead, both narrowly missing. Hundreds of fans greeted Inter Miami when the team arrived at its hotel Friday night and Montreal, in part because of Messi joining Major League Soccer last summer, sold out its 15,000 season tickets for the first time since the club joined MLS in 2012. Messi has scored in 31 countries.