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ELECTRIC MODEL RANGE

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12 SPORTS



Polling goes south as mercury heads north

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As swathes of north India stewed in brutal heat during the peak of summer, voter apathy continued in the fifth phase of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, with voter turnout recorded at 57.46 per cent (tentative until 8:30 pm) in 49 constituencies across six States and two Union Territories. This phase saw sporadic incidents of violence in West Bengal and a poll boycott in a village in Uttar Pradesh.

The highest polling percentage was in West Bengal (73 per cent), while the lowest was in Maharashtra (49.04 per cent). This was the smallest phase in terms of the number of constituencies for which voting took place.

Low voter turnout in the fifth phase sent political parties, including the BJP, into a tizzy. After Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency, one of the 49 seats voting in the fifth phase registered 54.49 per cent voter turnout seems heading for the highest turnout in the last eight Lok Sabha elections.

This is a record of sorts for the constituency in north Kashmir for any general election held so far. The best turnout in the last thirty-five year history of polling in Baramulla seat was 61.09 per cent, in the 1984 general

elections. This comes after Srinagar recorded 38.49 per cent polling during the fourth phase. Baramulla is one of the three seats in the Kashmir division of J&K other than Srinagar and Anantnag-Rajouri-where the BJP has not fielded any candidates. In 2019, the constituency recorded a turnout of 34.6 per cent, whereas in 1989, it was at a mere 5.48 per cent, the commission said.

As per the EC's voter turnout App, Ladakh recorded at 67.15 per cent, Jharkhand at 63.00 per cent and Bihar 52.60 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir 54.67 per cent, Odisha 60.72 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 57.79 per cent. In Maharashtra, the Dindori seat recorded highest voter turnout of 57.06 per cent, Bhiwandi recorded 49.43 per cent, Dhule 48.81 per cent, Dindori 57.06 per cent, Kalyan 41.70 per cent, Mumbai South 46.91 per cent, Mumbai North Central 47.46 per cent, Mumbai North East 48.67 per cent, Mumbai North West 49.79 per cent, Mumbai South 44.63 per cent, Mumbai South Central 48.26 per cent, Nashik 51.16 per cent, Palghar 54.32 per cent, Thane 48.04 per cent and Kalyan 41.70 per cent.

In 14 Lok Sabha seats of Uttar Pradesh, Amethi and Raebareli, two well-known constituencies in the State recorded voter turnout



UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addresses a campaign meeting in support of BJP candidate for East Delhi seat Harsh Malhotra for Lok Sabha polls, in New Delhi, on Monday

at 54.17 per cent and 57.85 per cent respectively. Union Minister Smriti Irani from the BJP is contesting here while Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is contesting from Raebareli.

After the fifth round of polling in the ongoing Lok Sabha election, the Congress on Monday said only 15 days remain for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's departure, claiming that winds of change are blowing across the country and the INDIA Opposition Bloc is set to sweep the ruling NDA away.

AAP's trouble mounts over foreign donations

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In yet another setback to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his party, of which he is the national convenor, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has alleged that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) received Rs 7.08 crore in foreign funds from 2014 to 2022, allegedly violating the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), the Representation of People Act (RPA), and the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

In its dossier to the Union Home Ministry, the ED has revealed that the AAP received funds from multiple donors in USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Oman and other countries.

According to the ED, the real identity of foreign donors was concealed in AAP's books to circumvent restrictions on foreign donations to political parties, with donations directly deposited into AAP's IDBI bank account.

The ED investigation revealed that multiple donors have used the same passport numbers for donation, e-mail IDs, mobile numbers and credit cards to donate to the AAP.

The ED has shared all the information with the Union Home Ministry relating to its investigations with details of donors, such as names of the



donor, country of donor, passport number, amount donated, mode of donation and bank account number of receiver, billing name, billing address, billing telephone numbers, billing e-mail, time & date of donation and payment gateway used etc, gathered during the investigation under PMLA, 2002.

The ED, in its investigation, claimed several instances of irregularities in the collection of foreign funds by the AAP and its leaders and accused some of them, including AAP MLA, Durgesh Pathak, of siphoning off the funds collected during a fund-raising event in Canada in 2016, for personal benefits.

The directorate has substantiated the allegations through the contents of e-mails exchanged between various AAP volunteers and functionaries, including Aniket Saxena (coordinator of AAP overseas India), Kumar Vishwas (then convenor of AAP overseas India), Kapil Bhardwaj (then AAP member) and Durgesh Pathak.

The investigations so far revealed that not only amounts were collected through fund-raising campaigns in the USA and Canada and identities of actual donors have been concealed in the books of accounts maintained by the AAP in order to circumvent the restrictions imposed under FCRA on donations by foreign citizens to a political party. But also the analysis of data of foreign donations revealed that multiple donors have used the same passport numbers for donation, used the same passport numbers, e-mail IDs, mobile numbers and credit cards to donate to AAP.



BJP National president JP Nadda chairs party's national general secretaries' meeting, at party headquarters, in New Delhi, on Monday

Two rounds to go, Nadda takes stock of BJP poll fortunes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the hectic Lok Sabha polls campaigning for the remaining two phases, an urgent meeting of top BJP leaders, including general secretaries was convened by party president JP Nadda on Monday at the party headquarters.

Party sources said the meeting was called to review the party's performance so far in the election and devise a strategy for the remaining phases.

BJP national general secretary (organisation) BL Santhosh, national general secretaries Arun Singh, Tarun Chugh, party IT department head Amit Malviya, national media in-charge Anil Baluni, and Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw were among those who were in the meeting.

Sources said Nadda asked all senior leaders and office bearers of the party to play a "more effective role" and make an "active contribution" in the implementation of the party's poll strategy on the ground. BJP chief also reviewed the fifth phase of polling and also discussed the future strategy of the party with regard to the ongoing elections, the sources said.

Iran Prez dies in chopper crash after stinging Israel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/DUBAI

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, the country's Foreign Minister and several other officials were found dead on Monday, hours after their helicopter crashed in a foggy, mountainous region of the country's north-west, state media reported.

Raisi was 63. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei hours later announced Iran's first vice president, Mohammad Mokhber, would serve as the country's acting president until elections are held. Khamenei also announced five days of public mourning.

India announced one-day State mourning on Tuesday as a mark of respect for President Raisi. The Union Home Ministry said the national flag will be flown at half-mast on all buildings where it is regularly flown across India and there will be no official entertainment during the period of State mourning.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Congress president Malliarjun Kharge expressed shock and sadness at the demise of the Iranian President. Modi said, "India stands with Iran in this time of sorrow."

"As a mark of respect to the departed dignitaries, the Government of India has decided that there will be one day's State mourning on May 21 (Tuesday) throughout India," the



spokesperson said.

Meanwhile, state TV gave no immediate cause for the crash that occurred in Iran's East Azerbaijan province. Among the dead was Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, 60.

The helicopter also carried the Governor of Iran's East Azerbaijan province, other officials and bodyguards, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

It was last month when tension had increased in the region after Iran and Israel had clashed in worrying, unprecedented fashion. But temperatures cooled after the intervention of the US and other world powers.

No relief on the horizon till May 24

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

There seems to be no respite from the sweltering heat for the residents of Northwest India, including Delhi, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issuing a stark warning on Monday of impending heatwave to severe heatwave conditions over the next five days in the region.

As temperatures increased to alarming 48-degree Celsius mark in Delhi's Najafgarh and red alerts issued for the national Capital and extensive regions of northwest India, the severity of the situation cannot be overstated. This has also pushed the country's peak power demand to hover near the projected 235 GW level in



Women cover themselves with dupattas to beat blistering heat on Monday in New Delhi

May, following excessive use of cooling appliances like air conditioners and desert coolers.

According to the Union Power Ministry data, the peak power demand or the highest supply in the day has already reached 233 GW on May 6 compared to 221.42 GW recorded a year ago.

The IMD said scorching

heatwave conditions will persist in Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh-Delhi, and West Rajasthan; in some parts of West Uttar Pradesh, East Rajasthan, and northwest Madhya Pradesh during May 20 to May 24, 2024.

Also, the heatwave conditions are likely to be over North Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat during the period.

Health experts said this extreme weather not only poses significant health risks but also disrupts daily life and challenges the day to day activities of the people.

"In the face of such adversity, urgent measures are needed to safeguard the well-being of citizens and mitigate the impact of this blistering heatwave," they said.

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Har Pal Aapke Saath

Offline registration for Char Dham Yatra suspended till May 31

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In view of the increasing number of pilgrims, the State government has decided to suspend the offline registration for the Char Dham Yatra till May 31.



The CM directed the officials to analyse shortcomings in the arrangements and management of the Char Dham Yatra in the last 10 days.

police in the arrangements. He also directed the officers to ensure availability of adequate doctors and medicines on the Yatra routes.

of departments related to drinking water should go to the field and see the drinking water arrangements.

On a firm note, the CM said special focus should be laid on crowd management in the Char Dham Yatra and it should be ensured that the devotees are sent in the Dhams as per the capacity determined.

The CM said that the devotees who have entered the State without registration and want to visit other religious and tourist places other than Char Dhams should be sent there.

On a stern note, the CM said the officers who have been given the responsibility as nodal officers in Kedarnath and Yamunotri should remain in the field continuously and cooperate with the district magistrate concerned and the

During the review of power supply, the CM gave instructions to ensure adequate electricity supplies in the State. He directed that all the three power corporations, U P C L, UJVNL and P I T C U L should work in mutual coordination.

Deploy mechanical excavators 24x7 at Sirohbagad slide zone: Kumar

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Health secretary and secretary in-charge of Char Dham Yatra, R Rajesh Kumar has directed officers of Public Works Department (PWD) and administration for round the clock deployment of mechanical excavators at Sirohbagad landslide zone in Rudraprayag district.



Rudraprayag. He directed the chief medical officer and medical superintendent to ensure that the treatment of the indisposed pilgrims starts on priority basis.

Nagar Panchayat and district panchayat for maintaining sanitation in the Yatra points.

He directed the Jal Sansthan for ensuring proper supply of drinking water in the Yatra.

Kumar also inspected many food outlets and restaurants in Rudraprayag city during his visit. He directed that the edible items should not be kept in open and special care of maintaining quality of food should be done.

The representative of the Vyapar Mandal met the secretary and informed him about the lack of proper drinking water and toilet facilities in Rudraprayag market.

The secretary met the district magistrate Saurabh Gaharwar and superintendent of police Vishakha Ashok Badhane at GMVN guest house. The DM informed the secretary about the arrangements and facilities on the Yatra route of Kedarnath.

The CM Dr HC Martoria informed that five medical officers (MOs) and one physician from other districts have been deployed for Kedarnath Yatra.

Upgrade traffic management plan for Char Dhams considering summer break: DGP

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The director general of police Abhinav Kumar directed the officials to upgrade their action plan for traffic management on Char Dham routes as the number of local pilgrims and tourists is expected to increase soon.

Dham Yatra through proper traffic management on all routes. He said that when traffic pressure increases, the police should make arrangements to halt passengers at designated places.



ly. This will ensure that all can have a smooth and well-organised Darshan without overcrowding in the temple premises.

Tour operator arrested after threatening suicide for Char Dham registration

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police on Monday arrested a tour and travel operator Ravi Kumar Pandey (50), a resident of Uttar Pradesh, on charges of threatening to commit suicide in the transit camp in Rishikesh to allegedly put pressure on the administration for Char Dham registration of pilgrims.



grims to Rishikesh claiming that he will register them for Char Dham Yatra, to extort money from them. Since the government has closed new registrations for Char Dham pilgrimages this month, the employees at the transit camp refused to register the pilgrims.

during a meeting with senior police officials at Joshimath in Chamoli on Monday. He held the meeting regarding the smooth conduct of the Char

eSwasthyaDham app launched for Char Dham pilgrims

App designed to monitor health status of pilgrims, integrated with Char Dham registration portal

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In an initiative aimed at enhancing healthcare and monitoring systems for pilgrims undertaking the Char Dham Yatra, the Health department of Uttarakhand in collaboration with Wadhvani Initiative for Sustainable Healthcare (WIHS) has launched 'eSwasthyaDham' application.



at the screening points managed by WISH and the HANS foundation on the Yatra routes. The status of the health checkups will be updated on

The app. Pilgrims themselves can access this vital information, ensuring transparency and empowering them to make informed decisions about their health.

The chief secretary Radha Raturi said that the health web app underscores the government's unwavering commitment to health and wellbeing of pilgrims during pilgrimage season.

Punjab National Bank E-Auction Sale Notice. Circle Office- 01 Paltan Bazar, PNB House, Dehradun, Uttarakhand. SCHEDULE OF THE SECURED ASSETS. Table with columns: Lot No., Name of The Branch, Name of the Account, Name & Addresses of The Borrower/Guarantor/Mortgagor, Description of the Immovable Properties Mortgaged/Owner's Name (Mortgagors of Property (ies)), (A) Dt. of Demand Notice u/s 13(2) of SARFAESI Act 2002, (B) Outstanding Amount as on, (C) Possession Date u/s 13(4) of SARFAESI Act, 2002, (D) Nature of Possession Symbolic Physical/Constructive, (A) Reserve Price, (B) EMD, (C) Last Date of deposit of EMD, (D) Bid Increase Amount, DATE & TIME OF AUCTION, Details of The Encumbrances Known To The Secured Creditors. Includes details for multiple properties with prices and auction dates.

Opposition hits out at Modi over his minorities remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Opposition on Monday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "not just today but never" acted against them. He, however, made it clear that he is not ready to accept anyone as "special citizens". BJP MP Sudhanshu Trivedi said what the PM has said is the truth and all his policies for the poor have benefitted all. He also said the Congress has constantly violated the secular spirit of the Constitution, and his campaign speeches are aimed at



exposing the opposition parties' bid to appease the minorities with vote bank politics. Reacting to the prime minister's remarks, CPI general secretary D Raja said, "It is completely lie. Modi knows how they (BJP) have been talking about Muslims. Who spoke about mangalsutra, mothers giving births to more children? Muslims and other minorities have been disrespected and deprived of many of their due rights." The BJP-RSS have been pursuing a "sinister design" of

undermining the minorities and ridiculing them, Raja alleged. While TMC MP Sagarika Ghose also slammed the prime minister for his remarks, AAP MP Sanjay Singh said the prime minister's comments were laughable as he talks in the "language of hate daily". "When you think he cannot lie anymore, he speaks another lie... This is the party which garlanded the rapists of Bilkis Bano, this is the party which garlanded those who lynched

Confident of securing youth votes for Congress: IYC

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Confident of securing the youth votes for his party as well as INDIA Bloc alliance members, the youth wing of the Congress — Indian Youth Congress — claims to have toiled hard to set the narrative of perennial problem of unemployment amongst all caste, creed, section, religion and irrespective of degrees and qualifications. "Unemployment, just like poverty is a curse on humanity which has no religion. In the last 10 years of (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's misrule such a vast country has only show growing inequality, restlessness amongst youths, no jobs, no vacancies, no manufacturers to fill the vacuum of earning in every household. Youths have understood that Modi cannot play the Pied Piper of Hamelin by exhibiting false narratives through several platforms of media including the social media where he (PM) and his entire army (Council of Ministers and BJP) keep on sharing vague figures, fake reports of unknown agencies. Youth need jobs to feed their



family, look after this kids for better education and care their elderly parents who needs proper medical attention," said Indian Youth Congress (IYC) president Srinivas BV, in an exclusive interview to *The Pioneer*. Srinivas said the above gist is the Congress Manifesto 2024 Lok Sabha poll which has shaped after millions of interactions done by the party's tallest leader, Rahul Gandhi, during his two Bharat Jodo Yatra — the first one from Kanniyakumari to Kashmir and the second from Manipur to Mumbai. He also questioned the very intention of the BJP State Governments about the exams or job vacancies' paper leaks regularly which he claimed that the job seekers too now under-

stood the 'malafide tactics' of BJP Governments. During his yatra, along with RG, (Rahul Gandhi as mentioned by him), Srinivas claimed that most complaints were on the issues related to demonetisation, GST, pandemic and the combined effect of all these has led to depressions, other medical complications amongst the citizens. "Over these a lot of thoughts were given during the preparations for general elections and the strategy to dislodge the BJP led Government at Centre and in due course in the States. Modi government and BJP Governments have only brought complications in their governance which always hampered the common man. Congress from its inception one and half a century ago first thinks of welfare and social upliftment and work to bridge the gap wherever. If you look soon after Independence the realisation how a visionary statesman like first PM Nehru ji worked to balance the regional imbalance by placing strategically industries, institutions, organisations the benefit of which shall continue for another century. BJP and Team Modi has this understanding but they will never utter a word on these vision because the saffron party has now visions except to dent harmony," Srinivas said who earned lot of laurels for his humane approach during the covid pandemic for creating a team and bank of medicines and oxygen cylinders to distribute to the needy. On a question that what has been the reason that once upon a time Congress' top youth leaders left the party to join BJP, the Youth Congress president said those who were afraid by pressure tactics and intimidations by the ruling party has gone. "Our leader (Rahul Gandhi) says he will never compromise on party ideology and sincerity come whatever may. He always convey us Daro Mat (don't be afraid). During my criss-cross travel for the elections I heard even the citizens of the country have started feeling the same and says that this time they will pass on the idea of Daro Mat. They claimed they are being intimidated by the current regime that Congress will take away their cattle, ornaments (mangalsutra) but the voters have realised yet another chunavi jumla will not reap this time," Srinivas said.

Agnevirees not just soldiers but leaders, innovators, defenders of national sovereignty: CDS Chauhan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Monday said Agnevirees are not just soldiers but also leaders, innovators and defenders of the nation's sovereignty. Interacting with the Agnevirees undergoing training at Maratha Regimental Centre and Airmen Training School (ATS), Belagavi, he underscored the noble purpose of military service and its pivotal role within the military framework. The CDS lauded Agnevirees for choosing the Armed Forces. He stated that it was a testament to their exceptional duty towards the nation, defence ministry said here. Acknowledging the personal challenges faced by the soldiers and their families and the hardships they endure while operating in the challenging environments, General Chauhan assured that despite the challenges, the Agnevirees will find their journey immensely rewarding and their each step, will lead to their personal growth and deep sense of pride in serving the nation. Elaborating the evolving nature of the warfare, the CDS highlighted the complexity and unpredictability of future conflicts to include



Cyber Warfare, Artificial Intelligence and Asymmetric Threats which are now an integral part of the battlefield. He also spoke about technology integration and continuous learning and mentioned that in addition of staying abreast with the latest advancements, there is also a need to showcase innovative approach towards combat. During his visit to ATS, Belagavi, CDS took a tour of the training institute to gain insight into Agnevireevyau training of IAF. He interacted with the third batch of Agnevireevyau trainees undergoing training as per the revised induction pattern introduced by the defence ministry in 2022. He exhorted them to focus on training for becoming technically proficient soldiers,

No attempt be made to reduce area of open air prisons functioning in country, says SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed that there shall be no attempt to reduce the area of open air prisons functioning in the country. Semi-open or open prisons allow convicts to work outside the premises during the day to earn a livelihood and return in the evening. The concept was introduced to assimilate the convicts with society and reduce psychological pressure as they faced difficulties in leading normal lives outside. A bench of Justice BR Gavai and Justice Sandeep Mehta noted advocate K Parameswar, assisting it as an amicus curiae in a matter related to jails and prisoners, submitted that a model draft manual has been prepared by the Centre wherein the nomenclature "open correctional institutions" was used for open air camps/institutions/prisons. "We further direct the (Union) Ministry of Home Affairs to present a status report on recent developments in respect of the open correctional institutions after coming of the Model Prison Manual, 2016, and the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023," the bench said in its order passed on May 17. The bench noted it has been informed that there is a proposal to reduce the area at

Sanganer open air camp in Jaipur. "We thus direct that there shall be no attempt of reduction in area of open air camps/institutions/prisons, wherever they are functioning," the bench said. "The data put on record, wherein such open correctional institutions are shown to be functioning in different names, would further show that the said institutions are not being utilised to their optimum capacity," it said. It noted the amicus curiae submitted that strengthening of the open correctional institutions, apart from addressing the issue of overcrowding of jails, will also help in the rehabilitation of prisoners and do away with caste discrimination faced by them. The top court directed Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal, where such facilities are functioning most robustly, to share their best practices, applicable rules, guidelines and experience on setting up, expansion and management of open correctional institutions with the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA). "The registry shall communicate this order to the chief secretary of the states of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal for compliance," it said.

Kharge heaps praise on Adhir as combative soldier of party

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/KOLKATTA

Days after snubbing him for questioning the trustworthiness of TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday heaped praise on West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, lauding him as a "combative soldier" of the party. Kharge had snubbed Chowdhury, five-time Lok Sabha MP from Bahrampur, last week for his remarks that Banerjee cannot be trusted and that she might go with the BJP. "Vo hamarey ladaku sipahi hain (combative soldier)," he said about Chowdhury, who has only intensified his offensive against the West Bengal chief minister by alleging that she has used violence to crush the Congress in the state and has been helping the BJP. Kharge said some TMC leaders were now trying to rake up the issue of the Congress alliance with the Left but that will not help. "They are trying to present it differently. But it will not happen like this as the Congress party is strong and understands each other. What has happened in West Bengal is that the Congress high command has taken a decision to have a coalition with the Left and we are moving forward with that," Kharge said. The TMC is contesting the Lok



Sabha elections alone in the state, while the Congress and the Left are jointly fighting the polls. On Saturday, Kharge had dismissed Chowdhury's criticism of Banerjee while addressing a joint press conference with Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray and NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar in Mumbai. "Mamata Banerjee is with the alliance. She has recently said that she will join the government. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury will not take the decision. The decision will be taken by me and the high command and those who don't agree will go out," Kharge had said in remarks that riled Chowdhury's supporters in Bengal. Chowdhury, while reacting to Kharge's comments, had said, "I cannot speak in favour of someone who wants to finish me and our party in Bengal politically. This is a battle for every Congress worker. I have spoken on their behalf. I don't want the state Congress to be used for her (Banerjee's) personal agenda and then finish the organisation". After Kharge's remarks, several posters and hoardings of the Congress president were defaced with ink in front of the party's state headquarters in Kolkata on Sunday. Chowdhury had expressed displeasure over the incident and asked party workers to lodge a police complaint. Banerjee, who had initially stated that she will extend outside support to the opposition front INDIA after it comes to power, later said she is very much part of the anti-BJP alliance at the national level and would form the next government with it. However, the West Bengal CM alleged that the state units of both CPI(M) and Congress, who are part of the alliance, have joined hands and helped the BJP in the state. The TMC had walked out of the INDIA bloc in West Bengal in January.

Congress vows to deliver Paanch Nyaya, Pachees Guarantee if INDIA Bloc comes to power

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the Siddaramaiah-led A government completed one year in office, the Congress on Monday said it has successfully implemented all guarantees made to the people of the State and when the INDIA bloc inevitably gets the clear mandate on June 4, the party will deliver by implementing 'Paanch Nyaya Pachees Guarantee'. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said when the Congress makes guarantees to India's voters, it delivers. "It has now been one year of our government in Karnataka, where we have successfully implemented all guarantees made to the people. When the Congress and INDIA

Janbandhan inevitably get the clear and convincing mandate of the people on June 4th, we will deliver again, by implementing our 'Paanch Nyaya Pachees Guarantee'. Ramesh also gave a summary of the Karnataka government's guarantees which have been implemented such as 'Gruhalakshmi' under which every month, 1.21 crore women heads of the family receive 2,000 directly in their accounts from the government, combating inflation and inequality. "With a monthly allocation of Rs. 2,430 crore, close to Rs 23,365 crore has been spent till date for Gruhalakshmi!" he said. Ramesh said under the 'shakti scheme', 60 lakh women in the state travel for free in



buses daily, accounting for 210 crore free rides and costing approximately 5,096 crore. Under the 'Annabhagya', he

said in order to end hunger in Karnataka, the government transfers 5 kg free rice grain to 1.38 crore families and 4.08 crore beneficiaries. Ramesh also listed the other schemes implemented by the Karnataka government such as 'Yuva Vidhi' — to support youth looking for jobs, graduates are given Rs. 3000/month and diploma holders Rs. 1500/month — and 'Gruhajyoti' under which 200 units of free electricity is benefiting over 1.67 crore families. "Many of our signature guarantees for the Lok Sabha elections are built on the Karnataka Model: Mahalakshmi: Rs. 1 lakh per year transferred directly to the account of one woman in each poor family; Doubling of

the individual allowance of free ration under the National Food Security Act to 10 kg per person; Pehli Naukri Pakki: Guaranteed one-year apprenticeship of Rs. 1 lakh per year to all graduates and diploma holders," the Congress leader said. The Congress' vision for India is being implemented in Karnataka today -- freedom from hunger and from price rise, affordable healthcare, jobs for youth, and prosperity for all, Ramesh said. The Congress has pitched its election campaign on 'Paanch Nyaya' — Yuva Nyaya, Naari Nyaya, Shramik Nyaya, Kisaan Nyaya and Hissedari Nyaya -- under which it has promised 25 main guarantees for the people.

Three Indian Navy ships in Philippines to strengthen maritime cooperation: Official

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Three Indian Navy ships are in the Philippines with an aim to further strengthen maritime cooperation with that country, an official said on Monday. Their visit is part of an operational deployment of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet to the South China Sea. Indian Navy ships — INS Delhi, INS Shakti and INS Kiltan — arrived in Manila on Sunday, a spokesperson of the Navy said. The aim is to further strengthen the long-standing friendship and mar-

itime cooperation, the official said. The ships were accorded a warm welcome by the Philippines Navy. During the visit, personnel from both the navies will engage in wide range of professional interactions, including subject matter expert exchange, sports fixtures, cross-deck visits, cultural visits and collaborative community outreach programmes, the spokesperson said. "The ships will also participate in a Maritime Partnership Exercise (MPX) with the Philippines Navy," he said.

ICMR distances itself from research stating 50 per cent of Covaxin recipients complained of infection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Monday distanced itself from the study, conducted by researchers from the Banaras Hindu University that stated that nearly 50 per cent of 926 participants who received Covaxin complained of infections during the follow-up period, predominated by viral upper respiratory tract infections. Covaxin has been indigenously developed in India by the Hyderabad based Bharat

Biotech in collaboration with the ICMR. ICMR Director General Dr Rajiv Bahl criticised the study for its poor methodology and design, and clarified the article was misleading and erroneously "acknowledged" the government's premier medical research institute. Dr Bahl said the study had no control arm of unvaccinated individuals for comparing the rates of events between the vaccinated and unvaccinated groups. Hence, the reported events in the study cannot be linked or attributed to COVID-19 vaccination.

The ICMR is not associated with the study and has not provided any financial or technical support for the research, Dr Bahl said. The ICMR DG has also written a letter to the authors of the paper and Editor of the journal to immediately remove the acknowledgement to ICMR and publish an erratum. The research paper, titled 'Long-Term Safety Analysis of the BBV152 Coronavirus Vaccine in Adolescents and Adults: Findings from a 1-Year Prospective Study in North India' stated that nearly one-



third of the 926 participants in the study who received Bharat Biotech's anti-Covid vaccine Covaxin reported 'adverse events of special interest', or AESI. Dr Bahl said that ICMR was acknowledged for research support without any prior approval of or intimation to ICMR, which is inappropriate and unacceptable. He stated that ICMR cannot be associated with this poorly designed study which purports to present a "safety analysis" of Covaxin due to several critical flaws. He said the study does not

even provide background rates of observed events in the population, making it impossible to assess the change in incidence of observed events in the post-vaccination period. Baseline information of study participants is missing. The study tool used is inconsistent with 'Adverse Events of Special Interest (AESI)' as defined in the reference provided in the paper for AESI. The method of data collection has a high risk of bias, he said. Dr Bahl also noted that similar acknowledgements to ICMR have been made in

previous papers without permission, raising concerns about the authors' practices. "The authors have been urged to immediately rectify the acknowledgment to ICMR and publish an erratum. Additionally, they are asked to address the methodological concerns raised. Failure to do so may prompt ICMR to consider legal and administrative action," he said. The Editor has been asked to retract the paper which implicitly makes conclusions on vaccine safety which are not supported by evidence.

Congress did not revoke Article 370 for appeasement politics: Shah

PTI ■ KARNAL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday attacked the Congress, saying the party did not revoke Article 370, which allowed special status to Jammu and Kashmir, for the sake of appeasement politics. Addressing an election rally here, Shah reiterated that Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) belongs to India and "we will take it back". The senior BJP leader also attacked the Congress on the Ram temple issue, saying its top leaders such as Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi did not take part in the temple consecration ceremony to please the party's minority vote bank. Targeting the Congress on Kashmir, he said "For appeasement politics, they did not revoke Article 370." The Congress did not revoke the article despite a rise in terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, he said. "You all made Narendra Modi ji the Prime Minister for the second time, and on August 5, 2019, he scrapped Article 370. And now our tricolour proudly flutters in Kashmir," he said.



Addressing the gathering, Shah told the crowd, "Tell me, is Kashmir ours or not? Say it loudly, your voice should reach Kharge." "Kharge sahab, you are 80-year-old but you do not understand the country. Haryana's youth can give their life for Kashmir," Shah said hitting out at the AICC president. Shah was alluding to the AICC president's recent remark on why the prime minister spoke about the abrogation of Article 370 during a rally in Rajasthan and not the issues plaguing the state. The home minister also slammed Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar's atom bomb remark that has sparked a political row.

"I want to tell Rahul (Gandhi) baba from this land of Karnal, listen with open ears, this is the BJP government, PoK belongs to India, will remain ours and we will take it back," he said. In a purported video clip that has gone viral on social media, Aiyar is heard saying 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 have its effect in India too. Shah also asked the Congress and particularly, its party leader B S Hooda why they let the Ram Temple issue linger for 70 years.

He highlighted that all the major developments regarding the temple took place in Modi's second term - the 'bhoomi puja' of the temple land, the victory of the Hindu side in the Ram Janmabhoomi case, and the idol consecration on January 22. The BJP leader also pointed fingers at Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi for not taking part in the "Ram Utsav (consecration) which was happening after 500 years as they feared about their minority vote bank". The Union minister also praised Modi on the occasion for making India prosperous and bringing the country's economy from the 11th to fifth spot.

Post polls, vacation beckons Andhra Pradesh leaders

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

After a whirlwind electioneering and polling, some of the prominent leaders from Andhra Pradesh are currently on a well-deserved break, scattered across diverse destinations, enjoying some much-needed relaxation and rejuvenation. Polls for the 175 Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in the state were held on May 13 and the counting of votes will be taken up on June 4, nationwide. YSRCP supremo and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy on May 17 left for a foreign tour with family. Jagan, who is currently in Europe, is expected to return during the month-end, sources close to him said. The YSRCP chief contested from Pulivendula Assembly segment in the recently concluded polls. Similarly, TDP supremo and Leader of the Opposition Nara Chandrababu Naidu also, along with his family left the country for a vacation after the polls, Telugu Desam Party sources told PTI. "Naidu will be coming back at the end of May. He may also undergo a health check-up in the USA during his vacation," they said. He also visited Shirdi and offered prayers at the Sai Baba temple before embarking on the voyage. The TDP leader is contesting from Kuppam Assembly



constituency. Janasena founder and actor Pawan Kalyan also left for a foreign country after the polls and is expected to return in a couple of days, party sources said while refusing to share details. Kalyan contested from Pithapuram Assembly segment. Naidu's son Lokesh, along with his family is also currently on an international tour. He is contesting from Mangalagiri Assembly seat from where he lost in 2019. The YSRCP contested in all 175 Assembly seats and 25 Lok Sabha segments in the state. As part of a seat-sharing deal among NDA partners, the TDP was allocated 144 Assembly and 17 Lok Sabha constituencies while the BJP contested from six Lok Sabha and 10 Assembly seats. he Janasena fielded candidates in two Lok Sabha and 21 Assembly seats.

62 per cent voter turnout recorded in Jharkhand till 5 pm

PTI ■ RANCHI

A voter turnout of 61.90 per cent was recorded till the end of polling at 5 pm on Monday in the three Lok Sabha constituencies in Jharkhand, officials said. Voting had commenced at 7 am in Chatra, Hazaribag, and Koderma constituencies as part of the second phase of elections in the eastern state. It was peaceful in all the three constituencies, officials said. Hazaribag Lok Sabha seat registered the highest voter turnout of 63.66 per cent, followed by Koderma (61.60 per cent) and Chatra (60.26 per cent). The overall voter turnout in these three constituencies was 61.90 per cent. Among the voters in Hazaribag was 81-year-old Abhijit Sen, who exercised his franchise at polling booth no 153 in Hazaribag town. "From voting during the time of first Prime Minister Pt Jawaharlal Nehru to present PM Modi, I have voted in all the Lok Sabha and assembly elections since 1962," Sen claimed. First-time voter Aadya Chandra, 18, said she was happy to participate in the festival of democracy. Similarly, 91-year-old Shankar Lal Choudhary, who voted at Koderma, also expressed his happiness to take part in the process. This phase involved 22 candidates in Chatra, 15 in Koderma, and 17 in

Hazaribag. In Hazaribag, villagers boycotted polling at booths 183 and 184 in Kusumba village under Katkamdag due to unmet demands for a bridge. About 58.34 lakh voters, including 28.35 lakh women, are eligible to vote in these constituencies. Chief Electoral Officer K Ravi Kumar said this phase covered seven districts and three parliamentary constituencies. Kumar said there were 6,705 booths, including 6,130 in rural areas. Among these, 73 were managed by women, 13 by persons with disabilities, and 13 by youths. Chatra constituency has 16.89 lakh voters, including 8.27 lakh women, with 1,899 booths. Koderma has 22.05 lakh voters, including 10.65 lakh women, with 2,552 booths. Hazaribag has 19.39 lakh voters, including 9.42 lakh women, and 2,254 booths. The BJP has fielded Manish Jaiswal from Hazaribag and Kalicharan Singh from Chatra. The Congress has nominated KN Tripathi from Chatra and Jai Prakash Bhai Patel from Hazaribag. CPI (ML) Liberation has given ticket to Bagodar MLA Vinod Kumar Singh from Koderma. BJP Koderma nominee Annapurna Devi promised to focus on employment generation and educational improvements after winning the polls.

Restoration of JK statehood is solemn promise we have made, will stand by it: Modi

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said his government has made a "solemn promise" for restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood and will stand by it, adding the Centre was working very hard to create the right conditions. Noting that the record voter turnout in Srinagar is one of the "most gratifying things" he has seen in his tenure, Modi said people of Jammu and Kashmir have seen the NDA government's commitment to democracy enhancement in the region, "even at the cost of us sacrificing power for ourselves". "The restoration of statehood is a solemn promise we have made and we stand by it. We are working very hard to create the right conditions so that it can be done expeditiously," he told PTI in an exclusive interview here Sunday night.

The Modi government had abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, in August 2019 and the erstwhile state was bifurcated into two Union Territories — Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. "Through the abrogation of Article 370, we today have witnessed not just the dreams and aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir coming into fruition but also their enthusiasm for participating in one of the biggest festivals in any democracy — elections," Modi said. He said the voting percentage in Srinagar, once a hotbed for all kinds of radical elements, witnessed the highest voter turnout in decades. Srinagar recorded a 36.7 per cent turnout—the highest since 1996—in the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections on May 13. The world witnessed the growth and enthusiasm of the people in J and K when they welcomed the delegates from across the world during the G20 events, he added. "The progress that Jammu and Kashmir has made in the last five years gives me immense hope that we are on the right path to restore statehood. We want to institutionalise the positive changes that have taken place and make the gains irreversible so that the people

of the region have to never ever witness the torrid years that generations had to bear. "We want to create a Jammu and Kashmir where violence is history, prosperity is destiny. This is our long term strategy for Kashmir. Our aspiration is that Jammu and Kashmir regains its stature as the hub of culture, knowledge and tourism along with becoming a centre of futuristic technologies like AI (Artificial intelligence)," Modi said. On holding assembly elections in J and K, the prime minister said the Supreme Court has set a date for assembly polls in the region and the Election Commission is mandated to follow the directions of the highest court and it is the best organisation to assess as to when and how it will conduct assembly elections. In December 2023, the apex court had directed the Election Commission to conduct elections in J and K by September 30, 2024. Asked for his assessment on the high turnout in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls in J and K after the abrogation of Article 370, Modi said



Parliament had put its seal of approval on scrapping this provision in August 2019 and the people had given their implicit approval in 2019 itself and beyond by defying all doomday predictions and helping maintain peace in the region. Then in December 2023, he said, the Supreme Court imprinted the judicial seal on the abrogation with an unanimous verdict by a constitution bench. "What the elections in Jammu and Kashmir have done in

2024 is to put a seal of explicit democratic approval as well - the final seal in the trinity of according approval to our historic decision," Modi said. Modi said the BJP is perhaps the only party in the country which walked out of a government so that more power could be devolved to the people. "And we fulfilled our commitment by conducting peaceful local body and Panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir in December 2018."

In June 2018, the BJP, which was part of a coalition government in J and K with the People Democratic Party (PDP), pulled out of the alliance, leading to the fall of the then Mehbooba Mufti government and imposition of central rule. The saffron party then alleged that it became untenable for it to continue its alliance government as "terrorism, violence and radicalisation have risen and fundamental rights of the citizens are under danger in the Valley".

Modi said people of the region have seen his government's honest intentions, the consistent efforts it has made to integrate them into the mainstream of India's democracy and they have now proactively endorsed the steps taken through this peaceful, high voter turnout. "I have no doubt in my mind that Jammu and Kashmir has a very bright future and the region will serve as a beacon of democratic empowerment and aspirations." Asked how the recent situation in J and K aligns with the government's long-term strategy for the region, the prime minister said Jammu and Kashmir, since 1947, has been a victim of the conflict economy, where the stakeholders were a few politicians, many who were working for their own personal agendas or those of "outside forces". "For almost seven decades, the people of Jammu and Kashmir were denied the right to development, progress, and prosperity because a few families, in India and their masters outside, wanted to use the people to peddle their own

separatist agenda. This was an irreversible loss for generations of innocent families who were pulled into a conflict. We want to ensure that now there is an irreversible dividend of peace for future generations to come." Modi said ever since his government came into office in 2014, its agenda has been quite clear — development for all, opportunities for all, prosperity for all. He said for 70 years, there was a conflict, but for 70 years, not all regions were accessible via all-weather roads, or with all the basic necessities. "Think about the struggles of the tribal population in the mountains, or the youth in region who could not get any aspirational jobs like the youth in the rest of the country. We have managed to reverse this trend, especially post 2019," he added. The prime minister said from tourism to education, from sports to agriculture, from manufacturing to FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations), and from SHGs (Self Help groups) to entrepreneurship, the government wants to create an ecosystem for everything within the region itself.

Over 45 per cent polling recorded in five LS seats in Bihar till 3 pm

PTI ■ PATNA

A voter turnout of 45.33 per cent was recorded in five Lok Sabha constituencies in Bihar till 3 pm on Monday, officials said. The polling began at 7 am in Muzaffarpur, Madhubani, Sitamarhi, Saran and Hajipur Lok Sabha constituencies and will continue till 6 pm, a senior official at the CEO's office said. Over 95 lakh voters in these five seats will decide the electoral fate of 80 candidates at 9,436 polling stations. Over 49.99 per cent of voters have exercised their franchise in Muzaffarpur, 45.19 per cent in Sitamarhi, 44.59 per cent in Hajipur, 43.77 per cent in Madhubani and 43.13 per cent in Saran till 3 pm. Of the total voters, 45.11 lakh are women, 21 lakh are under 29 years of age and 1.26 lakh are in the age group of 18-19 years. Talking to reporters in Patna, Bihar BJP president and Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said, "Voting is going very smoothly in all five constituencies in the state



today." Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Nityanand Rai cast his vote on Monday at a polling booth in Hajipur Lok Sabha constituency. After casting his vote, Rai said, "I urge people to exercise their franchise in large numbers. It's a festival of democracy". Rai is seeking re-election from Ujjiarpur Lok Sabha constituency where voting took place on May 13." Notable candidates include NDA ally Chirag Paswan in Hajipur, Lalu Prasad's

daughter Rohini Acharya, who is pitted against two-term sitting BJP MP and former Union minister Rajiv Pratap Rudy in Saran, and Muzaffarpur's sitting MP Ajay Nishad, who crossed over to the Congress after being denied a BJP ticket for a third term. Sudhir Kumar Ojha, an advocate who remains in the news for his petitions against top political figures, Bollywood stars and even foreign heads of state, is contesting from Muzaffarpur.

Amitabh Bachchan, SRK, Aamir Khan, Akshay Kumar and other celebs vote in Mumbai

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Popular Hindi cinema stars Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan and Akshay Kumar were among the celebrities who stepped out to cast their votes in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections here on Monday. Polling was underway since 7 am in 13 Lok Sabha constituencies of Maharashtra, including six in Mumbai. Bachchan, 81, and wife Jaya, 76, cast their votes in a polling booth in the Juhu area of Mumbai. Daughter-in-law Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, who is nursing a hand injury and just returned from her trip to the Cannes Film Festival, was also seen at a polling booth. Aamir Khan and ex-wife Kiran Rao posed for cameras after voting at a polling booth in Bandra in suburban Mumbai. The actor also urged people to come out and cast their votes. "I just want to appeal to all Indians to come out in large numbers and cast their vote and become part of this democracy. It is our responsibility to vote. I appeal to everyone to step out and



vote, and don't waste your vote. I want youth, elderly, women, men and everyone should come out and vote," the superstar told reporters. Shah Rukh Khan, wife Gauri, son Aryan, daughter Suhana and younger son AbRam were also photographed entering a polling station in Bandra. Superstar Salman Khan's father Salim Khan and mother Salma too cast their votes. Ranbir Kapoor posed for pictures with his inked finger after casting his vote. Ranveer and Deepika, who are expecting their first child, cast their votes at a polling booth in Bandra, while Varun Dhawan and Shahid Kapoor took to their social media accounts to encourage others to vote. Kumar, who voted for the first time since receiving Indian



citizenship, was one of the early voters. "I want my India to be developed and strong and I've kept these things in my mind when I went to cast my vote, and all the Indians should think what is right for them and vote," Kumar said after voting at a polling station in Juhu. Akhtar, who queued up at a polling station in Bandra West to cast his vote, told PTI: "My vote is for good governance, the government that looks after all people, gives us a better city." The actor-filmmaker urged people, especially youngsters to step out and vote. "I just heard from somebody that young people are complaining that it's too hot but it's not hot at all, so please do step out, do vote," Akhtar



said. His sister, filmmaker Zoya Akhtar and mother Honey Irani also voted. Actor Hema Malini, who's BJP candidate from Mathura Lok Sabha constituency, said she is hopeful that voters' turnout will be good. "We are very much concerned (about voter turn-out). We've done maximum publicity for people to come and vote. Across India, celebrities have requested (people to vote). I'm sure the voter turnout will be good," Malini, who was accompanied by daughter Esha, said after casting her vote in Mumbai. Dharmendra, 88, said, "They (voters) know how to be a good Indian citizen. They know how to take India to great heights, and they know how and what to do for that." Other Bollywood celebrities,



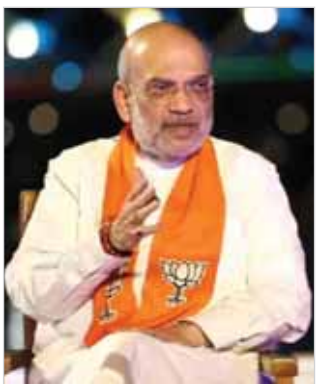
who have voted so far, include Tabu, Kajol, Saif Ali Khan with his wife Kareena Kapoor Khan, Kiara Advani, actor Kiara Advani, Rekha, Sunny Deol, Sanjay Dutt, Sanya Malhotra, Govinda, Manoj Bajpayee, Anil Kapoor, Ali Fajal, Konkana Sen Sharma, Paresh Rawal, Shradha Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar, Ananya Panday, Sara Ali Khan with her mother Amrita Singh, Suniel Shetty, Shilpa Shetty, Arshad Warsi and Tiger Shroff. Ashutosh Gowariker, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, Subhash Ghai, Onir noted poet and lyricist Gulzar, his filmmaker daughter Meghna Gulzar, Kunal Kohli, musician Vishal Dadlani, singer and music composer Shankar Mahadevan, among others.



The PoK hobgoblin

In election season, BJP leaders intensify campaign for PoK integration with India

If it is election season in India, can references to Pakistan be far behind? In 2019, it was Pulwama and the resultant surgical strikes. This time, an IAF convoy came under terror attack in the Poonch area on May 4, following which Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) made a rather late entry into the poll narrative. The call for reclaiming PoK is being given wide currency by the BJP; its top leaders are making bold assertions on the issue. Senior party leaders Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and Himanta Biswa Sarma have all recently underscored the BJP's commitment towards integrating PoK with India. To begin with, Amit Shah made a striking declaration, asserting that India will take PoK as it "belongs to us". The statement is seen as a bold political promise, aligning with the BJP's long-standing position on PoK. Then, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma echoed the sentiment, adding that the move is not merely aspirational but a realistic objective under the current Government. Then came Rajnath Singh's slightly different approach, focusing on the human rights situation in PoK. Singh called on international bodies to take cognisance of the rights violations in the region. These statements during the ongoing polls are clear indication that the BJP wants to draw people's attention to this long-pending issue. They also underline the party's strategic use of PoK as a rallying point in the lead-up to the elections, aiming to consolidate support among nationalist segments.



Indeed, the situation in PoK is not good. The locals there are demanding greater autonomy and political rights, more self-governance and local control. They are also concerned about rights abuses and restrictions on civil liberties, calling for the protection of their basic rights, freedom of expression and an end to political repression. Additionally, economic development is a major issue, with calls for better opportunities, improved infrastructure, healthcare and education, along with increased investment to drive regional growth. But can India intervene in PoK matters and reintegrate it in our territory is another question. Unfortunately, such statements often cross borders and have unintended ramifications on the other side. Domestically, it may serve to galvanise the party's core supporters and assert the BJP's strong stance on national security and territorial integrity. It is also likely to influence electoral dynamics, with the party hoping to leverage this narrative to bolster its performance in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Internationally, these statements may further strain India-Pakistan relations, potentially escalating tensions in an already volatile region. The call for international intervention on human rights grounds adds a new dimension to the discourse, potentially inviting global scrutiny and diplomatic engagements which India has been avoiding ever since this issue started. These remarks are more driven by poll expediency and election rhetoric rather than the Government's stated policy. These statements could exacerbate regional tensions and complicate diplomatic efforts.

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PICTALK



People show their inked finger after casting their vote during the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Ladakh

Communal friction must end now



PRAFULL GORADIA

Despite facing criticism, Modi's tenure has seen minimal communal clashes, emphasising the importance of mutual understanding for communal harmony

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the hectic campaigning for the current Lok Sabha elections has asked the Muslim community to seriously introspect; he has also exposed the Congress of endlessly pampering their notions of separateness. As expected, he has been pilloried for doing some blunt speaking. No honest political observer can deny that Prime Minister Modi's administration has been free of communal clashes, except the Delhi riots of 2020. Earlier, this used to be a regular feature. The only other communal clashes have been over the abduction of cows. Hindus detest the killing of cows and oxen. In the 16th century, the Mughal emperor Akbar banned the killing of cows, because it offended Hindu sentiments.

In the 20th century, the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Hind, founded by Maulana Azad advised Muslims to avoid killing cows as it offends Hindus. An unwritten clause of the Partition of India was that those Muslims who wanted to stay back in post-Partition India shouldn't do anything to offend Hindu sentiments. Qaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah had clearly stated in his Lahore speech of March 22, 1940, that "Hindus and Muslims are very different and cannot exist in the same country". Dr BR Ambedkar endorsed this view in his 1941 book Thoughts on Pakistan that an exchange of population should be organized on the Turko-Greek lines in 1923, under the auspices of the League of Nations. Jinnah, Ambedkar and Dr Rajendra Prasad endorsed this view. Rajendra Babu, India's President from 1950 to 1960, had written India Divided, wherein he proposed that Muslims who couldn't emigrate to Pakistan could be specially permitted to stay back, not as citizens but as aliens with visas.

Jinnah and other League functionaries in 1946 and 1947, had repeatedly demanded an exchange of population. Their views were published in the Dawn, newspaper Jinnah (now published in Karachi but initially printed in Delhi). Sir Feroze Khan Noon, later Pakistan's first prime minister, threatened in April 1946 that if Hindus took an obstructive attitude to population exchange, Muslims would re-enact the murderous orgies of Genghis and Halaqu Khan. Iftikhar Husain, the Nawab of Mamdot, in December 1946 said he supported an exchange of population because many Muslims wanted to settle in Sindh. Ismail Chundrigar, later Pakistan's sixth prime minister, said that the British had no right to hand over Muslims to a subject people over whom they had ruled for 500 years. Shaukat Hayat Khan, son of Sikandar Hayat Khan, said the exchange of population was an integral part of the demand for Pakistan. Ismail Mohammed, a Muslim Leaguer from Madras said that Muslims were in the middle of a jihad. Similar were the views of Raja Ghazanfar Ali, who was later Pakistan's food, agriculture and health minister. To the extent that Professor M Mujeeb, Vice-Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi met the Turkish representatives to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization (UNO), the latter was surprised and asked Mujeeb, "How are you representing India? I thought all Muslims went away to Pakistan". The point here is that all



April 1946 that if Hindus took an obstructive attitude to population exchange, Muslims would re-enact the murderous orgies of Genghis and Halaqu Khan. Iftikhar Husain, the Nawab of Mamdot, in December 1946 said he supported an exchange of population because many Muslims wanted to settle in Sindh. Ismail Chundrigar, later Pakistan's sixth prime minister, said that the British had no right to hand over Muslims to a subject people over whom they had ruled for 500 years. Shaukat Hayat Khan, son of Sikandar Hayat Khan, said the exchange of population was an integral part of the demand for Pakistan. Ismail Mohammed, a Muslim Leaguer from Madras said that Muslims were in the middle of a jihad. Similar were the views of Raja Ghazanfar Ali, who was later Pakistan's food, agriculture and health minister. To the extent that Professor M Mujeeb, Vice-Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi met the Turkish representatives to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization (UNO), the latter was surprised and asked Mujeeb, "How are you representing India? I thought all Muslims went away to Pakistan". The point here is that all

clashes or friction between the two communities ought to have been put finally at rest. They would have been so but for the insertion of Articles 25 to 30 into the Constitution of India by the Leftist followers of the country's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru. They wanted a substantive vote base for their great leader. This explains why a Uniform Civil Code was made a non-justiciable part of the Constitution. While zamindaris and jagirdaris were abolished, waqfs, which have been nationalized in many Islamic countries, were left untouched. Every other aspect of the separateness of the community's separate identity, like Urdu, polygamy, instant verbal talaq, etc., was not only not touched but continuously pampered. Madrasas, which foster a parallel and obscurantist education system, continue to thrive, preaching sectarianism and schism, to the detriment of their community. The present Government has been bold to bring in some reforms, however limited. Instant verbal divorce has been abolished and educational facilities and initiatives have been expanded to include Muslim girls. The womenfolk of the community, who have benefitted from these reforms, are being suspected of voting for a Hindu party in these elec-

tions. Islam accords priority to the ummah (community) over the vatan (country). There can be no denying that former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said that Muslims have "first claim over our national resources" and he would have no hesitation in allotting 15 per cent of resources to them. During his regime, he appointed no less than five commissions to 'enquire' how and why Muslims in India were disadvantaged and what should be done to pull them up. Qutubuddin Aibak captured Delhi in 1192 AD and thereafter, one Muslim dynasty after another ruled Delhi till 1857, i.e., a total of 665 years before they were erased by the British Crown. With such a long rule, has any Government asked why the community is backward and needs a lift-up? Is taqlid (orthodoxy) in preference to ijihad (re-interpretation) the reason for this? Does the neglect of women also further this state of near-perpetual backwardness? Who is answerable for these crimes of omission? Is the present prime minister, the first Indian leader to ask these uncomfortable questions, in any way answerable for this? (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)



THE INCUMBENT GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN BOLD ENOUGH TO BRING IN SOME REFORMS, HOWEVER LIMITED. INSTANT VERBAL DIVORCE HAS BEEN ABOLISHED AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES AND INITIATIVES HAVE BEEN EXPANDED TO INCLUDE MUSLIM GIRLS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS PERSIST

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Economic crisis takes a backseat in elections," published on May 20, this is my response. In this dance of democracy, scarce resources are rambling up election tempos. The focus shifts from core issues like employment to distractions like religious and cultural symbols. Despite being touted as the fifth-largest economy, India faces grim realities: high unemployment, displacement due to conflicts in Manipur and agrarian distress. Political promises of increased reservations appear futile without sufficient job creation. The International Labour Organisation highlights severe forced labour issues, questioning India's progress. With inflation soaring and trade deficits widening, the economic situation remains dire. Public-sector job cuts and reliance on self-employment indicate systemic failures. To truly uplift the marginalised and revitalise the economy, a robust public sector and equitable competition with the private sector are essential. Would politics support such a transformation? Kunal Singh | Patiala

THE TRUMP SYNDROME

Madam — In US politics, Donald Trump was not the cause of a democratic crisis of faith. He just rode to power on it. Once in control, he leveraged the same disillusionment that helped him into office. Debasing democratic norms and abusing tall institutions led to the subversion of democratic systems. This Trump syndrome of relentless polarisation, which spawns apathy and disconnect in the polity, is seen creeping into nations across the globe to keep the political brew on a boil. Scandals and crises would shake voters' faith in the political system occasionally, but an engineered schism and dysfunction in the polity with agenda-driven governance turned corrosive. Universally, people feel that democracy is failing because the Governments it produced were unable or unwilling to address their greater concerns. In the ongoing

Combating wildlife trafficking



Apropos the news article, "YouTube happy hunting ground for wildlife traffickers," published on May 20, this is my response. Reading about the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) taking down over 1,100 YouTube videos linked to illegal wildlife trade is both reassuring and deeply concerning. On one hand, it's encouraging to see concerted efforts to tackle this digital menace. However, the sheer volume of such content on a major platform like

YouTube highlights a troubling trend. It's alarming that tech-savvy wildlife traffickers exploit YouTube's vast user base to market and sell protected species, such as parakeets, rare turtles and pangolins. This underscores a significant challenge: the intersection of advanced technology and traditional crime. Despite YouTube's policies against animal abuse, the persistence of these videos suggests enforcement gaps. The WCCB's proactive steps, involving volunteers and "WILD NET," show progress in wildlife crime control through digital tools. Stronger tech-enforcement collaborations are vital for effective monitoring and policy enforcement. As we applaud the WCCB's efforts, we must also recognise the ongoing battle against a lucrative and persistent illicit wildlife trade that adapts as quickly as we counter it. Neha Gupta | Delhi

phase of political asphyxiation, the disillusioned electorate is spirited to defend a system that has failed to champion its cause. Worse, it could be more than ever before that ballots may no longer be the sole guarantee of true democracy. Apathy towards democracy is a gateway to larger unrest. R Narayanan | Mumbai

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT

Madam — Various things on earth now feel the effect of climate change. Due to climate change, it has been seen that the negative impact on the mental health of people has increased. This research has been published in the journal "Lancet Neurology." Fluctuations in temperature are now affecting brain diseases as well. I recently read in the news that the severity of diseases like cerebral palsy and encephalitis is increasing. Cases of cerebral palsy are also increasing due to the rise in nighttime temperatures. Overall, the scope of climate change is becoming very large. Due to the increase in temperature, various birds and animals have also start-

ed to be affected. It is time for them to go to human settlements for drinking water. All this is happening due to many things. It seems that more than 5 million trees have been cut in India only from 2018 to 2022. This was recently stated in the report "Nature Sustainability." According to this report, most trees have disappeared in Telangana and Maharashtra. It has come to light that big trees have been cut down to expand agriculture in many areas. The remaining trees are also affected by forest fires and fungal infections. One factor that mitigates overall temperature rise is the current state of the tree. The temperature rise will affect many things and many cities near the sea are also likely to go under water. The increase in temperature should be stopped by humans. Otherwise, it seems that he will have to face many problems and the Government should also take measures for this. Shantaram Wagh | Pune

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Museums are pillars of culture and education

Museums play an essential role in preserving the history of human civilisation, offering tangible evidence of our existence and activities throughout time

Museums play an indispensable part in understanding the history of human civilisation. It is proof of our existence on this planet and material evidence of human activity carried out during our lifetime. Understanding the diverse cultural tapestries that make up human history helps build more inclusive societies. Museums come in various types, each focusing on different aspects of human knowledge, culture and the natural world, like Art museums, history museums, natural history museums, science museums, military and war museums, aviation and space museums, etc. This range of purposes results in a remarkable diversity of museums in terms of their form, content and function. The history of museums is a fascinating journey that reflects humanity's evolving ways of collecting, preserving and interpreting objects of significance. The concept of collecting valuable or significant objects dates back to ancient civilisations. In ancient Greece, for instance, temples often housed collec-



tions of art and artefacts dedicated to the gods. The word "museum" originates from the Greek "mouseion," a term used to describe a place dedicated to the Muses, the goddesses of the arts and sciences. The concept of the public museum began to take shape in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Many consider the Ashmolean Museum, which opened in 1683 at Oxford University, as the first public museum of its kind. The founding of the British Museum in London in 1753 was a watershed moment in the evolution of museums worldwide. Numerous national museums were founded in the 19th century, frequently serving as emblems of cultural identity and national pride. The history of museums in India is deeply intertwined with the country's rich cultural and historical legacy. The colonial period saw the estab-

lishment of the first formal museums in India. The British East India Company and other colonial powers began collecting artefacts, often to showcase their conquests and understand local cultures. The Indian Museum in Kolkata, founded in 1814, is the oldest museum in India and one of the earliest in the world. It was established by the Asiatic Society of Bengal and housed collections that ranged from geological to archaeological artefacts. Post-independence, the National Museum under the Ministry of Culture was established in Delhi in 1949. It houses a vast collection of artefacts representing over 5,000 years of Indian history. It was a significant step towards preserving and showcasing India's cultural heritage. To propagate science and develop scientific temper, the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) was established on April 4, 1978. Today, it administers 26 Science Centres/Museums spread across the country and is considered the world's largest network of science centres/museums. Museums not only play a vital

role in education and research, serving as repositories of knowledge, culture and history, but also in the conservation and preservation of the region's cultural heritage. Their contributions extend beyond simply displaying artefacts; they provide immersive learning experiences, support scholarly research and engage the public in various educational activities. Museums offer interactive exhibits that engage visitors in hands-on activities. These interactive elements make learning more engaging and memorable, helping visitors, especially children, to grasp complex concepts in science or history through experience. Museums also act as centres of active research. Researchers in archaeology, anthropology, biology and art history rely on museum collections for their studies. Much breathtaking research in science, especially on paleogenomics, was done using the artefacts from museums. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN



FIRST COLUMN ADDRESSING EMOTIONAL IMBALANCE IN SOCIETY

Independence is not possible without education in emotional self-control



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Today, whether you open a newspaper or tune into a news channel, you are almost guaranteed to encounter reports of crimes ranging from petty thefts to dacoity, murder, terrorism and sexual offences. Crime is alarmingly on the rise. This surge in criminal activity to a variety of factors, each adding to the growing sense of unease in our society. Giving the rationale behind this frightening phenomenon, they explain that some cases are due to the motive of money, others due to rage, hate, enmity and revenge and yet others due to odious discrimination based on caste, religion, ethnicity, culture or nationality or due to business rivalry or professional jealousy. However, they do not go into the common root cause of all these multifarious manifestations and motives of crime. As a result, they fail to address themselves to the real problem and to remedy the worsening and threatening situation. So, it would be correct to say that, in reality, there is no other problem but that people do not know and eradicate the roots of the tree of all problems and, instead, they try to get rid of some of its branches only. Of course, no one can deny that in a society where corruption and criminal tendencies have become strongly entrenched and where the virus of crime has entered and spread into the whole body of society, it has become difficult to breathe the pure air of freedom or liberation from worry, fear and tension and, despite lacs of able-bodied military men and police and trained and thoughtful investigating officers, life is neither safe from ruffians nor Governmental apathy. Everyone is fed up with the delaying tactics of those whose job is to facilitate rather than obstruct. Everyone is tired of the corrupt ways of everyone who can do something good and gracious but who, in practice, is doing the reverse.



But still, everyone is doing, more or less, what he or she considers distasteful, disdainful, obnoxious or horrible. If we go deep into this problem, then we will find that emotional disturbance is the origin of all disturbances. Yes! Emotional imbalance or instability of the mind is the forerunner of all imbalances and instabilities. Emotional imbecility is the mother of all kinds of anarchy, deviant behaviour and crime — big or small. It is a lack of emotional intelligence that is at the back of every kind of waywardness, wanton behaviour and vicious tendencies.

In this context, let us understand that like and dislike are the natural tendencies in all men and women. But liking for a particular gender may become so irresistible as to grow into lust and dislike for certain persons may become so strong as to grow into deep hatred and, in the case of these emotions going berserk, people may, one day, find that they have landed in jails. So, when we talk of emotional maturity or control, what we mean is that we have to have a measure of discipline or control over our tendencies of inclination and aversion, liking and disliking or love and hate so that these natural tendencies enable us to keep the company of what is good and salubrious and keep away from what is bad and harmful.

When we refer to emotional intelligence, we, refer to our sound judgment as to what are the things or who are the persons with which or with whom we should associate and what or who are of the opposite kind so that we may ward them off. But, alas! Most men and women miss that education that trains emotions or develops emotional potential positively. As long as this continues to happen, we will have a society where crimes are rampant and where people live in a State of tension with the push and pull of criminal tendencies pounding their minds. But what else is the means of emotional training than spiritual education? Our struggle for independence will remain incomplete unless people are educated to have emotional self-control.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

Celebrating the power of cultural diversity



RAJDEEP PATHAK

As Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu once articulated, our differences underscore our mutual interdependence, highlighting the profound value of cultural diversity

The "World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development", celebrated annually on May 21st, stands as a beacon of hope in a world often marred by conflicts stemming from cultural, religious and socio-economic differences. In such a situation of growing discord, dialogue emerges as a powerful tool for fostering understanding, cooperation and ultimately, development. Dialogue serves as the cornerstone of development in a world, characterized by its diversity. The 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner from South Africa and Theologian Desmond Tutu had eloquently stated, "We are different so that we can know our need for one another," thus necessitating the essence of cultural diversity — an opportunity to learn, grow and empathize with others.

UNESCO established the "World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development" in response to the 2001 terrorist attack that destroyed the Bamyān Buddha statue in Afghanistan. In December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly officially designated May 21st as this day. The 2002 Universal Declaration recognized the need to "Enhance the potential of culture as a means of achieving prosperity, sustainable development and global peaceful coexistence".

Moreover, with 89% of all current conflicts in the world occurring in countries with low intercultural dialogue, to forge effective cooperation and sustain peace, strengthening intercultural dialogue becomes a necessity. Further, according to UNESCO data (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/cultural-diversity-day>), the cultural and creative sector is one of the most powerful engines of development worldwide. It accounts for more than 48 million jobs globally - almost half of which are held by women - representing 6.2% of all existing employment and 3.1% of global GDP. It is also the sector that employs and provides opportunities for the largest number of young people under the age of 30. However, the cultural and creative sector still does not have the place it deserves in public policies and international cooperation. Thus, in a bid to change this, in September 2022, delegations from 150 States gathered in Mexico for MONDIACULT 2022 - the largest world conference devoted to culture (in the last 40 years) - where they unanimously adopted the historic 'Declaration for Culture' affirming 'culture' as a "global public good" and calling for it to be integrated "as a specific goal in its own right" in the Development Agenda beyond 2030.

But what exactly are the concepts of diversity and inclusion along with culture? Diversity encompasses the intentional and inclusive gathering of individuals from various backgrounds, encompassing differences in race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, age, educational background and this list can go on. It emphasizes the importance of bringing these diverse identities together to interact positively and contribute to a shared environment. Inclusion goes beyond merely acknowledging and respecting each person's distinct experiences and identities. It requires fair treatment and widespread recognition. It means embracing and appreciating these differences as essential



THROUGHOUT HISTORY, NUMEROUS INSTANCES UNDERSCORE THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENCY OF DIALOGUE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION. ONE SUCH EXAMPLE IS THE GANDHIAN MODEL OF 'NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION'. MAHATMA GANDHI ADVOCATED 'SATYAGRAHA' AGAINST OPPRESSION

elements for the progress and well-being of all. Thus the "World Cultural Diversity Day", commemorating the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, also emphasizes four key objectives. First, it advocates for policies fostering the creation, production and dissemination of diverse cultural goods and services. Secondly, it encourages initiatives facilitating a balanced exchange of cultural products while enhancing the mobility of artists and cultural professionals. Thirdly, it promotes sustainable development policies and international aid programs that embrace cultural integration. Lastly, it underscores the importance of aligning international and national legislation with human rights and fundamental freedoms, ensuring the preservation and flourishing of cultural diversity worldwide. All this is because, 'Cultural Diversity', drives development, not only economically, but also personally. Simultaneously, 'Dialogue' also transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, catalysing cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. As Rumi, the 13th-century Persian poet, poignantly expressed, "The wound is the place where the Light enters you," a profound insight underscoring the potential for growth and enlightenment that arises from engaging in dialogue, even amidst adversity.

In today's complex landscape, dialogue emerges as an urgent necessity, given the multitude of global challenges like climate change, economic disparity and geopolitical tensions. Martin Luther King Jr.'s timeless words, "Injustice any-

where is a threat to justice everywhere," emphasize the interconnectedness of human experiences and the pivotal role of dialogue in addressing systemic inequalities in this landscape. Engaging in dialogue, not only enhances self-awareness but also fosters profound connections with others. For instance, movements like 'Black Lives Matter', sparked by tragic incidents like George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's deaths, underscore the imperative of dialogue in combating systemic racism and police brutality. Meaningful conversations among communities, law enforcement agencies and policymakers are essential for driving substantial reforms and promoting racial equity.

Throughout history, numerous instances underscore the transformative potency of dialogue in conflict resolution. One such example is the Gandhian model of 'nonviolent communication'. Mahatma Gandhi advocated for 'Satyagraha' or truth force, advocating peaceful resistance against oppression. His commitment to dialogue and nonviolence inspired millions, to follow the path of non-violence against the might of British colonial rule. Through nonviolent protests, civil disobedience and constructive dialogue, Gandhi showcased the power of dialogue in effecting profound social and political change. His method challenged colonial oppression's legitimacy, spurring a global movement for civil rights and social justice, across the country and inspiring others worldwide. Gandhi's legacy underscores dialogue's enduring potential in resolving conflicts and advancing justice worldwide.

CEO of the East African Centre for Human Rights, Judith Oloo, writing for "The Standard" in her article "The World Day of Cultural Diversity: Children's role as carriers of culture" (standard media.co.ke), lays importance on the role of children as torchbearers of cultural diversity. She says that children, "As participants in and carriers of our culture... are a critical part of our population - the future of our societies". According to her, culture profoundly shapes children's development, influencing emotional, social, physical and linguistic growth from birth. Customs, beliefs and practices surrounding food, art, language and religion play significant roles. Recognizing this, professionals working with children, such as social workers and child rights advocates, must grasp these influences to bring about a change.

In today's world, addressing global challenges requires collaborative approaches rooted in dialogue and mutual understanding. According to the UN, "Three-quarters of the world's major conflicts have a cultural dimension. Bridging the gap between cultures is urgent and necessary for peace, stability and development". Each of us has a role in fostering understanding to cultivate thriving communities. It's crucial to recognize how culture, in its various diversified forms, enriches discourse and contributes to sustainable development across different realms - social, environmental, economic and so on. Is it then not the time for us to at least sit across the table and start communicating?

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

Outrage over superstar Mammootty's alleged Jihadi ties

The controversy has ignited a fierce political debate and exposed deep-seated tensions within Kerala's political landscape

The disclosure by Mohammed Sharshad, a Chennai-based businessman, who is also a CPI(M) activist, that Malayalam cinema's "super mega star" Mammootty was shocked the secular, liberal and democratic political leaders of Kerala. The CPI(M), CPI and Congress leaders have come out openly against the Sangh Parivar for portraying Mammootty as a Jihadi. The disclosure about Mammootty's links with Jihadi organisations was made by a Muslim youth, a local leader of the CPI(M). The first person to attack Sangh Parivar about the report about Mammootty's Jihadi links was K T Jaleel MLA, a former CPI(M) minister and former president of the banned SIMI. Jaleel is famous for his



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

speeches and writings that India could be liberated only through Islam. Then other ministers took up the issue and it has caused ripples in Kerala. Mammootty, who was a below-average student during his college days is an Arabic graduate from Maharaja's College Ernakulam. While he was a student, Prof Ummar was the head of the Arabic Department and it was the latter who set the question papers

and valued the answer sheets. No Arabic student has failed in BA Arabic examination in Maharajas College those days. The title super mega star reminds one of the age-old adage in the land of the blind, the one-eyed is the King. Mammootty is no match for his counterparts in Hindi movies or Hollywood. Being a Jihadi or communalist is not a crime. The issue here is that one who questions the organized bargaining capacity of the Muslim community becomes persona non grata in Kerala. Leaders who were bold enough to point out the hidden agenda of the Muslim political and spiritual leaders ended up in dustbins. EMS Namboodirippadu tops the list of such persons who

were decimated by the Islamist leaders. Before the 1991 assembly elections, there was a suggestion from certain CPI(M) leaders like E K Nayanar and M V Raghavan (both left to meet Marx, Lenin and Stalin) that the party should ally with the Muslim League. But Namboodirippadu was quick to retort that the Muslim League should get rid of its name and flag (that resembled the Pakistani national flag) to be considered an ally. Leaders of the Muslim League became furious and they saw to it that Namboodirippadu was cut to size and the CPI(M) removed him from the coveted position of general secretary in 1992. The next to earn the wrath of leaders of the Muslim community was A K Antony who was the chief minister during the

period 2001 to 2004. The 2003 Marad beach massacre that saw the slaughtering of eight Hindu fishermen by Islamic radicals happened during Antony's tenure. Antony was for an investigation by the CBI but made a hasty retreat as Muslim League leaders throttled the move. But he warned the League leaders openly that the organized bargaining power of communal outfits would not be entertained by his Government. This hurt the Muslim League leadership who asked the Congress High Command to remove Antony from the chief minister's post at the earliest. That's how Antony tendered his resignation post-2004 Lok Sabha polls and moved over to New Delhi. V S Achuthanandan, a widely respected leader of the

CPI(M) was sworn in as chief minister in 2006 after the assembly election. Achuthanandan was always against any kind of communalism and fanaticism. During a press meeting in the national capital in 2010, Achuthanandan said that Love Jihad was a reality. "The Muslim fundamentalists have an agenda to convert Kerala into a Muslim majority State within the next two decades," he had said. Though the CPI(M) lost the 2011 elections by a whisker, the party returned to power in 2016 making use of the goodwill enjoyed by Achuthanandan all over Kerala. The highway from Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram was dotted with larger-than-life-size

posters of Achuthanandan giving an impression that he would be the automatic choice of the CPI(M) as chief minister after the election. But Pinarayi Vijayan, whose pictures or posters were conspicuously absent, was nominated as chief minister by the party's leadership and since then the former has become the uncrowned king of Kerala. Achuthanandan was sidelined not because of the influence wielded by the Muslim community in the CPI(M). The ire of the Muslim League and community leaders also claimed the political career of G Sudhakaran, a CPI(M) minister who was disliked by the district-level leaders of Alappuzha (all belonging to the Muslim community) from where he hails. PC George, the

seven-time legislator who had defeated both the LDF and the UDF in assembly elections was made to bite the dust in his home turf of Poonjar for lambasting Love Jihad and the role of various Islamist outfits in this operation. For more than four decades, George was a secular leader acceptable to the Muslim community. But when he pointed out the plight of the victims of Love Jihad, George became an enemy of humanity and the entire Muslim community voted against him in the 2021 assembly election. This is Kerala's brand of secularism. Caveat Emptor would be the ideal word of caution for those daring to question the Islamist outfits.

(The writer is a special correspondent with the Pioneer; views are personal)

Mohammad Mokhber appointed Iran's acting President

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran's first Vice President Mohammad Mokhber was appointed as acting president of the Islamic Republic on Monday after the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in the country's northwest. Mokhber, 68, largely has been in the shadows compared to other politicians in Iran's Shiite theocracy. Raisi's death under the constitution thrust Mokhber into public view. He is expected to serve as caretaker president for some 50 days before mandatory presidential elections in Iran.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made the announcement of Mokhber's appointment in a condolence message he shared for Raisi's death in the crash Sunday. The helicopter was found Monday in northwestern Iran. Despite his low-key public profile, Mokhber has held prominent positions with in the country's power structure, particularly in its bonyads, or charitable foundations. Those groups were fuelled by donations or assets seized after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, particularly those

previously associated with Iran's shah or those in his government. Mokhber oversaw a bonyad known in English as the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, or EIKO, referring to the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The US Treasury said the organisation oversaw billions of dollars in assets as "a business juggernaut under the direct supervision of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei that has a stake in nearly every sector of the Iranian economy, including energy, telecommunications, and financial services." "EIKO has systematically violated the rights of dissidents by confiscating land and property from opponents of the regime, including political opponents, religious minorities, and exiled Iranians," the Treasury said in 2021 in sanctioning Mokhber. The European Union also had sanctioned Mokhber for a time with others over concerns then about Iran's nuclear programme. As the head of EIKO, Mokhber oversaw an effort to make a COVID-19 vaccine during the height of the pandemic, pledging to make tens of millions of



In this photo provided by Moj News Agency, rescue team members work at the scene of a crash of a helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Varzaghan in northwestern Iran, Monday

doses. Only a fraction of that ever made it to the public, without explanation. Mokhber previously worked in

banking and telecommunications. He also worked at the Mostazafan Foundation, another bonyad that's a major con-

glomerate that manages the country's mega-projects and businesses. While there, he found himself entangled in a bit-

ter legal dispute between mobile phone service providers Turkcell and South Africa's MTN over potentially entering the Iranian market. MTN ended up entering Iran. A Turkcell filing alleged Mokhber sought MTN's help in securing "certain defence equipment" in exchange for potentially working with it as opposed to Turkcell. Mokhber used "improper influence up to and including negotiating with and on behalf of the Supreme Leader in MTN's favour," Turkcell later alleged in a legal filing. An MTN report later said there were no arms transfers, though it acknowledge Mokhber was a player in Iran's decision to go with MTN. Iranian media reports suggest Mokhber, who holds a doctorate in international law, was crucial in Iranian efforts to bypass Western sanctions on its oil industry. Mokhber has been a member of Iran's Expediency Council since 2022, which advises the supreme leader, as well as settles disputes between parliament and the Guardian Council, Iran's constitutional watchdog that also oversees the country's elections. Mokhber

'China lost a good friend'

PTI ■ BEIJING

President Xi Jinping on Monday condoned the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who was killed in a helicopter crash, saying China has lost a good friend as he made positive efforts to consolidate and deepen the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two nations. In a message to Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber, Xi on behalf of the Chinese government and the people of China, expressed deep condolences and extended sincere sympathies to Mokhber, the family of President Raisi, and the Iranian government and people, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said. Xi said since President Raisi took office, he made important contributions to maintaining



Iran's security and stability and promoting national development and prosperity. He added that Raisi also made positive efforts to consolidate and deepen the China-Iran comprehensive strategic partnership. Raisi's tragic death is a great loss to the Iranian people, and the Chinese people also lost a good friend, Xi said.

was born Sept 1, 1955, in Dezful in Iran's southwestern Khuzestan province to a clerical family. He served as an officer in the Revolutionary Guards medical corps during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, according to the

pressure group United Against Nuclear Iran. "Mokhber used the vast wealth accumulated by EIKO — at the expense of the Iranian people—to reward regime insiders like himself," UANI said.

WikiLeaks founder wins bid to challenge extradition to US

PTI ■ LONDON

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on Monday won a major reprieve as a London court permitted him to appeal against his extradition to the US on espionage charges, a legal saga which has been going on for over a decade. The 52-year-old Australian national has been held at Belmarsh high-security prison in London since 2019 when he was taken into custody from the Ecuadorian Embassy here where he had sought asylum. While the US authorities want Assange to face trial for allegedly endangering lives by publishing thousands of classified documents on Wikileaks, his lawyers have argued that the case against him is politically motivated. On Monday, two High Court judges at the Royal Courts of Justice granted the Australian-born Assange permission to appeal against his extradition



order. They agreed with his legal team on the issue of assurances from the US administration that Assange would be protected by and allowed to rely on the First Amendment of the country's Constitution, which protects freedom of speech in the US, and the death penalty would not be imposed. "Based on the principle of the separation of powers, the US court can and will apply US

law, whatever the executive may say or do," barrister Edward Fitzgerald told the court on behalf of Assange. The barrister representing the US government countered that the judicial branch of the country would take due notice of the executive's "solemn assurance". "The assurance does make it clear that he will not be discriminated against because of his nationality. He can and will be able to raise all those arguments and his nationality will not prejudice a fair trial," said James Lewis in written submissions. The High Court ruling in favour of Assange means he will be able to challenge US assurances at a full hearing over how his prospective trial in America would be conducted and whether his right to free speech would be infringed on being extradited. His appeal is expected to be heard sometime next year as he continues his fight against

being extradited after the UK government had signed off on the order in June 2022. Assange has denied any wrongdoing all along and argued that his disclosures in 2010 revealed war crimes by the US. Supporters of Assange, led by his wife Stella Assange, gathered at the High Court and continued their calls for his release on medical grounds. Had the court ruled in the US's favour, Assange would have exhausted all legal avenues in the UK. He has resisted extradition from the UK for more than a decade after his Wikileaks website published thousands of confidential US documents in 2010 and 2011. The US Department of Justice described the leaks as "one of the largest compromises of classified information in the history of the United States". The files suggested the US military had killed civilians in unreported incidents during the war in Afghanistan.

Condition of Slovakia PM Fico improves

Bratislava (AP): Slovak populist Prime Minister Robert Fico's condition is improving following an assassination attempt last week that shocked the European Union nation deeply polarised over his policies. "After today's consultation, the patient's condition is stabilised," the hospital treating the Slovak leader in the central city of Banská Bystrica said on Monday.

A statement released by the clinic said Fico is "clinically improving, communicating, inflammatory parameters are slowly decreasing". It said Fico remains hospitalised in the clinic for the time being. On Sunday, the clinic said that Fico, 59, was no longer in life threatening condition after he was shot in the abdomen as he greeted supporters on Wednesday outside a cultural centre in the town of Handlova, nearly 140 km (85 miles) northeast of the capital, Bratislava.

South Africa's apex court ends Zuma's bid to be elected again

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africa's highest court on Monday ended a bid by former president Jacob Zuma to stand as a candidate for Parliament in a national election on May 29 citing his previous criminal conviction. The country's apex judicial institution, the Constitutional Court (ConCourt), upheld the initial decision by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to disqualify 82-year-old Zuma's candidacy on the grounds of his 15-month prison sentence for contempt of court in 2021. He had been nominated as the leader of the recently-established Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) Party, named after the erstwhile armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) during the freedom struggle that ended in 1994 with Nelson Mandela becoming the country's first democratically-elected President.

When MK named him as its candidate whose photo should appear on the ballot paper, the IEC declared that Zuma could not run because of the constitutional provision that prohibited anyone sentenced to more than 12 months in prison from being a member of parliament. On appeal to the Electoral Court, the IEC decision was overturned and Zuma has been actively campaigning for the party, despite a dispute with a founding member that Zuma was no longer the leader of the party. "It is declared that Mr Zuma was convicted of an offence and sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment for purposes of Section 47(1)e of the Constitution and is accordingly not eligible to be a member of and not qualified to stand for election to the National Assembly until five years have elapsed since the completion of his sentence," Justice Leona

Theron said as she read the unanimous decision of the court. Zuma was ousted in 2018 by the ANC just months before the end of his second term in 2018 after he refused to step down amid a huge public outcry about his alleged closeness to the controversial Gupta family, originally from India and now believed to be in self-exile in Dubai, as South Africa seeks their extradition to face charges of looting billions from state coffers. After walking out of hearings at the Commission of Inquiry into state capture in 2020, Zuma was slapped with a contempt of court sentence of 15 months. He served only three months after being controversially released on medical parole. The incident led to unprecedented violence and looting for several days in Zuma's home province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and in the economic hub of Gauteng province, Johannesburg.

Ship that caused deadly Baltimore bridge collapse refloated

Baltimore (AP): The container ship that caused the deadly collapse of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge was refloated Monday and has begun slowly moving back to port. The Dali has remained at the collapse site since it lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's supporting columns on March 26, killing six construction workers and snarling traffic into Baltimore Harbour. The ship appeared to start moving shortly after 6 am as crews started to maneuver it out of the wreckage. It started and stopped a few times before slowly backing away from the collapse site. Officials said it would move at about 1 mph on the roughly 2.5-mile (4-km) trip, a fraction of the speed it was travelling when it lost power and crashed into the bridge. Pieces of the bridge's steel trusses protruded from its bow, which remained covered in concrete from the collapsed roadway. Officials have said they plan to unload the ship's containers and complete some short-term repairs while it's docked in Baltimore. Monday morning's high tide had been expected to bring the best conditions for crews to refloat and start moving the ship, according to a statement from the Key Bridge Response Unified Command. Several tugboats were escorting the Dali on its path to the marine terminal. The work is expected to last at least 21 hours. Crews conducted a controlled demolition on May 13 to break down the largest remaining span of the collapsed bridge. The Dali experienced four electrical blackouts within about 10 hours before leaving the Port of Baltimore for Sri Lanka and hitting the bridge, according to a preliminary report issued by the National Transportation Safety Board.

ICC prosecutor seeks arrest warrant for Netanyahu

AP ■ THE HAGUE/ JERUSALEM

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said Monday he is seeking arrest warrants for Israeli and Hamas leaders, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in connection with their actions during the seven-month war. Karim Khan said that he believes Netanyahu, his defence minister Yoav Gallant and three Hamas leaders — Yehya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — are responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel. Speaking of the Israeli actions, Khan said in a statement that "the effects of the use of starvation as a method of warfare, together with other attacks and collective punishment against the civilian population of Gaza are acute, visible and widely known. ... They include malnutrition, dehydration, profound suffering and an increasing number of deaths among the Palestinian popula-



tion, including babies, other children, and women." Of the Hamas actions on October 7, he said that he saw for himself "the devastating scenes of these attacks and the profound impact of the unconscionable crimes charged in the applications filed today. Speaking with survivors, I heard how the love within a family, the deepest bonds between a parent and a child, were contorted to inflict unfathomable pain through calculated cruelty and extreme callousness. These acts demand accountability."

'ICC SEEKING WARRANTS IS 'HISTORIC DISGRACE'

Israel's foreign minister says the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court's decision to seek arrest warrants against Israeli leaders is "a historic disgrace that will be remembered forever". Israel Katz said Monday he would form a special committee to fight back against any such action and would work with world leaders to ensure that any such warrants are not enforced.

UK's health service accused of cover up in infected blood scandal

AP ■ LONDON

Britain's state-funded National Health Service (NHS) was accused of cover up in an infected blood scandal dating back to the 1970s in a public inquiry report submitted to the government on Monday. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is expected to issue an apology on behalf of the government after inquiry chair Sir Brian Langstaff delivered his scathing verdict on the issue, which involves over 30,000 people being infected with life-threatening viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis C while they were under NHS care between the 1970s and 1990s. It involves infected batches of Factor VIII, an essential blood clotting protein which haemophiliacs do not produce naturally, imported from the US and used widely to treat patients at the time. They were infected as donated

blood was not tested for HIV/AIDS until 1986 and Hepatitis C until 1991 in the UK. "The scale of what happened is horrifying. The most accurate estimate is that more than 3,000 deaths are attributable to infected blood, blood products and tissue," notes Langstaff in his report following a five-year investigation. "Standing back, and viewing the response of the NHS and of government, the answer to the question 'was there a cover up?' is that there has been. Not in the sense of a handful of people plotting in an orchestrated conspiracy to mislead, but in a way that was more subtle, more pervasive and more chilling in its implications. To save face and to save expense, there has been a hiding of much of the truth," he said. The 2,527-page and seven-volume document goes on to detail the enormous scale of the scandal and also makes a series of recommen-

dations, including a speedy compensation scheme for those directly affected and who lost loved ones as a result. The report also calls upon the NHS to ensure anyone who received a blood transfusion before 1996 is urgently tested for Hepatitis C. New patients at any medical practice should also be asked if they had a transfusion before that time. The report also picks apart the approach to the scandal under the Margaret Thatcher led Conservative Party government, which insisted that people were given "the best treatment available" at the time. "The reality is that this use of this blanket line to take — sometimes applied to the position of people with bleeding disorders, sometimes to all those infected with Hepatitis C from blood or blood products — was inappropriate. It was wrong and its use was unacceptable. It became a mantra and was never ques-

tioned," it notes. "An apology should not only give some detail as to what is being apologised for, but to be understood by those to whom it is addressed as sincere and meaningful, it should lead to action. Compensation is part of this," it adds. Two sets of people were caught up in this historic health scandal of contaminated blood — people with haemophilia and similar blood clotting disorders who received a new treatment at the time to replace the missing clotting agents made from donated human blood plasma and a second group who had a blood transfusion after childbirth, accidents or during medical treatment. Ministers from the Sunak-led government have promised to address the issue of final compensation once the inquiry's report is published, the total cost for which is likely to run into billions of pounds.

Saudi Arabia's all-women rock band 'Seera' breaks barriers

AP ■ RIYADH

Leaning into the microphone in Saudi Arabia's capital, Nora let loose a primal scream. Guitars wailed and drums thrashed behind her as part of a set with her bandmates during a recent show. The performance by Seera, an all-women psychedelic rock band that blends traditional Arabic melodies with the resurgent psychedelia of bands like Tame Impala, would have been unthinkable just years earlier in the kingdom. But as Saudi Arabia liberalises some aspects of its society, Seera represents the way women now are finding their voice and expressing themselves through the arts in a nation long associated with ultraconservative Islam and the strict separation of the



sexes. "We didn't know how people would react," said Meesh, the band's bassist, who like other members asked to be identified by their stage names. "We believe strongly in self-



expression. To our surprise, they really had open arms for us." The band's name, Seera, can mean "life" or "biography" in Arabic. Band members say they try to embrace the multi-

ple meanings one can draw from a word in the language in its sound, whether through the driving drums and cymbals or the synthesizer backing the guitars. Seera's music style

revolves around the life experiences of the four-member band, who are all Saudi nationals. They sing in the Saudi dialect of Arabic, while drummer Thing wears a traditionally embroidered red face covering. "I thought this would be great as a reflection of the culture, the heritage and the roots," she said. "At the same time it would be a cool representation between the traditional and the modern and the expression of it. That's also within our sonic identity as well." Seera is quick to point out they aren't the first female band in the kingdom. Instead, they say that goes to The Accolade, which formed in 2008 and could only play underground. Things have changed radically in the kingdom in recent years since the accession of King Salman and

his assertive son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. In 2018, women gained the right to drive. Movie theatres and other entertainment centres opened. Women are no longer required to wear the fully cloaking black abaya. Clear limits still remain on speech and any political activity in the tightly governed kingdom. But in the arts space, Saudi Arabia is slowly opening up, as could be seen by Seera's show earlier this month at The Warehouse, a live music space in Riyadh's Diriyah neighbourhood. There, dozens of youths in leather jackets and black rock T-shirts swayed and danced to the music. One young man with heavy eyeliner wore a shirt declaring "I HATE LIFE." The fashion choices resembled any

other punk show at a club in the West, though there was an absence of smoking or any alcohol in the dry kingdom. "Things have become definitely better, more towards inclusivity and in a broader perspective and in a broader way," Thing said. "There's definitely room for more growth." Seera plans to release their debut album later this year. They've also booked their first international concert in Dubai, where they'll get their first chance to perform outside of Saudi Arabia. Nora said she wanted the band to be "an inspiration for the younger generation" to express themselves. "It's OK to look, act, behave the way you want as long as you're not harming anyone," she said.

one young man with heavy eyeliner wore a shirt declaring "I HATE LIFE." The fashion choices resembled any



Be it sports or education, discipline is necessary: Gopichand to students

PTI ■ PATNA
Discipline defined him both as a player and coach. So, it was hardly a surprise that Pullela Gopichand stressed on the virtue as he delivered a motivational speech to youngsters preparing for competitive exams here, drawing sporting analogies to drive home his point. The 50-year-old former All England champion, who is also a Dronacharya awardee, was addressing a gathering of students preparing for competitive exams in streams such as engineering and medicine. "Be it sports or education both are same. In both, discipline as well as dedication is necessary.

Zverev's stock rising for French Open

AP ■ ROME
Top-ranked Novak Djokovic hasn't won a tournament all year. Record 14-time French Open champion Rafael Nadal has been far from his best. Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz have been out injured. And Daniil Medvedev has won only one clay-court title in his career. Considering the state of his rivals in the top five, Alexander Zverev's credentials entering Roland Garros are looking pretty good following his second Italian Open title. The clay-court Grand Slam in Paris starts this weekend. "I'm somebody that I know when I don't play well, I can lose to anyone, but when I play well, I know I can beat anyone. That's my mindset. That's how I think about it," Zverev said after raising the trophy in Rome. "I know I have to focus on myself, to find my rhythm in Paris the way I did here. Then everything is on my own racket." Zverev won 44 of his 49 service points in a 6-4, 7-5 victory over 24th-ranked Nicolas Jarry 6-4, 7-5 in Rome on Sunday to earn his biggest trophy since a gruesome ankle injury two years ago. It's been a long road of recovery for the fifth-ranked Zverev after tearing three ligaments in his right ankle during the 2022 French Open semifinals against Nadal. In all, Zverev has reached three consecutive semifinals at Roland Garros — which has



led him to declare it's the tournament he wants to win more than any other. "It's the one where I have the most memories, good or bad," Zverev said. "U.S. Open, yes, I was two points away from winning the title. Of course, that's also one that kind of sticks out. (But) Roland Garros, so close to being in the final in 2021, I felt like I was playing some of the best tennis of my life in 2022. Those kind of things, they are still in the back of my mind. That's the one that I want to do well in." That loss in the 2020 U.S. Open final to Dominic Thiem remains the closest that the 27-year-old Zverev has come to winning a Grand Slam title. Having been in the top five of the rankings for years, claimed Olympic gold in Tokyo three years ago and won the ATP Finals twice, a Grand Slam title is the only big thing missing in his career. And if Zverev is going to contend in Paris, he's going to have to do it while dealing with a major distraction. Zverev has disputed a penalty order from a German court over allegations that he caused bodily harm to a woman and he will go on trial in his home country starting on May 31 — entering the middle weekend of the French Open. Zverev is accused of physically

because we actually have a great relationship — which is not always the case, a father-son, father-daughter relationship when they're coaching them as well. You see it a lot of times, it's very shaky. But we have a great relationship outside as well." A few years ago, the elder Zverev was missing from the player's box due to medical issues. "I'm going to have him around as long as he wants to," the younger Zverev said. "It's obviously a special moment for all of us, given the circumstances that this is my first Masters after the injury. There was obviously a lot of uncertainties whether I was going to be back at this level." Zverev's mom, Irina, was also court-side, along with the family's two dogs. In Paris, however, the Zverevs won't be the only high-profile entourage. Djokovic has entered a small tournament in Geneva this week to get more match preparation in before heading to the French Open, and Sinner and Alcaraz have been back on the practice courts following hip and right forearm injuries, respectively. "Nole is going to be at his best. You'll see. It's just the way it is," Zverev said. "Rafa is going to play a lot better than he did in Madrid and Rome. I'm certain about that. The other two, they just depend on health. If they're healthy, they're two of the best players in the world for sure and there's no question about it.

Taunted for being mentally impaired once, Para world champion Deepthi is now feted in village

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
For a long time, Deepthi Jeevanji's parents were taunted by fellow villagers for having a "mentally impaired" child. But now they are counting the compliments as the same bunch converged at their modest house in Telangana's Kalleda hamlet to celebrate her world record-beating gold medal in the Para Athletics World Championship in Kobe, Japan. Born to daily wage labourers at in Warangal district of Telangana, the 20-year-old Deepthi on Monday clinched gold with a world record time of 55.07 seconds in the women's 400m T20 category race. She also qualified for the upcoming Paris Paralympics. The T20 category is meant for athletes who have intellectual impairment. Deepthi's coach Nagpuri Ramesh said her parents were at the receiving end of taunts from the villagers, who would often say that she will never get married since she is "mentally impaired." "Deepthi's parents were daily wage labourers and they were

Co-hosts from Caribbean aiming to defy history and win third Twenty20 World Cup title

AP ■ ANTIGUA
After leading the West Indies to two Twenty20 World Cup titles as a captain, Darren Sammy has to defy history to win again as a head coach. No host has won the tournament on home soil in the first eight editions, a trend Sammy hopes to break with the 2024 T20 World Cup being staged in the United States of America and the Caribbean. Sri Lanka went the closest by reaching the final in 2012 before losing to West Indies in Colombo. That win is widely remembered for the Gangnam Style celebrations of the Caribbean players after Sri Lanka was bowled out for 101 in pursuit of a 138-run target. Four years later, a fearless brand of West Indies cricket set the Eden Gardens alight in India. Carlos Brathwaite hit four consecutive sixes against Ben Stokes in the final over to steer the Caribbean team to a second T20 World Cup title. Sammy was appointed head coach of the West Indies limited-overs squads last year. His past teammates Johnson Charles and Andre Russell, T20's most accomplished all-rounder, are the only two-time champions still in the squad. "We know how to select winning teams," Sammy said in a news conference with Caribbean media to announce the squad. "We've done it before and I think, as a selection group, we're really



the roof of a building but acted as if she didn't feel any pain because of the inability to express her feelings. Chief national badminton coach Pullela Gopichand also played a role in Deepthi's career. It was Gopichand who suggested Ramesh to take her to the National Institute for the Empowerment of Person with Intellectual Disability in Hyderabad. After medical tests, she was certified as "mentally impaired" and that allowed her to compete in para events. Gopi-Mytra Foundation chipped in as her sponsor and funded two international events for her to get international license, which is a must for para athletes to compete. "She competed in two tournaments, one in Morocco and another in Australia and she got her international license. Around Rs three lakh were spent in the two tournaments and Gopi-Mytra Foundation funded it," said Ramesh, a Dronacharya awardee, who was also the coach of top sprinter Dutee Chand. winning the Para Asian Games gold medal. "Deepthi's parents are now doing better. They have bought land with the money Deepthi got as reward for her achievements and they have started farming," said Ramesh. After Deepthi was brought to Hyderabad, she was enrolled at the Sports Authority of India's Training Center in Hyderabad where Ramesh is a coach. She was studying in ninth standard at that time. Ramesh, who is also the Athletics Federation of India's national junior team coach, said he had a tough time initially in training Deepthi because she could not communicate. "You cannot teach her too many techniques as she is slow in learning things. If you do that she will get confused," he said. Her parents once told Ramesh that Deepthi fell down from

BCCI lays foundation stone for indoor cricket academies in six North Eastern States

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The Indian Cricket Board (BCCI) on Monday laid the foundation stone for indoor cricket training academies in six North-Eastern states, with the sole emphasis on helping budding cricketers from the region. The indoor cricket academies will serve players from Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim and will be based in Shillong, Itanagar, Kohima, Aizawl, Imphal and Gangtok. "Honoured to have laid the foundation stone for BCCI's upcoming state-of-the-art indoor training facilities in the Association of Bengal (CAB). "Our cricketers from six states — Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim — will soon benefit from world-class indoor nets, indoor swimming pools and fitness centres for year-round training options," Shah wrote. "This, along with the launch of the new pavillion in Mizoram, are big steps towards our vision to enhance cricket infrastructure in the region, exciting times ahead," he added. Meanwhile, the BCCI is already in the process of developing a new National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru with expanded area and facilities.

Indian Open Surfing to kickoff on May 31

PTI ■ MANGALORE
The fifth edition of the Indian Open Surfing (IOS) will be held at the Sasihithlu Beach here from May 31 to June 2, the sport's governing body SFI announced on Monday. The three-day surfing competition will include four categories — Men's Open, Women's Open, Groms (U-16) Boys and Groms (U-16) Girls. "Indian Open Surfing will be the 2nd stop of the National Championship series of the 2024 calendar year, following the International Surfing Festival Kerala 2024, held in March at the beautiful cliff beach of Varkala," the Surfing Federation of India (SFI), the governing body for the sports of surfing and stand-up paddling in the country, said in a media release. The IOS will feature intense rivalry between surfers from the east and west coasts, as these championships carry important ranking points that will determine the surfers' standings at the end of the season. "Our goal is simple, we want to elevate India to the top in surfing. After a successful start to the National Series in Kerala, we are glad to continue the championships in Mangalore before the championship tour moves to the East Coast," SFI president Arun Vasu said. Ramesh Budihal, Harish M, Srikanth D, and Manikandan M will be the surfers to watch out for in the men's category, having performed exceptionally well in the last national championship recently held in Kerala. In the women's category, Kamali Moorthy, Srishthi Selvam, and Sandhya Arun are among the participants competing for the top honors. Teenage sensation Kishore Kumar will have all eyes on him, having stunned everyone with his recent performances.



excited about it." "It's an exciting time, and this preparation did not start now. It started from the last World Cup in Australia," Sammy was quoted as saying by CNC3. "What we've been able to do throughout the last year as a T20 group, the players we've exposed, has brought us to this moment, and I think we're about to knock it out of this world." Curtley Ambrose, the great West Indies pace bowler, was confident the squad could play the consistent, smart cricket required to win a third title. West Indies and England are the only teams to have won the title twice, and no host has ever won, he said, "so all that is motivation for the guys to do well." The last two T20 World Cups in the United Arab Emirates in 2021 and Australia in 2022 didn't go well for West Indies. Kieron Pollard's team was eliminated in the group stage in the UAE with just a win. Nicholas Pooran's side didn't qualify for the main round in Australia the following year. It was a setback for West Indies cricket, dating back to the late 1800s when a collection of mainly English-speaking Caribbean nations and territories began playing under a unified banner. And, it's something Sammy's squad is determined to put right, coming off some solid individual performances in the Indian Premier League. Without the pressure of the captaincy, Pooran could be a key to success in the middle-order. The left-hander had an impressive outing in the IPL, scoring 499 runs at a strike rate of 178.21 for Lucknow Super Giants. The absence of Sunil Narine, who helped Kolkata Knight Riders top the IPL standings this season with his batting and bowling exploits, will be difficult to cover. Sammy said he'd had conversations with Narine since the last Caribbean Premier League season, but couldn't convince him into a West Indies comeback. "As the news clearly stated, Narine is retired." But, led by captain Rovman Powell, West Indies has enough batting firepower to challenge the leading teams and the advantage of playing in the CPL. Young fast bowler Shamar Joseph, who has just played three T20s and is yet to make his T20 International debut, was selected ahead of Matthew Forde as the West Indies looked for extra speed in the bowling attack. "Shamar Joseph has the pace, he has skills with the new ball," Sammy said. "Not saying Matthew Forde doesn't but when you look at the role, it makes it easier for us to now pick the personnel to fit that role." West Indies will be playing its first two Group C games against Papua New Guinea and Uganda at Providence on June 2 and June 9 before taking on higher-ranked New Zealand and Afghanistan at Torouba and Gros Islet on June 13 and June 18. The top two teams from each of the four groups in the league stage will advance to Super 8. The tournament starts June 1 with a North American rivalry between the US and Canada in Dallas and concludes with the final on June 29 at Bridgetown, Barbados.



Salt less KKR take on Sunrisers Hyderabad in power hitting slugfest

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

High-flying Kolkata Knight Riders and an unpredictable Sunrisers Hyderabad, teams that have built their IPL 2024 campaign on power-hitting, will look to outmuscle each other in Qualifier 1 here on Tuesday. If KKR were the first team to make IPL playoffs this year, SRH gave themselves a huge boost by inflicting a four-wicket loss on Punjab Kings on Sunday to eventually finish second with 17 points, ahead of Rajasthan Royals. While the two top teams from the 70-match league round have enjoyed some time off courtesy incessant rains during their respective clashes over last 10 days, the lack of turnaround time to compete in a high-intensity playoff game will also pose a unique challenge. KKR and SRH will get only a day's time to traverse thousands of kilometres and get here for the first half of the playoffs as they both featured on the final day of the league round on Sunday. SRH would feel they have hit their strides following a comprehensive win over PBKS and having also got recent game-time, which isn't the case for KKR whose last complete game was on May 11. Shreyas Iyer's KKR had won four games on the trot before rains washed away their last two league games and the two-time winners. Table-toppers KKR (19 points) will also have to fill in the huge void at the top with their second-highest run-



scorer and wicketkeeper Phil Salt (435 runs) leaving the camp for national duties with England ahead of the T20 World Cup. Salt had forged a devastating partnership with Sunil Narine (461) at the top and KKR were immensely benefited by their ultra-aggressive approach with the bat, backed up well by a potent middle-order even though skipper Iyer (287) was not a major impact yet. The washed out contest against

RR in particular robbed KKR of an opportunity to give expected replacement Rahmanullah Gurbaz a go at the top with Narine, something that would have settled a few concerns certainly. For KKR, the form of Nitish Rana adds more solidity to the middle-order while a fiery Andre Russell among the finishers promise them vital runs. In many ways, SRH match KKR's firepower on paper and

that is what adds more to the lure of this contest. Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma have both got their runs at a strike rate exceeding 200 while inspiring their side to rewrite a few records. Australian southpaw Head has in many ways redefined aggressiveness with the bat while also remaining successful (533 runs with one century and four fifties). His fearlessness has also brought the best out of the

young Indian batter Abhishek (467), who has clobbered an overall 41 sixes this IPL - 10 more than his overall tally of 31 in the previous six seasons. SRH have also managed to find answers to a couple of questions which were lingering on for a while. At No 3, the 2016 winners have found a dependable option in Rahul Tripathi who can both accelerate as well as weather storms when bowlers are on-song. Additionally, Heinrich Klaasen has rediscovered his form after a dip in the middle of the tournament. With a crucial knock of 42 against PBKS, Klaasen has signalled having found his mojo back, which only makes SRH even more formidable. At Ahmedabad, as seen in the World Cup final last year, teams batting second have had more success, winning four out of six completed games while only twice the team which batted first could defend successfully. Also, against the style of play for both these teams - to bury oppositions under mountains of runs - this venue has had only two scores of 200 or above in 12 innings, which means the bowlers will also have their say. If KKR have a battery of spinners to back their fast bowlers led by Mitchell Starc, SRH's pace bowling attack led by skipper Pat Cummins has time and again produced unified efforts to make their mark. In their only meet earlier this season back in late March, KKR had pipped SRH by four runs in a high-scoring game.



Swapnil Singh contemplated quitting cricket until RCB picked him up in IPL auction

PTI ■ BENGALURU

When Swapnil Singh went unsold in the initial rounds of the 2024 IPL auction, the dejected left-arm spinner felt it was time to end his 18-year-old-career. But then Royal Challengers Bengaluru raised the paddle late in the auction to add a welcome twist to his cricketing journey. "The day of the IPL auction I was travelling to Dharamsala for a game. It was around 7-8 pm after I landed. Nothing had happened by then and the last rounds were on. When I missed out at first, I thought that's it. Frankly I thought it was all over," Swapnil told RCB Bold Diaries. "I thought I would play out the ongoing (domestic) season, and if needed, I would end my career after playing the next season because I did not want to keep playing all my life," he said.

"There are other things to do well in life as well. I was very disappointed," said Swapnil, who made his debut in 2006 and had even shared the dressing room with RCB teammate Virat Kohli at one point in time. Bought at a base price of Rs 20 lakh, the 33-year-old has repaid the faith the franchise showed in him. Swapnil has played a pivotal role in RCB's recent string of wins which have propelled them into the playoffs, with the 2016 finalists set to face a struggling Rajasthan Royals in Ahmedabad in the Eliminator on Wednesday. Swapnil said it was an emotional moment for his entire family after they learnt that he was picked up by RCB. "As soon as my family called, we broke down. Because no one else understands how emotional the journey has been."

Swapnil has also credited former Zimbabwe captain and RCB head coach Andy Flower for showing the faith in him. "Before RCB picked me in the auction, they had organised a trial-cum-camp. I spoke to Andy sir and told him all about how my (domestic) season had gone. I told him, 'Just give me one chance. This might be my last chance. Just have faith in me.' He told he had faith in me. He called me for the camp," Swapnil said. Swapnil also revealed his wish that he expressed to his brother, that he wanted to contribute with the bat in IPL. The moment eventually arrived when he smacked a four and a six against Sunrisers Hyderabad. "I would tell my brother that I have neither scored a four nor a six in the IPL, and I have taken only one wicket. So I really want to hit a four and a six," he said.

OTHER SPORTS

Rohan to pair with either Balaji or Yuki at Paris Games

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's top doubles player Rohan Bopanna will pick either N Sriram Balaji or Yuki Bhambri as his partner for the Paris Olympics and All India Tennis Association (AITA) will most likely approve his choice even as the combinations will be discussed by the selection committee. Ranked four in the world, 44-year-old Bopanna, being a top-10 player, can pick a player of his choice as per the rules. The men's doubles draw at the Paris Games will be a 32-team affair, where one nation can have a maximum of two teams. The qualification criteria gives top-10 players the privilege to pick their partners, who should be inside top-300 on the ATP and WTA ranking charts. The rankings of June 10 after the

conclusion of the French Open will be considered for qualifications. According to AITA sources, Bopanna had recommended names of Balaji and Bhambri to the national federation for inclusion in TOPS as his potential partners for Paris Olympics. "Usually, it's the player's choice (to pick his partner). The selection committee will ask him about his choice and discuss that. Whoever Rohan wants to play with, will be considered positively," AITA Secretary General Anil Dhupar told PTI when asked if the national federation will allow Bopanna to play with the partner of his choice or impose its own choice on him. Both Balaji and Bhambri have got some decent results on clay in lead up to the Roland Garros, where the action will unfold during the Summer Olympics from July 27. Balaji won the Cagliari Challenger



event with German partner Andre Begemann apart from reaching the semifinals at Francavilla al Mare in Italy. Bhambri won the ATP 250 event in Munich with French player Albano Olivetti in April and reached the semifinals of the Bordeaux Challenger - the only event he competed this month. The nominations for Olympics or other multi-sporting events have often created controversy in Indian tennis. In 2012, a huge controversy had erupted when both Mahesh Bhupathi and Bopanna had refused to pair with Leander Paes, who was forced to play with Vishnu Vardhan. Sania Mirza was then asked to pair with Paes in the mixed doubles event and the top woman player of the country had chastised the AITA for using her as bait to placate Paes. In the 2018 Asian Games, Paes had

pulled out of the continental event just two days before the start of tennis competition, saying he was not given a specialist player to pair with. AITA had nominated Bopanna and Divij Sharan as a team, leaving Paes with no option but to pair with one of the singles players in the squad. It will be Bopanna's last shot at winning an Olympic medal, having come close to a bronze medal with Sania Mirza in the mixed event of the 2016 Rio Games. In the singles, Sumit Nagal will need a good run at the French Open to boost his ranking. He is placed 94 as of Monday. In a draw of 64, the organisers will accept 56 direct entries and out of six ITF places, three men's quotas have been awarded to winners of continental events - Asian Games, African Games and Pan-American Games.



Nagal bows out of Geneva Open after loss to world number 19 Baez

PTI ■ GENEVA

India's top-ranked singles player Sumit Nagal made a first round exit from the Geneva Open after going down fighting against Argentina's Sebastian Baez. The world no.94 went down 6-7 (7) 3-6 to the Argentine, who is a clay court specialist, in a match that lasted one hour, 52-minutes here on Sunday. "Gutted with the loss today. But good preparation ahead of Roland Garros. Paris next," Nagal, who has qualified for the French Open, tweeted after the loss. Nagal started off brightly taking an early 4-1 lead over Baez. He also had a set point. But world no. 19 Baez, who has already won two titles on clay this season, showed his class to force a tiebreaker owing to his fantastic first serve performance. In the second set, Baez continued to bank on his superb first serve, and wrapped up the proceedings in 38 minutes.

Focus on Sindhu as she looks to end title drought at Malaysia Masters

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Back from a break, P V Sindhu will look to hit the right notes in her quest for some confidence-boosting wins ahead of Paris Olympics when she spearheads India's campaign in the Malaysia Masters badminton tournament starting here on Tuesday. Sindhu, a former world champion, returns to the international circuit after skipping the Uber Cup and Thailand Open, and she will aim to go deep in the women's singles draw of the BWF World Tour Super 500 event. The 28-year-old from Hyderabad hasn't been able to hit top form after recovering from a knee injury sustained in October last year. A silver and bronze-winner at the Olympics, Sindhu's return hasn't been smooth and she has endured a series of narrow losses. Sindhu has just two quarterfinal finishes to show in her six competitive appearances so far. The last title win for her came in the 2022 Singapore Open though she did come close to claiming the Spain Masters last year when she reached the finals in Madrid. Sindhu, who had also suffered a stress fracture on her left ankle en route to the 2022 Commonwealth Games gold,

will look to hit the ground running when she opens against Scotland's Kirsty Gilmour this week. Top stars such as An Se Young, Chen Yu Fei, Akane Yamaguchi or Carolina Marin are not participating this week and Sindhu will be desperate to test her preparation against the next generation players, who have troubled her recently. With a new set-up under mentor Prakash Padukone, Sindhu has shown glimpses of her menacing game but she hasn't been consistent with her shot-selection. Ashmita Chaliha, Aakarshi Kashyap and Malvika Bansod too will look to produce some good results after having been in the circuit for quite sometime now. Chaliha has played some quality matches against the likes of Han Yue and Aya Ohori, both of whom she had pushed to three games recently. In men's singles, Kiran George is the lone Indian in fray and he will open against Japan's Takuma Obayashi. While Thailand Open champions Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have opted out and it will be a chance for Krishna Prasad Garaga and Sai Pratheek K to show their prowess in men's doubles. In mixed doubles, the husband-wife duo of B



Sumeeth Reddy and N Sikki Reddy, and Sathish Kumar Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath would be carrying India's hopes. Paralympic athletes, each of them alone in an empty stadium. The campaign slogan - "Il ne me manque rien, sauf vous" (I'm not missing anything, except you) - is a rallying call to get people to come along and

not missing anything, except you. The countdown campaign for the August 28-September 8 Paralympic Games begins Monday. It features three Paralympic athletes, each of them alone in an empty stadium. The campaign slogan - "Il ne me manque rien, sauf vous" (I'm not missing anything, except you) - is a rallying call to get people to come along and

watch them compete. The French athletes featured in the campaign are Arnaud Assoumani, a long jump and triple jump specialist who won gold at the 2008 Games in Beijing; wheelchair tennis player Pauline Déroulède, and blind soccer player Gaël Rivière who was a European championship winner two years ago. He plays at club level for Bondy Cécifoot Club - in

the same suburb where France star Kylian Mbappé grew up. National broadcaster France Télévisions will show the campaign in a bid to raise awareness and - ultimately - boost sales. So far, 900,000 of the 2.8 million tickets have been sold. A total of 4,400 athletes will take part in the Paralympics. Tickets are available from 15 euros (USD 16) for track and

field sessions at Stade de France, wheelchair tennis at Roland Garros, or blind soccer at the foot of the Eiffel Tower. The finals cost from 25 (USD 27) euros and it costs 45 euros (USD 49) to watch the closing ceremony. Ticket sales could escalate once posters start appearing around Paris, with organizers aiming to raise awareness and increase fan engagement and solidarity. There will be 651 posters dotted around the city, 972 on the subway and a further 2,520 on the sides of buses. On Tuesday, four Paralympic athletes will walk up the famed steps at the Cannes Film Festival along with Paris 2024 Olympic head Tony Estanguet. Of the tickets sold so far, organizers said 300,000 have been bought by the state and 150,000 by the International Olympic Committee and National Paralympic Committee. Organizers haven't released details for the amount of tickets sold for the opening ceremony, which takes place along a section of the famed Champs-Élysées. Paul McCartney has let the song "We All Stand Together" be used in a promotional film for the International Paralympic Committee. The Paralympics will have a record 164 broadcasters worldwide covering 549 events across 22 sports.